

[← BACK TO EVENTS](#)

AI-powered Multilingualism: Friend or Foe for European Universities?

25 November 2025



TYPE OF EVENT

Keynote Panel



FORMAT

Hybrid



OPEN TO

All



DATE

25 November 2025

Fanny Meunier – UCLouvain / Circle U. – CU.mil

fanny.meunier@uclouvain.be

Spoiler conclusion

AI-powered multilingualism : neither a true friend nor a total foe...

Use the machine, but keep a close eye on it; and put your trust in people's strategic choices

But let me unpack this further now 😊



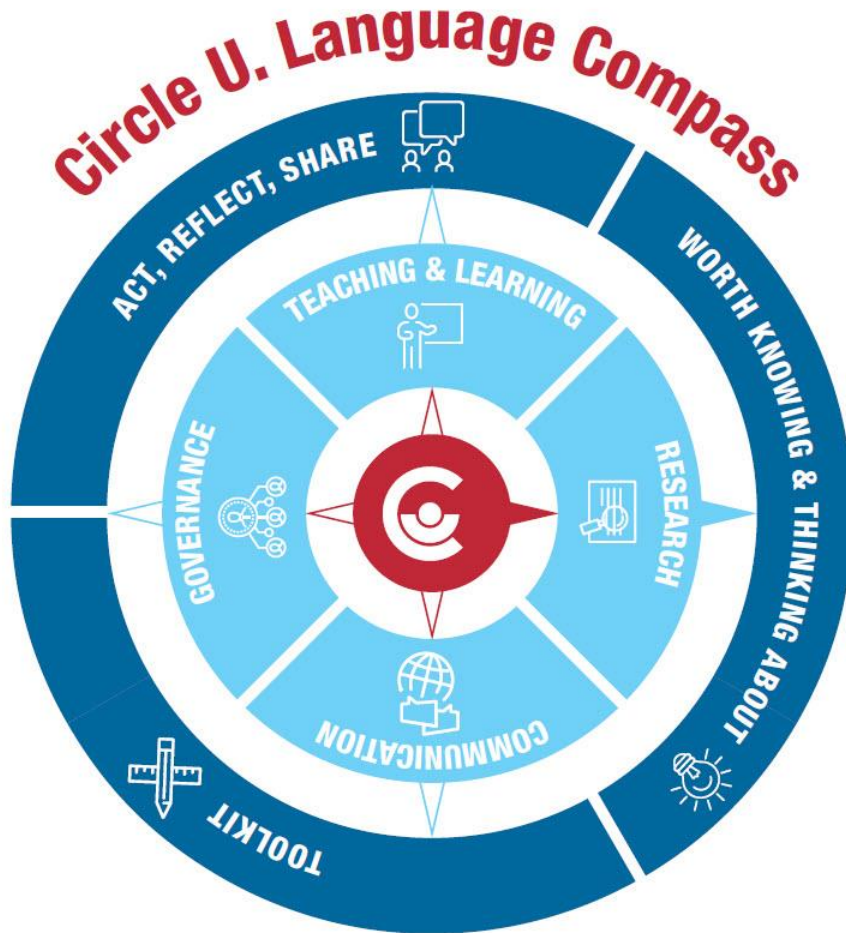
A 'meta' perspective

- to complement the more technical/tool-focused presentations
- to focus on strategic choices
 - stepping back
 - questioning assumptions
 - making intentional choices
- and to share some food for thought...



En partage

A Circle U. perspective

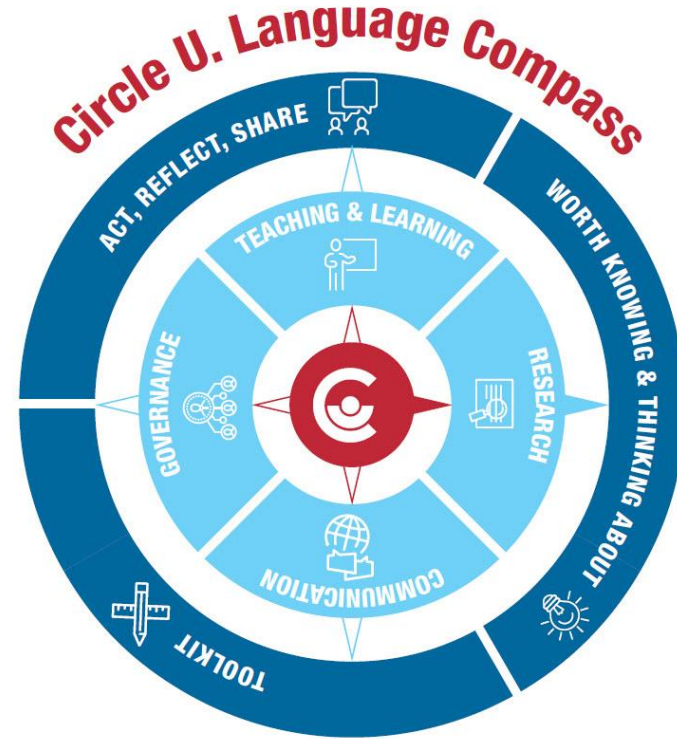


Access the full text here:



