European Multilingualism

Current Perspectives and Challenges

Rosita Rindler Schjerve and Eva Vetter

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In memoriam
Peter Nelde

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Rosita Rindler Schjerve and Eva Vetter
Vienna, April 2011

List of Abbreviations

CDA	Critical discourse analysis
CoE	Council of Europe
CoP	Community of Practice
DMM	Dynamic model of multilingualism
EC	European Community
ECJ	European Court of Justice
EEC	European Economic Community
ELF	English as a lingua franca
EM	European Multilingualism
KBS	Knowledge-based society
LMT	Language management theory
LPP	Language policy and planning
RML	Regional and minority language
WP	Work package

Introduction

The book at hand addresses multilingualism in the European Union (EU), attempting a close investigation of this phenomenon in its socio-cultural and political, as well as its scientific dimensions. The particular focus on the EU can be explained by the fact that the topic of European multilingualism (EM) primarily results from the contexts of advancing Europeanisation. This is the reason why this multilingualism appears to be geared to the EU's integration process from a political perspective. Furthermore, the focus on the context of the EU is also due to the fact that this book is essentially based on the results of the major project LINEE (Languages in a Network of European Excellence, FP6 2006–2010), which was commissioned by the EU to investigate EM and which has recently been completed.

Writing this book was motivated by the following considerations: on the one hand, the desire arose within this major project to make certain components of the project results accessible to a wider scientific community. On the other hand, it had become clear in the course of working on the project that the term 'EM' appears to be vague, contradictory and inconsistent, both in its political dimension and in its scientific foundation, and that it thus seems to require a certain degree of revision. Moreover, the LINEE research gave rise to the impression that, in its profiling and policy development, EM reflects a process in the making which is essentially substantiated in the overlap between the ability to shape policy and the generation of scientific knowledge. It thus seemed promising to gauge the deficits and discrepancies shaping the conception of the term 'EM' by means of a critical synopsis of these two dimensions. And finally, the experience resulting from the authors' occupation with developing a research platform for theories and methods of multilingualism should serve to summarise and reformulate the body of knowledge created in LINEE with respect to the general theorisation of multilingualism.

When talking about EM, it cannot be ignored that from the 1990s onwards there has been a paradigmatic shift, when not only scientific scholars but also political stakeholders set out to rethink the heterogeneous linguistic landscape in Europe in the scope of the diversity framework. From a political perspective, this shift has been largely prepared by the goals and activities of two primary agents in this field, namely, the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Economic Community (EEC), although the global initiatives launched by the UNO and UNESCO should also be mentioned in this context,

albeit their being primarily geared towards human and cultural rights (e.g. the *Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights 1996*: cf. UNESCO 1996 or the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity 2001*: cf. UNESCO 2001).

Since the early 1950s (cf. European Cultural Convention 1954), it has been a major concern of the CoE to promote language learning and teaching. This was, inter alia, reflected in the development of not only basic models such as the Threshold Level and the Niveau Seuil but also of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (cf. CEFR 2001) and the *European Language Portfolio*, which have evolved into the most influential instruments in European language education policy, albeit at a later stage. The emphasis on intercultural communication and plurilingualism expressed in the language learning-related and the minority-related policy since the 1980s is entirely in line with the policy of the Council, which has mainly been directed towards the issues of human rights, democratic citizenship, and cultural integration. In fact, the *European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages* (cf. Charter RML 1992) and the European *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (cf. Framework Convention 1995) are also to be viewed from this perspective, as well as the increased focus on the linguistic and cultural integration of the immigrant minorities. In this context, it should be stressed that the Council has repeatedly been seeking cooperation with the EEC and the subsequent EU in the pursuit of its goals.

Although the initiatives of the EEC were also concentrated on language acquisition policies and regional minorities, this policy was nevertheless underpinned by considerations resulting from the requirements of economic integration and of the search for a solution to the regionally escalating conflicts in the individual member states. The prelude to an explicit policy of EM, however, occurred only with the foundation of the EU, where the respect for cultural diversity was codified in the Maastricht Treaty. The EU's move towards multilingualism was primarily fostered by the requirements of the Europeanisation process, where multilingualism was to ensure not only economic growth and transnational communication but also sociocultural cohesion and the development of a common European identity.

