

Minutes of the 12th International CertiLingua Annual Conference

venue: Landespräventionsrat Hannover / Lower Saxony

13 – 14 September 2018

DAY 1

13.09.2018 Hannover

Welcoming Words

Jens Bolhöfer welcomes the participants of the 12th Annual International CertiLingua Conference. He is speaking on behalf of the Minister of Education of Lower Saxony, Grant Hendrik Tonne, who is very happy to be hosting this year's conference, but regrets not being able to welcome this year's participants personally.

In his address, he highlights the importance of CertiLingua as a label of excellence not only in Germany, since competences in foreign languages and the intercultural domain are a prerequisite to successfully act in an international and globalized world. CertiLingua fosters these competences and students do not only give proof of them in a scholastic setting, but also in the compulsory face-to-face project that requires their personal involvement and thus makes these competences so sustainable. The minister hopes that the label will continue to be successful and will continue to grow throughout Europe.

Dr. Beatrice Schmitz welcomes the participants on behalf of the International Steering Group. She connects the CertiLingua programme with the developments of European language policies. CertiLingua is a European label and is founded on European key documents such as the Common European Framework of Reference. It is the aim of the label to enable students to act competently in a united Europe. The Bologna goals of mastering two foreign languages on a high level and of developing a European identity are also central ideas of CertiLingua.

The label has clearly led to a diversification in language education at the participating schools and to a diversification in bilingual education (referring to subjects and their working languages likewise). The curricula are perceived as "fuller" and "broader" in terms of European issues at CertiLingua schools and schools report of an added prestige.

CertiLingua, therefore, is certainly in line with European concepts of foreign language teaching and learning.

Setting itself apart from a “mere” language certificate, the CertiLingua network has defined its own standards where no European document was to be found and has developed the *CertiLingua Standards of Excellence in Intercultural Competences*. It is therefore seen as a future challenge to be tackled by all members of the CertiLingua Network to disseminate the label’s chances for the European educational landscape (COM 2025!) and at the same time assess potential need for adaption (New Companion Volume).

It is underlined that the CertiLingua principles are cherished (unanimous vote, every contribution counts, everybody does what is within their powers) and that on their basis the CertiLingua Network has proven to be jointly and successfully committed to the idea of connecting people and cultures and will continue its good work in the future.

Dr. Beatrice Schmitz cordially welcomes all representatives of the Member States that were able to join the Annual Conference 2018:

- Belinda Steinhuber from Austria,
- Pille Põiklik from Estonia,
- Vicky Gusto from France,
- Grit Orgis from Berlin,
- Jennifer Collin from Brandenburg,
- Martin Eckeberg from Hamburg,
- Jens Bolhöfer from Lower Saxony,
- Michael Grabis from Rheinland Palatinate,
- Rüdiger Möller from Saxony,
- Gisella Langé from Italy,
- Verena Euler from Hesse.

Some representatives were not able to come:

- Eva Engdell from Sweden,
- Ekaterina Smirnova from Perm/Russia,

- Ruth De Sy from Belgium,
- PhDr. Marie Černíková from the Czech Republic,
- Cornelia Becker from Bremen,
- Rolf Knieling from German Schools Abroad,
- Cornelia Schlagowsky from Mecklenburg Western-Pomerania,
- Anka Fehling from Thuringia.

The Relevance of Foreign Language within the Volkswagen Group

Susanne Ak, Volkswagen AG

Ms Ak introduces herself as a former language teacher who is now with the Global Assignments department of Volkswagen Group. She was head of 4 British and International Schools and has been with Volkswagen since 2011. She stresses the importance of English within VW: It is used at international conferences, for the talent pool, for vehicle presentations at trade fairs, and is the lingua franca used everywhere in the company as soon as one person does not speak the language of the others.

In addition, VW supports employers in learning the languages of host countries. Management career development requires an assignment abroad. Car plant tours are given in various languages, intercultural training is compulsory when going abroad. The “Wanderjahre” programme offers dual careers to students and fully-qualified professionals at the start of their career and comprises up to 12 months abroad.

She points out that Wolfsburg is a truly international town. 141 nationalities work for VW! There are 4300 foreign service employees with 2370 partners and 2780 children, all of which VW supports in going abroad.

The basis for such programmes to work is that people are prepared to be mobile and have a least one foreign language. Assignment directions have become increasingly complex, families become more multilingual, although German is still an important language for VW – in host locations new employees have to speak German (and English). VW is a German company “Mutter Volkswagen” but acts globally, and English – and other languages - have become a normality.

