

Introduction

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Dear participants,

As a linguist dealing with applied linguistics and language acquisition, I am very honoured to participate in this conference and its organisation.

In fact, close cooperation and a joint endeavour between linguists and jurists, crossing disciplinary borders, is not frequent. But it is exactly what we want to do in this conference.

We are starting from an observation: in the real world, plurilingualism, the existence of and interaction between many languages, is reality. Even there, where neither institutions nor legal rules do provide for this to happen. And thus, even at school.

From this follows the necessity to adapt education and school organization to the needs and requests of children, parents and teachers; in the end, to the needs and requests of society as a whole. This means, that we are talking about a bottom-up phenomenon – in all senses, when we are talking about plurilingualism and education:

- bottom-up, because the requests usually come from parents and the positive reactions from some headmasters or authorities, at least in the beginning;
- bottom-up, because we should start from kindergarden or elementary schools;
- bottom-up, because there is contact and contagion between schools – exchange of good practice

In this conference, we want to look into the situation of territories which are - more or less - plurilingual and compare them in order to gain new ideas and options.

This is also true for the discussion with our colleagues from the legal discipline: the very idea of new rights, including one to plurilingual education, promises to change the approach of schools towards this phenomenon permitting new experiments and changes to teaching methods.

Schools often demonstrate courage. So do teachers and headmasters. But this is **not** sufficient.

Today, the need to be plurilingual may not yet be a full right in positive law, but it has certainly become an obligation, but is also a chance.

It is important that this does not only refer to economic factors (in foreign language teaching these are known as instrumental motivation). The advantages of plurilingual education are also cognitive and cultural.

Italy is traditionally considered monolingual and without adequate language teaching in its school system. However, even in Italy it has become normal over the last 20 years to know and speak more languages, in particular English, at least for the new generations. But over

these years, also the concept of knowing a language has changed; one is tempted to say “despite” school.

In fact, in the past, the ambition was learning a foreign language like a native speaker. Today, the aim is to reach a knowledge which is adequate for communication, and for cultural and social purposes.

Quoting an advertising campaign, we have left behind “the cat is on the table” and move towards the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) of the Council of Europe. This means “know how” – to use and to be in different languages.

All this, and certainly much more, we want to discuss in this conference – gaining precious insights in and from different disciplinary perspectives.

Thank you and ... *buon lavoro!*

Trento, 28.IX.2015