

Multilingualism in the European Union

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Abstract

Based on a comparative analysis, this paper aims to provide a review of the development of the idea of multilingualism in European documents between 1919 and 2010 by starting from the following hypotheses: H1 - Numerous documents of the European institutions emphasize the importance of multilingualism and multiculturalism; H2 - All the languages in Europe have the same cultural value; H3 - The policy of multilingualism is implemented in EU member states; H4 - CEFR has a strong influence on the teaching of foreign languages in Europe; H5 - Rise of multilingualism has been noticed in the 21st century. Research has shown that European documents continuously emphasize the importance of multilingualism (H1), but the formal will of the documents is not implemented in the actual communicative practice in many countries (H2). This is shown by a comparison of the language situation in many EU countries, where only one foreign language is taught, which is mainly English (H3). CEFR is applied in the majority of EU countries and has a great influence on the methodology of foreign language teaching (H4). Multilingualism is one of the basic factors of the European language policy in the 21st century, but at the same time the first doubts about its successful implementation have occurred (H5). The authors point out that linguistic diversity is not sufficiently reflected in European schools. Therefore it is necessary, that through better cooperation with all EU member states, linguistic and intercultural skills of all the individuals are developed and that they become aware of them, so that the final goal of the Council of Europe – plurilingualism can be achieved.

Keywords: multilingualism, European documents, CEFR, the English language

1. Introduction

In the circumstances of growing international contacts, media and communication networking, as well as connectivity of global proportions, the knowledge of foreign languages represents one of the key competences that an individual needs to master in order to improve his or her opportunities for education and advancement in the increasingly dynamic world of work. European institutions have recognized the importance of language competences of European citizens and multilingualism has become an important factor of European identity as well as one of the main goals of language policy in Europe. This has been confirmed in numerous documents of the European institutions that emphasize the importance of multilingualism and intercultural education to preserve the diversity and richness of European languages and cultures. In the 1995 White Paper¹ on Education and Training European Commission has defined the goal that in addition to their mother tongue all European citizens should master two foreign languages. This paper follows the development of the idea of multilingualism and intercultural education in the documents of the European institutions before and especially after the creation of the European Union. It emphasizes the importance of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which outlines the desire of the European Union to act jointly in the field of culture and education, particularly in the development of the system of language teaching. In the end, however, the question arises whether the formal will expressed in the documents is really implemented or whether there are reductions in official languages in the actual communicative practice and that English is preferred and the respective arguments are supported by concrete examples.

2. Aim, hypotheses and methodology of the research

Based on a comparative analysis, this paper aims to provide a review of the development of the idea of multilingualism in European documents between 1919 and 2010 by starting from the following hypotheses:

H1: Numerous documents of the European institutions emphasize the importance of multilingualism and multiculturalism

H2: All the languages in Europe have the same cultural value

H3: The policy of multilingualism is implemented in EU member states

H4: CEFR has a strong influence on the teaching of foreign languages in Europe

H5: Rise of multilingualism has been noticed in the 21st century.

Based on the analysis of the EU documents, a diachronic review of the language policy in Europe is given.

3. Foundations of multilingualism and interculturalism in Europe

Multilingualism in Europe is not a completely new concept. As early as 1919, the international multilateral contract, the Treaty of Versailles, was in addition to French, which was at that time the undisputed language of diplomacy, also written in English. The English version of the agreement thus became the full official version of the agreement. The European

¹ White Paper on Education and Training – Teaching and Training – Teaching and Learning – Towards the Learning Society. COM(95) 590, November 1995

