

BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF EUROPEAN STUDIES

DOCTORAL THESIS

The Multilingual Europe

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The Multilingual Europe

- language policies in the European Union -

Table of contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
1. INTRODUCTION	5
1.1. The importance of foreign languages	6
1.2. The origin and evolution of languages	10
1.3. What is linguistic diversity?	14
1.4. Languages of the world and languages of Europe	17
1.4.1. The genealogic classification	18
1.4.2. The geographic classification	21
1.5. Perspectives on language	27
2. THE EUROPEAN UNION AND MULTILINGUALISM	37
2.1. Brief history of the European Union	38
2.2. Minority languages in the E.U.	43
2.2.1. Ethnicity and nation	44
2.2.2. Majority and minority	48
2.2.3. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages	51
2.2.4. Actions taken in the member-states to protect regional or minority languages	54
2.3. What is multilingualism?	68
2.4. Official E.U. documents on multilingualism	75
2.5. The supremacy of English.	113

	Challenges for multilingualism in the European Union.	
2.6.	Multilingualism for economic development	129
3.	LANGUAGE POLICIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION	139
3.1.	What are language policies?	140
3.1.1.	Introduction	140
3.1.2.	Definitions of language policy	142
3.1.3.	Language policies and the state	146
3.1.4.	Languages in the E.U. institutions	154
3.2.	Translation and interpretation in the European Union	159
3.2.1.	Introduction	159
3.2.2.	Brief history of translation and interpretation	160
3.2.3.	Translation and interpretation in the academic curriculum	167
3.2.4.	The influence of different cultures and languages of the E.U. on translation and interpretation	173
4.	EDUCATION FOR MULTILINGUALISM. ITALY AND ROMANIA – A COMPARATIVE STUDY	184
4.1.	Education for democracy. Foreign language learning and teaching in the European Higher Education Area	185
4.1.1.	The European dimension	186
4.1.2.	Language policies in European universities	187
4.2.	Language in the education systems in Italy and Romania	191
5.	ATTITUDES TOWARDS LANGUAGE LEARNING AND LANGUAGE TEACHING IN ITALIAN AND ROMANIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES	203
5.1.	General methodology	204
5.1.1.	Introduction	204
5.1.2.	The preliminary stage	207

5.1.3.	The designing stage	209
5.1.4.	The implementation stage	211
5.1.5.	The questionnaire design	213
5.2.	Language learning in higher education. Survey results and charts	216
5.2.1.	General information	216
5.2.2.	Students' linguistic skills	219
5.2.3.	Foreign languages in higher education and students' attitudes towards foreign language learning	247
5.3.	Language teaching in higher education. Survey results and charts	265
5.3.1.	General information	266
5.3.2.	Knowledge of the E.U. language policies	266
5.3.3.	Language policy within the university	267
5.3.4.	Language teaching in higher education	268
5.3.5.	Final remarks	274
6.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	277
7.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	282
8.	APPENDICES	300
	Interview with Professor Paolo Balboni	
	Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia	301
	Multilingualism and language attitude in universities.	
	Questionnaire for students	305
	Multilingualism and language attitude in universities.	
	Questionnaire for language teachers	311

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The Multilingual Europe

- summary -

Language represents one of the highest cultural forms and also one of the most important factors that distinguishes human beings from animals. Language means diversity, cultural heritage and cooperation. It is an important part of our identities and represents the most direct manifestation of a culture. Due to language, one may establish relations with other people and may transmit the cultural heritage of his/her people. Languages represent bridges between peoples and cultures.

As Robert Phillipson stresses in his book, languages are considered to be “the medium through which communication takes place in politics, commerce, defence, academia, the media, technology, the internet, and most aspects of life”, therefore they are definitely “central to our increasingly international world, to globalisation and to the accelerating process of European unification” (Phillipson 2003: 5).

Many scholars have written, along the years, about languages, their power and importance in human life. These aspects are undeniable; therefore our thesis will also concentrate on the importance of languages, of learning and teaching languages within the space of the European Union.

Linguistic and cultural diversity, multilingualism and multiculturalism are among the main values of Europe. Nowadays, as we have previously stated, multilingualism is a bridge among cultures, but, as we are well aware, it has not always been like this. Languages, together with other cultural instruments, were used as battlefields. Some

languages dominated, others were discriminated or even excluded. It is still the case in certain countries, where linguistic, cultural or religious differences cause riots, rebellions that lead to the death of many people.

According to the Council of Europe, and to many other specialists, a distinction should be made between “multilingualism” and “plurilingualism”. The former refers to a geographical area where there is a linguistic diversity, several languages or varieties of a language are spoken. The latter refer to the languages an individual can use, and it is opposed to monolingualism. Therefore, an area is multilingual, a university may be multilingual, but an individual is plurilingual¹. This difference will be further discussed within this thesis.

