THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND TEACHING¹

Aleksandra VRANES²

ABSTRACT

The mere existence of a library is already a step on the way of nurturing spiritual diversity and curiosity, which is a prerequisite for affirmation of reading. Each library has its historical duration, social responsibility and influence in contemporary social moment, implemented through supporting the development and use of information and communication technologies, education of librarians and users. Public and school libraries have a special responsibility as they are educating the future generations of readers, who are the backbone of every culture and science, and society as a whole. Libraries, with their digital collections of old and rare books, manuscripts, sound and visual recordings and other forms of non-book materials, with access to databases, entirely, for financial reasons, inaccessible to individuals, with their specialist profile and well-thought collections, with their professional staff, trained to conduct a wide range of cultural events and educational programs, are becoming, in a true sense of the word, parallel universities. They gain a special quality due to the element of voluntariness of their use. Already obsolete voluntarism and liberalness of libraries give the impression of freedom and casualness even to serious projects, such as the foreign language learning. The knowledge arising from the recreational and creative, rather than educational reasons, is always easier and faster to master. The library expands its meaning and is easily transferable to the personal computer, thus we can safely say that it is personalized. As such, it provides a new quality of immediacy in language teaching and introduces other cultures.

Key Words: Libraries, language education, teaching, parallel universities, foreign language learning, cultures.

1. INTRODUCTION

In times of economic, political, national and state divisions, we consider the issues that associate the cultural being and its survival with the very essence of the language, sometimes from media-polemical and often from scientific-research aspect. Language, whether it belongs to the alleged major languages, or to the ones popularly called endangered languages, is both myth and reality, and has its own ethnic, social, ideological, political, communicative dimension.

¹ This study was presented as oral paper at the I. International Symposium on Language Education and Teaching.
² Prof. Dr. Aleksandra Vranes, The University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philology, e-mail: aleksandra.vranes@gmail.com
According to the theories of Swaan (Swaan, 2001) and Calvet (Calvet, 2002) languages are organized similarly to galactic constellations, and thus the communication takes place at three levels: a) at the level of the mother tongue, the popular speech of the smallest language community, b) at the level of political administration unity with its official national language, c) the international level where dominates the alleged “imperial” language, which is frequently lexically and metaphorically weakened as the general language of understanding. (Mufwene, 2005: 32-33).

The Importance of Language Education and Efforts of European Institutions as to Increase Bilingualism and Multilingualism

Man’s domination over nature is established through language, writing and communication ever since the Old Testament. Language, as an essential marker of cultural identity, in its diverse complexity, regardless of the territory and population whose native language represents, as well as of its dialect branching, is the carrier of its unique codification, historical and cultural heritage. Regardless of whether we are talking about the language of the Middle Ages, in which the idea of theocentrism was dominant, or about the periods of national awakening and ethnocentrism, or, of more recent times, in which the anthropocentrism sometimes gives way to profitcentrism, belonging of an individual to a particular language or languages is the quest for meaning, cultural and historical identity, national being and communication code that is meaningless and non-existent without personal or national entity.

The Council of Europe, European Parliament, European Commission, United Nations, UNESCO, and all of us who are in constant communication with them, out of necessity or through our projects, are continually drawing attention to all of the aforementioned, as well as expressing the need for lifelong learning of other languages and expansion of plurilingualism as a predecessor of multicultural understanding. The efforts of European institutions to make available the most important documents in as many languages as possible, to support philological studies, especially the studies of simultaneous and consecutive interpreting, to remove language barriers by expanding channels of communication via the Internet, digital media, databases, distance learning, through migration of students and teachers, lead towards an increase of bilingualism and multilingualism, but also strives at achieving a greater level of commercial profitability and competitiveness of individuals and companies.

2. METHOD

Considering that the preservation and cultivation of linguistic and cultural diversity is equally important for the humankind as is the care for biodiversity for the survival of man and nature, the obligation of every individual, and above all of philologists, is to conserve linguistic diversity, as we are thus preserving cultural heritage as well as our unique view of
the world. Faculties of philology are natural bases for such ideas, given that by learning the
tongue through specific programs we are not only mastering the vocabulary, morphology,
syntax, phonetics of language, but also the history, culture, literature, and spirituality of a
particular nation.

