

Language use in public administration



European Federation of National Institutions for Language

Pirkko Nuolijärvi / Gerhard Stickel (eds.)

Language use in public administration

Theory and practice in the European states

Contributions to the EFNIL Conference 2015 in Helsinki

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Preface

Communication between citizens and the institutions responsible for public administration is essential for the functioning of national life at all levels. The challenges for effective administrative communication are great in every society but especially great in countries with more than one official language, or with vibrant minority languages alongside the official language or languages. What actions can be taken to avoid bureaucratic jargon in official communication, and especially in official documents and forms? How can the communication between citizens and their public administrations be improved? The European Union presents an extreme case of a multilingual administration, in which speakers of 24 different official languages are expected to communicate both with each other and with the citizens of the 28 member countries.

These and related questions and issues were discussed at the 2015 conference of EFNIL in Helsinki. The conference aimed to provide a detailed picture of the present linguistic situation regarding communication by and with institutions of public administration in various European countries, and in addition of the special situation within the institutions of the European Union. This publication presents the written versions of the contributions to the conference.

After some introductory statements, representatives of the European Commission describe the tasks and problems faced by the Commission's translation and interpretation services in coping with the multilingualism of the activities within this European institution. This is followed by a report on an initiative by an international consortium to "crack the language barrier" in Europe. Speakers from twelve European countries then present reports on the language use of their national administrations; several of them also discuss problems relating to communication between administrations and citizens and possible solutions. A panel discussion of several EFNIL members on key aspects of communication between citizens and their administrations concludes the volume. As in previous publications, a list of the member institutions of EFNIL is added.

The working languages at the conference were English, Finnish and Swedish. Here, the main parts of most contributions are presented in English; Finnish and Swedish texts are followed by English translations. Several articles have brief abstracts in the native tongues of the various authors. In this way we have tried to present all contributions in the language most widely known in Europe, but also to give a clear picture of the rich diversity of European languages.

We would like to thank Joachim Hohwieler, Hilary Simpson and our EFNIL colleague Tamás Váradi for their efficient help in preparing all the various texts for both the online version and the publication in print.

Saatteeksi

Julkisen hallinnon ja kansalaisten välisen viestinnän onnistuminen on tärkeää valtion kaikelle toiminnalle. Hallinnon tehokkaan kommunikaation haasteet ovat mittavia kaikissa yhteiskunnissa, mutta erityisen merkittäviä haasteet ovat niissä maissa, joissa on enemmän kuin yksi virallinen kieli taikka virallisen kielen tai virallisten kielten ohella vahvoja vähemmistökieliä. Mitä voi tehdä byrokraattisen jargonin välttämiseksi viranomaisten viestinnässä ja erityisesti viranomaisteksteissä ja -lomakkeissa? Miten voidaan parantaa kansalaisten ja julkisen hallinnon keskinäistä kommunikaatiota? Euroopan unioni on äärimmäinen esimerkki monikielisestä hallinnosta, jossa 24 virallisen kielen puhujien oletetaan kommunikoivan sekä toistensa että 28 jäsenvaltion kansalaisten kanssa.

Näistä ja näihin liittyvistä kysymyksistä ja teemoista keskusteltiin vuonna 2015 EFNILin konferenssissa Helsingissä. Konferenssin tavoitteena oli kuvata yksityiskohtaisesti nykyisen viranomaisviestinnän tilannetta ja viestintää viranomaisten kanssa eri Euroopan maissa. Lisäksi tarkasteltiin Euroopan unionin elinten haasteellista kielitilannetta. Tämä julkaisu sisältää konferenssin esitykset kirjallisessa muodossa. Ne ovat siinä järjestyksessä kuin ne esitettiin Helsingissä.

Tervehdyspuheenvuorojen jälkeen Euroopan komission edustajat kuvaavat komission käännös- ja tulkkipalveluiden tehtäviä ja ongelmia tämän eurooppalaisen elimen monikielisessä toiminnassa. Tämän osan jälkeen on raportti kansainvälisen konsortion aloitteesta “murtaa kielirajat” Euroopassa. Seuraavaksi Euroopan 12 maan edustajat esittelevät kansallisten hallintojensa kielenkäyttöä; monet heistä keskustelevat myös hallinnon ja kansalaisten välisen kommunikaation ongelmista ja niiden ratkaisuehdotuksista. Julkaisun lopussa on useiden EFNILin jäsenmaiden edustajien paneelikeskustelu niistä keskeisistä seikoista, jotka koskevat kansalaisten ja heidän maansa viranomaisten välistä kommunikaatiota. Kuten aiemmissa julkaisuissa, mukana on luettelo EFNILin jäsenlaitoksista.

Konferenssin työkielet olivat englanti, suomi ja ruotsi. Tässä julkaisussa valtaosa artikkeleista on englanniksi; suomen- ja ruotsinkielisistä teksteistä on englanninkieliset käännökset. Kaikissa artikkeleissa on lyhyet abstraktit tekijöiden äidinkielellä. Täten haluamme esitellä kaikki puheenvuorot Euroopan laajimmin hallitulla kielellä mutta tuoda näkyviin myös Euroopan kielten rikkaan monimuotoisuuden.

Kiitämme Joachim Hohwielerä, Hilary Simpsonia ja EFNIL-kollegamme Tamás Váradiä tehokkaasta avusta kaikkien tekstien työstämisessä sekä sähköiseen versioon että painettuun julkaisuun.

Förord

En fungerande kommunikation mellan medborgarna och de myndigheter som ansvarar för den offentliga förvaltningen är en viktig förutsättning för all verksamhet i ett land. Utmaningarna för en effektiv myndighetskommunikation är stora i alla samhällen, men särskilt stora i de länder som har fler än ett officiellt språk, eller i de länder som har starka minoritetsspråk vid sidan av det officiella språket eller de officiella språken. Vad kan man göra för att undvika byråkratjargong i den offentliga kommunikationen, framför allt i offentliga dokument och blanketter? Hur kan kommunikationen mellan medborgarna och den offentliga förvaltningen förbättras? Europeiska unionen utgör ett extremt exempel på mångspråkig förvaltning där det förutsätts att talare av 24 olika officiella språk ska kunna kommunicera både med varandra och med invånarna i de 28 medlemsländerna.

De här och liknande frågor och teman diskuterades på EFNIL-konferensen i Helsingfors 2015. Syftet med konferensen var att ge en detaljerad nulägesbeskrivning av myndighetskommunikationen inom den offentliga förvaltningen i de europeiska länderna och därtill en beskrivning av den speciella situationen inom Europeiska unionens institutioner. Den här publikationen innehåller de presentationer som hölls på konferensen. De ingår i den ordning som de ingick i programmet i Helsingfors.

Efter de inledande anförandena följer artiklar där representanter för Europeiska kommissionen presenterar de uppgifter och problem som kommissionens översättar- och tolktjänster ställs inför inom sin mångspråkiga verksamhet. Den här delen följs sedan av en rapport om ett internationellt konsortiums initiativ att "spränga språkgränserna" i Europa. Därefter följer rapporter som behandlar den nationella förvaltningen i tolv olika europeiska länder. Många av dessa rapporter tar också upp olika problem i kommunikationen mellan myndigheter och medborgare och kommer med idéer för hur man kan lösa dem. Publikationen avslutas med en sammanfattning av den paneldiskussion som ordnades om olika aspekter på kommunikationen mellan medborgarna och den offentliga förvaltningen och där flera EFNIL-representanter deltog. Liksom i tidigare publikationer ingår också här en lista över EFNIL:s medlemsinstitutioner.