The CertiLingua Excellence Label develops foreign language competencies, not only in English but also in other languages that are also extremely important to VW. Ms Ak also stresses the importance of intercultural competences. Not being able to speak/write perfectly can be compensated, however intercultural competences are an absolute must. Intercultural competences lead to high emotional intelligence, to empathy, mobility, globality, risk-taking attitudes and reduce emotional barriers. Cross-cultural links are seen to strengthen the company in the long-term. VW therefore wants and needs young people with such a mindset in its global group.

The label's goals are thus very much in line with policies at VW and Suanne Ak offers cooperation of the CertiLingua project with the VW funding/sponsoring system.

An Example

Sarah is 20 years old, studying law and human resources in Wolfenbüttel and currently doing an internship with VW in Wolfsburg. Her parents are from Poland, she was born in Germany. She was raised bilingually with German and Polish. In school she learned English and Spanish. At the age of 12 she experienced the internationality of VW. Her father, working for VW, moved to Russia, afterward to Bratislava, Slovakia, the family followed. She attended the German school there and learned Spanish and Slovak there. She now speaks 5 languages.

Martin Eckeberg asks about the exact nature of intercultural training. Ms. Ak refers to their global mobility policy. Part of the policy refers to the family and partners. They also take part in a compulsory one or two-day workshop that prepares employers and their families for the main differences to their home country before going abroad.

Defining and Assessing Intercultural Competence Prof. Michael Byram

Prof. Byram outlines the purpose of the presentation: to provide a basis for discussion and potential development of the *CertiLingua Standards of Excellence in Intercultural Competences*.

Competence(s) can be viewed positively and negatively. In vocational training it is sometimes viewed only as a skill. Competence is, however, usually something positive in an educational context: move away from a traditional curriculum to a richer conception of learning which refers to what people can do. It is the ability to meet complex demands, as, for example, described in the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). There is no definition of competence in the Common Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), old or new, while the RFCDC defines the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant values, skills, knowledge and/or understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities that are presented by a given type of context.

Intercultural competence is this: to respond to intercultural situations. Prof. Byram presents models of intercultural competence. A model, in this context, simplifies, it does not reproduce every detail without simplification. He refers to his own model (1997) and Deardorff's from 2006.

Prof. Byram stresses the particular importance of values as the basis for successful ICC. In the CEFR plurilinguists have a single, inter-related language repertoire that they combine with their general competences and various strategies in order to accomplish tasks. Plurilingual and pluricultural competence are described as two aspects that usually go hand-in-hand. According to Prof. Byram there is no clearly articulated model of pluricultural competence.

As defined by the Council of Europe there is plurilingual and intercultural education. Pluriculturality needs to be distinguished from interculturality. Pluriculturality refers to the capacity to identify with and participate in multiple cultures. Interculturality refers to the capacity to experience and analyse cultural otherness, and to use this experience to reflect on matters that are usually taken for granted within one's own culture and environment (and use it for mediation, interaction and cooperation etc.). Prof. Byram refers to the *CertiLingua Standards of Excellence in Intercultural Competences* and points out that these are a model, yet one without levels.

The CEFR Companion Volume does not assess intercultural competence but pluricultural competence, while the RFCDC contains values, attitudes, skills,

knowledge and critical reflection. It is related to foreign language education. It provides scaled descriptors. For the CertiLingua Network he stresses the importance of sharing examples for criterion-referencing.

Reports from the Member States

Austria

Belinda Steinhuber highlights that the main success is to keep the CertiLingua schools active, which is not an easy feat at the moment. Students are still motivated, but it is becoming harder to keep motivation up, as they have a lot of other things to do as well. Due to that, getting students to a B2 level in their second foreign language has become a challenge.

For the label's recognition and students' motivation it is therefore important to get wider recognition from companies and institutions of higher education. Austria will launch an article in the magazine of the chamber of commerce in Austria to reach companies more effectively.

All in all, the administration regards CertiLingua as an important issue and is eager to keep things going.

Estonia

Pille Põiklik reports on successes in Estonia. The pilot phase has officially been completed. Three schools are accredited. Challenges are issues of motivation, or reaching appropriate levels. The compendium is made available in Estonian to support schools and coordinators. It is intended to get more schools to join the network.

France

Vicky Gusto reports for France where CertiLingua is growing and currently comprises 47 schools in 3 academies. To win new academies is a goal for the future. Foreign languages are English, German, Spanish and Italian. Regular meetings of the schools are held. Support for the label is gained from the industry and President Macron who has stressed the national goal to learn two foreign languages at school. As in many

other Member States, recruiting boys for the label seems to be a challenge and it is hoped that the video documentations will help to change this.

