
EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS OF MULTILINGUALISM POLICY

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As many languages you know, as many times you are a human being.
(Czech proverb)

INTRODUCTION

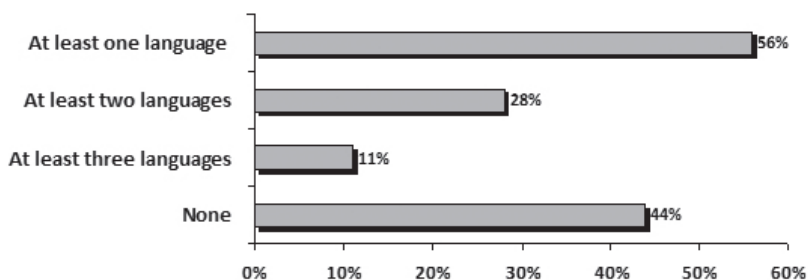
Today the European Union is home for almost 500 million people of diverse linguistic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The linguistic patterns resemble a mosaic, differing from member state to member state, and from one region to another. Such patterns have been shaped by history, geographical factors and the mobility of people. The European Union recognises 23 official languages and approximately 60 minority languages spoken over its geographical area. On the one hand, the European Union is a truly multilingual organisation which fosters linguistic diversity and facilitates foreign language skills by indicating benefits of knowing foreign languages such as better understanding, intercultural communication and tolerance, enhanced mobility and, last but not least, higher competitiveness. On the other hand, the EU recognises one's right to national and personal identity and actively promotes freedom to speak and write one's own language. Promotion of diversity and concurrent respect for individuality and identity are complementary aims of the EU embodied in the EU's motto 'United in diversity' (European Commission, 2006).

Leonard Orban, European Commissioner for Multilingualism very aptly described the benefits of knowing foreign languages by saying that "the ability to communicate in several languages is a great benefit for individuals, organisations and companies alike. It enhances creativity, breaks cultural stereotypes, encourages thinking "outside the box", and can help develop innovative products and services" (European Commission, 2008).

One of the indications of the growing importance of multilingualism was the *Special Eurobarometer*, a survey carried out between 5 November and 7 December 2005 in the then 25 Member States and Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and Turkey. The main goal of the survey was the assessment of national procedures in education and progress in language teaching/learning and, above all, a holistic evaluation of

foreign language knowledge (European Commission, 2006). A key message of *Special Eurobarometer*, presented in the table below, and a starting point for further analysis was the level of general communicative knowledge of a foreign language allowing one to hold a conversation.

Figure 1. Percentage of citizens speaking foreign languages



Source: Eurobarometer. Europeans and their Languages. 2006.

The above table shows that 56 percent of the respondents of *Eurobarometer* were able to hold a conversation in one foreign language, 28 percent in two foreign languages, but still almost half of the respondents admitted not knowing any language other than their mother tongue. *Eurobarometer* also showed that EU citizens widely supported the idea of foreign language learning and a great majority believed that young Europeans should learn two languages, with English as the first foreign language (European Commission, 2006).

DEFINITION OF MULTILINGUALISM

A clear definition of the term multilingualism is required for complete and proper understanding of the EU linguistic policy. In the European Union multilingualism stands for i) the individual's ability to communicate in several languages, ii) the co-existence of different language communities in one geographical/political area, and iii) the EU's policy to operate in more than one language (European Commission, 2012).

Easily, one may notice that the first two definitions refer to the knowledge and use of two or more languages by an individual or community, the third one does not refer to language skills or abilities of a person or group but to the EU-specific policy aiming at the promotion of language diversity. The first two meanings of the word

multilingualism are, however, firmly embedded in the third one, as the principal goal of the policy of multilingualism is to enhance linguistic skills of EU citizens in the interests of mutual cross-border understanding and communication. It should also be noted that whereas the EU understands multilingualism as both individual and societal phenomenon, the Council of Europe's language policy distinguishes the two terms. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages clearly defines multilingualism as "the presence in a geographical area, large or small, of more than one variety of language" and plurilingualism as "the repertoire of varieties of languages which individuals may use, and is therefore opposite of monolingualism" (Council of Europe, 2001: Chapter 1.3). Despite the Council's focus on plurilingualism, the EU does not apply a clear-cut division between multilingualism and plurilingualism and applies the term multilingualism in a broader meaning. This article discusses educational aspects of multilingualism within the EU's understanding of the term.

