

**Sabira Stahlberg**

**Multi  
coloured  
language**





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# Introduction

Language is so deeply rooted in our lives that we hardly notice when we use it. We think, read, write, communicate, acquire information, express feelings and opinions, create and maintain social relations and carry out lots of other activities using language. Human language forms the base for *culture* and the complex world humanity has created. Without language you would not be able to read these lines and they would never have been written by me.

The human brain appears to have an inherent ability to learn languages. Therefore it should not be a problem, but when a baby is born language suddenly turns into a complicated issue. Which language or languages should the child learn? Can the child learn *more than one* language? When the child goes to school the question becomes even more acute. At school the pupil is expected to learn the school language and one or more foreign languages. Today at the work place adults often need more than one language.

The language knowledge we gain during our lives affect our opinion of ourselves, achievements and our feeling of success. A person with a *weak* language, who does not possess enough words to express feelings, thoughts or skills, might believe that they simply do not exist. Other people judge us by our use of language, too. A person who possesses a cultivated language and a rich vocabulary is often considered more intelligent and gains more respect from other people.

## Education - for all?

Language is one of the main working tools for an author and a researcher. In both capacities and over many years I have followed the scientific development of such widely separate fields as languages and cultures, pedagogy, ophthalmology and brain research. Multiple languages have always existed in my world. I teach and lecture about several *multi*-topics, including *multilingualism*, *multiculturalism*, *creativity*, *integration* and *adaptation*, in various countries, in several languages and for all age groups.

For some years now, many of us working with education, children and youth observe an alarming trend. We do no longer need to write and read ourselves; there are machines to do it. What happens to languages, reading and writing skills, intellect and intelligence? The aim of education is to give the pupils a solid base both in the school language and other languages. An average of 1,500 hours are spent on developing only the school language. Still there are pupils who leave school without ability to write a complete sentence. The literacy level is generally high in Europe, but every fifth person is estimated to have difficulties in understanding a written text. Their numbers are increasing and today it becomes even more important to ask: is it an *illusion that everybody can read and write?*

*General access* to education and cultivating the intellect are the aims of society. But is it really possible for everybody *to learn in the same way?* Basic models and attitudes to languages and learning are formed in childhood. Many factors influence;

some pupils leave school with pleasant experiences and a positive attitude to learning. Others had less success and hold firmly onto the opinion that they cannot learn anything new.

A task of educational systems is to provide the society with well-informed and functioning citizens, but in fact schools and other institutions transmit *standardised* norms, knowledge and opinions, and a *collective* culture based on standard language, national identity and majority values. Different learners, such as multilingual and multicultural persons, might find it difficult to *identify* with the citizen they are expected to be or become.

The number of multilinguals is growing in schools and work places. The important question should therefore be *what do we really want to achieve* in language learning and development? What are the *real goals* of education? Where can we find the *balance* between technical progress and the requirement that pupils should express themselves in a rich and correct spoken and written language? Science and various methods, patterns and models could help, but how do we measure for example *quality* and *quantity* of language knowledge? Should pupils continue to learn reading and writing in the traditional way, in a world and everyday life filling up with technology, and with machines that already talk about feelings?

Certainly, *a machine cannot replace a human* when it comes to language. Translation, interpretation and all kinds of other activities require skills, a sense of language and experience which cannot be programmed into machines. Today however the risk that profound language knowledge will be limited to a small group is growing parallel with *fragmentation* of reading

and writing. All who produce texts and speeches are expected to use a rich language, but what happens to those, who do not work with language? Are we on our way back into a segregated situation like at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the educated class spoke and wrote “excellent” language and all others only were required to read passably?

## Insights and insights

One important insight this book emphasises is that *every brain is different* and all situations are *individual*; in other words, there are over seven billion different ways to use languages on this planet and many more needs and aims. Every person learns and uses language(s) in their own way. In my creative writing courses, work with Easy to Read books and as a manifold user of languages, I have met and taught utterly different learners in various language contexts. I can only confirm the scientific observation that each learner has their own *unique conditions* and methods. Some common traits can be observed, however, and I have collected part of them here, conscious that every person and situation require separate processes and solutions.

This book is written for all who are curious to know more about languages, learning and multilingualism, and for all who work with various languages and education. Parents, teachers and multilingual families and persons often need information about how our brains handle, process and produce language. This book is also written for all, who believe that languages is something that only other people can learn.

Increasing language awareness, developing language and supporting that of others are main topics in the book. It focuses on practice, methods, experiences and research, key concepts and ideas, relating not only to so-called foreign languages, but also first language(s) and school language are discussed.

*Multicoloured language* hopefully inspires readers to create their own exercises, analyses and linguistic experiments. It also encourages to take more risks and *enrich the use of languages* in a variety of environments, from family and networks to education and hobbies, at work places and in senior homes. In fact, all activities can develop language.

This book is a kind of sequel to the previous *Multicoloured book*, an Easy to Read book with thought-provoking texts for those who move to another country. Many people in various countries have asked me for a book, where I reveal the secret for successful language learning. *Hard work and practice* has long been my standard reply, but it does not satisfy anybody, not even me.

Very often I am asked why some individuals learn languages faster and “better” than others and why some languages are more difficult to learn than others. People who speak a more unusual language prefer to believe their tongue is *impossible to learn*, because it is “the most difficult language in the world”. I have not yet encountered a language which an outsider cannot learn, but some languages take more time and require more effort, sometimes due to widely different reasons. As languages have been developed and are used by humans, other humans can learn them.

All who expect to find miracle recipes for language learning in this book will be disappointed. I have not discovered the most fantastic method, nor will I present a pioneer hypothesis or theory (in fact, I do not believe there is a universal theory) about languages or learning languages. Instead, I write about various questions *comprehensively* and *concretely*, anchoring them in everyday experiences. Those who have no possibility or time to dive into scientific studies and results and researcher jargon, will thus be able to *form an understanding* of their own.

Languages are a rewarding and exciting *adventure* for each of us. We can – if we wish – enjoy this adventure during our whole lifetime and even make it into a lifestyle. A person who uses several languages is seldom bored and has the opportunity to discover the world in various ways and to meet many interesting people.

I wish to thank all, who have participated in my numerous linguistic adventures throughout the years, everybody who has shown interest, encouraged, criticized, taught, patiently listened to lessons and lectures, participated in innovative experiments and tests and asked complicated questions. My special thanks go to Easy to Read expert Maria Viitasalo and editor Marianne Stahlberg for valuable views on this book project. Thanks to the Bokpil and Colorit teams for support and interest, and all others who have cooperated in different projects about Easy to Read, diversity, multiculturalism and multilingualism.

*Sabira Stahlberg*

# Language

What is a language? We are used to thinking in terms of native language (mother tongue) and foreign languages, but human languages are *complex systems for communication*. Language contributes to our social interaction and affects our views on ourselves and the world around us. Language is not limited to sounds we produce or hear, gestures and facial expressions, but includes also vocabulary, structure and other aspects. Many *skills* we develop, among others reading and writing, are based on language. Language is further related to culture and various codes and signals, which can be specific for a language, culture or cultural sphere.

Around seven thousand languages are estimated to exist in the world, divided into some twenty *language families*. Indo-European languages, to which English and a majority of the European languages belong, are spoken by almost half of the world's population. Vocabulary and structure are considered to separate languages, but a language or dialect can be defined in different ways due to *political* or *historical* reasons.

Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are categorised as separate languages, because they are spoken in different countries. The languages are fairly close and speakers can understand each other without studying the other language. Chinese languages are officially dialects of one single language, but they are not mutually understandable. The Chinese languages differ very much from each other, both in pronunciation and structure as well as in vocabulary.

*Task: Read a text in Norwegian or Danish or Icelandic. How much do you understand?*

## Languages are mixed

A common myth tells that languages are relatively stable and limited to certain countries or regions. In reality the situation is much more complex. A state can have one or several *official* languages. Few countries are so tightly isolated that there are no minorities or migrants. Languages *change and mix* all the time. If a speaker group is split because of emigration or some other reason, the language develops in different directions. All speaker groups are influenced by their surrounding languages. Vocabulary and expressions also change over time.

*Sprachbund* or areas of linguistic convergence are formed by contacts among languages that not necessarily belong to the same language family. In the Balkans, the languages resemble each other, although not all are related. Common words are found quickly, but also structure and pronunciation can be similar. Two or more languages can combine into *pidgin*, which usually has a simple grammar. *Pidgin* can develop and acquire a more complex vocabulary and structure; then it is called *creole*. An example of this development is the official language *tok pisin* in Papua New Guinea.

Mixing processes occur all the time also on the individual level. We are influenced by languages around us and develop various forms of language use, depending on our needs, values

and situations. Language mixing or *mixed language* is seen as “bad” language at school and in the society, but in fact *nobody speaks a completely “clean” language or even perfectly*. The question is how far different languages can be mixed before speech or text are not understandable anymore or classified as *pidgin*. All humans use words and expressions from other languages or dialects. The English dictionary is full of not only French and Latin words, but also words from many other languages and language families. Nowadays researchers think that it is *normal for us humans to mix languages*.

*Task: Mix words from another language into the two sentences above. Does it feel right?*

## Languages develop

The language(s) in a society *develop with every generation*. Elderly persons usually find that children and youth speak the language slovenly, but the young people have other needs and a different language use, which reflects their identity and answer to the *linguistic challenges* they meet. The world changes and the language must be up to date to reflect the environment as we perceive it right now. Each generation adds new words and expressions and change and expand the linguistic norm. Today an expression might grate on our ears, but tomorrow it is commonly accepted and found in dictionaries and grammars.

Teenagers very often appear to have limited vocabulary or mix languages more than is acceptable. Despite anxiety among

teachers and parents, most are able to use a *normal language* when they grow up, if they get enough encouragement and support to develop their language(s) at home and school. The brain matures during the teenage years. Diverse brains need different time and various methods to process adult language.

Teenagers can still *experiment* and play with the language just as in childhood, but social pressure is growing and they are expected to behave like adults and use a grown-up language. They can react by provoking through language or refusing to use “decent” language. The importance of friends and building their own networks grows. Identity, belonging, attitudes and positions in family, school, networks, hobbies, etc., can be expressed through language use. Teenagers know that they are expected to speak to elderly persons differently than when talking to peers and they are capable of consciously selecting expressions – when they want to.