Italy

Gisella Langé reports of clear improvements in the selection process. In Italy, a national committee assesses the documents and project documentations. In the past 10% of the applicants did not meet the requirements. At the moment, 350 candidates are being assessed. The quality of the documentations has been clearly improved. The regions are networking more effectively. 12 regions in Italy participate in the programme. Challenges are seen in better international networking, better recognition from universities and companies. Gisella Langé reminds the CertiLingua community of the revision of 8 key competences with regard to language learning within the EU. There have been slight changes in the makeup and wording and revised recommendations are currently being discussed on foreign languages.

She points out that in this proposal CertiLingua is included as an example of best practice (cf. appendix)

Berlin, Germany

Grit Orgis reports on continuity and stability for CertiLingua in Berlin. Challenges are integrating Chinese and Japanese on level B2. Due to the high workload put on teachers, there is little time for counselling, so Berlin has implemented a central information meeting for all students in the state

Brandenburg

Jennifer Collin is new to the CertiLingua programme, and currently analysing the status quo. There is only one school accredited in the state. Ms Collin will be able to report in more detail next year. A challenge for the school is providing appropriate internships

Hamburg

Martin Eckeberg reports for Hamburg. 6 schools are accredited now (2 new schools). A central achievement is that the number of students taking up a second language has increased. Some of this is due to CertiLingua. Another challenge is harmonising standards, particularly regarding the reflection of intercultural competences. The

numbers of students vary a lot, this is due to public recognition, which must be fostered.

Hesse

Verena Euler reports on 4 success stories in Hesse.

In the past, some project documentations were merely summaries and some students were not awarded the certificate in 2017. This led to a meeting of teachers in Hesse focussing on intercultural competence which helped to increase the quality of the project documentations significantly.

There are two additional schools, 32 in total now. There is a great variety of subjects taught bilingually and more natural science classes have been offered. The possibility of the video-documentation was received positively by the schools with many participating in the pilot phase.

Lower Saxony

Jens Bolhöfer presents a stable number of schools, while one has dropped out, two have applied to join the programme. With Volkswagen a global player could be won as a new supporter and there are also some schools which are participating in the pilot phase for the video documentation.

North Rhine-Westphalia

Jan Gerstenberger reports that the numbers of schools and certificates are stable. The video-documentations are being piloted. There has been a conference of the pilot schools, but results cannot be expected until next year. It is still difficult to provide opportunities for face-to-face projects.

Rhineland-Palatinate

Michael Grabis reports for Rhineland-Palatinate. There are 14 schools accredited at the moment. All 24 candidates were awarded the certificate last academic year. The minister of education wrote a personal letter to the students, which was greatly appreciated. The certificate was awarded at a ceremony together with the university entrance qualification. To support CertiLingua there is an annual meeting at the ministry in Mainz. Teachers are supported in the extra work through resources

provided by the ministry. There is intensive counselling before the students go on their face-to-face encounters, which is considered vital for the high standards in the project documentations and the success of all candidates.

Summing up, Dr. Beatrice Schmitz points out that public recognition remains a challenge for the entire network. One difficulty are the changing contact persons in the companies and universities. This is a field where the network will need to continue to work hard and an effort regarded worth the while in the face of the label's success so far and the values it stands for.

She closes the first day of the conference and Jens Bolhöfer invites the participants to the evening's cultural programme, a visit of the Sprengel Museum, and to dinner afterwards.

DAY 2

14 September 2018

Presentation of workshop results

Work has been continued in three workshops presenting their work to the plenary.

Workshop 1: Intercultural learning: Status Quo – Exchange of Experience

(Belinda Steinhuber/Hartmut Ebke)

At first the participants exchanged ideas and experiences of how international and intercultural competences are acquired at schools in different member states. Apart from intercultural competences (skills, attitudes, knowledge) being integrated into most national curricula of foreign languages, manifold international activities and topics are offered at CertiLingua schools and are part of the school curricula.

Having exchanged various examples, the participants concluded that the personal intercultural encounter is still the most effective and challenging way of gaining intercultural competences. The personal experiences of the learner should be the basis in teaching, and making use of the intercultural expertise of learners seems a sensible idea, not only with respect to intercultural encounters but also with regard to

pluriculturalism, since in many classrooms there is a lot of cultural experience and expertise. But learners need guidance in their reflection of experience, which can – without guidance – also reinforce stereotypes and prejudices. The CertiLingua network promotes the use of additional material to support this process of reflection, like the *Autobiography of Intercultural Experience*. The workshop proposes to add this document to the “Guidelines for Tutors”.

