

## **Communicative competences and language learning in an ecological perspective: The triple contexts of participation and language learning from childhood to adulthood**

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In this paper we discuss a basic question of language education from an ecological perspective: How can language education (mother tongue, second language, international language, and foreign language) contribute to friendly and fair cooperation within and across places, regions and nations, ethnicity, gender/sex and age and to a fruitful childhood, creativeness and democracy? (cf. van Lier, 2004). Thus, we discuss communicative competences and language education in an era of globalization and migration, focusing on the need for communicative competences related to communication in intra-cultural, inter-cultural as well as trans-cultural contexts. These three prototypical contexts embrace three different and dialectically interconnected life forms and language and education practices and policies, and they encourage different processes, namely:

1. Intra-cultural contexts: the more traditional homogeneous family and tribe (firm roles, homogenization)
2. Inter-cultural contexts: the local, national and global democracy, administration and formalized exchange of goods (negotiation and voting, legalization)
3. Trans-cultural contexts: the heterogeneous meeting of people of diverse cultural backgrounds in the transcultural societies of the global and local village(s) (creativeness, heterogenization)

The agents and organizations of democratic language education relate to all three types of contexts and support children and adults in developing languages and literacies related to the dominant languages and communication practices of each context: mother tongue (the language of family and friends), 'neutral' hegemonic languages (languages of the powerful), and locally and globally developed highly context sensitive common languages.

Language is a multidimensional, multimodal phenomenon, which dialectically shapes and is shaped by the mind, nature and society. An ecological literacy education includes all modalities and relates to all three contexts.

### *Theoretical framework*

The model of the triple contexts of participation and language learning presented in this paper has been developed within the framework of the dialectical theory of language (Bang, Døør, Steffensen & Nash, 2007; Bundsgaard & Lindø, 2000). The dialectical theory of language is related to a branch of the Ecolinguistics movement (Bang, Døør, Alexander, Fill & Verhagen, 1996; Fill, Penz & Trampe, 2002, Bang & Trampe, forthcoming). Dialectical Linguistics and ecolinguistics both strive to explicate their approach to language and linguistics politically and morally, arguing that no one and no theory is neutral. Ecolinguistics and dialectical theory of language are critical approaches to the study of language and are related to the thoughts within dialogism (Bachtin and Linell) and to Faircloughs Critical discourse analysis. The paper also relates to commensurable theories of literacy such as Barton (2007), New London Group (1996), and Willinsky (1999), as well as to the work in the field of language and culture (Risager

2006; Andersen, Lund & Risager 2006; Guilherme 2002; Byram, Nichols & Stevens 2001; Byram & Risager 1999; Kramsch 1998).

*What is language?*

Critical linguistic approaches regard language as a multidimensional phenomenon, which both shapes and is shaped by the mind, nature and society and their logics, because ' [...] even so-called 'laws of nature' are habits and habits are impermanent and are continually and constantly changing and evolving.' (Bang & Døør et al., 2007, p. 52). From this perspective communication is regarded as multimodal (cf. Kress 2009; Scollon 2001) and takes place in a context of core contradictions and complex relations. Being communicatively competent implies being able to participate in contexts of contradictions and social conflict, and therefore, it is of great importance that language education (and every other linguistic activity) explicitly relate to the multiplicity of modes and the contradictory situations. We regard this complexity as a fruitful departure for a critical and ecological linguistic awareness and consciousness and it should not be eliminated as a constraint (cf. Lund, 2006, p. 81). "[A] theory of language is part of a theory of life" (Bang & Døør, 1998, p. 7), and, therefore our theory is a conflict theory, and our models illustrate and highlights the complexity and asymmetries in our lives and in our use of language and communication.

On the other hand we also underline that a language is not a thing, not a mechanism and not an organism, but a "[...] system of specific sign relations" (Bang, Døør, Steffensen & Nash, 2007, p. 200) that is constituted by a speech community whose members share vital relations. As we have already pointed out this viewpoint does not mean that we neglect the differences – on the contrary, we regard the differences as just as important as similarities.

In order to illustrate the complexity of meaning making as well in everyday situations as in more complex relations we have developed the so-called semantic matrix (Figure 1). It says that the meaning of an utterance is dialectically constituted by social as well as individual aspects.