*Task: Read a chat discussion or comments about an article on migration. Which words or expressions trigger reactions in you?*

## Language is global

Our use of languages is greatly influenced by the bigger *world languages*. More than a hundred years ago, it was important to know German and French, but presently English dominates globally. *Regional* preferences influence which languages are

used and studied, and *economic contacts* may affect language choice. Also political and historical reasons make groups or communities choose a specific language, or they might be forced to learn a certain language; fashion can also make one language more popular than another. Many learners choose to study a language with a *similar vocabulary* and structure to their first language, because it seems easier to learn, but very often schools offer teaching mainly in world languages.

Today we can easily observe how our everyday language is changing mainly by adding *technical* terms. A lot of words are borrowed into other languages from English or new words are created on the basis of already existing ones. Some words are given new meanings. *Neologisms* are considered new until we learn them and start using them. Nevertheless, it is evident now that everyday language is becoming impoverished both among individuals and society and in media as well as literature. One reason can be the altered way we communicate. Technical aids like e-mail, text messages and *digital communication* forms require that we compress our writing. Chats seldom contain big letters, dots or complete sentences and are therefore frequently incomprehensible. We cannot stop this development – it has spread all over the world and we are actively participating in it. The question is not if technology is good or bad, but how we use it and artificial intelligence in a *sustainable and beneficial way*, so that they expand and do not restrict communication.

*Task: Check a list of neologisms in your language. Which words are new to you? How many of the words do you use?*

## Brain and language

All languages start in the human brain. We listen to languages and *intonations* already in the womb. Our brains continue to learn and develop language skills, vocabularies, comprehension and competences such as reading and writing throughout life. Earlier the left hemisphere was thought to host our language centre, but now researchers know that *both parts of the brain participate in the input and production of languages*. Exactly where the languages are stored, processed and produced is still not clear, but we know that the brain compensates and activates other parts if one part is damaged. The idea that the brain is like a machine is slowly fading away before the insight that *no brain is like the other*. Individual differences could be one reason why it is so difficult to research how the brain handles languages, and also to study language learning processes.

When our brains process language, we create and develop a *mental lexicon*, a vocabulary which combines pronunciation, structure, orthography and meaning as well as other elements. Unlike computers, which have much the same algorithms, our brains shows surprising differences in the vocabulary and how we understand word meanings. Most words remain *passive*, which means we recognise them but do not use them actively. An adult is estimated to know from 3,000 to 5,000 word families (roots). A higher language level, like fiction, requires knowledge of between 8,000 and 15,000 words. In everyday life we need some 800 to 1,000 words, and then we understand about 75% of the language.

How many languages a human brain can process is still a controversial issue, which reflects more the traditional opinions than physical reality. Brain researchers have found that the *human brain is polyglot*. It expands and the brain mass grows more condensed with every new language. We can learn many languages, but the number depends mostly on *social factors* and *our needs*, and of course also on how much time we can set aside for learning them. The highest number of languages ever observed in one individual is over seventy.

*Task: Count how many unique (not repeated) words there are in a newspaper article and in the text above. Compare them. How big is the difference?*

## Exercise and practice

Why do some people learn languages faster? They are thought to be gifted or have a talent for languages. Science has no clear answer to individual differences, but different kinds of brains and needs, *activity* and *interest* are suggested as factors. *Visual comprehension* contributes to developing reading and writing skills. Whatever the reason, learning a new language means *exercise* and *practise*. Journalists who write and edit articles need to develop writing skills more than a mechanic. Musicians pick up language “melodies” and reproduce them in speech, because they are used to hearing and creating melodies. Pupils are trained at school to perform different learning processes and daily practise all kinds of skills that support learning.

The *structural and lexical proximity* to other languages we already know and *general knowledge* can assist when learning a language. *Experience* affects how the brain works with new languages. Multilingual persons and experienced learners pick up grammar and words faster. They often develop their own *techniques* to learn languages and they know how the learning process runs. With every language it becomes a little easier to take in the new information, because we have created a certain *routine* for learning.

Our language and cultural background are supposed to play an important role in learning languages, but scientists find that general knowledge, *language and cultural knowledge*, intellect, previous exposure, study experience, *reading and study habits* and *studying discipline* are much more important, as are social networks, *environment, context*, support, *social contacts* and values. How we learn and use a language can affect how *efficiently* we acquire it. For a hobby or a holiday trip we might need to know less than for work or study, but it is no excuse for avoiding to learn. To learn languages and use them in many different situations and with a multitude of people in many ways is *healthy exercise* for our brains.

*Task: Learn five words in Czech, Polish or Ukrainian. Which words were difficult to learn and which ones were easy to remember?*

# Language choice

Language is much more than structure and words; it is a major *tool for communication* and the basis for the functioning and development of our societies. Language transmits and reflects thoughts, attitudes, feelings, and personal, social and cultural relations. Through language we participate in a *larger context*. A constant *dialogue* between individuals and their surrounding societies takes place. Language is an important condition for the interchange. On the collective or social level, language expresses and influences culture, *values, ways of thinking*, politics, economy and many other aspects.

Our choice of language, *when, where and how we choose to use* a certain language, does not mean we have to choose only between two languages. We must decide about language level and style, tone, way of speech, words and expressions even within one language. Finding the *correct choice* in social situations is of great importance if we want to be understood and continue the dialogue. We develop the ability to select and choose by experimenting and gaining experience not only in school, but throughout life.

One example of how we are taught to make right choices are the popular stories about how we misunderstand each other due to *differences in languages*, the so-called “false friends”, words that look alike but carry another meaning. The Swedish verb *springa* means to run, but in English *to spring* means ‘to leap or move suddenly’ and ‘to jump’ in Danish and German. These stories about misunderstandings remind us to avoid pitfalls.

Today, researchers try to analyse *social negotiations* and games, where participants through choice of language use their power, try to convince, manipulate, express belonging to a group or separate a group from others and to show identity. Yet in everyday situations language choices are not necessarily a question of negotiation, identities or power – those require too much energy and time. We are more *pragmatic* and *economical* in daily life and most of the time we express thoughts and feelings without any specific goals and often without thinking about the consequences.

*Task: Write a letter to an unknown person, and a personal letter to a friend. Which language levels, styles and tones did you choose for the two letters?*

## Emotional language

An *emotional language* is considered to be the language(s) in which we best express our thoughts and feelings. A word and expression or an emotion can “feel right” in a certain language. Generally, scientists suppose that the emotional language is the *native tongue* of a person. This concept of emotional language is rooted in an outdated idea of one language forming the foundation and all others are additions. In reality, multilingual persons often possess more than one emotional language and they are able to express emotions and thoughts in several languages, in manifold ways and with a great variety and rich *nuances*.

The emotional language is also seen as the language “closest to the heart”. It can change and does not need to remain the same throughout life or in every situation. As languages offer a wide range of expressions and tools, multilingual persons have *countless possibilities to formulate their feelings*. The question if they express *exactly the same emotion* in all languages has not yet been solved. Multilinguals sometimes explain that they feel differently depending on language, but these differences might be minimal.

*Positive* or *negative* feelings influence how a person uses or does not use and learn a language. Emotions are affected by our experiences. For individuals who move to another country, the *encounters* in the new surroundings are of vital importance for their emotional language. If for some reason they feel like outsiders, they tend to go back to earlier languages instead of start using the new language. *Personal taste* can also influence our choices. We might be fascinated by a culture or feel that a language sounds beautiful and therefore like to learn or use it.

What happens when a person does not have an emotional language and is unable to express thoughts and feelings, or perhaps does not even possess words for them? Lack of self-confidence and difficulties in creating social contacts are consequences which can lead to aggressive behaviour. At least one emotional language is needed for the brain to develop knowledge and various skills.

*Task: Write in English and another language about a happy event. In which language did you write more easily?*

## Emotional filter

*Emotional* or *affective filter* is a term used by researchers to describe the feelings that support or hinder language processing during learning. The filter is chiefly negative, something we must remove, as it *blocks* communication and learning. Some filters are created by the teacher, group or situation. Negative response, condescending attitudes and arbitrary rebukes or criticism reduce a learner's feeling of *meaningfulness*. Anxiety and doubts can grow within an individual for several reasons, but the *social context* is crucial. The learners themselves, the teacher and the group can create or eliminate filters.

*Positive* feelings, according to research, create success and a feeling of capability. Openness, motivation, good relations, respect both within the group and between teacher and group, realistic expectations, *constructive reactions* from others and enough space for personal development and individual working habits are factors that support the process of learning. When we learn in an *engaged* environment and encouragement, interest and positive expectations pervade the atmosphere, we have more possibilities to accomplish and develop our knowledge. Uncertainty is reduced when we are treated well and can work in an individual way. Stress levels drop and emotional filters fade away.

*Teaching materials* at school or in adult education can cause emotional filters if they are too limited, unrealistic, artificial or distort the information from our viewpoint. People with other backgrounds, minorities, multiculturalists and -linguals might

have *another view on the world*, which can be the opposite to the materials they are supposed to learn. Study materials that are *attractive*, contain variation and awaken interest, created with a clear understanding about different points of view, can contribute to the reduction of negative feelings.

In real life, the situation is usually not that easy. Often we have to work for a *longer period* before we see any results. The concept of emotional filters has since the 1980s inspired teachers, but it is limited and principally assists educators in detecting and identifying challenges in *social* situations. We all learn in different ways and the reasons why learning is (not) successful are complex. Further, emotions are not only positive or negative and not all situations can be solved by these suggested methods. No infallible solutions for learning exist and some individuals must for some reasons work harder than others to acquire new material. All who work with education have an important responsibility, however: to be a *positive and open* model and to create an encouraging environment. And yet every one of us is responsible for our own achievements.

*Task: Read an article on artificial intelligence. Did you become interested?*

## Politics and prestige

In society, individual and collective choices of language are made for *political*, historical, *social*, cultural, economic and many other reasons. They create preferences or refusals to use

a language. Perhaps a minority does not want to use the official state language because it is linked to oppression. Some groups are afraid they might be assimilated into majority culture and refuse to learn the language of the surrounding society. Both integration and children's education is hampered or made more difficult by negative and *restrictive* attitudes, which can be found both within the group itself and in majority society.