The European Commission's multilingualism policy is deeply rooted in the language policy of the European Union and constitutes its inextricable part. However, language policy, being an official social policy of the European Union, by definition encompasses a wide range of actions aiming at the protection of rights arising out of national identity and language equality, and the policy of multilingualism, established by the Lisbon European Council of 23 and 24 March 2000 and subsequently implemented by the European Commission, was originally designated for the promotion of foreign language learning in the lifelong perspective and linguistic diversity.

LEGAL BASIS FOR LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The significance of language policy within the European Union was noticed very early after the establishment of the Economic Community (1957). Nevertheless, linguistic aspects of the Community operation had been gaining importance gradually until the first decade of the 21st century when the actions of the European Commission made it clear that multilingual language policy became one of the European Union priorities.

The European Union language policy found its basis in the Treaties, i.e. the Rome Treaty (1957), the Treaty on European Union (1993) and in the Treaty of Lisbon (2009), in the Charter of Fundamental Rights (2009), the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1953), as well as in the secondary law and case law of the European Union. The Treaty of Lisbon guarantees

the respect for cultural and linguistic diversity and “the equality of Member States before the Treaties, as well as their national identities” (Foster, 2011: 3) (TUE, Article 4.2). It also obliges the European Union to safeguard and enhance Europe’s cultural heritage” (Ibid) (TUE, Article 3.3). Moreover, the Treaty of Lisbon vests citizens of the Union with a right to petition or address the institutions and advisory bodies of the Union in any of the Treaty languages and to obtain a reply in the same language (Ibid: 25) (TFUE, Article 20).

In addition to the Treaty guarantees, the Charter of Fundamental Rights provides clear provisions regarding language policy. First and foremost, it prohibits any discrimination based on language (Article 21) and assures respect for linguistic diversity (Article 22). Moreover, similarly to Article 20 of TFUE, the Charter provides a guarantee that every citizen of the Union has a right to good administration, including possibility of addressing institutions in one of the languages of the Treaties (Council of European Union, European Commission, European Parliament, 2000).

The guarantees enshrined in the Treaties and the Charter are reinforced by the stipulations of the Council of Europe’s Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by the European Union under the Treaty of Lisbon (Foster, 2011: 3) (TUE, Article 6). Not only does the Convention prohibit discrimination on the grounds of language (Article 14) but also guarantees that an arrested or charged person has a right to obtain information in a language understandable for him (Article 5.2, Article 6.3) and an entitlement to have the free assistance of an interpreter if he cannot understand or speak the language used in court (Article 6.3) (Council of Europe, 1950).

The stipulations on the protection of language diversity and national identity, as well as the principle of non-discrimination on the grounds of language are also reflected in the secondary legislation, most significant of which is Regulation No. 1 of 1958 determining the languages to be used by the European Economic Community, amended each and every time after the new accessions. The European Union case law also displays a good deal of legal disputes related to discrimination on the basis of language, for example 379/79 *Groener*, 271/98 *Agonese*, or respect for national identity, such as C 391/09 *Runevič-Vardyn and Wardyn*. The analysis of the relevant legal provisions and of the case law are beyond the scope of this article and, thus, will not be discussed in detail. Yet, they have been cited with the purpose to demonstrate that the language policy of the European Union is a wide and complex area, which is well

grounded in the primary and secondary law and provides any EU citizen with an opportunity to claim if the law is infringed.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR MULTILINGUALISM

The Lisbon European Council of 23 and 24 March 2000, which included the knowledge of foreign languages into key competences to be provided through lifelong learning, established the roots of the current policy for multilingualism. This decision, commonly known as the Lisbon Strategy, rapidly increased the importance of foreign language knowledge. In March 2002 it was upheld by the Barcelona European Council, which called for actions to improve the mastery of key competences, in particular by teaching two foreign languages to all from a very early age. The consequence of this new approach was the publication of the Commission's Communication of 24 July 2003 *Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: an Action Plan 2004-2006* and the Commission's Communication of 22 November 2005 *A new Framework Strategy for Multilingualism*. The former was published just before a large enlargement and stressed that the ability to communicate in a foreign language would become more important than ever before. The latter confirmed the engagement of the European Commission in the multilingualism policy and outlined the first ever EC strategy in this regard, predominantly aimed at the promotion of multilingualism in society and the economy. Having implemented the first assumptions of the multilingualism strategy, the European Commission published the next Communication of 19 September 2008 *Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment*, which not only reaffirmed the value of linguistic variety, but also underlined a need for a broader and more complex policy to promote multilingualism. This new more comprehensive approach was the outcome of work of the High Level Group on Multilingualism appointed by European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Multilingualism Ján Figel in 2006 and was confirmed by broad social Internet consultations carried out in 2007–2008 and two reports prepared by expert advisory groups (Rapid, 2006).

