



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### A toolkit for multilingual communication in Europe: dealing with linguistic diversity

Backus, A.; Marácz, L.; ten Thije, J.D.

**Publication date**

2011

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

A toolkit for transnational communication in Europe

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Backus, A., Marácz, L., & ten Thije, J. D. (2011). A toolkit for multilingual communication in Europe: dealing with linguistic diversity. In J. N. Jørgensen (Ed.), *A toolkit for transnational communication in Europe* (pp. 5-24). (Copenhagen studies in bilingualism; No. 64). University of Copenhagen, Faculty of Humanities.

**General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

**Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

# A TOOLKIT FOR MULTILINGUAL COMMUNICATION IN EUROPE: DEALING WITH LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

Ad Backus, László Marác & Jan D. ten Thije

## **Abstract**

This paper describes four communicative strategies that can be used in situations in which speakers of different mother tongues converse together: English as a Lingua Franca, the use of a Regional Lingua Franca, Receptive Multilingualism (in which each interlocutor uses his/her own language), and Codeswitching (in which two or more languages are used together in the same communicative event). Advantages and disadvantages of each strategy will be discussed, and the architecture of a communicative toolkit will be outlined, with which we hope to be able to provide sound advice to people and organizations who need to manage linguistic diversity. This advice will be sensitive to general properties of the communicative strategies and to specific aspects of the local situation.

## **1. Introduction**

Language choice is not always an easy issue. Whenever there is a choice of which language to use, there are advantages and disadvantages to the available options. Modern life is full of communicative situations in which a choice has to be made for the linguistic medium. Often, it will not feel to the participants as if they really have a choice, since one particular language is the entrenched norm for that particular type of situation; in other cases, however, the choice is not so obvious and it is such communicative settings that the present article focuses on. We will see that the choice for one or the other language is often problematic because it is tied up with some sort of inter-group conflict. Potential conflict is always lurking whenever there is diversity, and the communicative toolkit we will argue for is meant to be an instrument that helps organizations, such as governments and companies, to manage diversity. Whenever there is more than one option for the choice of language, it is more than likely that each option will only be to the advantage of one of the parties. Any choice, therefore, is connected to issues of inequality and

access to resources; good management of such issues is important if the goal is to stave off conflict before it erupts.

While issues of language choice are in evidence throughout the world, our empirical focus will be on Europe. Globalization and the progressive integration that has characterized recent European history have proceeded in a context of transnationalism, a process that challenges the traditionally established modes of either assimilation to a dominant culture or of multiculturalism, and the associated modes of monolingual communication (Vertovec 2007). Transnationalism results when multiple ties and interactions link people or institutions across nations, or across communities more generally. It is typically associated with migration, both of people in pursuit of jobs (ranging from seasonal agricultural work to the offices of multinationals and European institutions), and of companies in pursuit of lower production costs. While not limited to the modern world, it has rapidly become a common form of identity formation in our postmodern world of high mobility (job mobility, cheap travel, etc.) and easy communication (email, cell phones, etc.). As a result, the individuals this pertains to need a large *repertoire* of verbal resources and sophisticated communicative competence (Lüdi en Py 2007; Blommaert & Backus 2011; see below).

In relatively formal settings, language choice will be regulated by law or custom; in others, various options are possible depending on the actors involved, the particular settings, and the available languages. Possibilities of multilingual communication include English as lingua franca (ELF), use of a regional lingua franca (RELF), Receptive Multilingualism or *Lingua Receptiva* (LARA) (each speaker uses his/her mother tongue in multilingual communication), and code-switching (CS). These strategies have been studied in separate traditions in socio-and applied linguistics, and have not been compared within a coherent framework. Yet, they have things in common, perhaps most of all that they let speakers use the resources they already have. This in turn helps avoiding the need for costly professional translation services in at least some settings. This article aims to go over the pros and cons of each option, with the aim to contribute to what should become a toolkit for communication in multilingual settings, to be used as an aid in making optimal linguistic choices, so as to minimize the likelihood of conflict (Rindler-Schjerve 2007) and maximize the chances of communicative success.

There are at least two reasons why language choice is not always an easy matter. One is that speakers need to take into account their

interlocutors' linguistic abilities, and these are not always easy to gauge. In many cases, there may not exist a single language that would be intelligible to all present. A second reason is that languages and varieties are connected to identities, values, and attitudes. Misunderstanding, in the sense of people misreading each other's intentions, and the potential conflict that might result, are real dangers. The toolkit is intended to help ward off such problems before they can occur, by helping people to understand the motivations behind linguistic choices and the effects they may have on interlocutors. The ultimate goal is that it will help people to recognize what will be the adequate communicative strategy in particular situations. Communicative efficiency, on the one hand, and the preservation of European principles and values (democracy, human rights, equality, social cohesion, economic prosperity, etc.) on the other hand, are the most important reference criteria. These twin principles show that there may be a tension between what may be called the Democracy and Economy Principles: interactants will want to act fairly, avoid exploiting the inequality with respect to access to the relevant resources, and remain faithful to broadly accepted principles of decency, but they will also strive for efficiency, and go for what involves the least effort and involves the lowest costs.

