

# Multilingualism language policy in the EU today: A paradigm shift in language education

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*The official rhetoric of the European Union (EU) describes the linguistic diversity by which it is characterised as ‘an asset for Europe and a shared commitment’, while it also represents languages as commodities for employability, mobility and economic growth. In the context of the EU embracing institutional multilingualism, promoting foreign language learning and suggesting ways of coping with the ‘new’ multilingual and multicultural classrooms, the management of its complex linguistic diversity is no simple matter. While its language policies reflect consistent efforts to cope with its unique multilingualism, they are often contradictory partly because they are not part of a cohesive overall strategic plan. This paper attempts a review of the EU’s commitment to institutional multilingualism, through policies, decisions, recommendations and actions aiming at the management of its multilingualism, focuses on language education policy in particular, and concludes by suggesting that a new didactic paradigm for language education is needed in Europe and beyond because in today’s interconnected world, the ability to speak multiple languages and communicate across linguistic divides are critical competences.*

**KEYWORDS:** *multilingualism, linguistic diversity, language policy, CEFR, plurilingualism, mediation*



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## 1. INTRODUCTION: EUROPE’S LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

Linguistic diversity is rooted in the legal framework of the EU. The Charter of Fundamental Rights, adopted in 2000, which the Treaty of Lisbon made legally binding, mandates that the EU respect linguistic diversity (Article 22) and prohibits discrimination on grounds of language (Article 21). Respect for linguistic diversity is therefore a fundamental value of the EU. This paper intends to show that the policies generated by the EU and adopted by its governing bodies are articulated in

both normative and instrumental discourses in the attempts to secure linguistic justice for all EU majority and minority languages and to ensure that young people learn at least two foreign languages in addition to their mother tongue. The recommendations are usually too general and vague failing to adequately address the needs and interests of specific language groups, while the foreign language learning project is related to the dominant languages of Europe. At the same time, it should be understood that the EU functions in an advisory capacity to members states’ promotion of

multilingualism, resulting in a discrepancy between supranational level recommendations and decisions regarding linguistic diversity and language learning at member state level.

The EU aim and commitment to embrace the European cultural mosaic and promote the appreciation of Europe's linguistic wealth became even more challenging after the EU's enlargement with the new nation states that emerged in central and eastern Europe in the early 90s. The aspiration remained the same though: to establish a collective identity as Europeans (who are different but united), so that tensions and conflicts between national interests be resolved as they are within a family – where all members are equally important. And so it ought to be. The EU should regard everyone as equally important despite the obvious inequalities in geography, population size, GNP per capita, etc. But, it is not so. Therefore, it is common to hear member states with less economic and political power complain when the European Council and the European Commission (EC) act on the basis of the principle of equality along the lines that 'all states are equal, but some of them are more equal than others' on both symbolic and material level.

Adding to the complexity of Europe's rich cultural and linguistic diversity are now the immigration flows from across MENA, which have accelerated in speed and scale in recent years, impacting the

continent well beyond the initial stresses on the infrastructure and organisational capacity of the receiving countries. In reality, the immigration wave constitutes the most powerful driver of the changes that are remaking Europe at levels ranging from its ethnic and religious composition to its politics, challenging the ideas that are at the very core of reciprocity and the mutuality of societal obligation.

In the midst of all these changes, which are putting the inclusive European dream to the test, is the issue of the plurality of languages, cultural expression, and ethos of communication. The challenge of managing Europe's new multiracialism, multiculturalism and multilingualism, while facilitating integration and maintaining social cohesion, is now even more demanding.

The range of languages spoken in the EU, which is one of the most institutionally multilingual polities in the world, is not confined to the 24 national or official languages used in each of the 28 EU member states and recognised as official languages of the EU. Over 60 indigenous, regional or minority languages are spoken by some 40 million people including Basque, Catalan, Frisian, Gallaecian, Saami, Welsh, Yiddish, as well as the languages that populations immigrating within or to EU states have brought with them: languages from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and from

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European countries which are not in the EU, including Russian – the second or principal foreign language of migrants from the eastern European countries (European Commission, 2017).

