Teaching and learning in the multilingual classroom

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XVIII Cercels Conference
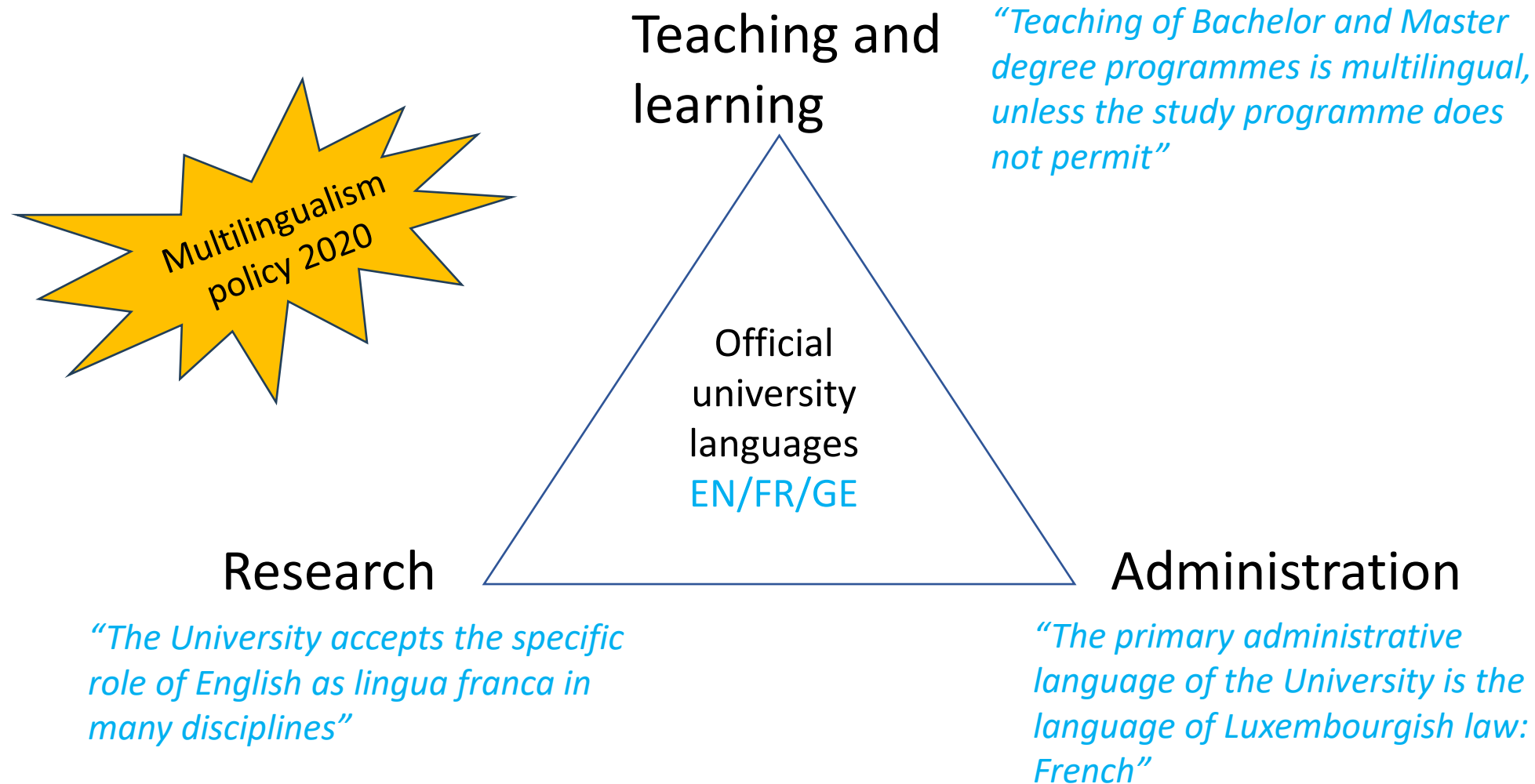Durham University, 13 September 2024

The Luxembourgish context

Linguistic diversity in Luxembourg

- 3 administrative languages: Lëtzebuergesch, Français, Deutsch
- more than 33% allophones: people whose main language is not one of the three official languages (Portuguese, Italian, South Slavic languages, English, etc.)
- people in Luxembourg speak on average 4 languages
- https://statistiques.public.lu (Fehlen et al. 2021)

The University of Luxembourg

Which role do languages play at uni?

