

# **AThEME Consortium meeting**

## ***Summary Report***

**September 15 - 16, 2016**  
**Verona, Italy**

## Introduction

The second AThEME Consortium meeting was held in Verona, Italy, on the 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2016. Over 60 participants (including AThEME researchers, a few AThEME Advisory Board members, the AThEME Ethics Advisor and the EU Project Officer) attended the two-day meeting, which was hosted by the University of Verona in the beautifully refurbished Polo Santa Marta Università. The focus of this meeting was to discuss preliminary results, allowing (especially) Phd students and Postdocs to present and update all participants on their AThEME research.



Picture 1 Plenary Session in Polo Santa Marta Università

## AThEME Objectives

The Project Summary of AThEME (DoW) states:

“AThEME (Advancing the European Multilingual Experience) is a collaborative research project aimed at the study of multilingualism in Europe by incorporating and combining linguistic, cognitive and sociological perspectives. It is an integrated approach using a range of different research methods and techniques and focusses on three levels of multilingualism (the multilingual individual, the multilingual group and multilingual society)”.

This integrated approach towards the study of multilingualism is grounded in the idea that multilingualism in Europe has many facets. AThEME will cover the different forms of multilingualism in Europe by developing new lines of inquiry on regional/minority languages, heritage languages, languages spoken by bi/multilingual speakers with communicative disorders, and languages spoken by bi/multilingual speakers at different stages of development and life.

Fundamental questions AThEME studies include: What does it mean to be bilingual? How and why do people succeed or fail in learning another language? How can we help speakers maintain their regional/heritage language and reach proficient multilingualism? What are the reciprocal effects of multilingualism and cognition? Are there cognitive benefits of multilingualism for senior citizens? How does multilingualism 'interact with' communicative disorders? Which societal factors have a major impact on successful maintenance of regional/heritage languages?

Answers to these questions will provide a firm basis for assessing existing public policies and practices within major areas such as education and health and contribute to evidence-based policy-making. AThEME aims to raise societal awareness of multilingualism through building on the successful model of academic public engagement provided by the program Bilingualism Matters.

## **AThEME Consortium Meeting, Verona**

Since this Consortium meeting marked the halfway point of the 5-year AThEME project, it was decided that it would be beneficial to invite AThEME's Advisory Board members, the AThEME Ethics Advisor, as well as the EU Project Officer to the meeting. In this way researchers and guests could mingle, allowing Advisory Board members (and the EU Project Officer) to get a real sense of the project and where it is heading. Three Advisory Board members were able to participate: Professor Ellen Broselow from Stonybrook University, USA, Professor Emeritus Camilla Bettoni from the University of Verona and Professor Tomas Riad from Stockholm University in Sweden. Professor Julie Franck from the University of Geneva also attended the meeting, in her capacity as the project's Ethics Advisor. Finally, François Grin, Scientific Coordinator of the MIME Project, the other European project on multilingualism to have been awarded funding from the EU Socio-economic sciences and Humanities programme in 2013, was invited to give a talk about his own project and how AThEME and MIME might benefit from each other's research.

On the evening preceding the meeting (14<sup>th</sup> of September), members of the AThEME Steering Committee (Work Package leaders) gathered for a dinner meeting. Amongst other things, members discussed and made final preparations for the Verona Consortium meeting.

## Day one

The first day kicked off with a keynote speech by Maria Teresa Guasti from the University of Milan-Bicocca. In her speech she outlined what new insights emerge when identifying specific language impairments in children (second language). After some questions, AThEME Project Manager Anneloes van Iwaarden presented a status update on the project as well as upcoming deadlines, meetings and a few other project management issues. Subsequently, each of the Partner Representatives gave an update of their team's research progress and the (preliminary) results that had been achieved. These 60-second pitches by the Partner



Picture 2 Maria Teresa Guasti

Representatives allowed all participants to get better a feel for the project and its many facets. To round off the morning, the EU Project Officer Sylvie Rohanova presented a talk on Horizon 2020, with a particular focus on 2017 Societal Challenges calls for proposals.