Struktur der 4 Kompassrichtungen

- *Worth knowing and thinking about:* research insights and key concepts
- *Toolkit and guidance:* practical tools, strategies and resources
- *Act, reflect, share:* small (or big) steps, evaluation, and sharing of best practices



Focus sull'area Comunicazione del Compass

Communication is not just transfer of information

Communication = co-construction of meaning, based on shared codes, expectations, identities, and relationships. This requires more than 'just' translation

Functional multilingualism is the realistic way forward

"Not everything in all languages, not everything in English"
-> no maximal translation, but meaningful access

Universities communicate at multiple layers: internal admin, teaching, research, society, alliances

Each layer may require different languages





Maximal translation is another form of monolingual mindset

- **Maximal translation is monolingualism in a multilingual costume:** it assumes one center and several peripheries (treats some languages as ‘originals’ and others as ‘derivatives’)
- Maximal translation ‘easy’ these days : e.g. 3 seconds demo <https://www.circle-u.eu/> on Firefox
- It implies that people only consume information in ‘their language’, not in multiple ones – which is not really aligned with reality
- It ignores *receptive multilingualism, language awareness, language choice strategy, integrated plurilingualism* and *audience-specific communication*
- Translating everything into all languages solves the workload problem with technology, but not the mindset problem with monolingual communication



AI enables multilingual access, but doesn't replace plurilingual thinking

AI subtitle tools, automated translation, simultaneous interpretation can extend accessibility but ...

- they require transparency (e.g. this was machine-translated using...)
- they cannot replace awareness about language choices
- they may introduce errors, biases, etc.
- they are not culturally neutral
- multilingualism does not mean multiculturalism



Multilingualism goes beyond the official languages of the alliance

- Heritage languages, migration-related languages, non-standard varieties, community languages, etc. : all matter for inclusion and belonging – give them some visibility too
- If we only consider the official languages of our alliance(s), we likely miss half of the linguistic reality of our universities

Some **pitfalls** to avoid in communication

- ✗ Using flags in visuals to represent languages (reinforces national identity stereotypes – one nation, one language; excludes many speakers)
- ✗ Choosing English ‘for inclusivity’ without asking for whom it is really inclusive
- ✗ Overloading your staff with unrealistic translation expectations, and assuming machine translation is always enough

Why AI is your *φίλος* as a communicator



It *saves time* and makes multilingual output possible rather quickly

- Small comms teams suddenly gain the capacity to produce multilingual posts, subtitle videos in seconds, translate announcements and events, communicate with international audiences instantly, summarize contents, etc.

It increases reach and engagement

- More languages, larger audiences, more visibility, better engagement, stronger inclusion, better 'brand' perception

It improves accessibility

- AI subtitles, captions, summaries also help deaf and hard-of-hearing students; people who prefer text over audio; audiences who rely on another language; quick-skimming readers

But AI can also be a *duşman* if we're not careful



Overreliance produces embarrassing mistakes

- AI tools can get tone, culture, humour, or context wrong.

It encourages 'English-first' communication

- If everything is drafted in English and then translated, we risk overlooking local audiences, silencing other languages, reinforcing English dominance

It creates false expectations

- People may think 'great, now everything is available in x languages!,' but not all content needs translations (see earlier slides on maximal translation)

It can flatten our human voices

- Personality, humour, human warmth, emotion, nuance, cultural references, creativity, etc.

En conclusion: un équilibre à (re) penser

Equilibrio entre separación e integración

Protecting linguistic breathing spaces¹: languages also need temporary protected spaces to flourish ‘on their own’. Creating such spaces is not separation for the sake of separation; it is a way to ensure vitality, identity, and equitable participation in the long run.

Plurilingualism also means strategic alternation, not constant blending : being plurilingual includes the ability to *choose* when to integrate and when to maintain linguistic boundaries, depending on purpose, audience, clarity, and inclusion.

Trusting communicators’ informed choices : teachers, students, researchers, and staff often know best which language choice enables participation, precision, and equity in a given moment. We should trust them to decide when breathing spaces are needed and when integration is more helpful.

¹ Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2017). Minority languages and sustainable translinguaging: threat or opportunity?. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 38, 901 - 912. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2017.1284855>.

People before systems

AI, translation tools, and policies can support multilingual practices, but human judgement is key. Strategic choices by speakers are not an easy 'one-size fits all', nor a problem to be solved; they are part of communicative competence.

Balance, not dogma

A healthy linguistic ecology requires both:

- *spaces where languages can breathe*
- *spaces where languages mix, scaffold each other, and co-exist.*

The art lies in moving between the two with awareness and intention

thank you

tusind tak
謝謝 dakujem vám
ngiyabonga
dziękuję
merc
baie dankie
धन्यवाद molte grazie
gracias
obrigada
obrigado
teşekkür ederim
شكرا
tack så mycket
gràcies
tānan
mahalo
teşekkür edire

suksema
danke