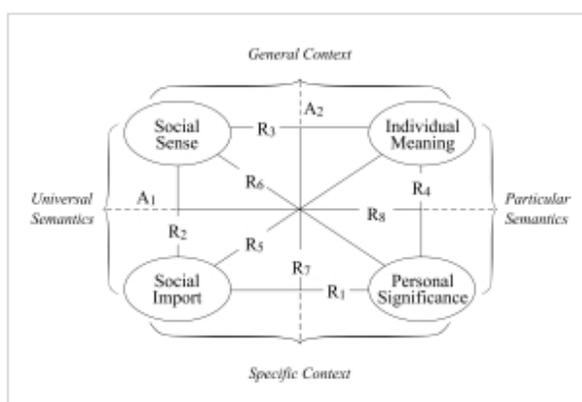


Figure 1. Semantic matrix (Bang & Døør 2007)

The semantic potentials of a dialogue are defined by the participants. The term “social sense” of a dialogue refers to the traditional way a word is used among the individuals of a community – thus, the social sense is identical to the language users’ internalized idea of the hegemonic standard meaning of a word. The social sense constitutes – together with the individual meaning – the diachronic dimension of the communication. Social sense changes over time, but is relatively stable.

The individual meaning is the meaning of a word that an individual grows up with and is as such a drive belt for the individual's personal history. Like social sense, individual meaning is relatively stable – it is part of the person's identity. It is also likely that it is relatively stable under different circumstances (time, place, and situation). Bang, Døør, Steffensen & Nash (2007, p. 96) define individual meaning as "(1) the normal way a person uses a word/text; and (2) the interpretation the person habitually uses in understanding other people's use of the word/text".

The third aspect of the four fields, social import, is a more spatio-temporal specific dimension of communication. Social import is defined as the language use of a certain group, an institution or a discipline. Thus, the use of social import presupposes a common identification of the communicative context and situation. Personal significance is constituted by a person's particular semantics in a specific context, and it conditions – together with social import – the actual language use. Thus the semantics of these two fields is in the foreground of the communication. The semantics of social sense and individual meaning – the more diachronic dimensions of the communication – is in the background. Semantics is a matter of signification. But it is more than that. Semantics is also an aspect of language that constrains and controls knowledge. We argue that the semantic matrix is a fruitful model in understanding communication and language teaching, because it makes explicit the subject positions that an individual can be positioned in (or position her/himself in) and thus underlines that there is no hard core of meaning of any word<sup>1</sup>.

### *The triple contexts of participation & language learning*

In Figure 2 we present our model of the triple contexts of participation and language learning. The model is generated from the logical claim that a unit has something that is inside (intra), stands in relation to other units (inter) and has something that is outside and unknown (extra) or alien, and which therefore needs to be transcended. In human participation, one unit is *culture*. We define a culture as carried by a group of inter-connected persons with shared traditions (ways of doing, thinking, valuing, aiming) and artifacts (tools, laws, institutions) and often physical places. In this way a culture can be regarded as a homogeneous unit in which members are assimilated and conform to common traditions; but of course core contradictions constitute the relations of the members and therefore a culture is a dynamic unit (cf. Kramsch 1998, p. 4ff.). The definition leaves room for cultures to encompass cultures. In this way an ethnic group can be regarded as a culture that encompasses villages that encompasses families; and people of the world can be regarded as members of a global human culture. Historically, cultures developed in more or less closed circles with more or less frequent exchange with other cultures. Today most cultures are highly interrelated due to the globalized market and communication.

The state and its bodies have a monopoly on violence and power that they use to control the bodies of the citizens. In this way the state organizes the interaction between cultures in formalized ways, thus it is a central topos ('place') of inter-cultural communication. Other central inter-cultural contexts are the market and at a higher level, international organizations (the EU, OECD, UN). When members of two distinct cultures (families, villages, ethnic groups, etc.) meet outside formalized meeting places or where the formal frames do not fulfill their needs, they face the challenge of transcending their own cultural background to establish a common ground for participation and communication. Here, a new language is created, a language which integrates the cultures at stake. The context is thus a trans-cultural context. This is one of the

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1 The idea of a so-called hard core meaning of a word stems from traditional semantics, e.g. Hurford and Heasley (1983).

most critical tasks of the highly globalized societies of today. These considerations have formed the background for the model of the triple contexts of participation, cf. Figure 2.

