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COST Action IS 1306 – International Seminar

“New Speakers in Latvia: Language Education Policy for Integration and Peace”

In cooperation with Rēzekne Academy of Technologies, the Latvian Language Agency and the DAAD Information Centre Riga

European Union House, Riga, Latvia, April 10, 2017

SUMMARY REPORT

1 Overview

On April 10, 2017, **Rēzekne Academy of Technologies (RTA)**, the **Latvian Language Agency (LVA)** and the **DAAD Information Centre Riga** organized a seminar entitled **“New Speakers in Latvia: Language Education Policy for Integration and Peace”**. It took place as part of the **“New Speakers” Action IS 1306** of the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) network which also covered parts of the expenses.

The following summary report aims at providing a brief overview of the presentations given and at summarizing the main issues which were raised during the following discussions.

The focus of the seminar was to provide a frame for taking the topic of **“New Speakers”**, a term which has become increasingly popular in international sociolinguistics in recent years, to Latvia. **“New Speakers”** refers to individuals who have mastered a linguistic variety different to their **“mother tongue”** or **“L1”** to a certain level of proficiency. **New Speakers** are more than learners of a language since they have reached a level of competence which enables them to use the language in their daily professional and/or private activities. Yet, they are far from being as proficient as **“native speakers”** – with partly severe consequences not only for the level of success of communication, but also for recognition by other individuals and, thereby, opportunities of participation in society. In the Latvian context, the term **“New Speakers”** has been translated as **“Jaunie valodas lietotāji”**, literally **“New language users”**. This translation has been chosen in particular in order to overcome possible misunderstandings between the meanings of **“young”** and **“new”**, since Latvian uses the same term for both meanings.

The main goal of the seminar was thus to collect experiences of New Speakers in several European countries, to give Latvian society the opportunity to learn from those experiences, and to juxtapose these experiences with perceptions by representatives of different groups of New Speakers from Latvia. To that end, the seminar included both speakers from Latvia and from other EU-countries.

2 Papers Framing the Latvian Context

The seminar was organized and chaired by **Sanita Lazdiņa** and **Heiko F. Marten (Rēzekne Academy of Technologies, DAAD Information Centre Riga)**, both members of the COST research network. Marten and Lazdiņa opened the seminar with an introduction to the COST action, its web site and main aims, as well as a short explanation of the term “New Speakers” along the lines outlined above, followed by a brief presentation of the agenda, respectively in English and Latvian.

2.1 The Perspective of the Latvian State: The Latvian Language Agency on Recent Migrants to the Country

Marten and Lazdiņa then introduced **Gunta Kļava** and **Ērika Pičukāne** of the **Latvian Language Agency**, the Latvian state’s main institution with regard to language planning and research of Latvian as a mother tongue and Latvian as a second and foreign language. The two speakers had been selected to represent the perspective of migrants who have arrived relatively recently to the country as New Speakers of Latvian. They recounted their experiences of teaching Latvian to different groups of migrants to Latvia, incorporating both the perspectives of the LVA and their own points of view as language teachers.

As an introduction to the linguistic situation of Latvia, Kļava and Pičukāne presented statistics which showed the large and diverse group of New Speakers of Latvian. Numbers revealed that most speakers come from the countries of the former Soviet Union, but there are increasingly also large numbers of Chinese seeking to do business in Latvia, as well as a relatively small group of around 300 refugees who have come to Latvia during recent years. When looking at statistics, the tradition of government-sponsored Latvian language lessons has resulted in increasing the number of Latvian residents who are able to speak Latvian from 60% in 1991 to between 80-90% now.

Kļava and Pičukāne stated that their approaches in teaching languages can generally be divided into two ways. The “classical” approach focuses mainly on teaching the language through grammar and theory, whereas the communicative approach has successfully applied exposed learners to everyday situations where the practical use of the language could be trained. Kļava reported that, although it seems natural to assume that the latter approach would be more promising (as generally argued also by contemporary academics working with language teaching), individual experiences in language learning and in making use of new languages in practice need to be taken into account. Some groups reacted better to the “classical” approach, highlighting in particular Chinese language students.

