

# TEACHERS' VIEWS TOWARDS LANGUAGE AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

---

Petra Daryai-Hansen

University of Copenhagen/University College UCC, Denmark

Inta Rimsane

Rezekne University of Applied Sciences, Latvia

# Outline

1. Theoretical background
2. Data overview
3. Analysis: Denmark
4. Analysis: Latvia
5. Questions and discussion

# Teacher cognition (Borg 2003, Barnard & Burns 2012, Borg & Sanchez 2015)

What do teachers know, believe/think, and do?

Knowledge, attitudes, experiences of the participating teachers.

# Experiences from the FREPA-workshops – main obstacles

”A very interesting approach, but...

- I **don't speak/understand** these languages!”
- I don't have **time** to integrate this type of exercises in my classroom!”

# Data

The participating teachers from pilot schools in **Denmark (n=3)**, Estonia (n=1), Finland (n=1), Iceland (n=1), **Latvia (n=3)**, Lithuania (n=3), and Sweden (n=1)

1. Initial teacher survey
2. Interim teacher survey
3. Final semi-structured focus group interviews in the national context
4. Transnational semi-structured focus group interviews

Larger teacher surveys, e.g. all teachers at the pilot school, language associations

# Teachers' interim surveys

"**Different** from all the other projects we did at school"

"I hadn't expected that the **students + parents** would have been that **interested** in the project."

"I have been surprised by **pupils' interest** in languages and dialects, their comprehension of links between languages and cultures, their activity, willingness to cooperate and **ability to share personal experience.**"

# Teachers' interim surveys

"LA is a normal way of thinking for the **students** because they are **curious** about words in other languages."

"I have noticed that they **try to use** now what they know about other languages when learning English and Danish for instance."

"I have recognized that the project is **useful, relevant, interesting for me and the students.**"

# Teachers' interim surveys

"I have also changed and I think that is the beginning of my LA."



# Teachers' interim surveys

"the activities were either too long or too short"

"the existing language awareness activities [...] grasp only few subjects (mostly geography, biology and foreign languages)"

"more physical activity"

"I have found it difficult to find the time to integrate the activities in my class."

"the materials do not match our standards and programmes"

# Analysis: Denmark

Three teachers – Randersgades Skole, International Profile School of Copenhagen, Østerbro

1. Initial teacher survey
  2. Interim teacher survey
  3. Final semi-structured focus group interview
- Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, Experiences

# Denmark – the initial teacher survey

Two teachers already implemented language awareness activities in their teaching.

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes: The three teachers are positive about the approach.

Language knowledge:

Fluent knowledge: Danish, English, Swedish (Norwegian)

Basic knowledge: French, German, Norwegian (Spanish)

Just a few words: Arabic, Icelandic, Italian, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, Finnish, ...

“We teachers do not have any problems to relate to the language awareness approach”

# Larger teacher surveys – Denmark and Iceland

Teachers have a very positive attitude towards LA activities.

They think that LA activities contribute to students' reflection on languages and cultures.

The recognition of minority languages and the integration of plurilingual teaching activities in other areas of the curriculum are fields that need emphasis.

# Teachers' beliefs – Denmark

D1. Language awareness activities can make a positive contribution to changing students attitudes towards oth...

D2. Language awareness activities can help integrate students from minority ethnic backgrounds into the whole class.

D3. Language awareness activities can demonstrate that all languages are of equal importance.

D4. Language awareness activities can promote positive attitudes towards speakers of other languages.

D5. Language awareness activities can stimulate curiosity and interest in language learning.

D6. Language awareness activities can help students to understand how language works.

