

LANGUAGE RICH EUROPE

**MULTILINGUALISM FOR STABLE
AND PROSPEROUS SOCIETIES**

LANGUAGE RICH EUROPE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS



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LANGUAGE RICH EUROPE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper is based on the conclusions of the national and regional profiles set out in *Language Rich Europe: Trends in Policies and Practices for Multilingualism in Europe*, together with reports of the national and regional launches and workshops carried out in order to consider the core document and make proposals for national action. It also takes into account the discussions at the Language Rich Europe (LRE) London Conference that took place at the British Academy in December 2012.

Overview

As anticipated the country and regional reports demonstrated a degree of diversity in terms of priorities and proposals for the future.

Particular national or regional issues included:

- Significant variations in the amount of data and information available relating to national provision
- Ambiguity about regional and immigrant languages and in some cases foreign language learning where the status of the national language(s) was not secure
- The interface between regional language(s) and state language(s)
- The need for a campaign to convince policy makers of the importance of languages
- Interest in developments such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) which varied across the sample
- Attitudes to assessment
- Low take up of language learning in Anglophone countries
- The need for a policy at university level
- The existence of dubbing rather than subtitling

As mentioned in Part 1 of the LRE publication there is considerable variation about the ways in which different language types are described and conceived – ‘foreign’, ‘minority’, ‘immigrant’, for example. Indeed these are not clear cut categories, as a given language may be in any one of these categories depending on context: Turkish can be ‘foreign’, ‘immigrant’ and a ‘mother tongue’, and the same applies to many languages, even major languages of communication. Despite such ambiguity and despite the variations across Europe, there is nonetheless a surprising commonality of concern, from which these recommendations to be proposed at European level arise.

POLICY STATEMENTS

It was generally agreed that in terms of data, the *Language Rich Europe* survey provides a solid basis, but that in some areas more research is required – for example, the public services and spaces surveys and business questionnaires were not necessarily a representative sample. There is a general demand for more reliable data – on languages, on policies and on provision. Information is available in relation to languages in education, for example, in the regular Eurostat reports on language teaching, and this may need greater dissemination and publicity. There is, however, a strong case for more systematic data collection about languages as they are actually used in society as a basis for future planning. And there is a case for harmonising European statistics on language diversity as a long-term ambition at the European level. Despite its limitations the LRE data makes an important contribution in this respect, but more information is needed across the domains at the European level if we are to create coherent policies.

It was also reported that largely because of massively increased mobility, but also because of the particular position of English as a language learned, the interrelationships between languages – ‘national’, ‘mother tongue’, ‘foreign’, ‘minority’ – had changed since the 1990s and that a new conceptualisation of this was required. The current model assumed progression through the acquisition of one or two new languages rather than the development of intercultural competence involving different levels and uses of language.

It is also considered of central importance that all learners be given the support they need to master the language(s) of schooling, to acquire the academic competence that is essential for knowledge building and school success.

Recommendation 1

Steps should be taken to increase current knowledge about the languages spoken and used in different communities and countries throughout Europe, and on the relationships between languages; for example, through data on translations. An initial survey of existing census data should be compiled and relevant authorities should be encouraged to carry out further census/survey work in this area.

Recommendation 2

The European Commission’s trilingual formula of ‘mother tongue plus two’ should be updated and further developed. For many citizens ‘mother tongue’ is no longer the same as the national language. The particular position of English also means that in practice most citizens will learn English plus one, so it is rarely any ‘two’. A useful development of the formula could include the clear articulation of a linguistic profile.

Recommendation 3

Every child and adult should have the right to learn the official language of his/her country of residence to the level of academic fluency. Authorities should remove any major obstacles; for example, by providing free additional support.

EDUCATION

Despite some of the different emphases listed above, there was a quite remarkable level of common concern in relation to languages education. Many partners reported concerns about:

■ English

English is the most widely chosen language learned in school. A number of countries reported this as something which was becoming a substitute for multilingualism and which undermined diversity. There were also concerns expressed about the loss of domains for even established national languages as a result of the influence of English in higher studies, especially postgraduate.

■ Standards

The level of achievement in school language learning is a widely expressed concern, in particular for languages other than English. Very much related to this concern was the frequently articulated demand for further and improved training of language teachers.

■ Coherence

Many education systems are struggling to create coherence and continuity across all phases of language learning from primary to university, and between the different languages taught and the learning of the national language. There is also an identified disconnection between school and home/community learning.