http://europa.eu/documentation/official-docs/white-papers/index_en.htm#1995

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Coal and Steel Community, was founded in 1951 with the aim of creating a single market for coal and steel for its six member countries, accepted French as its official language. According to the Schuman Declaration² the integration of the industry had to reconcile the old enemies of Germany and France and finally lead to the creation of a European federation. As only a couple of years had passed since the end of World War II, the Italians and the Germans did not insist on their languages and the Dutch were numerically in minority. The French language managed to remain the language of diplomacy for almost 30 years. This is not surprising because French was the official language of the three countries that have established the community, while in the other three it was the most commonly taught foreign language. The founding treaty of the European Economic Community that was signed in Rome in 1957 does not mention multilingualism at all (Siguan, 2004, 147). The Article 217, which states: “The rules governing the languages of the institutions of the Community shall, without prejudice to the provisions contained in the Rules of Procedure of the Court of Justice, be determined by the Council, acting unanimously”, does not mention the language of the community³. Council Regulation, which was adopted on 15th April, 1958 can be considered as a kind of a linguistic Charter of the European Economic Community as it provides official and working languages of the institutions (German, French, Italian and Dutch), and stipulates that all laws, decrees, and all articles of general importance must be written in the official languages as well as that the documents that EEC institutions send to their member states should be in the official language of the country concerned⁴. The Article 2 of the Treaty states that every citizen has the right to contact the authorities and institutions in one of the official languages and to get the answer in the same language. This article made it possible for all citizens to communicate with the authorities and institutions of the Community in the official language of his or her country. Linguistic question was elaborated in the 1958 Treaty on the European Community⁵.

New membership of Britain and Ireland to the European Community in the 1970s contributed to the strengthening of the influence of the English language. The 1970s also marked the beginning of the active discussion of the model of multilingualism, and in the 1980s in the Homburg Recommendations⁶ (1980) multilingualism of an individual started to be seen as a precondition for the peaceful coexistence of different nations. According to the Homburger Suggestions multilingualism can be achieved by changing the traditional way of choosing foreign languages in schools as well as by changing the objectives of foreign language learning. A very specific and concrete encouragement for multilingualism was given by the Conclusions of the Council of Ministers in 1984 where they required the acquisition of

² The Schuman Declaration was named after the French foreign minister Robert Schuman. Schuman was the president of the European Parliament and is considered one of the main founders of the European Union.

³ The Intergovernmental Conference on the Common Market which was convened on 29th May, 1956 in Venice by the ministers of foreign affairs of the Kingdom of Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of France, the Republic of Italy, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg adopted the text of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community and the attachments thereto.

http://www.mvep.hr/custompages/static/hrv/files/EUugovori/11957E_Ugovor_o_osnivanju_EEZ-a_hrv.pdf

⁴ EEC Council: Regulation No 1 determining the languages to be used by the European Economic Community Official Journal 017, 06/10/1958 P. 0385 – 0386;

⁵ Cf. “The Treaty Establishing the European Community”, “The Treaty of Lisbon” and “The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union” and the German versions „Vertrag zur Gründung der Europäischen Gemeinschaft“, „Vertrag von Lisabon“ and „Vertrag über die Arbeitsweise der Europäischen Union“ <http://www.politische-union.de/egv99/>

⁶ Homburger Empfehlungen für eine sprachenteilige Gesellschaft in Deutschland und Europa – cf. Rutke Dorothea (Ed.) (2002), Europäische Mehrsprachigkeit: Analysen-Konzepte-Dokumente, Aachen, Shaker Verlag, 97-100.

practical knowledge of two languages after completing obligatory education. (Bär, 2004; 30). In 1985 the European Council accepted the report of the so-called Adoninno Committee entitled “On a People’s Europe”⁷ where it is mentioned that languages that are spoken in a community are an integral part of the cultural heritage and that they contribute to its richness and diversity. In order for people to be able to communicate beyond borders, they should first of all be able to understand each other. Therefore, practical language skill, the knowledge of the cultures and living conditions in other member states is particularly important and should be encouraged as early as the childhood. In addition to this the Committee mentions that it is necessary that young people completing compulsory education should gain practical knowledge of two foreign language, of which at least one should be one of the languages of the Community. This report also mentioned that future teachers of foreign languages should spend one part of their education in the country whose language they will be teaching and that as many students as possible should have an opportunity to stay in the countries whose language they are learning. Only two years later, in 1987, the Council adopted conclusions on the joint action programme to encourage mobility of the students studying in institutions of higher education called Erasmus. The Erasmus Project primarily aims to facilitate the mobility of students and teaching and non-teaching staff, fostering international exchange of experience and new knowledge, especially the knowledge of foreign languages.⁸ The Decision of the Council of Ministers of Education of the European Community for the action programme for the promotion of foreign languages in the European Community that was adopted in 1989 called *Lingua* testifies that the Community had committed itself to the preservation and development of multilingualism in Europe. The *Lingua* Programme primarily develops awareness of the multilingual richness of the European Community and stresses the importance of lifelong learning.

