



Integrating European Language Research

A Review of the Volume

Rindler Schjerve, Rosita and Vetter, Eva:
European Multilingualism. Current Perspectives and Challenges.
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The present volume covers the results of a large-scale research project co-funded by the 6th Framework Programme of the European Commission (EC). This project bears the name *Languages in a Network of European Excellence (LINEE)*. The authors Rosita Rindler Schjerve, full professor of Romance Linguistics, and Eva Vetter, professor for research into Language Teaching and Learning, deal with the central issues of the above mentioned research project. The book presents the common concepts of the 12 Working Packages (WP1-WP12) of the project within the thematic areas ‘Language, Identity and Culture’, ‘Language Policy and Planning’, ‘Multilingualism and Education’ and ‘Language and Economy’. It supplies a ‘sociolinguistics perspective in the attempt to combine the major strands on which [...] European Multilingualism (EM) appears to be actually founded’ (7).

The authors deal with a special Working Package focused on the theoretical integration of the mentioned thematically orientated packages. This so-called Working Package 0 (WPO) offered a platform for theories and methods of multilingualism within the project and supports the integration and defragmentation of the scientific work done within the WP. The book discusses ‘first the theoretical and methodological issues relevant to the thematic areas, second the identification and assessment of parallel and cross-cutting issues and third the proposal of new strategic lines of research’ (63). The book presents the common variables of fairly different approaches of the research teams involved. These variables are ‘culture’, ‘discourse’, ‘identity’, ‘ideology’, ‘knowledge’,

‘Language Policy and Planning’, ‘multi-competence’ and ‘power and conflict’. They are also referred to as features, concepts or components.

The volume contains four chapters, each divided into several subchapters, as well as an introduction, a conclusion, references and an appendix. The appendix contains the LINEE research structure. The first chapter is dedicated to the multilingualism policy framework of the EU and provides an overview of the major issues of the EU language policy. The subchapters describe the language education policy, the linguistic minority policy and the EU institutional language regime, which taken together reflect the principal elements of the EU language policy.

The second chapter offers an overview of the research on multilingualism in Europe. Moreover, it focuses on the multidisciplinary potentials of this field of research. Chapter three is the main chapter of the book and comprises the key variables and the methodological issues of LINEE mentioned above. Chapter four aims to present questions regarding European multilingualism beyond LINEE. The respective subchapters discuss possible re-conceptualisations of the mentioned term and the problems and contradictions visible today. Finally, in the conclusion a more sustainable framework for EU multilingualism than presently identified is being discussed.

To better understand the context of the presented research areas, the authors start with a general introduction into the EU language policy and give the summary of the political background of the research into European multilingualism. They present the publicly accessible policy documents, e.g. the *High Level Group Report 2007*, the *Report of the Group of Intellectuals 2008*, the *Declaration of European Identity 1973*, the *Report by the Committee on a People’s Europe 1985*, the *European Charter of Fundamental Rights 2000*, the *Action Plan Multilingualism 2003* and *Job Mobility 2007*, the *ELAN study 2008*, the Commission’s communication *Multilingualism: An Asset for Europe and a Shared Commitment 2008*. In addition, they address other highly relevant publications, including EU treaties, white papers, resolutions and conclusions. Moreover, the chapter presents the documents of the European Council, e.g. the *Millennium Declaration 1999* and the *Common European Framework of Reference 2001* and therefore provides an in-depth overview of the most important developments within the European language policy. One can see this contribution as an added value of this research since such comprehensive presentations of this issue are rare.

The main part of the book opens rightly with the statement that the mentioned policy has become an ideologically driven concept. This concept that includes such topics as migration, social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and lifelong learning has been changing over the past years. Nevertheless, the authors mention that the scope of the migrant and minority languages and the question of language hierarchies have not been cleared yet. Furthermore, they point out the economic value of languages in the common European market.

In a brief historical outline given in chapter two, the authors give weight to the close interconnection of nation building in Europe and languages and display the different key aspects of the multilingualism policy in a timeline. They conclude that a European identity should be complementary to the national identities since, following the motto “Unity in Diversity”, cultural diversity is one of the most important issues in the EU. The authors refer to the key publication by Peter Kraus *A Union of Diversity* and accentuate that a common European public sphere is required to establish such policy. Therefore, the arising question of the relationship between linguistic and cultural diversity is tackled. The authors point out that the idea of a single common language is being strongly rejected. The current development with English as the only Lingua franca is clearly not compatible with the eulogy of the blessings of multilingualism in the EU. According to the authors, the so-called European Multilingualism was a matter of education policy in the first place. The principal objective of this policy was the foreign language learning and the protection of minority languages. This means that primarily it was all about plurilingualism. The authors do not mention at this point, but later in the chapter, that already in the fifties of the last century the so-called Declaration No. 1 formed the basis for a multilingual EU without any reference to educational matters. However, the authors conclude rightly that the question remains open whether linguistic diversity can be implemented into an effective communication within the EU. The chapter discusses the problematic integration of the migrant languages in this context.

