

Ingrid de Saint-Georges



by Valeriya Baranova

“Closer dialogue between select groups of people might go further in enabling them to find out what kind of knowledge is crucial in the EU context and what solutions must be built and designed in the future to respond to its most pressing social and economic needs”

Ingrid de Saint-Georges is an Associate-Professor at the Faculty for Language and Literature, Humanities, Arts and Education at the University of Luxembourg.

She joined the Faculty in January 2010. She holds a Ph.D. in Sociolinguistics from Georgetown University. Her interest is in the study of the complex ways in which discourses play out in situated social actions, focusing on how discourses are produced, how they are used, how they are mediated, as well as on the consequences actions and discourses have in the social arena. She investigates those issues in the field of education, paying attention to sociocultural processes of learning and collaborating in various contexts (the workplace, the classroom, the workshop, out-of-school training programs).

Before joining the LCMI research unit, she held a researcher and lecturer position at the **University of Geneva**. She collaborated on a 5-years research project, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, focusing on the role of interactions and other forms of mediations in vocational education and training. Prior to her appointment in Geneva, she received a one-year scientific mandate from the Francqui Foundation for postdoctoral research. She worked with the ReCCom (Research Center for Conflict and Crisis Management) at the Faculty of Economics, Social Sciences and Management (Facultés Universitaires Notre-Dame de la Paix, Namur, Belgium). Her current work is in the field of language and work, (multimodal) communication and learning, and discourse analysis in educational contexts.

1. You are Director of the Master's in Learning and Communication in Multilingual and Multicultural Contexts (MLCMMC) at the University of Luxembourg. Could you please tell us about the reasons for launching this Master's programme?

I'll begin with a bit of background perhaps... Europe today is characterised by more and more 'contact zones' (to use a term by Marie-Louise Pratt) between people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The phenomena of migration and mobility, for example, mean that many of our education systems, our workplaces and our neighbourhoods are more linguistically, culturally and religiously diverse than a few generations ago. New technologies also mean that, even when people are not on the move themselves, they engage in more transnational relations and cooperation through different media.

Thanks to new media, minorities are able to carve out niches for themselves in the public sphere where 'voices with an accent' (Lippi-Green) were not always heard before. Monolinguals are becoming exposed to multilingual voices. More hybrid identities are finding room to express themselves. These societal transformations are extremely rich and interesting to observe. They also come with challenges that are interesting for researchers: for example, to what extent does one's linguistic repertoire open or, on the contrary, limit access to work, education and democratic participation? To what extent do we lose useful opportunities for professional and economic innovation, knowledge creation, social solidarity and cohesion when we tame this diversity? How does one tap into the multilingual and multicultural resources of citizens? But also, if more power is given to the more 'multilingual' amongst us, where does that leave the more 'monolingual'?

Against this background, the Master's was set up to critically examine the challenges and opportunities that arise from this situation – when more people from a wider range of backgrounds come into contact. The aim is to form thinkers and practitioners capable of developing innovative ideas about how to make the most of these contact situations and to share these ideas with the relevant stakeholders (companies, international institutions, educators, politicians, the media, civil society, etc.).

2. What are the main goals of this Master's programme? What career opportunities does it open?

The Master's offers a mix of theoretical input and practical applications. On the theoretical level, the students become acquainted with the latest research dealing with multilingualism and multiculturalism in different fields of study (sociology, linguistics, new media studies, cultural studies, education, sociolinguistics, new literacy studies, multimodal approaches to learning, terminology and translation studies). They take courses taught by international experts hailing from international universities (we work with researchers from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Finland, the Netherlands and Portugal).

Contemporary theory and approaches enable students to develop their own research projects. On the more practical side, students are encouraged to apply and test these theoretical insights in practice. For example, the programme provides students with opportunities to do traineeships. Moreover, some of our teachers also come from the private sector and from the EU institutions, in order to bridge the gap between the academic and the professional world.

In career terms, the Master's prepares students for a broad spectrum of professions. Rather than targeting a specific profession, it contributes to developing skills that are applicable to a variety of professional fields. It is unique in its aims to combine students' previous experience with an academic curriculum that enables them to carve out career opportunities for themselves. Over the years our graduates have pursued work in research, education, cultural institutions, mediation settings, translation, journalism, marketing, the new media and the financial sector, for example.

3. The Master's programme is trilingual. Could you explain the advantages of using three languages and how this programme may influence students' perception of languages?

The Master's is one of very few trilingual Master's programmes in Europe, with courses taught in English, French and German. The advantages are numerous. First,

there is the obvious advantage that they develop skills in three languages and learn to use them at an academic level. Second, it is quite unique and rewarding to be able to read texts and ideas that have been produced according to various academic traditions. You gain access to other ways of viewing and understanding the world, which is a considerable epistemological advantage and puts you in a position to develop more creative and innovative ideas. A third advantage is that the diversity of literature and frames of reference encourages a more empathetic view on theoretical and social questions: you learn to shift your gaze and look at problems and questions from many different vantage points. This is important in the long run for developing ethical and democratic frames of thought.