Though the 24 official/national languages of the EU are supposed to enjoy equal status, three of these languages (English, French and German) have a higher standing, and they are the ‘procedural’ languages of the European Commission – i.e., used in the day-to-day workings of the EU institutions – while two more languages (Italian and Spanish) have special status as ‘support’ languages. The status of these five languages is contingent upon political and economic power, as these are the languages of the strongest economies in the EU.

Adding to this colourful and rich mosaic of Europe’s linguistic landscape are the foreign languages spoken by Europeans, as the educational systems in most member states require that students learn foreign languages as part of

their general education. As a matter of fact, according to Eurydice (Key Data on Teaching Languages at School, 2017 Edition) more primary school students are learning foreign languages from a younger age, and more lower secondary school students are learning two foreign languages compared to 10 years ago.

The foreign languages commonly included in school curricula are the five European languages with a higher standing that serve as commodities for economic development. The first foreign language most commonly taught is English – the language which has dominated the foreign language teaching and learning scene for the last three decades – and the most common second foreign languages are French and German. Specifically, according to the 2015 Eurostat information, 97.3% students in lower secondary schools across Europe are learning English, 33.8% French and 23.1% German. Spanish, Russian and Italian are far behind with 13.6%, 2.7% and 1.1% respectively. However, there is significant difference in the achievement of learning goals in school, between the first and the second foreign language, according to the results of the *European Survey on Language Competences* – a study conducted by the European Commission so as to afford comparable data concerning language learning in schools across the EU. On the basis of this large-scale project, which provided substantial information, not only about pupils’ competences

in the languages they are being taught, but also about the contextual conditions of foreign language study in European schools, the EC advises that more effort has to be put into foreign language teaching across the EU and that pupils' language competences will need to be significantly improved particularly where the second foreign language is concerned (Costa & Albergaria-Almeida, 2015). Nevertheless, EU officials maintain that the EU is moving closer to its 'Europe 2020' goals on education in general and language education in particular – whose utilitarian value is underscored – suggesting that:

- commodity languages are important for EU's economic growth and development;
- less 'important' EU languages are supported to the extent that the Union is bound by its official commitment to institutional multilingualism;
- the languages that children from immigrant families bring with them have no value as symbolic capital in themselves; their maintenance can be beneficial for the children, but the requirement is for them to acquire full proficiency in the language of schooling and to learn the commodity languages taught in school.

## 2. THE ROLE OF LANGUAGES AND LANGUAGE POLICY IN EUROPE

Language, in particular, has played an extraordinarily significant role in nation-building

in Europe since medieval times and has functioned as a strong symbol of cultural identity, shaping people's national identity and their allegiances. Language has served the purpose of construing social subjects in European countries, where there is an overriding feeling of being at risk for political, economic or military reasons and where ideologies of national language protectionism have been strong, sometimes leading to the assimilation of linguistic minorities and to language or dialect death. In countries whose economic and political power allows them to feel more secure, the attitude to minority or community language ranges from tolerating to supporting them and from respecting to legitimising them by including them in the educational system.

The so-called 'foreign' languages do not pose the same kind of threat that minority languages do. In fact, most people believe that learning a foreign language (having in mind a commodity language like English) is a plus, as revealed by the 2012 Eurobarometer survey on Europeans and their Languages: 98% believe that mastering foreign languages will benefit their children, 72% agree with the EU goal of all pupils learning two foreign languages in school, and 77% are of the opinion that developing foreign language skills should be a policy priority (European Commission, 2012a). This is because these languages are considered as cultural and especially economic capital. Of course, recently, a number of other languages are

on demand – languages such as Russian (the most popular non-EU language), Chinese and Arabic as they are languages spoken in fastest-growing emerging economies.

However, foreign languages other than English are rarely an obligatory subject in school nor a requirement for a degree in any subject area in either the sciences or the humanities, while proof of English language competence is required very often for entrance into postgraduate programmes of any discipline. In some parts of Europe, especially the Nordic countries, university studies are offered through the national language, but often access and production of knowledge (reading and project work) is in English, the language which has managed to take over and make the field of natural sciences monoglossic. English is used almost to the exclusion of other languages, which can and does have an impact on crushing different ways of thinking that are valuable especially in science, suppressing different theories or ways of theorising which undeniably comes with the use of different languages. Of course, science is not the only domain in which English has taken over in Europe (cf. Macedo et al., 2003) forcing many people to use a ‘lingua franca’ (Gazzola & Grin, 2013) and have a ‘false sense of mutual intelligibility’ (García & Otheguy, 1989).