Konferensspråken var engelska, finska och svenska. I den här publikationen är de flesta bidragen på engelska. De finska och svenska texterna följs av engelska översättningar. Alla artiklar har korta sammanfattningar på de olika författarnas modersmål. På det här sättet vill vi presentera alla bidrag på engelska som är det språk som är mest bekant i Europa, men också synliggöra den rikliga språkliga mångfalden i Europa.

Vi vill tacka Joachim Hohwieler, Hilary Simpson och vår EFNIL-kollega Tamás Váradi för deras effektiva hjälp i arbetet med att bearbeta de olika texterna för både nätpublikationen och den tryckta publikationen.

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Opening

Pirkko Nuolijärvi

Avaussanat / Opening remarks

Arvoisa opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön kansliapäällikkö, arvoiset vieraat, hyvät EFNILin jäsenet, hyvät työtoverit!

Kotimaisten kielten keskuksen nimissä ja Anna Maria Gustafssonin ja omasta puolestani minulla on ilo toivottaa teidät kaikki tervetulleiksi tähän EFNILin 13. konferenssiin Helsinkiin, tähän meille rakkaaseen kaupunkiin, joka on kunniaksenne pukeutunut syksyn väreihin. Olen odottanut kauan tätä hetkeä ja olen todella iloinen nähdessäni teidät kaikki täällä. Toivon, että ulkona vallitsevasta hienoisesta viileydestä huolimatta jokainen teistä voi sydämessään tuntea olonsa lämpimäksi, kotoiseksi ja tervetulleeksi.

Konferenssin teema *Kielenkäyttö julkishallinnossa – teoriaa ja käytäntöä Euroopan maissa (Language use in public administration – theory and practice in the European states)* on monesta näkökulmasta ajankohtainen ja tärkeä. Kaikissa maissa pohditaan sitä, miten viranomaiset ja heidän asiakkaansa voisivat kohdata toisensa mahdollisimman hyvin ja mutkattomasti. Koska kohtaaminen tapahtuu aina kielellä, joko kirjallisesti tai suullisesti, on tärkeää, että tekstit ja suullisesti annetut ohjeet ja suullinen vuorovaikutus kaikkiaan ovat asiallisia, selkeitä ja ymmärrettäviä.

Suomessa julkaistiin viime vuonna *Hyvän virkakielen toimintaohjelma*, joka sisälsi paljon ehdotuksia julkishallinnon kielen parantamiseksi. Luonnollisesti Kotus oli opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön tukemana tässä prosessissa aktiivinen. Sen jälkeen käynnistettiin virkakielikampanja, josta kuulette vielä tänään tässä konferenssissa. Meillä kielen asiantuntijoilla ja tutkijoilla on tällä hetkellä se käsitys, että Suomessa virastot ovat viime vuosina tulleet yhä enemmän tietoisiksi kielen merkityksestä toiminnassaan ja erityisesti asiakaspalvelussaan. Tämä käsitys on vahvistunut siksi, että niin monet virastot ovat hyvin konkreettisella tavalla etsineet omasta toiminnastaan niitä tekstejä ja prosesseja, jotka tarvitsevat kohennusta, ja ryhtyneet aktiiviseen työhön. Ihmisiä vartenhan palvelut ovat. En usko olevani ylioptimistinen, kun sanon, että tämä asia ymmärretään eri virastoissa mielestäni entistä paremmin. Uskon, että monilla teistä on samanlaisia kokemuksia omista maistanne, ja niistä on todella kiinnostavaa kuulla.

Jag ska nu byta språk och använda Finlands och mitt andra språk en stund, svenska. När det finns två officiella språk i ett land är det viktigt att bedriva nära samarbete när man utvecklar texter och kommunikation inom administrationen.

När man till exempel planerar texter på finska och svenska samtidigt, är det möjligt att hitta bättre lösningar. Man jämför ju hela tiden texter, och det ena språket kan på ett sådant sätt få stöd av det andra.

Det är trevligt att förbereda en konferens när man har kunniga och pålitliga kolleger som medarbetare. Jag vill här redan i början tacka hjärtligt Anna Maria Gustafsson – de flesta av er känner henne bra – som har tagit ansvar för många praktiska saker. Vi har suttit mycket tillsammans och funderat hur det är bäst att göra. Det har varit så lätt och naturligt att dela arbete och att bestämma vem som gör vad. Under den senaste veckan har vår unga kollega Bianca Holmberg och två studenter, Valtteri Kulmala och Anna Svanljung, från Helsingfors universitet hjälpt oss. Alla av dem är här och vill hjälpa er i praktiska frågor.

Suomalainen runoilija Pentti Saarikoski kirjoitti kerran lyhyen mietelmäräunon, joka kuuluu:

Me tulimme eri teitä samalle laiturille.

Jokaisella EFNILin jäsenellä, jokaisella teistä vieraista, on oma tausta ja kokemus. Näitä kokemuksia olemme täällä jakamassa toisillemme, samalla laiturilla. Kiitos, että haluatte kertoa työstänne ja että olemme teidän ansiostanne saaneet rakennetuksi täyteläisen ja rikkaan ohjelman!

Toivotan teille kaikille mielenkiintoista konferenssia ja miellyttäviä hetkiä Helsingissä. Olette lämpimästi tervetulleita! Ni är hjärtligt välkomna!

Dear Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Culture, dear guests, dear Members of EFNIL, dear colleagues!

On behalf of the Institute for the Languages of Finland, Anna Maria Gustafsson, and myself, I have the pleasure of welcoming you to the 13th conference of EFNIL in Helsinki, our dear city, which seems to have donned autumn colours in your honour. I have been waiting for this moment for a long time and I am really glad to see you all here. I hope that, despite the slightly chilly weather outside, every one of you will feel warm, cosy, and welcome.

The theme of the conference – *Language use in public administration: theory and practice in the European states* – is topical and important in many respects. In every country, there have been discussions about how authorities and their customers can interact with each other in a smooth and positive manner. Since these encounters always involve language, either written or spoken, it is important that written texts, oral instructions, and all oral interactions are appropriate, clear, and understandable.

Last year, we published in Finland a *Report of the Working Group for Clear Administrative Language*, which contained many proposals for improving the language of public administration. Of course, the Institute for the Languages of Finland was actively involved in this process, supported by the Ministry of Culture

and Education. Following the report, we launched a campaign for administrative language, which you will hear more about today in this conference. We, language specialists and researchers, currently believe that officials in Finland have become more and more aware of the significance of language in their activities, especially in customer service, over the past few years. We have become more certain of this, as many departments have taken very concrete measures to identify texts and processes within their field that need to be improved. After all, it is for the public that these services exist. I do not think I am being overly optimistic when I say that this is an issue that is better understood than previously in different departments. I trust that many of you have similar experiences in your countries, and it will be thrilling to hear about them.

(The following italicized part of the address is in Swedish)

I am now going to switch languages, for a while, to Finland's and my second language, Swedish. When there are two official languages in a country, it is important to work in close cooperation whilst developing texts and communication within administration. For example, when we devise texts simultaneously in Finnish and Swedish, we can end up finding better solutions. The fact is that in such a case, we keep comparing the texts with each other, and the language versions support one another.

