

Conference Report on "Multilingual Turns: New Perspectives on Cross-Cultural Communication"

Justus Liebig University Giessen, 17 May, 2016, International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC), Giessen

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Multilingualism as Concept, Method, and Condition

What role does multilingualism play in the formation of linguistic, political, and intellectual communities? What strategies do authors use to recreate multilingualism in literature? How can we promote multilingualism in educational contexts? – These are just some of the questions addressed by the symposium “Multilingual Turns: New Perspectives on Cross-Cultural Communication”, co-organized by the GCSC Research Area 5 “Media and Multiliteracy Studies” and the DAAD-Network “Kulturelle Kontakt- und Konfliktzonen im östlichen Europa” (coordinated by Nazarii Gutsul, Justus-Liebig University, Giessen).



The GCSC hosted ten doctoral and postdoctoral researchers from the GCSC and its university partners from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan working on multilingualism across sociology, political science, cultural history, linguistics, literary studies, and didactics. The short presentations formed the basis of a day-long roundtable discussion with expert feedback provided by supervisors and guest researchers from Justus Liebig University Giessen and the Herder Institute in Marburg.

THOMAS DAIBER (Justus-Liebig University, Giessen), Professor at the Institute of Slavic



Studies, opened the symposium by introducing the audience to the general concept of the symposium and to the topic of multilingualism from a linguistic point of view. The first two presentations were delivered by KSENIA MAKSIMOVTSOVA (Justus-Liebig University, Giessen) and MARIA KALASHNIKOVA (Kazan Federal University, Kazan). The first presentation invoked a lively discussion around the topic of state

bilingualism in Estonia, Latvia, and the Ukraine, where the issue of language policy remains one of the most debatable problems in the public space. Maria Kalashnikova showed how Dina Rubina, a Russian-Israeli author, employs the strategy of code-mixing in her novels by reflecting on the influence these foreign-language inclusions have on her writing.

Multilingualism in Politics and Education

EKATERINA PANKOVA (Justus-Liebig University, Giessen) talked about the ideological foundations of language policy in contemporary Russia. In the presentation, she addressed the issue of the controversial relationship between the officially proclaimed language policy delivered by the federal centre and the regional language policy.

PAUL VICKERS (Justus-Liebig University, Giessen) explored multilingualism in area studies by considering both the practical execution of translations that enable the circulation of knowledge, as well as the notion of translation as a travelling concept signalling the movement of ideas, epistemologies, and methods between culturally diverse sites of the production of knowledge. Focusing on multilingual strategies in James Joyce's collection of short stories *The Dubliners*, MARIA KOVALCHUK (National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Kiev) presented an interesting case at the crossroads of multilingual studies and postcolonial relations. She provided a comparative analysis of the language of war and peace in contemporary Irish and Ukrainian discourse.

James Joyce's novel *Finnegans Wake* served as a point of reference for TOM CLUCAS (Justus-Liebig University, Giessen), who applied the concept of the "multilingual subject" developed by Claire Kramsch in his analysis of multilingual strategies in this novel. The fourth panel also hosted a guest researcher from Kazakhstan, who described the language situation in modern Kazakhstan. DAUREN BORANBAYEV's talk (Kazakh Ablai Khan University, Almaty) was a great complement to the previous presentations by Ksenia Maksimovtsova and Ekaterina Pankova, who addressed the issue of multilingualism in post-Soviet Estonia, Latvia, the Ukraine, and Russia. In this sense, Kazakhstan stands out from these cases as a relatively successful attempt at state language policy implementation, which means that both the official Kazakh language and Russian as a language of interethnic communication are equally respected by the population.

**Multilingualism in Literature and Linguistics**

The last panel addressed multilingualism in the field of education. NEVENA STAMENKOVIĆ (Justus-Liebig University, Giessen) provided a detailed overview of her research project dealing with approaches to teaching multilingual literature in foreign language education. Drawing on preliminary results from an empirical study she conducted at four Berlin high schools, she showed how multilingual Chicano literature can be used to encourage learners' engagement in the symbolic use of language. YANINA ZINCHENKA (Belarusian State University, Minsk) on the other hand addressed the asymmetrical situation of language use within higher education in modern Belarus, showing how the use of Russian still predominates in the Belarusian higher education context.

The discussion was rounded out by a keynote lecture by CLAIRE KRAMSCH (Professor of German and Education at UC Berkeley and an international expert on multilingualism), who investigated the role of multilingualism in the interdisciplinary and transnational study of culture from the perspective of applied linguistics.

By exploring the concept of multilingualism in various case studies, the contributors managed to show the relevance of the concept across disciplinary and national borders. The discussions proved very fruitful, while raising many questions about how language helps to mediate communication within and between cultures. They furthermore showed how social and cultural debates often register themselves on a linguistic level through discussions of language politics. This event helped to develop multilingualism as a travelling concept to be applied in the study of culture and to conceptualise ways in which to study multilingualism at the intersections of language, culture, and politics. The organizers are currently planning a publication of selected contributions.