Teaching and learning

"Teaching of Bachelor and Master degree programmes is multilingual, unless the study programme does not permit"

Multilingualism policy 2020

Official university languages
EN/FR/GE

Research

Administration

"The University accepts the specific role of English as lingua franca in many disciplines"

"The primary administrative language of the University is the language of Luxembourgish law: French"

The multilingual classroom

Bachelor students' nationalities

Nationalities	Number of students (winter semester 2023)
Luxembourgish	2.152
EU countries	826
Non-EU countries	171
	3.149

How multilingual is the uni classroom?

Spanish, **Portuguese**, **Italian**, **Dutch**, **Arabic**, **Chinese**, **Hebrew**, Russian, Hungarian, Bosnian, Croatian, Filipino, Greek, Lao, Martinican Creole, Nepali, Romanian, Serbian
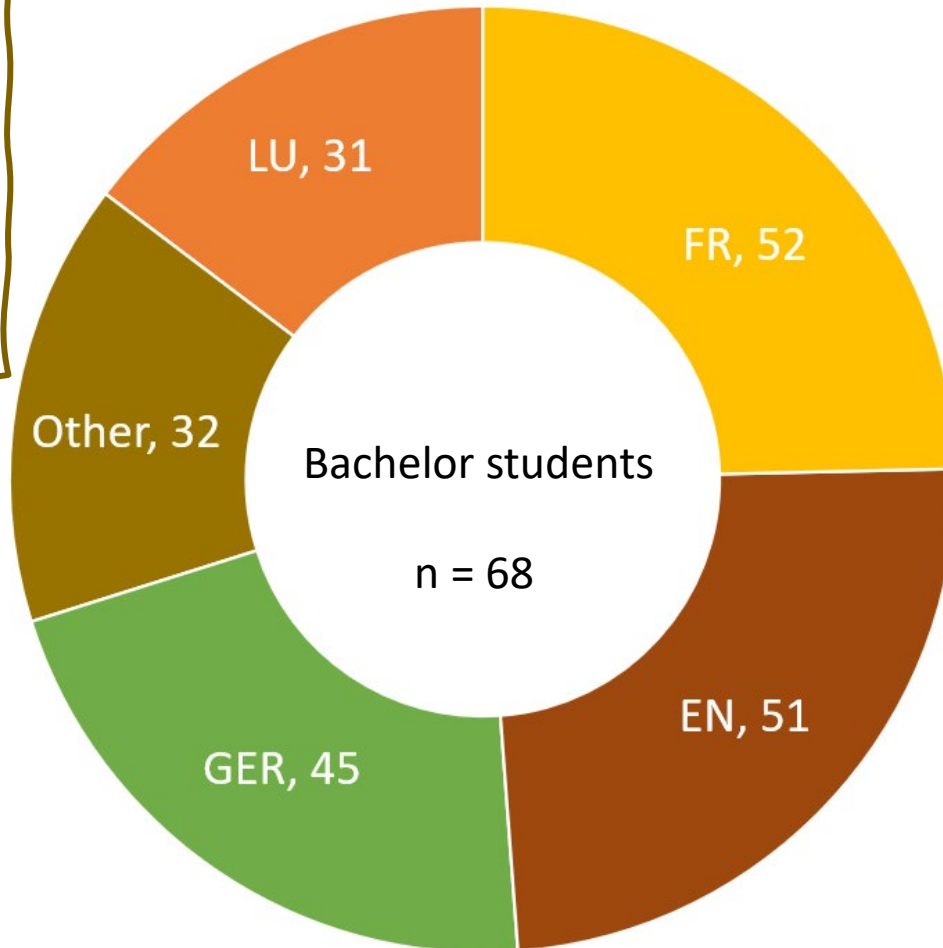
Portuguese, **Italian**, **Spanish**, **Dutch**, **Arabic**, **Chinese**, **Hebrew**, Czech