The *CertiLingua Standards of Excellence in Intercultural Competences* are regarded as adequate for the purpose of the CertiLingua Label of Excellence, as there are no different levels. The CertiLingua Standards are a sufficient document and among the workshop participants no immediate need for change is seen, even though, the Companion Volume adds the category of “values”. The workshop participants share the view that “values” are expressed in the learner’s attitudes. Thus, the Companion Volume defines a category which can be regarded as being already integrated into the CertiLingua standards.

However, the Companion Volume could be added as an additional bullet point in the *Awarding Criteria*.

A more holistic view is taken for CertiLingua. The descriptors in the Companion Volume can assist learners and teachers in the development of a more criterion-based notion of what is to be achieved in this domain.

Intercultural Competence is an issue in all national curricula, but further teacher training is welcome, especially when focussing on the development of attitudes and values. It is suggested to provide additional ideas for the teaching of intercultural competences such as simulations, role plays and the like and to further strengthen the tutor’s view on the importance of a guided and reflected face-to-face project.

Workshop 1 – results as presented on cards in plenary

What works well	Suggestions
Focus on personal intercultural experience of learners Making use of learners' intercultural expertise (diversity in the classroom)	Recommendation: ⇒ additional material to structure and support students' reflection e.g. - AIE (Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters) - addition to 2012-17-DE (guidelines for tutors) with a focus on reflection
CertiLingua Standards of Excellence in Intercultural Competence work well	CEFR Companion Volume 2018 as additional bullet point on page 8 (see conference reader)
Holistic view of intercultural competence is adequate for assessment	CEFR descriptors of the Companion Volume contribute to a deeper understanding (particularly for teachers, but possibly also for students)

Workshop 2: Intercultural learning: Further Perspectives for CertiLingua

(Beatrice Schmitz/Jan Gerstenberger)

Jan Gerstenberger:

The group discussed the difference of pluri- and intercultural competences. For CertiLingua intercultural competences seem to matter most.

It is suggested to keep it simple for the network, but acknowledge the CEFR New Companion Volume as a frame of reference for students to enable them to reflect upon certain situations that provide evidence for the acquisition of certain competences.

The question was raised of if and how to incorporate values into the CertiLingua framework. The assessment of values, however, is seen as a problematic issue. The reflection of one's own culture should possibly be incorporated.

It is also to be discussed how mediation can be considered for CertiLingua. The so-called "butterfly diagram" is regarded as a useful addition. Slight changes in the wording of the standards were discussed in the workshop, such as creating a second version of the document for teachers with the perspective changed to that of *the student*.

Hartmut Ebke reminds the conference of the how difficult it was to arrive at a commonly accepted formulation of the documents. Any change in the documents would entail potentially lengthy discussions and complications. He suggests not to change, but to amend the documents instead.

Workshop 2 in French

(Vicky Gusto/Gisella Langé)

Gisella Langé reports on the results of the workshop. It is pointed out that the *CertiLingua Standards of Excellence in Intercultural Competences* were received positively. However, they should be critically revised and possibly aligned with the

- CEFR Companion Volume
- Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture

These new documents might provide new impulses and support teachers and students in the process of the acquisition of intercultural competences. A critical re-reading of the CertiLingua Standards is required in order to determine whether it will be necessary to modify them.

A “piste de reflexion” for students is suggested as an additional tool. For the development of such a tool and the alignment of CertiLingua with European standards, a small European taskforce should be established.

The workgroup sees the need to train teachers in order to explain the new descriptors to them as they play a major role in helping CertiLingua students. It is probably necessary to “translate” the new descriptors of the framework into the language of the students.

Moreover, the organization of Erasmus+ programmes is encouraged to promote CertiLingua in Europe. The programme provides key benefits for our students (e.g. the development of cultural awareness and open-mindedness, the improvement and acquisition of language skills). Furthermore, the power and dynamism of the CertiLingua Network should be used to evaluate the Intercultural competences.

Workshop 3: Questions and Answers

(Pille Põiklik /Clemens Boppré)

Pille Põiklik and Clemens Boppré report on the results of the workshop.

In the group questions of public recognition, assessment of project documentations and the challenges of networking were discussed.

