

# Feasibility of policy in university language teaching today

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## The tradition of Erasmus

University language centres can boast a long tradition: the first institute that could qualify as a university language centre, the *collegium trilingue*, was founded in Louvain as early as in 1519. The founder was none other than Desiderius Erasmus. By that time he was 53 years old and on his many trips he had become acquainted with the teaching systems in many countries such as Holland and Flanders, the German countries, Italy, France and England. Erasmus's reason for founding a college for language teaching in Leuven was that he felt that the average student and teacher had insufficient command of languages. In his view, an important condition for humanistic education at a high level was that students could improve their knowledge of three languages. These languages obviously included Latin, the language of instruction at the time, but also Greek and Hebrew, the other source languages of classical and Christian science, philosophy and theology. The name *collegium trilingue* was therefore based on a personally approved, ambitious humanistic programme. Academics not only had to have personal access to the academic tradition in its various languages; they also had to be able to express themselves properly in these languages. To achieve this, good language teaching was an absolute prerequisite. Erasmus knew this only too well, not only because he himself was a master in speaking and writing Latin, but also because he harboured a deep-seated frustration in this area: he had not learned Greek and Hebrew until he had reached a relatively advanced age and he had always felt this to be a disadvantage. Although the exact reason remains unclear, Erasmus's initiative was not very successful: the *collegium trilingue* was underfunded and soon became the object of conflicts in the academic

community. Erasmus was unable to relate to the other professors at Louvain, who viewed the new institute as a competitor and a threat to their own academic position. Erasmus himself had no managerial qualities and with his restless nature he was not the right person to lead his institute. He left Leuven a few years later and the language centre soon disappeared (the name *In de Driy Tonghen* is now associated only with a pub), but the idea had been realized once and the ideal would remain.

At a time when the European Union casts the humanist Erasmus as a kind of patron saint of university education and links his name to a number of programmes associated with international mobility, Erasmus's commitment to language teaching deserves attention too. If students are to acquire international competence and are to be prepared for the international labour market by means of a specific academic programme in combination with experience abroad, language teaching will have to be given an appropriate place in the university's curriculum. Whereas in Erasmus's day it was not particularly difficult to identify the three most important languages used in academia and list the most necessary language skills, this is much more complicated today. If Erasmus's term *trilingue* was to be put into practice today, the result would probably be quite different: a multilingual competence, including good command of the mother tongue, English as the academic *lingua franca* and one other foreign language relevant to the personal academic profile. As was the case in Erasmus's time, this *trilingue* sets out an ambitious programme if it is not to be limited to language students but to apply, in principle, to all students. After all, the implications would be many if, at the time of their graduation, all students were able to say that they had a good command of English as an academic language and that their command of another language, besides their mother tongue, is sufficient to give them a selling point on the labour market. Naturally, the ideal of a modern *trilingue* could differ, depending on the region where one lives and one's particular field of expertise. What matters is that at this time, with the evolving political horizon and labour market in Europe, and, concomitantly, the gradual internationalizing of university education, the consequences for language teaching must be reviewed critically and fitting course provision must be created (Beacco & Byram 2003, Breidbach 2003).

The short episode in Erasmus's life and the history of the University of Louvain epitomize the place of language teaching at universities; what occurred in Erasmus's time could easily recur. What is striking is the idealistic approach of Erasmus, who wanted to give

language teaching a central place in the curriculum, supported by the new medium of printed books. Another notable fact is that his colleagues did not share his views. This led to a long and laborious discussion: is language teaching part of the core programme of academic education or is it rather a useful but essentially secondary auxiliary science? This question about a prominent or a more marginal position for language teaching is related to essential factors such as political support and financial means: in Erasmus's day this was apparently already a delicate issue and it has not changed since. Erasmus's experience demonstrates yet another point: language teaching depends very much on teachers who happen to be available (Erasmus's departure marked the end of the *collegium trilingue's* success), and successful academic teaching therefore requires teachers to have a particular profile. Finally, Erasmus's experience shows that the management of language teaching is a difficult issue, as it requires competences few people possess in the desired combination (Ruane 2002). Anyone succeeding Erasmus as a director of a university language centre must combine vision for the contents of teaching with managerial qualities, and an international horizon with the ambition to put his/her administrative initiatives into practice in a field that is held in relatively low esteem. Below we will discuss the current situation of language teaching, taking Erasmus's experiences and the problems identified as a starting point.