4. European Union

Suggestions of the Adoninno Committee became a reality with the creation of the European Union with the Treaty on European Union (Treaty of Maastricht 1992)⁹ that enabled the development of European integration in all areas in all the areas of the Treaty of Maastricht. The Treaty of Maastricht¹⁰ was changed and amended with the so-called reform treaties (e.g. The Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997¹¹) and the agreements on the accession of new EU member states.

The development of the European Union as well as growing social and economic cohesion of its members and greater mobility of the population inevitably lead to complex economic, cultural and linguistic interaction. As a prerequisite for a democratic identity of Europeans, multilingualism has been built in the foundations of the European Union since the European Union was established on the principles of respect for the diversity of cultures, and thus

⁷ Source: Bericht des Ausschusses für das 'Europa der Bürger' an den Europäischen Rat von Mailand (Mailand, 28.-29.Juni 1985). <http://www.cvce.eu/viewer/-/content/b6f17ee2-da21-4013-9573-c2b159f86ff5/de>

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/eilc1011_en.htm

⁹ http://www.vlada.hr/hr/dodatno/upute_i_vodici/pojmovnik/ugovor_o_europskoj_uniji_ugovor_iz_maastrichta

¹⁰ The Treaty of Maastricht was renamed by the Lisbon Treaty in 2007. to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union). The Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community form the legal basis of the European Union. These contracts changed and amended several times.

<http://www.politische-union.de/egv99/>

¹¹ One such agreement is the Treaty of Amsterdam that introduced new labelling of articles. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/de/treaties/dat/11997D/htm/11997D.html>

implying the diversity of languages. Language policy of the European Union supports a supranational European identity and promotes language diversity and multiculturalism. Thereby, however, cultural and national identity of a certain country is not lost, but rather particular attention is paid to the protection and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity, as it is evidenced by the motto of the European Union “united in diversity” (for Latin “in varietate concordia”¹²) which was officially declared by the European Parliament on 4th May, 2000¹³. Although the education of youth and cultural policy is primarily decided by each member state separately, the EU institutions promote multilingualism and multicultural cooperation. For this purpose they established “Leonardo da Vinci” programmes in 1994. They provide a basic framework for the improvement of teaching and learning of foreign languages in the European Union and thus an intercultural dialogue too. The Council decided also on a Community action programme “Socrates”. Very important is the Decision No 819/95/EC of the European Parliament and the Council on a joint action programme. Part of the project are: the Comenius Programme which covers school and pre-school education and encourages international cooperation, the Grundtvig Programme”, which is specialized for lifelong learning and teaching of adults, Minerva, a programme for the development of ICT in education and others. Linguistic and cultural diversity are also promoted through programmes as Culture 2000 supporting translation of contemporary authors of the European Union. At the session of the European Parliament on 28th February, 2002¹⁴ it was emphasized that nearly 40% of the 376 million citizens of the EU were younger than 30 years. They were the target age of the Socrates programme. By promoting mobility, interculturalism and diversity of education that programme had an opportunity for a big success in the coming years.

5. Multilingualism (Plurilingualism) and Interculturalism (Pluriculturalism) in the 21st Century

Economic and cultural cooperation of global proportions in early 21st century, accompanied by the development of new communication and information technologies, especially the Internet, which “becomes an unavoidable phenomenon of science, culture and economy” (Gai, 2001;8) changes the view of multilingualism and the individual who is no longer expected to achieve the perfect competence in the foreign language that would be equivalent to that of a native speaker, but to master the linguistic and sociolinguistic competence that would enable him or her to navigate in another language and another culture.

An important role in the formation of unified criteria for teaching and assessment of achieved levels of knowledge and language skills applicable to all European languages has been played by Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)¹⁵. CEFR was developed by a Resolution of the European Union in 2001 as a basic document for the development of a system of assessment of language competence. CEFR is a document of the Council of Europe and it provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks across Europe. It gives a detailed explanation of what language learners have to do and what knowledge and skills of a certain foreign

¹² Info Blatt 1/5 die Europa Symbole

¹³ Eurominority <http://www.eurominority.eu/version/eng/languages-motto.as> (15.12.2012)