AIMS OF MULTILINGUALISM POLICY

There are three major goals of the European Commission's multilingualism policy, i.e. to encourage language learning and promote linguistic diversity in society; to promote a healthy multilingual economy; and to give citizens access to European

Union legislation, procedures and information in their own languages. The main focus of attention within this article is given to the first mentioned goal, which is of fundamental importance for educational systems of the EU Member States. Promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity is deeply set in the education and training policy, as education institutions are the principal sources of contact with foreign languages for the majority of learners. Therefore, the enhancement of quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning, which is a complex and challenging task and which encompasses a multitude of measures to be undertaken for a final result to be satisfactory, plays an extraordinarily important role (Commission, 2005).

Successful language learning and effective promotion of linguistic diversity are predetermined by adequate teachers' skills. Obviously, high-quality teaching is essential for successful learning at any age and efforts should therefore be made to ensure that language teachers have a solid command of the language they teach, that they have access to high quality initial and continuous training and possess the necessary intercultural skills. As a part of language teacher training, exchange programmes between Member States should be actively encouraged and supported (European Council, 2009).

EDUCATION AND TRAINING POLICY

The Barcelona European Council of March 2002 endorsed the 'Education and Training 2010' programme and in this way—in the context of the Lisbon Strategy—for the first time established a solid framework for the European cooperation in the field of education and training. This cooperation was based on common objectives and primarily aimed at the improvement of national education and training systems by way of the development of complementary EU tools and exchange of good practice. The cooperation, which so far resulted in noticeable progress in modernisation of higher education, development of common European instruments promoting quality, transparency and mobility, included the Copenhagen process, i.e. closer cooperation with regard to vocational education and trainings, and the Bologna process ensuring compatibility in standards and quality in higher education qualifications (Council, 2002).

One of the principal actions initiated by the European Commission within the Lisbon Strategy consisted in the creation of evidence-based series of reference levels of the European average performance in education and training ('European benchmarks'), which would help to measure overall progress and show achievements.

Such benchmarks were first introduced in the Council Conclusions of 5-6 May 2003 (Council, 2003) and adopted under the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme and later reaffirmed in the *Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training* 'Education and Training 2020' (Council, 2009). The Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 included four strategic objectives: 1) making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; 2) improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; 3) promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship, and 4) enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training (Ibid). Each strategic objective identified priority areas and reflected individual needs of Member States.

MULTILINGUALISM IN EDUCATION & TRAINING POLICY

The introduction of strategic objectives at the European Union level proves that the place of multilingual education plays an incrementally important role within the education and training policy. Strategic objective 2 of the 'Education and Training 2020' is an interface between the multilingualism policy and the education and training policy. The priority area of this objective comprises language learning/teaching, i.e. enabling EU citizens to speak two foreign languages, promoting language teaching in VET (Vocational Education Training) for adult learners and providing migrants with opportunities to learn the language of the host country, and professional development for teachers and trainers (Council, 2009, Annex II).

The above shows that language learning/teaching became priority of the education and training programme of the European Union. This is also confirmed by the fact that language skills began to be perceived as key competences, which should be mastered in lifelong learning. According to the definition, key competences are those, which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment (Recommendation, 2006). The reference framework of the Recommendation (2006) includes eight key competences, where the first two places are taken by communication in the mother tongue and communication in foreign languages respectively. This confirms the fact that knowledge of languages is one of the basic skills European citizens need to acquire in order to play an active part in the European knowledge society, and one that both promotes mobility and facilitates social integration and cohesion (Recommendation, 2006). The pivotal role of language education was also stressed by the Barcelona European Council of March 2002, which

called for the creation of the European Indicator of Language Competence (European Council, 2002). The intended indicator was to be achieved through the European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC). The underlying goal of the indicator was to provide participating countries with comparative data and give them insights into good practice in language learning and share experience and, in the end, to measure overall foreign language competences according to predetermined parameters, methods and skills: reading, writing and listening in each Member State. The measurements were based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Language (Council of Europe) and relied upon five levels of the scales: Pre-A1, A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 (European Commission, 2005).