As a result, Kļava and Pičukāne stressed the need for different approaches to different learners, noting that previous experiences of the learners had a great influence on learning results. Among the challenges that language teachers of recently arrived migrants face is, for

example, that some learners were, at the time when they came to Latvia, not even familiar with the Latin alphabet. Another major challenge was how to accommodate learners with very different backgrounds who study together in one class. Not only individual learning experiences, but also cultural expectations and economic differences (in particular between refugees and migrants who have come to Latvia for business reasons) need to be taken into account. The presenters showed a number of teaching tools meant to react to these circumstances, ranging from animations and songs to different games.

In total, the paper showed that the Latvian state makes a variety of efforts to provide language lessons which would create New Speakers of Latvian. In spite of existing challenges, the results of the lessons were presented as promising, not least because of the flexible approach of the teachers to accommodate individual needs. These include, right from the start of the teaching process, but with an increased focus as students progress in their language competence, the inclusion of typical situations which New Speakers of Latvian are faced with in their everyday lives, e.g. with regard to bureaucratic necessities or to medical services.

2.2 Russophones in Latvia: The Perspective of Soviet-time Migrants and their Descendants

The second paper was given by **Marina Kručāne**, a teacher of German at a secondary school in Riga and a Master student at the University of Latvia. Kručāne framed the question of New Speakers in terms of the Russian (and other Russophone) families who lived in other Soviet republics and who (or whose ancestors) moved to Latvia during Soviet times. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, they had to adjust their relationship to the language of their new home countries. In the paper, Kručāne heavily drew on her own personal experience as part of such a Russian family. She reported that she and the rest of her family had little or no knowledge of the Latvian language during Soviet times, acquisition of Latvian was not seen as important. After the re-establishment of Latvian independence, her father recognised that her family would need to integrate into Latvian society, and thus sent her to a school in which the language of instruction was Latvian.

This attitude is not entirely uncommon among ethnic Russians in Latvia, yet it is still rather the norm for Russians to attend the so-called minority schools, i.e. bilingual schools in which part of the curriculum is taught in Russian and part in Latvian. The aim of these schools is to ensure fluency in Latvian among those children who are raised monolingually in Russian, but at the same time to allow them to receive mother tongue education, schooling on Russian literature and several other subjects in Russian.

On the question of why some Russophones in Latvia refuse to learn Latvian, Kručāne argued that one of the reasons might be found in political nationalism. She reported of her observation of how detrimental the refusal to grant Latvian citizenship to everybody who permanently lived in Latvia in 1991 was, with regard to accepting the dominance of Latvian culture and language by parts of the Russophone population (even though it is possible for everybody to obtain Latvian citizenship based on a test in Latvian language, history and politics and children who are born in Latvia have since the 1990s automatically been eligible to Latvian citizenship).

At the same time, she reported of the reluctance of many members of the Russophone community to accept biographies such as hers. According to Kručāne, there is a remarkable

tendency among some parts of the Russian-speaking population to see any attempt to integrate into Latvian society (e.g. by attending Latvian-medium schools or also simply by celebrating Latvian festivities together with one's Latvian neighbours) as "giving up one's Russian culture". In this, there is a notable essentialist understanding of what it means to be Russian – which stand in sharp contrast to the many shades of identities among Russophones in Latvia today. This essentialist understanding is partly reinforced by media broadcasts from Russia which transport the official views of the Russian state on nationhood, identity and culture.

In total, the paper by Kručāne, even though it was in some respects more a personal account of an individual family's language trajectory than an academic paper, reflected very well some of the continuing tensions which characterize Latvian society today. In the context of New Speakers, Kručāne herself is an example of a New Speaker of Latvian who is fluent in Latvian and who has adopted many aspects of Latvian culture, but who is torn between Latvian mainstream society, some parts of which still tend to look upon her with suspicious eyes (rather on the grounds of her ethnic than of her linguistic identity), and traditional Russophone attitudes which see her as too ready to assimilate to Latvian majority culture.

2.3 The Regional Language of Latgalian: Challenges in Finding Space for Oral and Written Use

The third case study from Latvia examined a case which stood in sharp contrast to the previous papers. **Vineta Vilcāne (Latgalian Cultural News Portal lakuga.lv)** reported of her views on the promotion of the regional language of Latgalian, a variety closely related to Standard Latvian spoken in the Easternmost Latvian region of Latgale. Latgalian has been recognised by the Latvian state as a historical variety of Latvian and has a contemporary standardized orthography and grammar; yet, it largely lacks official recognition. Vilcāne's presentation discussed mainly the situation of Latgalian speakers and their perceived need to preserve the language.