How does Brussels deal with EU’s rich linguistic wealth and how are the ‘English-only’ tendencies

or English plus French (especially at government level) tackled? Which are its language policies, what sort of recommendations does it make and what kind of actions are taken to ensure that language diversity and multilingualism in Europe is secured?

The official language policy, as it is stated in the European Parliament Facts Sheet of the European Union is the following:

*‘Languages are an integral part of the European identity and the most direct expression of culture’ (European Parliament Facts Sheet of the European Union). In an EU, founded on the motto ‘United in diversity’, the ability to communicate in several languages is an important asset for individuals, organisations and companies. Languages not only play a key role in the everyday life of the European Union, but are also fundamental for respecting cultural and linguistic diversity in the EU’ (Franke, 2017).*

Two important statements, ‘respect for linguistic diversity is a fundamental value of the EU’ and the ‘respect for the person and openness towards other cultures’ are incorporated into the preamble to the Treaty on European Union, while Article 3 of the Treaty states that the EU ‘shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity,’ and Article 165(2) emphasises that ‘Union action shall be aimed at developing the European dimension in education,

*particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the member states’ (The Lisbon Treaty, 2007).*

In the aforementioned Facts Sheet, it is also stated that *‘in 2013 the European Parliament adopted a resolution on endangered European languages and linguistic diversity in the European Union, calling on the member states to commit to the protection and promotion of the diversity of the Union’s linguistic and cultural heritage’ (Franke, 2017).*

Also recorded in the aforementioned Fact Sheets on the European Union, is that *‘as part of its efforts to promote mobility and intercultural understanding, the EU has designated language learning as an important priority’* and that Multilingualism *‘... is an important element in Europe’s competitiveness [as well as] one of the objectives of the EU’s language policy is therefore that every European citizen should master two other languages in addition to their mother tongue’ (Franke, 2017).*

The EU’s interest in sustaining and efficiently managing multilingualism has been questioned and criticised by a number of language professionals (Kraus & Kazlauskaitė-Gürbüz, 2014; Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2011; Phillipson, 2016; Romaine, 2013). Certainly, since Mr Juncker’s cabinet was announced, Brussels has moved from having one entire portfolio on Multilingualism

(Leonard Orban, 2007-2010), to a Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth (Androulla Vassiliou, 2010-2014), to no portfolio on Multilingualism. This was just about the time that the Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism, launched in 2009 by the European Commission, stopped being financially supported and receiving mandates – a decision which led to the development of an autonomous NGO, i.e. the European Civil Society for Multilingualism (ECSPM), which is living up to its mission and growing with the inclusion of academic institutions (European Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism, 2018).

During the time that Orban was European Commissioner for Multilingualism, the appreciation of linguistic and cultural diversity was presented as a priority for Europe. At the launch of the Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism in 2009, he was quoted as saying:

*‘We should use this diversity to Europe’s advantage. A culture of multilingualism promotes a culture of openness and tolerance. These are crucial values not only for Europe, but for the entire world. Any realistic international vision for the future of our world has to be founded on acceptance and appreciation of different cultures – and languages are at the heart of any culture. In the Commission’s strategy on multilingualism I emphasise that multilingualism can play a key role*

*in intercultural dialogue; in creating more cohesive and more sustainable societies'* (Orban, 2009).

This was the time of the 'Multilingualism: An Asset for Europe and a Shared Commitment' communication, which was put forth by the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

By 2012 – the year that the 'Rethinking Education: Investing in Skills for Better Socio-Economic Outcomes' proposal put forth by the Commission recommending the reform of education systems across the EU 'so as to meet growing demand for higher skills levels and reduce unemployment' (European Commission, 2012b) – the European Council's Conclusions regarding multilingualism and languages were articulating a more instrumental, utilitarian discourse than before. The 2011 and the 2014 Conclusions of the European Council recognised that *'linguistic diversity is a fundamental component of European culture and intercultural dialogue'*, but also that *'a good command of foreign languages is a key competence essential to make one's way in the modern world and labour market'* thus expressing the new political intentions to instrumentalise languages for market-oriented purposes (Council of Europe, 2011).