¹⁴ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegistreWeb/search/simple.htm?language=DE&fulltext=28.02.2002&reference=&relName=&auteurSearch=&codeTypeDocuSearch=&datepickerStart=&datepickerEnd=>

¹⁵ Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR) http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_en.pdf

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language they have to develop so as to be able to use it for effective communication. The CEFR advocates the use of the term “plurilingualism” instead of “multilingualism”. According to the CEFR¹⁶, multilingualism is “the knowledge of a number of languages, or the coexistence of different languages in a given society” whereas plurilingualism means that the individual “does not keep these language and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact” (ibid:4) ... The introductory chapter also lists the goals of language policy of the Council of Europe. To promote interculturalism the following goals are mentioned:

- “To promote mutual understanding and tolerance, respect for identities and cultural diversity through more effective international communication.
- To maintain and further develop the richness and diversity of European cultural life through greater mutual knowledge of national and regional languages, including those less widely taught.
- To meet the needs of multilingual and multicultural Europe by appreciably developing the ability of Europeans to communicate with each other across linguistic and cultural boundaries” (CEFR,2005: 3)

CEFR has had a very strong influence on the formulation of the outcomes of learning foreign languages in most European syllabuses. According to CEFR “the various cultures (national, regional, social) to which that person has gained access do not simply co-exist side by side; they are compared, contrasted and actively interact to produce an enriched, integrated pluricultural competence, of which plurilingual competence is one component, again interacting with other components” (ibid, 6). A plurilingual person uses all his or her linguistic knowledge and experience for successful communication, which also means navigation in a foreign culture. As outlined in the Article 8 of the Recommendation¹⁷ of the Council of Europe “Recent studies have shown that the ideas that every language is linked to a particular culture and that bilingualism ultimately excludes the individual from both cultures are mistaken. The view that bilingualism or plurilingualism is a burden on pupils is also incorrect – they are assets.” Therefore, the intercultural education operates twice, the perception of an awareness of their own culture and puts it in relationship to the other culture.” As stated by Petravi , “stereotypical notions are not related only to the image of a foreign culture (heterostereotypes), but also to images of their own community (autostereotypess)” (Petravi , 2010: 70). In fact, we raise the awareness of our own culture only in contact or meeting with other and different cultures (Šmidt Pelaji , 2009: 12). The 2006 Commission Statement entitled “On a New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism”¹⁸ emphasizes the cultural and socio-economic benefits arising from the knowledge of a language. As quality teaching of foreign languages is only possible if it is done by quality teachers, the Article 12 emphasizes the importance of supporting measures for better teacher training. The same article notes the necessity of expanding the number of languages that are taught in and out of school. Commission Decision of 20th September 2006 set up the High Level Group on Multilingualism whose task was “to bring about an exchange of ideas, experience and good practice in the field of multilingualism and to make recommendations to the Commission for

¹⁶ In 2005 the Croatian version of CEFR was published with the title: Zajedni ki europski referentni okvir za jezike: u enje, pou avanje, vrednovanje. Council for Cultural Cooperation, Board of Education, Department of Modern Languages, Strasbourg. (Translated by Valnea Bressan and Martina Horvat). Zagreb: Školska knjiga.

¹⁷ Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, The Place of Mother Tongue in Schol Education, 10091, Recommendation No 1740 (2006), Article 8.

<http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta06/EREC1740.htm>

¹⁸ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?language=EN&objRefId=130694>

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actions in this domain.”¹⁹ End of 2007 the Commission launches a campaign for the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, which aimed to promote dialogue between different cultures and mutual understanding and better coexistence.²⁰

However, the first doubts about the possibility of a successful implementation of the intercultural education started to appear. Thus a study of the European Parliament of June 11th, 2008, which dealt with the implementation of the intercultural education in classrooms in selected EU countries (France, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Great Britain), concluded that despite the increasing complexity of the social communities in the EU, the intercultural education was given less attention in political discourse. In order to improve the situation, new measures that would contribute to the development of multilingualism and intercultural competence, were continuously taken. Thus Article 8 of the Resolution of March 2009²¹ on Multilingualism emphasizes the importance of lifelong education of foreign language teachers and their mobility in order to improve their language intercultural competence. Although the decisions and recommendations of the European institutions emphasize the importance of multilingualism, and although it is formally implemented, the actual practice of communication often leads to the reduction of official languages. The evidence of this is a request sent to the European Commission by a member of the European Parliament, Sergio Berlato on September 2nd, 2010²². In his letter, Berlato asks a question about the discrimination of Italian and other languages in the EU compared to English, French and German. He specifically cites the example of job offers for 300 new vacancies for administrative officers in which they asked to send their job applications in English, French or German. Berlato noted there was a danger that such jobs could be more often filled only by applicants from those language areas, which would reduce the possibility of applicants from other countries to get those jobs. It is clear from this example that regardless of the recommendations of the European institutions, the actual language situation in the European Union is not developing in line with the recommendations and that priority is given to the English language. However, all the latest documents²³ continue to emphasize the importance of supporting and upgrading programmes for culture and education that promote mobility and multilingualism to strengthen common values and intercultural dimension within the European Union.