### **University language teaching: a threefold programme**

The case put forward in this chapter is not primarily concerned with those students who are majoring in a language (this category of students seems to be declining in numbers), but with those students who wish to improve their languages in addition to and for the purpose of other disciplines (a growing number of students). Language teaching is for various reasons important for the latter category of students: 1) knowledge of the mother tongue alone, even if this is English or French, is evidently no longer sufficient to study or work in any particular academic discipline; 2) academic courses increasingly have an international character and student mobility is expected to grow during the course; spending part of your university education abroad requires proper preparation; 3) a university degree therefore implies a certain degree of 'international competence': students must be equipped with adequate linguistic and intercultural skills to function effectively in an international and multicultural context and to enable them to participate in the international labour market. For these reasons language teaching needs to be given a proper position at universities, now

and in the future. Moreover, most young people in secondary education, even those in countries like the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland where languages traditionally have a prominent place in the curriculum, are not equipped with sufficient language skills to complete their academic studies without paying more attention to their languages. Indeed, language teaching in secondary education seems to be declining, and students do not become aware of their personal need to work on their multilingual competence until they are at the university and have gained more specific expert knowledge and a better idea of the labour market.

In what way can a university respond to the need to give language teaching a more prominent position in its degree programmes? It will have to develop a differentiated course provision to meet the different needs and requirements of students. We can discern three fields of action here.

Firstly, teaching in English as the language of science. In practice, this means that students must be able to read and interpret academic texts pertaining to their own domain, listen to an academic paper or lecture and pick up the most important elements, express themselves both verbally and in writing at an academic level, have sufficient knowledge of the specific terminology and conventions in their own subject, and be familiar with a number of cultural and interpersonal conventions in English.

The partial introduction of *English-Medium Teaching*, which has taken place in Maastricht and is a trend elsewhere in Europe as well, clearly offers a good opportunity for students to learn English as the language of science in a number of ways. Indirectly it will contribute to achieving the objective mentioned above, i.e. that graduates will be able to perform effectively in an international and multicultural context (although it is no guarantee). The effectiveness can be enhanced if students from a variety of backgrounds take part in English-medium teaching and teaching takes place in a small-scale, interactive, and student-centred context; the latter is common practice at Maastricht University as part of its teaching system, which is based on the principles of problem-based learning (Wilkinson 1996). In practice, the partial introduction of English-medium courses results in three different types of English teaching: teaching whereby the English language is used to convey knowledge and skills about a particular subject area, but where the aim is not overtly to develop the language (usually called CLE – *Content Learning through English*), teaching in which the aims are to develop both knowledge and skills of both a particular subject area and the language, English

(CLIL - *Content and Language Integrated Learning*), and a more general, supporting type of language skills training (LI – *Language Instruction*) (cf. Brinton, Snow, & Wesche 1989).

How does this affect language teaching itself? A number of linguistic skills, such as reading, listening, and learning specific subject terminology, are sufficiently covered by the course programme, albeit perhaps indirectly or implicitly. These aspects of teaching can therefore safely be left to the subject teachers. However, it appears in practice that training in writing and speaking skills requires specific expertise from a teacher and is so time-consuming that it is best left to specialist language teachers, usually from a separate university language centre. It is in fact necessary for each student to be trained to such a standard that he or she learns to express him- or herself easily at an academic level, with the ability to express finer shades of meaning (levels C1, C2 of the Common European Framework of Reference, see below; Council of Europe 2001). This can be achieved by specific training in *writing skills* and *presentation skills*. Another task requiring the expertise of language centres rather than subject teachers is the preparation of students who do not possess the general language competence required for admission; this may be remedied by organizing for instance intensive summer schools or a preparatory year for this category of student (level B2). In particular, the latter category will also greatly benefit from facilities for independent study and, during their studies, some form of remedial teaching. In any event, students rarely doubt the usefulness of English language training, although there seem to be big differences in student confidence and self-evaluation (Donné 1999; Sercu & Put 2003). Policymakers think the provision of English language courses at the language centre useful and attractive, although they do not always realize the volume that is necessary. In Maastricht, several thousand students follow training courses in the English language each year.

