Experiencing trilingual Master study programs at uni.lu

Perceptions of multilingualism: a Grounded Theory

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Subject

University of Luxembourg: founded in 2003, officially trilingual (French, German, English), bi- or trilingual BA-Programs

26 MA-Programs in winter term 2012/13

4 trilingual MA programs

Preliminary findings

a) Perceptions of a trilingual Master
- multilingualism = courses in different languages vs. multilingual practices within courses
- emergence of language hierarchies seen as necessary vs. problematic when combined with marginalization of languages
- ideal of trilingual students and professors vs. perception of heterogeneous linguistic repertoires (seen as enriching or disturbing)

b) Multilingual teaching strategies
- in heterogeneous groups resuming parts of lecture in another language
- alternating between languages
  - comparing originals with translations
  - discussing concepts in different languages -> enhancing awareness of meaning nuances

c) Student’s strategies for coping with multilingualism
- writing papers in one language mainly (time economic)
- giving presentations in a weaker language to improve
- while taking notes translating a lecture into L1 or taking notes in the language of the talk
- learning from misunderstandings and from corrections
- creating new words in Luxembourgish (building up the academic register of Luxembourgish in the Lux-Master)

d) Perceptions of learning the third language (as a beginner/already advanced learner)
- acquiring writing skills in Luxembourgish (only Lux-Master)
- realizing that immersion in one language is hard to achieve
- learning from each other & multilingual contexts
- avoiding the weak language
- following lectures by clinging to key words already acquired

Purpose

- Exploratory study
- Focus on students perceptions of studying in several languages

Aims:
- develop an interpretive theory of how individual & institutional multilingualism is perceived
- show value of trilingual study programs for Higher Education, the labor market and students

Research questions

- Where and how do multilingual practices emerge in the Master?
- Which perceptions of multilingualism and of a multilingual study program are expressed by students?
- How do students perceive and categorize individual language repertoires?
- Which strategies do students declare to use to cope with linguistic and academic challenges?

Methods

- Interactional and linguistic ethnography (Dellwing & Prus 2012; Rampton et al 2004)

Selection of References


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