It is enjoyable to prepare a conference when you have skilful and reliable colleagues to work with. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Anna Maria Gustafsson – most of you know her well – who has taken charge of many practical issues. We have spent a lot of time together thinking about how we should go forward. It has been easy and natural to share responsibilities and decide who should do what. During the past week, our young colleague Bianca Holmberg, and two students, Valteri Kulmala and Anna Svanljung, from the University of Helsinki, have helped us. They are all here, willing to help you with any practical questions.

Pentti Saarikoski, a Finnish poet, once wrote a brief aphoristic poem:

Me tulimme eri teitä samalle laiturille.

[We came through different ways to the same platform.]

Every member of EFNIL, every one of you, has their own special background and experiences. We are here to share these experiences with each other, on the same platform. Thank you for wanting to tell us about your work, and thank you for enabling us to build a fully-fledged and rich programme!

I wish all of you an interesting conference and a pleasant stay in Helsinki. You are warmly welcome!

Anita Lehtikoinen

Address

It is a great pleasure to be here at this conference, hosted by the Institute for Languages in Finland, to discuss language use in public administration. This is a very important topic, close to our hearts at the Ministry of Education and Culture. To start with, I venture to say that in Finland the situation with regard to improving administrative language is quite good. The Institute for Languages is an important agency with considerable influence in our country. Its experts have managed to convince us how significant good language is for democracy, and even for productivity in the public sector. Besides this, the institute has made us enthusiastic about working on good language and communication. I feel that the ministry and institute share a common will and enthusiasm for further and continuous development of administrative language. This shows that the institute has really succeeded in communicating with our administration!

Finland is a bilingual country with two official languages, Finnish and Swedish. The Government Resolution on the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland, issued in 2012, expresses the intention to maintain these two as viable national languages far into the future. Outlines and actions to reach this objective have been written into the strategy.

The language landscape in Finland is rich and varied, and this is how we want to keep it. Our national minority languages are part of this landscape. All three Sami languages spoken in Finland are threatened; two of them, Inari Sami and Skolt Sami, are seriously threatened. A year ago the Government issued a resolution on an action programme to revive the three Sami languages in our country. More education both about the Sami languages and in these languages is now given, especially in areas outside the Sami Homeland, because this is where the majority of the Sami people live today. To do this, distance learning is used. What is positive is that teaching in the three Sami languages is available in all municipalities within the Sami Homeland. Teaching is also available in all the subjects taught in basic education. For the development of the Sami language and culture it is vital that they are taught and studied at universities. The University of Oulu has been assigned a national mission to address this by means of special funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture.

With regard to the Romani language, a solution has been found now that the University of Helsinki offers the opportunity for the teaching and study of Romani language and culture. This is important because teaching and study at university level is a condition for the production of learning material, the education of teachers, and the further development and continuity of the

language. Experts in Romani language and culture can now be educated for specialist tasks in teaching (and producing the material for this), communication and culture. Achieving this took quite a long time, but we are very happy with the result.

The academic tradition for sign language is somewhat older. Today it has an established position in university education, with the future secured by means of financial support from the Ministry of Education and Culture to pursue this national mission. This is founded on the teaching and study of sign language, the education of sign language teachers and a professorship in sign language studies introduced at the University of Jyväskylä in the 1990s. Now there is an academic community in Jyväskylä where people using sign language can study in their own mother tongue. This community has been very active in international cooperation, as can be seen in their numerous international projects and events. One important future challenge is to have enough research to lay the foundation for further development of teaching and materials for this. The sign language community itself has indicated that teaching often suffers from a lack of learning material. Serious research efforts are needed to support this development work. One important step in terms of the position of sign language was the coming into force of the national Sign Language Act securing the rights of sign language users last May.

The Karelian language has been spoken in our country for as long as Finnish, but in a way it can be considered a recent immigrant among our minority languages. There has been a professorship in the Karelian language at the University of Eastern Finland since the beginning of 2009. In the same year the Karelian language was recognised as a minority language, as it was included in the reporting of the regional and minority languages of the Council of Europe by a decision of the President of the Republic. The Karelian language can be recorded as a mother tongue in the Population Information System of the Population Register Centre. The Karelian language is being taught on a local basis and “language nest” activities have been launched. Several Karelian societies publish literature in the Karelian language, and newspapers and magazines are eligible for so-called press support for minority languages. We can therefore say that a revitalisation programme for the language is well under way.

A new national core curriculum will be introduced in the Finnish basic education system from the beginning of next year. One of the objectives is for linguistic and cultural awareness to be part of the operating culture of schools. In this context linguistic awareness means a community-level understanding of the important role of language in learning, teaching and identity building. In a school with high linguistic awareness, the special characteristics of the language used in the different branches of knowledge are known. Language is highly valued and both the languages taught and pupils’ mother tongues are strongly present in various school situations.

The objective concerning linguistic and cultural awareness is very demanding, as it calls for changes in the ways we are used to thinking and acting. School management and teaching staff must have a deep understanding that highly qualified, ethical teachers must always be teachers of language and culture as well, even when the main teaching content is something other than language. Supplementary education will be needed to succeed in this.

Linguistic and cultural awareness has become even more important now that growing numbers of asylum seekers are bringing new features to our language landscape. Our language reserve is becoming richer and more diverse, but there are considerable challenges as well. There is an urgent need for a language strategy to outline the necessary actions for language teaching, research and language policy development.

Besides developing teaching in our national languages, teaching the mother tongues of the immigrant population is one of the main future challenges. Studies have shown that learning one's mother tongue supports the learning of other languages and success at school in general. Preserving and improving one's mother tongue skills are important for self-esteem and identity building. The role of the mother tongue has also been proven in the PISA results. The learning results of pupils with immigrant backgrounds have been better in countries where teaching of the mother tongue and functional bilingualism are promoted, besides teaching the target language. Early childhood education is also important in this. The early years of one's life are the most important time for language learning, and bilingualism should be promoted both in early childhood education and at home. Parents may not be aware of the challenges relating to a child's linguistic development, which is why they should not be left alone in these areas. Early childhood education and the school system must support the learning of one's own mother tongue among children with immigrant backgrounds.

Teaching a range of mother tongues requires long-term planning, both in municipalities and at the central government level. In this context it is important to reflect on the role and tasks of mother-tongue teachers. We know very well that their role in the school community is considered particularly important when the teacher functions as a liaison between home and school and helps in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the teaching process as a whole.

What is particularly worrying with regard to pupils with immigrant backgrounds is that mother-tongue teachers are difficult to find. Many of the teachers that are recruited have no teacher education or education in the language they should teach. Organising the education of mother-tongue teachers is not a simple matter. Decisions have to be made as to the languages in which education for mother-tongue teachers can be provided. Obviously such education cannot be arranged in all languages now being taught as the mother tongue – more than 50 in total. I see and hope for opportunities for collaboration in teacher education between different countries.

Now back to the topic of this conference, language use in public administration. We live in a society where we have to be able to communicate in diverse ways. Free public dialogue is the cornerstone of democracy. In order for that cornerstone not to disintegrate and crumble, every member of society must have the opportunity to take part in discussion on common issues. This opportunity only exists when the language used in the dialogue is clear and understood by all. Understanding is necessary to form opinions and have influence.