Secondly, an aspect that should not be overlooked is the command of the local language of the university and the country in which it is located (for a large group of students this is their mother tongue). In most cases, it will be desirable for these students not only to have a good command of English as the language of science, but also to have the ability to express themselves at an academic level in their own language or in the language or languages of the country in which they take their degree, if only because they will often pursue their profession in this language. A doctor, for instance, has to be able to communicate with his patients effectively and subtly; a lawyer who wants to take up his or

her profession will need advanced linguistic skills in the local language, etc. In addition, virtually all academics need a wide range of writing skills, not only in English, but also in their mother tongue. Training of domain-specific academic language skills such as discussion and argumentation, both orally and in writing, and learning academic terminology and conventions are usually left to subject teachers. Universities that adopt wholly or partly a system of English-medium learning often assume an automatic ‘transfer’ from English domain knowledge and language skills to the mother tongue, which, however, is not so easy, because concepts might differ considerably from one language to another just as academic rhetoric and conventions do). Each department has to judge for itself the need to allocate study time for practising the mother tongue or the local language – but with the shorter programmes under the Bachelors/Masters structure it is not very likely they will find this extra time.

Non-native speakers will need extra training from university language centres. Several types of training are required: 1) Language preparation for non-native speakers who will do part or the larger part of their studies in the local language (for instance German students of psychology in Maastricht who start their studies by preparing for the university entrance exam (*Interuniversitair toelatingsexamen Nederlands (C1)*, equivalent to the *Staatsexamen Nederlands NT2*, level 2); 2) At a later stage, during their studies, training of language skills at higher levels, including advanced writing skills (levels C1, C2), and increasingly domain-specific language skills (for instance communication in Dutch for doctors who are non-native speakers); 3) Introductory courses for non-native speakers who have selected an entirely English-medium programme, but still need knowledge of the local language for purposes of integration in the university and the town (courses at beginners level, A1, A2, sometimes B1). In Maastricht, where English-medium learning has been introduced widely at some faculties but at the same time large parts of course programmes are taught in Dutch, as many as 500-600 students take one of the Dutch courses at the Language Centre every year. Although Maastricht University increasingly presents itself as a European and English-speaking academic institute internationally, some of the target groups appear to find it quite acceptable, or even attractive, to invest in knowledge of the Dutch language as well. This applies for instance to students from the neighbouring countries Germany and Belgium, Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, South Africa and Indonesia. For them this is a way to work on their ‘international competence’. However, not everybody in the Netherlands recognizes the

attraction of studying in the local language and it needs continuous political support (KNAW 2003).

Thirdly, there are a variety of reasons for students to learn yet another foreign language. In the first place, there are faculties where a very good command of a third language is a compulsory or necessary component of the course: in Maastricht, for instance, all students who take a degree in European Studies, European Public Administration and International Business, follow a course in a third language for one or two modules; in many cases this third language is French, as this is a prominent language in European administration, but it may also be one of the other large European languages. This third language will enable them to reach a higher professional level and prepare themselves for the international labour market. In many cases the courses concerned are taught at an intermediate level (B1). Then there are students who take an independent decision to learn another foreign language. They often do this in their own time and at their own expense, but at Maastricht the Language Centre does give them an official certificate and awards them extracurricular credits which they can have noted on their degree certificate. The reasons for taking such courses vary from personal interest to a very specific academic desire to make an in-depth study or acquire additional knowledge of the subject (for instance a student of psychology who is interested in a particular French academic tradition, a student in health sciences who is focusing on Brazil, a student in comparative law with a specific interest in China, etc.). These students are generally keen to reach a high level of proficiency in the language (for instance B2, C1). Thirdly, there are students who are preparing for an exchange programme at a university abroad and for that reason have to learn the language concerned: these students often start with one or two beginners courses (A1, A2). In some cases they have had sufficient training at school to follow a course at intermediate level B1 or B2. In all cases, studying a third (or fourth) language makes a substantial contribution to the personal and professional profile of the student concerned: for that reason virtually all students are highly motivated to work on this language and most of them would like to do more than what the university offers. As faculties usually have little or no specific expertise, this form of language training almost always takes place at the Language Centre. However, training in third or fourth languages does present a number of additional problems: 1) the starting levels of students differ widely, which results in a fragmentary, logistically complex and costly programme; 2) students' timetables , vary, because some participants may study just one

module and others may prefer steady language acquisition over a period of one or two years; students often leave it too late to start learning a language but nevertheless want to attain a certain level; 3) the relevant languages have to be applied in very different subject areas and therefore high demands are made on the language teacher. In many cases a standard taught programme offered during contact hours will have to be combined with extensive facilities for independent study. In Maastricht, the Language Centre offers a short course of about 35-50 contact hours in one of the total of 13 modern foreign languages to approximately 1,500 students per year. Yet, as mentioned before, the amount of teaching provided is not nearly sufficient to satisfy the virtually unlimited demand.