The *desire* to learn is influenced strongly by prestige, status and how languages are regarded in society. Scientists notice that surrounding attitudes and *concepts* and individual feelings and opinions affect far more the choice of languages than any *actual conditions and facts*. Children learn from adults which languages are important and enjoy high status, but also society, networks, friends and school affect individual attitudes towards languages and thus also the learning.

A language which is ridiculed, considered out of fashion or strange, inferior, ugly or uninteresting, will be less used and learned. The speakers themselves possibly prefer the more "valuable" majority language instead of their own despised one. Some parents do not transmit their language, wishing to integrate their children in majority society. The home language is not seen as worthwhile or supportive for the child, who is supposed to become a successful and capable citizen.

They are partly right: children who do not learn the society's language(s) get less chances in that society. But they are also wrong and harm their children. Multilinguals succeed in life just as well as monolinguals. Children who do not learn their family language(s) have *difficulties in communicating* with

their surroundings. Their language development suffers if they do not get support and help at home and it might hinder them in developing a rich emotional language.

People who have not learnt their parents' language often feel as adults that something is missing. The family's culture is *foreign* and they do not understand their parents or relatives. It is possible that the parental language has been stored in the brain, if the children have heard it often or even spoken it to some degree or until a certain age. The language has stopped developing and must be *activated and built up* through studies later in life.

International PISA and PIRLS literacy assessments done in schools for the past years show that socio-economic situations are of less importance for successful learning than *personal* and emotional factors and the parental *engagement*. Values, opinions, attitudes, prejudices and *expectations* about learning and education are far more important than the question of social and economic status. The same could be said also for choice of language.

*Question: Which language(s) would you like to or have you dreamt of studying? Why this language or these languages?*

# Language environment

The present language environment, other people and situations, in addition to emotions and attitudes, influence when, where and how we use a language. Abroad we often need another language than in our usual environment, but also at home the usage is different; depending on where we are, with whom we speak and what we do; in family or at school, at work or during our free time. Every person participates in several *networks* and most people play different roles within them. We grow up getting socialised into networks, and we create our own, too. The networks influence our *personal development and identity*, social relations and which issues we consider important and meaningful, and further how we learn.

When a network is *exclusive*, our individual space for action diminishes and consequently also interest in the surroundings. If family and friends remain outside or separate themselves from majority society, or the society and other networks shut out or discriminate, our *alternative choices and freedom are reduced* and we have less personal space at our disposal. If our networks, school or university, work, group, etc. strictly keep to one language only and exclude others, the result is limited possibilities for all to use their language, cultural and any other resources they possess.

*Including and open networks* create possibilities for greater individual freedom and exploration of other networks. We are able to develop our own personality and identity. Examples of including networks are work places or educational institutions

permitting the use of several languages and providing space for various opinions and views.

*Task: Take notes during one day on which languages and how you speak, with whom and in what situation. How do you change language use according to the surroundings?*

## Identity language

*Identity language*, like emotional language, plays an important role in our lives. Identity language is the language on which our *self-concept* and identity are based, as seen by ourselves and expressed before others. Identity can have many different meanings, depending on the person we ask or how we put the question, but generally it means *character traits, personality, expressions, attitudes and convictions*, which contribute to make each person a unique individual. A society or a group can have a *collective identity*. When learning languages, the word ‘identity’ receives another meaning: how our *relation with the world around us* is understood by ourselves and how it is structured and developed in our social contexts.

Every individual should have the right to *freely choose and express* identities, but this is not always possible. Today in many societies, a common attitude is that there must be only one collective identity. Variations from the norm could be hard to accept. But a *uniform identity* is only a dream and we all see the collective identity in our own way. In those societies and networks, where individual identities are suppressed, both the

individuals and the community are influenced unfavourably. Also less visible *social forms of abuse*, such as discrimination, bullying, segregation, isolation or dysfunctional relations are damaging personal, collective and language development.

In reality, *each individual possesses several identities* and presents various aspects of them in different surroundings and in a multitude of ways. Fresh identities or aspects of existing identities are developed during our whole life and they become especially visible in multilinguals. Similarly to the emotional language, we choose one or more identity languages already in childhood, but we can *change language or add more* emotional and identity languages whenever we need or the environment and situation demand. Multilingual persons can hold many identity languages and *multiple identities* which they express according to situation and whatever the surroundings require. An observer can easily get the impression that the multilinguals appear to *change personality* with language, as gestures, face expressions and way of speaking transform. Researchers are still discussing if this is a question of various *aspects* of one identity or *separate identities*.

*Task: Talk for a minute in your emotional language about an event today, and then do the same in another language. Was the time enough to say all you wanted in both languages?*

## Being different

Strong opinions are expressed in current social debates around the world about how groups or individuals who “deviate” from the majority language and culture should be dealt with. Should they be totally *assimilated* or just *integrated*, so that they can function in society but without asking them to become majority persons or adapting completely to social norms, or should they primarily remain *isolated* in their own culture and speak only their own language(s)?

These both extremes, assimilation and separation, have not brought about satisfying results anywhere, but the myths are long-lived and questions tricky. What does “their” culture and language exactly mean? *Who has the right to decide about the norms* and about who is allowed to belong to a group or a community? In the nineteenth century, nationalism introduced the belief of one *national language* and standardised culture. In fact, every citizen has their *own concepts of a nation* which are based on experiences, understanding, emotions and often also on level of education. Each of us decides who we want to be individually, but we are also influenced by our networks and the surrounding society and our identity is not static. In different situations we choose the *elements or aspects we want to emphasise* of our personality, language(s) and culture(s).

If larger groups with similar language and background move to another environment, they start to develop a specific form of “their” language and culture. No group is insulated from the “foreign” surroundings, despite the fact that some try to shut

themselves and their communities into a capsule. A *diaspora* always adjusts to its surroundings and the new circumstances, whether they want it or not. All individuals and groups must confront the challenges of the new society, but their strategies vary. Language changes: words, pronunciation and expressions from the majority language or other languages are mixed into speech and writing. Children going to school perceive “their own” culture and traditions in another way than their parents, often *filtered through the majority viewpoint*. Migration is increasing and our societies become more colourful and varied, but many still want to categorise other people, because we have all been taught to think about ourselves and others in ethnic terms. The nationalist illusion of one common origin is alive and it flourishes in debates, homes, schools and mass media.

The classic question “where are you from?” always feels uncomfortable and frustrating for a person who differs from the majority self-concept. “Where are you from *originally*?” is directly abusing and insulting. It means that the person is a foreigner and remains a foreigner, even if both the individual asking and the person answering may have been raised in the same part of the city, live, dream and speak in the same language and eat the same type of food. Those who are *forced by others to feel foreign* usually develop various strategies such as humour, ignoring, avoiding complicated situations or retreat. Being forced to be foreign still feels wrong, every time.

*Task: Write five arguments for language integration and five opinions against. Which ones did you write quicker?*

## Safety

To express ourselves freely, we have to *feel secure*. Without safety it becomes more difficult for us to function in a normal way. People who grow up or live in threatening or dangerous circumstances, such as war, conflicts, persecution, or people who carry traumatic experiences and children who experience an acute lack of adult support often experience learning and expressing thoughts and feelings as something difficult. Their brains are occupied with *processing* difficulties and have little capacity for anything else. One solution could be to first *work with the experiences*, but not everybody wants it. Some wish to put everything behind them and forget as soon as possible. Their desire to live here and now and leave work on the trauma for later is also a possibility.

A safe environment where all individuals can use all their languages and language resources freely and *constructively* supports expression, language use and development, and other knowledges and skills. The possibilities for persons with other backgrounds or languages to participate depend on the degree of *knowledge* and understanding in the environment, and on the *context* and the views of what the norm should be. For majority people it might be a challenge to see a person with a different language background as an individual, especially if the person does not speak the society's language fluently.

When school or work is considered a secure space, where everyone is *respected*, all can develop their language skills. Yet if pupils or workers are segregated or categorised as incapable

due to language or cultural background, their achievements and future are endangered: *pre-conceived attitudes* can do a lot of damage. A pupil who is expected to know the school language poorly due to background (but knows it well), or who does not act or function as the others in “their own” group (but acts as a majority pupil), might experience severe social consequences. The teachers still might see this pupil only as a member of the “incompetent” group. At the same time, the pupil is being discriminated, isolated or bullied by “their own” community, majority pupils and possibly also school staff.

*Authority attitudes* are extremely important for creating a feeling of togetherness and security. Teachers, managers and others in decisive positions should take their responsibility in earnest. Their values, capacity to act and use of power affect inclusion, progress, accomplishment and *the general opinion about who is considered capable*. Trust is required for every person to function well. Talking openly about any issues, even difficult ones, should be possible. Language knowledge is most important for solving and preventing conflicts.

An interesting observation is that we use a *poorer language in conflict situations* than when we cooperate or talk about things we feel good about. Educational institutions and society benefit from valuing language knowledge and also investing in language education, but to create a safe environment for all is just as important as education.

*Task: Give examples of a safe environment. What factors contribute to make a place feel secure?*

# Multilingualism

*Mother tongue* and *foreign language* are general terms for the first, second and following languages we learn. Researchers prefer to talk about L1, L2, L3, etc; L signifies ‘language’. But if there is no difference in knowledge and use, which one is “mother tongue” or L1, and which language is “foreign” or L2?

Previously *polyglot* was used as a term for a person with knowledge of more languages, but now *multilingual* (which means the same) has become more popular. Groups, networks and communities can also be multilingual. Those who know only one language are called *monolingual* and those with two languages *bilingual*. Today scientists define the bilinguals as multilingual. Those who do not know any language “for real” have been called *semilingual*, but this concept is no longer fully accepted among researchers.

The question who defines multilingualism is still unsolved. Should *individuals* consider themselves multilingual or are there any general criteria? Presently a person who is *capable of using more than one language* is considered multilingual.

Many countries are being challenged by increasing language and cultural *diversity* due to migration, globalisation and other factors. Multilingualism is still seen as an unusual phenomenon in which only a small part of the population participates, but the truth is far from the myth. National statistics usually do not ask about several languages, yet around half of humanity is estimated to be multilingual. Over 50% of European Union citizens can use at least one more language in addition to their

first language for speaking, reading or following media. The Eurobarometer indicates that 25% can use three languages and 10% more than three languages. Europeans generally have very positive attitudes to languages and almost all think that it is beneficial to know many languages.

