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The Mercator newsletter informs you about the news of the five Mercator Network partners:

**Mercator Research Centre of the Fryske Akademy**

**Mercator Media**

**Mercator Legislation / CUSC-UB**

**Stockholm  
University**

**Research Institute for Linguistics**

Newsletter focusing on multilingual regions dealing with regional or minority languages, but also immigrant languages and smaller state languages, with emphasis on language needs arising from migration and globalisation. Submit your subscription request, comments or suggestions to: **Richard de Boer** (Fryske Akademy).

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## NEWS

### Riga Summit: Will the Digital Single Market be Multilingual?

The Latvian EU Presidency hosted the Riga Summit on a **Multilingual Digital Single Market** (DSM) last week, just before the European Commission launches its much-awaited DSM plan. The Digital Single Market, presented on 6 May, is the European Commission's new flagship strategy, set to replace the former 'Digital Agenda'.

At the Riga summit, politicians reaffirmed their support for Europe's rich language heritage and multilingualism policies. But the real substance was taking place at expert level, with language researchers, software experts and translation officials getting their heads together to solve the EU's multilingualism conundrum. This included discussions on a free EU translation support service, and comparing language approaches of different media.



Speakers in Riga showcased how multilingualism solutions are already being implemented by

European industry, media outlets, governments, and service providers. But several expressed concerns about a monolingual internet, the lack of language interfaces to national content, and the dependency upon a few American applications, such as the often- criticised Google Translate.

The Commission's Digital Single Market, outlined in March, will include plans to unlock territorial copyright protection for TV, film and music. This includes tackling 'geo-blocking': the fact that media and entertainment rights are often attributed on a country basis, making it illegal and difficult to access such content from outside its licensed country.

Source: [EurActiv](#), 4 May 2015.

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## Viking 'forest' language set for Nordic preschool



A rare Nordic language used by a tiny forest community is set to be taught in a preschool in central Sweden. Elfdalian, which shares some similarities with Old Norse is a hot topic at an international linguistics conference in Copenhagen, as Scandinavian language experts campaign to stop it dying out.

It might sound like something from Lord of The Rings or The Local's recent April Fool's Day prank but Elfdalian is a real language currently used by around 2500 people in the municipality of Älvdalen (Central Sweden) and is understood to date back to Viking times.

The Swedish government has been reluctant to grant Elfdalian the status of a regional or minority language as defined by the Council of Europe. Sweden maintains that Elfdalian is a dialect, despite a growing consensus among linguists that it has all characteristics of a separate language. Leading linguistics experts are battling to save it, after figures emerged that less than 60 children can currently speak it.

"Often Norwegians, Danes and Swedes can understand each others' languages and dialects. But Elfdalian can't be understood by any Scandinavians apart from the ones that grow up with it, and that is why we consider it a separate language," Yair Sapir, a linguistics expert who lives in Copenhagen and teaches at Lund University in Sweden told.

Source: [TheLocal.se](#) and [Scroll.in](#).

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## The Role of Lexicography in Standardisation: Conference Report

On April 17 a one-day lexicographic conference was organised by the Fryske Akademy in Leeuwarden, The Netherlands. The theme of the meeting was the role of lexicography in standardisation and purification of minority languages and lesser used languages.



The languages involved were Basque, Estonian, Flemish sign language, Frisian, Irish and Welsh. In an inspiring atmosphere the lexicographers David Lindemann (Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea), Maria Tuulik (Eesti Keele Instituut), Mieke van Herreweghe (Universiteit Gent) & Myriam Vermeerbergen (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), Frits van der Kuip (Fryske Akademy), Chris Mulhall (Waterford Institute of Technology) and Andrew Hawke (University of Wales) discussed with the audience how they deal in their language with loan words and purisms.

This issue proved to be too complex for just one day, so in future there should be a continuation of this conference in a bigger form with contributions from even more languages.

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## "Nothing wrong with code switching as long as you are aware"

A UK linguistics expert who was tasked to compile a set of recommendations as part of a Language Education Policy Profile for Malta said that there's nothing wrong with code-switching as long as you are aware of it.

Code-switching occurs when a speaker alternates between two or



more languages, or language varieties, in the context of a single conversation. "There's a difference when one recognises he is code-switching and let's it happen and when a person does so without realising," he continued. The expert – one of a number who compiled the highly informative report – is Lid King, formerly the UK's director of languages who was speaking during the launch of a report compiled by a number of experts from the Council of Europe Language Educational Policy Unit – based in Strasbourg – following a request by the Ministry of Education.

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Source: [Malta Independent](#), 11 May 2015.