Therefore, every country, and within it the institutions dealing with philological education, or
providing support to philology studies, is faced with a number of tasks:

1) defining language education policy at the national level;
2) defining the core of the profession and creating a framework of study for foreign
language and cultural studies, in accordance with national and international
recommendations;
3) harmonization of competencies and learning outcomes at all levels of education
from elementary through high school to university;
4) technological improvement of language teaching at all levels through the use of
language labs and digital sources of written and read texts, without which there is no
successful teaching;
5) introduction of a wider range of languages in the regular educational system and
devoting special attention to teaching languages of smaller ethnic groups;
6) the sustainability of quality of the philological studies;
7) developing opportunities for cooperation between national and international
institutions, especially at the level of master or doctoral studies;
8) education for professions recognized within the labor market;
9) promotion of foreign languages and native language and culture;
10) development of modularity, as well as electiveness of philology and cultural
courses as to foster the plurilingualism;
11) connecting the language studies with other related scientific disciplines, such as
the study of literature, archival science, librarianship, culturology, museology,
communication studies, but also with entirely different disciplines, so that the placement of
scientific achievements could have a higher level of reliability and promptness of recognition
thanks to the appropriate linguistic competencies.

The Impact of Libraries on Extracurricular Activities and their Cooperation with the
Educational Sector

Regular teaching at all levels of education gives the best results in the acquisition of language
competencies if it is supported by extracurricular activities. Libraries as the most widespread
and most democratic institutions of a society, support the educational process.

The library should provide:
- availability, evaluation, interpretation of information and knowledge;
- communication with new and fresh ideas;
- affirmation and development of critical thinking;
• orientation towards all the students and teachers regardless of the degree of their intellectual and emotional potential;
• involvement in professional media programs and conferences;
• access to relevant and current materials;
• activation of the individual potential of each user;
• the awakening of the willingness and develop capacity for self-development;
• recognition of the artistic, psychological, physiological characteristics of each individual as to direct him/her towards the appropriate literature and life calling.

The library should become an information and communication center, which possesses diverse library materials processed from multiple aspects, and should present it to the reading public in a skillful, knowledgeable, inspiring and interesting way through stimulating programs as to increase the readership. The cooperation of libraries with schools and universities can and should be carried out in the field of:

1) coordination of procurement of library materials;
2) abolition of social stereotypes associated, for example, with the development of recreational and creative reading;
3) providing instruction on the use of computer software and multimedia in language teaching;
4) fostering experimental reading classes or discussion forums on language, literature and cultural issues;
5) placement of ideas of equality on religious, national, cultural, social, sexual, linguistic, personal plan;
6) the dedication of the state and educational system to conduct teaching of a larger number of languages in schools and outside of schools in a professional manner, organized in accordance with the European recommendations for language learning (working in small groups, while using appropriate equipment and methodology) in such way that the children can acquire knowledge and confidence to move in multilingual and multicultural environment from an early age;
7) training staff as to acquire adequate linguistic competence and knowledge, as well as pedagogical-psychological and methodological knowledge, abilities and skills, in order to create professionals and humanists, who will be communicating with students on a daily basis, whose knowledge of languages, European values, democratic and humanistic achievements is at an enviable level, so that their students could one day be open for a dialogue of cultures and consciously promote their own culture;
8) enabling application of the methodology and methods of foreign languages teaching in such a way that ensures that the time spent in active and high-quality language learning would be directly proportional to the functional knowledge of the participants.