In our administration we must bear in mind that people are not experts in everything, which is why linguistic differentiation within the administration should be avoided. Hiding behind the jargon used in one's own specialist field often leads to cumbersome language. This increases the distance between administration and citizens, and may also be an obstacle to cooperation between administrative branches. It is more difficult to access information and use services. This problem is particularly prominent in the language of economy and finance, and when major reforms are being launched. The temptation to come up with obscure new expressions is great, but this can be overcome when we all pull together and ask the simple question "Is the new concept clear and understandable?"

Good administrative language is a key factor in good governance. Through open knowledge and data, open action and clear language, administration becomes a facilitator instead of being an obstructor or alienator. For me, good administrative language is one of the factors by which we can assess the quality of our administration. I was very pleased to see the excellent outcome of the campaign to promote good administrative language launched in Finland about a year ago, as indicated by the results of the administrative language contest which reveal the work done on renewing the language used in several fields of our administration.

I am confident that the varied content of this conference and the input of the highly qualified experts we have here will further encourage us to be active friends, promoters and supporters of good administrative language.

Gerhard Stickel

Opening and introduction to the conference theme

Arvoisat vieraat, hyvät kollegat,

Kiitos tämän vuoden konferenssin järjestävän organisaation johtajalle, Pirkko Nuolijärvelle lämpimistä avaussanoista täällä Helsingissä. Tahtoisin myös puolestani toivottaa teidät tervetulleiksi EFNIL:in 13. (kolmanteentoista) konferenssiin. – Heille, jotka ehkä epäilevät lukua: kyllä, tapaamme tänään todellakin jo 13. kertaa EFNIL:in yhteydessä! Perustustilaisuus oli vuonna 2003 Tukholmassa, siten vietämme tänään myös 12. EFNIL:in vuosipäivää.

Ärade gäster, kära kolleger

Jag vill instämma i de vänliga välkomstorden som Pirkko Nuolijärvi redan framförde som direktör för värdorganisationen. Även jag har den stora glädjen att hälsa er alla välkomna till den trettonde årliga EFNIL-konferensen. För er som är vidskepliga, vill jag bara säga att det faktiskt är den trettonde årliga konferensen, om vi räknar det konstituerande mötet i Stockholm 2003 som den första. Men på samma gång är det EFNILs tolv-årsjubileum.

Honoured guests, dear colleagues,

I would like to add my own welcome to the kind words of Pirkko Nuolijärvi, who has just greeted us as director of the host organisation. It is with enormous pleasure that I welcome you all to the 13th annual conference of EFNIL. For the superstitious ones among you: it is indeed the 13th annual conference – counting the founding meeting in Stockholm 2003 as conference no. 1 – but it is at the same time only the 12th anniversary of EFNIL.

Innumerable conferences and seminars have been held over the years for scholars, educators, journalists, and politicians anxious to promote the cultural and linguistic diversity of Europe. Despite their good intentions, many of these meetings have ended up producing no more in the way of change than an anthology of the papers read or a joint declaration (and sometimes even this was unpublished). An organisation such as EFNIL, which has emerged from its initial enthusiasm and survived for a dozen years, shows – as I hope you will agree – some evidence of durability and sustainability. It gives me great hope for the next dozen years of EFNIL. I am encouraged, too, to see some approval for our federation's goals and encouragement for our future work by the presence of several representatives of the European Commission and of the Finnish government.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Permanent Secretary Anita Lehtikainen, from the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, for her warm welcome address and her good wishes for this conference. I also thank Mrs Peggy Heikkinen, Vice-Chair of the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity, for being here with us today. From what she said in her address, there seems plenty of scope to develop a fruitful cooperation between EFNIL and the NPLD.

I would also like to extend a special welcome to Mrs D'haen-Bertier, the Director of Interpreters at the European Commission, and Mr. Christos Ellinides, Deputy Director General for Translation at the Commission. Both will be actively contributing to our conference by reporting on their important activities in the service of the European Union: I thank you for your participation and contributions in advance.

I am also delighted that we have two more guests from the Directorate General for Interpretation: Miss Anne-Laure Hubert and Mr. Javier Hernández-Saseta, head of the multilingualism unit. Javier has been a friend of EFNIL for several years.

I also welcome Mr. Jesper Schou-Knudsen, the head of the Nordic Language Coordination group. There is no doubt that we should learn from the practical linguistic cooperation between the Nordic countries.

Let me also welcome Ms. Nicoletta Mariolini, the Federal Delegate for Multilingualism in Switzerland. I am encouraged to consider her presence as an indication of enhanced co-operation in future between EFNIL and several Swiss institutions. Ms. Mariolini will also contribute actively to our conference programme, as will Dr. Georg Rehm, the representative of META-NET, another important European language organisation with which EFNIL is cooperating.

We need to start the detailed work of the conference soon, and much as I would like to continue to name all of our other guests personally, I hope that in the interests of the conference you will all accept this general welcome. And now I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to the hosts of this conference: Pirkko Nuolijärvi, Anna Maria Gustafsson and their colleagues and helpers. The fact that we all are here shows that your preparations have been a great success. I will save the rest of my thanks to you for the end of the conference.

Now, I would like to say just a few words about the theme of our conference. At last year's conference we discussed the use of languages in the academic world. This year we turn to another relevant area of language use in our countries. In agreement with our Finnish friends, we have chosen as the general theme for this year's conference: *Language use in public administration – theory and practice in the European states*. Communication between citizens and the institutions responsible for public administration is essential for the smooth functioning of national life at all levels. The challenges for effective administrative communication are especially great in multilingual countries, and in particular in those with

more than one official language, or with vibrant minority languages alongside the official language or languages. Should everyone be able to communicate with the authorities in their own mother tongue, and how should we facilitate this? What actions can be taken to avoid bureaucratic jargon and gobbledygook in official communications, and especially in official documents and forms? (I thank our friend John Simpson for the useful expression *gobbledygook*.) The increasing use of digital media by authorities can also cause additional problems for some citizens.

This conference will hopefully provide us with a more detailed picture of the present linguistic situation regarding communication by and with the institutions of public administration in various European countries. We have therefore invited the members of EFNIL to present reports on the language use of administrative institutions in their own countries, including that of the law courts and other judicial authorities. We hope that the linguistic descriptions will also be linked to any significant social change factors in recent years. Such changes might include increased immigration or an enhanced awareness of citizen's rights in relation to communication with the administrative and judicial authorities.

Let me take my own country, Germany, as an example: unlike the administrations of officially multilingual countries such as Finland, Luxemburg, or Belgium, the German authorities are essentially monolingual, with only a few exceptions in small regions with linguistic minorities. German is legally stipulated as the language of public administration and the law courts. As in other countries, the language use of public administration and legal authorities has developed grammatical, lexical, and idiomatic characteristics and peculiarities that often make official texts hard to comprehend for many people. In the past this came to be persistently criticised, and it was strongly argued that in a democracy the language use of public institutions and their agents should allow for the informed participation of the citizens concerned. In the 1970s, public servants, lawyers, judges and linguists cooperated with the aim of creating a "bürgerfreundliche Sprache", a citizen-friendly language. This led to remarkable improvements in public announcements, and in the published decisions of various authorities – including the law courts. Even oral communication between citizens and administrators improved. Since the 1980s and 90s this development has been augmented by a requirement for gender-neutral attitudes and expressions to contribute to overturning old prejudices and allow women to be as visible as men in public language. Because of the structure of German word formation, these attempts have led at times to the wording of some official texts becoming unnecessarily complex and strained. The jostling demands for linguistic equality on the one hand, and for clear and comprehensible language on the other, have not been completely resolved even now. However, there are signs that linguistic compromises are emerging.