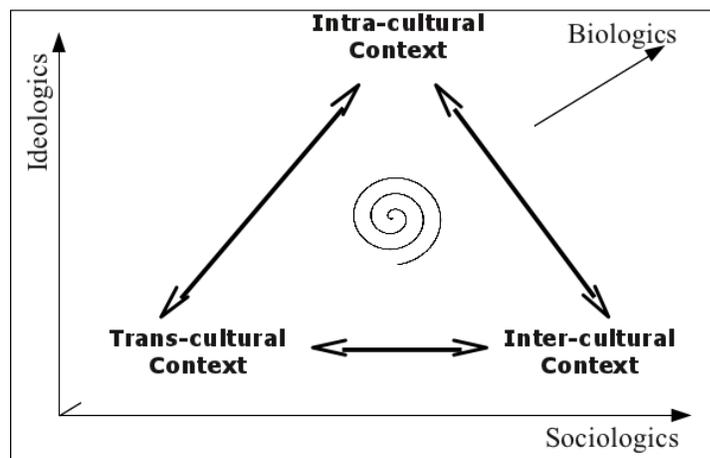


Figure 2. Triple contexts of participation & language learning.

Language and communicative competences are learned and developed in intra-cultural, inter-cultural and trans-cultural contexts (Byram, Nichols & Stevens, 2001, p. 1f.). But in schools today, focus is mostly on the inter-cultural and to a certain extent, the intra-cultural contexts. Through a further presentation of the characteristics of the three contexts, we argue that this focus is too narrow if the goal of language education (mother tongue, second language, international languages, foreign languages) is to contribute to friendly and fair cooperation locally and across regions, nations, ethnicity, gender/sex and age and to a fruitful childhood, creativeness, and democracy (cf. Guilherme, 2002, p. 219.).

### Three prototypical situations

The model of the triple contexts of participation and language learning embraces three types of prototypical situations, which can be metaphorically described as (i) life in the family and with friends, (ii) interaction and negotiation in the market, bureaucracy, democracy and institutions, and (iii) meetings between strangers.

#### *The intra-cultural context: Family and friends*

In the life of the family and between friends, language is used to coordinate social life, co-narrate experiences and common history, demarcate right and wrong, and to play by telling jokes, playing games, and creatively co-creating virtual worlds and scenarios. Children meet three types of language in the intra-cultural context: The language of their parents and other caretakers, the language of their grandparents and the language of their friends and peers. These languages of three generations share a number of characteristics but are nonetheless distinct. They are all used in an intra-cultural context, but have diverse historical roots, and different textures of authority and focuses of interest. Thus calling the language of our childhood our 'mother tongue' reflects profound wisdom. And it is crucial that the adults the children meet in kindergarten, school and out of school activities acknowledge and appreciate the mother tongue and the dialects of the living places that the children come from. Each child meets these languages in its local family and community, but they are likely to meet people in their proximity who carry slightly or profoundly dissociated cultures that are related to differences in class, ideology, religion, urbanity etc. These meetings constitute a trans-cultural context. Intra-cultural

communication has to a great extent been performed in face-to-face meetings using the multimodal language of speech and body language (facial expressions, gestures, proxemics etc.). But in recent years we have witnessed a revolution in intra-cultural communication that has been carried forward by the increase in written language as a mode of communication made possible by mobile and internet technologies and social networks (Kennedy & Wellman, 2007). Children nowadays lead their intra-cultural social life to a great extent through writing. They try the best they can to develop well-functioning practices of faceless communication, but this is not an easy task (cf. Bundsgaard forthcoming). Thus a focus on language learning ought to integrate reflections and practices of faceless communication.

*The inter-cultural context: Discourse in anonymous/authority relations*

In modern society the number of inter-cultural meetings is huge compared to any other point in time. Children today learn to interact on the market from an early age. Of the adults they meet, some are caregivers in institutions like day care or schools and some are representatives of the state and society. They need to learn the complex communication practices of combined social relationships and formal authority. They also need to acquire the rules and practices of interaction and negotiation in a modern complex bureaucracy and democracy (Kemp, 2005; Sennet 1998).

