



UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ



NORFACE
ERA-NET

NORFACE SEMINAR SERIES *Social Aspects of Language Diversity*

**Report on the 2nd seminar held in Tallinn, Estonia
26 – 28 September 2007**

The Norface seminar series, *Social Aspects of Language Diversity*, coordinated by the Department of Languages at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, has brought its participants together in two international seminars in Jyväskylä, Finland (March 2007) and Tallinn, Estonia (September 2007). The third seminar in this series will be organized in Limerick in March, 2008. The participants of the seminars include established researchers, among them some leading experts in the field of multilingualism, as well as junior researchers from nine European countries.

The aim of this Norface seminar series is to explore how multilingualism and language diversity are manifested on both micro and macro level of social practices and processes. The study of the micro level involves, for instance, an analysis of the ways in which language users employ multilingual resources in a variety of situations to express discursive and social functions in social activity. Data used in this research range from rap lyrics and football discussion forums to skateboarding texts and ethnographic materials informing about school children using migrant languages. From the macro point of view, research focuses on the functioning of multilingualism at the level of society and considers its implications for language and immigration policies.

The two seminars have focused on language diversity and multilingualism as a problematic resource for both individuals and societies. The seminar participants are engaged in research on various aspects of language diversity and multilingualism with overlapping approaches and ways of thinking. Through providing a forum for exploration and discovery of mutual goals both in the meetings and in ongoing discussions following the seminars, the seminar series has enabled a rich and genuine dialogue between the participants researching and working in different societies and cultures. This dialogue has already resulted in new forms of collaboration in the form of working on joint publications and planning further research exchange and cooperation.

The seeds for collaboration involving postgraduate as well as postdoctoral and senior researchers were planted in the first seminar in Jyväskylä where participants presented their current research for discussion and sought for common themes and questions to be explored further. The work continued in the second seminar in Tallinn, where the focus of activity shifted towards concrete plans of reporting and publishing

research findings. Some 20 established participants of the Norface network joined the Tallinn seminar. The [programme](#) consisted of an open forum for researchers and practitioners in which local professionals working in the field of multilingualism and language diversity in Estonia could share their work and views with the Norface participants. The invited plenary lecture of Elana Shohamy from Tel Aviv University “Methods/mechanisms for negotiating language diversity within an expanded framework of language policy” challenged different mechanisms, such as language laws, language education policies and language tests, which are often used to suppress and impose language and to work against diversity thus raising an issue of critical language policy. Martin Ehala, an established member of the Norface seminar series network and the host of the Tallinn seminar, presented a proposal for an integrated framework for conceptualizing the issue of identity in the context of globalization in his plenary talk “Fluctuations, distinctions and the emergence of identities”. Ülle Rannut’s research documentary shed light on “Minority language policy in the Middle East: Circassian Language Maintenance in Jordan“, which served as a case in point showing how language policy is implemented in Asia.

The agenda of the seminar series has been to work intensively as a whole network as well as in smaller groups, each focusing on a specific aspect of language diversity and multilingualism. The groups have explored identity construction in multilingual contexts and hybrid linguistic environments, multilingualism in the global context such as media, tourism and historicities and language attitudes, policies and ideologies. The intensive work in each group has resulted in the establishment of common goals and a shared agenda for the network and for the final seminar to be held in Limerick, Ireland in March 2008. Firstly, the groups will continue to work on a joint publication on their specific area of research. A virtual workspace, which was set up for the series in September 2006, will continue to work as a discussion forum for participants for sharing drafts and for giving and receiving feedback from others. Secondly, individual as well as joint work in progress will be published as working papers in the newly established web-based working paper series at the Department of Languages in the Jyväskylä University called *WILD (Working Papers in Language Diversity)*. The working paper series functions as a first forum of publishing papers which are to be published later in leading scientific journals in this area.

The Norface seminar series has proven to support and encourage collaboration between different approaches and in particular, has provided postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers with an opportunity to participate in international research collaboration with already established scholars in the field. Funding by Norface has provided all participants a unique opportunity for sharing their research findings. It has also given rise to future considerations for establishing new networks and collaboration with people from different fields, such as language testing, education, media studies, political science and immigration.

Further information on the Norface seminar series *Social Aspects of Language Diversity* on the seminar series [website](#).

Arja Piirainen-Marsh
Sari Pietikäinen
Tiina Virkkula
24th October, 2007
Jyväskylä, Finland