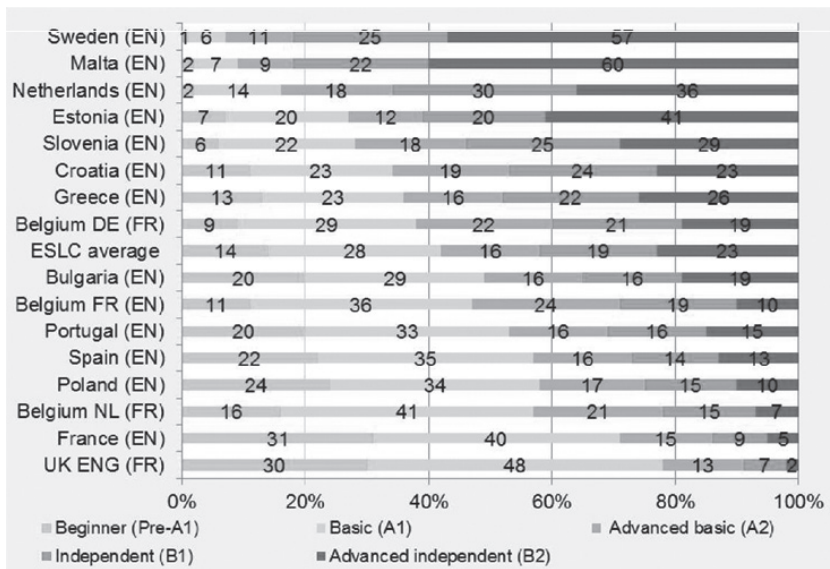
Table 1. ESCL levels based on CEFR

| ESLC level | | CEFR level | Definition |
|------------------|---------------------------|------------|--|
| Independent user | Advanced independent user | B2 | A learner can understand the main ideas of complex, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation; can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible; can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue. |
| | Independent user | B1 | A learner can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.; can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling, can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar; can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. |
| Basic user | Advanced basic user | A2 | A learner can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information); can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on routine matters; can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background and immediate environment. |
| | Basic user | A1 | A learner can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases, can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details, can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly. |
| Beginner | | Pre-A1 | A learner who has not achieved the level of competence described by A1. |

Source: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/portfolio/?m=/main_pages/levels.html,
edited by the author.

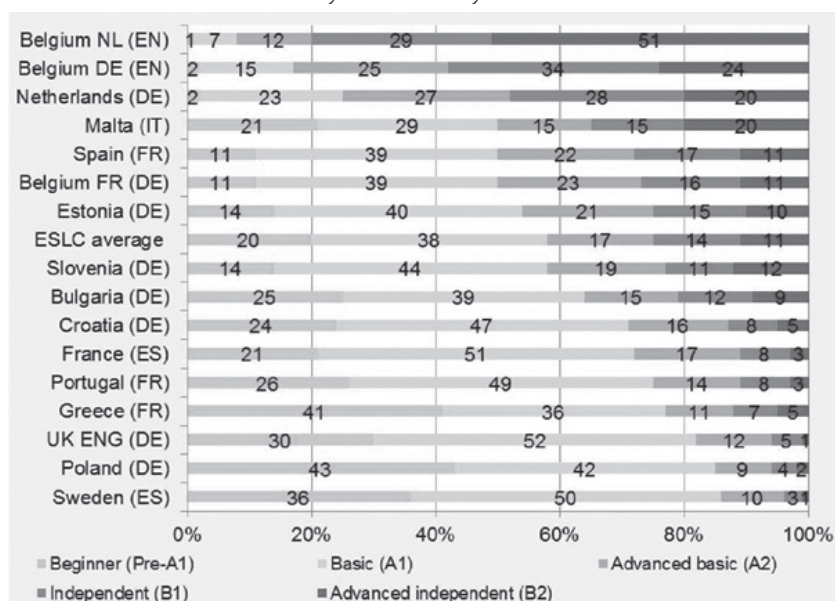
The main ESCL study was carried out in 2011 by the SurveyLang Consortium and it included 14 European states: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, France, Greece, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and UK-England. The survey was conducted among the last-year pupils of lower secondary education. According to the executive summary of the European Survey on Language Competences, language competences provided by educational systems need to be improved, the level varied greatly among educational systems of examined countries and that English was the language pupils are most likely to master (Commission, 2012). The tables presented below display an overview of educational system performance in the first and the second foreign language. The tested foreign language (EN – English, FR – French, GE – German, IT – Italian, ES – Spanish) is indicated in brackets.

