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Andrew Linn

Investigating English in Europe: Contexts and Agendas

English in Europe, Volume 6

With contributions from
Ulrich Ammon, Beyza Björkman, David Block, Alessia Cogo, Jeroen Darquennes, Michele Gazzola, Anne-Line Graedler, Nigel Holden, Anna Kristina Hultgren, David Lasagabaster, Heiko Motschenbacher, Gabriel Ozón, Carmen Pérez-Llantada, Ulrikke Rindal, Stephen Ryan, Tamah Sherman, Dag Finn Simonsen, Josep Soler-Carbonell

DE GRUYTER
MOUTON

There are strong economic and political interests at stake in globalization, and a common view is that globalization requires English. Hence, a language policy meant to hamper the use of English may clash with the preferences of both the political authorities and the business community, not to mention ordinary people. In that case, the image of English as an 'opportunity' overrules that of English as a 'threat'.

When discussing national language policy-making in the era of 'Global English', it seems appropriate to sum up by quoting Fishman et al. who dedicated their 1977 book *The Spread of English* to "those speech-and-writing communities utilizing 'small languages' that have already learned to live creatively in the company of 'the mighty', and, even more, to those still learning how to do so".

Michele Gazzola

4.3.2 EU Language Policy and English

This section provides a brief outline of the language policy of the EU, and it critically discusses some of its most important policy documents.[2] Documents dealing with languages at the EU level can be collected into five groups:

1. Documents defining and regulating the use of the EU official and working languages.[3] Such documents can be legally binding (e.g. the Regulation 1/58) or not. Internal vademecums, codes of conduct or reports concerning the use of translation and interpreting services within EU institutions are examples of non-legally binding documents.
2. Official documents about EU language policy, i.e. Communications from the European Commission or Resolutions of the European Parliament. These documents deal with four general themes:
   a) *Education, language learning and teaching.* Following the Conclusions of the European Council in Barcelona in 2002, the EU recommends to the Member States that at least two foreign languages should be taught to all

2 This section draws on the report *Documenti e orientamenti dell'Unione europea in materia di multilinguismo: una classificazione degli atti* written by the author for the project *La lingua quale fattore di integrazione sociale e politica* (University of Florence, Project PRIN 2010-11). Additional financial support from the European Commission is gratefully acknowledged (Grant agreement No. 613344, project MIME). The author wishes to thank Bengt-Arne Wickström and Torsten Templin for their remarks on an earlier version of this section.

3 For a detailed description of the history of the EU language regime, its legal basis and its practical implementation, see Ammon (2014: 730–833), Athanassiou (2006), Gazzola (2006), Hanf, Malacek and Muir (2010: 81–162), and Nißl (2011: 72–127).

pupils from a very early age. This formula is sometimes called 'mother tongue plus two foreign languages' or MT+2. Besides, the EU promotes transnational teacher training and new methods for language learning such as CLIL (content and language integrated learning).

b) *Languages and the economy* (e.g. foreign languages for business and for mobility of the workforce within the common market).
c) *Languages in society* (i.e. languages for European citizenship, linguistic democracy, inclusion, social cohesion and intercultural dialogue).
d) *Support for minority languages*.

3. Various external reports or studies published (but not drafted) by the Commission or the Parliament on several aspects of the language policy of the EU.
4. The decisions of the Court of Justice or the European Ombudsman concerning language issues (e.g. discrimination as regards the language requirements in the recruitment procedures of EU institutions).
5. Parliamentary questions on language issues lodged at the European Parliament.

In addition, there are different official documents, reports or studies that indirectly or incidentally mention language policy as an aspect of other issues, e.g. migration policy, the creation of a unitary European patent, or the promotion of a common area for higher education and research. The list of documents is too large to be reported here.[4] To wit, 97 documents were published from 1981 to 2015 belonging to group 2, and 75 to group 3. It would not be feasible even to make a summary of the most important statements, reports or studies. It is necessary, therefore, to circumscribe the set of relevant documents and to define from which perspective such documents should be discussed. Group 2 is probably the most interesting because it contains the general orientations of the language policy of the EU. We focus on two specific areas, that is, the economy and society. They correspond to points 2b and 2c in the list above. As noted by Grin, Marác, Pokorn and Kraus (2014), EU language policy aims at contributing to the achievement of two EU socio-economic objectives that are difficult to reconcile, i.e. promoting

4 For a comprehensive overview of EU actions and initiatives in the field of multilingualism, see Cullen et al. (2008), European Commission (2008c), European Commission (2011).

intra-EU *mobility*[5] and at the same time ensuring *inclusion* and *social cohesion.*[6] The next section illustrates the heart of the matter.

4.3.2.1 The context of EU language policy

During the last decades the official EU discourse about foreign (or second) language learning and teaching has been increasingly connected to the achievement of the general socio-economic objectives of the EU (Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2011). Such objectives were defined in the *Lisbon Agenda 2000–2010* and in the *Europe 2020 Agenda.*[7] The EU does not however seek to neglect the cultural or cognitive aspects of language learning; quite simply, the scope of EU language policy has been broadened. Languages are increasingly viewed as skills that can contribute to economic growth, competitiveness, mobility of labour, and employability. This change has gradually become evident in different official documents. We should mention, among others, the *Action Plan 2004–2006* (European Commission 2003), the Commission's communication *A new strategic framework for multilingualism* (European Commission 2005), the Commission's communication *Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment* (European Commission 2008d), the *Council conclusions on language competences to enhance mobility* (European Council 2010), and the communication *Rethinking education: investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes* (European Commission 2012c; European Commission 2012b).