Vilcāne first presented a summary of the historical situation of Latgalian, beginning with the first books printed in Latgalian, covering the suppression of the language in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, to its revival since the 1980s. She also explained her decision to use the term "Latgalian language" throughout her presentation, this in itself being a rather courageous and possibly provocative step in a formal context in Latvia's capital Riga. Vilcāne then discussed the results of an informal survey which she had conducted among her Latgalian-speaking acquaintances, detailing their usage of Latgalian. The survey confirmed existing views that Latgalian is used regularly in oral communication in informal domains by a substantial proportion of the population in Latgale (as also revealed by the 2011 census in Latvia), but there is almost no formal use. The written language is almost non-existent in more formal domains, but is also rarely used among Latgalian speakers in less regulated contexts.

With regard to New Speakers, the case study provided interesting insights into the revitalization attempts of a minority language community which continues to be restricted in opportunities to use their language, similar to many regional or minority languages in Western Europe. The attempts to raise the status are hindered mostly by restrictive policies based on centralist approaches. In contrast to many minority languages in Western Europe with solid support by language policies which aim at language maintenance and the

accommodation of new speakers, users of Latgalian enjoy rather little support of official policies and are more at the beginning of their struggle for more public representation. This applies in particular to the written variety, whereas oral communication in Latgale in a diglossic situation with Standard Latvian seems to be less controversial – at least where two speakers of Latgalian identify each other as such (the latter being rather unproblematic in particular in smaller rural communities). One of the reasons why there is such a lack of the written use of Latgalian is that it was largely prohibited in public space for much of the 20th century; only more recently, activists have started to teach the written standard of Latgalian and to use it more prominently in some media and other publications. Because of the tradition of a lack of literacy in Latgalian, also those individuals who use the language in oral communication are often insecure in using it in writing, and if they do, they are lacking opportunities which would go beyond private communication. In particular with regard to this latter respect, the situation of “New Writers” of Latgalian in their need to expand opportunities to practice the variety resembles experiences of minority languages from other countries.

3 Papers Providing the Context of Discussions on New Speakers in Europe

3.1 Global Perspectives: Experiences from the Netherlands and Beyond

After the lunch break, two presentations by speakers from other European countries provided a contrastive view to the situation in Latvia. The beginning was made by **Sjaak Kroon (Tilburg University, Netherlands)**. In his paper entitled “Policies from above and practices from below: The case of the New Speaker”, Kroon related the concept of New Speakers to different case studies which provided an overview of what he called “New Realities”, i.e. the changes brought to sociolinguistic patterns by globalisation, mobility and superdiversity. One example used to illustrate these new realities was the Belgian town of Oostende, which has in recent years seen a dramatic rise in the diversity of languages spoken by its residents. In addition to its indigenous citizens who speak French, Dutch, German or a number of regional dialects as L1 as well as post-colonial and labour migrants of older generations, the city has recently experienced an influx of new migrants and refugees who stem from a vast variety of countries and linguistic backgrounds.

For language policies, the basic challenge of these new linguistic realities in many societies is that language(s) need to be understood, used and taught in very different ways. From a rather monolithic structure closely related to nation states, language policies and practices need to move to freer concepts. Top-down policies are often inefficient, whilst bottom-up practices have a significant impact on ecolinguistic situations, though not necessarily the ones intended by official policy-makers. In this, Kroon argued, it is helpful if top-down language policies coexist with bottom-up practices. Kroon illustrated, drawing on rich examples from countries as diverse as the Netherlands, Wales, East Timor and Suriname, that there is often a significant disconnection between the goals and the implementation of language policies and between official views and practices by the population. To understand why this could be the case, Kroon showed a list of factors relevant to the implementation of language policies, from time and place (by the time policies have been formulated and implemented, the situation might have changed considerably), to the conflict between actors and stakeholders (policy makers and target groups have different goals and desires), to the policy cycle itself (problems are identified by politics, but policy-makers have to formulate the solution). Kroon

suggested that these problems were the result of formal policies of only focusing on a small part of the complex system of sociolinguistic reality. He emphasised that effective language policies needed to look at the system as whole.

In total, Kroon's paper related to the New Speaker theme by showing the diversity of challenges that mostly migrants are exposed to.