The next section discusses the motivation for the Toolkit effort more fully, by examining how communicative norms emerge and how they are maintained. Section 3 portrays the four strategies identified above. Section 4 compares the four strategies, and outlines in which situation which strategy seems to work best.

## 2. Choice of language

The sheer existence of linguistic diversity testifies to the fact that communicative choices are not always obvious. Otherwise, there would be no codeswitching or bilingualism, nor style and register differentiation, and the effort to establish Esperanto as a universally used language would probably have succeeded. Norms for which variety to use in which setting can be quite entrenched, but they can also be quite hotly contested. Often, this takes the form of linguistic tension, in extreme cases conceptualized as 'linguistic conflict' (as in Belgium), though such conflicts are usually proxy wars for group conflict. Society is affected by this problem in various ways. If a language variety is to be *banned* from particular domains, public support for this state of affairs needs to be motivated with decent

arguments. Access to any *privileged* variety, on the other hand, needs to be guaranteed for all, for example through education. If a language is to be promoted for use by non-native speakers, the issue of proficiency rears its head, because it needs to be decided how proficient speakers need to be in order to function efficiently.

Language policy can only do so much to regulate linguistic choices, and it is an open question whether they should be regulated in the first place. One could argue, for example, that since human behavior rests on cooperation, people can be trusted to do what they can to make communication successful. Theoretically, this would support a *laissez-faire* approach to communication choices that is quite at odds with the idea that regulation is needed. Of course, people are not always *that* cooperative, especially perhaps when they are not communicating on their own behalf but as a representative of an organization, a nation or some other collective group. The need to assert authority, superiority, authenticity, priority or some other contested kind of social identity often gets in the way of taking the easiest option, or at least the option that is at a practical level the most likely to lead to successful communication. And even this only holds if 'successful communication' is defined in identity-neutral terms, as conveying factual ('referential') information successfully, in the sense of the hearer understanding what was said. There is a good case to be made, however, for including connotations and other kinds of social meaning ('indexicality'; Blommaert 2010) in what is conveyed in any communicative act, and this goal may very well require communicative choices that are not optimal for the goal of conveying the referential information efficiently. It may help keeping frustration levels at bay, though. This is essentially why the toolkit will not advise everybody to just learn English well and use that language all of the time.

Communication proceeds in many different settings, varying from each other as to goal, participant constellation, location, degree of formality, status of the various participants, mother tongues of the participants, the degree to which they know other languages, linguistic choices made previously by the same participants, etc. There is, as yet, no database of communicative settings, and the linguistic and cultural resources people make use of them. Having a database like that would make it possible to compare one's own communicative setting with other settings in what will hopefully once be a fairly complete taxonomy, and choose the optimal language choice strategy on the basis of past experience in such settings. The construction of a

database like that has become all the more urgent because communication has undergone interesting changes in recent times, thanks to globalization and expanding technology. It is unclear to what extent this necessitates accompanying changes in theoretical frameworks, but exploration of this issue is certainly needed. The fragmentation of one's social life into many different subcommunities, each with its own communicative and linguistic conventions, and the use of social media that until recently did not exist, pose interesting challenges for the conceptualization of linguistic repertoires and the inventory of linguistic forms or resources that make up one's linguistic competence (Blommaert & Backus 2011). This necessitates theoretical innovation in the form of an improved description of communicative repertoires, in which both individual resources as well as reifications at a higher level of abstraction (varieties, e.g. sociolects, ethnolects, etc.) are addressed. We are particularly concerned in this paper with communication that encounters between people with different cultural backgrounds and different native languages.

Many people face language choice issues on an almost daily basis. This holds for informal and formal communication, and for one-off encounters as well as institutional discourse. While modern Europe is rooted in the monolingual and monocultural nation state, it is increasingly involved in processes of integration and globalization, which calls for a transnational outlook at all levels, from individual European citizens to international multi-state bodies. People move out of their home areas, and are involved in multinational companies or offices; regions and nations collaborate in supra-regional and international organizations. EU citizens are expected to develop transnational identities. A transnational perspective, and the practices in which it plays a role, calls for multilingual linguistic competence, and numerous choices as to which of those resources to use in which situations. Depending on specifics of the context, various communicative options are available, including the four we focus on in Section 3.

Life would perhaps be easy, if somewhat boring and unfair, if there were laws for how and when to choose what language. For the vast majority of our communicative interactions, such laws do not exist; yet, we are not generally free to choose, as many recurrent communicative situations seem to be governed by unwritten laws, by **norms**. This term can be understood in two ways, and the tension between them lies at the heart of the subject of this article. First, norms can be conceptualized in purely theoretical terms as a common

pattern that emerges from behavior, as the 'normal' way of doing things. The second use of the term is how it is generally used in our everyday language use, referring to imposed rules for behavior, as the way things *should* be done. Depending on how effective such imposed norms are, the two types of norm can be virtually the same (the way we do things is also the way we think they should be done), or they may clash (we don't want to behave according to the rules). At the level of EU institutions, for instance, imposed norms often follow the democratic principle that provisions must be made for the use of any of the community languages, a principle directly related to the common language ideology that all languages are equal and citizens should not be placed in situations of inequality because of what happens to be their native language. However, actual communication will often be constrained by a number of other factors, such as ease of communication and effectiveness, but also individual factors concerning language purism, attitudes, and prestige. Sometimes such factors will reinforce each other and favor the same language choice, while at other times they may conflict and produce insecurity as to which language to choose. Conceptualizing language choice as a matter of norms allows it to be analyzed as just another aspect of human behavior that can be governed, managed and influenced; and since norms defined this way are always open to negotiation it also provides a framework within which adherence and resistance to current norms can be understood.

