

Minutes of the 17th International CertiLingua Annual Conference in Milano

**Educando Setti Carraro,
Via Passione, 12,
20122 Milano, Italy**

14 & 15 September 2023

DAY 1

14 September 2023, Milano

Conference Opening & Welcoming Words

Gisella Langé, the President of the Italian CertiLingua National Committee, welcomes the participants in Milano and briefly provides some historical information on the remarkable building this year's International Annual Conference is hosted in.

She also introduces her colleague and the students from another CertiLingua school in Milano, the Paolo Frisi school, whose students provide the catering for the conference, as well as Giorgio Ragusa, the headteacher of this year's venue who also greets the conference's participants at his school.

Diana Saccardo, Foreign Languages Inspector at the Ministry of Education and Merit, welcomes the participants on behalf of the Ministry and stresses the asset CertiLingua provides for foreign language learning in Italy, since the candidates reach high levels of proficiency not only in English but in another foreign language as well. The label radiates a sense of importance, increases motivation, and thus has an impact on language learning and teaching through the involvement of both, teachers and learners

As a member of the Italian committee for the evaluation of the CertiLingua Project Documentations she also underlines the importance of the intercultural competences students acquire and reflect upon for the label. They, she points out, are the basis for social cohesion and peaceful societies.

Gisella Langé explains that the label's success in Italy can also be explained with the powerful structures and networks that have been established for the label's sake, the focus that was laid on teacher training and the connection of schools within the CertiLingua network.

Silke Hinz, the chairwoman of the International Steering Group, thanks Gisella and her team for hosting this year's Annual Conference in Milano and stresses the importance of the

competences acquired for and through CertiLingua for students' personal careers, and, more importantly, for the solution of the many challenges societies in Europe and the world are currently facing. Most of these cannot be solved on a national level but require international cooperation. CertiLingua fosters exactly this overall competence: the ability to cooperate internationally in many ways. This overall goal has always been the guiding idea of the label and it is mirrored in the network's standards and procedures that have also helped in steering the label through a challenging time in the past, when Covid-19 made international face-to-face encounters impossible. In order to maintain and increase the label's public recognition the importance of the competences certified by CertiLingua cannot be stressed enough.

Christian Balzer presents the current evaluation data. The number of participating schools has slightly increased to 341 in the year 2022. Yet there is a certain drop of about 20% in the certificates, which can be explained with Covid-19.

As far as the evaluation procedure is concerned, it is pointed out that an extensive evaluation is actually overdue, as it was agreed in 2017 to collect the optional data every three years, which has not been done since then.

Reports from the Member States

The Member States have provided information concerning the label in their states in advance on a padlet (<https://padlet.com/certilingua/AnnualConference2023>) and the representatives of the Member States only briefly comment on it.

Estonia

Pille Põiklik reports an increase in awarded certificates (from a usual 3–4 per year to 13 in 2022/2023) and welcomes the addition of Finnish to the CertiLingua languages in Estonia. The local network piloted a new format for a joint event for Estonian CertiLingua schools which will be developed further in coming years. Still, interest in the label is experiencing similar difficulties in Estonia as elsewhere.

Rhineland Palatinate

Michael Grabis points out that the number of schools increased by more than 10 %. With two new schools the total number is now 19.

Berlin

Jan Peter John reports that the eight CertiLingua schools in Berlin are quite happy about the high language level students attain for CertiLingua. Nevertheless, there is a certain Covid gap in the numbers. The quality of the documentations is an issue Berlin is currently working on.

Italy

Gisella Langé stresses the importance of networking for Italy and the label in general. Italy has intensified its teacher training for CertiLingua. Another focus is put on strengthening the regional representatives for CertiLingua by the National Committee.

Many schools and teachers from Italy contributed to a collection of essays “La Classe Plurilingue”, published by Sanoma/Pearson this year.

Bremen

Marie Laurent reports that another school could be won in Bremen.