Languages in inter-cultural contexts are much more formalized and explicitly rule-based than what children are used to from their lives in intra-cultural contexts. Children need to acquire a national language, which might be considered “the same” as the language that is spoken in their homes, but for most children the national language is a different dialect. And for all children, the texture of authority is different in a national language because it is used to mediate the meeting and negotiation of various cultures. The language of inter-cultural communication values argumentation and reasoning and the balancing of, for example, interests and civility.

Today most (non-English speaking) children also need to be able to communicate in languages other than their mother tongue and national language. In a way these languages are not English, Arabic, Mandarin Chinese or Spanish, but special inter-cultural versions of these languages, spoken by people not raised in the contexts of these languages, and thus not familiar with prototypical situations of terms and idioms (Risager, 2006, 110ff.). But although we develop special inter-cultural versions of these languages, they still carry the experiences through which they were developed and the social history in which they have participated. All children, also native speakers of the international or inter-cultural languages, need to develop their competence in using inter-cultural versions of languages like English, Arabic etc. But native speakers of these languages will have a closer, more intimate relationship to words, idioms and the social organization of the language.

*The trans-cultural context: Dialogue and collaboration between strangers*

The third context, the trans-cultural, is a novum to the participants. When people from different parts of the city or country meet for the first time or when people from different countries or ethnic or religious cultures meet outside familiar contexts, they have to be much more sensitive than they are in intra-cultural or inter-cultural contexts. Such meetings have been commonplace in children’s lives since the dawn of time; in a way a child experiences its first trans-cultural context when it is born into a family. But in today’s highly globalized communities, children as well as adults continuously experience trans-cultural contexts, ranging from meeting (or being) immigrants and people of other religious convictions or social classes to traveling to foreign countries or other parts of one’s own country or town. When people meet in a trans-cultural

context the participants do not (know if they) share language, identification of relations, power, authority, values and appreciations, objectives and goals etc. They may very well identify each other as foreigners and therefore as a threat to their own form of life, leading on a larger scale to prejudice, xenophobia, racism, fear, violence, and war.

In post-war western countries, pre-war anti-Semitism has largely been replaced by a number of shared precepts and taboos. Thus the trans-cultural state of xenophobia has to an extent been replaced by an inter-cultural approach of forbearance and tolerance, ideally making it possible for different cultures to live together in peace. For example, some (former) Jews and Christians have formed or entered into shared cultures (families, friends, local communities, etc.). Learning foreign languages and about the cultures of the native foreign language speakers is a way to challenge prejudices and begin to see the other as a friend you have not yet met. But of course this is an unsteady change, because the other can still very easily be identified as strange and aberrant.

Meetings in trans-cultural contexts can also be characterized by an inclination or urge to find common ground and reach mutual understanding. Education needs to promote this inclination. Such meetings are characterized by efforts to establish a shared language, finding shared identifications. The language used could range from international languages to locally produced language (including gestures, facial expressions etc.). This kind of communication puts demands on the participants' social, natural and mental creativity, responsibility, and fairness. Focus must be on communicative ecological competence and not correctness, and the goal must be to reach a shared understanding, maybe to find out that the presumed stranger was like oneself, or maybe to find out what differentiates the participants in order to transform the relation into an inter-cultural context in which different goals and objectives can be negotiated and the participants can find a way to co-exist.

*Characteristics of the triple contexts*

Having described the three contexts, we will now attempt to characterize the contexts and the communication within them more clearly. We have identified a number of characteristics that we summarize in Table 1. In the following sections we will elaborate on a selected number of them. *Table 1. Some prototypical characteristics of the triple contexts of participation and language learning*

<b>Context</b>	<b>Process</b>	<b>Relationship</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Prototypical communication</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Participation</b>
<i>Intra-cultural</i>	Homogenization Identity	Ethics	Ritualization	Conversation Deep semantics	Solidarity (closed)	Assimilation & differentiation
<i>Inter-cultural</i>	Equilibration Categorization	Politics	Legalization	Discourse Formal semantics	Loyalty	Negotiation & war
<i>Trans-cultural</i>	Heterogenization Identification	Crisis	Globalization	Dialogue Creative semantics	Solidarity (open)	Integration & alienation