Figure 2. First foreign language. Percentage of pupils at each level by educational system



Source: http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/docs/en/executive-summary-eslc_en.pdf, p.12

Figure 3. Second foreign language. Percentage of pupils at each level by educational system



Source: http://ec.europa.eu/languages/escl/docs/en/executive-summary-escl_en.pdf, p.12

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate surprising differences in the level of first and second foreign language knowledge and provide extremely helpful indications for each participating state. Moreover, the ESCL also maps out differences within and between educational systems in number of areas: exact onset of foreign language learning, number of languages offered and number of lessons taught. Clear differences between educational systems are also seen in the informal language teaching opportunities available to pupils. The amount of student's talking time in a foreign language during lessons also significantly differed in individual educational systems.

CHALLENGES AND DANGERS

The results of the survey highlight the challenges, which still need to be tackled in order to improve language competence in the European Union. Although the aims have been clearly indicated by the European Union, a huge part of work needs to be done by the Member States. Many activities carried out to date have already shown impressive progress in a number of areas, yet, there are still spheres which lack relevant and

comparable data for monitoring processes in relation to the objectives set. Firstly, the quality and comparability of the existing indicators still must be improved. The ESCL is the best example that the data obtained through research and studies is the only way to identify problems and apply appropriate measures. Secondly, educational systems need to step up their efforts to prepare pupils for further education and the labour market. Thirdly, Member States and regions should create language friendly living and learning environment inside as well as outside schools. Next, the importance of the English language should be addressed and competences in this language should be further improved. Apart from general problems and struggles, there are more specific ones, which have to be handled by teachers, educators and linguists. As already mentioned, an exemplary EU citizen should speak three languages, including their mother tongue. A person speaking three languages is trilingual. Trilingualism is a new phenomenon not only for linguists but also for teachers. So far nobody has presented a special selection of didactic materials, which could eliminate negative and positive inferences hindering or accelerating the process of learning. This area requires special attention and cooperation among didactic personnel and academics from different Member States (Widła, 2008).

CONCLUSIONS

The multilingualism policy, widely approved by EU citizens, has been promoted and implemented by the European Commission for more than ten years now. Although the outcome of efforts is noticeable in some areas, e.g. benchmarking and creation of some European indicators, establishment of framework strategy on multilingualism, defining language knowledge as key competence, raising awareness of EU citizens etc., new challenges have to be met and continual actions must be initiated if the multilingualism policy is to be fully successful. Undoubtedly, the success of multilingualism policy is greatly conditioned by successful implementation of the education and training policy. This, in turn, depends crucially on the initiatives and concrete measures undertaken by individual Member States, regions and localities.

In conclusion, the cooperation at the local, regional, national and EU level is of utmost importance for multilingual development in the EU. Only extensive cooperation may make EU citizens fully aware of possibilities and opportunities they have, as well as teachers and linguists of obstacles they have to face. Whereas numerous initiatives conducted at various levels seem to be the only way to attract and motivate

citizens at different age to learn foreign languages, to stress the weight of multicultural dialogue, to become more conscious about their culture and language and, last but not least, to pinpoint personal benefits flowing from good language command, only close and well-organised cooperation between education personnel may help obtain tools and measures to effectively teach trilingual students.

Both citizen-oriented and teacher-oriented regional/interregional cooperation plays an extraordinarily role in the entire process of multilingual development strongly embedded in the education policy, mainly due to the fact of acting as a link between the EU level and a grass-root level. Such cooperation may exert direct influence on any European citizen and any ambitious language teacher. In my view, this is the only way to make citizens feel that multilingualism is as an outstanding feature of the European Union and it is a symbol of its identity and a way for a full integration of European Union citizens.

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