After lunch it was time to delve deeper into the actual research conducted by AThEME researchers over the past 16 months. This time around the organisers had chosen to give a bigger role to AThEME's PhD students and Postdocs to present their research work for AThEME. Therefore, during the scientific break-out sessions nearly all of the PhD students and Postdocs gave presentations within their respective research themes. Presentations for the '**Regional Languages**' theme ranged from a case study of the Fiumun Dialect to an investigation into contact phenomena in the Alps. Researchers examined populations of Italian-Sardinian bilinguals as well as speakers of Gallo and Frisian. Presentations in the '**Heritage Languages**' theme brought us to heritage Korean and heritage German but also introduced joint work on innovations in Multicultural London English (MLE) and gave insights into the language use of Moroccan-Dutch youth living in the Dutch town of Gouda.

The third AThEME topic focusses on **Communicative Impairments and Multilingualism**. One of the presentations, for example, outlined the sociolinguistic features found in bidialectal nursing homes and challenged the negative assumptions about ageing and language. Another presentation delved deeper into the relationship between bilingualism and dyslexia. Other projects included an investigation into the relationship between knowledge and use of language(s) and the physical properties and physiological processes in the brain. The final research topic '**Being Multilingual**' covered a wide variety of presentations, such as a comparison of different populations when it comes to language and attention in bilingualism. But we also listened to talks on the bilingual language decline associated with aging and whether or not a bilingual advantage could be found in children, young adults and the elderly. A few Postdocs investigated the role listening to foreign accents plays on sentence comprehension and on the predictive mechanisms of the brain.



Picture 3 Scientific break-out sessions

## Day two

The second day of the meeting started out with keynote speaker Patricia Cordin from the University of Trento giving a presentation called ‘Linguistic Contact, Bilingualism and Multiple Grammars’. This presentation was followed by special guest François Grin from the University of Geneva introducing his collaborative research project on multilingualism MIME (Mobility and Inclusion in Multilingual Europe, [www.mime-project.org](http://www.mime-project.org)). He outlined the goals and objectives of this project and how he thought AThEME and MIME, two European projects on multilingualism, complement each other. The morning concluded with another scientific break-out session during which researchers continued to discuss ongoing AThEME research but also important deadlines, such as the Policy Briefs to be written toward the end of the project.

After lunch it was time to listen to the results of AThEME’s first Dissemination Network Meeting, held two days earlier in Trento. On the 13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> of September, the University of Trento, also an AThEME partner, hosted this meeting and welcomed around 30 participants from all across Europe. To disseminate AThEME results, project partners De Taalstudio B.V. and the University of Edinburgh (Bilingualism Matters HQ) make use of the well-established Bilingualism Matters network of national branches or dissemination points, which provides information and organises events about multilingualism (<http://www.bilingualism-matters.ppls.ed.ac.uk/>). AThEME helped establish four of these national branches. During the AThEME Consortium Meeting the Dissemination leaders updated all

the AThEME researchers on the results of the Dissemination Network Meeting (the summary of which is available on the AThEME website, [www.atheme.eu](http://www.atheme.eu)).



Picture 4 Dissemination Leaders Antonella Sorace & Maaïke Verrips

After a final scientific break-out session, Scientific Coordinator Lisa Cheng and the host of the meeting Denis Delfitto thanked the organisers, guests and all other participants and congratulated them on a successful meeting.

## Conclusion

The second AThEME Consortium Meeting proved to be an intense but fruitful meeting during which all researchers involved in the project could once again meet and discuss their progress. Scientific discussions were interspersed with more general keynote speeches as well as a talk on dissemination. This provided for a varied and appealing programme for all. At the time of the meeting, the AThEME project had entered into its final 30 months. Just over halfway into the project, participants and guests were able to listen to preliminary results and get a clear idea of where the project is headed.

A special thanks goes to our three Advisory Board members for attending this meeting and giving valuable feedback, which is being taken on board: Professor Ellen Broselow from Stonybrook University, USA, Professor Emeritus Camilla Bettoni from the University of Verona and Professor Tomas Riad from Stockholm University in Sweden. We would also like to thank Professor Julie Franck from the University of Geneva who attended the meeting in her capacity as the project's Ethics Advisor. We are grateful for the participation of our EU Project Officer, Sylvie Rohanova, and would also like to thank François Grin, Scientific Coordinator of the MIME Project for his participation. Last but not least, a big thank you to the Verona Organising Team led by Denis Delfitto, for organising such a fantastic event.