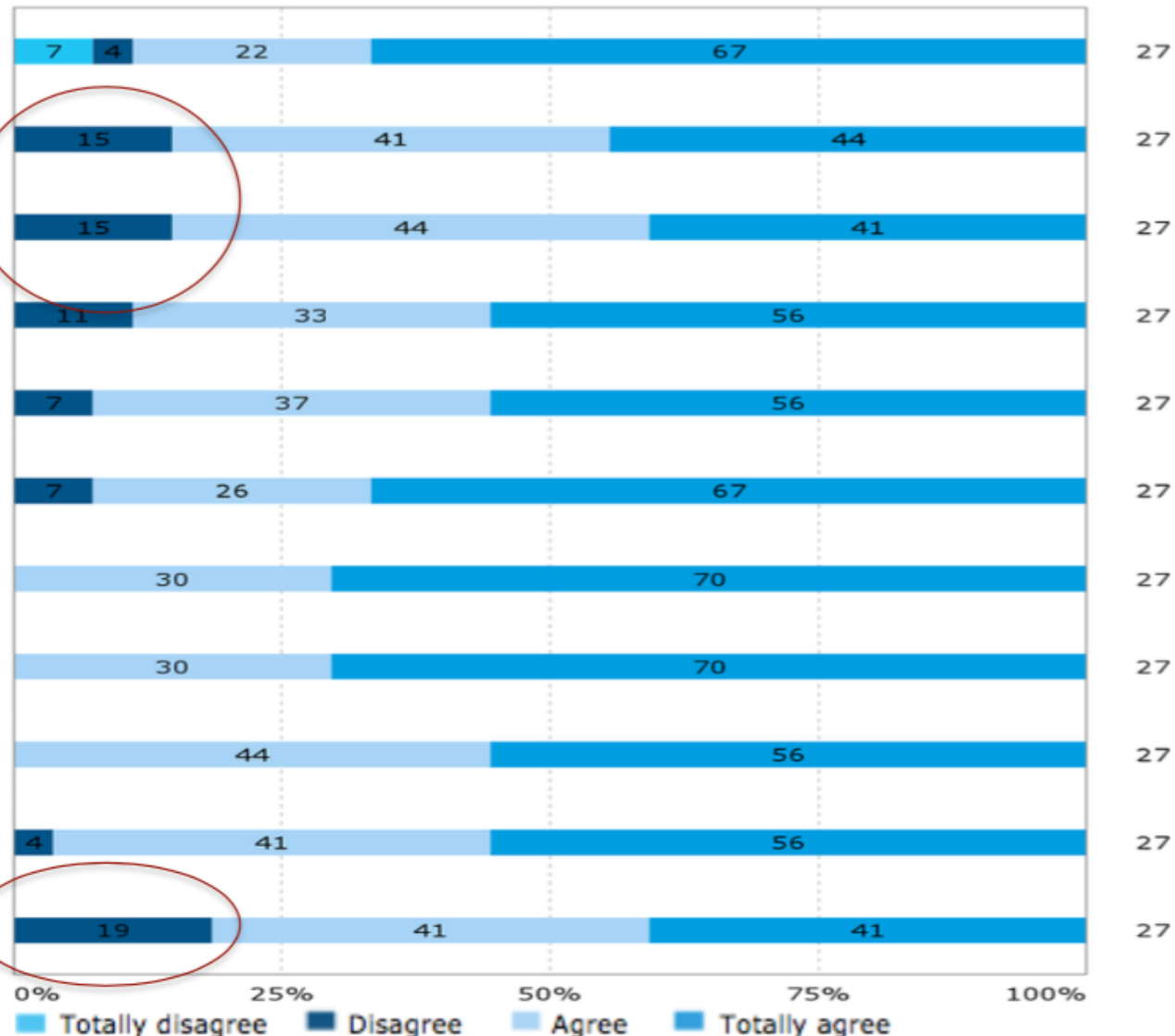
D7. Language awareness activities can help students in learning other languages.

D8. Language awareness activities can help students to improve their skills in the main language of the school.

D9. Language awareness activities can help students to improve their skills in their first language/mother tongue (...)

D10. Language awareness activities should be a part of language teaching.

D11. Language awareness activities should be integrated into other areas of the curriculum.



# Teachers' beliefs – Iceland

D1. Language awareness activities can make a positive contribution to changing students attitudes towards oth...

D2. Language awareness activities can help integrate students from minority ethnic backgrounds into the whole class.

D3. Language awareness activities can demonstrate that all languages are of equal importance.