As far as norms are not imposed by some source of authority, the norms that govern our daily lives, including how we speak, develop out of behavior. We keep track of what we do and what other people do, we build up knowledge of what is common and what is not, and we use this knowledge to shape our further actions. The basis for this lies in some of the most basic cognitive skills humans possess: cultural learning, pattern finding, and usage-based storage of knowledge in memory (cf. Tomasello 2008).

As human beings, we learn how to behave according to the norms, or *conventions*, of human behavior. We are able to do this because our cognitive capacities allow us to build up a record of past experience. As we store traces of everyday experiences in our memories, we build up a cognitive representation of these experiences, and if a particular experience occurs often enough, its representation gets entrenched. This aspect of normativity explains why we often do things, e.g. choosing the language in which to communicate with one's partner, 'for no particular reason', 'just

because', or 'because it's always done this way'. This is what is called a 'usage-based approach', developed for linguistic competence in various branches of 'Cognitive Linguistics' (e.g. Bybee 2006; Langacker 2008; Dąbrowska 2008), but it is compatible with current theorizing in sociolinguistics (Blommaert & Backus 2011) and various subfields within cultural studies (Cicourel 2006; Nye 2000, Pennycook 2007).

While norms are, strictly speaking, located in individual minds, there is an important social dimension to them. When someone chooses the 'normal' language for a particular conversation, he/she has not just checked his/her own internal norm for language choice in conversations of that kind, but also assessed whether that norm is identical to the one other people hold. This allows interlocutors to gauge how much *common ground* there is between them (Clark 1996), and sufficient common ground is a prerequisite for successful communication. When there is not enough common ground, interlocutors may *think* they share the same norms while they really don't, and this may lead to misunderstanding and conflict.

Relevant dimensions for the description of all communicative settings include, then, the degree to which the cultural backgrounds of the participants differ, the degree to which the participants are aware of these differences, and the degree to which the interaction contributes to decreasing the difference. As to the linguistic dimension of this, differences are often not only to be found in the inventory of linguistic forms the participants know, but also in what these forms *index* for them. We gain all this knowledge as we are socialized into our various social networks and *communities of practice* (i.e. the groups to which we belong by virtue of common interests and obligations; cf. Eckert 2003). Importantly, we all belong to many different social networks and communities of practice, which, moreover, rarely overlap completely with those of another person.

All this makes assessing the degree of common ground always a contentious affair: we have gaps in our own knowledge and we cannot see into other people's minds. We may think, for instance, that our choice for, say, English, for a particular international meeting is a polite choice that allows everybody to take part, but some interlocutor may well perceive it as an effort to raise the status of those who are good in English, and to block contributions from those whose English is less good, or to subtly accuse those who don't accept the practical choice of English as a lingua franca of silly obstructionism, perhaps out of misplaced pride or jealousy. The basis of the misunderstanding,

in this case, would ultimately lie in insufficiently realizing, or insufficiently caring, that language is not just a vehicle for conveying propositional information: it is also a social and political construct.

Sometimes reification of norms produces *explicit* norms at the meta-level, e.g. about what is and what is not part of ‘our’ culture, what counts as ‘standard language’, or indeed which language one should speak in particular situations. The most obvious example of such explicit norms is a *prescriptive* rule, e.g. a law, but it is important to note that even in the absence of overtly prescriptive codes of conduct, people attach normative value to common patterns of behavior. That is, we often interpret ‘this is how it’s always done’ as ‘this is how it *should* be done’, elevating the normal pattern to the status of ‘unwritten law’. While failure to comply with norms may sometimes be evaluated positively (e.g. as an act of creativity), it will often meet with negative responses (in which case it is interpreted as rebellion or unwillingness to behave ‘normally’ or ‘properly’).

Norms of behavior, including norms of language choice, may get contested, of course, especially in situations of social change. Such conflicts occur within as well as across communities. Large-scale social phenomena such as (post-)colonialism, urbanization, migration and globalization produce cultural encounters between groups based on such identity-shaping factors as religion, ethnicity and gender, and do so on various scales, ranging from entire nations to all kinds of linguistic minorities and subgroups in society. Identity, broadly defined as the way a person positions himself or herself in the world and in relation to fellow human beings, is a central concept in all of this, as many of the things people do are implicit (and sometimes explicit) acts of identity: the act itself, e.g. choosing Language A rather than B, ‘stands for’ or ‘indexes’ a certain attitude, opinion or stance. Contesting a norm is, for instance, one outcome of the wish to increase the value of one’s cultural background, while adhering to norms, as a powerful mechanism for achieving belongingness, is equally expressive of identity (i.e. the assertion that one belongs to the group that behaves ‘this way’). Importantly, this is not limited to choosing Language A or B: monolingual language use itself may be contested as well. For instance, in schools, media, and elsewhere European bilinguals (or multilinguals) are routinely confronted with a demand that they use only one language at a time. This is the double (or triple, etc.) monolingualism norm. The double monolingualism norm has substituted the earlier monolingualism norm which is closely connected to a Herderian ideal of the close relationship