We live now in the era of globalisation, but, while at global level there are certain languages that tend to dominate the scene, in Europe, the linguistic diversity is not eliminated, but celebrated. Without the constant effort of the European citizens to learn the languages of their neighbouring states, at any time in their lives, there would not be understanding or a true “unity in diversity”. However, English tends to dominate the scene as a *lingua franca* in various domains of human life. A separate sub-chapter of this thesis will analyse this very problem.

The strategy for multilingualism of the European Union stresses the fact that speaking other languages and understanding other cultures strengthens the connections between different parts of Europe, as well as the fact that languages represent the path that has to be followed for social integration and intercultural dialogue. “Learning a language is not just accessing a communication code. By learning languages, and gaining an insight into the point of view of the others, we become more tolerant, more ready to compromise, more conscious of the complexity of our society. We do not belong to just one mother tongue, but we are nurtured by a variety of cultures”².

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¹ www.coe.int, 07/02/2011.

² Leonard Orban, *Multilingualism – a bridge to mutual understanding*, speech delivered at Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca, 15 May 2009.

Our thesis is structured in six chapters, as follows: *Introduction*, *The European Union and Multilingualism*, *Language Policies in the European Union*, *Education for Multilingualism. Italy and Romania – a comparative study*, *Attitudes towards Language Learning and Language Teaching in Italian and Romanian Public Universities* and *Conclusions and Recommendations*. The first three are theoretical chapters, the fourth analyses the educational systems in the two countries selected for this research, the fifth is an analysis based on a research conducted both in Italy and Romania, in the institutions of higher education, while the six comprises the conclusions that we have drawn and the recommendations that we have made.

The first chapter, *Introduction*, analyses the importance of languages, what linguistic diversity is, the main theories around the origin of languages, as well as their evolution; furthermore, it also presents some points of view on language issued by some of the greatest philosophers of humankind. Last but not least, this chapter deals with the languages of Europe, a brief history and main language families.

The second chapter is entitled *The European Union and Multilingualism* and it obviously has to do with the E.U. and its policy regarding multilingualism. Starting with a brief history of the European Union, the chapter continues with the definitions given to multilingualism along the time, as well as with the main documents issued by different E.U. bodies on multilingualism. The chapter then goes on and tries to find and analyse the main challenges that language policies face within the European space, due to the obvious supremacy of English not only in Europe, but around the world as well. Moreover, apart from the official languages recognised by the E.U., there are also tens of other minority languages, which make the motto “unity in diversity” even more difficult to handle. In the end, the chapter focuses on the strong connection between languages and economic development, which cannot be denied in the era of globalisation.

The third chapter, *Language Policies in the European Union*, tries to go deeper in the issue of multilingualism. After defining what language policies are and seeing their connection with the states and with the E.U. institutions, this chapter goes further and makes an in-depth analysis of the actual measures that have been taken for language

teaching, language learning, as well as translation and interpretation in the E.U. member states.

The fourth chapter of my thesis, bearing the title *Education for Multilingualism. Italy and Romania – a comparative study*, is, in fact, a research, an analysis of the higher education area in Europe, more specifically in Italy and Romania. This chapter prepares the ground for the analysis that has been carried out in two public universities in Italy and Romania.

The fifth chapter, *Attitudes towards Language Learning and Language Teaching in Italian and Romanian Public Universities*, presents the results of the survey carried out in the period of time ranging from January 2011 until June 2011, analysing the way in which the language policies recommended by the European institutions have been implemented in higher education institutions in Italy and Romania. For this, we have chosen two representative universities in Italy (“La Sapienza” of Rome) and in Romania (Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai of Cluj-Napoca). For this, we made two questionnaires, which were applied, on the one hand, to students in the above-mentioned universities and, on the other hand, to the professors teaching languages. The questionnaires (for both students and professors) can be seen in the Appendix to this thesis.

As to the methodology applied, mention should be made that we used the quantitative method; we administered 140 questionnaires to Romanian students and 59 to Italian students, as well as the qualitative method especially in the case of questionnaires addressed to professors. Following the steps recommended for the questionnaire design and implementation, we continued with data gathering and analysis. Therefore, we used the SPSS programme for statistical analysis of the data.

Finally, the sixth chapter comprises, as we have previously stated, the conclusions that we have drawn from the analyses made, as well as the recommendations that we have made.

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Linguistic and cultural diversity, multilingualism and multiculturalism are among the main values of Europe. Nowadays, as we have previously stated, multilingualism is a bridge among cultures, but, as we are well aware, it has not always been like this. Languages, together with other cultural instruments, were used as battlefields. Some languages dominated, others were discriminated or even excluded. It is still the case in certain countries, where linguistic, cultural or religious differences cause riots, rebellions that lead to the death of many people.

As we have already mentioned, the strategy for multilingualism of the European Union stresses the fact that speaking other languages and understanding other cultures strengthens the connections between different parts of Europe, as well as the fact that languages represent the path that has to be followed for social integration and intercultural dialogue.