D4. Language awareness activities can promote positive attitudes towards speakers of other languages.

D5. Language awareness activities can stimulate curiosity and interest in language learning.

D6. Language awareness activities can help students to understand how language works.

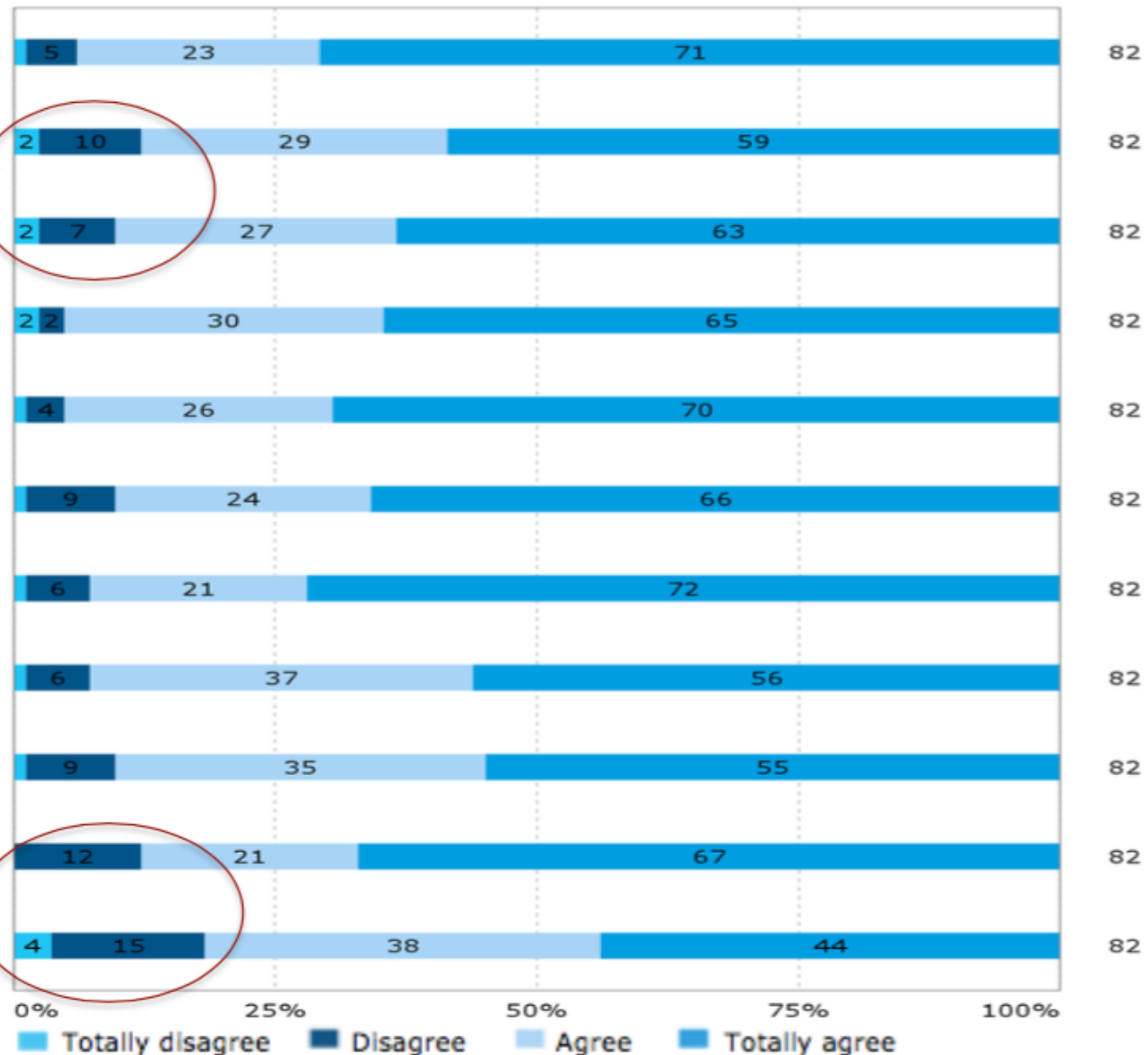
D7. Language awareness activities can help students in learning other languages.