between people, nation, and language. As Jørgensen (2010) reminds us, well into the 1900’s linguists warned against children growing up with two languages, unless special conditions were met. Both the monolingualism norm and the double monolingualism norm stress the ideal of monolingual linguistic behavior. They are to a large extent essentialist, as they depend on the conceptualization of languages as nicely packaged sets of features. In contrast, an integrated bilingualism (or multilingualism) norm emphasizes that language users may codeswitch, i.e. use features from different languages in the same production when that is appropriate.

We have devoted quite a bit of space to how norms get established and how they are cognitively represented. The cognitive perspective seems, at first sight, to be fairly irrelevant to the Toolkit enterprise, as it deals with concrete decisions that need to be made in particular, relatively formal, communicative settings, but understanding with what norms people come to these situations helps understanding to what degree misunderstandings may be a danger to reckon with. It also helps understand why people embrace certain decisions and resist others. It also implies that we must deal with issues such as proficiency, access to desired norms, their acquisition, and the justification for the privileged positions of only some norms and not others. The Toolkit is **not** meant to suggest more prescriptive rules; it is meant to pool and disseminate knowledge about the normativity issues that need to be widely understood in order for people and organizations to make effective language choices in a range of communicative situations involving speakers of different languages. This will increase their chances of making their communicative efforts successful.

### 3. The four strategies

We focus on four different strategies that seem to be used, often or less often, in multilingual communicative settings: English as Lingua Franca, Regional Lingua Franca, Receptive Multilingualism, and Codeswitching. Which one can be used in any given communicative situation naturally depends on which norms hold for particular settings, the degrees to which such norms are shared by participants, and the linguistic resources that are available to the participants. We will discuss each strategy in turn; fuller accounts of each are given in the other papers collected in this volume.

### 3.1 English as Lingua Franca (ELF)

At present, English is clearly the most widespread language in the world in terms of people learning it as a second language, often so that they can function in situations in which people communicate who have different mother tongues. Ensuring that everyone has access to English and then using English as the default lingua franca in such communicative situations seems, at first sight, a reasonable solution to the language choice problem. After all, English is “encountered and used by speakers from all levels of society in practically all walks of life” (Seidlhofer, Breiteneder & Pitzl 2006: 5). In addition, if everyone knows English, using English avoids the costs involved in having to provide translations (Breidbach 2003: 20). However, there are at least two problems that need attention.

First, English is not as neutral as the above idealization more or less implies. Its widespread use as the lingua franca of a globalised world may endanger the vitality of other languages, by limiting their potential to be used as vehicular languages (Philipson 2006). In a summarizing article on this problem, Seidlhofer, Breiteneder & Pitzl (2006: 8) write: “This situation is obviously problematic: The need for a common means of communication is in potential conflict with the ideals of societal multilingualism and individual plurilingualism.”

Second, not everyone has equal access to English. The widespread success of English in various professional domains not only imposes further pressure on everybody to just use English: the employment of English often subjects the participants to the norms of a native-like competence: making do with just any level of English one can muster is not enough if one wants to fully participate and be taken serious, for example at international conferences, especially if these include native speaking participants. Under ELF, efforts are made to minimize the degree of normativity involved, and to develop a more relaxed norm for the type of English that should be used. The rules of Standard English are not necessarily enforced in such communicative situations, and this gives rise to new varieties of English, referred to as *World Englishes*. These varieties are “endonormative”, as they establish their own conventions which will diverge to a greater or lesser extent from those of Standard English. Often, the respective native languages of the speakers can be seen reflected in ELF usage. A particularly productive research area in this area concerns language attitudes and identity (Gubbins & Holt 2002;

Duszak 2002; Duszak & Okulska 2004; Jenkins 2007; Joseph 2004; Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004; Simon 2004).

### 3.2 Regional Lingua Franca (RELF)

The system of officially monolingual states that came to characterize Europe after the First World War is at odds with the linguistic diversity on the continent, as, for one thing, there are many more languages than countries. The typical European state settled on one official language, the language of the majority nation. Any other languages used within the state territory were relegated to subordinate status, and its speakers had to accommodate to the official language, should they want to play a role in society. Pre-World War I, much of Europe was part of large multiethnic empires, such as the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, typically multilingual societies in which a lingua franca was used, learned by most people as an L2.

