

Im Fokus: Mehrsprachigkeit und transkulturelles Lernen

*Mono-/multi-/pluri-/inter-/trans-*ⁱ in Council of Europe language policy documents: a synopsis

The following article explores words in two Council of Europe (CoE) language policy documents – CEFR (CoE, 2001) and CEFR Companion Volume (CoE, 2020) – with the prefixes *mono-*, *multi-*, *pluri-*, *inter-* and *trans-*. These fundamental terms are translated into Russian as an example of the Slavic languages taught at (Austrian) schools and universities. Translations into other Slavic languages can easily be supplied by theorists and practitioners.

Mono-:

While the prefix *mono-* was still present in CoE (2001) as in *monolingual dictionaries* [одноязычные словари]ⁱⁱ or *monolingual communicative competence* [одноязычная коммуникативная компетенция], it no longer appears in CoE (2020). In CoE (2001), monolingual communicative competence is portrayed as being rather monolithic.ⁱⁱⁱ Monolingual L1 speakers are different from language learners who, acquiring a second or a foreign language and at the same time staying experts in their L1s, simultaneously turn plurilingual and interculturally competent by mediating between and communicating with users of two languages (ibid., p. 41).

Multi-:

Multilingualism [многоязычие] is defined as the knowledge of several languages or the co-existence of different languages in a given society (CoE, 2001, p. 4; CoE, 2020, p. 30). It may be attained by “encouraging pupils to learn more than one foreign language” (CoE, 2001, p. 4), hereby expanding their experience of languages in various cultural contexts and making them aware of the interrelation and interactional components between languages. Belonging to a *multilingual and multicultural environment* [многоязычная и многокультурная среда] or moving from one specific environment to another may be a longshot from what pupils typically experience in language lessons or in their textbooks. But this fact could be brought into play to make them think outside the (school) box and their home communities.

Pluri-:

In 2001, *plurilingual* and *pluricultural competence* [многоязычная и поликультурная компетенции] were not yet mapped in the CEFR scales – it is thus the most recent and modern prefix mentioned in this article. The aim of developing such ‘can do’ descriptors was, on the one hand, in unison with the CEFR vision to give “value to cultural and linguistic diversity at the level of the individual” (CoE, 2001, p. 123). On the other hand, it was triggered by the wish to “encourage teachers to include the acquisition of plurilingual and pluricultural competence, appropriate to the proficiency level of their learners, in their planning” (CoE, 2020, p. 246).

Plurilingual and pluricultural competence can be accelerated by *inter-comprehension* [межъязыковое понимание или интерпонимание] – the capacity to exploit knowledge of one



language as leverage for understanding texts in other languages (ibid., p. 126) to achieve a communicative goal. This goal can only be reached by building on a *plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire* [набор многоязычных и поликультурных компетенций] (ibid., p. 123)^{iv} and by following a clear progression from “simple everyday transactions” (ibid., p. 127) at the basic user (A) level to “manipulating languages creatively” and “blending and alternating” between them (ibid.) at the independent user (B) level, and ultimately to “gloss and explain sophisticated abstract concepts” in various languages at the proficient user (C) level.

Inter-:

Apart from *interaction(al)*, *interactive*, *interlinguistic*, *intermediary*, *interlanguage*, and some others, *intercultural* [межкультурный] is a frequent attribute used in collocations with nouns such as *approach* [подход], *awareness* [осознанность], *interaction* [общение], *skills* [умения], *misunderstandings* [не(до)понимание/неправильное понимание], *relations* [отношения], *experiences* [опыт], and *communicative competence* [коммуникативная компетенция] (cf. CoE, 2001). According to the CEFR, the language learners need to develop intercultural awareness to become plurilingual. Their competence is modified by the knowledge and awareness of “the other” (ibid., p. 43), or by contrasting the commonalities and differences between “the culture of origin” and “the foreign culture” (ibid., p. 104) of the target community. In CoE (2001), *intercultural* seems to be used as an equivalent to having “an enhanced capacity for and greater openness to new cultural experiences” (ibid., p. 43) and, above others, an “ability to overcome stereotyped relationships” (ibid., p. 105).

Trans-:

In the two language policy documents, the prefix *trans-* mainly appears in words such as *translation*, *transition*, and *transaction*. The word *transcultural* [транскультурный], alas, is absent in both CoE documents (2001; 2020).^v “In a super-diverse world”, writes Hülbauer (2016, p. 196), “it is not only migration in the traditional sense we are dealing with but continuous transit, both in term of actual and virtual movements.” Thus, one is left wondering why (trans-)cultural *translation* [перевод] or (trans-)cultural *mediation* [посредничество/медиация] have not yet been incorporated as separate CEFR scales. In the meantime, we will have to accept and work with the existing four scales – *Mediating a text*, *Mediating concepts*, *Mediating communication*, and *Mediation strategies* [Посредничество в передаче текста, Посредничество в передаче понятий, Посредничество в общении, Стратегии посредничества] (CoE, 2020, p. 245) – for developing multi-language tasks and assessing integrated skills.

Worth a note: The word *translanguaging* [транслингвизм/трансьязычие] appears twice in the CoE (2020, 31), albeit in a box, stating that the term first appeared in 1996 in connection with bilingual classroom teaching in Wales, and being defined as “an action undertaken by plurilingual persons” (ibid.). Translanguaging, however, has meanwhile acquired a more complex meaning as in using multiple languages both simultaneously and strategically by drawing on a complex language repertoire. *Code-switching* [переключение кодов], on the other hand, means changing or shifting between two separate languages in a single conversation.

Summary

Mono- is out, *multi-* and *pluri-* are in. The latter two, of which *multi-* is more society-oriented and *pluri-* more learner-oriented, are the basis for *inter-* as in *intercultural interaction* [межкультурная коммуникация]. While the prefix *inter-* might imply a dichotomous relation

between home and target culture, *pluri-* emphasises proficiency in several languages and experience of several cultures.

Inter- still fills the place for *trans-*. In my opinion, *trans-* does more justice to the cultural diversity of societies than *inter-* but has not yet made it into the CoE documents (2001; 2020), although learners acting and performing as a competent *intermediary* [посредник] in dynamic transcultural settings and encounters would be a desirable learning outcome from a multilingual and transcultural language learning and teaching perspective (see also Kolaković & Vučajnk in this issue).

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ⁱ See also Hülmbauer (2016).

ⁱⁱ See the Russian translation in Sovet Evropy = Совет Европы (2005). Words not appearing there were translated by the author.

ⁱⁱⁱ ... apparently without taking into account that, for instance, attrition also may affect monolingual persons

^{iv} The corresponding scales are to be found in the CoE, 2020, on p. 128 (plurilingual repertoire), p. 125 (pluricultural repertoire) and pp. 126–127 (plurilingual comprehension), respectively.

^v For more information on “transculture” [транскультура] see https://www.emory.edu/INTELNET/fs_transculture.html.