Regarding public recognition, it is seen as important to communicate realistic expectations to the CertiLingua candidates. CertiLingua is an opportunity for great personal development; it is a soft qualification that sets students apart from other applicants for internships, jobs and university courses. It is proof that they can successfully interact and productively work in international contexts. By certifying excellence in the fields of foreign language competence, bilingual competence and European and international competences in an internationally transparent way, it can facilitate entry and provide advantages. There has been feedback from many CertiLingua graduates, who have reported on the positive benefits their CertiLingua certificate has had on their applications and their careers. It must be clear however, that CertiLingua is not a formal qualification comparable to a university entrance qualification. Thus, it does not give students a right or predetermined privileges nor provides them with additional ECTS-points. With the EU recognizing CertiLingua as a best practise example in the context of their language policy, a more formal contextualization may prove possible in the future. This is a great opportunity for the label and the future of the network.

The group also discussed advantages and disadvantages of different assessment procedures of project documentations in the countries. What is practical, realistic and effective is dependent on the administrative structure, the number of schools and candidates in the country. There is a large spectrum within the CertiLingua community from centralised assessment in some countries to completely decentralised systems in others to decide whether a project documentation is worthy of the CertiLingua-Label.

There is a wish to intensify networking within the group. The group did not have any ready-made solutions for this, as there are a number of difficulties in various national contexts. Facebook was a topic in Tallinn; however, this group has not been

particularly active. This may be due, in part, to there being legal problems when dealing with social networks. There is data protection legislation, e.g. in Germany, that makes it very difficult to impossible for school administration to officially motivate or suggest to teachers to be active on commercial social networks. There is of course the possibility for coordinators to directly contact coordinators at other CertiLingua schools. Successful partnerships depend on real persons, so bringing people together, facilitating that coordinators can meet each other has quite some potential to further improve networking on a school level. This will be difficult to implement structurally for the entire network, however it might be an option to do this on a smaller scale, perhaps bilaterally or trilaterally between particular countries, or in the context of an Erasmus+-project.

Annual Conference

The Annual Conference unanimously agrees on the **CertiLingua Compendium** in the form presented in Hannover.

The Annual Conference unanimously agrees on the **CertiLingua PPT** in the form presented in Hannover.

The Annual Conference unanimously elects a new **Steering Group** consisting of

- Belinda Steinhuber, Austria
- Ruth de Sy, Belgium
- Pille Põiklik, Estonia
- Vicky Gusto, France
- Gisella Langé, Italy
- Dr. Beatrice Schmitz, North Rhine-Westphalia

Changes to the back of the Certificate are discussed. It is suggested to either replace or leave out the B2 description there. No consensus is reached and the Certificate remains unchanged. It is pointed out that it has always been possible to certify levels

higher than B2 on the front of the Certificate, on the condition that corresponding proof of attainment can be provided by students. It is unanimously accepted to discuss potential **changes to the Certificate** in Eupen in 2019.

Beatrice Schmitz thanks Jens Bolhöfer for his hospitality and honours Hartmut Ebke, who is resigning from the international steering group, for his profound and passionate support of the label.

The next Annual Conference will be taking place in Eupen, Belgium from 26 to 27 September 2019. The focus will be on the project documentations with video elements.

Appendix

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Accompanying the document

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages

4.3 A whole school approach to learning languages

A school with a high degree of language awareness will consider the language dimension in all levels of school organisation, teaching and practice. This includes literacy development, foreign language learning, subject teaching, acknowledging other languages brought in by pupils, communication with parents and with the wider school environment, etc. This requires close cooperation among the different members of the school community, ideally within a concept of the school as a learning organisation³⁹ or within a whole school approach⁴⁰.

Example: The CertiLingua Label for Schools

The CertiLingua Label of Excellence for Plurilingual, European and International competences guides students towards linguistic and cultural pluralism and simultaneously assists them to develop the mobility they will need in shaping their personal and professional lives and for their further education. This excellence label is awarded to pupils in addition to their university entrance diplomas on the condition that they have written and oral command of at least two foreign languages on level B2 of the Common European Framework for Languages, that they have successfully used at least one of these languages as their learning and working language in one or more CLIL courses, and that they have given evidence of their knowledge about Europe and their intercultural ability to act by their participation in a European / international cooperation project.

Any public school from any EU Member State can apply for accreditation as a CertiLingua School with the country's educational authorities on the condition that they provide the learning opportunities necessary for students to fulfil the awarding criteria for the label. Currently, more than 300 schools throughout Europe are participating in this project, teaching accordingly to the principles of CertiLingua⁴¹.

Similar principles are applied for other networks of schools having adopted a whole school approach to learning languages with the aim of preparing students for mobility and the opportunities offered on the European single market. The European Schools⁴² form another successful example. These schools, intended largely for the children of personnel of EU Institutions, are official educational establishments controlled jointly by the governments of the Member States.