In European history the choice of lingua franca is usually connected to the high status of the language of the ruling classes or majority populations, who had enough political power and prestige for their language to dominate communication in other parts of the empire. The original Mediterranean *Lingua Franca* was largely based on Italian and Provencal; it was spoken from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries around the Mediterranean basin, particularly in the European commercial empires of Italian cities and in trading ports located throughout the eastern Mediterranean rim; Koine Greek was used in the parts of Europe where the Byzantine Empire held hegemony; Latin was used in the other parts of Europe due to Roman expansion and maintained its prestige for a long time thanks to the wide diffusion of the Roman Catholic Church; Latin was for instance used as the language of scholars in Europe until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in most subjects. In more recent times, German served as a lingua franca in large portions of Europe for centuries, mainly on the territory of the Holy Roman Empire and it was one of the official languages of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; French was the lingua franca of diplomacy from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the language of European literature in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; and the rise of English as a lingua franca in diplomacy started after the First World War and achieved its present dominance after the Second World War. In the eastern part of the continent, Polish was a lingua franca in regions that belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. For several centuries, Polish was the main language spoken by the ruling classes in Lithuania, Ukraine and the

modern state of Belarus. Russian is in use and widely understood in areas formerly part of the Soviet Union and may be understood by older people in Central and Eastern Europe, formerly part of the Warsaw Pact. Russian remains the *lingua franca* in the Commonwealth of Independent States; and Serbo-Croatian functions as *lingua franca* in some of the former Yugoslav republics.

Most of these languages may be characterized as Regional *Linguae Francae*, since they were employed as such in the wider region covered by the empire or some other type of political union. After the empires or countries to which they were connected collapsed or lost prestige, they had to compete with the national languages of the new nation states and often disappeared from the official domain.

Since the establishment of the European Union the nation-state system has come under some pressure. Europe is characterized by multi-level governance in which the role of the nation-state has been reduced, especially because its borders have become transparent (Zielonka, 2007). Furthermore, the goal of Europeanization (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005) is that European norms and values, including that voiced by the Council of Europe on the desirability of multiculturalism and the protection of regional and minority languages, spread over the whole continent (Breidbach 2003). In the resulting 'common European communicative sphere', the use of former Regional *Linguae Francae* and other vehicular languages has re-emerged. In some cases, speech communities that were located on different sides of a border but who use the same language have been reconnected due to the stimulation of cross-border, transnational cooperation. In these regionally restricted border areas old communicative patterns have resurfaced within the EU regime. The emergence and re-emergence of transnational communication with the help of regional *linguae francae* offers a possibility for overcoming linguistic diversity at the edges of neighbouring states, although due to its territorial restrictions it is limited in scope. In the territories where RELF is operative, it may compete with ELF as the more efficient or acceptable communicative option. There are some differences in the way in which RELF usage proceeds, depending on whether speakers speak the language in question as their mother tongue or not. Janssen, Mamadouh and Marác (this volume) use this dimension to distinguish between three types of RELF usage.

### 3.3 Receptive Multilingualism/*Lingua Receptiva* (LaRa)

Generally speaking, "Receptive Multilingualism" is a mode of intercultural communication in which the conversation partners can employ different languages or varieties and still understand each other without the help of any additional *lingua franca*. Their mutual understanding is established because recipients have enough knowledge of the language that their interlocutor(s) is (are) speaking to be able to comprehend most of what is said. Previously, this phenomenon was conceptualized as "semicomunication" (Haugen 1981), or "intercompréhension" (Grin 2008). It has recently been described as "receptive multilingualism" or, emphasizing the *receptive* component of communication, as LaRa ("Lingua Receptiva"; ten Thije & Zeevaert 2007; Rehbein/ten Thije/Verschik 2009). LaRa is defined as the ensemble of the *linguistic, mental, interactional* and *intercultural competences* which are *creatively* activated when listeners are addressed in one of the languages they know. Communication is enhanced if speakers monitor the degree to which they are understood, and make use of subsidiary competencies to control communicative asymmetries as soon as they become manifested in interaction. Such competencies come naturally to many speakers, but they can also be trained.

In LaRa, a distinction is made between hearer and speaker components, as their roles demand slightly different sets of skills on the dimensions mentioned. The hearer's competence is communicatively realized by nonverbal signals, prosodic elements expressing a range from agreement to disagreement, formulaic expressions such as *I don't understand, what do you mean, what?*, echo questions, and other elements with which the hearer gives feedback to the speaker about the extent of comprehension. Strategies that the speaker may use in order to overcome comprehension problems include reformulations, repairs, recapitulations, rephrasing, and other kinds of metadiscourse realisation. Such accommodation processes give rise to lexical and morphological adaptations towards what the speaker imagines to be more easily understood by the hearer.

For purposes of understanding, hearers reactivate an often implicit comprehension potential, especially where languages share many similarities. In earlier studies, covering Scandinavian, Germanic (Braunmüller 2002, Zeevaert 2004) and Romance languages (Conti & Grin 2008), typological similarity within language families was pointed out to be relevant for successful *intercompréhension*.



LaRa has a long standing tradition in Europe, but has been largely ignored or suppressed throughout the twentieth century due to the homogenising language policies of European nation-states (e.g. Rindler Schjerve 2003). And yet, LaRa communication continues to occur in various multilingual niches, in which receptive multilingualism has led to efficient intercultural discourse (Koole & ten Thije 1994). When it works, LaRa helps transcending communicational misunderstanding and failure, and helps construct new forms of understanding.