The condition of things with regard to languages in

the EU is indeed much too intricate to create conditions for multilingualism, especially with the EU's increasing emphasis on economic growth from a neo-liberal perspective. As a matter of fact, Kraus and Kazlauskaitė-Gürbüz (2014) claim that *'in the official discourse of the European Union, the approach to linguistic diversity has typically oscillated between two normative poles. On the one hand, linguistic diversity is seen as a central element of Europe's cultural inheritance, as an asset that is a pillar for achieving the intercultural understanding on which a trans-European civil society has to rely. On the other hand, multilingualism is seen as a challenge for creating an integrated market-cum-polity'* (Kraus & Kazlauskaitė-Gürbüz, 2014, p. 517).

It is, therefore, not surprising that the EU does not have a coherent approach for dealing with its wide-ranging and multi-levelled multilingualism. And, in truth, though the EU does support academic and hands-on research by language professionals with the aspiration that research will pave the way for a well worked-out approach, an across-the-board methodology for managing European multilingualism EC officials often find the results of significant large-scale research programmes such as D.Y.L.A.N. (Language Dynamics and Management of Diversity) and M.I.M.E. (Mobility and Inclusion in Multilingual Europe), and smaller-scale ones like ATHEME (Advancing the European Multilingual Experience)

much too abstract and vague to implement. There is a lack of a coherent plan and strategy on multilingualism in the EU and all that this entails. The attempts to support social multilingualism and language learning seem to be incongruent. On the one hand, there is the EU's institutional multilingualism, which some consistently undermine, believing in a monolingual solution to Europe's 'Babel' and using English alone. Nevertheless, the EU has been supporting its multilingualism by maintaining its two cross-languages services and many are still convinced that a monolingual answer is not only a politically stormy issue, but costly also. There are several studies substantiating this claim, the most interesting one having been carried out by two scholars who showed that while there would be a reduction in the direct costs of European multilingualism through the imposition of a single language, this would merely shift costs towards citizens whose mother tongue is not the lingua franca (i.e. English). The use of translation and interpreting, though not free, remains more effective (and at a reasonable cost) solution for the EU, while *'it is also more fair than a monolingual regime which unavoidably privileges native speakers'* (Gazzola & Grin, 2013, p. 93).

One of the two cross-language services in the EU is the DG Interpretation, which services the Commission, the European Council, Council of the EU, and other EU committees and agencies,

provides support for multilingual meetings and conferences and is supposed to help put the Commission's multilingualism strategy into practice. The second service is the DG for Translation whose responsibilities include the translation of laws, correspondence, policy papers, reports, etc., drafted by or sent to the Commission, provision of help to the Commission to communicate with the public, thereby helping citizens understand EU policies, advice to the Commission departments on language and on managing multilingual websites, and help with the correct terminology in all official EU languages, as documented in the inter-institutional database (IATE).

Connected to the DG Translation's amenities is the Commission's machine translation service. MT@EC can translate texts and documents related to EU policy in the 24 official EU languages, but also allow (free of charge to public administration officials in the EU) rapid checking of the general meaning of the text inserted with a precision that the free Google or Microsoft machine translation services, for example, do not have.

Along the same lines, a new network was created, entitled 'European Language Resource Coordination: Supporting Multilingualism in Europe'. It is an interesting network developed to manage, maintain and coordinate the relevant language resources in all official languages of the



European Union, especially public service documents, so as to help improve the quality, coverage and performance of automated translation. An additional activity related to translation is the 'Juvenes Translatores' prize awarded to the best translation done by a 17-year-old student in the member states, translating from and into any official language of the European Union.

Another related plan of the EP's Committee on Culture and Education is to work on an own-initiative report on 'Language Equality in the Digital Age – Towards a Human Language Project', based on a study with the same title drawn up at the request of Parliament's Science and Technology Options Assessment Panel.