D8. Language awareness activities can help students to improve their skills in the main language of the school.

D9. Language awareness activities can help students to improve their skills in their first language/mother tongue (...)

D10. Language awareness activities should be a part of language teaching.

D11. Language awareness activities should be integrated into other areas of the curriculum.



# Semi-structured focus group interviews – interview guide

1. The teachers' language awareness development in terms of knowledge, attitudes and skills
2. Their pupils' language awareness development in terms of knowledge, attitudes and skills
3. Integration of all students in the school community
4. Outcomes of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation
5. Obstacles and difficulties
6. Ideas for the future

## Denmark – final focus group interview (L1 and L2) and qualitative interview (L3)

The teachers' language awareness development in terms of knowledge, attitudes and skills.

Focus on:

**Knowledge:** *an increased attention to the language awareness approach* (“I have always been aware of it, but my attention increased”, “I have not been critical about it – but what should we use this for? Perhaps should they just learn Danish instead?”), *knowledge about languages spoken by their pupils, knowledge about Baltic languages and countries.*

**Attitudes:** *openness* (“I feel a bit like the pupils, that the more foreign it is, the funnier it gets.”)



# Denmark – final focus group interview

Their pupils' language awareness development in terms of

**Attitudes:** *curiosity/interest* (“curiosity for the language, curiosity for the country”), *openness* (“There was nobody who dropped out and said that s/he could not do it.”), *self-confidence that can be transferred to other subjects* (“we can do this pretty well, even though we do not understand at all what it is written here”)

**Skills:** *to compare, to identify patterns, to try to guess what words mean*

**Knowledge:** *pupils especially remember what is distant from their own world* (e.g. “Are you sleeping Brother John” in Zulu, to count to five in Croatian), *one can use a language to learn another language, one can understand something even though one does not know the languages, languages build on relations to each other*

# Language hierarchies

“They did not express that some languages were better than others – they had the same approach independently of the languages.”

”Those who got English were very disappointed.”

“They were irritated if they got English – they thought it was too easy.”

# Denmark – final focus group interview

Integration of all students in the school community:

- A sense of competition that one has contact to as many languages as possible;
- Migrant languages as Arabic or Turkish are not mentioned;
- The pupils do not know migrant languages as they live in Østerbro and there are almost no pupils who speak migrant languages in the class;
- A girl from Pakistan: "She got on track, because she is the only one who can speak the language"
- A Lebanese pupil: "Does not want to contribute with his knowledge, he would rather be like the others"
- A boy from Iran: "He cannot speak any Farsi."

# Denmark – obstacles, difficulties and ideas for the future

- **An approach for language teachers** (“It must be difficult for teachers who do not teach languages – culture is more approachable”)
- **A challenge in terms of teacher identity** (“It is okay if they ask if something that has to do with for instance Arabic, so nobody thinks it is too bad if I cannot answer, but if there is something that is a bit nearer, I would like to be able to give an answer.”)
- **Difficulties to find materials** for “a bit different, a bit funnier languages” (= remote languages)
- **Need for more Nordic-Baltic cooperation** (“Much more closed in their curriculum” – perhaps it could be possible to apply for an intercultural education project?”)
- **Organizational obstacles**, as there is not enough time to share knowledge (“The other teachers do not know what we did – they know that we have been away traveling”)
- Suggestion to implement “**one language awareness hour per week**”

# Analysis: Latvia

Three teachers

1. Initial teacher survey
  2. Interim teacher survey
  3. Final semi-structured focus group interview
- Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, Experiences

# Latvia – the initial teacher survey (I)

30 teachers who work in Grades 1-12. 15 teachers are fluent in 2 languages. 10 teachers are fluent in 3 languages: Latvian (Latgalian)-Russian-English.

27 teachers consider that language awareness activities should be a part of the school curriculum.

Advantages of language awareness activities: teachers with the working experience of more than 20 years.