The beginning of the “mother tongue + 2” policy of the EU is dated back to 1984 - this fact is often overlooked and thus is particularly important to mention. Moreover, the authors interpret the 1995 *White Paper on Education and Training: Teaching and Learning. Towards the Learning Society* as being the first document to address language learning not only for pupils but for all Europeans. However, this turn in EU plurilingualism policy, in my opinion, took place later - in 2002 - with the Barcelona decision of the European Council. The mentioned White Paper, however, addresses for the first time the EU commission’s acknowledgement of the “mother tongue + 2” aim and emphasizes that foreign language learning should not be limited to two languages. Disregarding these minor issues, the chapter clearly points out the diversity of foreign language knowledge as pursued by the EU and the existing contradiction with the real politics, e.g. when the *European Indicator of Language Competence* is being applied to only five most widespread languages in the EU.

The authors tackle the issue of the linguistic minority policy, whose roots date back to the early 1980s, and the emerging ethno-linguistic regionalism in Western Europe. This “regionalist crisis” (31) has finally lead to the *Community Charter of Regional Languages and Cultures*, which was finally taken up in the Lisbon Treaty. The authors point out critically that the charter rejects migrant languages

explicitly. In this respect they emphasize that “migrants are actually excluded from the equality principle” (46). They nevertheless conclude that “the EU is more than ever committed to including the migrant languages into its multilingualism framework” (36). The subsequent chapter aims to present the EU institutional regime. Here, the authors mention that this institutional regime is not clearly regulated and causes problems when using ‘less widely used’ language. The authors conclude that this regime has a rather “symbolic weight since the everyday practice reflects the leading political role of the powerful states in the EU”. However, as other research indicates, all languages except English are under pressure due to the lack of clear regulations. The concluding subchapter “Positions and challenges” discusses the position of migrants and their languages under the EU language policy and comprises some open questions, which encourage further research. Although the authors seem to be uncritical about the quoted documentations, in this chapter they draw a picture of the most important developments within the EU language policy. Noteworthy, a more critical review of such policy can be found in the concluding chapter of the book.

The second main chapter presents multilingualism as a field of research. The authors position this research between being the ground for political planning and being placed in a frame set up by policy making. This dialectic relationship of politics and research is estimated as problematic. As far as the research field itself is concerned, the chapter is dedicated to its high multidisciplinaryity: minority languages, diglossia, language maintenance and shift, languages acquisition and learning, code switching, borrowing and mixing, pidgins and creoles, language politics and planning, languages attitudes and ideology or intercultural communication. The chapter thus reflects the difficulty of defining what multilingualism research is. According to the authors, there are several factors which explain this difficulty: it is a relatively young research topic; it is a strongly bi-lingual orientated topic; it has been a marginalized topic in the field of general linguistics; in Europe, it has been strongly driven by EU and EEC policies and it was methodologically dominated by a North-American paradigm of languages in contact; language learning has been lately integrated as an integrative and not only as a sub-part of multilingualism research. The chapter describes this scientific fragmentation as a result of different funding interests and different theoretical perspectives. The latter brings us to the main part of the book: the theoretical and methodological integration of the LINEE project.

Chapter three, called ‘The LINEE Project’, presents the structure of LINEE and describes the “analytical backbone” (60) of the project. The four thematic areas are covered here: ‘Language, Identity and Culture’, ‘Language Policy and Planning’, ‘Multilingualism and Education’ and ‘Language and Economy’. As mentioned above, 12 Working Packages covered these areas. These WPs in turn consist of several thematic areas. The task of WP0, and of this book, though, is to

“integrate the work conducted within the WPs” (62). The chapter thus aims to defragment the scientific space. Therefore it presents a research platform tackling three major issues: it discusses the relevant theoretical and methodological issues; it identifies and assesses transversal issues, and it proposes new strategic lines of research.