We may conclude that in the spirit of tradition of Erasmus, each modern European university should ideally offer a form of *trilingue* language programme: in English as the language of science, in the local language and in another foreign language. It is clear that not all students would benefit from such a teaching provision, but a large number of students would benefit from at least two out of the three languages provided, because the provision meets one of their specific needs. Moreover, what applies to students obviously also applies to academic and administrative staff: they too will need specific training in English, for instance to enable them to provide English-medium teaching and course administration at a sufficiently high level. An increase in international staff will result in a rise in demand for staff training in the national language. Finally, courses in a third or fourth language are relevant to members of the academic staff as well, to enable a more comprehensive study of the subject and to support international cooperation.

### **University language teaching and the Common European Framework of Reference**

If a university decides to stimulate language teaching in these three fields of action, it should encourage students to take courses, create an 'international atmosphere', allow some space for subsidiary language courses in the curriculum and provide facilities for independent study. But that will not be sufficient. What will be required is an infrastructure that forms an adequate response to the volume. We have mentioned some figures from the practice at Maastricht above: each year, about 2,000-2,500 undergraduates (50% of the students before the Bachelors/Masters structure was introduced) are given training in English language skills, about 600 non-native speakers follow an introductory course in Dutch (40% of the regular students and 25% of the exchange students), and 1,500 students take a course in one of the

modern foreign languages (10-15% of the student population). Although these percentages are relatively low, the actual volume of teaching is considerable. An even more systematic strategy could, for instance, aim to involve most, if not all undergraduates in English training courses in *oral skills* and *writing skills* (70-90 %), to involve most, if not all regular students who are non-native speakers in introductory courses in Dutch (60-70 %), and to offer a third language to a substantial number (30-40 %) of the students. Yet realizing these figures, however reasonable they may look from the point of view of policy-making, will require years of growth, and many obstacles in infrastructure, planning, finance and logistics (e.g. fitting the teaching into the academic curriculum) will have to be removed. Such a policy will have to be preceded by careful planning and budgeting, but first of all it will have to be put on the university's agenda (Van Leeuwen 2000).

For even a university that has shown a positive attitude and a pro-active policy in the field of language teaching runs the risk of overlooking a number of fundamental questions: generally, little thought is given to the facilities required, the final levels of language skills that should be attained, and the investment of time and money involved. Universities that pay relatively much attention to language teaching, including Maastricht University, may even fall prey to a certain rhetoric: the rather extreme (and false) expectation may be raised that each student could be perfectly multilingual after his or her studies. Very often, the levels students are expected to attain are not clearly defined and the learning outcome is left to what is achieved in practice. If no clear standards are set, working on language skills will become a hobby that may be pleasant and useful, but because of the relative lack of obligations the outcome will differ greatly from student to student.

One of the major problems that arise when languages are to be fitted into the academic curriculum as subsidiary subjects has always been that the efforts of students were difficult to express and the levels attained difficult to explain to non-specialists. As a result the students' linguistic achievements were not viewed in the same light as the achievements in their own subject: not comparable and not on a par. The completion in 2001 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, a new instrument for defining levels in language learning that was drawn up under the auspices of the Council of Europe, means that now a standard reference for linguistic levels exists (Council of Europe 2001). Even though this standard may not yet be as hard as the common European currency, the euro, it may function successfully as a kind of exchange rate between institutions. The

Common European Framework has many advantages, including the possibility to compare levels for the various languages; recognizability of levels for the students; the option for students to use self-assessment to determine which course they should take and which level they need to attain in the language of their choice; a certain standardization of learning targets for both the language teacher and learner (and the policymakers); and a link with learning methods and assessment tools available on the European market. The Common European Framework offers each university language centre the opportunity to provide and certify language teaching in an internationally transparent way. This obviously has many advantages for international mobility. On the other hand, the introduction of the Common European Framework requires substantial investment, including a review of the curriculum taught, research, and training of teachers, documentation to inform students about the new level descriptions, development of self-assessment facilities and access to those facilities via for instance ICT infrastructure. For many language centres, the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference will therefore be a process that will take years to accomplish. Undoubtedly it will not be until 2006-2007 that the description of levels will have been fully calibrated, and learning materials and official language tests will have been adapted to the level descriptions.