■ 'Immigrant' languages

Most countries reported a failure to support or value what some described as the 'gold mine' of immigrant languages. At a time when the need for an ever wider range of language skills is needed, this linguistic capital is generally neglected. In many countries a lack of understanding about teaching the national language to newcomers is also reported. The second class status of immigrant languages also arose in relation to issues of identity and social cohesion.

Recommendation 4

The particular position of English in Europe should be explicitly acknowledged, in order to propose a new model for the co-existence of languages in Europe. This would have implications for policy formulations, in particular the key objective of 'mother tongue plus 2'. It would also encourage more research and development work on the ways in which the position of English could be used to promote and support multi/plurilingualism rather than to undermine it. Finally it would mean that European funding streams, for example, the successor to the Lifelong Learning Programme, would prioritise support for languages other than English.

Recommendation 5

A priority of the new programmes should be to enable and encourage the mobility and further training of language teachers across Europe – there should be a specific 'Erasmus for teachers'. Linked to this, national governments should be encouraged to co-operate through mutual training provisions, the exchange of teachers, trainers and educators; and the removal of barriers to employment for teachers from other Member States. Only such a level of co-operation will meet the needs of a multilingual Europe.

Recommendation 6

Research is needed at European level on the factors which favour both good language learning and the development of the plurilingual citizen, taking account of existing linguistic needs and capabilities and both in-school practice and informal learning in the community. The 2012 European Survey on Language Competences should be expanded and extended to address these questions and develop guidelines to inform national practice.

Recommendation 7

'Migrant,' 'Immigrant,' 'Community' languages should be explicitly recognised through appropriate instruments at European level. They should be eligible for more funding support in national and European policies. The offer of languages other than the national language(s) should be adapted so that all students, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to learn the languages of their community, from pre-primary to university education. Where in-school support is not possible for less commonly spoken languages, education authorities should provide financial support for language learning outside of school and find ways to recognise the value of all these languages in the daily life of the school. Language skills should be developed for more inclusive societies and teaching should reflect the diversity of the student population.

MEDIA AND PRESS

The LRE network reports considerable variation across the cities surveyed. However, the reality of multilingualism means that provision of diverse languages in the press and audiovisual media is largely market driven. Where there is demand for a wide range of linguistic and cultural products they are made available. They are available to some degree in every urban centre surveyed. The development of online – and relatively low cost – media has encouraged this tendency.

Some questions for national jurisdictions include the predominance of dubbing in some countries, although it seems unlikely that legislation could have much impact here as in many, if not all, cases this also reflects a cultural preference. Generally 'linguists' prefer subtitling to enable people to experience the real language, but if people prefer otherwise, this becomes a tricky issue to resolve. There is, however, a possible role at European level for the international organisations to take a lead in this area.

At national level there is also some evidence of resistance to the use of state funded television and radio for broadcasts of certain minority languages, for example, Turkish.

Recommendation 8

In their audiovisual and language policies and support, European-level institutions should opt for subtitling rather than dubbing as the best means to promote the language competences of citizens and officials in Europe.

PUBLIC SERVICES AND SPACES

This was not a major area for discussion or reporting (although some reports still have to come in this area). It is also likely to be a national rather than European concern. In general there was considerable variation in the provision of multilingual services and information across the cities surveyed. In many cases, the multilingualism was symbolic rather than actually functional and useful.

Recommendation 9

Good practice in Multilingual Communication Modes (use of translation, interpretation, technology-assisted communication) should be researched and disseminated, using existing networks such as Eurocities. The European Capital of Culture programme should include criteria relating to communication for multi/plurilingual populations.

BUSINESS

Most countries reported an ambivalent attitude from business. This involved a stated commitment to multilingualism (mainly competence in English which was regarded as the main business language), but overall a lack of strategy, monitoring or rewards for language skills. In some countries the domination of English, for example in computer manuals, was described as demoralising. The current EU position that multilingualism = profitability does not seem to be reflected in the practice of the companies surveyed, where English is seen as essential and most other languages (beyond the national language) as an optional extra.

Recommendation 10

We should reassess the ways in which multilingualism increases trade and profitability. Research is needed into how successful companies actually engage in successful business exchanges across languages and cultures from an economic and sociological perspective rather than with a solely linguistic bias. This should provide case studies and practical guidance on negotiating the multilingual marketplace both for businesses and employees.

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