



## Waldemar Martyniukin haastattelu

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*European Centre for Modern Languages'in (ECML) johtaja Waldemar Martyniuk vieraili konferenssipuhujana soveltavan kielentutkimuksen kesäkoulussa ja kansainvälisessä konferenssissa "Who needs languages" kesäkuussa Suomessa. Elisa Miettisen tekemässä haastattelussa pohditaan kielenoppimisen tulevaisuutta Euroopassa sekä kouluissa käytettävän opetuskielen asemaa. Tekstissä sivutaan myös Martyniukin konferenssissa pitämää esitelmää.*

Waldemar Martyniuk is the executive director for the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) and an assistant professor of applied linguistics specialised in Polish as a foreign language at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. In the conference, he held a plenary lecture on the Council of Europe's perspective on language education.

Martyniuk studied Swedish literature, but started working for the department for Polish as a second language after graduating as he was attracted by the varied possibilities the field had to offer. Since it was a new field of study, he had the chance to take part in writing textbooks, developing curricula and testing and assessment systems, and experimenting with new approaches and methods. Later on, through his engagement in the Association of Language Testers in Europe, where he developed a system of certification for Polish, he got involved in the work of the Council of Europe around the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. He is also known as the translator of the CEFR into Polish. His work with the framework continued on a secondment in the Council of Europe's Language Policy Division, and in October 2008 he started his 5-year post as the executive director at ECML in Graz, Austria. His position at the University of Krakow is waiting for him.

Martyniuk's fascination with languages and language learning as well as his choice of career have been affected by his versatile experiences as a language learner. His first foreign language was Russian, but he calls studying it "learning for learning and not learning for something useful" as there was no contact with anyone using that language. In upper secondary school he studied German which was taught in a very traditional and school-like way with concentration on grammar and vocabulary. Martyniuk realized the problems of this approach when he visited East Germany for the first time and noticed that people understood him but he wasn't able to handle a conversation because he didn't understand the native speakers' colloquial speech. On the other hand, he learned English without any instruction in the language. Instead, he got lots of input, for example by watching subtitled movies. "You realize after 150 films that you have some language in your head and you start speculating why not starting using it bit by bit, and so it started, and one day I realized that I was quite ok with English."

Yet, Martyniuk became truly fascinated with languages when he started studying Swedish at the University of Krakow. The study programme was quite new, which meant that the students were able to experiment and shape the programme while studying under the guidance of Swedish native speaker teachers. “That was the greatest time in my language learning time because in one year I developed high-level skills in Swedish.” The enthusiastic student also spent several summers working and studying in Sweden. Through Swedish he “discovered the beauty of learning languages and having the wide world at your disposal”

### **Understanding of language learning**

Against this background, Martyniuk has formed his own understanding of what learning languages is all about. He sees language essentially as a way to handle meaning. “I like the idea of abandoning the noun ‘language’ and going towards the verb ‘linguaging’, and then replacing the notion of ‘language’ with the adverbial notion of a ‘way to handle meaning’.” In the Polish language, one does not literally speak, for instance, English, but speaks ‘in the English way’. The different ways of handling meaning can be called languages, dialects, styles or genres etc., but “it’s all about linguaging the world”.

Another theory Martyniuk has concerns the role languages play in education. According to him, “education is the ability to handle meaning, and the more meaning you can handle - receive and produce - the more educated you are”. Without language it is indeed impossible to get educated or educate others. Hence, Martyniuk states that “education is about supporting language development because, in fact, to be educated or to progress in education means being more and more powerful in terms of your linguistic ability, in your ability to handle meaning”.

### **CEFR and plurilingual education**

The idea of linguaging the world and the importance of languages in education are tightly connected to the concept of plurilingual education that is promoted by the ECML. The Common European Framework of Reference was published in 2001 after 10-years work, and it very quickly became a “bestseller and something that language education has started to refer to”. Yet, Martyniuk is disappointed because most people have only read parts of it and, thus, have missed the full insight into the new approach that is in fact proposed with the framework, namely the concept of plurilingual education. “In all too many cases the whole idea of the framework was reduced to the scales of language proficiency offered with the framework”, he says.

Plurilingual education encompasses “all language abilities people can develop” starting with pupils’ first languages, and the European language portfolio was offered as a way to illustrate this new concept. In Martyniuk’s words: “the portfolio is a tool to encourage people to collect their languages, their language abilities and see them growing and be happy about this and work further in that direction. So with the framework the concept of plurilingual education was already put on the table, but the attention that the framework attracted went rather to the 6 reference levels.”

