Discussion Paper: Internationalization, Multi-lingual & Multi-cultural agenda

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1. Preamble

Mono-lingualism and mono-culturalism are neither a solution for Europe nor for the world in general, as they would endanger cultural ecosystems and annihilate every notion of singular identity. A social necessity is, instead, the respect for languages, cultures and identities. Such respect can, however, only be fostered if people understand the impact that linguistic and cultural differences have even in international organisations or environments where only one working language is being used.

That people feel very strongly about their languages and cultures, that they wish to express themselves and have access to information and knowledge in their own language and that there is a direct link between language, culture and identity has been neglected for too much time. "English only" was seen to be the solution not only for the problems of communication but also for the market. Furthermore the Anglo-American way of doing things was seen as a mandatory model in many countries.

With the erosion of traditional patterns of identification such as national states brought about by developments like European unification, independance of former colonial states, globalization of the market and not least the overcoming of traditional borders by digital media, the importance of such questions comes to the forefront again. The UNESCO has even felt the need to declare that humans have a right to access (digital) information and knowledge in their own language. Furthermore, both the Tunis Commitment and the Tunis Agenda consider the respect for cultural and linguistic diversity and identity one of the most important agendas.

While the virtual market and online firms have already realised the importance of such questions and therefore not only make their web pages available in many languages but also proclaim that cultural differences have to be taken into account as well, national governments and institutions in general and universities and learned societies in particular are lagging very much behind in this development.

Mono-lingualism and mono-culturalism are, however, not a solution for universities or learned societies such as the ADHO and its constituent member associations either.

- It is necessary, instead, to recognise first of all that there is a strong relationship between languages, academic cultures and traditions:

This relationship is even acted out when papers or posters are proposed and / or presented in English and is responsible for the differeneces in style, level of language, form and content and so on of abstracts, papers or posters, slides, handouts presented by non-English speakers in general and by people who have not been socialised in the Anglo-American way in particular. This relationship becomes crucial when proposals to our conferences and / or journals are being evaluated according to criteria which for historical reasons have been developed with Anglo-American culture in mind and by specialists who belong to the same cultures and are not conscious of such a relationship and the differences it entails.

- It is necessary, furthermore, to recognise that linguistic barriers do not only exist with respect to languages other than English, but to texts written in English as well.

In fact, also texts written in English are not always readily received, notwithstanding the fact that English is understood by a great majority of scholars. One proof is, for example, that many approaches in Corpus- or Socio-Linguistics are only known in English speaking countries notwithstanding the fact that they would be an enrichment to the disciplines on the whole.

2. Aims & objectives

As the key objectives of the *ADHO* are to create an associational framework that supports the promotion of the scholarly application of advanced technologies in humanities research and teaching as effectively as possible across a wide range of countries and possibly world wide, there is an imperative for ADHO to take the multi-lingual and multi-cultural issue seriously and to develop adequate policies and frameworks.

The same goes for the already existing regional chapters, i.e. the *Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing* (ALLC), the *Association for Computers in the Humanities* (ACH), which, at present, are the constituent organisations of ADHO, and which themselves operate in very complex linguistic and cultural settings. The same will apply to any regional chapter to be instituted in the future.

Successful handling of multi-lingualism and multi-culturalism is crucial to our credibility as an international scholarly organization, and also to our ability to attract the membership (not just in numbers, but in breadth of constituency) that the organization will need in order to thrive. The Digital Humanities community has to share knowledge and ideas more widely - and programmatically - across language and cultural barriers. Thus, the goal has to be to create an organization within which there are significantly reduced barriers to scholarly communication and in which the collaborative atmosphere and openness towards new, unusual and innovative approaches that has been the hallmark of ACH / ALLC can be extended to speakers of languages other than English and of diverse cultures.

In order to overcome these barriers ADHO and its constituent regional chapters, ALLC and ACH, and the new chapters to be created in the future, have to take the multi-lingual, multi-cultural setting in which they operate and from which they draw their membership into account, promoting inside the scientific community at the same time a fundamental shift in attitude with respect to linguistic and cultural differences.