Supporting multilingualism from the point of view of language learning are several 'action programmes' aiming at facilitating multilingualism in the EU. One of them is the Erasmus+ Programme for Education (2014-2020) and its objectives include the promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity. In supporting mobility, which offers students and working adults the opportunity to experience different sociocultural realities in education and work, it provides help via Erasmus+ Online Linguistic Support (OLS) to programme participants to learn and assess themselves in the language of the host country.

From the beginning, in 2014 it has supported and up to the time it finishes in 2020, it will support a variety of actions in support of multilingualism in education and society. One of these actions is the 'Creative Europe Programme' in the framework of which support is provided for the translation of books and manuscripts under the Culture sub-programme. It should be noted that when the 'Creative Europe Programme' was adopted in 2013 by the European Parliament, a specific provision on funding for the subtitling, dubbing and audio description of European films was added so as to facilitate access to, and the circulation of, European works across borders. They also include the European Day of Languages, celebrated every year on 26th September, when all sorts of events to promote language learning throughout the EU take place, including the European Language Label, an award by the Commission designed to encourage new initiatives in language teaching and learning, to reward new language teaching methods, and to raise awareness of regional and minority languages.

Before 2014, when the Unit of Multilingualism was still operational, the management of language learning in Europe was viewed as a mission that was mostly linked to the 2002 Barcelona objective of 'mother-tongue + two', which entailed gathering information about language education and training in EU countries, collecting data to monitor school students' progress in language teaching and

learning with large projects such as the European Survey of Language Competence, mentioned earlier, in an attempt to make ‘evidence-based policy’ and also encouraging Member states to adopt ‘innovative, scientifically proven methods of speeding up language learning’ (referring particularly to CLIL and CALL). For the 2014 Report, where Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) referring to teaching subjects such as science, history and geography to students through a foreign language and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) are viewed as ‘innovative’ and ‘scientifically proven’ foreign language teaching methods, see European Commission (2014). See also European Commission (2014b) for another report having to do with ‘Peer Learning Activity’.

### 3. FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE EU

#### 3.1 Language educational policies, consultations and instruments

Lack of human resources and expertise in the Commission itself invites consultations and collaborations which may lead to the development of a cohesive language education policy, built on a sound philosophy of language and language learning that results in a coherent strategy for language education in European schools and language learning as a lifelong learning project. Among its consultants are groups of experts on language issues, representatives from relevant

organisations of member states and civil society platforms.

An important consultant to and collaborator of the EC since 2014-15 is the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) and the Modern Languages Division of the Council of Europe which is responsible for the production of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEFR). This document, initially published in 2001, after more than twenty years of research, is promoted by the EU to member states as a transparent, coherent and comprehensive reference instrument on the basis of which language educators may develop curricula and syllabuses for the teaching and learning of languages for the design of teaching and learning materials and for the assessment of foreign language proficiency (Council of Europe, 2001).

#### 3.2 Immigration and language learning

As the immigration flows to Europe grow, member states are invited to develop ways of helping children and adults with migrant backgrounds to learn the host country language(s), paying attention to subsidiarity and taking into consideration national circumstances.

Since the dissolution of the autonomous Multilingualism Unit, the language policy officers of the EC’s DG for Education and Culture (EAC)

have been transferred to a new unit called 'Schools and Educators; Multilingualism', and they have begun focusing attention on the language management of classrooms which are increasingly multilingual, with a great range of cultural and linguistic variability across Europe – however unevenly spread the students from immigrant backgrounds are and they are indeed. According to *Eurostat* (*Eurostat Statistics Explained*, 2018), the total number of EU migrants was 18.5 million in 2015 and their proportion varies considerably across the member states ranging from about nearly 40% of foreign-born EU citizens in Luxemburg, to Poland that has 0.6%. Education systems must respond to this diversity.

A good deal of work has been done in a relatively short period of time in this domain, with a view to facilitating the EU's scope of integrating immigrants in European societies (though anti-right-wing governments in certain countries want them gone – not even assimilated). Therefore, the EC and specifically the DG EAC has outlined the goals, articulated policies and proposed ways of achieving them (see European Commission, 2015c). These are summarised in two reports published by the EC. Both describe the context, recommending ways of dealing with children of immigrant background in schools and the community (European Commission, 2015; European Commission, 2015b; European Commission, 2015c).