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5 Mobility is the result of various flows, that is, "*immigration* (foreigners moving into the country); *emigration* (nationals leaving the country); *return migration* (nationals returning to the country); and *circular migration* (nationals who move back and forth between countries)" (Vandenbrande 2006: 9).

6 Following the guidelines of the *Social Policy and Development Division of the United Nations*, we adopt the following working definitions. *Social inclusion* is the process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities – that everyone, regardless of their background, can achieve their full potential in life. Such efforts include policies and actions that promote equal access to (public) services as well as enable citizens' participation in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. *Social cohesion* is a related concept that parallels that of social integration in many respects. A socially cohesive society is one where all groups have a sense of belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition and legitimacy (http://undesadspd.org/socialintegration/definition.aspx).

7 The *Lisbon Agenda* was a plan developed by the European Commission aimed at making the EU "the most competitive and dynamic 'knowledge-based economy' in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion by 2010". It was followed by *Europe 2020*, a 10-year strategy aiming at "smart, sustainable, inclusive growth" with greater coordination of national and European policy.

In the already mentioned communication *Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment,* for instance, language skills are described as a factor contributing to economic prosperity. Language skills are viewed both as an asset contributing to the competitiveness of European companies and as form of human capital that can positively affect citizens' employability. In the Commission's communication *A new strategic framework for multilingualism*, the improvement of citizens' skills in foreign languages is even presented as a precondition for the achievement of the common market: "for the Single Market to be effective, the Union needs a more mobile workforce. Skills in several languages increase opportunities on the labour market".

There are sound economic reasons behind such statements. Generally speaking, language skills are rewarded on the labour market (see section 5.4 in this book for a discussion). Further, neoclassical economic theory suggests that the mobility of production factors (labour and capital) improves economic efficiency. For example, mobility of workforce helps reduce structural gaps in unemployment rates across regions, and it equalises marginal productivity of labour, thereby leading to allocative efficiency. Yet, worker mobility in the EU remains a relatively marginal phenomenon. According to official figures:

> around 2% of working-age citizens from one of the 27 EU Member States currently live and work in another Member State. By comparison, the respective share of third-country citizens residing in the EU is almost twice as high.
> (European Commission 2007: 3)

There are different social and institutional factors discouraging a move to another country, including the fear of losing social ties (family and friends), the lack of mutual recognition of professional qualifications, differences in the tax systems, and the need to learn a new language (see Vandenbrande (2006: 26) for an overview). Hence, promoting foreign language teaching and learning, according to EU policy-makers, is precisely a means to increase intra-EU worker mobility, foster economic growth and reduce unemployment.

Language skills, however, are important also for the integration and inclusion of EU citizens, and therefore for social cohesion. At the institutional level, for example, providing information to citizens in all 24 official languages is necessary to include them in communication about EU institutions and policies (e.g. European Commission 2005; European Commission 2010; European Parliament 2010). At the national level, foreign language skills can increase job opportunities of EU citizens in their home country; this could reduce unemployment and improve social inclusion (European Commission 2012b; European Council 2010). The most challenging point, however, concerns the need to include *mobile* workers, students and children. Developing adequate skills in the language(s) used in the

host country, in addition to one's mother tongue, is a condition for guaranteeing equality of opportunity to children from a migrant background (European Commission 2008a), and to integrate adult migrants (i.e. mobile workers and international students). This is crucial to preserve social cohesion at the national level, that is, to prevent the emergence of separate communities within a given country and to reduce the risk of xenophobia and populism.

The challenges, nevertheless, are huge. Mobility can contribute to economic growth, but at the same time it raises many concerns about the capability of European societies to include migrants and mobile citizens coming from linguistically diverse countries and regions. The Commission notes that "students with a migrant background score systematically less well than domestic students, notably because of insufficient command of the language of instruction" (European Commission 2008b: 20). Furthermore, "providers of basic services (health, school, local authorities and courts) are increasingly in need of communicating with people speaking other languages while their staff is not trained to work in languages other than their mother tongue and do not possess intercultural skills" (European Commission 2008b: 21). The crux of the matter, therefore, is to understand whether the MT+2 formula can effectively mitigate the tension between mobility and inclusion (that crucial tension we encounter throughout this book), or whether the promotion of one vehicular language such as English provides a better solution. Of course, it is not possible to find an answer to such a complex question here, although the current book seeks to provide further means for researchers to continue to explore this issue. In the next section, nevertheless, we present the main points of the ongoing debate.

