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Language, Culture and Knowledge

‘A prerequisite for intercultural
competence and global citizenship
is a critical concept of knowledge.’

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Julia Suárez-Krabbe

AARHUS UNIVERSITETSFORLAG

SPROGforum

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SPRØGforum

Foreword

Over the past 35-40 years, the idea of the connection of languages with the cultures from which they have originated has become generally accepted by most people, not only those whose business is language. Within language teaching, attention has, among other things, been drawn to how the semantics of words can very well differ from one language to another, e.g. the meaning of the English word 'great' and the Danish word 'stor', and there are plenty of other examples. Culture also changes, and thereby also the connotations of words, e.g. the Danish word 'rygebord' (smokers' table) probably gives rise to other associations in Denmark today compared with 40 years ago. Even though the relation between language and culture is complex, most people nevertheless agree that there is a relation.

But this relation should not be exaggerated either, for language and culture can also be separated. Many language users move around the country, between rural areas, provincial towns and capital, between various urban districts. Regional pronunciations, dialects and sociolects mingle. Some people go abroad and perhaps settle in places that are characterised by other cultural relations than those we find in Denmark. They take their Danish language with them and adapt it to the new cultural context. For them a new relationship between language and culture comes into being. Something similar happens for foreigners who come to Denmark: their language develops in the new context, e.g. they can borrow words and expressions from Danish.

Today, many people are interested in the fact that it is possible to learn language while also acquiring knowledge about one or other knowledge area that does not have to be specifically oriented towards the target language countries or an international culture, but can be knowledge that traditionally falls within other subject areas such as geography, social studies, mathematics, business, visual arts, etc. In such cases, one can simply choose to use the foreign language (often English, but it can be other languages) to the extent necessary for acquiring relevant knowledge as, for example, when one reads subject-related texts in English, as commonly used at universities

and parts of teacher education in Denmark. One can also practise teaching as both language learning and subject-related learning at one and the same time, gaining help and guidance in both language and subject areas. Particularly in the European context, many people talk about the new area CLIL: content and language integrated learning, where the ideal is precisely to combine language learning with content learning.

It can, however, easily happen that language is perceived as a code that simply mediates a content no matter which language is actually involved. One often reads texts in English without taking into consideration that they are actually in English and not French, Spanish or Chinese – or translated from one of these languages, i.e. one omits considering the cultural component of the languages and their historical anchorage. This has more far-reaching consequences than the above-mentioned examples of semantic differences between words in different languages. Languages such as English, Spanish and Chinese have played highly different roles in world history, and they have been connected to different discourses and world-understandings and thus also to different forms of knowledge. Race and ethnicity are, for example, perceived differently in the (former) British and Spanish colonies, and these concepts have furthermore a different nature in the vast Chinese area. One can say the same thing about other languages, and many people are now interested in examining what discourses, world-understandings and forms of knowledge have been developed in various language communities, from the large and dominant ones (English, Spanish, Chinese, etc.) to the smaller and extremely small and dominated ones (the several thousand local languages in the various parts of the world, particularly outside Europe).

The above-mentioned difference between the English ‘great’ and the Danish ‘stor’, or the changes in connotations between the Danish ‘rygebord’, along with the example of forms of knowledge in connection with race and ethnicity, are examples of linguaculture, i.e. culture that is directly linked to language and its meanings – as opposed to other parts of culture that are not dependent on language, such as music, clothing, food habits, design, etc.

The knowledge forms of the various language communities can perfectly well be mixed. Knowledge from various language communities can be spread through the activities of multilingual individuals, including translation, interpretation and intercultural dialogue. The feature article of this number looks at one side of this important mediation – the need for interpretation in Denmark.

Language, culture and knowledge are, then, related to each other – but what does that mean in practice? What does it mean for the content that it is expressed in a particular language – no matter whether it is a question of everyday content or a subject-related or literary content? This question is actually hard to relate to if one either has no mastery of other languages than one's own (just think of all the monolingual English speakers in the world), or if one has never been confronted with the question in the course of one's education.

Here language subjects have a very important role. Firstly, in the sense that by educating the pupils or students in some other language they enable them to come into contact with other discourses, world-understandings and forms of knowledge than those that circulate for example in Danish in Denmark and in the Danish media. And in this connection not only forms of knowledge that are expressed in English are being thought of. Secondly, the language subjects are the place where one can meet concrete examples of how the choice of language can play a role for the knowledge one acquires. The review of *Kampen om disciplinerne* (The fight for the disciplines) in this number touches on this subject.