### **3.3 Meeting the challenges of a multilingual Europe**

The major challenges in today's multilingual Europe faced by the EU were outlined at a consultation meeting held in Brussels in early February 2018, in which I participated, along with other representatives from civil society organisations, academic institutions, and representatives from Ministries of Education of the member states. The purpose of the meeting regarding languages in education was to discuss a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages to be later submitted as a proposal to the European Council.

The Brussels meeting had followed the Gothenburg Summit for 'Fair Jobs and Growth' leading to the Heads of State or Government, which reiterated in the European Council Conclusions of 14-12-2017 its ambition to improve language learning so that children would speak at least two languages in addition to their mother tongue. It is to be noted, however, that for the first time, an EC delegate at the meeting clarified the 'mother tongue' issue, which has been a cause for concern and critique. It was explained that the 'mother tongue + two' objective refers to the EU's resolution to assist children in Europe to be able to speak at least two languages in addition to the language of schooling by the end of their upper secondary education. The level of fluency would obviously vary according to their needs and

interests. Also to be noted is that the EC delegate at that meeting clearly stated that the primacy of English in everyday communication and in education should not be questioned. It is the status quo.

To meet the challenges related to the linguistic diversity in the educational systems of member states, caused by first and second-generation immigrant families' children, the policy officer at the Brussels consultation meeting presented the participants with the following priorities: (a) to develop support mechanisms for immigrant children to learn the language of instruction in school so as to use it competently in daily situations alongside their home language(s) and have adequate literacy in the language of schooling; (b) maintain their mother tongue, and useful literacy in this tongue; and (c) learn other European languages.

With regard to the challenges facing foreign languages, the priorities presented were (a) creating common standards for the teaching, learning and assessment of languages by adopting the CEFR referred to earlier, (b) support for more effective teacher education and training – in collaboration with the Council of Europe and the ECML, (c) financing projects for languages and multilingualism through the Erasmus+ programme, and (d) supporting studies resulting to guidelines for education and training.

#### **4. DISCUSSION - CONCERNING LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY**

In May 2018, the EC submitted a Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages (European Commission 2018a; European Commission 2018b). These two documents are important to the extent that they set goals and priorities which are likely to impact language education in the EU in the years to come. One of the priorities is the adoption of the CEFR as a guide for redesigning foreign language curricula across the member states and for assessment of language competences in ways that can have comparable results.

##### **4.1 Promotion of CEFR**

As noted above, the EU (by way of the EC) is promoting the Council of Europe's CEFR, as part of its overall approach to the teaching and learning of languages and is endorsing the Council of Europe's language education policy (Council of Europe, 2018b), which is committed to advocating plurilingual education (Council of Europe, 2018c). The CEFR is a comprehensive reference tool, which contains descriptors about what the learners of different foreign languages can do at six levels of proficiency (with A1 being the lowest and C2 the highest). The reference levels which are detailed 'can do' statements concern the comprehension and production of oral and written discourse at the six different stages of learning a

foreign language. Since its publication, the CEFR has been criticised by several scholars as needing to be substantiated by further research (e.g. Alderson, 2007; Little, 2006), and as needing to document its reference level descriptors on the basis of precise linguistic elements making the levels explicit for individual languages (e.g. Dendrinos & Gotsouliia, 2015) in order for them to be less vague and imprecise – to make explicit for example what it means to be able ‘write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects...’ at B2 level. It has also been criticised for the problematic effects it has produced when teachers attempt to implement it in various contexts.

However, it is the first and only document which has attempted to validate (though in an empirical way, rather than through linguistic research), on a European level, explicit referential levels for identifying degrees of language competences and communicative activities across languages, providing a basis for differentiated teaching in diverse educational environments. In providing objective criteria for describing language proficiency, the Council of Europe’s aim was to promote educational transparency and ‘*to facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications gained in different learning contexts, and thus aid European mobility*’ (Council of Europe, 2001, p.1).

More importantly, however, because of its expansive use (and misuse) as an aid to defining

levels for teaching, learning, and testing, the Education Policy Division of the Council of Europe decided to commission an extended version of the CEFR. In early 2018, the CEFR Companion Volume was published (Council of Europe, 2018a). It contains illustrative descriptors that complement the original ones at both lower and higher levels, but also includes descriptors for the important concept of mediation that was defined in the original CEFR which, however, contained no validated-calibrated descriptors.