Bachelor students — n = 68: FR, 52 · EN, 51 · GER, 45 · Other, 32 · LU, 31

Lecturing staff — n = 13: LU, 7 · FR, 13 · GER, 12 · EN, 13 · Other, 8
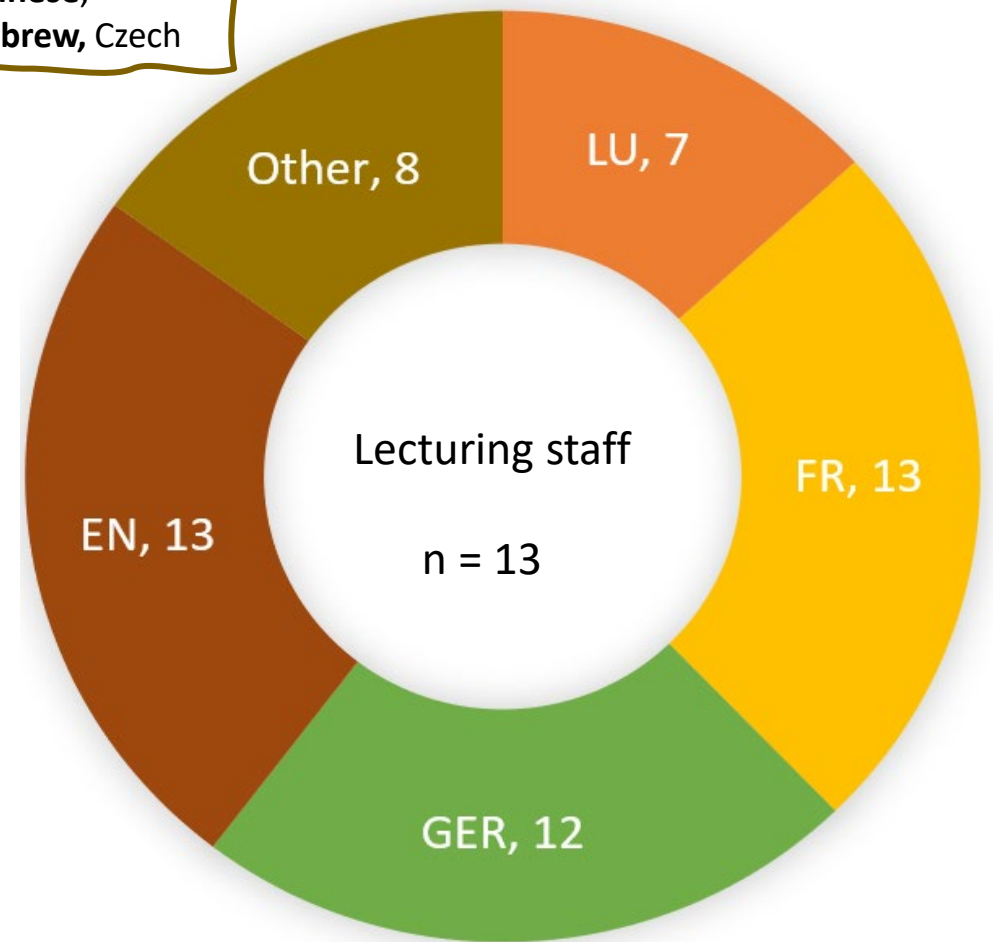
Students' language skills