It is striking that a significant proportion of the existing courses taught by university language centres are difficult to incorporate in the Common European Framework (CEF). In Maastricht, for instance, this is the case for the skills training courses and domain-specific language courses taught at a high level. The courses concerned are usually short courses of 16-30 contact hours, in which students either receive highly specialized training (for example in *academic writing* or *negotiating*) or learn professional language and terminology (*medical English*, *legal English*). These courses are taught at levels B2 and C1 of the CEF, but the subject area is too specific and too limited in volume to be able to claim that the courses cover a whole level: for this reason there is little point for students in relating such courses to the CEF.

In order to implement the Common European Framework, each language centre will have to determine how the existing course provision fits into the framework and how many contact hours and hours for independent study should be set for a particular level. It is interesting to observe that interpretations differ greatly in the field, as do the interests involved (see for instance Van Leeuwen, Roodzant, & Steemans 2003). The more commercial institutes frequently offer modules of entirely identical lengths for each level, for

instance 80 hours for A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2 each. This sells best and this is assumed to be what the customer needs. On the other hand, it is in contradiction with the description of the various CEF levels, and it does not reflect the fact that language study at an advanced level requires a proportionally bigger investment in time. The higher the level of a student, the more time he or she will have to invest to continue to make progress (for instance in vocabulary acquisition; Hazenberg 1994). The table below, taken from course planning in the University Language Centre in Maastricht, shows for instance what the CEF may look like when applied to modern foreign languages programmes, how many contact hours and how many hours of independent study are planned on average for highly educated, non-native students in a foreign language. There are obviously numerous variables of influence too, including mother tongue, individual talent, local language, social factors and personal motivation. Yet despite the large number of variables, it is inevitable that standardized programmes will have to be provided, based on the performance of the average student, as this is the only way to budget for language teaching.

**Table: The Common European Framework in the practice of teaching**

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING	contact hours*	student hours
A1	30-60	60-120
A2	40-80	80-160
B1	60-100	120-200
B2	60-100	120-200
C1	80-120	160-240
C2		

\* The number of contact hours and student hours is based on pragmatic considerations: differences in mother tongue, background, talent and motivation of the students and the opportunity to be exposed to the target language outside the course may result in relatively large variations. These data are based on a more or less equal balance between contact hours and hours of independent study. In language teaching this is relatively common practice; the use of ICT might result in a shift in this balance towards a reduction in contact hours and an increase in independent study.

The table not only shows that implementing the Common European Framework is not that easy and can lead to completely asymmetric modules, varying for different languages and different levels. The table also makes it decidedly clear how much time students are expected to invest in order to attain a level that may be defined as 'professional' or 'academic' (B2, C1). This is the level that is so readily expected and prescribed at the University. Even a highly educated non-native speaker will in the most favourable of circumstances have to invest some 600-800 hours in order to reach a similar level in a foreign language: this constitutes half an academic year if he or she has no prior knowledge of the language and works on it full-time!

### **The place of language teaching in the academic programme**

Against the backdrop of these figures it is not difficult to understand why it often takes such effort to fit language teaching as a subsidiary subject into an academic curriculum. . For if the university intends to provide its students with a well-considered language teaching programme that enables them to reach a substantial level, this will involve many hours of study, many credits and high costs. A student who takes the language as a subsidiary subject may be slightly hesitant to make such an investment and the necessary funds are often in short supply at modern universities! It makes it clear why language learning through content learning presents a welcome solution: content becomes an instrument for language learning, and language learning is instrumental for the content. At present many universities are experimenting with a kind of content learning through English, which is no longer limited to the economics sector as it was in the beginning, and some of them, like the universities of Helsinki, Fribourg, Luxemburg and Bolzano, tend to go even further and offer content learning in three languages. But even then, a huge programme of subsidiary language courses will remain necessary.

The bottlenecks for language teaching are usually not found in the area of demand, as there is typically sufficient demand at European universities, but in the area of supply. How is language teaching actually fitted into the academic programme? How much funding is available to invest in language teaching? What size of language centre can a particular university actually afford? How much study time or spare time can students reasonably be expected to spend on studying languages? We will now discuss these questions.

The first problem is time. As a result of the introduction of the Bachelors/Masters system in the Netherlands from 2002, the four-year undergraduate degree programmes are now offered in a more compact form of three years. In practice this means that many subjects are struggling to keep their position in the degree programmes, often at the expense of the space that used to be reserved for subsidiary subjects (including languages) and placements or periods of study abroad (in Maastricht the introduction of the Bachelors/Masters structure led to a 30% reduction of integrated language teaching in the curriculum!). Paradoxically, it must be concluded that the introduction of the Bachelors/Masters structure has at first instance had a detrimental effect on the way the international aspect of the academic curriculum is shaped, and that former achievements now have to be relinquished.