Specifically, there are descriptor scales provided for cross-language and interlanguage mediation, as well as for the related mediation strategies and plurilingual/pluricultural competences, which are absolutely essential in a multilingual Europe which claims a dominant role in a globalised world. As a concept, plurilingualism is significant because it shifts attention from the influential construct of the perfect ‘native speaker’ and focuses on the language user who uses all semiotic means available to him or her for the creation of meaning.

#### **4.2 EC investment in linguistic diversity**

Another priority included in the EC’s 2018 Council Recommendation, relates to member states investing in the initial and continuing education of language teachers and school leaders to prepare them to work with linguistic diversity in class and to encourage research into the use of innovative,

inclusive and multilingual pedagogies. The issue here, of course, is to define what constitutes a 'multilingual pedagogy'. A quick review of the relevant literature points to pedagogical practices with bilingual students, in US classrooms: e.g. accepting the hybrid language practices of bilinguals (García, 2011; García & Sylvan, 2011) and capitalising on bilingual students' linguistic and cultural resources (Catalano et al., 2016).

This raises the question of whether this is relevant in the European context.

It also raises the question of how it bridges the gap in the aforementioned division between managing the teaching and learning situation in classrooms with a small or larger percentage of bilingual students acquiring school literacy in a language other than their home language plus one or more additional languages and with a percentage of monolingual students acquiring school literacy in their home language and other foreign languages.

### **4.3 Languages in a globalised world**

While the aforementioned Recommendation does not specifically refer to the important role languages in a globalised world, it is a point raised in many EU documents, and it is at the core of Council of Europe language and language education policy. It is certainly understood that worldwide labour mobility, trade, social integration of immigrants, language policies in

*'It is certainly understood that worldwide labour mobility, trade, social integration of immigrants, language policies in multilingual countries and international competitiveness of businesses are about languages and communication first and foremost'*

multilingual countries and international competitiveness of businesses are about languages and communication first and foremost. A multilingual workforce, for example, is an advantage as it provides companies with a competitive edge and it is necessary for them to invest more in language and intercultural skills. The outcomes of the ELAN Report, a study commissioned by the EC in 2006 investigating the effects on the European Economy of the shortages of foreign language skills in enterprises, include that (a) amongst the 200 small and medium size enterprises that lost potential contracts for lack of foreign languages, 37 valued the lost business at £8-13.5 million, (b) a further 54 companies had lost contracts worth £16.5-£25.3 million for lack of communication and intercultural skills to capitalise on opportunities. However, languages also have a direct relationship to citizenship and the development of linguistic repertoires as a component of (language) education in a globalised

world. Research has shown the interconnections between multilingualism, globalisation, and identity, illustrating the multidimensional ways that youth invest in language learning and socially construe their multiple identities within diverse contexts while weaving in and out of particularistic and universalistic identifications.

But there are other aspects to consider when focusing on language learning in a globalised world, because it seems that the language proficiency demands of societies are different today. In the past, becoming fully proficient in a language meant becoming a social agent operating according to the formal properties of language as

designated by rules in grammar books.

Today's societies, however, who wish to be players in the global arena are in need of entrepreneurial social agents prepared for high-speed change – at all levels in social norms and institutions and in language and ways of using it. Language itself is a social institution, constantly developing to serve society, which is moving forward at an overwhelmingly accelerated pace today and is inscribed in language, discourse and texts.

Language changes brought about by technology in this digital age, for example, are encoded in new types of texts and textual forms, replacing older equivalents (Table 1).

Table 1

*Textual parallels*

PAST	PRESENT
Business card, resume	LinkedIn
Scrapbook	Facebook
Diary, newspaper opinion column	Blogs
Encyclopaedia	Wikipedia
Broadcast TV	Interactive TV, YouTube
Manuscript	Google Docs
Broadcast radio	Playlists podcast, iPod
Photo album, picture book	Flickr
Memo, letter	Email
Brochure	Website
Telegraph, telegram	Twitter, SMS

Language has a different role today for both communities and individuals. Within the autonomous states of the past, communities, identities, processes and practices are key concepts linked to the role of language in the construction of social identities and relations. Today, however, people experience a sense of community and identity away from autonomous structures in spaces – such as digitally created spaces – where linguistic and discursive variation are central to new forms of social organisation. Languages as bounded systems, identities in stable social positions and communities as uniform social formations are superseded by mobility and multiplicity. Social actors play an active role in the flows and transformations, contributing further to globalisation, transnationalism, and the new economy.