3. FINDINGS

Within *The Blue Day Book* by Bradley Trevor Greive, there is an image of a confused puppy crouched in front of an elevated big bone and under this image it says: "Do not be afraid to
bite more than you can chew."\(^3\) Nowadays, the reading requires the time that we do not have, money we try to gain, knowledge of multiple media, not only printed materials, which elude us every day, interests that are heterogeneous, communicator that is controlled by our will. "Indeed, the act of reading is by its nature lonelier than other means of communication and artistic expression, but the solitude of a writer and reader is not asocial. It is just one of many ways to find each other. (...) It is precisely this value of the book that should be maintained and developed, since its main task is to establish unlimited, permanent and always new communication between people."\(^4\) Reading habits are conditioned by: family tradition, educational level of the individual and his immediate environment, social conditions, mental and physical abilities, quality of curricula design and implementation at various levels of education, national development plan of publishing, bookselling and librarianship. But reading in the original language of the copy provides particular quality.

The mere existence of a library in one place is already a step on the way of nurturing spiritual diversity and curiosity, which is a prerequisite for affirmation of reading. Each library has its historical duration, social responsibility and influence in contemporary social moment, implemented through supporting the development and use of information and communication technologies, education of librarians and users. Public and school libraries have a special responsibility as they are educating the future generations of readers, who are the backbone of every culture and science, and society as a whole.

**The Role of Libraries in Language Education and Teaching**

Public and school libraries, established across Europe in the 19th century, followed the organized and state guided development of education, which lasted during the forties of the last century on the Serbian territory, supported by legislation and constitutional provisions. UNESCO’s recommendation of 1971, laws on library activities that acknowledged this recommendation and the current needs of education and librarianship pay attention, although insufficiently, and only formally, to school libraries, especially those related to educational institutions whose work is based mainly on modest financial possibilities of institutions to which they belong and enthusiasm of individuals. The efforts of the Ministries of Education, Science and Culture and the various institutes, as well as procedures for the improvement of education, should be formally, legally and essentially directed at strengthening the role of libraries in developing multilinguality of school population, as the multicultural tolerance and understanding is achieved in this way.

Libraries, with their digital collections of old and rare books, manuscripts, sound and visual recordings and other forms of non-book materials, with access to databases, completely, for financial reasons, inaccessible to individuals, with their specialist profile and well-thought collections, their professional staff, trained to conduct a wide range of cultural events and

---


educational programs, are becoming, in a true sense of the word parallel universities. They gain a special quality due to the element of voluntariness of their use. Already obsolete voluntarism and liberalness of libraries give the impression of freedom and casualness even to serious research projects, such as the foreign language learning. The knowledge arising from the recreational and creative, rather than educational reasons, is always easier and faster to master. The library expands its meaning and is easily transferable to the personal computer, thus we can safely say that it is personalized. As such, it provides a new quality of immediacy in language teaching and getting to know other cultures.

4. CONCLUSION

In a situation when the formal education systems of most countries are giving up on organizing the teaching of foreign languages, although they declaratively and proclamatory highlight the importance of multiculturalism, universities in which several foreign languages are being thought, such as the Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade, offering the studies of 35 languages, represents a real rarity. Some of the languages thought at the Faculty of Philology include: English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Arabic, Japanese, Chinese, Turkish, Russian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Ukrainian, Scandinavian and many others. Each department of the Faculty of Philology has its own library, which helps students to achieve better language learning outcomes, bearing in mind the emphasis that the Faculty of Philology puts on the importance and the role of libraries in language education and teaching. Namely, we believe that libraries should take on the role of educational centers, since they are not burdened with accreditation processes, methodological outdated statistical indicators of social needs, means and principles. However, that does not mean that libraries should not be guided by standardization and harmonization of standards in achieving language skills and concepts of inter- and multiculturality. This only implies that they should participate extensively in foreign language teaching.
REFERENCES

Bradley Trevor Grieve  

Robert Eskarpit  

Aleksandra Vraneš, Ljiljana Marković and Jasna Janićijević  
Vraneš, А. Marković, Lj. Janićijević, Ј. (2012). Od rukopisa do biblioteke: pojmovnik (From the manuscript to the library: glossary). Belgrade: Faculty of Philology.

Marion Wilson  

Barbara Bultmann  

Jussi Valimaa and Oili-Helena Ylijoki  

David Skyrme  

Thomas T. Surprenant and Claudia A. Perry  

William H. Davidow and Michael S. Malone  