Within the EU and against the background of the longstanding homogenising politics of the European nation states, the move towards multilingualism eventually occurred in an amazingly short period of time. The change was long overdue for several reasons: on the one hand, national monolingualism has been the exception rather than the rule due to the fact that from the very beginning, most European nation states have actually been multilingual. The national homogenisation of the linguistically heterogeneous communities, however, has for a long time obscured the existing multilingual reality. On the other hand, more recent immigration

has brought about new and highly complex forms of bi- and multilingualism which (cf. also Vertovec 2010: 86–67), although largely neglected by the state authorities until recently, called for a solution. Another point is that in the background of ongoing European integration, the question is to be raised as to how the existing linguistic diversity might be accommodated within the scope of European unity. That is to say, it has so far remained unclear how to tackle the increased range of official languages on an equal footing within the EU institutions and, in particular, how to deal with English as an emerging supranational lingua franca in this and other transnational contexts. Another unresolved question is how to implement a reasonably balanced policy of foreign language learning that would not focus exclusively upon the large prestigious languages, as is presently the case, but would account for the diversified multilingual requirements of the various transnational and regional contexts. And the third question concerns possible modes of integrating the highly diversified linguistic resources of the old and the new minorities.

It is true that the public debate on linguistic diversity and multilingualism in Europe is of rather recent origin. However, as early as in the 1970s, public awareness about linguistic heterogeneity was raised when the European regional movement was headed towards challenging the cultural and linguistic dominance of the nation state. The struggle of regional minorities for linguistic and cultural autonomy and the conflicts it gave rise to had the effect that these minorities came to constitute a field of both scientific investigation and political commitment. At that time, the scope of these activities was, however, largely directed towards the phenomena of bilingualism and diglossia rather than towards multilingualism. Interestingly enough, this orientation also applied to those cases where more than two languages were involved.

Furthermore, bilingualism was the focus of the acquisition studies of these times, and the bilingual stance was maintained when the political stakeholders within the enlarging EEC set out to plea for increased second language learning. It was only in the 1980s that the plea for multilingualism emerged for the first time, when the European Commission and the Council started to argue in favour of two foreign languages. This plea for multilingualism continued well into the 1990s, when the famous *White Paper on Education and Training* (cf. COM(95)590) of the European Commission stated that Europeans should learn at least two community languages besides their mother tongue.

We can say, however, that the call for language learning and the preoccupation with regional minority languages largely took place at separate sites and that both were inspired by somewhat different paradigms. The same holds true for migrant minorities, who from the 1980s onwards became a focus of increasing scientific interest, which, however, developed more or less independent of the research focus regarding the regional minorities.

Rare exceptions to these separate activities can be seen in those cases where acquisition policies concerning bilingual minority schooling, for example, in Germany with a focus on immigrants, or in countries like France, Great Britain or Spain regarding regional minorities, drew upon the scientific expertise of both education and minority research.

It was only within the EU context, and especially after the millennium and the Lisbon strategy (cf. Lisbon Conclusions 2000), that the plea for multilingualism started to integrate the separate perspectives into the larger scope of the European diversity debate. In this scope, linguistic diversity is referred to as a basic quality of the EU since it is seen as reflecting the different European identities and cultures while at the same time representing a marketable resource for the New Economy. Moreover, since Barcelona 2002 (cf. Barcelona Conclusions 2002), the appeal for EM has been evolving into a political strategy in which the learning of languages is seen as a means to foster the knowledge-based society (KBS) while at the same time enhancing economic growth, social cohesion, welfare and intercultural understanding within the Union. Interestingly enough, there appears to be growing concern about how the languages of the old and the new minorities are to be integrated into the diversity scope. The reasons for this anxiety can be seen in the fact that the issue of minorities combines with the question of human rights, democracy and equality, the core principles and values on which the EU is founded.

Following the communication of the European Commission (cf. COM(2008)566 final: 4–6), 'unity in diversity' constitutes a cornerstone and a political objective of the European Union. Hence, promoting EM is seen as a comprehensive strategy which integrates languages into the wider context of the EU agenda for social cohesion and welfare. From this it can be concluded that the promotion of EM constitutes a strategy which is to ensure the political implementation of linguistic diversity in Europe.

Beyond the political dimension, which is still in the making, it cannot be ignored that EM constitutes an ever growing field of scientific investigation and research. Taking its epistemological stance from different disciplinary sites, for example, multicultural and European studies, studies in language contact concerning the old and new minorities, foreign language learning and acquisition or language policy and planning (LPP), EM has been developing into a multi-faceted cover term that embraces a wide range of theoretical and methodological perspectives. As yet, these different disciplinary strands appear, however, to be rather isolated and fragmented as they lack integration into an overall framework. Unfortunately, no such framework is available to date. Against the background of the existing fragmentation, it hence constitutes a major challenge for scholars of EM to seek for the basic common grounds on which such a framework might be developed.