3.2 Minority Languages in Western Europe: The Case of Scottish Gaelic

The last paper was given by **Stuart Dunmore (University of Edinburgh)**. Dunmore's focus was on the Gaelic language in Scotland and its New Speakers, i.e. people who have acquired Gaelic as adults, mostly in an attempt to gain insight into the language of their ancestors where intergenerational transition no longer existed.

Similar to the presentation on Latgalian, Dunmore first started with a summary of the historical development of Gaelic. He explained how Gaelic gradually spread from Western Scotland and Ireland, until it became the primary language of around 50% of the Scottish population. At around the 16th century, the Scottish crown initiated an explicit policy to extirpate Gaelic. With the demographic and economic changes of the 18th and 19th centuries, Gaelic began to decline rapidly, until only a small number of Gaelic speakers remained. Late in the 20th century, seeing the disappearance of the language, the Scottish government began to implement language policies to halt the dwindling of Gaelic speakers, among them plans to introduce Gaelic as a language used in school education. The policies seem to show a certain level of success, with the number of Gaelic speakers having almost stabilised, and the possibility of a reversal of the long-term decline of the language.

Dunmore highlighted the recent arrival of the term "New Speakers" in the debate on Scottish Gaelic. Scottish policy makers frequently use the term for referring to the importance that long-term education, including on higher levels, plays in the revitalisation of Gaelic. Dunmore then discussed the results of a 2015 study which analysed the role that Gaelic plays in the day-to-day lives of Gaelic speakers, the beliefs and ideologies they have with regard to Gaelic, and how those beliefs affect language practices and prospects for the maintenance of Gaelic for future generations. The results showed that the majority of respondents used Gaelic only infrequently, especially in their home environment. Dunmore also presented a number of recent studies conducted with regard to Gaelic speakers, showing that pronunciation and vocabulary diverge between New Speakers and "traditional" speakers of Gaelic.

Dunmore concluded his paper by noting that more research was needed for understanding what distinguished New Speakers from traditional speakers, and on the role of their identification with the language for the future of Gaelic.

4 Round-table Discussion

The seminar concluded with a discussion of all contributors on the questions raised during the day, chaired by Sanita Lazdiņa and Heiko F. Marten. They opened the debate by providing a short summary of the main issues raised in the papers. Several topics were identified which

had kept re-occurring throughout the day, most prominently identity issues of New Speakers, motivations for learning and using a language, challenges in language learning for both learners and teachers, issues of language policy, and opportunities to use and practice a language as a New Speaker on one's way to more proficiency and societal integration.

As the introductory question to the panel, Marten asked where the participants saw problems in using a language as a New Speaker. Ērika Pičukāne argued that one of the major problems among speakers of Latvian is that people tended to switch to English or Russian when talking to foreigners, and thus would not allow New Speakers to use their acquired Latvian language skills. Coming back to her focus on Latgalian, Vineta Vilcāne argued that she saw fewer problems regarding spoken Latgalian, emphasising instead the needs to create opportunities for using written Latgalian. According to her, it was usually impossible to submit documents in Latgalian and that grammatical rules for Latgalian usually were not enforced, resulting in non-standard writing. Vilcāne argued that the underlying problem of Latgalian was the lack of self-esteem among many speakers of Latgalian based on the history of negative attitudes by many Latvians from other regions which results in feeling ashamed of using Latgalian in public. She quite directly accused the Latvian state of not supporting Latgalian sufficiently, feeling that it had given no clear message of the value of Latgalian. She suggested teaching Latgalian at schools in order to overcome the lack of skills as well as of confidence among users of Latgalian. A member of the audience asked Vilcāne whether speakers of Latgalian were ready to accept New Speakers and other outsiders as part of their community. Vilcāne admitted that there were speakers that believed that Latgalian belonged only to the core community, and that those people were often not open to welcoming New Speakers.

On the question of Latgalian, a discussion between Sanita Lazdiņa and Vineta Vilcāne evolved. Lazdiņa raised doubts about some of Vilcāne's conclusions. Drawing on Stuart Dunmore's paper on Scotland, she pointed out that introducing Gaelic as a school subject did not necessarily lead to the learners actually being motivated to learn and use the language. She also disagreed with Vilcāne's focus on the necessity of a strictly grammatically correct usage of Latgalian, instead putting forward that creating opportunities for using a language in itself was more important than its correct use. Sjaak Kroon interjected in this discussion with a remark that it should be made clear whether "teaching a language" implies adapting a normative sense (as required by schools and other formal contexts), or whether it should be taught as a language for everyday purposes, where "correctness" according to official norms was less important. He argued that substantial differences should be made in the ways how a language is taught, depending on the target audience. He made a strong point that practices of multilingualism, of code-switching and of incorporating any linguistic means available to an individual should be given priority over discussions of a "correct" use of terminology, in particular with regard to purist tendencies mentioned by participants from the audience with regard to traditions of "eradicating" loan words from Standard Latvian.

