

Participation through Language: Actors, Practices, Ideologies Funded by ZHAW Research Focus Societal Integration

Abstract

Language plays a powerful role in shaping policy-making activities, legal revisions, and curriculum reforms that are undertaken for the purpose of societal and professional integration, in both Swiss and European contexts.

This project is concerned with 'linguistic participation' on a political, social and individual level. As understood in this project, linguistic participation relates to a broad understanding of processes taking place in multilingual societies. They include multimodal and plurilingual resources of all citizens, ranging from their ideas on democratic participation to general and institutional assumptions of social and professional responsibility.

The project aims to build a European network in order to identify, examine, and discuss the actors, practices, and ideologies that impact, and which are instrumental to, linguistic integration. The objective of this network is to establish international, transdisciplinary and transformative cooperation that points to common lines of research and development needs at regional, national and supranational levels.

Four working groups focus on the following topics:

1. Language ideologies in discourses

Linguistic participation is based on language ideologies linking thematic aspects from politics, society, and education. Language ideologies manifest themselves powerfully, especially in professional, mass media and social media-based discourses.

This working group will analyse language ideologies of actors and communication-related practices/actions. Based on empirical data we will explore ideological effects and reflect them from different perspectives.

For educational contexts, this means to examine how ideological assumptions influence language policy decisions in formal and informal educational contexts. One focus lies on how educational policy stakeholders and authorities conceptualize the tension between linguistic diversity and the internationalization of education. Employability constitutes a strong driver of language policies in educational contexts, emphasising language training for professional purposes and the use of international languages such as English. This educational trend contrasts with national or regional language policies which are oriented towards societal cohesion and integration, promoting an appreciation of linguistic and cultural diversity.

2. Concepts of language promotion between inclusion and exclusion

This working group deals with concept of language promotion as it relates to language ideologies and policies. It examines the relationship between language comprehension (e.g. language as an instrument, language as a resource), teaching methods, curricula and the

inclusive and exclusive effects of language assessments. It reflects on the effects of language promotion concepts on individual development and processes of participation in a democratic society.

3. Intercultural competence in linguistic practices

Processes of participation and Integration are essentially made possible by language and via communication. In addition, strengthening intercultural competence is necessary in order to promote social cohesion. Linguistic participation, therefore, requires linguistic practices characterised by intercultural competence. This work group examines linguistic practices as a locus of interaction where institutionally and culturally different concepts in perception and (inter-)action may converge and can be reconsidered critically. Since linguistic practices are enacted mostly in institutional contexts, thereby putting course instructors in an agent role and language learners in a client role, a guiding question will be how intercultural competences can empower students and learners to become actors in social discourses and use language in an inclusive manner, both in professional and everyday environments.

4. Understandable communication between experts and laypersons

We live in a world characterised by specialisation. The comprehensibility of specialised content (e.g. contracts, diagnoses in the event of illness or billing after treatment) is one of the central prerequisites for integration into and participation in this specialised world. Understanding particular challenges of professional communication and the comprehension obstacles in the communication between lay people and experts is the core objective of this working group. The aim is to reflect on the success of knowledge transfer to the general public and to propose solutions for inclusive knowledge communication.

Further Information

We will be hosting the conference “Participation through Language: Actors, Practices, Ideologies” from 25-26 March 2021 in Winterthur, Switzerland. You can register on our [website](#) and also submit an abstract if you would like to present your research.