*Processes, function, relationship and participation*

Members of a culture are in-culturated in the intra-cultural context by being taken care of and by trying to conform to the ways things are usually done. The notion of being a member of a culture means being alike, developing an identity as “one-of-us” and “we-are-one”, pursuing a homogeneous unity, working on *assimilating* new participants. Culture is maintained and sustained through a continuous negotiation of how things are done right, through *ritualization*, and members try to keep each other on the right track. In this process, there needs to be something which is not “us”; thus the culture is *differentiated* in relation to other cultures (Kramsch, 1998, p. 8). Therefore the process is one of *homogenization* and creation of *identity*. And the relationship between members of a culture is one of *ethics*.

In inter-cultural contexts participants meet on neutral ground (the marketplace, the courthouse, parliament, the school, the public office, etc.) to negotiate, deliberate, exchange, etc. often in highly formalized ways. Rituals are developed over time that set the frame of interaction (civility (“Höflichkeit”), democracy, diplomacy, buying-selling etc.) (Habermas 1990). In these contexts the process is one of *equilibration*, which means that the participants act in relation to or develop firm categories, rules and regulations. Things, people, relations are *categorized* as this or that, making it easy to recognize the unfamiliar as something well known, that is, having a name, and the participants try to cope with disagreement and differences in a relationship of *politics* through a *legalization* function (Bundsgaard 2000). If participants disagree, their way of participation is preferably one of *negotiation*, but if that fails, the participants go into a state of *war*, fought either in the legal system or on the battlefield.

A diversity of cultural backgrounds meets in the trans-cultural societies of the global and local village(s). The challenge is to establish a common ground of participation and communication, where participants can transcend their cultural background, develop a common ground, and create a new language that integrates the cultures at stake (Guilherme, 2002, p. 219f.). In trans-cultural contexts the participants are in a relationship of *crisis* because they are not familiar with each other; the other might have unfamiliar views on life and on the world, other ways of acting, relating, valuing and caring, other interests and ethics. Crisis is a state of change, a transition to another phase either in a more dismissive or aggressive direction, a state of destruction or a “cold war” of mutual fear and terror, or in a more peaceful and embracing direction, a state of positivity and quietness, but also a more conservative state. A crisis occurs when nobody knows right away what to do, and when the ways things have been done until now do not suffice to handle the ongoing changes.

When the participants succeed in trying to develop common grounds, communicate peacefully and experiment with solutions to incongruence, fear and aggressiveness, they need to accept differences and to learn to identify the unfamiliar person they meet as an individual and not an alien. In this process of *heterogenization* participants’ outlooks widen to develop either a participation of *integration* or one of *alienation*, and the function of this context is one of *globalization*. Meetings in trans-cultural contexts are one of the most critical tasks of the highly globalized societies of today.

*Prototypical situation and approach*

In our theory of dialectical linguistics we have elaborated a model of the communication situation, called the dialogue model.