Saxony

In addition to the 10 schools in Saxony another one has articulated its interest in the label. The two foreign languages on a very high level are seen as a major challenge, yet the schools in Saxony are overall very happy with the programme, says Florian Lindner.

France

Silvie Luyer-Tanet from the local education authority in Poitiers reports for France, since Muriel Surroz-Bost could not make it to the conference. Unfortunately, Covid-19 has had a major impact on the academy’s schools and no project documentations were handed in this year.

However, the schools supervised by the academies in Lille, Marseille and Nancy have not been affected in the same fashion and in Nancy/Metz there even was an increase in applicants.

Sani Jean-Marie from the academy in Lille points out that many CertiLingua schools successfully participate in the Erasmus+ programme.

The fact that some of the students did not meet the criteria is seen as a sign to better prepare the teachers for the tutoring of CertiLingua applicants. A reorganization of the educational landscape in France has led to international relations of schools gaining prestige and importance which is regarded as a good development for CertiLingua.

Austria

Belinda Steinhuber reports about two schools having joined the CertiLingua network in Austria while one has discontinued its participation.

Due to changes in the curriculum, schools might be given the choice to further reduce the teaching hours in the second foreign language, which might jeopardize the level B2 in the second foreign language and might make additional certification necessary. While they do acknowledge the added value of CertiLingua it remains a challenge to motivate students for the extra work the label might entail for them.

North Rhine-Westphalia

As Christian Balzer reports the interest of schools in CertiLingua remains rather stable in North Rhine-Westphalia with two new schools last year.

Schools have asked for standardized privacy forms for the project documentations with audiovisual elements and there is a continuing interest in this new format. As for many others the impact of AI on the assessment of student products remains an issue of much debate.

Keynote Speech

Professor Enrica Piccardo, from the University of Toronto, speaks about “Plurilingualism and Pluricultural Competences for CertiLingua”.

As mirrored in the CEFR’s Companion Volume there is a new vision in language education that acknowledges the many languages and cultural practices an individual possesses. She explains that the CEFR’s action-oriented approach seeks to take these into consideration and promotes “a shift away from syllabuses based on a linear progression through language structures, or a pre-determined set of notions and functions, towards syllabuses based on needs analysis, oriented towards real-life tasks and constructed around purposefully selected notions and functions.” CEFR, p. 26.

This approach, centered around real-life tasks, is very much in line with what CertiLingua is promoting. The international face-to-face projects require a huge amount of languaging and mediation between the different social agents involved.

Her presentation is provided in the appendix and can also be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.lingueculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/E-Piccardo-CERTILINGUA-Pluril-14-Sept-2023-1.pdf>

Video Presentation

David Marsh from the University of Jyväskylä provides a video presentation about the challenges and, more importantly, about the chances AI offers in the educational landscape with it being a tool accessible by all that can help and support learners. Nevertheless, students need to be supported in becoming competent users of such technologies.

His presentation, due to the size of the file, cannot be provided in the appendix.

Instead, the file has been uploaded and can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIZSk4xhrJU>

DAY 2

15 September 2023, Milano

Workshops and Workshop Results

Chatbots: changes and challenges for teachers and students

Pille Põiklik presents the group's ideas and stresses the necessity to face the changes AI entails for education in general and for CertiLingua in particular.

It needs to be made sure that students become competent in dealing with AI and learn how to deal with it responsibly and critically instead of merely becoming complacent users of it.

It is a central goal of CertiLingua to help students become creative and emphatic people and good communicators. These goals can be supported but not be replaced by AI.

With regard to assessing students' products – or, in the context of CertiLingua, their project documentations – two major shifts are regarded as necessary. On the one hand a shift from product to process assessment (relevance & meaningfulness), and, on the other hand, a shift to different forms of assessment, like oral formats, that require a certain amount of spontaneous production.