One of the main questions regarding LaRa is how it relates to the other strategies. In LaRa, communication partners can verbalize in their chosen language what they could not verbalize in English or any other Lingua Franca. On the other hand, whereas ELF users can base their verbalizations on acquired means which are “safe” to a certain extent, as English will often not be the mother tongue of any of the interlocutors, LaRa-understanders often have to activate a comprehension potential, and undertake an active adaptation process, to a language that they generally master to a lesser extent than the speaker.

### *3.4 Codeswitching (CS)*

One option that is rarely chosen or even considered in language choice processes for formal meetings, and one that is extremely frequent in everyday speech, is codeswitching, the use of two (or more) languages at the same time. LaRa could be viewed as one kind of CS, but the latter is broader: it covers any type of language use in which two languages are used together, often by the same speaker, and often within an individual sentence (see Auer 1995 for a general overview of the various sub-types). The phenomenon has been studied in multilingual families and communities all around the world.

CS could be argued to be the prime expression of cultural equality. Its obscurity reflects the dominant language ideology that is held almost everywhere in official quarters: languages are seen as self-contained entities, which need to be as pure as possible. Codeswitching goes against this ideology, as it breaks down the barriers between languages. While discourse about English as Lingua Franca and its alternatives generally takes place under the specter of language recognition and rivalry between national languages, codeswitching practices cheerfully ignore this and seem to expose it as an elite preoccupation. Supporting evidence for this view could come

from the interpretation that as long as some form of coercion is possible, people can be forced to stick to one language, but in everyday informal settings where such coercion is generally absent, communication often proceeds in two or more languages at the same time. The idea that languages are discrete identities is of course reinforced enormously in pretty much everybody’s upbringing; that codeswitching is nevertheless practiced abundantly in most bilingual communities studied testifies to the fact that these distinctions are in some sense unnatural.

We propose that an upgrade of the appreciation of codeswitching (and various other types of language mixing; ‘codeswitching’ is just a widespread, though not very accurate, cover term) is useful. The central ideas are that 1) the bilingual skills involved provide an undervalued resource in communication policies and education, and 2) recognizing their value may help rewrite public perception of what languages are and thus combat some of the purism that plagues much of the debate. The rest of this section works this out for a number of empirical domains where codeswitching might be a feasible alternative to monolingual choices.

Basically, codeswitching should be possible in the same situations as where LaRa is possible, as it can only be communicatively successful if all participants have some knowledge of both (or all) of the languages involved. This must be relativized, though, in at least two ways: 1) the thoroughness with which participants “know” the languages is open to discussion; and 2) translation mechanisms can help communication even if not everybody speaks all languages involved.

As for proficiency, it would probably be counterproductive if, on the one hand, we promote CS as a valid communicative option, and, on the other hand, only expect people to use both languages if they have a high level of proficiency in those languages. The reality of language is, after all, that people differ in how easily they learn second and foreign languages, and education can only play a limited role in this. While we certainly do not want to argue against teaching various languages in school, we argue against imposing high-level proficiency norms on anyone wishing to participate in communicative practice.

As for ‘translation’, CS data often show that speakers repeat information in two languages. Often, this has pragmatic motivations, such as lending emphasis to particular information, but note that this is often done as a service to the interlocutors. CS often plays this role: it allows interlocutors to interpret the intentions of the speaker, i.e. it is a

contextualization cue. Communication training could educate speakers about these functions that apparently come naturally to bilingual speakers, as they use them spontaneously, in order to exploit them in more official settings.

One practical advantage of ‘allowing’ CS is that speakers do not have to think hard about a way to phrase something in the language of communication if another language says it better. Many culturally loaded expressions are of this type: if speakers are allowed to just use the expression in the other language, perhaps accompanied by phrases such as ‘as they say in X’, and a further explanation of its meaning, this will help them a) to express optimally what they want to say and b) contribute positively to every participant’s intercultural competence. Many of the settings that we are looking at in the context of our Toolkit lend themselves well to CS as practiced ‘in the wild’, because of their relative informality. This holds, for instance, for daycare centers, some classroom interaction in schools, community organizations, shops and markets, work settings, and public transport. In theory, more formal domains, such as classrooms, official services (city hall, police, tax office, etc.), staff meetings in business, parliament sessions, and written media could just as well feature CS, but commonly held negative attitudes characteristic of purism work against its use. The question is whether this is to be accepted as normal. Background to all this is sociolinguistic work on language attitudes, both in the form of socio-psychological work through, e.g., questionnaires, and in the form of observations of the ways in which the indexicality of different languages is reflected in communicative practices (as in the current work on linguistic landscapes, for instance, cf. Juffermans 2010).

Attitudes are all-important. Whenever the current norm for monolingual language choice in any communicative settings meets with hostility, disappointment and resentment in some of the participants, making CS acceptable and normal would probably go quite some way to relaxing the tensions involved, and this, in turn, would increase the chances of communicative success. Less urgent, perhaps, but still a positive contribution that CS can make is that it spices up communication, adding creativity and humor. Not being allowed to break into the possibilities other languages allow holds the flow of conversation back, making for stilted discourse, and as we all know, a little fun can do wonders in any communicative situation.