The subsequent subchapters focus on the above mentioned recurrent variables. All these chapters are divided into four paragraphs: 1) a theoretical dimension providing general explanation of the specific variables or terms; 2) the terms used within LINEE; 3) the terms used in the thematic areas; 4) a conclusion. Here we can see that these terms are commonly used in a great variety of meanings. The authors tend to understand ‘culture’ in a constructionist way associated with primordialist views. The term ‘discourse’ is connected with the interactional ‘language in use’ perspective within the project. ‘Identity’ is seen as a diverse and changing phenomenon in the field. The concept identity interacts strongly with all other features. The project reveals many diverse or competing ‘ideologies’, which are mainly articulated through ‘discourse’. ‘Knowledge’ is seen as a contribution to the shape of European multilingualism. ‘Language policy and planning’ is observed as a comprehensive category which points out the pragmatic dimension of multilingualism. ‘Multi-competence’ appears to be in conflict with the economic restriction of selected languages. The term ‘power and conflict’ plays a role in all thematic areas and is closely interconnected with all others, although it is not explicitly conceptualized. The authors argue that the broad scope of LINEE did not allow to go beyond the general itemization of the common concepts.

In addition to the theoretical dimensions, the next chapter addresses the methodological issues arising within LINEE and discusses the methods used within the different thematic areas characterized as transdisciplinary. The authors acknowledge that “methods must contribute to answering the research questions and deal with validity threats to these answers” (147). By explaining different methodological approaches, they situate the overall project in a qualitative framework “the ‘here’ and ‘now’ present day phenomena” (149). Another major focus of WPO was to combine various methods of data collection used in different research areas. The authors observe that different methods – the paradigm model, mixed methods and triangulation - have been used side by side, and they reject the hypothesis that such research methods might be incompatible.

In the following, the authors present some general outcomes of LINEE. They conclude that European multilingualism remains a vague concept, which is conceptualized within the scope of human rights and the language equality principle and is to be seen as an economic capital. They point out the lack of the coherency in the perception of this concept. The authors remark critically: “Since the equality of languages is a guiding principle of the EU politics of diversity, it may at times be instrumentalised as substantial part of political correctness. In this

function, however, it would be further reduced to an empty wording merely promoting politically correct talk about the diverse languages” (156). Further critical remarks comprise the lack of regulations for ‘legitimate’ plurilingual competences and the weak implementing power of EU language policy. Another issue they mention is the increasing national commitment for minority languages, whereas the language knowledge by migrants is mostly considered to be insufficient. The authors conclude that the monolingual ideologies in the nation state schools undermine the EU endeavors towards multicompetences. As far as the fear that English would become the only dominant ‘Lingua franca’ is concerned, the authors emphasize that this fear has no grounds since English is recognized as a tool for multilingual communication “without comprising speakers’ motivation for learning or using other languages” (159). Unfortunately, the chapter does not provide references for these very interesting results.

The last chapter covers the topic of multilingualism beyond LINEE. It asks whether one of the symbols of the EU “Unity in Diversity” can be reached by adopting the present language policy of distinct and compartmentalized national languages. The authors argue that identity and culture are part of historically unstable processes. The use of a certain language does not imply a certain national identity. The subsequent chapter tackles the language equality principle, which should enable the establishment of an equal representation of all official EU languages. However, at present this is not the case. The above-mentioned Regulation No. 1 allows institutions to develop their own working language rules neglecting this overall principle. Another important point is that minority and migrant languages, according to the authors, “largely remain excluded from this principle” (165). The authors claim a basic rethinking of this principle. In the following the authors focus on the different intersections of the eight concepts. The chapter aims to provide a better assessment of these concepts. ‘Knowledge’ and ‘discourse’ are identified as the main terms, and the multi-layered dynamics of these terms is shown. Furthermore, the close interaction of ‘identity’, ‘culture’, and ‘ideology’ emerges. Here, the contradiction of the dynamic equality principle of the EU and the restriction through national policies is revealed. The national policies still promote the homogeneous nature of identity and culture.

In the Conclusion the authors one more time point out the fact that the key areas of EU language policy are Linguistic Minorities, Regional- and Immigrant Languages and the Linguistic Regime of the EU Institutions. The authors acknowledge that research in this area is fragmented in themes, theories and methodologies, and they rightly stress that, with this book, a contribution to the defragmentation of the research field is done. One can conclude from this work that the concept of European multilingualism is more than just the sum of all languages. The authors bring up some key questions for further research concerning the ideological basis of the European multilingualism. The first question refers to the

market-based capitalization of languages, which would interfere with the principle of the equal status for all languages. Further, the authors of the book raise a question what the 'legitimate' plurilingual repertoire should look like. To be able to provide an answer to this question, they suggest searching for dynamic and flexible repertoires instead of predefined inventory. And finally, they again point out the role of minorities' and migrant languages and ask how these languages can be integrated in the EU framework of diversity.

In sum, this book is a substantial contribution to further understanding of the correlation of core research issues of multilingualism policies in Europe. It allows an illuminative insight into the theoretical and methodological issues and challenges in such a large multifaceted research project as LINEE. The book should be recognized as a valuable body of experience and as an important guideline for future projects of that kind.