Have an enjoyable read!

The editors

Community interpreting in Denmark

[Tolkning i Danmark]

Abstract

Children interpreting for their parents. Husbands interpreting intimate details about their spouses. Erroneous interpreting in hospitals and in court rooms. These are stories that are often told. What the stories have in common is that they apply to linguistic minority groups in Danish society. Professional competencies in demand in society are normally provided for through education and training. What is at stake here is that professional interpreter training in the languages of minority groups in Denmark does not exist. Of course, languages such as French, German, Spanish and so on are not the problem. Over the years, many reports and scientific projects have documented the poor quality of community interpreting in Denmark and the need to educate competent interpreters. So why doesn't it happen? This is a political issue. As long as a majority of members of the Danish Parliament does not vote in favour, no quality standards will be established and no publicly provided training courses and formal education will be provided at the relevant training institutions.

Abstracto

Niños interpretando para sus padres. Esposos interpretando los detalles más íntimos de las esposas. Interpretación equivocada en los hospitales y en los tribunales. Muy a menudo escuchamos tales relatos. Lo que los relatos tienen en común es que tienen que ver con grupos de minoridades lingüísticas en Dinamarca. Normalmente competencias de demanda en las sociedades se obtienen a través de educación y formación profesional. De lo que se trata ahí es que la formación profesional de intérpretes en las lenguas de los grupos minoritarios no existe. Por supuesto, no se trata de idiomas tales como el Francés, el Alemán o el Español, etc. Durante muchos años informes y proyectos científicos nos han mostrado la calidad inferior

de interpretación de la comunidad en Dinamarca y también la necesidad de educar a intérpretes profesionales. Entonces, ¿Por qué no pasa nada? Eso es un asunto político. Mientras una mayoría de los miembros en el Parlamento Danés no van a votar en favor, no habrá estándares de calidad y no habrá cursos de formación y educación públicos en las instituciones relevantes de formación.

Résumé

Des enfants agissent comme interprètes pour leurs parents. Des maris agissent comme interprètes pour leurs conjointes concernant des détails intimes. Des erreurs d'interprétation surviennent dans les hôpitaux et dans les services judiciaires. Ce sont là des faits dont on parle souvent. Et tous ont un point commun : ils s'appliquent aux groupes linguistiques minoritaires de la société danoise. Les compétences professionnelles requises par la société sont normalement assurées par l'intermédiaire du système d'éducation et de formation. Le problème, c'est qu'il n'existe aucune formation d'interprète professionnel dans les langues des groupes minoritaires du Danemark. Bien sûr, le français, l'allemand, l'espagnol et autres ne présentent aucun problème. Au fil des ans, grand nombre de rapports et d'études scientifiques ont démontré la qualité inférieure de l'interprétariat communautaire danois et le besoin de former des interprètes compétents. Pourquoi n'est-ce donc pas le cas? Parce que c'est une question politique. Tant que la majorité des membres du Parlement danois ne seront pas en faveur, aucune norme de qualité ne sera établie et aucun cours de formation ne sera offert au niveau des institutions publiques concernées.

The blind spots of the global citizen

[De blinde pletter i verdensborgerens blik]

Abstract

In recent years, global citizenship and interculturality in education and learning have received increasing international attention. However, all too often global citizenship and interculturality in education operate with a very vague or abstract understanding of knowledge. Because of this, we propose to distinguish between three types of knowledge; 'true' knowledge, epistemology and common sense. Drawing from our work on two different initiatives of internationalisation in Denmark—the Language Profiles at Roskilde University and the Global Citizenship program at Rysensteen's High School—we present examples of these types of knowledge. In this manner, we show the relevance of the tridimensional understanding of knowledge to the operationalisation of global citizenship. We also contribute to making visible some of the blind spots, implicit ideals and hierarchies of knowledge in work on global citizenship and interculturality. We conclude that the critical understanding emerging from the relationship between the three types of knowledge is a central basis for work on intercultural competencies and global citizenship.