On the positive side, the scales, that make it possible to compare, for example, examination and certifications objectively, caught the attention of governments, test providers, and textbook writers and made parts of the framework so popular and widely adopted. However, the CERF and the Council of Europe have much more far-reaching goals: language skills have become part of the bigger framework of the Council’s work closely related to questions such as “how to ensure democracy, how to support the human rights, how to provide support for intercultural dialogue, how to make people understand each other better and not just in terms of communicating their wishes or their problems but of accepting the otherness in Europe.” It is also concerned with providing “means for integration of society to encourage people to participate in democratic processes”. In the experts’ understanding, education is an important part of achieving those goals, and as language skills

are central to education, they are worth supporting.

### **Platform of resources and references for plurilingual and intercultural education**

Thus, the concept of plurilingual education was already in the framework, but seemed to require further development. In the middle of the 2000s started a work that aimed to bring together people specialised in foreign language education and mother tongue education. In addition to expert meeting, the process included intergovernmental consultations and discussions as well as seminars and conferences focused on the possibilities to implement plurilingual education. The result of this work is the platform of resources and references for plurilingual and intercultural education.

Another framework was not offered because of the problems illustrated by the CEFR. Instead the platform “has been designed in the form of a virtual space where there are several levels of documents being offered.” There are official recommendations and documents of the Council of Europe, expert studies and papers, and cases or references offered by member states for other member states to have a look at and make use of. Another goal is that the platform is “living”: the information will be updated and more will be added. It also has room for discussion and there is information on related events.

The aim of the platform is to promote the idea that all education goes through language and involves supporting language development. Yet, the notion of mother tongue was abandoned, because it does not correspond to the mobile and multiethnic reality of Europe. “We cannot use ‘mother tongue’ as a notion if we mean the language in which we educate people in Europe so we switched to the notion ‘languages of schooling’”, Martyniuk explains. The platform also includes foreign languages, both modern and classical, and ‘additional languages’ that refer to all the non-dominant languages that can otherwise be called regional, minority, heritage, home, non-territorial, sign languages etc.

Another focus in the platform is indicating that being able to handle the language of education does not simply mean, for instance, German in Germany or Finnish in Finland. Language is also present in all the other subjects across curriculum including, for example, biology and physical education. Thus, Martyniuk emphasizes that all teachers are “language teachers and they should understand themselves as language teachers to quite a great extent”.

### **Future opportunities and challenges**

Martyniuk thinks that the major challenges for European language education in the next 10 to 20 years will be caused by mobility and the globalisation of trade, culture, and communication. The dramatic development of communication technology is also part of this because nowadays being literate means not only being able to read and write but also being able to access information and use the new media. Thus, Martyniuk points out that it is also “all about language”, and the important question is “how to meet these challenges in language education or through language education”.

In the question above he also sees the opportunities that are related to the proposal of plurilingual and intercultural education. “We would like to encourage people to learn and develop as many languages as they are able and as many as seems to be useful for them in a given situation.” Yet, in addition to convincing learners and parents of the individual benefits this will offer, states and societies as well have to be convinced that support for the development of language abilities is worth investing in. What Martyniuk wants to stress is “the fact that Europe is diverse in terms of languages and cultures should not be viewed as a problem but should be viewed as a source for potential to draw on and benefit from. This is the opportunity.”

There's also another "change in the mindset" that ECML wants to bring about. Martyniuk claims that people today have the false conception that "only the talented ones, the highly-skilled ones can learn languages". As an example, he tells that 60 years ago only 40 % of the Polish population spoke Polish as their mother tongue. Nowadays the country is considered monolingual, and few would even believe how multilingual the country used to be. 100 years earlier the same applied to most of Europe, and being "able to handle more than one language was a rather natural state of affairs", as Martyniuk puts it. He thinks that we have now "got stuck with the idea of one state, one nation, one language, one religion, which was never the natural situation".

Instead, Martyniuk wants to emphasize that it is a "natural ability of human mind to be able to handle several ways of languaging the world. It's nothing special." "If the mother tongue has been developed, then any other language can develop as well." To achieve this, people need be aware of this and get encouragement and proper support.

Finally, Martyniuk points out that the question "how many languages do you speak?" is wrong. "I should say: how many languages are you able to handle or how many ways to handle meaning are you able to use." Using the potential of all the language systems we know, we are able to understand languages we might have never even thought about. Everyone can handle some ways of languaging better than others, but in the plurilingual mindset understanding is already an ability and it's not necessary to speak every language in one's repertoire fluently.

*Elisa Miettinen opiskelee englannin kielen aineenopettajaksi Jyväskylän yliopistossa. Hän työskenteli kesäharjoittelijana Soveltavan kielentutkimuksen keskuksessa.*

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