

Diversity Languages: meaning differences according to contexts and languages

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To follow our reflection on diversity concepts and languages, I shall base my speech on the reflections that emerged while:

- the training manual was being conceived (by the work group that chose to write it)
- we were introducing our work on the “Respect for Diversity”, our team and our centre of Educators of Young Children exchanged, debated on this issue.

First of all, I shall define a few concepts that are particularly valued and used in French: welcome, respect, secularity and the nuances existing between these terms.

These terms have been the source of several exchanges and debates, because they do not have in English the same meaning as in French and making oneself understood was difficult. We always had to take into account the history, the philosophy and the country context in order to induce the right meaning of these terms. Furthermore, these terms are debatable in French.

Then I will take into account the work of some authors, philosophers, linguists to link language, culture and power and stress the importance of preserving the richness of languages and thoughts.

The term **welcome** is a fundamental concept for us, trainers of Young Children’s Educators. We are not satisfied by translating *welcome*, which refers to the pleasure of welcoming someone. To welcome means to receive professionally and warmly. We admit the user’s right to use public services or services related to public services (for example to baby-sit). According to us, welcome includes the expression “welcoming diversity of persons and publics).

This case was presented to us while we were working as an ESSSE team and we were explaining to our colleagues the work network on welcoming diversity; we showed what differentiates us from other departments: to welcome means to welcome diversity, without using the term. But it also means to meet, to be helpful, to look after – that is to take care, to support, to value, to be convivial, and so much more.

According to the dictionary « Le Petit Larousse », the term « respect » in French means: *feeling that makes people treat one another with consideration, respect, for example: filial respect, out of respect for you: I do not mean to offend you.*

We also talk about respect for something: not to harm anything; respect for someone’s will; respect for silence in a holy place; respect of laws.

“To hold someone in respect” means to stop someone, to impose to someone to contain, for example: *that policeman holds him in respect.*

The philosopher Jean-Michel BESNIER asks himself on the meaning of respect that we ask for ourselves and for the others. There is no such thing as disobedience once we respect/ consider. The author thinks of this term as a symbol of “lack of interest” in someone, because “respect” is not debatable.

“To respect” purely and simply means “to want things to stay as they are”; and evolution is not possible; if we do not follow this idea, we still can use the expression “welcome and diversity” that includes respect, but it’s larger than that in meaning.

In January 2005, during the Lyon conference “respect for diversity in the early childhood field”, Jean-Michel FOURNIER had presented a reflection on this term and underlined the difference between “diversity respect” and “respect for diversity”. The respect “of” consisting in not interfering with any prejudice and respect “for” that induces a meeting dynamics, including diversity promotion and production.



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Let's consider now "secularity"; we have hit a snag over this term, because French and English speakers do not have the same acceptance of this concept. This French terms does not have the same English translation: "secularity", but "séculier" does not mean the same thing. The term "secular" means "to return to secularism", *to secularize the Church goods: to render them to public use*. *Secular clergy* means *a clergy living in a secular world* that opposes to the regular clergy belonging to an order.

The term "secularity" means in French "of public use"; the term comes from the Greek *laos* referring to people taken as a whole/population.

"Secularity" refers to the public field, *Res Publica*, of public use. That is why the Republic is secular when religion is sent to individual and collective private spaces, different from the public space.

Secularity is, as the philosopher Henri Pena-Ruiz puts it, the difference between what I believe and what I know. Make the difference between belief and knowledge is to prove one's criticism and to refuse fanatic spirit that mixes everything. To share a common world needs to push away the beliefs.

As you can see, concepts are charged of meaning in a language and culture building them, in our case, since 1789.

The translation "word by word" is not enough, we have to think over in order to make ourselves understood. We can clearly see how the language used in a speech is fundamental:

How can we express our thoughts and explain our concepts and key-words and use terms of another language that cannot translate all our thoughts?

It is important to translate in order to make oneself understood; but the translation does not reflect the meaning and the thought subtleties. To communicate is different from to make oneself understood. It is necessary to take the necessary time to explain to what definitions/reflections the term used refers.

We've made this experience, while we've used two languages to conceive our training manual. We had difficulties in understanding the semantic precisions, details that meant so much in a speech. To convey one's own language subtleties of thoughts proved to be difficult.

English, that is our common language of work has to allow us to transmit information on our ongoing activities, and more to share, exchange, debate definitions, conceptions. "Pidgin", a form of basic language, is not enough to do the job.

A language is not only a communication tool, we cannot instrument and reduce it to this unique use.

In France, the language of the country may not be seen as a tool; it is a national monument at least and a work of art at the most, as two journalists (Canadian and Quebec). Language has been a means of strengthening the country's identity and unity: it's a story starting with Charles the Great who wanted to impose Latin in all his empire. This situation lasted until the First World War when 10% of the population spoke only a dialect.

It may seem a paradox that a common language should be used in order to make oneself understood and at the same time this language may be an obstacle to thought exchanges. We have just seen how difficult it may be to share our thoughts in a language we do not master the subtlety, the mother tongue nuances or the language:vector of a culture we bathe in:

- if we listen to a "tool" language, our brain activity focuses on the translation, not on the reflection; the answer, in case there is one, is delayed.

- To share one's thoughts, we use the common tool as much as we can; we lose all subtlety, pertinence, innovation; we communicate information and a few personal thoughts.

* we use our mother tongue, and we risk not to make ourselves understood, or that our speech is repeated and deformed by a literary translation losing the genuine meaning and we cannot interfere.



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In his January 2006 book, Claude Hagège explains that using several languages enriches the exchanges, allows model dissemination, and becomes an obstacle on a model domination. Consequently, using several European languages forbids the levelling out, worse the regression of culture, ways of thinking and of a history.

To conclude, I would like to refer to Barbara Cassin's book, "European Vocabulary of philosophy": this book is a reflection on philosophy language, not the diversity language. But the author shows that there are words difficult to translate; words and conceptual networks are not perfectly similar; but more difficult is the exercise, richer the thought is. The author concludes that we have to "take into account the European languages, and not only from a patrimonial point of view as we conserve the endangered species". The fight against globalisation and in favour of language diversity and multilingualism is both political and ideological.

These recommendations are also debated in Alan Thomas's rapport, that follows the same line of work.

It is also Amin Maaluf's speech, who published in 1998, "The killing identities" where he suggests using several languages of exchange. No language will predominate over the others.

His proposition is not the simplest; on the contrary it is among the most complex; but don't you think that it is high time to think as Jacques Ardoino ("The Changes of Education", published in 2000): "to refuse complexity is to start barbarity"?

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