*Question: How many people in your surroundings use several languages? How many languages do they know on average?*

## Language level

A question discussed both in scientific circles and around many dinner tables is language level. *When do we know a language?* General opinion says that we must know a language perfectly, but no human knows a whole language. One single language contains often more than 100,000 words. An adult usually needs, uses and recognizes about 20% of them.

To speak a language *fluently* is another usual principle, but there are extinct languages like ancient Egyptian or Sanskrit which we can read and write without needing (or having the possibility) to talk. To speak, read and write are different processes for the brain and we can learn these skills to various degrees. Some people speak better than they write, while others read or write better than they talk, depending on their brains and practice.

The ability to express *feelings* and thoughts in one language and appreciate *literature* (especially poetry) is also thought to

be proof of sufficient knowledge, but even that does not cover the whole linguistic field. An engineer maybe uses a language only for technical topics, or a person speaks a language at work but not at home, and expresses few feelings or seldom or never reads fiction in the work language.

A common definition today is that we *know a language when it is enough for our needs*: for a hobby or a trip abroad, e-mail, chat or whatever we want to use it for. Our needs and our language knowledge change, too. Some of the languages are active and others passive depending on use, personal choices, social contexts, *feelings* and interest.

Which language is more active can be noticed especially when we switch languages. Depending on experience, how tired we are, *stress* and factors such as what languages we have spoken recently and how demanding the situations have been – simultaneous interpretation and communicating in a new language can be exhausting – the brain can take from a few milliseconds up to one week or more to change languages.

Those who are used to switching do it easily and quickly and they are also able within one conversation to change languages several times.

*Task: Think in English and another language in the morning. Do the same in the evening. How did you feel and where there any differences in the effort?*

## Language channels

When we learn a language, our brain needs to build structures and vocabulary and pathways to connect them. A simplified explanation is that it establishes new *language “channels”*. If we have a few languages in store or learn *two or more languages simultaneously*, the brain can compare them and learns faster. We also learn to switch the languages we already know and the new language(s).

According to modern research, children should be exposed to several languages already before school. Even children who early on *experience* different languages through songs, rhymes or in some other way, despite not learning the languages, still show a better ability to learn languages later. Their ears have picked up sounds and intonation. In order to start speaking a language, a child usually needs at least one adult who *actively communicates* in that language.

Children seem to “pick up” or quickly *acquire* languages. Many believe that they have a special “language ear” but closer observations show that children listen, imitate and experiment actively, just like adults, when acquiring a language. At school, learning is *structured* and *systematic*. Experience, familiarity with studying, *previous knowledge*, *understanding* and study habits play important roles. Repetition and exercises strengthen the memory and specific neurons, but still it takes many years before the language of a child reaches an adult level.

Adults actually possess more *tools* than children to support learning. Logic, experiences and memories are valuable aids.

The ability to formulate, analyse, combine, draw conclusions and create connections strengthen the creation of language channels. Multilinguals often have more *self-confidence* when learning languages and they create new channels faster than persons with only one language. Their brains are used to perceive, handle and construct vocabulary and structures. Multilinguals identify similarities in languages and use their previous knowledge. They are sure that they can learn another language and they know how *other people will react* on their language experiments. In consequence, they fearlessly imitate, explain and use newly learned words and expressions without being afraid of making fools of themselves.

*Multilingual parents* often choose to teach their children several languages and encourage them in language learning, but only if the attitudes, values and language climate in the surrounding society permit it. In situations where a language or a community are discriminated, children often do not learn their family language or the opposite, they *refuse to learn* the majority language. Both cases create many complications on the individual and social levels.

The general assumption that the longer a foreigner has lived in a country, the better this foreigner should know the society language, is misleading. Much more important than time are *experience, training and social contacts*. Feelings, values and attitudes also play a crucial role: a person who does not want to learn a language simply never learns it.

*Task: Read about Swahili. Which resources do you use, when you try to understand how the language functions?*

## Multilingualism is normal

Nationalism spread globally from Europe in the nineteenth century, declaring that a nation has only *one language and one culture*. The consequences are *disastrous*. They still continue: discrimination, oppression, war, conflicts, genocide, violence and displacement of millions of people. Nationalists also force multilingual communities to become monolingual and destroy or seriously reduce *language and cultural diversity*.

The fellowship nationalism offers probably answers to some kind of social need, but our brains do not function one-sidedly. Nationalism has manipulated our values and views so that *a majority of us limit the use of our brain resources ourselves*. It is difficult to see through nationalist myths, however, because we all grew up with them and they are everywhere around us.

Theories influenced by nationalism around 1900 emphasised that many languages was an obstruction. Children were able to learn only one language at a time; more would damage their development and cause confusion and mental problems. The scientists – men who observed but did not participate in child care or daily work at home – discovered lots of examples for mental deviations. What they missed was the fact that *the majority of the world's population was multilingual* and they were not more muddled than monolinguals.

In the beginning of the 1960s, researchers started to view language as an important part of *thought processes in the brain*. Bilingualism contributed to better learning of languages, but still human language knowledge was considered to consist of one *dominating basic language* or mother tongue plus one extra language. The brain was like a machine where only one language was active at a time; the other languages were turned off. Now we know that all *participate simultaneously* in the brain processes. Many people have two or more equally strong languages and *hyperpolyglots* (more than six languages) keep several languages active at the same time.

Soon scientists saw all languages as valuable and important for *social functions*, but multilingualism was still a mystery. Only in the 1980s, they understood that *multilingualism is in fact normal: a natural function of the brain*. To this new insight of multilingual brains contributed studies from brain research and also various fields such as psychology, social psychology, linguistics, cognitive linguistics and several cultural and social sciences. Educators in various parts of the world encourage the use of multiple languages today in order to *activate all the language resources we possess*.

Multilingualism is still, despite scientific research showing the opposite, thought by many to be an abnormal condition. Among decision-makers, in schools, universities and families *obsolete attitudes* continue to exist. Language issues are used in several societies for stirring up conflict, and they cause strong emotions and disputes especially in countries where the nationalism is strong.

*Task: Read an article on brain research and language learning. What new insights did you get?*

## Research situation

Present research on multilingualism consists mostly of social, *cognitive, communicative and interpretative* studies. Scientists are interested in the connections between language and culture, *competences, abilities and emotional* factors. Strategies, motives and functions of the human brain are mapped out. Still, research remains insufficient and scientists do not agree about methods, models or *terminology*. We know too little about multilingualism, an enormous field including many different research disciplines and *endless individual variations*.

A large number of scientific results are based on language tests in laboratory conditions, necessary for brain and memory research and similar experiments, but far from real situations. Critics point out that the results are misrepresentative as the selection and the experiments are made with individuals, often students, who are WEIRD or *Western Educated Industrialised Rich Democratic*, an expression borrowed from psychology.

A logical question would be: why do scientists not walk out into the world and study multilingualism in various situations? The replies are certainly manifold and individual, but two must be mentioned here: it is easier to work in a laboratory than with people in uncontrolled situations and the scientific results can be tested and reproduced by others. Out in the field it is

difficult to authenticate them. A fundamental dilemma is then should science need to “prove” as yet, or is it more important to observe and describe now? Much more material than what is available today is needed for real analyses and conclusions.

*Task: Listen to an interview for a few minutes and take notes. Listen again: How much did you catch?*

## Multilinguals and special needs

One of the consequences of this deficient multilingual research especially for pedagogy is that *special needs* such as dyslexia, reading and writing difficulties and other learning challenges among multilingual learners remain hard to detect. Education, tests and teaching are all created for monolinguals, and as a consequence multilingual learners’ challenges are confused with imperfect knowledge of language or other deficiencies.

Some individuals appear to have *dyslexia in one language but not in another*. Educators generally believe dyslexia exists in all languages, but experience shows that it is not that simple. Persons who receive the diagnosis of dyslexia perhaps have other challenges or eye problems which makes the eyes tired; reading and writing are strenuous. *Training* influences how we read and write in all our languages.

In some cases, the phenomenon of dyslexia in only one language could be explained by *different writing systems*. For languages with alphabet about 10% of the readers are estimated to have dyslexia. The number increases for a language with big

differences in writing and pronunciation such as French and English. Writing systems with characters, such as Chinese or Japanese, are processed differently in the brain and dyslexia is estimated to be prevalent among 1% of readers.

One possible explanation is also that languages are *stored in different places* in the brain. The brain can *compensate* if one part does not function; if we damage the hand we normally use for writing we can learn to write with the other.

*Task: Try writing a sentence with your other hand. How does it work?*

## Faultylingualism

A newly invented word, *faultylingualism* (my translation of the Swedish term *felspråkighet*), is used to describe the situation of multilingual persons, migrants and children with autism or other challenges, whose language knowledge *does not fit into the models and norms of community or school*. In pedagogical discussions, the issue is often raised how for example migrants can learn both school language and subjects, but the question of faultylingualism is much broader.

Today, many teachers already understand that *faultylingual pupils do not want to and should not be treated differently than others*. Extraordinary attention, both positive and negative, can cause segregation, bullying or isolation. *Stress* affects language use and learning. A person tries to speak language A, but the

brain produces instead words and expressions in language B. Especially when we are learning a new language, *interference* occurs in vocabulary and grammar. After the brain has worked more with the new language and created a separate channel for it, interference mostly disappears. It can appear again if we are tired or under pressure, in a *demanding language situation*, if we only know the language *superficially* or did not use the language for a long time, or when we feel that people around have negative attitudes towards us and what we are saying.

*Critical multicultural education* criticises norms and focuses on equality. All knowledge is important and *multilingualism is an asset*; language and cultural connections and combinations are created. This method has been criticised for producing new stereotypes and categories which are different from traditional ones, but still *limited*.

In the adult world, life is more complicated than at school. A person who stumbles when speaking or makes many mistakes can cause people who are not used to listening to variations of the language to miss the contents. They might even classify the speaker as childish, stupid or incapable. It is often not enough to speak a language fluently; if we have an accent or “unusual” looks, we can still be categorised as foreign and faultylingual. To understand faultylingual persons, understanding, *experience and competence* are required.