#### 4. Communication strategies: A preliminary comparison

The four strategies we consider here are not the only ones that are possible in multilingual communication (cf. House & Rehbein 2004; Rehbein, ten Thije and Verschik, to appear). What makes them particularly useful, however, is that they do not involve pressure on the communication partners to develop full competence in one or more non-native languages, nor do they require the use of expensive professional translation services. Use of English or a regionally prominent language as lingua franca can proceed without ‘full’ command of the language in the sense that one does not need to sound like a native speaker, or be able to use the language fluently in any communicative situation. LaRa and CS share the feature that interlocutors are called upon to help each other out whenever comprehension problems arise, by treating the *totality* of linguistic skills available to those present as the resources for achieving successful communication.

Still, significant differences can be detected between the four modes, and these differences provide clues for realizing the ultimate goal of selecting the optimal mode of communication in a particular communicative setting. First, while all four strategies have in common that they do not rely to any great extent on an excessive orientation towards the target language norm, they differ in the degree to which they avoid this. Especially ELF and CS de-emphasize the importance of standard norms. The higher the reliance on ‘perfect skills’, the more costly the educational needs. Second, there are differences in the socio-historical embedding of the four modes, as has become clear from the individual descriptions in the sections above. ELF is a relatively new mode; RELF and LaRa have historical antecedents, while CS is very old as everyday practice, but has had little presence in official discourse. Third, the four modes seem to be preferred on different regions of the formality cline, with especially CS typically used only informally. They also differ in territorial scope, as only ELF can be used practically anywhere. All other strategies are crucially dependent on available linguistic skills. A little training can sometimes go a long way, though, and speakers should be encouraged to work on their repertoires throughout their life. Spending all one’s energies on perfecting his/her skills in one foreign language (e.g. English) is, for most communication goals in modern Europe, perhaps not the most efficient way of doing this. Therefore, we may also compare the four modes with respect to their learnability. As a basic

principle underlying efficient transnational communication we suggest that everything should be done to allow communication partners to make use of whatever they have in their linguistic repertoires (see Gumperz 1982; Lüdi & Py 2008; Blommaert & Backus 2011). Having said this, there is no gold standard that will allow everybody to function in an optimal way; what one needs in terms of linguistic repertoire depends on what communicative settings one is likely to enter on a regular basis.

One of the main aims of the Toolkit project is to develop reliable and objective dimensions that enable comparison and assessment of communicative effectiveness. Only on the basis of more comprehensive case studies can these tentative assessments summarised be underpinned and elaborated. The Toolkit project brings several such case studies together.

## References

- Auer, Peter (1995): The pragmatics of code-switching: a sequential approach. In: Lesley Milroy & Pieter Muysken (eds.): *One speaker, two languages. Cross-disciplinary perspectives on code-switching*. Cambridge University Press, 115-135
- Blommaert, Jan (2010): *The sociolinguistics of globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blommaert, J. & Ad Backus (2011). Repertoires revisited: 'Knowing language' in superdiversity, Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies Paper 67.
- Braunmüller, Kurt (2002): Semicommunication and accommodation: Observations from the linguistic situation in Scandinavia. In: *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 12:1, 1-23
- Breidbach, S. (2003): Plurilingualism, democratic citizenship and the role of English. Strasbourg: Language Policy Division, Council of Europe. Retrieved from [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural\\_Cooperation/education/Languages/Language\\_Policy/Polica\\_development\\_activities/Studies/BreidbachEN.pdf?L=E](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Cooperation/education/Languages/Language_Policy/Polica_development_activities/Studies/BreidbachEN.pdf?L=E)
- Bybee, Joan (2006): From usage to grammar: The mind's response to repetition. *Language*, 82, 711-733.
- Cicourel, Aaron (2006): Cognitive/affective processes, social interaction, and social structure as representational re-descriptions: their contrastive bandwidths and spatio-temporal foci. *Mind & Society* 5: 39-70.
- Clark, H. H. (1996): *Using language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Conti, V. & F. Grin (dir.) (2008): *S'entendre entre langues voisines: vers l'intercompréhension*. Chêne-Bourg: Georg
- Dąbrowska, Ewa (2008): The effects of frequency and neighbourhood density on adult speakers' productivity with Polish case inflections: An empirical test of usage-based approaches to morphology. *Journal of Memory and Language* 58(4). 931-951.
- Duszak, A. & U. Okulska (eds.) (2004): *Speaking from the margins: Global English from a European perspective*. Frankfurt: P. Lang
- Duszak, A. (ed.) (2002): *Us and others: Social identities across languages, discourse and cultures*. Amsterdam: Benjamins
- Eckert, Penelope (2003): Language and gender in adolescence. In J. Holmes and M. Meyerhoff (eds.): *Handbook of Language and Gender* 381-400. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gubbins, P. & Holt, M. (eds.) (2002): *Beyond boundaries: Language and Identity in contemporary Europe*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters
- Gumperz, John J. (1982): *Discourse strategies*. Oxford: University Press
- Haugen, Einar (1981): Semicommunication. In: E. Haugen (1987): *Blessings of Babel. Bilingualism and language planning*. Berlin etc.: Mouton de Gruyter, 71-76
- House, Juliane & Jochen Rehbein (2004): What is 'multilingual communication'? In: J. House & J. Rehbein (eds.): *Multilingual Communication. Hamburg Studies on Multilingualism* 3. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1-17
- Jenkins, J. (2007): *English as a lingua franca: Attitudes and identity*. Oxford: University Press
- Jørgensen, J. Normann (2010): *Languaging. Nine years of polylingual development of young Turkish-Danish grade school students*. Copenhagen Studies in Bilingualism, The Køge Series, Vol. K15. University of Copenhagen, Faculty of Humanities.
- Joseph, J. E. (2004): *Language and Identity: National, ethnic, religious*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan
- Juffermans, Kasper (2010): *Local languaging. Literacy products and practices in Gambian society*. Tilburg University Ph.D. thesis.
- Koole, Tom & Jan D. ten Thije (1994): *The Construction of Intercultural Discourse. Team discussion of educational advisers*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Langacker, Ronald W. (2008): *Cognitive Grammar. A basic introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lüdi, G. & B. Py (2008): *To be or not to be ... a multilingual speaker*.