6. Conclusion

¹⁹ ccvista.taie.x.be/showDoc.asp?celex=32006D0644&country=53

²⁰ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-07-1842_en.htm

²¹ Report on Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment (2008/2225(INI))

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2009-0162+0+DOC+XML+V0//en>

²² Request for written Answer E-6018/2010 to the Commission Article 117 of the Rules of Procedure by Sergio Berlato

www.europarl.europa.eu/RegistreWeb/search/simple.htm?language=EN&fulltext=Mehrsprachigkeit+und+Interculturalitat¤tPage=2

²³ Europäisches Parlament 2009 – 2014, Ausschuss für Kultur und Bildung, 2011/2182(INI), 24.1.2012, Stellungnahme des Ausschusses für Kultur und Bildung für den Petitionsausschuss zu dem Bericht über die Unionsbürgerschaft 2010: Weniger Hindernisse für die Ausübung von Unionsbürgerrechten, (2011/2182(INI))

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/commissions/cult/avis/2012/474001/CULT_AD%282012%29474001_DE.pdf

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Research has shown that European documents²⁴ continuously emphasize the importance of a strategy for multilingualism that promotes the value of foreign language learning. The Council emphasizes that all the European languages have the same cultural value and the same dignity as well as that they are an integral component of the European culture and civilization. Therefore, all the member states are required to make it possible for the students to learn two, and if possible, more foreign languages in addition to their mother tongue. The 2004 Agreement on Constitution articulates that different cultures, languages and tradition have to be seen as a richness of all Europeans.²⁵ Guidelines for multilingualism are therefore given, but the formal will of the documents is not implemented in the actual communicative practice in many countries. This is shown by a comparison of the language situation in many EU countries, where only one foreign language is taught, which is mainly English. It is noticeable that the English language has been imposed as a lingua franca and that a vast majority of students in primary and secondary schools learn English as the first (and often only) foreign language.²⁶ CEFR is applied in the majority of EU countries and has a great influence on the methodology of foreign language teaching. Regardless of the propaganda for multilingualism in the EU documents, it is actually not implemented in reality, but English has been imposed as the only foreign language. Thus the European schools poorly reflect the European language diversity, since 95% of all foreign language teaching is concentrated on only five languages (German, English, French, Spanish and Russian) with the very dominant English language (Krumm, 2008). Multilingualism is one of the basic factors of the European language policy in the 21st century, but at the same time the first doubts about its successful implementation have occurred.

In order to change the current situation, it is necessary, particularly through better cooperation with education systems of the member states of the European Union, to raise the awareness and to develop language and intercultural skills of the individuals. Only in this way will it be possible to realize the ultimate goal of the Council of Europe, which is reflected in the plurilingualism, i.e. “in the communication of each individual in his or her mother tongue and in two other languages that would make that person plurilingual, and would significantly contribute to the multilingualism of the social community, regardless of the fact whether it is a historically multilingual community or whether it is a community of acquired multilinguality“ (Gai, 2010: 306).

²⁴ Cf. COM (2005)596 of November http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/archive/doc/com596_en.pdf

²⁵ „It shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States. It shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced.“

Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, Part I, Title I, definition and objectives of the Union, Article I-3, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2004:310:0055:0185:EN:PDF>

²⁶ Cf. 63.4. Special Note (2005). Europeans and languages. http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_237.en.pdf

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Eurominority. European motto „In varietate concordia“
<http://www.eurominority.eu/version/eng/languages-motto.as> (November 23rd, 2012)

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