*Task: Listen to someone speaking Indian, Singapore or Caribbean English. For how long could you listen patiently?*

# Language skills

Personality and personal development influence our *individual thinking, behaviour and attitudes*, but we are not isolated from the world around us. In various social and cultural contexts we develop manifold skills and knowledges, and gain experience, understandings and *competence* so that we are able to function in different networks, contexts and situations. We all acquire a great number of language, *social and cultural skills as well as competences* intentionally or unconsciously throughout life.

The concept of *linguistic competence* appeared in the 1960s to describe the knowledge of grammar we possess in our first language. It was quickly criticised as too narrow, because we process also *vocabulary, language codes* and much more. Now researchers prefer a broader concept, *strategical competence*, or how well we master the verbal and non-verbal codes (facial expressions, body language, etc.) of a language. Linguistic competence can today be defined as an umbrella concept for all the skills and knowledges we possess and gather during life.

These specifically human capabilities enable us to think and communicate. Language actions, for instance, can be executed by machines and artificial intelligence only to a limited extent. *Efficiency* is suggested as a measure for the degree of linguistic competence, but how efficiency should be determined is not clear and depends on subjective evaluations by the observer.

Linguistic competence forms the foundation for many other skills and capabilities. Persons who did not have the possibility to develop this competence in childhood encounter difficulties

as grown-ups, when they try to acquire adult language and to develop emotional and identity languages; the process takes much more time and effort. The lack of linguistic competence signifies having insufficient vocabulary and a limited capability of expression. Both affect the *self-respect* and block a realistic self-understanding. Other people might react negatively, too. Scientists notice that persons with low language competence level also receive lower marks in intelligence tests.

*Question: What competences do you need to discuss the weather and to explain Japanese Nō theatre?*

## Communication

*Communicative competence* describes the degree of knowledge and use of various language *codes*. Codes can be anything from word choice to way of expression and choosing speech level. Our brains appear to be pre-programmed for exchange and we are born with the ability to communicate. Historically it is probably the opposite: the human brain has developed various strategies *because of an increasing demand for complex communication* in human societies.

Communicative competence has in scientific terminology expanded to include *social competence* and a more universal understanding that multiple competences are necessary in life. Today researchers concentrate mainly on what competences we as *individuals need and develop to meet the requirements* and challenges in various situations. *Skills*, desire and the way of

communicating varies according to each individual. How we speak depends on the language we use, but also on our own choice or certain language and cultural codes defining gestures, voice, facial expressions, smiles, tone, how quickly we talk and so on. Also the *situation* determines our communication. A shy person maybe keeps quiet in one environment but becomes talkative in another which feels more secure. If we do not speak a language fluently, people around us might become impatient and think we have nothing to say.

In new and foreign situations, the question of competences becomes acute. For recently arrived migrants and some pupils everyday life can seem unmanageable, especially if they do not have experience of school, the language or society, and lack language knowledge and *tools*. They need to practise switching languages, analysing codes of their home and school languages and activate *understanding* and language production. *Realistic expectations* and well-structured study units (holistic approach) should be priorities. In fact, all learners benefit from them regardless of their competence level.

*Task: Watch videos of persons talking in Arabic, Finnish and Thai. What codes did you notice?*

## Cultural competence

Culture is usually defined as anything from *traditions* to ways for constructing *identities* and social relations or gaining experience. Nationalism has created a myth that all cultures are

separate units with unique and separate characteristics, and that every national culture, language and identity is clearly different from others. We meet these beliefs daily and also when we are learning a new language and another culture. The first thing we are introduced to are *national self-images*. In time we create our own networks, experiences and knowledge, and challenge the stereotypes which become less significant for us.

Cultures are in fact huge, flexible *networks* consisting of lots of other larger and smaller networks. Cultures develop and *change constantly*, just like individual and collective networks and identities. One common presumption is that the better we know our own culture, the bigger our chances are to obtain knowledge of other languages and cultures. We certainly need to know our own networks, languages and cultural dimensions, but learning becomes more efficient if we *experience many different languages and cultures*. New information is stored faster in the brain through comparison processes.

Accessing several languages and cultures we develop many competences in various ways. Possibilities for *new contacts* grow exponentially with every new language; our personality develops and we get to know ourselves better and might find new aspects and skills. Researchers emphasise that the average multilingual person is *flexible*, adapts more easily, thinks and communicates with rich *nuances*, switches roles and copes with different kinds of situations. The ability to *analyse*, choose and decide, and the *senses* and sensory perceptions are more developed. Multilingualism also reduces the risk of *dementia*, according to new research.

Various tests indicate that multilingual persons are more *tolerant*, not only about different languages, but also in their values, understanding of and encounters with other people and cultures. An individual who feels comfortable with and has knowledge of several languages and cultures can build bridges and use a wide range of strategies for communication. They are able to reduce stereotypes and act as language and *cultural interpreters*. Translation and interpretation require not only language competence but also a profound cultural competence.

*Question: Which cultures do you know well? Which ones do you know a little but would like to learn more about?*

## Interlingual competence

*Intercultural* and *interlingual* competences and education are increasingly needed today in society. Developing competences aims at acquiring skills to communicate with persons from different language and cultural backgrounds. *Intercultural competence* consists of *cognitive*, emotional and other skills which facilitate exchange on the cultural levels. *Interlingual competence* enables communication with people using another language. Yet we also need *intralingual* competence (within a language). *At least one stable or “strong” language makes the development of all the other competences easier.*

When we enhance our interlingual competences, we might even become able to speak with people with whom we have no common language: we use our skills for *decoding* messages

and for our own language production. The more languages and codes we have acquired, the more effectively we communicate in languages we are learning or have never used before. An experienced polyglot and also many talkative persons, who are used to communicating, perceive and *imitate* words, gestures and intonation and soon speak more or less understandably.

How can we effectively acquire intralingual and interlingual competences? Every individual has their own way, but a well-known method is to *study* and *expose* the learner to languages and cultures and gather many different experiences. *Gradual* learning is recommended by scientists: first we learn the ability to see things from *another viewpoint*: should we use a polite form or an unofficial form when talking – and why? Then we start discovering *possibilities* and *limitations*: how can we express thoughts and opinions? *Understanding* increases and contributes to gaining insights into for instance how different facial expressions should be interpreted. Language and culture *awareness* is the aim, but there is no precise definition of it.

*Question: How long can you be quiet in English and your other languages before the situation becomes embarrassing?*

# Language learning

Language learning is usually considered to be a question of *age*, talent, gifts, interest or experience; but learning is actually based on *activity*. Elderly people often complain that they learn much more slowly and they have trouble remembering words. They are partly right. In our memory, the image of previous learning processes is *distorted*. In a rear-view mirror everything looks easier than it actually was in childhood and young age. We forget how many years and lessons we needed. A child takes about one year to begin producing language (talk) and about twenty years and thousands of hours of education until the language reaches an adult level.

Brain researchers suppose that our active memory only has a certain *capacity*. A language learnt at school and maybe used for work stays active until it no longer is needed, but we can train and activate our memory. Most scientists today consider that by *training* we are able to expand and make our memory function more effectively.

For the brain, the language learning (*input*) and production (*output*) are different processes. Our brains store information and construct new structures and concepts, but the individual differences between brains can be huge. In addition to the specific characteristics of a brain, also the capability to acquire information, *study techniques*, experience, knowledge and practice, how we learn, motivation, interest and support from our surroundings influence learning.

Often we first learn to understand a language and then to speak and write. For language production, *more processes* are activated in the brain than when learning. Speech and writing, translation and interpretation require *practice and experience*, competences and linguistic strategies. The brain needs *access* to vocabulary and structures. If words or grammar are missing, we can use *existing elements* from the same or other languages. With more training we develop the ability to learn and produce language at the same time, just like most multilinguals when they communicate.

A *sensitive period*, a favourite concept among psychologists for a certain period when children under school age appear to learn languages faster and more effectively than later in life, does not exist for the brain. Our brains build up knowledge in the same way all through life, but our *methods* develop with age. Children can freely use all the linguistic resources they possess, because nobody *expects* their language level to be as high as among teenagers and adults. Language production is basically a social function and therefore influenced by our own and other people's needs, expectations, *attitudes*, prejudices and reactions.

At school, knowledge is taught with standardised methods. This approach *does not suit all learners* and therefore results might differ widely. Brain research results are now more often taken into account in language education, but there is still a lot to discover.

*Question: Do you learn to speak or write a language first?*

## Attitudes

“Why do we have to learn more languages? What *benefit* will we get from them?” These questions are often raised by pupils who feel burdened by all those languages they are supposed to learn at school. In most countries in Europe, pupils learn *at least one language in addition* to their school language. Many are studying two or more languages. Adults generally reply that “when you go abroad, you can make yourself understood and enjoy the trip more”, or “you get a better job when you know more languages” or something similar. But are these answers enough to motivate pupils to learn?

Unlikely. *Children and teenagers need models*. In a family where adults do not read books, the children will seldom read either. This affects their school results and chances to find a suitable job. *Socio-economic factors* and for example number of *books* at home (favourable models) have been identified by researchers as important for learning success. *Cultural models* influence: when girls are supposed to need only some basic knowledge, it might be difficult to persuade parents, girls and networks that girls have the same right as boys to schooling and that education does not harm them; just on the contrary. Superior or condescending attitudes block learners’ *motivation* to learn and use languages; our brains need positive signals and attitudes to learn.

We could also turn the question around: *what are we missing out on, when we know only one language?* One answer could be: the rest of the world. Each of us choose our own life,

environment, languages and opinions, but life is enriched and we receive many more opportunities with several languages. The term *foreign language* has long contributed to the false belief that other languages than our mother tongue are elements outside our daily life.

Attitudes are slowly beginning to change and consequently also language learning, partly through to globalisation, Internet, mass media, travel and other factors. A parallel phenomenon we now can observe is that a *profound knowledge* of our first language(s) is seen as less important than before. Globally growing numbers of citizens have difficulties with the language level society requires and needs. “Too much information” those who lack reading habits explain. Reading comprehension and writing create stress and anxiety and complex contexts are perceived as too difficult for them.