- In: *International Journal of Multilingualism and Multiculturalism* (forthcoming)
- Nye, Mallory (2000): Religion, post-religionism, and religioning: Religious Studies and contemporary cultural debates. *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 12, 447-476.
- Pennycook, Alastair 2007. *Global Englishes and transcultural flows*. London: Routledge.
- Pavlenko, Aneta & Adrian Blackledge (2004): Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts. Clevedon: *Multilingual Matters*
- Philipson, Robert (2006): *English-Only Europe? Challenging Language Policy*. London: Routledge.
- Rehbein, Jochen, Jan D. ten Thije & Anna Verschik (in press): 'Lingua Receptiva (LaRa). Introductory Remarks on the Quintessence of Receptive Multilingualism'. In: Jan D. ten Thije, J. Rehbein & A. Verschik (eds.): Special Issue on 'Lingua Receptiva' of the *International Journal of Bilingualism*.
- Rindler-Schjerve, Rosita (ed.) (2003): *Diglossia and Power. Language Policies and Practice in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Habsburg Empire*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Rindler Schjerve, Rosita (2007): Language conflict revisited. In: J. Darquennes (ed.): *Contact Linguistics and Language Minorities*, 37-50.
- Schimmelfennig, Frank and Ulrich Sedelmeier (eds.) (2005): *The Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe*. Thaca: Cornell University Press.
- Seidlhofer, B., A. Breiteneder & M.-L. Pitzl (2006): English as a Lingua Franca in Europe: Challenges for Applied Linguistics. In: *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 26, 3-34
- Simon, B. (2004): *Identity in modern society: A social psychological perspective*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Thije, Jan D. ten and Lüdger Zeevaert (eds.) (2007): *Receptive Multilingualism*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins
- Tomasello, Michael (2008): *The origins of human communication*. MIT Press.
- Vertovec, Steven (2007): Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30 (6), 1024-1054.
- Zeevaert, Lüdger (2004): *Interskandinavische Kommunikation. Strategien zur Etablierung von Verständigung zwischen Skandinaviern im Diskurs*. Hamburg: Dr. Kovač.
- Zielonka, Jan. 2007. *Europe as Empire. The Nature of the Enlarged European Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Copyright 2011: The authors

**J. Normann Jørgensen (ed.):  
A Toolkit for Transnational Communication in Europe**

**Copenhagen Studies in Bilingualism Volume 64.**

ISBN 87-91621-48-8

ISSN 0901-9731

Cover design: Michael Schøldardt

Print: Røde Hane

The Copenhagen Studies in Bilingualism is a peer-reviewed series of scholarly works, published by the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Copenhagen.

Editors:

Juni Söderberg Arnfast, Center for Danish as a Second and Foreign  
Language, University of Copenhagen

Anne Holmen, Center for Internationalization and Parallel Languages,  
University of Copenhagen

Jakob Steensig, Section of Linguistics, Aarhus University

J. Normann Jørgensen, Center for Danish as a Second and Foreign  
Language, University of Copenhagen

Distribution: Studenterafdelingen, publiKom@hum.ku.dk

This volume edited by: J. Normann Jørgensen

## CONTENTS

- 5 Ad Backus, László Marác & Jan D. ten Thije  
**A TOOLKIT FOR MULTILINGUAL  
COMMUNICATION IN EUROPE:  
DEALING WITH LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY**
- 25 Ad Backus & J. Normann Jørgensen  
**CODE-SWITCHING**
- 43 Cornelia Hülbauer  
**ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA (ELF):  
A MODE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS**
- 69 Rudi Janssens, Virginie Mamadouh & László Marác  
**LANGUAGES OF REGIONAL COMMUNICATION  
(*ReLan*) IN EUROPE:  
THREE CASE STUDIES AND A RESEARCH AGENDA**
- 102 Roos Beerkens & Jan D. ten Thije  
**RECEPTIVE MULTILINGUALISM  
IN THE DUTCH-GERMAN BORDER AREA**