At present there are more urgent problems, especially the often difficult communication between the authorities and an increasing number of immigrants and refugees. Public servants of various administrations meet speakers of more than a hundred different first languages who know little German or who have no German at all. A great variety of measures are employed to overcome these linguistic barriers: forms, announcements and explanations in the languages of at least some of the immigrants' languages are provided; interpreters are engaged; and courses are offered in the German language. However, the measures taken vary from one federal state to another, and sometimes from one city to the next. Coordinated action across different organisations is rare. German authorities and the indigenous citizens are only slowly learning that monolingualism is not the one-and-only, necessary state of communication within a society.

I will not enlarge on this now: we will have ample opportunity in these two days to discuss comparable linguistic problems in other European countries, and hopefully we will develop proposals for solving them. It will be interesting and useful for our members from officially or predominantly monolingual countries such as Germany, France and Italy to learn from their colleagues from countries that have a long bilingual or multilingual history.

The institutions of the European Union present an extreme case of a multilingual administration, where speakers of 24 different official languages are expected to communicate both with each other and with the citizens of the 28 member states. The language use of the EU institutions is vital for the smooth functioning of political, social and economic communication within multilingual Europe. We are, therefore, very glad that representatives of the Commission have accepted our invitation to present reports on the legal conditions and the practical reality of their work in the fields of interpretation and translation. Though most members of EFNIL are trained linguists or philologists, we have little experience in actual interpretation and translation. Therefore, we look forward to learning from professional experts about strategies developed to support the multilingualism of European institutions – which is a matter that today concerns all Europeans.

Peggy Heikkinen

Language use in public administration – theory and practice in the European states

Thank you very much for the invitation to attend this Annual Conference being held by EFNIL in my bilingual home city of Helsinki/Helsingfors. It's a great pleasure to be here with you to discuss issues that are very close to my heart – languages and how their use can best be developed at a local, regional, national and European level.

It's also a great pleasure to be with you here today in my capacity as the Vice Chair of NPLD, which is the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity.

NPLD is a European-wide network. We work in the field of language policy and planning for Constitutional, Regional and Small-State Languages (CRSS). The NPLD network includes governments, both at a national and regional level, universities, and a range of associations who are involved in language related issues. My employer The Swedish Assembly of Finland (or Folktinget in Swedish) is a full member of the network.

NPLD's main goal is to raise awareness at a European level of the vital importance of linguistic diversity. NPLD also aims to facilitate the exchange of best practice between governments, policy makers, practitioners, researchers and experts from all over Europe.

The theme of your conference here in Helsingfors is of great interest to many of our members. Many of us deal on a daily basis with the promotion of bilingualism or multilingualism in public administration. It's good to see today that you are looking at how countries deal with the issue of having more than one official language, and also how you deal with languages across a wide range of interfaces with the public.

However my main interest in being here is to highlight how important it is for NPLD to have a good and productive relationship with EFNIL. Both EFNIL and NPLD are networks working at a European level on issues related to languages. Networks in themselves are notoriously difficult to sustain. But as we look to the future, where it appears that the emphasis at the European level is moving away from issues such as languages, I believe that we need to work much more in partnership, and indeed we have already started along this path.

Both organisations have already realised the importance of technology for the future of their languages and for the sustainability of a multilingual Europe.

If the languages we enjoy using at the moment are to survive into even the near future, there must be an investment in language technologies in areas such as automatic translation and interpretation, multilingual information retrieval and other bi- and multilingual processes.

We know that language technology will be a key enabler in the next wave of the IT revolution. You won't type; you will speak with your hardware or machines. So we'll need to ensure that the basic building blocks for these developments are in place for all European languages. But in order to do this we have to collaborate. Very few individual countries will have the necessary expertise or funding to accomplish all that is needed on their own. This is a task for the European Union. However it must not only be for the national languages; it must be for all the languages of Europe.

What has increased our awareness of this issue is the publication of the EU's policy statement on the Digital Single Market, where no mention at all is made of the importance of languages. Not everyone speaks English!

This is where EFNIL and NPLD have joined forces in the past. We published a joint Position Paper on the Multilingual Digital Single Market in April 2015. This was jointly agreed in the run up to the META-Forum which was organised by META-NET in Riga, Latvia.

This is not going to be an easy initiative to win. Therefore we need to work in partnership with you on this issue and on other language related issues. We need to bring the issue of languages and linguistic diversity back on to the European agenda. Together we can do that.

I wish you well with this conference, and I'm looking forward to being part of the fascinating discussions. In my mother tongue Swedish: tack så mycket! Thank you very much!

Ann D'haen-Bertier

The importance and use of languages in the EU institutions, in particular from the perspective of interpretation

Abstract

The 2004 enlargement marked a sea change for the EU institutions. With the near doubling of the number of official languages, the challenges were especially acute for the institutions' "language" departments of translation and interpretation.

I propose to show in particular how the Directorate General of Interpretation of the Commission (SCIC) tackled this challenge, and what it implies for our day to day operations. In this context maintaining the quality of interpretation is of prime importance and I will therefore explain how we endeavour to ensure this, as well as how we prepare to meet other current and future challenges.

1. Introduction

There are three interpretation services in the EU institutions: one (DG INTE) in the European Parliament; the Directorate for Interpretation in the Court of Justice; and DG Interpretation (DG SCIC) in the Commission. This presentation outlines the specific case of DG SCIC, but the situation and challenges we face are very similar to those faced by the interpretation services in the European Parliament and the Court of Justice.

DG SCIC is the Directorate General of Interpretation of the European Commission, but since its very beginnings the service has always had an inter-institutional function. We also provide interpretation for the Council of Ministers and the European Council, as well as for some meetings of the EESC (European Economic and Social Committee) and the Committee of the Regions, and some other European agencies and bodies such as Europol. The Council of Ministers is by far our main "client", representing 62% of our interpretation activity in 2014.

DG SCIC has existed as a Commission service since the 1960s, when there were 4 official languages (French, German, Italian and Dutch), and over the years has grown and expanded its language coverage in keeping with successive enlargements. Needless to say, by far the biggest challenge we faced was the 2004 enlargement, with the near doubling of the number of official languages. In spite of the fact that there were many Cassandras predicting that the 2004 enlargement would mean the end of full multilingualism, DG SCIC (and our

“sister” interpretation services) successfully met this huge challenge, and is today able to deliver interpretation from and into the EU’s 24 official languages without a hitch.

We were able to do this thanks to extensive preparation undertaken by DG SCIC in the early 1990s in the then candidate countries, particularly by raising awareness among the relevant national authorities of the importance of actively supporting and – in some countries – of setting up professional conference interpreter training courses in centres of excellence, as well as by advising and assisting relevant universities with curriculum design and with the training itself.

Today we are able to provide interpretation from and into all official languages whenever needed. This is an achievement which I believe DG SCIC can rightly be proud of.

2. Multilingualism and interpretation activity today

Currently, DG SCIC has some 800 staff, 560 of whom are staff interpreters. In addition to staff interpreters we also have a list of over 3,000 freelance interpreters (including interpreters for non-EU languages) who are formally accredited (following a test) and available to all three interpretation services. Some 1,500 freelancers on this list work for DG SCIC on a regular basis.