All in all, it is more than evident that the world has changed enormously in the last 50 years or so. The European continent has witnessed the EU's birth and its attempts to develop a supranational political and economic structure, without cultural and linguistic borders, but the paradigm of language teaching remains more or less the same and so do expectations regarding language learning.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The basic issue I should like to put forth as a conclusion to this paper originates from the

concern that while Europe and the rest of the world are changing, language teaching and learning are viewed in the same way and, as Butcher (2005) maintains, teachers and students continue to be domesticated subjects of the dominant foreign language pedagogy discourse. Foreign language teaching, learning and assessment still aims at 'native-speaker' proficiency. Emphasis is still on learning the target language as though it were a stable structural, semantic and pragmatic system and the focus is still on sentence-level grammar and vocabulary. There is little concern with the new discursive and textual meanings, with communicative effectiveness, through the use of multimodal texts, while the development of literacy in EU schools (and not only) remains a monolingual enterprise.

Alternatively, education for today's linguistically and culturally heterogeneous societies should perhaps be aiming at plurilingualism and the development of (multi)literacies in the languages and discourses which may be a part of learners' repertoires. The notion of plurilingualism has already been referred to, but I wish to make a distinction at this point between plurilingualism, which is a notion distinct from that of (individual) multilingualism that refers to someone who can use two different languages or more in different communicative events. Plurilingualism refers to the language user who has a repertoire of semiotic resources (be they different modes of



communication, languages, language varieties, media), which s/he is able to use effectively to design meanings – a repertoire which is dynamic, in the sense that it develops and changes throughout one's life. Having plurilingual competence means that one is able to perceive and mediate the relationships which exist among languages and cultures, that one is able to mix and shift from one language to another with ease (cf. Dendrinos, 2013).

What does this mean for schooling, which is changing in the framework of globalisation, technology and local cultural and linguistic diversity? It implies moving away from the monolingual paradigm in education, and recognising that semiotics is at the centre of all subject areas; that European schools become multilingual topoi, where a single language or a single mode of semiosis does not dominate the curriculum; topoi where several languages and multimodality come into play and are used as resources for meaning making; topoi where new pedagogic practices are employed for the development of students' plurilingual competences, associated with intercomprehension, translanguaging, and mediation.

As a matter of fact, a new pedagogic paradigm is needed: language pedagogy which prepares learners to use the languages they already know

(and which are their own but should be shared cultural capital) and those they are learning as meaning-making mechanisms, so as to increase the quantity and quality of their communication with speakers of other languages; a language pedagogy oriented toward developing in learners the competence to operate at the border between a number of languages, manoeuvring their way through communicative events; a language pedagogy that trains them to use the sociocultural knowledge and skills they have developed, by making maximal use of their communication strategies, their multiliteracy skills, their abilities to deal with the multimodality of texts, and of their translinguistic and transcultural knowledge.

Interestingly, a group of experts who were invited by the EC as consultants in laying out the new educational recommendations, prepared a very interesting contribution which was submitted as a proposal for education policy design. It is entitled 'Rethinking Language Education in Schools' and is available online for anyone interested (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission, 2018).

The experts' contribution is to make a case for change in current practices in schools from a human rights perspective, from an equity and inclusion perspective and from a public health perspective. They stress in their document that there is intrinsic value in developing and

maintaining the linguistic repertoire of multilingual children with a view to valuing their identity. Their basic point, however, is the proposal that, in order to address today's societal, economic and technological challenges, it is important to rethink the following basic concepts and they explain what each implies: rethinking literacy, rethinking

multilingualism and rethinking mother tongue. To do so, however, and to move from theory to practice, requires the EU's and member states' willingness not only to support action research, but also a major change in the programmes of initial teacher training institutions and in the support for teacher professional development.

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