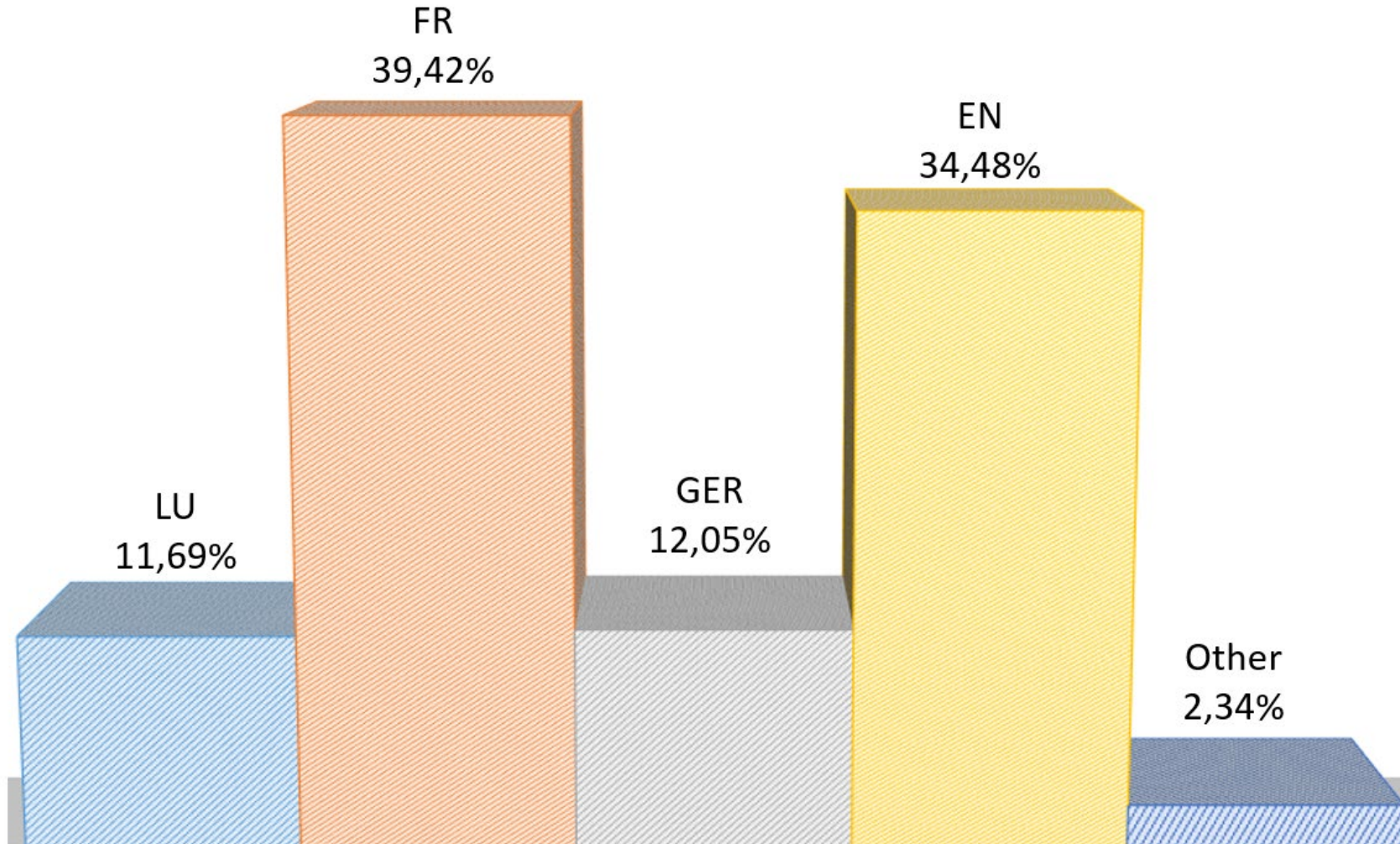70% mention at least one of EN/FR/GE/LU as their first language(s)

30% are proficient users in the three EN/FR/GE

38% are proficient users in two of the university languages

13% have no language skills in one out of the three university languages

Average exposure in language(s) at the University (bachelor students)

Conclusions drawn from students' open answers/focus group discussions

- Students find it very helpful to be able to mix or switch languages in class

- Students find it very helpful to write key words in their first language(s) when studying new concepts/taking notes

- Students find it helpful when the teacher uses all the University's official languages in the sources they share

Shared experiences

Se renseigner par soi-même dans les langues qu'on connaît le mieux, lire un même texte dans deux langues différentes pour se familiariser avec les termes et leurs équivalents.

It's better for students if we also have support in other languages, maybe having the same text but translated, I think it's very helpful.

Conclusions drawn from interviews with teachers

- Teachers mostly use translations and prefer to switch to a shared language

- Teachers stick to the official teaching language(s) of the course and use simple language or repeat notions

- Teachers think that it is important to acknowledge students' background and bring in students' relevant experiences

What do we learn from the data?

There is potential for exploiting multilingual profiles of teachers and students in classrooms more evenly and more structurally.

Theories and concepts for teaching with shared experiences and practices

1) Translanguaging and transcultural competence

Translanguaging, transcultural competence

- Translanguaging is understood as the use of the entire linguistic repertoire or a discursive practice that includes practices such as translation, codeswitching and the construction of hybrid words or language structures (Garcia 2009).

- Moore (2016) emphasizes that the mobilization of multilingual repertoires can help students to better understand the complexity of academic content.

- Universities, as international spaces, should consider transnational identities and the ways in which language practices help to construct, mediate and negotiate these identities (De Fina 2016).

Shared experiences and practices

I ask people **where you come from**, and **explain me how it's in your case**. And so **I can adapt my content on this case** or can say sometimes it's really important *not to explain how we do it, but to explain where are the differences.*

It's always very exciting to **use these multilingual background exchanges** over what is the expression for political concept in **your own language**? and students explained […] whatever they could use.