Language subjects: access to knowledge about the world

[Sprogfagene – adgang til viden om verden]

Abstract

In this article I discuss whether or to what extent the different language subjects give access to knowledge of the world in the geographical sense, i.e. the whole world or the planet. In the official guidelines to the subjects English, German, French and Spanish (but not Danish as a second language) the term ‘world’ is very often used and with positive connotations. But the meanings of the word vary considerably in scope in the different language subjects. The article proposes some concrete examples of how the language subjects can include themes that transcend their traditional geographical horizons: ‘the English-speaking countries’, ‘the German-speaking countries’, etc.

Ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity in Danish-language teaching materials for the teaching of Chinese

[Etnisk, sproglig og kulturel mangfoldighed i dansksprogede læremidler til kinesisk]

Abstract

The aim of the article is to find out whether a Danish-produced teaching system provides a more balanced representation of ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity in China than three Chinese materials. All materials are used to teach Chinese in Danish schools. Both the Chinese and Danish teaching materials are found to ignore or downplay ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences in China. A study by Huaqing Hong and Xianhong He concludes that the Chinese materials do so, because it serves well the interest of the government in China. As for the Danish teaching material, the article proposes three tentative explanations. The first is self-censorship: The authors may have omitted topics or angles that the Chinese government might not like. The second explanation is related to educational considerations: As students find Chinese hard to learn, it may have been considered educationally suitable to focus on only one variety of Chinese – *putonghua* – one geographical area – Mainland China – and one culture – the Han majority culture. Finally, the Danish teaching material may also look the way it does because it follows a global tradition for the production of (Chinese) language textbooks.

Linguistic and cultural funds of knowledge in the classroom

[Sproglige og kulturelle vidensfonde i klasseværelset]

Abstract

The findings of a comparative/international investigation into how culturally and linguistically diverse children's 'knowledges' are represented in Danish *Folkeskoler* and Canadian state-run schools suggest that while programs differ, both groups of learners and teachers face similar challenges. Moll and González's (1997) notion of "funds of knowledge" (or the knowledge base and life strategies students learn at home and in local communities) frames this study, challenging the view that children unfamiliar with the language and culture of Western schools 'know nothing.' Data for this qualitative case study were collected through interviews with Danish-as-a-second-language and English-as-a-second-language educators in Denmark and Canada and document analysis (Ministry of Education guidelines, pedagogical materials, school library books, educator lesson plans, etc.). The findings suggest that there is a crucial need for teachers to adopt a *funds of knowledge* mind-set to see (and legitimise) migrant children's cultural resources (including languages) as different from, but just as valuable and legitimate, as dominant group children's resources.

Language and culture in job interviews

[Om sprog og kultur ved jobsamtaler]

Abstract

This paper presents the main results from a large interactional study of job interviews with second language speakers of Danish. The job interviews were part of a Danish governmental initiative ('IO-stillinger') aimed at integrating immigrants and newcomers to Denmark, firstly through tailor-made job interviews, and later on through workplace mentoring, language courses and professional upgrades. At first sight, the 'IO-stillinger' job project was an example of an affirmative action towards the integration of immigrants in the workplace. In practice, however, the recruitment process and the job interview as well as the phase-in were carried out as prototypical gatekeeping events that did not differ from other established employment practices. The paper discusses several examples of job interviews focusing on the co-construction of brought-along and brought-about conceptions of candidates' communicative styles. It illustrates how successful candidates are not necessarily those with the best professional qualifications, but those whom the interviewers assess as capable of performing according to perceived Danish cultural norms.

SANNE LARSEN, PETRA DARYAI-HANSEN
AND ANNE HOLMEN

Plurilingual internationalisation at the universities of Copenhagen and Roskilde

[Flersproget internationalisering på København Universitet og Roskilde Universitet]

Abstract

Of the past few years, people have started to relate the concept of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) to European higher education programmes. The field is dominated by projects that focus on integrating English into another subject, but two Danish universities have experimented with a plurilingual approach. The article presents and compares the two initiatives from RUC and KU, subsequently discussing them from a CLIL perspective.

A knowledge and culture encounter between Copenhagen Business School and the University of Copenhagen

[Et viden- og kulturmøde mellem Copenhagen Business School og Københavns Universitet]

Abstract

Concepts concerning Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and Collaborative learning (CL) also have been among the new and promising concepts within Danish higher educational institutions. In this article I argue for another integration of competences, namely Collaborative education (including CLIL-inspiration) and present the new joint Master of Intercultural Market Studies in German, French or Spanish, an educational collaboration between Copenhagen Business School (CBS) and Copenhagen University (KU) which has led to a very promising educational offer. Though these two institutions have different ‘*raison d’être*’, the collaboration has shown that by combining the best of CBS and the best of KU the “small” foreign languages in Denmark might gain strength. In short, I argue in favour of integrated competences at all levels, hoping that this can change the seemingly downhill trend of foreign languages competences in Denmark.