The first official document regarding languages in the EU was the *Regulation No. 1 regarding the language regime of the European Economic Community*. On 6 October 1958, the Council of the European Economic Community, based on Article 217 of the Treaty, adopted the *first Regulation regarding the language regime of the European Economic Community*³. The regulation settled the official languages and the working languages of the community institutions. Therefore, according to Art. 1 of the Regulation, the official and working languages were German, French, Italian and Dutch. Furthermore, Article 2 of the Regulation regarding the language regime of the European Economic Community mentioned that all texts addressed to the institutions by a sender from a member state, as well as the answers given by the institutions, had to be drafted in one of these official and working languages. Article 4 of the Regulation stipulated that the regulations and other texts of general applicability were also supposed to be drafted in the four official languages, and so did the Official Journal of the Community (as Article 5 stipulated).

Many other documents have been issued along the years to support, promote and protect foreign languages as well as regional or minority languages in Europe. The Commission also made proposals related to the language learning in higher education, referring to the Socrates programmes and to the Erasmus programmes, so that the

³ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/ro/dossier/dossier_11.htm, 18/10/2010.

Commission and the Universities would work more or promoting the mobility of students.

Furthermore, in what the range of languages is concerned, the Commission proposed the expansion of the curricula for foreign languages in order to have a wider range of languages taught in schools. Also, the Commission further proposed the development of the Leonardo da Vinci programme for the increase of the number of teachers, trainers and learners that use language products.

In addition, the member states were asked to promote the mobility of language teachers so that they gain more experience in their language by living in the country of the language they teach in school. Moreover, they were also asked to solve any legal problems related to the employment of foreign language teachers from other member states

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As a result of the survey carried out, thanks to the kind help of the students and language teachers who accepted to take part in our research, we came up with some important results which are worth mentioning here.

The first important conclusion we drew from the research we carried out is that, at least in what the two studied universities are concerned, Babeş-Bolyai University is one step ahead the Italian university in what the implementation of the E.U. recommendations on foreign language teaching is concerned. We do not refer here only to the fact that the Romanian university has a language policy since 2001, long before the accession of our country to the European Union. We also refer here, as the results on language teaching showed, to the fact that Romanian language teachers are more aware of and more informed about the language policies of the European Union and they strongly support their implementation in the university/faculty they are working in.

The second conclusion we drew from our research and observation is that Italian students benefit from more opportunities from the point of view of the language teachers they have in class. As such, as we have already seen in the case study, for each foreign language course, they have one Italian teacher who teaches grammar and general

linguistic knowledge, and a foreign lecturer in charge of helping students put into practice the knowledge they acquire during the theoretical course. Unfortunately, their language level according to the CEFRL is lower than the Romanian students' level, even though, theoretically, it should be higher, considering they have the advantage of working with native-speakers.

This leads to our third problem, which is, as we have understood from discussing with different language professors at different universities in Italy, that language teachers at primary and secondary level do not focus very much on the teaching of languages. English is seen as the most important language of the moment, therefore all funding goes towards that direction. This idea is supported as well by professor Paolo Balboni, a distinguished professor from the University of Venice, who responded to our questions and declared that the Berlusconi Government that has been leading Italy for the past decade can be blamed for this English-only policy.

Unfortunately, this leads to another discussion, a very important one as well. The European Union's policy referring to multilingualism is obviously a political matter. Due to the subsidiarity principle, the E.U. institutions cannot interfere in the educational systems of the member states, therefore, the entire language policy of the EU represents nothing but a recommendation.

As Paolo Balboni declared in our interview, idealistic multilingualism and political multilingualism are over. Just as sceptical is also Abram de Swaan who sees the E.U. multilingualism policy as an "imperial kitsch"⁴ and this all in the background set by his idea that "the European Union is more than a confederation, but less than a federation; more than just a free trade zone, but not quite an economic whole; almost a world power, but one without an army or an effective foreign policy of its own; with a common currency, the euro, but with coins that reserve a different verso for each member state" (de Swaan 2007: 135).

Marie-Pierre Escoubas-Benveniste, a teacher of French at the Faculty of Economics within "La Sapienza" University of Rome, writes, in the working paper elaborated by the Department of Modern Languages of the above-mentioned faculty, that "Italy represents

⁴ This is made as a reference to Phillipson's book "Linguistic Imperialism".

an interesting and a paradoxical case. English has been imposed as the only foreign language for study in primary education and remains the first foreign language studied in colleges or high schools, while the most recent legal provisions implicitly raise the question regarding the compulsory status of a second foreign language”⁵ (Escoubas-Benveniste 2009: 30).

The results obtained from the research carried out and from the talks we had with the foreign language professors, we noticed that, at least in the case of Italy, “foreign language teachers should commit more and engage themselves in reaching an optimum teaching method for the benefit of students who are motivated and more willing to study”⁶ (Marras 2009: 62).

We believe that both Balboni and de Swaan are right when they say they do not see a bright future for the European Union language policies. As long as they remain mere recommendations and as long as the role of English and its representative countries (the U.S.A. and the U.K.) are increasing, there is little chance for other languages to become as important as English.

⁵ Author’s translation.

⁶ Author’s translation.

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