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Introduction to the Special Issue

Language Use, Technology and Professionalisation in Higher Education: Preliminary Considerations

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This special issue seeks to explore some of the links between technology-mediated and/or face-to-face language use and professionalisation in Higher Education. In the field of Education—and more precisely the academic sphere—Leroux points out that defining professionalisation as a synonym of "employability" and laying emphasis on vocational training is ultimately likely to question the very nature of the skills to foster among students:

> *Should priority be given to teaching vocational subjects (preparatory skills and knowledge relating to a particular trade or career or a range of trades or careers), to general education, or to the development of the ability to adapt and behave in a way that is valued in the workplace (self-management skills)? As far as academic courses are concerned, it is clear that providing students with employability means developing attitudes that are of value on the labour market (i.e., soft skills such as communication, interpersonal, critical thinking, decision making, problem solving)* (2014, p. 97).

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Language use and professionalisation therefore appear to be strongly interconnected and have to be considered in light of the fact that the labour market itself is rapidly changing. To thrive in today's world workplaces, it is therefore necessary for educational institutions to stay updated continuously and to equip students with skills that ensure "[…] access to new forms of work through learning the new language of work", even though, at the same time, "students need to develop the capacity to speak up, to negotiate, and to be able to engage critically with the conditions of their working lives" (The New London Group, 1996, p. 67).

In this respect, Filliettaz (2022, p. 267) explains that, in the workplace, language use and communication can be harnessed to serve at least three functions:

- From a praxeological perspective, employing linguistic/language-related resources can be an instrument for action and coordination at work;
- At the socio-relational level, processes of professional socialization are inherently developed through the use of language;
- Finally, from an epistemological point of view, language use and communication contribute to the circulation of knowledge and its transmission within work groups.

Besides, Filliettaz adds that, in the academic sphere, language should be regarded as the very object of professionalisation in so far as, for students (i.e., would-be professionals), be(com)ing professionals implies mastering the semiotic resources used in the workplace by the members of the professional communities they are aiming at joining. This implies that, at work as well as in various other informal contexts, professionalisation can be achieved by means of language since it is through social interactions and feedback (among employees/professionals) that the learning process is due to take place. It also means that language use does not only include a verbal dimension but that it also encompasses a multimodal one, which is gaining momentum with the advent of digital technologies.

Furthermore, in the age of globalization, mobility and migration have triggered superdiversity, and language use takes place in multilingual, multicultural and multimodal contexts and circulates across space and time, be it in person or virtually (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016). Being able to communicate in several languages—and in English in particular—has thus more than ever become a valuable asset on today's job market and demand for L2-related expertise is rising continuously and steadily (Chancelade *et al*., 2016).

In this context, rapidly shifting modes of communication are changing L2 users' ways of interacting with others: instant access to information, the latest technological advances and the advent of social media facilitate distant communication and allow language users to choose among a variety of semiotic resources to meet their interactional needs.

Consequently, technologies have also reshaped the way we teach and learn languages: educators use technologies to expand opportunities for the learning and teaching of languages (the COVID period has illustrated the role technologies could play in this respect), and learning is due to occur in various types of interactional environments, that is, in informal settings, online/onsite, asynchronously, and so forth. In this context, machine translation tools also question the learning and teaching of additional languages and one may wonder whether, at a particular point in time, interactions with such tools could eventually replace L2 learning.

Technology—the new mediator of learning—has thus transformed the way we teach and learn languages and hence created a sense of urgency to modernize the training of today and tomorrow's professionals. In this respect, seeking to support learners in increasing their foreign language skills and

in participating in a technology-mediated society is likely to foster global citizenship, help them stay abreast of a dynamic and rapidly changing world and enhance their employability.

Against this changing backdrop, this special issue provides a basis for addressing some of the issues both Higher Education and the job market are facing in the 21st century. To do so, five papers were selected in response to a call for papers which was issued after the 28th international EUROCALL conference, an event co-hosted by Le Cnam and Sorbonne Université, held at Le Cnam (Paris, France) on August 25–27, 2021 and related to the topic of CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) and professionalisation.

The volume opens with the contribution of Laurent Filliettaz who examines the linguistic demands of learning in the Swiss apprenticeship system. In particular, by seeking to identify some of the features characterising the verbal and non-verbal interactions between apprentices and trainers as they occur in the workplace, Laurent Filliettaz discusses the theoretical conditions under which connections between work, language use and learning can be investigated both conceptually and empirically. Based on this input, the paper further elaborates on the practical implications and applications of these considerations as regards teacher education and language teaching and learning.

The next two papers investigate the use of online translation tools. To what extent do such tools sustain language learning? Are they likely to supplant language learning? The first study—authored by Rudy Loock, Sophie Léchauguette and Benjamin Holt—evaluates how a group of French undergraduate language students employed online translators to identify and correct machine translation (MT) errors, given that they are likely to continue to use such tools throughout their professional lives (although not working in the translation industry) and that they therefore need to be made aware ahead of time of the most common challenges translation efforts generally carry. The results highlight that the study participants greatly overestimated their ability to correct errors in MT output and provide evidence of the need for pedagogical material and for specific training for language teachers to help students use MT critically. Based on this input, the authors further argue that the development of a new type of digital literacy in relation to the use of MT is needed among students to help them refine their use of online translators.

In the same vein, Antonie Alm and Yuki Watanabe—based on a survey aiming at comparing MT use and perceptions across proficiency levels and languages as well as between teachers and students—provide insight into the ways university students (in New Zealand) make use of MT tools. Their results show that, contrary to the expectations of their teachers, many students used the tools to support rather than circumvent learning. They further suggest that MT does not present a threat to language education and, quite the contrary, that language teachers and learners need to develop MT literacy skills to engage in new language learning opportunities in the 21st century.

Oneil Madden, for his part, draws on a case study of a Franco-Jamaican online project to explore the potential of telecollaboration to foster *glocal* competence in foreign language student-teachers as part of their professionalisation process. To analyse the data, a qualitative content analysis of four competence frameworks was carried out. Preliminary findings show that the student-teachers under study developed negotiation, adaptive, and collaborative skills. They also reveal that local values impeded understanding of and appreciation for alternate worldviews on certain topics discussed.

The special issue concludes with an article written by Linda Bradley and Khaled Walid Al-Sabbagh, which deals with mobile assisted language learning (MALL) and examines how and to what extent the use of mobile apps by newly arrived migrants from the Middle East supports language development

in Swedish as a foreign language in Sweden. Learning the language spoken in the host country is considered a key element in professionalisation, that is to say in transitioning into professional and everyday life in a new country. For this purpose, the MALL applications under study were explored from a motivation and self-directed learning perspective by means of interviews and observations with migrants. The results show that even if the applications' built-in gamification aspects promoted app engagement and user retention, some challenges related to how MALL applications were used by migrants were found.

These papers contribute to the reflection on the links between language use, technology and professionalisation so as to inform training design and promote learning in Higher Education. They will hopefully inspire readers and spur their desire to further generate change in this field.

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Muriel Grosbois, Cédric Sarré, Cédric Brudermann, and Naouel Zoghlami
Guest Editors

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