4.3.2.2 The trade-off between mobility and inclusion

Language learning clearly facilitates mobility. Empirical evidence shows that those who learn and speak the official language of a country as a foreign language are five times more likely to move to that country (Aparicio Fenoll and Kuehn 2016). This happens because learning a foreign language during compulsory education reduces migration costs, especially for young people. The MT+2 formula, in principle, could equip EU citizens with skills that can be useful both for mobility *and* inclusion abroad. Assume for example that a Romanian pupil is taught French and German in school and that he reaches a B2 level[8] in these two languages at the end of compulsory education. This could certainly decrease the cost of moving to

8 A B2 level of The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) corresponds to an upper intermediate level of knowledge.

Austria or to Wallonia, for example, during his or her adult life, and it would facilitate integration in cities like Linz or Liège as well. Nevertheless, it would probably not substantially decrease the cost of moving to Ireland or England. Mobility often implies forwards and backwards moves from one country to another, and such moves are unpredictable. It is common knowledge that language skills cannot be simply bought and possessed like other commodities (e.g. clothes), because they are the result of a progressive learning process that can last years. In other words, schools provide language skills to children and students, but no one knows whether such skills are exactly what they will need in their adult life. Clearly, languages can be learnt also at a later stage, and promoting lifelong learning is actually one of the objectives of EU policy. Nevertheless, lack of adequate language skills is precisely one of the factors that decreases individuals' willingness to move abroad when an unexpected job or training opportunity appears.

Some observers point out that an alternative solution is to promote a vehicular language.[9] Sharing a common language, in principle, can facilitate mobility across linguistically diverse countries or regions. At present, there is no such a common language in Europe. Although English is taught in the vast majority of European schools (Eurydice/Eurostat 2012), in most cases pupils and students reach unsatisfactory levels of language proficiency (European Commission 2012a). Moreover, between 45 % and 80 % of European adults either do not know English or they do not speak it at a proficient level (see section 5.4 in this book for a discussion). Nevertheless, English is often pointed out as a language that is more likely to facilitate transnational mobility than others (see for example the recommendations of the *High level task force on skills and mobility*, European Commission 2001).

While a shared vehicular language can potentially ease mobility, it does not necessarily facilitate inclusion. For example, English can be useful to access higher education programmes in Hamburg or in Helsinki and to find a job in a high-tech company based in those cities. Nevertheless, it is not enough to fully integrate in societies in which German or Finnish, respectively, are still the local dominant languages. The language *skills* of an individual at a given time, in fact, can be viewed as a stock of human capital, but language *use* is a situated practice. In other words, Germans or Finns living in Hamburg or Helsinki, on average, may have good skills in English, but they are not necessarily willing to switch to English every time a foreign colleague or friend is present (this holds both in oral and increasingly also in written communication). Local dwellers may have good

9 Historical examples mentioned in the literature are German and Hungarian in the Habsburg Empire (Schjerve-Rindler and Vetter 2007; Korshunova and Marác 2012), Russian in the USSR (Grenoble 2003), Serbo-Croatian in Yugoslavia (Ivanova 2012).

reasons for this that go beyond parochial nationalism. For example, preferring interactions in the local language may reflect the need for belongingness to a given community, the desire to 'feel at home' in one's own city or country; they may feel more comfortable (i.e. less insecure) when they speak in their native language; it can be also the outcome of a free choice on language use. The problem is precisely that mobility makes interactions with foreigners more and more frequent both in the workplace and in private life; this, in turn, increases the number and the frequency of situations in which the use of the vehicular language would be required.

One of the possible negative outcomes of such a trend could be the emergence of 'parallel societies' in which local people and foreigners (or expats) live in rather separated communities or, using a catchier expression, in different 'linguistic bubbles'. In some situations, this is already happening.[10] Such an outcome would be harmful to social cohesion. Besides, the language dynamics resulting from an increasing mobility of citizens coupled with an intensive use of English as a vehicular language outside the Anglosphere could result in an erosion of language diversity in different sociolinguistic domains, and in massive distributive material and symbolic effects (Van Parijs 2011; Grin 2015). This would raise legitimate cultural and geo-political concerns[11] that could negatively affect peoples' attitudes towards mobility.

It is worth noting that a formula "English + another language" would not solve the problem. For example, if the second language learned at school is Italian, inclusion in the host country would be easier only if the child moves to Italy during their adult life. Note also that the EU has no competence in the field of education. It can make recommendations, but it cannot impose language education policies on the Member States. The lack of coordination among countries adds further complexity to the current situation.

To conclude, mobility and inclusion emerge as two central dimensions of the challenge confronting multilingual European societies today. The trade-off between them should precisely be the object of targeted language policy measures that aim at reducing the costs associated both with mobility and inclusion (Grin, Marác, Pokorn and Kraus 2014). Examples of such measures are investing in bilingual education, lifelong learning, translation and interpreting, provision of multilingual public goods, and a greater use of ICT in language learning and maintenance.[12]

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10 For example, we observe the emergence of rather separate networks of interaction among national and international students studying in English outside the UK or Ireland (Priegnitz 2014).

11 See, among others, Backus et al. 2013, Kraus 2008, Lacey 2015.

12 The study of different strategies to reconcile inclusion and mobility is currently the object of the EU co-funded project *Mobility and Inclusion in Multilingual Europe* – MIME (2014–2018). See