

EDITORIAL:

In a speech given to the plenary session of the Economic and Social Council¹ on 30 January, The French Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, spoke at length about globalization "which frees energies but also triggers negative forces which have to be kept in check". He took the opportunity to praise the European model based on the "respect for the diversity of languages and cultures" and suggested that "the right of states to freely enact cultural policies should be underpinned by a universal convention on cultural diversity"

This proposal is certainly noteworthy, however, such a convention would only make sense as long as each and every state managed to define their particular policy on language and culture.

One objection could be that many countries have already gone to great lengths over the years to protect their language and culture, France, for instance, as well as countries whose tongues are "minor" or "little spoken". These efforts, however, were, more often than not, meant to preserve the past rather than prepare for the future. Whereas nowadays, the effects of globalization, good or bad, referred to in Lionel Jospin's speech apparently require the rethinking of all the strategies upon which language and culture policies rest. An essential prerequisite for this is the in-depth analysis of the language situation in each country.

The French government, for this purpose, has recently established an "Observatory of Linguistic Practice" (Observatoire des Pratiques Linguistiques) within the framework of the new Upper Council for the French Language (Conseil Supérieur de la Langue Française - CSLF). The purpose of the Observatory will be to study the linguistic practices within France as well as the modalities and effect of the contact between languages. It has been made clear from the outset that the results of the observatory's activity will provide useful information for drawing up social, education and culture policies.

The significance of this initiative for our field of research, Language for Special Purposes and Professional Communication is evident from Lionel Jospin's speech at the inauguration of the CSLF in 1999²:

In the course of the 21st Century, languages will become ever more important: mastery of the various forms of oral and written communication is a requirement of the labour market and is a prerequisite for access to information, culture, social life and citizenship; the development of the service sector truly turns languages into active agents within the economy; globalization along with the building of the European Union increases the rate of exchanges and contact between languages; languages are, at long last, at the heart of the revolution brought on by new technology. All these developments require intervention designed to ensure linguistic and cultural diversity as well as the development of bridges between the languages such as learning several languages, translation, interpretation, terminology data-banks.....

It was in this context that the CLSF, in 2001, proposed, or, "put out to tender" a series of projects the purpose of which was to "better evaluate linguistic policy and practice within companies operating at international level in order to, in this fashion, turn government policy towards linguistic diversity"³.

The specifications of the "tender" state that the research has to be focussed on the use of language within the context of globalization, a context which, sometimes, leads to companies using languages other than that of the home country for purposes of internal or external communication.

Two areas of investigation are of particular interest:

- 1) communication within a given company when, as a result of business alliances or other types of co-operation at international level, staff members with different mother tongues work together,
- 2) external communication of a given company, in terms of its foreign market contacts, customers and suppliers.

This document comprises many questions that are pertinent to the terms set out in the framework mentioned above: frequency of the use of foreign languages, the rôle and position of the personnel in question, employment conditions, the effect of new information technology, the impact of languages on the definition of commercial strategy and the conquest of new markets, etc.

Those of our readers who would like to draw inspiration from this research which coincides with a large part of our sphere of endeavour, and that should also be of interest to governments of non-French speaking countries as well, can find the complete text of this document on the French Ministry of Culture's website.

The Editorial Board

References

¹ Speech delivered to the Economic and Social Council, " The Stakes involved in Globalization: Regulation and Development, 30/01/2002: <http://www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/fr/p.cfm?ref=31754>

² Prime Minister's speech at the inauguration of the Conseil supérieur de la langue française: "Which policy now vis-à-vis French and multilingualism?" 16 November 1999: <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/dglf/politique-langue/politique-langue.htm>

³ "Tender" for the linguistic policy and practice of companies issued in 2001 by the General Delegation for the French Language (La délégation générale de la langue française): http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/dglf/politique-langue/prat_ling_ao2001.html

DEADLINES

Any contribution to be published in the International Journal "LSP and Professional Communication" should reach us within the following deadlines:

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