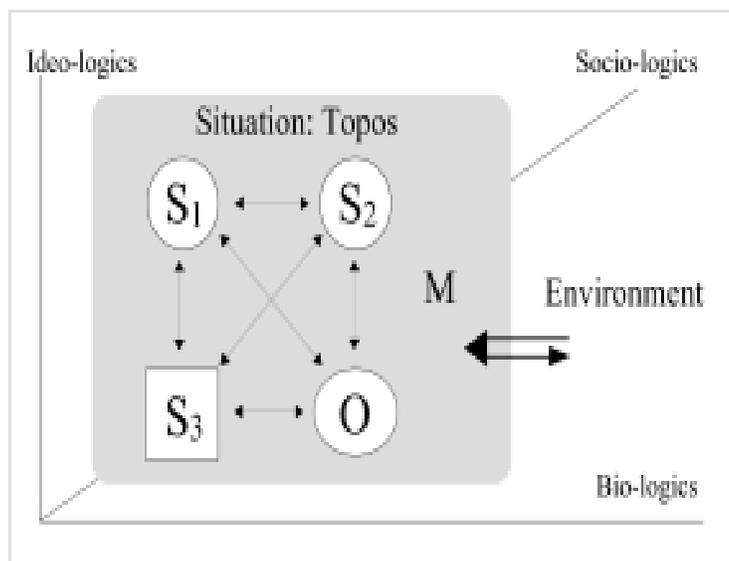


Figure 2. *The dialog model (Bang, Døør, Steffensen & Nash, 2007)*

The dialogue model is dialectical. This is indicated by dialectical arrows, which symbolize that there are relationships between the phenomena (participants, objects and media) in the situation, and between the environment and the situation, and that these relationships are unequal. In the model, the direction of each dialectical arrow illustrates that the contexts of communication dominate and constitute the situation and the dialogue, but also that the situational dialogue influences the context. The model also illustrates the principles of complexity in every dialogue.

Traditionally, e.g. in conversation analysis, and in critical discourse analysis, a dialogue is defined as an exchange of meaning between two or more participants. Our conception of dialogue differs from this conception as we define a dialogue as taking part between at least three persons. The third subject, S<sub>3</sub>, might be physically present in some situations and absent in others, but no communication occurs between two subjects only. Bang, Døør, Steffensen & Nash point out that: “The S<sub>3</sub> position might be occupied by a person who is superior, equal with or in an inferior position in relation to S<sub>1</sub> and/or S<sub>2</sub> or both of them or none of them” (2007, p. 60). The S<sub>3</sub> might also be more anonymous or generalized, e.g. our social conventions and the subjects who represent them. The anonymous S<sub>3</sub> is often expressed linguistically by means of the zero deictic “you” or the plural “we” and a demanding modality like “must” or “should”.<sup>2</sup>

In the model above, the active participants, S<sub>1</sub> and S<sub>2</sub>, are depicted with circles, while S<sub>3</sub> is depicted with a square. This is done in order to underline the ontological difference between the

<sup>2</sup> The notion of a third subject is well known in dialogism approaches. It was first introduced by Bakhtin in 1970 and has later been developed by e.g. Per Linell, who has elaborated a hierarchy of third subjects in his dissertation *Approaching dialogue* (Linell 1998; cf. Linell, 2009). Linell uses the term “third parties”.

three subject positions. The “O”, the object of the dialogue, is depicted with an oval in order to make explicit that it has a third ontological status. The observer and/or the “O” are not only observer and topic(s) of the dialogue. Each constituent influences (and is influenced by) the communication and thus becomes part of the communication. The interconnectedness between the three subjects and the object “O” is illustrated by the dialectical arrow, by the medium “M” and by the “environment”. In the prototypical situation of the intra-cultural context the third subject might be the child who overhears his parents’ conversation and thereby experiences different types of language games (Wittgenstein, 1953) and life forms in the family, or it might be a parent observing children play.

We characterize the prototypical communication in intra-cultural contexts as *conversation* emphasizing the sense of “living together, having dealings with other”<sup>3</sup>, and the etymology of *with* and *turning*. Conversations are thus interactions in which the participants narrate and coordinate their life. Intra-cultural communication is based on *deep semantics*, derived from participants sharing identifications and meanings through shared experiences, shared understanding and shared values. Deep semantics is rooted in the body and in a comprehensive tacit knowledge developed in shared intra-cultural life. In the prototypical situation of the inter-cultural context the third subject is often more anonymous, and the communication therefore seems to be in accordance with the dominating common values and logics of the culture and appears as neutral – however, it is still the logics of the power that define the communication and life forms.

We characterize the prototypical communication of inter-cultural contexts as *discourse* emphasizing the process of understanding and reasoning, and the thoroughness appearing from the etymology of *apart*, *away from* and *run*, which describes the process of investigating a case from more than one angle, *discussing* it, deliberating etc. The semantics of inter-cultural communication is *formalized* through the development of standard language, lexicographic registration of word meanings, definition of core concepts etc. In a trans-cultural context it might be very difficult for the participants to identify which S<sub>3</sub>s who are active, because the participants are not familiar with each other's cultural background. Thus people might very well seem to behave strange exactly because their S<sub>3</sub>s are different from one's own in the situation.

In the trans-cultural context, the participants traditionally focus on the differences in the communication. We call this prototypical communication *dialogue*, because we define a dialogue as a complex language game in which we are forced to reflect on both similarities and differences. The similarities – what is shared – make it possible for the participants to identify a common ground. The differences might be regarded as constraints, but the identification of the differences may also lead to new insights and cooperation. Cooperation is impossible unless everyone involved is willing to experiment with more or less radical change.