Plurilingualism & Pluriculturalism

Belinda Steinhuber points out that CertiLingua is very much in line with European language policies as defined by the new CEFR Companion Volume. The face-to-face projects are very close to what the CEFR defines as action-orientation and the projects require a lot of mediation, understood as the process of negotiating meaning between different social agents. The required CLIL hours are also a form of action-orientation as students work on subject matter tasks in these lessons.

The fact that two languages have to be learned for CertiLingua fosters plurilingualism and students should definitely be encouraged to use both of them in their project documentation. It could be discussed if a home language could be mentioned on the certificate as a third language. Yet accepting them for certification is not planned since questions of quality control cannot be properly addressed in this domain.

However, CertiLingua has always been promoting the "Europass" as an additional document for the documentation of home language competences and principally welcomes linguistic diversity.

In addition, Belinda Steinhuber stresses the need to stay visible as a network and reminds the participants of CertiLingua being mentioned as an example of good practice in the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages by the European Commission in 2018.

As CertiLingua continues being in line with European language policies all member states are encouraged to make and keep the label visible where- and whenever possible.

Video documentations good practice

As Clemens Boppré and Christian Balzer point out CertiLingua has always been a progressive label and the option for a project documentation with audiovisual elements can be seen in this tradition.

On the basis of examples provided by Clemens Boppré's school, it is agreed that the video elements clearly add something to the documentation.

While the overall numbers of these documentations are estimated to be about 6-7 % in North Rhine-Westphalia, that provided the examples for the workshop, there are schools where almost all students opt for a video documentation. Once again, counseling seems to be a decisive factor. If a coordinator is convinced of this approach, the students are more eager to follow it as well.

The working group stresses that this format is principally more open which is seen as something positive. In this context audios instead of videos are regarded as just as acceptable. It is therefore suggested to terminate the pilot phase and to make documentations with audio or audiovisual parts a standard option for students.

In general, schools would very much like to have more examples of good practice in this domain which, however, are a lot more difficult to provide due to data protection requirements.

Annual Conference – Resolutions

All resolutions must be taken unanimously. The official representatives of Thuringia, Lower Saxony, Hesse, Hamburg and Mecklenburg Western-Pomerania were unable to attend the Annual Conference and had transferred their voting rights to the chairwoman of the International Steering Group, Silke Hinz.

Termination of pilot phase for project documentations with audio-visual elements

The Annual Conference agrees to conclude the pilot phase for project documentations with audio-visual elements and to offer them as a regular option for students applying for the CertiLingua label of excellence.

Audio or Audiovisual

The Annual Conference agrees to explicitly allow for audio elements as well, the term "audio-visual" is replaced by "audio or audio-visual".

New Checklist

The Annual Conference agrees to replace the current Checklist for Assessing CertiLingua Project Documentations by a new checklist in the CertiLingua Compendium. The new checklist is based on the former one and supplemented by the agreements for project documentations containing audio-visual elements used during the pilot phase.

Editorial Changes in the Awarding Criteria that only mention a written documentation

The Annual Conference agrees to the editorial changes in the Awarding Criteria that the option of a Project Documentation with audio or audio-visual elements entails.

A new pilot phase for audio/video only documentations

The Annual Conference agrees to allow Member States to pilot Project Documentations that only consist of audio or audio-visual materials. The piloting schools will be supported by the Steering Group and the results will be discussed in the Annual Conference. The CertiLingua Standards, in form of the Awarding Criteria and the Standards of Excellence in Intercultural Competences, have to be fulfilled, although minor concessions may occur similarly to the previous pilot phase. Guidelines and an adapted checklist will be developed by the piloting schools and the Steering Group.

Face-to-face projects and online projects

The Annual Conference agrees on the great value of face-to-face encounters. Online projects are only acceptable if there is no other option. The decision is reached in accordance with the responsible school authority or the national coordinator.

Closing of the Annual Conference

On behalf of the International Steering Group and all participants Silke Hinz thanks Gisella Langé and her staff for their tremendous efforts in hosting the Annual Conference 2023 in Milano. A special tribute is paid to the students and their teachers that provided an outstanding support during these two days.