Shared experiences and practices

You tend to have the Luxembourgish people sitting in one corner, and say the non-EU students sitting in another corner. I mean they still talk to each other, it's not like they ignore each other, right? But if they have to choose a neighbor.

It creates communities inside the class! Social because the Portuguese sit together, the Luxembourgish sit together, the French group sit together, so they are not interacting that much, especially in the first year.

What can teachers do?

- look out for cultural or linguistic diversity in group or pair activities

- include structured peer feedback in teaching

- activate cultural knowledge by sharing procedures, concepts, terms

- activate linguistic repertoire by using all language resources to communicate

- co-create multilingual glossary for terms, definitions and phrases

- co-create drafts of procedures and concepts

- provide academic sources in different languages

2) Plain language

Plain language

Language and design strategies that make texts easier for target audiences to understand and use. (Cutts 1995, Schriver 1994, for an overview see Schriver et al. 2010)

"Textverständlichkeit, Lesbarkeitsforschung" in the German language context (Langer, Schulz von Thun, & Tausch 1974)

Shared experiences and practices

If you **don't understand** the definition or certain slide you can ask the professor to **repeat** and people will do that and they will **try to simplify it.**

We have this **visual support** of all the **graphs** and **pictures** and everything so it helps, it does not substitute for language but it really helps to understand.

Plain language

Event though the concept has been criticized for texts written for an expert community, some principles of plain language may still be applied in a multilingual academic contexts (Kimble 1994, Lillis 2001, Fairclough 2006, for an overview see Garwood 2014)

What can teachers do?

- provide short abstracts or summaries for basic concepts in plain language (PLSs)

- use plain language for asking questions

- repeat terms, definitions, basic concepts regularly

- use multiple modes: graphs, pictures, statistic to visualize major concepts

3) Intercomprehension and Lingua Receptiva

Intercomprehension

« Intercomprehension is the comprehension of a (foreign) language or linguistic variety without having acquired it by formal learning or in its cultural environment. »

(https://eurocomdidact.eu/; McCann et al.1999, Klein & Reissner 2006, Hufeisen & Marx 2007, Meissner 2012, 2016)

How does it work?

- in the academic genre many words are of Greek or Latin origin (internationalism)

- similar linguistic structures are shared by different languages in academia (formal language, text structure, etc.)

- works best between typologically closely related languages (within the Romance or the Germanic or the Slavic language family)

Identify the central message

Weronika Wilczyńska jest profesorem Uniwersytetu im Adama

Mickiewicza w Poznaniu. Ma bogate doświadczenie w praktycznej dydaktyce

językåw obcych. Jej zainteresowania naukowe obejmują psychologiczne

aspekty akwizycji językåw, z uwzględnieniem wymiaru kulturowego. Opublikowala

z tej dziedziny szereg prac o charakterze teoretycznym i praktycznym.

Interpretation after comprehensive reading

Weronika Wilczyńska (is) [female?] professor at the University (?)

Adam(a) Mickiewicza. Weronika Wilczyńska (at/in) Posen. (?) (?) (?) (in) practical/practice

didactical/didactics (language/s) (?). [Her/She] ?interes (?) (?) (?) psychologic aspect/s

acquisition (of language/s) and (?)(?)(?) (?) culture. (?)publish/ed/ (we exclude publication

as we know that the international series of –ation, azione, acián… is *atie or something like

that) (?)(?)(?)(?)(?)(?)(?) charakterized theoretical (and) practical/in theory and practice.

Final interpretation

Weronika Wilczyńska is a professor at the Adam Mickiewicz University

of Poznén in the field of didactics. Her interests concern the psychological aspects

of language acquisition. [We can guess that this is] related to culture [and that the]

publication serves theoretical and practical concerns.

Lingua Receptiva

« A form of multilingual communication in which each speaker uses a different language, but each speaker has sufficient listening skills in the other speaker's language for them to be able to understand each other. »

(https://www.luistertaal.nl/en/what-is-lingua-receptiva/; Bahtina & Thije 2010, Rehbein et al 2010)

Short demonstration of Lingua Receptiva

Lessons learned from workshop

- Most familiar with practices of translation and simplified language or visuals, even though the concepts of *Translanguaging* and *Plain Language* seem not to be fully understood nor structurally integrated in teaching

- Less or not familiar with practices of *Intercomprehension* and *Lingua Receptiva*. Both need more training. « It is hard to stick to your own language while speaking »

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Villmols Merci, Thank you, Vielen Dank, Merci