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### **New Regional Dossier: North Frisian in Germany (3rd edition)**

The latest publication within the Regional dossiers series is the dossier on North Frisian language in education in Germany, written by G.H. Alastair Walker of the Department of Scandinavian Studies, Frisian Studies and General Linguistics of the University of Kiel, Germany.



Among all of the 162,468 inhabitants of the North Frisian region of Germany, it is thought that only 50,000 of them consider themselves to be Frisian and 8,000 of them actually speak Frisian (which is 4,9% of all of the North Frisians).

When it comes to Frisian in education, it can be said that besides the schools where both German and English are used as medium of instruction, there is only one school that offers Frisian in a multilingual context. On the Danish-Frisian school in Risum, pupils are instructed in Danish, Frisian and High German from grades 1-9.

Overall, little progress is being made with respect to Frisian in education. Besides the lack of a legal framework, there is also no continuity in education: where the teaching of Frisian is primarily restricted to the primary level, Frisian is hardly being taught at secondary level. Another major problem is the lack of a body considering the science of language planning, systematically developing and evaluating a concept of language planning for the Frisian language.

Download [The North Frisian language in education in Germany](#) (3rd edition).

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### **Second meeting for teacher education in Swedish minority languages**



On 19 May, Professor Jarmo Lainio participated, together with the director of study of the Section of Finnish at Stockholm University, Sari Pesonen, in the second meeting of researchers and educators responsible for teacher education in the five Swedish national minority languages. The meeting took place at Södertörn University College, just south of Stockholm. Södertörn UC, which is in the process of developing a Romani research center, has thus far been the coordinator of the meetings, which now have become established, after its initial meeting in 2014.

In addition to briefings of the development of especially Romani, Finnish and Meänkieli teacher training and further training this time, Lainio gave a presentation of best practices of education within the framework of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The work of the Mercator Network was also introduced for the listeners.

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### **Visit of Joseph Lo Bianco to Mercator Research Centre**

Report by **Jorrit Huizinga** (Mercator Research Centre)

On May 1, the Mercator Research Centre in Leeuwarden (The Netherlands), was visited by Professor Joseph Lo Bianco. Lo Bianco is Professor of Language and Literary Education at the Melbourne Graduate School for Education, and is renowned expert on language policy and planning. Mercator Research Centre invited him in order to learn more about his activities, and to provide him with information on the work Mercator and the Fryske Akademy are involved in with regards to minority languages and multilingualism.



In a presentation, which was open to the general public, Prof. Lo Bianco discussed the work he has been involved in in South-East Asia in recent years, where language is used as a tool in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. After explaining the long history of ethnic conflict and repression of minority languages in countries like Thailand, Malaysia and Myanmar, Lo Bianco told the audience about the UNICEF Language and Peacebuilding Initiative in these countries.

This project, of which Lo Bianco has been research director since 2012, involves extensive consultation of civil society, language experts and policy makers to help these states create equal and inclusive policies on minority languages and language education. This in turn provides a more stable foundation for long-term peace between ethnic groups. Because he discussed a situation where language policy is seen as a means to reach stability and peace, and which differs drastically from the language situations most of the attendants were familiar with, Lo Bianco's presentation was regarded as very interesting and insightful.

More information on Prof. Joseph Lo Bianco and his work can be found on the [website](#) of the University of Melbourne.

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## Colorblind bilingual programs can perpetuate bias, study finds



Many presume bilingual education can level the academic playing field for English learners, but one UC Davis professor calls foul on current practices. In a new paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association on April 20, education professor Chris Faltis argues that "colorblind" approaches to multilingualism in education mask agendas that privilege the dominant, or "whitestream," culture.

Drawing upon research first done by Jodi Melamed of Marquette University, Faltis argues that scholarship on bilingual education during the past 25 years has "strategically erased race" from bilingual education. In its place is "coded language that bilingual education serves mainly poor, Spanish-speaking children and youth; children of undocumented parents; and brown people."

Because many bilingual programs are cast as a means "to close the achievement gap between white and Hispanic children," according to Faltis, the false notion that race and academic achievement are causally linked gets perpetuated. "When bilingual education is presented this way, racial beliefs about Hispanic children are accepted as a social reality."

Worse still, Faltis says research and practices in bilingual education "ignore the role of social language in learning, destroying local language practices in bilingual communities," and positioning academic English as superior to Spanish. "While there are arguments for using color-blindness as a promising approach to advocate for bilingual education," said Faltis, "in the long run, erasing race from bilingual education scholarship ultimately enables racism to fester and racial injustice to persist."

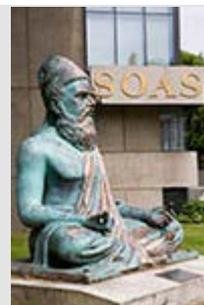
Source: [Phys.org](#), 21 April 2015.