Another point which was taken up again in the discussion was the topic of Russophones in Latvia. Marina Kručāne stated that many Russian parents send their children to Russian-speaking minority schools because of a perception that they would not be able to preserve their culture and traditions in other ways, and that this served to alienate them from their Latvian peers. In this context, Kručāne made the – in the political context of Latvia – quite provocative suggestion to close down the minority schools. As a result, all school children in Latvia would be integrated in one type of Latvian-dominant schools which could instead offer optional courses on Russian language and culture for Russian L1 speakers. She admitted that this view is considered very unpopular by large parts of the Russophone community.

Marten agreed that this might be one possible way of overcoming segregation between ethnic Latvians and Russophones which continues to exist in parts of Latvian society. Lazdiņa and Gunta Kļava commented that most Russophones in Latvia already had incorporated parts of Latvianness into their identities. Lazdiņa quoted a study which showed that Russian schoolchildren identified themselves as Russian-speaking Latvians rather than Russians, and Kļava claimed that over 50% of Russian parents already sent their children to Latvian-speaking schools so that they could learn Latvian as early as possible, if their home environments did not provide for this. However, a fear of political backlash stopped the Latvian state from abolishing minority schools.

In this context, Kroon returned to his paper in which he had discussed the situation of Chinese schools in the Netherlands. As a counterexample, he pointed out that these privately organised and funded Saturday schools added linguistic and cultural knowledge about China to the general education which young persons with a Chinese background receive in mainstream Dutch schools and universities. He argued, however, that most Chinese students had rather little interest in traditional Chinese culture and learnt Chinese mostly for economic purposes – thereby stressing their Dutch identity more than the Chinese identity of their ancestors.

Coming back to the topic of motivation, Stuart Dunmore raised the issue that it was important to communicate the value of a language from the top level, as it was very difficult otherwise to motivate New Speakers to learn the language. Lazdiņa agreed, but pointed out that state support and funding was not sufficient to generate motivation among the learners. Language policies also had to be supported by bottom-up initiatives in order to be successful. Vilcāne felt that support from the top, in the form of authority figures, was still very important also in the Latgalian case. She raised the example of a Latgalian music group as a possible authority which could attract in particular young New Speakers, but at the same time that parts of the Latgalian community dismissed younger users of the language due to their poorer use of Latgalian. She again emphasised the importance of using Latgalian correctly, fearing that showing tolerance for errors might distort the language. Members from the audience reacted to this – they disagreed by arguing that it should be possible to learn simply “for fun”, pointing out that many people used Latvian (and other languages) in non-standard ways in the social media. In total, however, there was agreement that both top-down and bottom-up initiatives, symbols and authorities would be needed to create spaces for New Speakers and for successful language activism in general.

Marten then raised the question to the panel of how linguists might be able to convince politics of the need of language policy reforms. Dunmore said that the only way would be to write more on the topic, and thus raise publicity. Kroon, instead, highlighted the difference between research *on* policy and research *for* policy. He used the example of the previous Dutch colony of Suriname, which still uses Dutch as the official language, even though the country has been independent since 1975. He told that political changes prevented language policy changes – language policies initiated by one President were abolished as soon as his successor was elected. Kroon used this example as an illustration of the limited impact of scholars in many situations – while research can generate ideas and make suggestions to policy-makers, the implementation of policy suggestions is much more difficult and depends on the understanding and dedication of politicians.

As a final point and in order to get back to the main idea of the event – to introduce the “New Speakers” concept to the Latvian context – Marten asked the panel whether or not, after

discussing the term for one day, the term “New Speakers” made sense in the Latvian situation. According to Dunmore, the term may be usefully applied to Latvia with regard to traditional or autochthonous language users in their attempts to increase acceptance and opportunities to use their varieties. The seminar had shown that there were clear parallels between speakers of Latgalians and minorities from Western Europe in their interest in creating new speakers of their language. Pičukāne agreed that, in her opinion, the term New Speakers did indeed make sense in Latvia, as it replaced a number of clumsy descriptions and euphemisms, such as “third-country citizens” or “asylum seekers”, that were in regular use. Kroon, on the contrary, was more sceptical regarding the term New Speakers in general, whether in Latvia or outside it. He argued that it did not necessarily describe an entirely new phenomenon; the difference between “Old” and “New” Speakers was gradual and impossible to define precisely and he questioned to which degree it added any true value as an academic term to the discussion in linguistic circles. He acknowledged, however, that the phrase made sense from a political and activist standpoint as a useful label for many groups.