At least a few reasons for these *diminishing language skills* can be found in the escalating use of visual technology, the fragmentation of data and knowledge distribution mainly via videos and photos, picture books and comics and other visual materials. They have taken over from texts and reading which previously were highly encouraged by both school *and* society. Researchers note that *picture books do not support children to read*, because it is easier to concentrate on the pictures. *Easy to Read* books, for instance, contain therefore very few pictures, with the clear goal that the reader can concentrate on the text and the reading process to improve reading skills.

Every citizen needs to understand the importance of *solid language knowledge* and a rich language for developing the

intellect and intelligence, language learning, brain functions and language development. *Good language skills support school and work, economy and society.* Employers, managers, leaders and educators also need to *invest time* and make an *effort* to obtain this knowledge and adapt it in a suitable way to their environment.

*Task: Read a picture book or comics and then a text without pictures. How does your reading differ?*

## Methods

How does a successful learning process happen? Until now, nobody has found the ultimate and fantastic method to learn languages. Machines cannot (as yet) translate as *competently* as humans. The situation does not stop the sellers of all kinds of methods and *digital aids* from filling the language market with miracle cures for everyone who wishes to learn languages without sweat or tears. These courses have chiefly short-lived and limited effects.

Less marvellous ways are *simultaneous* learning or studying a few languages parallel. *Successive* learning means that we learn the languages one after the other and *formal* teaching can be supported or supplanted by *informal* learning. Variations are endless and the results can be *symmetric*, that is we know the languages equally well, but often our language skills are *asymmetric* or the levels are different.

The theories about how we learn are as varied, paradoxical and inconsequential as the methods, and they contain mainly a wide range of questions. Should we learn words or *expressions* first? Do we need *grammar* or should we discover rules by ourselves through *logic* and deduction? Grammar is often left out when we concentrate on words and learn expressions by heart. How do we learn to listen, read and write – *guided* or freely, by ourselves or through *discussions*? Are *ready-made* dialogues better than inventing our own?

The interesting fact is that apparently all methods are useful but for different brains and individuals. Certain researchers believe we need a *quiet period* while we are creating a new vocabulary in the brain, but many learners start to talk in a new language at once. It is our individual choice how actively, in which manner and how much we decide to learn a language. The most efficient procedure is to *try out various methods* and use those that work for us here and now.

*Task: Read some Portuguese or Greek grammar and then twenty words and expressions. Do the same with Spanish or Slovak, but in reverse order. Which way felt better for you?*

## Connections and contexts

According to brain research, our brains create connections and contexts with the information and data we already have. New knowledge is processed more effectively and stays in the long-term memory if it can be combined with existing elements. All

new information revises and changes the previous knowledge. Scientists observe that our brains rebuild and expand whenever needed. Multilingual persons possess, for example, *more and denser brain mass* than monolinguals.

*Repeating* and creating pathways between various activities enable better learning and memory. The division into separate subjects at school, education and work does not reflect the way our brains or the world function. One example is that we learn *related* or *structurally similar* languages faster than completely different languages. A person who already knows French learns more effortlessly Latin, Italian, Spanish and Romanian than Hungarian or Turkish. For the two latter languages the brain has to process a different vocabulary and unfamiliar structures.

For all learners interdisciplinary work can be advantageous. *Cognitive challenges* and manifold tasks support and interest especially multilinguals, whose brains already are connecting knowledge, comparing, acquiring information and producing new data units. They get bored if they have to concentrate on one question only. School and language teaching methods are based on the principle that you first learn the *form*, then the *content*. But those who are learning a new language, or do not understand what they hear or read, might need first to catch the contents. When we know what a text is about, we can much more easily concentrate on *concepts, structure* and *form*.

*Task: Find out what the word 'shoe' is in four different languages. Which words stay in your memory?*

## Structure and reflection

In some countries a popular method, considered to reflect the way human brains learn by connecting and building on existing knowledge, is *scaffolding* or *instructional scaffolding*. Through support the teacher and pupils build up learning step by step. Previous knowledge and understanding are used, and interest and a feeling of success are created by acquiring new materials in smaller segments. Simultaneously, learning and memorising skills are activated and developed by comparison and feedback. The pupils also take more responsibility for their own learning.

Scaffolding can, however, be complicated for persons *who do not understand the teaching language*, or who have lived in another type of society or visited a different type of school or have *learning challenges*. Some people know how the society functions, but others are not that experienced. A few do not *care at all* about the rest of the world; they are interested only in certain sectors such as technology or history. Too narrow scopes hamper scaffolding.

Individual language or cultural competences influence how well scaffolding works. Physics, chemistry and other natural sciences are considered to be universal, but they are actually dependent on language and culture. A word or picture which is misunderstood can cause wrong answers or interpretations. Various *tests* at school and other educational institutions or at a work place are often based on a specific cultural and language background. The participants' language level and *degree of understanding*, as well as interest in the world, determine if

everything, some part or nothing is self-evident. Sometimes, aspects that school, work or society consider to be *normal* are not understandable at all.

*Reflective learning* means that the individual reflects about the learning process, motivates, plans, analyses and *evaluates* the progress and achievements. In traditional pedagogy the teacher is supposed to teach and control, but when the pupils themselves find solutions and revise their knowledge, interest, self-confidence, independence and also resilience increase. The *dialogue* and *relations* between the teacher and the group and the social dynamics within the group influence the degree of success with reflective learning, and decide if it will function or become blocked by for instance conflicts.

Our world is far from monolingual and therefore it is most important that children *activate all their language resources as early as possible*, from language acquisition and processing to production and speech, and later reading and writing. A strong knowledge of languages and the habit of language learning is needed not only at school but also in the future. Children and young people still *have the right to make mistakes*, discover and *test* various solutions, but this kind of time and liberty is seldom found in the adult world. Those learners, who since childhood are in the *habit of structuring and reflecting* about their own learning, have the benefit of being able to effectively acquire new information also as adults.

*Task: Solve a text task in mathematics or physics. Which challenges does one without your language skills encounter?*

# Activate languages

Language knowledge is similar to sports in one essential aspect – we have to *train to keep fit*. An old saying is that a language “rusts” if we do not use it. A simplified explanation is that the brain stores the language in the cellar to make room for current issues in the living room. We need to recover the language and unpack and activate it. An ideal situation would be that we use all languages we have ever learned every day, but already a *regular use* can keep up the skills. Parallel and diversified use in speech and writing challenges and stimulates our brains.

For multilinguals, languages are a *natural part of daily life* and they often remain active without special exercise. Possibly a multilingual person speaks one or two languages with family, another language in society or with friends, and reads news and books and watches films in various languages. Also persons who consider themselves monolingual use or experience other languages in different ways. Internet, literature, films, radio, theatre, *music, mass media* and other transmitters of language could be used as a “sports ground” where we are consciously training our language “muscles”.

For pupils, school and society language is a crucial *tool*. We have to keep doing several years of persistent work before we manage the adult language. According to general opinion and some scientists language development is slower in multilingual children; yet among teenagers the differences disappear. One scientific explanation is that multilingual children know *as many words* as monolinguals, but the vocabulary is distributed

between several languages. In reality, the child's *development* and how fast the language "matures" is far more influenced by *interest, motivation* and general *well-being*.

Language development and *language level* depend on the support from home and school, how parents and other adults communicate and for example read to or with the child. When a language is *exciting* and interesting and everything connected with it is attractive, the language is learned faster and becomes more stable. Once we have "cracked the code" for *reading* in at least one language, our skills increase, become stronger and develop for the rest of our lives. People who cannot read or write or do not read in adult life also continue to develop their language(s), but to a more limited extent than those who read regularly and extensively.

In our brains, learning and stabilising languages appear to happen gradually, but it is important to remind here that every individual learns in a different way. Learning and *expanding* our knowledge especially require patience, perseverance and an awareness that learning does not end with this lesson or course, but continues throughout life. By using our languages in *various ways*, we enrich our knowledge and acquire new experiences. Life can become much more exciting, interesting and attractive.

*Task: Use actively another language during one day; read, write, listen. Do you feel more comfortable with it?*

## Linguistic strategies

*Communication strategies* are extremely important for humans. Without them we could not survive. A baby develops various methods to communicate with the surroundings. Soon verbal strategies are added, such as negotiating, demanding, arguing, ignoring, giving orders, etc. Children test and select among the styles and strategies used in their environment and also develop their own. A first choice takes place when the child begins to talk. Which language(s) the child uses and how they develop depend on the people around and how they communicate and also on the *structure* of the child's brain. *Cognitive strategies* we develop are for example planning, control and evaluation.

The concept *codeswitching* means that we change language and/or cultural codes within a discussion or even inside one sentence. This abstraction is popular in pedagogy, linguistics, anthropology and various social and cultural sciences. The code is a cluster of *signals*, verbal and non-verbal, used for communication: words, word forms, voice, tone, expressions, gestures, facial expressions and others. We change for example languages or use expressions and words from another language or *dialects*. The variations are infinite and individual, but there are collective and periodical preferences, including the present-day English loan words in many languages.

Codeswitching is clearly observable in multilingual persons but also monolinguals switch codes. We use codeswitching consciously to reinforce what we are saying, *clarify*, quote, express emotions or opinions, *provoke*, create our own style,

because something sounds *funny* or we just like to play with language. For learning the concept of codeswitching is useful when it is employed to develop smooth language changes and language awareness, linguistic and cultural competences, as well as interpretation and translation skills.

Codeswitching can also be *non-intentional*, for instance to substitute limited vocabulary. When we do not find the right word, we use linguistic strategies and codeswitching (what is a ‘laptop’?). *Analytical* (explain: ‘a computer we can carry with us’) or *holistic* (related word: ‘mini computer’) strategies are effective to explain what we mean. *Transfer* (direct translation: ‘lap-machine’) is often used as a strategy, but not all scientists categorise it as codeswitching.

Some researchers believe that the manner of communication and codeswitching depend chiefly on the *situation*, the people and discussion partners. Others see *conscious* choices such as efficiency, *manipulation* and control as the aim. Research today focuses on communication strategies, aims and results which are more or less measurable.

What if language flexibility and the use of all language resources we possess are a normal and natural aspect of our brain functions and human communication?