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## 26-27 June: SOAS seminar on language pedagogy of minority languages

On 26 and 27 June 2015, SOAS and Mercator Research Centre co-organise the workshop and seminar 'Re-visiting language pedagogy of minority (and community) languages' at [SOAS](#), University of London.

Some have argued that the pedagogy of languages spoken by indigenous and immigrant minority communities merits greater attention than has been afforded in the past. This workshop and seminar is focuses on pedagogical aspects of minority (and community) languages. The topics under consideration include endangered languages, language policy, technology, as well as language teaching and learning resources. It will include both



researcher and practitioner based perspectives with speakers from the Netherlands and UK.

For further information, please contact [mercator@fryske-akademy.nl](mailto:mercator@fryske-akademy.nl)

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## Expert in the Spotlight for May 2015: Prof. Dr. Leonie Cornips



Prof. Dr. Leonie Cornips is researcher Variation linguistics at the **Meertens Institute**, the Centre for Research and Documentation of Dutch Language and Culture of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in Amsterdam. She is also professor and extraordinary chair "Language culture in Limburg" at **Maastricht University**.

"The challenge is to analyse language or dialect as a process and not as a monolithic, fixed and bound object," Cornips says. "This has a lot of repercussions since in this perspective the concepts of bilingualism or multilingualism are superfluous. Speakers put into use whatever they need of linguistic features to construct their identities."

Read more [here](#)

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## INTERESTING LINKS

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**America's Lacking Language Skills:** Budget cuts, low enrollments, and teacher shortages mean the USA is falling behind the rest of the world. Amelia Friedman reports for *The Atlantic*.

**The curious case of .cat, the Internet's weirdest, most radical domain.** Report by Caitlin Dewey (*The Washington Post*).

**Morocco's Amazighs still feel marginalized,** Imad Stitou reports for *Al-Monitor*.

**Language learning in Switzerland** is linked to wider political debates over immigration and education.

**'Nobody here is asking to leave Ukraine':** Some living in Transcarpathia, home to a variety of ethnic groups, say Russian media falsely portrays them as separatist. Report by *Al Jazeera*.

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## EVENTS

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The Impact of Socio-Political Transformations on Language and Identity, 18-20 February 2016, Tbilisi, Georgia – Call deadline 31 July 2015

**29-30 May 2015, Kaunas (LT): Sustainable Multilingualism: Language, Culture And Society**, international conference organized by VDUKI Institute of Foreign Languages.

**27-29 May, Leipzig (DE): International Conference on Language Variation in Europe**, Leipzig, Germany.

**28-29 May 2015, Joensuu (FI): Receptive Multilingualism: Multilingual Resources in Service of Mutual Understanding**, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland.

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**28-30 May 2015, Belgrade (RS): XV International Conference on Minority Languages**, Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, Serbia.

**3-6 June 2015, Hong Kong (CN): The Sociolinguistics of Globalization: (De)centring and (de)standardization**, The School of English, University of Hong Kong, China.

**18-20 June 2015, Leiden (NL): Globalising Sociolinguistics**, Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands.

**22 June 2015, Caen (FR): Natural Language Processing for French and European Regional Languages**, Caen, France.

**26-27 June 2015, London (UK): Re-visiting language pedagogy of minority (and community) languages**, workshop and seminar at SOAS, University of London, UK.

**1-4 July 2015, Valencia (ES): 12th International Symposium of Psycholinguistics**, Universitat de València, Spain.

**2-3 July 2015, Tours (FR): Bi-SLI 2015: Bilingualism and Specific Language Impairment**, Tours, France. Call deadline 1 February 2015.

**8-11 July 2015, Graz (AT): World Conference on Pluricentric Languages and their Non-Dominant Varieties**, Graz, Austria.

**26–31 July 2015, Antwerp (BE): Complex Linguistic Repertoires and Minority Languages in Immigrant Communities**, Antwerp, Belgium.

**31 July 2015, Cambridge (UK): 5th Cambridge Conference on Language Endangerment**, University of Cambridge.

**14-17 September 2015, Barcelona (ES): 4th Barcelona Summer School on Bilingualism and Multilingualism Workshop**, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain.

**29-30 October 2015, London (UK): Interpreting Communities: Minority Writing in European Literary Fields**, conference at the Institute of Modern Languages Research (IMLR), London.

**23-26 November 2015, Auckland (NZ): 4th International Conference on Language, Education and Diversity (LED 2015)**, University of Auckland, New Zealand.

**18-20 February 2016, Tbilisi (GE): The Impact of Socio-Political Transformations on Language and Identity**, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia.

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