The second problem is related to credits. The number of credits that can be obtained for a course is limited, and students can often get only a few or even no credits at all for extracurricular subjects such as languages. An evaluation in the form of credits is important for students' motivation, and often has financial consequences. The current solution for this problem is to give credits for language learning, but have them noted on the degree certificate as extracurricular credits.

The third problem is funding. At the moment there are few universities in Europe that are not facing a series of government cutbacks, a situation that in many countries has been going on for a number of years. In this climate the position of language teaching is especially vulnerable: not only because the languages do not usually form the core of the curriculum, but also because language teaching is relatively expensive: it needs comparatively many contact hours and, if done properly, the teaching takes place in small groups; in addition, productive skills training demands a considerable investment of time from the teacher, if only for marking written assignments and a careful evaluation of individual speaking skills.

The fourth problem is timetabling and logistic organization. Slotting language teaching into course timetables is far from easy. Subject teaching is timetabled first, and after this it remains to be seen how much room is left for other things such as languages. As a result the courses in languages frequently take place in the margin of the normal programme (for instance at less favourable hours or in the evening) or present a different pattern than the subject teaching (for instance short skills training modules at irregular intervals during

the academic year). Language teaching does not always take place at the time when the specific skill trained in the language module is also required in the subject teaching. Language modules in which writing skills are trained should, if possible, be run parallel to subject modules for which papers must be written. If presentation skills are trained in language teaching, this should preferably be done in a period when students have to give presentations in their field of study as well. But this is often not possible. Furthermore, students tend to discover their need for knowledge of a particular language at a relatively late stage: instead of being able to work on the language for a few hours a week over one or two years, they are then faced with the need to complete an intensive programme in a short period of time. As this is a structural phenomenon that applies to many students, any university language centre that wishes to address this situation has to make an extra effort to accommodate them.

Fitting language teaching into the margins of the academic programmes is far from easy as it is, but it becomes even more difficult if one wants to place students in classes at their particular level and offer them a choice of languages to learn. Because faculty timetables are completely full during the day, many language centres are forced to schedule their teaching in the evenings. This increases staff costs, partly because of the undeniably unpleasant fact that evenings are relatively short and therefore many parallel sessions need to be planned (which entails more classrooms and more teachers). Only four evenings a week are suitable for teaching and per evening just four hours are available for teaching; this means that the bulk of language teaching has to be crammed in just sixteen hours a week!

In addition, language teaching today requires extensive infrastructure. In the past decade language teaching has undergone a complete transformation, as the computer offers numerous opportunities for didactic innovation. Not only can the computer be used to support a number of traditional audio/video and vocabulary and grammar exercises, the computer also offers entirely new ways of generating or simulating interactivity and allows the student to make contact with the world of the target language via the internet. In the field of writing skills training, the computer offers new opportunities to create learning environments in which teachers and students can exchange texts easily and quickly. However, structural deployment of the new opportunities presented by multimedia in the language curriculum is not so simple. Language centres are faced with a costly investment in multimedia equipment and related facilities: a language lab is needed, normal classrooms

have to be equipped with computers, and it is in fact no longer possible to do without facilities for independent language study; moreover, language teaching also has to have a place in the learning environment provided by the faculties. It is clearly not possible to implement all these facilities at the same time. Distributing language learning materials over all computer rooms and integrating them in learning environments requires a powerful multimedia server; in addition, technical support must be arranged to maintain the computers. Teaching staff must be given regular training to inform them and keep them abreast of the possibilities of the new technology and to ensure that the teaching programme makes adequate use of it. Funds need to be budgeted to purchase new digital learning materials and to develop learning materials if required. The above lists in short the effects of ICT-supported language teaching: it may be concluded that the application of ICT in language teaching is a major development in didactics and that it is a long-term project that will require an all-out effort from every language centre. It will require the input of extra means in the area of infrastructure, staff, research & development, learning materials & licences. The use of multimedia can give an enormous impulse to the quality and efficiency of language teaching and possibly realize an increase in the scale of teaching that is as yet hardly imaginable: it would be possible to serve large target groups by distance learning via the internet. Yet before this can be realized and yield a return, it will in fact be a major investment that will weigh heavily on the limited means available and on staff who already have a considerable workload.