We suggest that the principle of sharing, the principle of difference and the principle of experimentation form a dialogic experiment, a sort of guideline that will lead to more democratic and ecological life forms and integration in situations with conflicts and crisis. In trans-cultural contexts semantics is constantly developing, making way for *creative* understanding and production of communication. We regard the notion of the third subject as a key ecological concept, because it reminds us of the fact that speech is never free or neutral. On the contrary, when you participate in a dialogue, you are responsible for the third subjects of the communication as they are involved in the dialogue (Lindø, 2007, p. 237). The awareness and

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3 <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=conversation>

explication of this also helps us to avoid dichotomic thinking and a polarization of 'we' versus 'them'.

### *Movement between contexts*

In modern life people continually shift between contexts, moving from being with friends, to going to work to meeting people from other countries or classes. We depict these movements with the spiral in the center of the model. The arrows between the three poles depict that one context can change into another. Sometimes participants succeed in changing a trans-cultural context into an intra-cultural or inter-cultural context e.g. by forming a friendship or laying out rules for future interaction. And sometimes participants split a culture into two, e.g. when the children grow up and establish a new family or when friendships are terminated. The important point is that none of the poles are inherently good. Staying in either context easily leads to negative results. Staying in the intra-cultural pole might lead to monopolization of truth or xenophobia, staying in the inter-cultural context might lead to a state of technologization, a search for certification instead of confidence and close relations, and staying in the trans-cultural context might lead to rootlessness and anxiety.

### *Politics of language and language teaching*

This analysis of the three *contexts* of participation and language learning leads us to articulate a new vision for democratic language politics. The foundation of the vision is a demand for a dialectics of homogenization, legalization, and heterogenization. Thus children and adults should:

- Learn to speak in home contexts, assimilate themselves into the language and world view of their mother and father and friends, the local community and the regional tribe (homogenization).
- Learn to negotiate in the common room of local, regional, national and international societies, in the institutional contexts of bureaucratic discourse (legalization).
- Learn to integrate differences and oppositions of language and world views locally, regionally, globally, in order to be a part of a dialog of change and solidarity (heterogenization).

Therefore we need to support students in developing three kinds of language, one for each of these contexts:

- *Mother tongue*: Children have the right to learn and use the languages of three generations, namely the language of their parents, their grandparents, and their friends and peers.
- *Neutral languages*: specialized languages (technical, administrative, bureaucratic, etc.), the standard national language, international languages (lingua franca, e.g. English, Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, or Arab).
- *Local and global common languages*, created in the situation to communicate and mediate experiences and insights in order to be able to communicate with strangers or friends with a different mother tongue (another dialect, language, cultural or social background, etc.); sometimes using body language, sometimes using versions of English, Arab etc., sometimes with a national standard language etc.

In each of these contexts we need to support students in developing their competences in participating with *sense and sensitivity* in *discourse* and *dialogue*. The idea of participating with *sense and sensitivity* means striving to acquire sensitive sympathetic insight into the meaning and sense of other people's utterances and thereby to develop deep semantics. Participating in and reflecting on *discourse* supports the student's mastery of the 'neutral' language of core institutional contexts, and their competences in argumentation, reasoning, and criticizing. Participating in a *dialogue* supports the student's development of the principles of democratic dialogue, which can be enacted in five steps: 0). Who is participating in the situation? 1). What is shared in the situation? 2). What are the differences between the participants? 2b). What are the individual characteristics of the participants (In Danish: "særheder", i.e. distinctive features)? 3). How can we construct an experiment to develop our common practice in healthy directions and overcome opposition?

We have argued that language education should support students in developing competences to participate in intra-, inter- as well as trans-cultural communication. Our assumption is that language teaching today focuses mainly on the aspects of inter-cultural communication that concern learning to handle standard languages and less on actually using language to participate in prototypical communication situations. We therefore invite colleagues, teachers and citizens to participate in a critical reflection on and scrutiny of curricula, lesson plans, learning material, and teaching and learning practice at all levels of the educational system in order to support the development of more democratic language education.

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