In terms of volume of work, in 2014 DG Interpretation (SCIC) provided a total of 110,943 interpreting days, which means that we assign between 500 and 900 interpreters on a regular working day; a huge logistical operation! The volume of interpretation provided annually by DG INTE of the European Parliament is almost of the same order of magnitude, with the Parliamentary plenary sessions representing the bulk of their activity. To put it in a global context: taken together, the volume of interpretation activity in the EU institutions represents some 80% of the total volume of interpretation in international organisations worldwide.

On average, DG SCIC services between 50 and 60 meetings per day, but obviously not all meetings have full multilingualism (i.e. interpretation from 23 languages into 23 – interpretation into Irish is not provided as it is covered by a specific waiver). The number of languages – the so-called “interpretation regime” – in a meeting depends on the nature of the meeting and the needs of participants as well as on the available infrastructure (i.e. the number of interpreting booths in the room).

Formal Councils of Ministers meetings and the EU Council generally have all official languages, but most meetings have their “à la carte” (and more limited) language regime. Interpretation in a given meeting could for instance be from 23 languages into 10 (you can speak 23 languages but only listen to 9 different interpretations), 5 into 5, or 9 into 3 – and some meetings just have interpretation from and into 2 languages.

Over and above interpretation from and into all the EU official languages, DG SCIC is also able to deliver interpretation from the three Spanish co-official languages (Catalan, Bask and Galician) and the UK regional languages (Welsh and Scottish Gaelic), and regularly ensures interpretation from and into other languages such as those from EU candidate countries or the EU's main international partners e.g. Russian, Chinese, Arabic, Japanese etc.

3. Our goal

DG Interpretation of course aims to provide whatever interpretation may be required for a given meeting, but in doing so we consider that the quality of interpretation is of paramount importance. To be able to guarantee a high level of quality implies firstly that we must set high standards at entry level, both for the selection of permanent staff in EU competitions or for freelance colleagues in the inter-institutional accreditation tests. We also regularly monitor the quality of interpretation and performance throughout the interpreter's career; for staff this is done in the annual career development report, and for freelance colleagues through a transparent system of regular reports by experienced officials.

To help our staff maintain a high level of quality in their work, we also invest considerable resources in training, both internally within the DG as well as externally by providing assistance to interpreter training in our partner universities.

Internally, this represents some 7,000 training days for staff interpreters; first and foremost this involves language training, i.e. courses and other support for learning new languages of interest to the service, as well as courses/support schemes for strengthening or maintaining language proficiency; and secondly we also invest in "thematic training," i.e. courses on various policy areas or new political or economic developments, to strengthen interpreters' background knowledge and awareness of overall context.

Externally, we provide support to conference interpreter training in our partner universities throughout the EU: via direct grants, bursaries for students of interpretation, and by sending experienced staff to universities to give master classes. In 2014 we provided 450 days of this "pedagogical assistance" and allocated 97 bursaries and 8 grants to universities (DG INTE allocates grants to an equivalent number of universities).

We also organise structured "Training for Trainers" events, when we bring university trainers to Brussels for a week to share experience and help "bridge the gap" between the training at the universities and the reality of the EU institutions.

Finally, to ensure that we keep in touch with clients' needs and expectations, we have since 2007 carried out three-yearly "Customer Satisfaction Surveys" amongst meeting participants. By means of a brief questionnaire which we dis-

tribute in all meetings during a three week period, we ask for feedback on a range of aspects concerning interpretation: use of terminology, accuracy and completeness of content, language register, delivery, use of voice, potential disturbing factors, etc. This enables us to take stock of our overall performance as a service. Whilst overall the outcome and the responses have been very positive, these surveys also help us identify areas of concern to our listeners where further improvements for interpretation could be made.

4. Our challenges

Whilst DG SCIC can pride itself on being able to meet the demand for interpretation from the various institutions and bodies it serves, there are nevertheless a number of short and medium-term challenges and constraints that we must constantly be aware of and need to address.

First of all, by its nature DG Interpretation is a support service which responds to the demand for interpretation from its clients; we are not ourselves in a position to set or predict demand, which may fluctuate in the light of the work rhythm or political priorities of each institution. For instance, in recent years we have seen a drop in demand for interpretation which is more pronounced for some languages than others. In this somewhat volatile context we nevertheless need to ensure the best possible use of our resources, so it is important to keep our finger on the pulse and to have constant monitoring of activity to detect possible trends and align our recruitment or staffing levels as closely as possible to the likely demand.

Secondly, as in all other Commission DGs, our resources are under pressure. Over a 5 year period until the end of 2017, DG SCIC's staff posts will be cut overall by 10%. We therefore need to carefully examine the resource needs for different languages and ensure flexibility in the internal reallocation of resources.

In addition, in some language units such as EN, FR, DE, IT and NL, we also face the problem that many senior staff interpreters will retire over the next 5 years; we not only face the challenge of replacing these staff with new qualified recruits, but those who retire often have several passive languages (some up to 6), whereas new recruits for the most part come with two or at most three languages, which in turn implies the need for a sustained language learning policy.

Thirdly, over the past decade, the nature of interpretation in the EU institutions itself has undergone some profound changes. As EU's policies and powers have broadened, the subject matter of meetings has become increasingly complex and often highly technical (just think of the financial crisis, taxation, home affairs, the digital agenda etc.), requiring much more thorough advance preparation by interpreters. With 27 member states around the table, the very nature of meetings has also changed: interventions are less spontaneous and more scripted; densely

written texts and statements are read out, often at break-neck speed, rendering proper interpretation extremely difficult, if not nearly impossible; not to mention the increasing predominance of English and the pervasive use of English by non-native speakers, which also impacts on interpretation.

How are we trying to cope with this? In part we have a sustained policy of awareness raising with our clients on best practice for working in meetings with interpretation. In particular, heads of language units aim to foster close relations with their Permanent Representations, to identify their needs and identify ways of ensuring that they get the best possible interpretation – e.g. by encouraging them to be in touch with their interpreters and to systematically share speaking notes and terminology, and to give feedback. With tailored training we also try and help interpreters develop certain coping strategies e.g. for read-out speeches. None of these initiatives are a panacea, but every little helps.

The fourth main challenge is that of new technologies and how to bring them into meetings with interpretation – in particular video conferencing, as well as remote interpretation. DG SCIC has worked with other Commission services and has developed standards to facilitate video conference meetings with interpretation, and also technical standards. Several meetings now use this facility on a regular basis. As for remote interpretation, an inter-institutional agreement was signed in 2007 to allow this type of interpretation in the EU Institutions. A derogation to this agreement negotiated in DG SCIC made it possible for us to systematically provide remote interpretation for dinners/meals of heads of state and government in the European Council from 2011.

Remote interpretation in practice means that the dinner takes place on the upper floor of the Council building, whilst the interpreters are in a meeting room several floors below. The rooms are connected by audio and video link and the interpreters work from 4 television screens which are placed in front of every interpretation booth, ensuring that the interpreters have the fullest possible view and “feel” of what is happening in the dining room. A large screen gives an overview of the dining room, two smaller screens placed on each side of the large screen show the speaker and one screen placed at the top always shows the President of the EU Council who steers the meeting.