Turning to the human resources, the availability of staff can, unfortunately, not at all be taken for granted. Many university language centres face permanent problems with recruiting and retaining qualified language teachers. The language centres have to compete with government institutions and the industry, which recruit increasing numbers of people who have studied languages and which offer attractive conditions of employment. The number of teachers with a language degree is steadily declining, for the simple reason that language courses are faced with falling student numbers. By contrast, the volume of teaching is on the increase, as are the demands made on teachers: they are confronted with a heavier teaching load and have to keep up with the large-scale didactic innovations in the field; in order to be able to teach their subject at a university (legal English, medical English, etc.), they will in many cases need a second specialization in addition to their language degree. Then there is the problem of salary and status, for the esteem for language teaching is often

perceived in a different light than academic teaching. At many European universities, language teachers are classified as 'administrative staff', they are placed in different salary scales and have fewer chances of promotion within the university. Unsurprisingly, the profession of language teacher is therefore not considered particularly attractive. And, unsurprisingly, if given the chance, language teachers may prefer a job at the arts faculties over one at the inter-faculty language centres. There is some influx of teachers from a different professional background who offer themselves as language teachers. The people concerned are often native speakers of the language they wish to teach and have moved to the region for personal reasons. Some of them may turn out to be good teachers, but often only with the investment of extra training and intensive coaching. The only way to create a team of language teachers of sufficient size and strength to deliver a language teaching programme as comprehensive as described above is by developing a sophisticated personnel policy. This policy should respond to market developments and combine initiatives for national and international recruitment with initiatives for continuous training and career mobility, and it should grant language teachers the same conditions of employment as academic teaching staff.

### **The feasibility of large-scale university language teaching**

In the sections above I described the ideal of a university that structurally incorporates teaching in modern foreign languages and gives each student the opportunity to obtain not only academic competence but at the same time international competence and the language skills required for this purpose. The investment in time involved for the students was calculated and an overview was given of the issues and problems that university language centres will be confronted with when developing a comprehensive subsidiary subject programme for language teaching. In most cases the problems will become bigger as language teaching increases in volume. This gives rise to the question whether the ideal to give language teaching such a structural position in academic teaching is actually feasible.

The solution is not necessarily to be found in generating vast volumes of teaching and creating a gigantic university language centre. It would be more feasible to develop strategies to generate interest in the languages in the university as a whole and to support this with compact, targeted courses given at a central, not too large, centre of expertise in language teaching. In such a scenario, a high-quality language programme that seeks to

secure substantial yet realistic rates of participation among students does not have to be particularly costly. A programme that provides 90% of the students with a few short training courses in English language skills during their studies, 50% of students who are non-native speakers of Dutch with an introductory course in Dutch and 40% of the students with two modules in modern foreign languages, would cost as little as 1.5% of the university's budget for teaching in Maastricht (budgets for research and infrastructure not included). In view of the strategic importance for teaching programmes to follow international developments and the fact that internationalization is part of many universities' profile, such an investment would not be disproportionate.

From this point of view, the partial adoption of English-medium teaching is a viable option for any university: it implies the choice of a structure that clearly demonstrates the international character of university teaching, and new generations are equipped with an almost natural familiarity with English, the world language and language of science. In addition, it serves as a method to make institutes of higher education accessible to students from abroad. However, those who expect English-medium teaching to be cheaper will at first be disappointed. Although it will enable increasing returns to scale in the long run, in the short run English-medium teaching will require considerable additional investment in order to develop new programmes, recruit and train staff and create additional facilities for a multilingual institute at the level of administration, communication and infrastructure.

There are hardly any figures available that reveal the actual cost of introducing a second official language in academic teaching: it is more expensive than normal university teaching, but less expensive than the creation of two separate universities. We believe that a minimum application will easily amount to a 10-15% increase of the budget for teaching for an initial period of 5-10 years (in the academic world such additional costs are often hidden in extra working time for staff and the invisible use of research budgets). One of the reasons why additional costs arise is the fact that one is unlikely to find any university that will be able to switch over to English-medium teaching from one day to the next: Maastricht, for instance, went through a relatively long period of transition, during which a number of modules for some degree programmes were taught both in English and in Dutch (for example in the first year of the course); in other programmes English-medium teaching was limited to part of the course (for example a number of subjects, or the entire final year). This gradual introduction, including the use of two working languages in the curriculum, was

necessary and it was also attractive to many students because of its aspect of multilingual higher education: yet over the years, cost-saving measures have caused a tendency towards more homogeneous programmes taught either in English or in Dutch, and parallel teaching of modules in several languages is on the decrease. Yet, the need of internal and external communication and representation in both languages remains, which nearly doubles the budget in this field.