Presentation of main thoughts in Claude Hagège's book *Contre la pensée unique*

[Præsentation af hovedtanker i Claude Hagèges bog *Contre la pensée unique*]

Abstract

In my article I give an account of the main ideas in Claude Hagège's book *Contre la pensée unique* (Towards a single way of thinking). According to Hagège, USA has succeeded in introducing the English language, way of thinking and culture to such an extent that a form of blindness has arisen towards the monolingual way of thinking which, according to him, this results in. At many universities and institutions of higher education in Europe, English is the language of communication. In terms of research, this is inexpedient, since researchers think and express themselves best in their own language and may be misled to simplify their way of reasoning and of presenting their case when it has to be in English.

Instead of English as the language of communication, Hagège proposes the use of translation. Each language constitutes a small universe of conceptual and idea-related meanings that are imprinted in the construction of that language. A good translation takes account of this and strives to reproduce an (original) text with great accuracy and with all the finest shades of meaning. So as to counteract a one-track way of thinking, Hagège would seek to encourage diversity in language, thinking and culture.

Open pages: Quizlet and vocabulary acquisition

[Quizlet og ordforrådstilegnelse]

Abstract

Vocabulary is a fundamental aspect of language acquisition. This article presents the results of a quantitative study on the effect of the web 2.0 tool Quizlet on vocabulary acquisition among students in a second year class of a Danish upper secondary school, with Spanish as their subject. The study finds that there was a significant positive impact on vocabulary acquisition among all students participating in studying 15 new words with Quizlet. With an average maintaining of 75.4 % of the target words receptively, and 37.4 % of the target words productively three weeks after the experiment.

The article defines the complex nature of vocabulary and how it is assessed. Furthermore, it looks upon the complexity of “knowing a word” by using the theory of Nation (2001) and his model “What is involved in knowing a word?” (Nation 2001). This model is used for illuminating how, and in what aspects of knowing a word, Quizlet has its impact. Finally the article provides a presentation of strategies of second-language teaching and suggests further classrooms activities in vocabulary teaching that will help students achieve an adequate vocabulary and word knowledge.

Abstracto

El vocabulario es un aspecto fundamental de la adquisición del lenguaje. Este artículo presenta los resultados de un estudio cuantitativo sobre el efecto de la aplicación web 2.0 Quizlet en la adquisición de vocabulario entre los estudiantes de segundo año de una escuela secundaria superior danesa con la asignatura de español. El estudio concluye que hubo un impacto positivo significativo en la adquisición de vocabulario entre todos los estudiantes que participaron en el estudio de quince palabras nuevas con Quizlet. Con un promedio

de 75,4% de mantenimiento de las palabras objetivo receptivamente, y 37,4% de las palabras objetivo productivamente, tres semanas después del experimento.

El artículo define la naturaleza compleja de la adquisición de vocabulario y la forma en que se fija. Por otra parte, se centra también en la complejidad del “saber una palabra” según la teoría de Nation (2001) y su modelo “*What is involved in knowing a word?*” (Nation 2001). Este modelo se utiliza para ilustrar cómo y en qué aspectos Quizlet incide en “saber una palabra”. Por último, el artículo presenta estrategias de la enseñanza de una segunda lengua y sugiere nuevas actividades de clase para la enseñanza de vocabulario que ayuden a los estudiantes a alcanzar un nivel de vocabulario y conocimiento de palabras adecuados.

Open pages: The teaching of traumatized refugees can be a strain on the psyche of the teacher

[Undervisning af traumatiserede flygtninge kan belaste lærerens egen psyke]

Abstract

The article deals with the question of secondary traumatisation of the teacher: The teacher plays an important role in supporting the rehabilitation of the traumatised course participant, but at the same time this can be an incredibly emotional strain on him or her. The article focuses both on the danger signals and the possibilities of prevention.

Good News

Selected recent books about Language, culture and knowledge at AU Library, Campus Emdrup.

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