Obviously, apart from the screen set-up, several technical issues had to be resolved (*inter alia*, how to ensure the requisite sound quality, including perfect lip-sync, for interpreters; how to guarantee a good visual image of the dining room and of meeting participants; camera positioning and quality, etc). However, and perhaps more importantly, remote interpretation initially met with considerable resistance amongst interpreters, who were concerned about the working conditions and the possible longer term impact on the profession; so overcoming this reluctance was an important challenge for the service. DG SCIC therefore negotiated an agreement with the interpreters’ staff representatives which outlines

the technical requirements as well the working conditions for the use of remote interpretation, which was subsequently accepted by a general assembly of staff. Since then the issue has become less controversial and remote interpretation at the dinners of heads of state and government is now a regular and generally accepted feature of EU Summits.

5. Conclusion

The above gives an overview of the practice of multilingualism and interpretation within the European institutions, in particular from the perspective of DG Interpretation of the Commission.

As stated at the beginning, I believe that DG Interpretation can be proud of its achievements, but we also need to be aware that the world around us, as well as the EU institutions, are constantly changing, and as a professional service we need to be alert and move with the times as well as try and steer new developments. I am confident that ultimately the ability to adapt and the pro-activeness which we have shown in the past will help prove that interpretation adds value and ensure that multilingualism in the EU institutions is safeguarded.

Christos Ellinides

Translating for Europe – citizens first!

Abstract

Γιατί τελικά είναι τόσο σημαντικό να κατανοούν οι πολίτες τι συμβαίνει στις Βρυξέλλες και πώς η Γενική Διεύθυνση Μετάφρασης (DGT) της Ευρωπαϊκής Επιτροπής συμβάλλει σ' αυτήν την κατανόηση;

Πώς μπορούμε να είμαστε βέβαιοι ότι τα χρήματα που καταβάλλει σε φόρους ο Ευρωπαίος πολίτης τυγχάνουν σωστής διαχείρισης;

Και με ποιο τρόπο η μετάφραση βοηθάει μια πολιτικά έντονη Ευρωπαϊκή Επιτροπή να επικοινωνεί σωστά με τους πολίτες;

Αυτά είναι μερικά από τα ζητήματα που αναλύει ο Αναπληρωτής Γενικός Διευθυντής της Γενικής Διεύθυνσης Μετάφρασης, κ. Χρίστος Ελληνίδης, στην ομιλία του κατά τη διάρκεια του Συνεδρίου.

It is a pleasure for me to be here today, addressing an audience which promotes the study of European languages and encourages linguistic and cultural diversity within Europe. You are all helping to create the linguistic infrastructure needed to make communication possible between people who do not have a common language.

Every day the European Commission puts into practice its commitment to communicate with all EU citizens in their own language ... in fact we consider this both an absolute obligation and an unconditional responsibility.

Over the next few minutes I am going to speak to you about how we, the European Commission's translation service (known as the Directorate General for Translation – DGT), constantly strive to facilitate communication between the Commission and the citizens of member states – because, for us, ***citizens will always come first!***

Communication is now more important than ever – people are becoming more critical of their governments and of the EU. 'Euro-scepticism' is growing and today we are confronted not only with a financial crisis but also with complicated humanitarian issues such as the wave of refugees into Europe. These are exactly the reasons why the EU institutions need to be citizen-centric and able to communicate with all levels of society in the Member States. Citizens want value for their tax money and they are right. It is our job to inform them of what we are doing, why we are doing it and how we are doing it, in a language they understand.

1. Marketing ‘Europe’...

Since its inception, the EU has advocated the right of citizens to contact the European institutions in their own language and to receive a response in that language.

This principle is cherished and protected in the EU Treaties. In fact, the EU’s first piece of legislation, still in force, clearly states that all EU regulations and other documents of general use by citizens must be drafted in the Union’s official languages. In this way we want to empower people by informing them about what the EU is doing, but more importantly making it possible for them to address the EU institutions in their own language.

And as I said, we do not consider this just a legal obligation. No, it was a conscious choice by the founders of the European Union to make sure people could have access to laws and information about the EU in their own language. It was a rational choice but also a moral responsibility: *if you want to engage people, you should do it in their own language!*

If we want European citizens to care about Europe, we need to care about them. It can be easy to forget that people interact, receive services and discuss Europe in their own language. Politicians at national level speak to people in their language; and we, the European institutions, should do so too.

How can we, in these challenging times, maintain enthusiasm for the European project and our Union? What is the best way to get the message across? I sometimes hear people say that the Commission could save time and money by using only English as the official working language.

Nowadays the EU consults and involves its citizens as never before. We in Brussels can do this better if we reach out and interact in a language people understand, so that they can become part of the conversation. This is why our **translators and interpreters have an increasingly important role to play and where they have real and significant added value in the communication process.**

Europe is not just about ideals, but also about making peoples’ lives better. As President Juncker said in his State of the Union speech last month, the European Union is a project **to serve its people.**

He emphasised the fact that we need more union in Europe ... and more solidarity. I would add that **translation is indispensable for creating this union and for making it work.** And solidarity is easier if people understand what the EU is trying to achieve.

Our primary concern is to make sure that citizens understand the laws that apply to them. This is a fundamental principle, touching on the basic foundation of the EU. We respect diversity. So we publish EU legislation in all official EU languages.

But while this may keep lawyers and other members of the legal profession happy, it is probably not enough to inspire and stimulate our citizens.

In a way, involving people is all about marketing: and as any marketing expert will tell you, when you want to sell something you have to speak the language of your customer.

Willy Brandt, the former West German Chancellor said:

‘If I am selling to you, I speak your language. If I am buying, dann müssen Sie Deutsch sprechen’ ... then you must speak German.

And to make sure that all 500 million EU citizens can understand what the Commission is doing, we communicate with them in **24 official EU languages**.

As you can imagine, this requires considerable coordination and a strategic approach to what we should translate and what not.

2. Communicating with the citizen – multilingual web presence

Let’s think for a moment – *‘what do citizens want?’*

Well, information, for sure. Our websites are an almost inexhaustible source of information. So much so that it is not always easy to find the right information.

That is why the Commission is now very busy revamping its websites on *Europa* so as to provide relevant, coherent and cost-effective digital services for all, in the languages that are needed for a particular site or service.

Some content will be available in all official EU languages and some content in fewer languages, based on evidence-based requirements and available resources in the Commission.

In May last year, the Commission carried out a survey to find out what people look for on our websites. The poll was conducted in 24 languages and over 100,000 people responded. The 5 areas that stood out as the most important for our citizens were:

- 1) EU legislation,
- 2) Research and innovation,
- 3) Funding, grants and subsidies,
- 4) Education,
- 5) EU strategy and political priorities.

As a result, we are improving our new web presence in line with the findings of the survey.

Like I said before, **it is all about putting citizens first!**

During the testing phase we upload translated versions of the websites directly for our citizens to see. Naturally people find these translated sites easier to use

than those in the original or source language! This confirms what many of us know, namely that we have a much better understanding when we do or read something in our own language, than when we use our second language. Translation therefore can indeed contribute to clear communication between the Commission and the public.

The Commission's new web presence will:

- 1) keep citizens up-to-date about the Commission's high-level political priorities, and
- 2) provide practical and relevant information, co-created by Commission departments to meet both institutional goals and peoples' needs.

The objective is to communicate more effectively, using clear content, social media integration, easy navigation and fewer websites.

This content then needs to be translated. Since translating for the web is very different from translating legal text, we have trained translators that master the skills required to produce web content. It is their job to draft content that is clear to the reader in his or her own language.