Another reason why additional costs arise is the need for continuous evaluation and quality assurance, even more than in normal university practice. Although there are many studies on multilingualism as such (cf. Maass & Schrader 2002; Beacco & Byram 2003), there is as yet a lack of studies on multilingual education programmes. Universities practising multilingual education, tend to do some research, as far as time allows, but very often the evaluation results remain internal documents and are not published. Existing research has a more qualitative character and often a poor statistical base; so many variables are presented that general conclusions are difficult to draw. A workshop on evaluation and research in multilingual universities in Fribourg, Switzerland, (September 2003; cf. <http://www.unifr.ch/msu>) concluded that universities that take their multilingual vocation seriously should invest considerably in evaluation and research and create new exchange channels with partner universities.

Universities with multilingual programmes should not underestimate the complex legal and institutional problems they will encounter. Dutch universities, for instance, are only allowed to offer education in language other than Dutch in specific, well defined situations: for degrees in languages, if the teacher has no command of the Dutch language or if there is an internationally mixed student audience. Although many of these criteria will be fulfilled in a multilingual university, the law remains rather strict and offers a poor basis for large-scale policy making in English-medium education. Belgian law is even stricter: it defines a maximum of 10% of English content learning to each university. But there are more complex legal obstacles: many public universities are not permitted to refuse students when they do not have sufficient language proficiency. Even if they do ask for specific entrance exams in languages, they are not allowed to, as they have a public function and the obligation to be accessible. Moreover, students might even have a legal right to do exams in the national language if they so request, in spite of multilingual university programmes or the specific exam regulations a bilingual university may have introduced. Similar problems occur

in the field of human resources, where national and European social legislation restricts discrimination on language grounds: in this way it is more difficult for a university to introduce a strong internationally oriented personnel policy. In short, any university offering programmes in language other than the national one will encounter many problems of implementation. It will need to establish a customized administration, and subject itself to careful regulation (Treanor 2003).

As a matter of course the investments involved are expected to yield a return in the future: providing teaching in several languages seems to have a positive effect on student recruitment, although recent market research conducted by Maastricht University of Dutch prospective students was not as unequivocal as policymakers would like to think. In any event it is clear that, at Maastricht University, once students have enrolled, they do appreciate its multilingual policy and are prepared to invest in it themselves. And, obviously, at least a small part of the costs of university facilities can be recovered via services to third parties. In the long term one may also expect to see a return in the production process and the research output, as researchers will be able to work faster and will be less restricted by linguistic limitations in their research and publications; they will also have more ready access to international funds.

Yet in the short term universities will be faced with extra costs, which are always difficult to account for in a time of economizing. To make the policy feasible, it is vital not only to have political credibility (the fact that this policy will really enable relevant teaching innovation to be realized); it is vital too to seize the opportunity to make subsidiary language teaching itself as cost-effective as possible. In this respect one may contemplate the fact that optional language courses can be made considerably cheaper if the students pay part of the price themselves; most students will be prepared to do so. In addition, language teaching can be organized in such a way that it is not automatically necessary to have many contact hours: one could use as well independent study with ICT-support and stimulate placements abroad (which could not be realized without students' own contributions). And we should not overlook the fact that students themselves are masters in finding ways to save money: at many international universities, for instance, one can see an alternative circuit next to the official language centres, consisting of students who teach each other languages, at times supported by facilities provided by the institute or a central point of contact (known as unitandem language projects). In short, by allowing students to take initiatives, supporting

the quality of these initiatives in a targeted way, and promoting international exchange programmes, universities can add much to the basic language teaching programme without incurring high costs.

There is one matter we should keep in mind. We mentioned Erasmus's ideals about university language teaching: the great humanist phrased these ideals competently and put them into practice himself, but ultimately he was not able to realize them on a grand scale. Although his ideas soon became fashionable and numerous humanistic universities adopted the *trilingue* ideal, it may have taken a hundred years or more before sound Erasmian language teaching became the standard in the European academic world and part of the basic provisions. Ideals regarding teaching apparently require a long incubation period: this may be a consolation to policymakers in foreign language teaching.

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