*Task: Explain what sisu, nirvana, saudade and ikigai mean in English and another language.*

## Language resources

Research and multilingual school experiences during the past decades show that when the pupils' languages are integrated in teaching, attitudes and strategies for learning change. Alarming or threatening situations and the risk for conflicts are reduced. Awareness and understanding increase both in the pupils and the teachers; *language and knowledge acquisition are more effective* and all learn to know each other better, because every language brings out another aspect of the personality and identity. When pupils are *encouraged* to use their languages in various situations and activities, positive expectations towards learning increase, which stimulate pupils to better results.

*Translanguaging* occurs when many languages are used in a classroom. Experiences from multilingual schools show that permitting more languages improve achievements, as teachers and learners use their language resources to communicate and explain. Translanguaging supports our brains in the process of connecting, which enhances our language development and awareness. The ear is trained, vocabulary grows and thinking is improved. Socially, translanguaging contributes to a feeling of togetherness and *equality*, when all feel that their language is respected and they can contribute to the group. Learners use more *concepts* and examine correlations while they develop their knowledge of different languages. The languages become both a *tool* for learning and *pleasure*, and also school language is much more interesting. The school language requires strong language, *cultural* and social skills. For some learners, learning

happens faster in another language and they can get *support* to learn in the language that works best for them.

Objections against translanguaging are for instance that in a class with dozens of languages it takes ages to *explain* even the smallest question. The *educational level* drops and the group never manages to wade through school materials, as everything is always repeated in several languages and *word meanings* are discussed. Not all words and expressions can be translated exactly. Nuances take time to clear up and misinterpretations must be corrected.

In practice, the school language is used in class and when needed, the other languages support. Still, it is very important that the *other languages are not prohibited*, but that clear rules exist for communication, for example defining the tone and how we to talk to each other (kindly) or which words are (not) allowed (no foul words or insulting jokes). Often the teachers choose the languages and how they are used, based on their experience and language skills and the learners' needs. When required, meanings and *concepts* are discussed in various languages; this increases the vocabulary for all learners.

Could translanguaging and accepting various languages be something for the work place, too? Yes, without doubt. When several languages are necessary for work and the employees are multilingual and *multicultural*, translanguaging is a useful option. For integrating those with weak language and helping those who are learning the work place or society language, cultural and social codes, a realistic analysis of the situation and conscious effort are necessary before using this method.

*Task: Look up the verb 'to fish' in a synonym lexicon and in two other languages. How many synonyms are there and which nuances do the variations of the word have?*

## Cooperation

*Cooperative* or *peer learning* means that we learn from each other. In daily life we learn all the time from others, but in education it means that a group holds a *free dialogue*, solves tasks and builds up knowledge together. The communicative competence, relations and social contacts are developed and strengthened when we work with others in the same situation and *without an authority*. Cooperative learning can, according to researchers and teachers, reduce the emotional filters and increase efficiency in learning. Where bullying, discrimination, segregation or other social issues exist, it is counterproductive. A safe environment is the basis for beneficial cooperative learning. When tensions or conflicts exist, they must be solved before the method is used.

In language learning, the method of cooperative learning is most effective when *new material is revised*. In multilingual groups, individuals who know the same language can support each other. There is always a risk for misunderstandings and then the teacher needs to correct them. Parents may be a problem, too, if they have the mistaken idea that their child will not learn from others of the same age. They miss the fact that their children pick up information from peers every day.

A general opinion is that *multilingual cooperation* at school is unfruitful or even harmful, as learners will not care for the school language if they can use their own languages or stay in isolated language groups. Research shows that younger pupils especially need *more space to use their home language(s)* parallel with school language(s) to acquire a solid basis for their language skills. Cooperative learning offers them the possibility to exercise both home and school languages.

In addition to language knowledge, a multilingual group or class needs to develop dialogue, *ability to observe ourselves and our actions*, a functioning communication based on respect and a lot of healthy and positive *humour*. Anybody can step on sensitive toes without wanting to blunder. In safe environments with an *open dialogue* and feeling of togetherness, everybody gets the possibility to understand and gain insights about others and themselves – and their toes become less sensitive.

*Task: Write a plan how you intend to learn a new language. How does this plan reflect your way of learning?*

## General education

Our networks can be *activated* to support our languages and general education, but it is not that easy to identify networks and find a way to cooperate. A popular method in schools is to interview and ask *concrete questions* of various representatives, for instance what their people eat, how they celebrate and how children go to school in another country. This method works

with younger pupils; teenagers need deeper information and analyses. Becoming acquainted only with cultural heritages, traditions and celebrations strengthen the *stereotypes*. In our globalised world this method is already outdated.

*General language and cultural knowledge* with a *solid all-round education* are far more useful now than nationally tinted tuition and could easily be integrated in educational systems and society. Varied and *relative* perspectives, knowledge and experiences offer each of us more possibilities to develop tools to understand ourselves and others, and children and youth get greater opportunities to succeed as adults.

The way we perceive and evaluate *hierarchies* and *cultural markers*, our position in networks and how strong the feeling of belonging is, affect learning and transfer of language, culture and skills. Adults must create and activate their networks by themselves, but at school a few discussions with pupils, family and representatives for networks can clarify with whom and what the pupil identifies, which *elements* are important and their *characteristics*. In which way the networks around the learner can support has to be defined together with them. The help can consist of for instance *language support*, reading together, *talks*, *knowledge transmission*, visits, discussions and interviews. Most important, however, is to see all different people as individuals, not as groups.

*Task: Which stereotypes can be applied to you in terms of language, background and culture?*

## Diversity

In an *equal* and tolerant world everyone, regardless of language or background, gets the same chances. Individuals are regarded as individuals and nothing else. There is space for *variation*, discussion and different values, viewpoints and attitudes. All participate in a dialogue, learn to listen and understand, express themselves and find the right words to explain experiences, thoughts and opinions. We use our languages to *reflect* and for *imagination* and *creativity* and solve different issues. Where *diversity* is accepted, each individual is allowed to participate and decide about rules and the environment, which encourages engagement and better achievements.

We must often *learn to accept* diversity and *non-standard ways of functioning*, independently of background, language or other aspects. Growing understanding of individual similarities and differences reduces social tensions and confrontations with unknown or difficult questions. We identify effectively what we and others do not understand, perceive or when we or they have differing opinions. Then we become able to discuss, explain and solve problems together.

Does it sound *utopian*? In the real world, the situation is often quite different, but each of us can surely contribute some components for change. At school or the work place, we could participate or initiate development of dialogue, and work on the ability to *individually and collectively solve issues*, manage any problems before they blow up into conflicts and also clear up existing social confrontations.

We can create diversity through a dialogue in which various views are taken into account to support language learning and language development. *Basic knowledge of languages and cultures and how they function* must be present when languages and cultures are compared. *To accept diversity* does not mean we must agree to everything; we should use common sense in any situation.

Education is today becoming decentralised with the aid of technology, but machines cannot replace a *knowledgable and conscious* human environment that possesses language, social and cultural competences and use them *sensibly*. Despite superior efforts and much hard work, it might still happen that with some learners' achievements and results are weak or *non-existent*. Ultimately each individual is responsible for their own capability for dialogue and also for their progress.

*Question: Are there written or spoken strategies for diversity at your work place? Explain how they function and what the results are.*

# Creativity and language

To learn a language is like *opening a door* into a new world. Could developing language skills be just fun, and is it always necessary to be entertaining? Do we use our languages only for a specific goal, or do we enjoy them, too? We learn, use and experience languages in various ways. Depending on situation, some languages are more useful than fun and others are rather sources for joy than beneficial. In the best of cases, all things we do can *develop our languages*.

Creative attitudes and work methods mean that we learn and use languages and develop language skills through activating our brain's resources in *innovative* ways. Creative methods do not exclude work, naturally, but they contribute to learning and language development by *varying learning methods*, creating correlations and giving the brain a possibility to process data in different ways. The more tools we can use and *the better we know ourselves*, the greater is the chance that the language develops. We can also discover inspiring ways to learn through creative methods.

Languages are more fun and learning more effective if we find the courage to take *risks* and use *logic* and *analysis* in a new way or from other points of view. Perhaps we do not listen to radio plays or watch TV theatre in our home language, but find them interesting in the language we are learning. There are infinite creative methods and possibilities to *experience* any language, independently if it is the first, fifth or seventeenth one. Using the language in many more and different manners,

*investigating* and *applying it to different situations* makes the brain work more efficiently. *A language is not worn by use*, just the opposite: it develops and flourishes.

When we *experience* a language, we make use of language resources such as listening, trying to understand, *guessing*, explaining and *finding arguments*. We can stimulate both brain and body by creative methods like *drama*, discussion, creating dialogue, *storytelling* or writing texts. If we *translate*, interpret, talk and *think aloud* or ask questions, we activate language production effectively. In groups or pairs we can for instance *cooperate*, carry out interviews or enjoy the language together through a hobby.

*Comparisons* between different languages and structures, words and codes for communication enrich our knowledge of the languages. Our chances for successful learning and use of language increase with *rich language, social and cultural contexts* we get acquainted with or live in. Creativity for learning and developing language is not about how to find *the one and only perfect method* and reach an ultimate goal, but to try various methods, *stimulate*, explore new dimensions and gain manifold experiences. Most of all, creativity applied to language learning signifies that we should *have fun on the way*.

*Task: Translate the above paragraph into another language. Compare the two versions. Was it easy to translate and find the right words?*

## Play and movement

*Play* is one of the most productive ways the brain seems to work with language learning. Children play and simultaneously do a lot of experimenting to develop their language. They test different words, structures and expressions and repeat them. Teenagers also play with languages in various ways and many people continue to play as adults. Language games, puns and rhymes develop the language in people of all ages. In groups, games can be of great benefit when investigating, *processing*, *developing* new knowledge, increasing understanding or using *complex* words and expressions and finding their meanings.

The group and their language level determine what kind of plays can be used. Possibly not everyone wants to read rhymes or can manage dramatising a text, but if language is *combined* with gestures, voice, intonation and *body posture* it can become easier to learn words and find the right expressions. *Imitation* is an attractive possibility: we can leave behind our usual way of speech and try communicating in a different mode.

Language knowledge can be processed and trained through playing roles. It could be drama on a full scale, short scenes or just sketches of a role with other values, attitudes, viewpoints, postures, vocabulary and expressions than we use normally. *Freedom to try new patterns* in various situations is important for developing language and cultural skills and codes. We also learn to know ourselves and the language more deeply.