This means that ADHO as a potential world organisation

- has to develop a general policy reflecting its commitment to multi-culturalism and multi-lingualism,
- has to make its information available in as many languages as possible,
- has to study and find ways of promoting multi-lingual publications,
- has to promote the idea, that it is important to publish in different languages,
- has to encourage multi-lingual conferences to become common practice,
- has to promote cultural and linguistic openness within its community,
- has to reform the criteria for the evaluation of proposals,
- has to publish guidelines for culturally and linguistically sensitive evaluators.

ADHO's policy and activities are to be seen as a framework inside which the regional chapters position themselves. Notwithstanding the absolute commitment to multi-culturalism and multi-lingualism within each of the regional chapters, the chapters can limit their coverage to the languages of the region they focus on. The chapters can, furthermore, adapt the criteria for evaluation and the guidelines for evaluators to the reality of the respective community. The multi-lingual multi-cultural agenda may thus have a slightly different shape from one regional chapter to the other.

3. Realisation

3.1. Multi-lingual web pages

Right from the start, the web-pages of ADHO which are to be created need to provide for a way to tackle multi-lingualism. All the documents which are of interest for the membership and the public need to be provided in several languages. Furthermore, the integration of documents in more languages has to be planned for. Some type of database where XML-texts are kept and can be updated easily might be a solution. Once developed this should be put at the disposal of the regional chapters as well.

Documents like minutes, reports and so on which concern above all the work of the committee are excluded. They will only be drawn up in the working language. The working language might be different from one regional chapter to the other.

3.2 Multi-lingual publications

It has to become important to publish one's ideas and research results in different languages. This does not mean, necessarily, that people have to have their original paper translated. Instead, they have to be encouraged to publish their ideas themselves in the different languages they know. This has to be seen as a contribution to the spreading of ideas and to the building-up of knowledge and not, as it is mostly the case now, as a way to increase the number of one's publications.

All papers, i.e. also papers in English, have to be preceded by an abstract in at least one other language. The decision in which language the abstract is to be written lies with the authors of the

papers. Whenever possible authors will write the abstracts themselves.

3.3 Multi-lingual conferences

- multi-lingual conference web sites
- one version has to be in the language of the country where the conference takes place
- multi-lingual call for papers
- several working languages
- ask for abstracts in at least two languages (one of the languages has to be among the conference languages)
- both versions of the abstract are to be published on the conference web site
- provide translation facilities and simultaneous interpretation

3.4 Evaluation

- establish a committee composed of members of the constituent organisations from different regions to revise the evaluation criteria and to draw up guidelines for culturally and linguistically sensitive evaluators
- build up a list of multi-lingual and culturally open minded reviewers

3.5 Financial implications

There are certainly financial implications not only for ADHO, but also for the regional chapters which need to be studied carefully.

The following would seem to be possible ways of solution:

- If we were able to turn multi-lingualism into a prestigious thing, then members should be prepared to pay their share to the regional chapters and through these to the umbrella organisation.
- Funding possibilities which exist on different levels need to be studied thoroughly. To do this, a researcher needs to be employed.
- Institutions which at the national level aim at the conservation and promulgation of the respective language and associations of translators / interpreters need to be approached.
- Providing advance translation by creating a compensation or incentive structure for organization members who assist in translation services could reduce the need for simultaneous interpretation.
- A bid could go out to universities which are doing translation studies and would be willing to create or already have created a spin off enterprise.
- If translation and interpretation services are provided there could be some increase in conference fees (particularly if the conference is larger than at present).
- Sponsoring organizations could be asked for contributions as part of their larger plan for handling multi-lingualism.

5. Final remarks

All this implies certainly quite a lot of work and a change in attitudes. On the other hand we now have a medium at our disposal which allows for a lot of flexibility and variety. Why should we not use the possibilities it offers and accept, instead, that our richness of cultures / languages /

identities is reduced only because it is simpler?

Furthermore, acknowledging the importance of language and culture for identity and trying to overcome at the same time the linguistic and cultural barriers by exploiting the possibilities offered by digital media and virtual spaces can lead to new research and the development of innovative problem solutions.