Marten and Lazdiņa closed the discussion with a short summary of the arguments presented.

5 Conclusion

In total, the following conclusions summarize the attempt of the seminar to apply the concept of New Speakers to the context of Latvia in the light of some of the main themes discussed in the COST Action on New Speakers throughout the past years:

- The term “New Speakers” may indeed meaningfully be applied to the situation in Latvia. In particular with regard to more recent migrants, the situation in Latvia resembles – on a lower numerical scale – demographic changes in other European countries. The situation of Latgalian may be compared to autochthonous minority languages in Western Europe, in particular regarding the role of the written language. As in many other countries, new users of Latgalian are torn between gaining acceptance in the traditional language community and attempts to gain more opportunities for their variety in society at large. The situation of Russian speakers is, in some respects, different to sizeable linguistic minorities in many countries – in particular with regard to the history of migration during the occupation of Latvia by the Soviet Union which resulted in many Russophones traditionally seeing no necessity in acquiring Latvian language skills. Yet, also here parallels to experiences with societal integration of larger migrant groups in Western Europe who have lived in Western European countries since the second half of the 20th century may be seen. In total, Latvia may therefore certainly benefit from previous experiences elsewhere and from discussions around the term “New Speakers”.
- It is important to understand that possible new discussions under the umbrella term of “New Speakers” obviously take up points raised previously in other debates – with regard to the acquisition of Latvian as the national language, to overcoming social segregation between ethnic Latvians and Russophones and to revitalization efforts of Latgalian activists. In this sense, the “New Speakers” concept introduces new perspectives and discourse strands rather than creating entirely new societal debates.
- Language policies are at the core of most debates on New Speakers. These include possible discrepancies between policies “from above” and “from below” on all levels –

i.e. by government agencies, by institutions of all kinds opposed to activists and individuals. Important fields are the creation of usage opportunities for New Speakers and, in particular, of educational opportunities. In this, the traditional language policy debates in Latvia may meaningfully be sided by more recent topics; in total these provide a picture of the linguistic diversity of the country. At the same time, academic debates and research do not automatically influence language policies; ways of engaging in discussions with stakeholders are therefore an important aspect of spreading ideas about New Speakers.

- Issues of power structures between societal mainstream and minorities or peripheral groups were identified as a common thread among the different groups of speakers represented in the discussion. Ethnic Latvians were partly just as sceptical towards migrant New Speakers as were parts of the Latgalian community or Russophones when categorizing speakers between “us” and “them”. Of major importance in this is a mutual understanding of different perceptions of linguistic (and other social) realities.
- A major challenge for policy makers is therefore to contribute to viewing Latvia as a dynamic, multilingual society which overcomes essentialist and nationalist views on links between language, culture and identity. The use of another language by members of one’s own linguistic or ethnic group (e.g. expressed in the refusal of some Russophones to send their children to schooling in Latvian) or the use of one’s own language by New Speakers (e.g. the use of non-standard forms) must not be seen as a potential “threat” to individual or collective identities. Only in this way, more tolerance and bridges between different groups of – old and new – speakers in Latvian society can be built.
- Multilingual practices which draw upon the entire language repertoire of an individual should be accepted. It is a normal way of how people use language – monolingual attitudes which reject translanguaging and stipulate strong norms are detrimental to successful language acquisition, to using a language confidently as a New Speaker and, in consequence, to societal integration.
- It became apparent that education is at the core of handling the needs of New Speakers and of integrating them into society. This relates not only to language education as such, but more broadly to education of citizens in a democratic and pluralistic society which takes into account different patterns of social groups, their perspectives on history and contemporary societal developments, and tolerance towards their needs and wishes. At the same time, education of New Speakers provides an opportunity to strengthen intellectual competence in general, not least with regard to media competence and resilience to influences by anti-democratic and other populist forces in times of “fake news”.