

EDITORIAL:

The article, “New Trends in the Language Professions”, that we carry in this issue, systematically goes through themes that have been discussed for quite some time in the faculties of foreign languages in various European countries. These themes include: the role of languages other than English, falling native-language competence, translation into second languages, expertise in IT technology, the need for initiation into the world of business, etc. – all themes of crucial importance in professional and intercultural communication.

Changes in the working conditions of language specialists, changes due to the globalisation and computerisation of society, clearly require changes in the traditional foreign language programmes in our universities.

As a consequence, the universities have been offering mixed study programmes for several years: foreign languages + another specialised field (economics, law, etc.). Unfortunately these innovations will not eliminate all the problems. On one hand, (as mentioned in the article) these mixed study programmes force students to specialise in two very different fields, which does not make things easy, and on the other hand, the study lines that used to train language teachers and translators disappear. And even worse: to an increasing extent, students turn away from language studies and especially from European languages other than English.

In Denmark, for instance, university statistics¹ show that, in all the universities in Denmark combined, out of a total of 113,129 students enrolled, only about 3,500² are studying languages, divided as follows: English approx. 1871, Spanish 498, German 450, French 258, Italian 57, other languages (including Russian, Chinese, Japanese and Arabic) approx. 400.

The same statistics show the annual total number of students enrolled since 2002, and the numbers for 2007, already very modest compared to before the turn of the century, continue to decrease, even for English. This tendency is going to continue so long as the politicians, out of ignorance or fear of

¹ ”Den koordinerede tilmelding” KOT rapport nr. 20 (2007), www.rektorkollegiet.dk ; Erhvervsbladet 27/3-08: ”Danske studerende fravælger europæiske sprog”

² In all language study programmes.

compromising themselves, fail to take the necessary measures to correct the situation.

There is, however, no lack of declarations and recommendations: countless reports have been published over the past 10 years by the European Union, by government committees in various countries, by organisations, etc. – reports that analyse the problems and propose solutions. In Denmark, the two most recent have just been published: one is a report³ from a committee appointed by the government in 2007; the other is a summary⁴ from a conference organised by CBS⁵ in October 2007. The first focuses above all on the future of the national language, but also proposes some interesting solutions to the reinforcement of foreign languages. The second focuses on foreign languages, but insists on the necessity of maintaining the position of Danish as a European language with all its rights in the European Union.

One very simple conclusion that can be drawn from these reports is the necessity of a reinforcement of language teaching (both national and foreign) at all levels in the schools. You can hardly blame the great majority of students who leave school with only a barely usable knowledge of English for not venturing into a further and higher education in another language they have never learned.

While we wait for the government to digest these reports, CBS, which has 90 years experience in teaching languages to future players in the business community and which has suffered the same fate as other universities when it comes to languages, has just initiated a project in cooperation with a Danish six-form college that might turn out to be interesting and may even serve as a model⁶.

In close collaboration with CBS, the college has created a language section specifically intended to prepare students for the different lines of study at CBS and to introduce them, already before the university studies, to higher education and how the business community works.

We will be following this experiment with great interest.

The Editorial Board

³ "Sprog til tiden - rapport fra sprogudvalget", Kulturministeriet 2008

⁴ "Fremmedsprog til fremtiden – Sprogpolitiske udfordringer for Danmark", CBS 2008

⁵ CBS = Copenhagen Business School

⁶ For further information, please see the website www.jsgym.dk