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“Integration ... needs language, the language of the workplace”: The contribution of work-related second language learning to the integration of adult migrants

Abstract: Labour market inclusion is a primary goal of integration policy. For millions of adult migrants in Europe, learning the language of the country of residence (L2) is a key enabler of access to and progression within the labour market. The Language for Work Network (LfW) brings together professionals working in this area to share and improve work-related language learning for migrants and ethnic minorities. It was created through a project funded by the Council of Europe’s European Centre for Modern Languages.


Résumé : L’intégration sur le marché du travail est un objectif prioritaire de la politique d’intégration. Pour des millions de migrants adultes en Europe, l’apprentissage de la langue du pays de résidence (L2) est un facilitateur essentiel de l’accès au marché du travail et de l’évolution professionnelle. Le Réseau La langue par et pour le travail permet aux professionnels de ce domaine de partager et d’améliorer l’apprentissage de la langue en lien avec le travail par les adultes migrants ou des minorités ethniques. Il a été créé par un projet financé par le Centre européen pour les langues vivantes du Conseil de l’Europe.

1 A European challenge

The integration of millions of adult migrants is a challenge for Europe and more so now following the recent influx of refugees. Integration courses are standard in many European countries. They aim to equip migrants with the necessary language skills to cope with everyday life in the new country. Typically, though they

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may touch on e.g. job-search, they do not claim to prepare learners for the labour market, let alone for a specific occupation.

In some European countries, labour force shortages and population ageing is leading to a growing concern for sustainable labour market integration of adult migrants. Communications skills in the majority language of the country of residence (L2) are widely recognized as a key enabler in the fight against exclusion from *and* within employment.

In response to this challenge, a range of approaches to work-related L2 learning for adult migrants is emerging across Europe, including

- pre-employment L2 learning for immigrants and in some countries for emigrants;
- L2 learning in vocational schools;
- L2 learning for specific occupational areas, and qualifications; and
- workplace L2 learning.

Work-related L2 learning is a complex, boundary crossing field. In addition to language learning, it encompasses work, migration, intercultural communication, social policy, didactics, literacy, linguistics, vocational education and training (VET), workforce development, management ... and more. It is shaped by policies regulating these diverse fields and is informed by a range of disciplines, from linguistics and educational sciences to the sociology of work.

2 Why work-related L2 learning?

The logic chain underlying this multi-dimensional field recognizes integration of migrants as essential for social inclusion. Work is central to migrant integration and communication is central to modern work practices. In today's workplaces employees need to understand safety and quality issues and workplace rights and responsibilities. They need to participate in relevant social networks, access training to cope with change and to improve career prospects. The ability to communicate effectively at work is crucial for migrants, employers, colleagues, customers, etc. The words of a Swedish care sector employer, "Better language skills, better care!" (SGRC 2011), encapsulate how improving the language skills of both migrant and native-speaker employees benefits the wider society too.

A group of researchers and practitioners, committed to the principles of inclusion and social justice and aware of how central work is to adult life and of the importance of communication in modern work practices, had the idea of networking professionals in Europe engaged in work-related L2 learning. With support between 2012 and 2015 from the Council of Europe's European Centre for

Modern Languages (ECML), the group created the Language for Work Network (LfW), an international network of researchers, practitioners, policy makers and others involved in the field. Now the group has won further support from the ECML for a follow-up project (2016–2018).

The aim of LfW is to promote and develop this area of linguistic integration, which is expected only to grow in importance during the years to come. Through its website (<http://languageforwork.ecml.at>) and programme of activities, LfW shares research, policy and practice across Europe, supporting the full range of practitioners engaged in this field.

3 Work as a vehicle for language learning

From both research and practice we know that, with the right support, work can provide an effective environment for language learning (Grünhage-Monetti, Halewijn, and Holland 2003; Arakelian and Braddell 2005; Extramiana 2012). It offers both the exposure to authentic language and opportunities for interaction that learners need, and the support, through management systems and team working, they require. For adult migrants, L2 development for, at and, particularly, through work has proved an efficient and sustainable instrument towards integration.

4 One issue, three projects

4.1 Odysseus and LfW 1

The earliest iteration of LfW came as long ago as 2000, with the ECML-sponsored Odysseus project, which brought together professionals who recognised the value of work-related language learning for migrants and ethnic minorities (Grünhage-Monetti 2003). This led to the first Language for Work project (2012–2015), “Developing migrants’ language competences at work” (LfW 1), co-ordinated by a team of researchers and practitioners from Germany, France, Spain and the UK.