I should also say that we don't limit ourselves to the three official languages of the programme. Many courses encourage students to draw on their own complex language biographies and multicultural backgrounds. To give an example, at the start of the 2014 winter term more than 35 nationalities were represented in the Master's, and the range of languages (linguistic competencies), cultural backgrounds and international experience they brought with them was even wider. It is the philosophy of the programme that students are given the room to experiment with multilingualism in the classroom, putting some of the issues that are discussed and debated in the scientific literature directly into practice. In this context the classroom becomes an incubator for thinking differently about multilingual and multicultural questions, but also for testing existing theories, including our own views of what language or culture is.

Naturally, students also learn a lot from each other and not only from their teachers. This also changes the exercise of teaching, the teacher's role and the notions of what counts as knowledge and what is regarded as norms. Finally, working in three (or more) languages is also good preparation for taking on challenges. Most students have one or two languages in which they can express themselves more effectively, or which they understand more readily. Working in three languages means that almost inevitably in some of their courses they will be pushed beyond their comfort zone. The programme strives to prepare flexible, inquiring, global, critical thinkers who are not afraid to deal with complexity and uncertainty, in whatever line of work they end up. In the end, we hope the students come out of the programme with a much more nuanced and complex understanding of the myriad practices and values which are hidden behind such abstract terms as 'language', 'culture' and 'identity', and that with this knowledge they become key contributors to public debate and decision-making processes in their own work environments.

4. In this programme you have introduced a course entitled ‘Multilingual Communication and Terminology in the EU’ taught by members of the European Parliament’s Terminology Coordination Unit (TermCoord). Why did you think it was important to offer this terminology component to your Master’s students?

When members of the Terminology Coordination Unit (TermCoord) approached us with the idea of offering a course in terminology, it immediately sparked our enthusiasm, for a number of reasons. Firstly, terminology has become so important in many lines of work (translation, computational linguistics, localisation, databases, etc.), so a basic understanding opens up career opportunities for students. Secondly, the intellectual exercise of building databases, identifying ontologies, etc. equips students with intellectual competencies that are useful beyond the confines of terminology itself and helps them further develop their understanding of how the way we formulate things affects our social life and interactions. Examining how terminology evolves over time speaks volumes, for example, about social structures and processes. Thirdly, we found it exciting for the students to be able to get a glimpse of the linguistic work carried out in the EU institutions by the very people engaged in it, given that EU translators, terminologists and language specialists are contributing in such an important way to the building of a democratic, multilingual and multicultural Europe.

5. You have chosen to participate, together with other EU universities, in a project launched by TermCoord aimed at offering students a traineeship in terminology research. What do you think will be the outcome of this cooperation for both TermCoord and MLCMMC students?

So far this cooperation has been extremely fruitful, and we have several students benefiting from this opportunity every year. The projects carried out by students during their traineeships are varied, ranging from building glossaries in areas of interest to them to developing web content (through interviews, blog entries, articles, etc.). This enables them to hone their skills as much in the field of terminology as in that of new media journalism and marketing. They also learn what it means to be a professional in a highly multilingual and multicultural work environment. My impression is that our students always bring dedication, motivation and their own personal touch to the tasks and projects they are asked to carry out. In return, they learn invaluable skills thanks to the excellent mentoring they receive in the very supportive learning environment.

6. What, in your opinion, can be done to further encourage and improve cooperation between the EU institutions and universities?

This is a very broad question. For the moment, funding instruments form the largest form of cooperation between the EU institutions and universities. These are of course

essential but, on the whole, funding instruments have been for large-scale, high-profile research projects that have had a very positive and significant impact. What might be missing is complementary funding for smaller, more agile, versatile projects. There is scope for such schemes to be developed in the future, and there is ample scientific evidence demonstrating that it is project work of this kind which plants the seeds of innovation. Many excellent projects fail to see the light of day because of the EU's focus on large-scale funding instruments, even though smaller projects would not need much to come to fruition. These little pushes might exponentially increase the number of innovative ideas and results, especially the ones that are most crucial to the needs of very local groups throughout Europe (but not only).

What we might need is something equivalent to European crowd-funding for mid-scale or small-scale research projects. Beyond funding instruments, I am a firm believer in more personal cooperation of the type developed between TermCoord and the MLCMMC. Here in Luxembourg we are lucky to be geographically very close to the EU institutions, which enables this different form of partnership. Closer dialogue between select groups of people might go further in enabling them to find out what kind of knowledge is crucial in the EU context and what solutions must be built and designed in the future to respond to its most pressing social and economic needs.

7. You accompanied your students on a study visit to TermCoord in February 2015. What were your impressions of the unit? What did you find interesting about its work?

That was in fact the third time that I attended a study visit to TermCoord. Actually, I like to accompany my students whenever I can. The presentations on the work carried out by TermCoord are always very clear and illuminating. The team manages to provide an insight into its very impressive work in a modest and also humorous way. But let's not be fooled by this understated approach: terminology is in good hands in Europe thanks to this very effective team and the incredible work it accomplishes on a day-to-day basis. What impresses me most is the entire democratic project that is behind this work: making EU texts, decisions and resources available to all citizens of Europe, in the languages they speak.

8. What is your opinion of IATE, the EU terminology database with entries in 27 languages? Do you think it can be helpful for MLCMMC students? Do you use it in your research?

I do not work in terminology and I have not used the database for my own research, but my last visit to TermCoord gave me a few ideas. For example, I teach a course in