*Movement, rhythm, rhyme, melody, singing, dance, poems and reading aloud* support language learning and development.

Younger children need much physical movement, but teenagers and adults also profit from moving while learning a language. For thousands of years humanity has used methods combining movement and language for learning and *entertainment*. Research indicates that we get more out of a language when we experience it physically.

*Task: Read a poem or rhyme aloud. Sing or clap along. Was it easy to find the rhythm?*

## Storytelling and discussion

Storytelling and discussions or debates are traditions probably far older than reading and writing in human history. Telling and discussing is *part of our social life*. They are based on a special type of intercourse and cooperation with other people. Using *interaction* we create together common thought processes and dialogue. They could be expanded into collective learning, the development of skills and knowledge and new discoveries. Storytelling and debates exist in all cultures in various forms, and for instance in modern times even as audio books.

When we tell a story or exchange thoughts and opinions, we use multiple linguistic strategies to describe, summarise, refer to, comment, *defend*, suggest, *negotiate* and oppose, etc. All participants in a storytelling or debating situation get a chance to *think* about words, expressions and questions. The same topics and themes are repeated in several ways, with different words, and we use various kinds of materials and information.

We listen, formulate and *react*, which stimulates our brains to work in different ways with both language and knowledge, and we get the possibility to develop skills and talents more efficiently.

*Task: Compare situations when you told something to a friend and before a group. How did you talk and which elements or questions did you emphasise?*

## Translation, interpretation and mixing

*Translation* and *interpretation* help our brains to handle and process languages by comparing and building bridges between them. At school, *instead of dictation* it could be more useful to give multilingual pupils the task to translate a text. To interpret and translate stimulates the brain *much more than focus on a monolingual text*. Simultaneous interpretation trains the ability to *switch* between languages and codes, and within a language to change expressions, codes and body language.

*Mixing languages* is not considered to be a sensible learning method, but all who know more than one language actually benefit from mixing in words, structures and expressions from one or several languages. Combining languages occurs anyhow naturally in our polyglot brains. *Language awareness* increases when we mix languages: we receive insights into *similarities*, *differences* and the use of the languages. How can this word be translated into another language? Why does an expression *feel* different in another context?

Searching for *solutions* on our own or together encourages *exploring* and experimenting and expands *general knowledge*. We find consciously or spontaneously a lot of new information which we probably know a little about or might never have heard of. Yet everything we find broadens our knowledge and contributes to the interest for further investigations.

*Task: Find the word 'snow'. How many words are there in Finnish, Xhosa, Bengali and Lithuanian?*

## Creative reading

*Literacy* is not a skill we are born with; each of us must make an effort to learn to read and write. We have (regrettably) no genes that give us automatic *reading and writing skills*. Once we have learnt to read, we develop further language resources so that we can understand and process what we have read.

To be able to read, we must possess a sufficient amount of concentration, memory, motor skills (specific muscles are used) and physical maturity. The eyes must be able to focus on a text and the brain contain a basic vocabulary to understand the language. *Mechanic reading* is a process that requires both knowledge and experience of language conventions and an ability to decode them. *Reading skills* include perceiving the language, and also critical thinking.

Experience in reading, language skills and type of text and vocabulary affect how we read and how much we understand. Methods such as guessing, identifying *keywords*, substituting,

defining, explaining and looking up words support the reading and can be used in creative ways. All the *senses* and skills we possess can also support reading, but to understand the content we need to recognise a *majority of the words* and their forms. Children who cannot read themselves, or adults who do not read habitually, often learn words and word forms by listening to someone *reading aloud* or from media. Still, children who already know how to read benefit from *parents continuing to read* with them and discussing texts. These joint activities support the child's own reading and language development.

Active reading contributes to a *rich language* among people of any age. At school language is built up through systematic learning and daily training, but adults take the responsibility for their own reading and development. Multilinguals are often able to create goals of their own, compare and think critically about their reading. In education their degree of literacy is, however, *measured* like monolinguals', although multilinguals hold several vocabularies and knowledge that do not fit into any standard. *Reading skills also vary according to language, interest and practice*, and tests often give misleading results.

Some researchers think that texts about real persons and circumstances trigger a greater *emotional response* or increase the interest for reading, but readers themselves might have the opposite opinion. A novel or poem can offer a stronger *reading experience* and cause more vivid involvement than a text based on reality. *Independently of personal taste, it is important to read all kinds of texts. Longer texts* or complete books create more correlations and train the reader in resilience, therefore

they should be recommended rather than shorter texts, although seemingly easier, but the shorter texts do not support much the development of reading skills.

The concept *multiliteracy* was coined in the 1990s in the United Kingdom and has today spread globally. It implies that we understand and perceive various kinds of written materials, from books and scientific texts to daily articles, media and Internet. The pedagogical and *norm-critical* aspects of the concept are supposed to meet the challenges of the *digital age* and create a *broader linguistic and cultural diversity*. The aim of multiliteracy is to create possibilities for new *discoveries*, *diversify* learning, increase awareness about different issues and vary reading and knowledge acquisition by applying them. Also activities such as *study visits*, interviews, music, dance and motions, *drama*, theatre and others, depending on the individual interests, needs and ways of learning can be added. The concept is still being developed.

*Task: Read a piece from William Shakespeare's Anthony and Cleopatra and facts about the real Cleopatra. What emotional responses did the readings awaken in you?*

## Easy to Read

*Easy to Read* (German *Leichte Sprache*, Swedish *lättläst* and Finnish *selkokieli*) offers a chance to read for people who have reading difficulties, are not *motivated* or used to reading, have weak *sight*, or *elderly* and persons with memory impairment,

and all who are *learning a new language*. Easy to Read texts have low readability index factor (LIX), which means that they do not include long or difficult words. LIX was developed in Sweden in the 1960s and is calculated with a mathematical formula. Easy to Read texts are characterised by *short lines, sentences and chapters*, everyday language and *clear logic* and an *evident line of events* in the story.

Easy to Read is not considered a separate genre, but the term shows to the reader that the *language is easy to understand*. The contents can be demanding, depending on the topic. Easy to Read texts aim at being comprehensive, *encouraging and to support reading skills*. They offer the reader a possibility to get information in a simple and effective way and to experience a feeling of *success* when reading. This motivates especially weaker readers to read on. Easy to Read books can be read by all with any need or habit and also *multilingually* to support language learning. Some people may need Easy to Read books and texts all their lives.

The need for Easy to Read is growing today as reading skills and language level are dropping. Easy texts contribute vitally to *accessibility and inclusion*. When everybody reads the same book also the weaker readers or language learners can join in a discussion. The feeling of belonging together is strengthened. Some Easy to Read books are re-written from “ordinary” books in simple language, but many are now written directly as Easy books. Easy to Read literature, information and *websites* exist today in several languages. There are books and articles for *every taste*, various *language levels* and all age groups.

*Task: Write a Easy to Read text. What makes it easy to read?*

## Creative Writing

*Writing* is of paramount importance for the development of language, cognitive skills and a whole range of other skills and competences. *Creative writing* is a possibility to turn writing into something interesting, to *discover* and develop linguistic and individual skills and to reduce and eliminate *stress*, anxiety and emotional blocks.

When writing creatively, we write *freely* on any topic in any language we choose, without thinking about spelling or word order. After writing the text, it can be *edited* and revised, but that is not obligatory and many texts remain forever as they were written. They may be too personal or express something we have felt or experienced at that moment. In groups the participants can discuss each others' texts, read aloud or *tell* the text in pairs or before the whole group. The atmosphere must be *inspiring* and *constructive* and provide time and space for reflection and each individual's personal point of view, in safe surroundings.

Creative writing has a great potential for *supporting* and *developing expression* and processing emotions, attitudes and values. Persons who write creatively work with the language, thoughts and emotions and can spontaneously reach *cognitive levels* they have not been aware about. Writing revises our view of ourselves, others and events in life, even difficult ones,

and supports the development of a *richer and more nuanced* language, or several languages.

Professional writers often use creative writing to find right expressions, *hunting for ideas* or just because it is *fun* and they get the feeling of being in the “flow”. *Mental blocks* can be solved by writing about them: how do we feel them, how do they look – are they monsters, oceans or rocks? We can further free ourselves of emotions or *conflict situations* by writing or simply express feelings and thoughts by creating new stories, writing letters or messages that we never send.

Any persons, learners or groups writing in several languages can *translate* and interpret their texts for the others, which adds to the value of the joint work. We can also *mix languages or language elements* or write many languages *parallel*, switch languages and play with them. We can create a new language or words and explain them. The goal for creative writing, as with all creative aspects of working with languages, is that we *primarily work with improving our own possibilities, skills and competences* and *discover* our potential as well as a multitude of new perspectives.

*Task: You open a door. Write a short text or a poem about the place you enter or experience when you step over the threshold.*

# Development

Languages are a precious *resource* which can give much joy and benefit. Most international organisations and also states and educational systems increasingly understand that languages are a *valuable asset* we need to cultivate today. Multicultural education is entering global consciousness simultaneously with growing political, economic, social and cultural cooperation. In Europe language diversity is protected and language learning is actively encouraged.

Every individual has the right to be multilingual, regardless of statistics or nationalist attitudes. Each of us has the right to create our own *multifaceted* identities to enrich both ourselves and our environment. Teachers have the crucial task to transmit educational materials. When the pupils leave school and walk into adult life, they should have developed at least some skills to function in society. Citizens are supposed to act *consciously* and *competently* and continue with life-long learning on their own. This implies that we need *tools* for both language and knowledge development and *constructive attitudes* to learning. The question is in fact: *what do we want to develop in the future* and how should education reflect it?

For the personal tool kit we develop throughout life we need many and various competences and strategies. The information, insights, insights and questions presented in this book are hopefully put among the instruments and used to broaden the understanding and awareness about our languages and how we work with them.

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## Websites

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Books: [villa.bokpil.eu](http://villa.bokpil.eu)

Tasks & Materials: [edu.bokpil.eu](http://edu.bokpil.eu)

*Multicoloured language*  
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in languages, language learning  
and multilingualism, parents,  
educators and teachers.

The book offers a  
comprehensive view  
into the workings of our brains,  
as well as ideas  
for creative language activities.

Sabira Stahlberg is a researcher  
and writer who lectures  
internationally about integration,  
languages, multilingualism and  
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