Disadvantages of language awareness activities: teachers with the working experience of less than 10 years.

Primary school teachers (Grades 1-4) are ready to use the activities in their lessons.

Teachers of Grades 5-12 do not want to use the activities because they are time consuming and disturb the teachers to prepare the pupils for the national examinations in Grades 9 and 12.

# Latvia – the initial teacher survey (II)

## *Conclusions:*

Teachers theoretically agree to the fact that language awareness activities should be a part of the school curriculum.

The activities should be integrated not only in the lessons of the foreign languages, but also in other subjects.

However, the majority of the teachers are not ready to use the activities in their own lessons.

# Latvia – the interim teacher survey

## Opinions about language awareness activities:

- The worksheets can be used only in few subjects (geography, biology and foreign languages); they take a lot of teachers' time to adapt them to the local needs; they do not match to the standards and programs approved by the Ministry of Education.

## Previous experience in working with language awareness activities:

- Many teachers from Latvia have participated in international projects, however many teachers of foreign languages have never been abroad so they face difficulties to use language awareness activities in their own work.

## Suggestions for developing language awareness activities:

- Being the Baltic and Nordic context related to minority languages quite different (for instance, in the Baltic countries the only minority is represented by the Russian speaking community and all Latvians speak Russian), it would be necessary to develop separate worksheets for the Baltic and Nordic context.



# Latvia – final focus group interview

*The teachers' language awareness development in terms of*

**Knowledge:** about the fundamentals of plurilingual approach;

**Attitudes:** positive cooperation experience with the colleagues from the Nordic countries; learning from the Nordic countries about their experience to work with migrant/minority students; tolerance towards other cultures.

**Skills:** how to develop teaching materials using the plurilingual approach; how to integrate different languages in the study process; how to design teaching materials, how to use Internet translation tools.

# Latvia – final focus group interview

*Their pupils' language awareness development in terms of*

**Knowledge:** about a great variety of languages; about the possibility to learn many languages from the same language group; about family history, new words in German, Lithuanian, Estonian and Polish; about the importance of globalization processes in the world;

**Attitudes:** interest about the process in other countries; tolerance towards other people, cultures; awareness about importance of foreign languages in everyday life; curiosity about other languages;

**Skills:** how to work with different tools while learning foreign languages; how to learn foreign languages through sharing experiences about different cultures.

# Latvia – final focus group interview

*Integration of all students in the school community:*

The question is not quite related to the context of Latvia. The schools absolutely have no experience in teaching migrant students because of the political situation.

Since 1991, the official (the only) minority is the Russian speaking community in Latvia. Part of minority schools use the bilingual teaching/learning (Russian, Latvian). The second part uses only Russian as the schooling language. The plurilingual approach could help minority schools to integrate more languages in the study process.

# Latvia – final focus group interview

*Ideas for the future.*

«I will use the activities in my lessons also after the official end of the project; they are very interesting for pupils. The worksheets will help the pupils analyse different cultural processes in the world; they create interest in other cultures. The worksheets really work and rise students' interest and motivation to learn other languages/cultures. However, the worksheets should be used in the lessons systematically to have a long-lasting effect».

# Latvia – final focus group interview

Obstacles, difficulties :

- Pupils have difficulties to work with the languages which they have never heard in the community or school.
- It is necessary to find the additional resources, for instance dictionaries.
- Teachers need much more time for preparation for the lessons because it is necessary to find the study materials not only in Latvian but also in other languages.
- In the worksheets, the words are similar in many languages so often it is difficult to determine the correct language.
- «Google translate» and similar tools translate words with many mistakes so there is a risk to learn the new language in a wrong way.
- The project worksheets are related to the Nordic context which is not very familiar with the Baltic countries, so the teachers have to adapt them to the local needs; teachers have to invest more time in the preparation of the activities.

# Comments? Questions?

Inta Rimsane

[Inta.Rimsane@rdc.lv](mailto:Inta.Rimsane@rdc.lv)

Petra Daryai-Hansen

[PDHA@ucc.dk](mailto:PDHA@ucc.dk)