The project set out to create a European learning network for professionals interested in work-related L2, on the basis that we can all benefit from Europe’s rich diversity of approaches to linguistic integration of adult migrants, as well as the diversity of its labour market structures and policies. A website was planned to operationalise the network, and three consultative meetings were organised to establish the network and develop the website.

The first consultative meeting, in 2012, attracted 20 specialists from 12 European countries. Specialists included civil servants, researchers, learning providers, trade unionists, and educational publishers. Knud Illeris, the Danish learning psychologist, introduced his research findings on workplace learning from the learners' perspective (Illeris 2011).

A year later, 26 specialists from 14 European countries attended the second consultative meeting. The workplace learning researcher Lorna Unwin (University of London) shared the “learning as work” model she and colleagues have developed (Felstead et al. 2011).

The final meeting, in 2015, at the close of the project, was attended by 46 specialists from 32 European countries. Guest speaker was Laurent Filliettaz (University of Geneva), who presented his findings on L2 learning in vocational apprenticeships together with insights from Australian researchers, such as Stephen Billet.

The consultative focus of these meetings was the purpose of a network and the functioning of the proposed network: Would a network be helpful? How should it function? What contribution should it aim to make? (Figure 1)

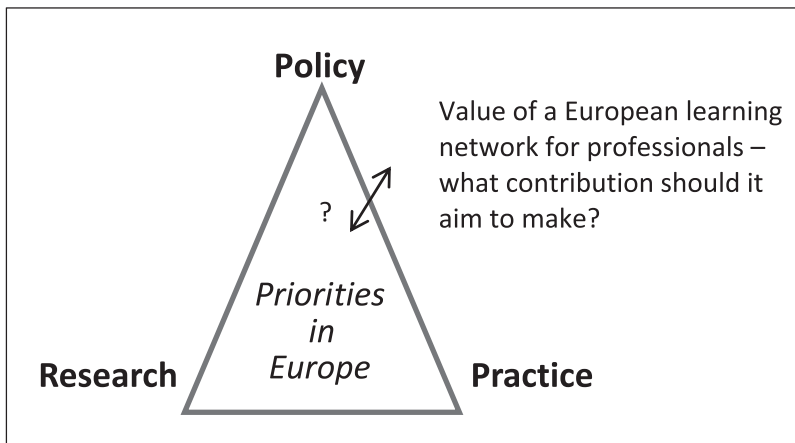


Figure 1: Consultative focus of Language for Work project meetings

Outcomes confirmed the demand for a network in Europe to raise awareness of the importance of work-related L2 learning for integration; to enable sharing of experience and resources; and to develop expertise. Objectives identified for the network included advocacy to promote awareness of work-related L2 learning at national and European levels; development of theoretical/conceptual

models, of practice models and of quality frameworks; and provision of expertise, resources and professional development opportunities.

In addition, these meetings also tested iterations of the website developed by the project team (with technical support from the ECML). This website now comprises a resource centre with scientific, practical and policy-related resources, as well as a community section to support active networking. The network and the website were the major products of LfW 1.

At the time of writing, the LfW network consists of 75 members from 23 countries.

4.2 Language for Work 2 – Tools for professional development (2016 – 2018)

Now a follow-up project, titled “Language for Work – Tools for professional development” (2016–18) and again supported by the ECML, aims to build on this success. It is prompted by the new approaches to work-related L2 learning that are starting to emerge across Europe. These approaches, many of which are not widely known, have the potential to significantly widen the participation of adult migrants in L2 learning. Some of the approaches take established methodologies and adapt them. Others are wholly innovative, focusing on non-formal and informal learning. All make new professional demands on practitioners.

The new LfW project (LfW 2) aims to help equip practitioners to access these new approaches and so benefit both adult migrants and the wider societies where they live. Coordinated by LfW network members from Germany, France, Sweden and the UK, the project will create tools and resources to support the professional development of teachers, teacher educators and other practitioners in the field of work-related L2. It will use the learning network created by LfW 1 to make its outputs (which will include a professional development framework) accessible to practitioners.

To support refugee integration, the project will also develop a “quick guide” with key underlying principles and a selection of effective approaches (including non-formal and informal approaches) to support work-related L2 learning. All products will be made available online via the LfW Network’s website (<http://languageforwork.ecml.at/>).

We end this paper with a quote from a participant at the closing meeting of LfW 1 in 2015: “What is particularly useful for me is the possibility to have access to an international network of professionals teaching a second language for work-related purposes” (Gorza Maisy, National Institute for Languages, Luxembourg) – and with an invitation to colleagues across Europe to join the network

to share and develop practice in an area of considerable importance and rich potential for the linguistic integration of adult migrants.

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