While DG Translation's direct customers are mainly other Commission departments, EU citizens and public administrations are the ultimate consumers of what we translate – **they are the final destination of our translations**. I strongly believe that our web pages are the most direct and easiest channel of communication between us and the citizens.

3. Machine translation

Wouldn't it be great if people could start using a public service in any Member State from anywhere and obtain the information they need in their mother tongue?

This is a Commission vision which is reflected in our initiative 'Digital Agenda for Europe'. It is an initiative that aims to develop cross-border public online services and facilitate the mobility of businesses and citizens. It is an initiative that envisages a true Single Market. It will give professionals and citizens new tools to create, exploit and preserve digital content in any language.

The Digital Agenda makes explicit references to multilingualism [and I quote]:

*'The Commission will [...] work with stakeholders to develop a new generation of web-based applications and services, **including for multilingual content and services**, by supporting standards and open platforms through EU-funded programmes.'*

We still have some progress to make towards meeting our target for an integrated pan-European digital market. This is partly because linguistic barriers still limit the free flow of information, services, debates and innovation.

There is no doubt in my mind that translation is, more than ever, a key factor in the development of this market. In a truly global economy, translation services should provide efficient solutions for our multilingual society.

There cannot be a ‘Digital Europe’ without multilingualism.

The Connecting Europe Facility, which is part of the Digital Agenda, will use automated translation services to provide multilingual, pan-European digital services for all Europeans, or, for that matter, anybody outside Europe.

DG Translation has been deeply involved in developing a machine translation system called MT@EC, which allows for translation from any EU official language into one or more of the other EU official languages. MT@EC is the key component of the automated translation services that will be offered by the Connecting Europe Facility.

The system will be used for online services funded or supported by the EU, such as the Internal Market Information System; the online problem-solving network SOLVIT; the Online Dispute Resolution Platform for the Commission’s Health and Food Safety department and the e-Justice Portal of our Justice department.

Our target is to remove the digital barriers between public administrations in Europe and facilitate the exchange of information between European public administrations free from language barriers. MT@EC is a fundamental building block for the new, user-centric, European public services.

We currently have a pilot project running that involves some 500 people, including civil servants in Member States like Finland, Germany and Greece. All of these people have full access to the system. Member States are showing particular interest, especially in the area of judicial cooperation.

And that is not all: we have also granted access to the staff and students of a number of universities, so that they can use and test the system for teaching and research purposes.

You could say that machine translation is taking multilingualism to the next level, a step up towards interoperability between public administrations, making it easier for them to work together. In fact, I would like to refer to machine translation as a ‘multilingual enabler’.

DGT wants MT@EC to help public administrations to provide even better services for EU citizens and businesses. However, machine translation can only complement human translation; it will never replace it, since the types of texts that we produce have to be translated with extreme precision to guarantee legal certainty across the board, in all 24 languages. In other words, we need to ensure that everybody understands the same thing; something we refer to as legal concordance ... and that is ascertained by translators.

4. Translation and better regulation

Citizens are important to us and that is why we want to listen to them. To really make the EU work, laws must not only be available in all official EU languages but they must make sense. This is the drive behind the Commission's Better Regulation initiative, led by Vice-President Timmermans. Better Regulation is about designing EU policies and laws so that they achieve their objectives at minimum cost. It ensures that policy is prepared, implemented and reviewed in an open, transparent manner, informed by the best available evidence and backed up by involving people on the ground.

One of the critical success factors in our efforts towards Better Regulation is simply to write clearly.

An American general once asked Churchill to look over the draft of a memo he had written. Mr Churchill returned it to the General with the comment: 'Too many passives and too many zeds'.

The general asked him what he meant, and Churchill told him: 'Too many Latinate polysyllabics like "systematize", "prioritize" and "finalize". And then the passives ... what if I had said, instead of "We shall fight on the beaches", "Hostilities will be engaged with our adversary on the coastal perimeter"?''

DG Translation contributes to Better Regulation through its Editing Service, which also runs a campaign on clear writing. Editing improves the quality of Commission documents, making the language clear, accurate and more concise.

This helps avoid (costly) misunderstandings and ambiguities, saves time in the consultation process, and makes documents more understandable to the reader. As there are 24 official languages, any ambiguity in the original is multiplied by 23 other versions if we fail to detect it in time.

In addition, DG Translation works closely with other Commission departments to better factor translation into the Commission's overall decision-making process.

As part of our translation strategy, we impose a maximum length on certain types of Commission texts such as white papers (15 pages), green papers (30 pages) and press releases (3 pages).

Not only does this reduce the translation workload, it also means that readers of Commission texts are not faced with voluminous documents which are difficult to read and understand.

After all, the purpose of publishing texts, be it laws in the Official Journal or information on our websites, is to inform and involve people. And **DG Translation translates more than two million of such pages every year for the benefit of Europe's citizens.**

If we – and by ‘we’ I mean all of us – act as the custodians of multilingualism in Europe, we will be serving everybody’s interest. From our side, I would like to reassure you that we will continue to build linguistic bridges between EU public institutions and the citizens.

I am convinced that high-quality translation and interpretation contributes to better public services and helps foster a better civic society. This is why we are committed to promoting the language professions and to ‘walk our talk’ towards a European Union without language barriers.

And we take this role seriously!

Georg Rehm

Cracking the Language Barrier for a Multilingual Europe

1. Introduction

A truly multilingual Europe, which is realised and supported through sophisticated monolingual, cross-lingual and multilingual language technologies (LT) is still far from being a reality. Since its inception in 2010, it has been the key objective of META-NET to foster and stimulate research and technology development towards this scenario. Important milestones along the way have been the publication of the Language White Papers (Rehm/Uszkoreit 2012; Rehm et al. 2014) and the Strategic Research Agenda for Multilingual Europe 2020 (Rehm/Uszkoreit 2013) as well as the deployment of META-SHARE (Piperidis 2012; Piperidis et al. 2014). While all these activities have had a certain amount of impact in various European countries (Rehm et al. 2016), new challenges but also new opportunities have been emerging in the last two years.

In this contribution we briefly report on the most recent developments in and around META-NET up till the end of 2015. After an overview of META-NET in Section 2, we briefly describe, in Section 3, one of the major challenges, i.e., the danger of continued community fragmentation. In Section 4 we report on the relationship between the EU's Digital Single Market flagship initiative and language technologies, which is one of the major challenges but also opportunities our field of research faces in the next couple of years. One of the milestones in 2015 was the Riga Summit 2015, which also included META-FORUM 2015 (Section 5). At this event, the very first version of the Strategic Agenda for the Multilingual Digital Single Market was presented (Section 6). As a direct follow-up action of the Riga Summit 2015, the new European initiative *Cracking the Language Barrier* was created as a federation of projects and organisations working on technologies for a multilingual Europe. Section 7 provides an overview of this federation, its setup and members as well as the topics and objectives of the collaboration.

2. META-NET: A brief overview

Our multilingual European society imposes societal challenges on political, economic and social integration and inclusion, especially in the creation of the Digital Single Market (DSM) (see EC 2010). LT will bring us closer to this goal.

It is one of the key enabling technologies to boosting growth and strengthening our competitiveness. Recognising the demand and opportunities within Europe, 60 research centres in 34 European countries joined forces to form META-NET, a European Network of Excellence dedicated to the technological foundations of a multilingual, inclusive and innovative European society.¹ In its first funded phase, from 2010 to 2013, META-NET was supported through four EU projects (T4ME, CESAR, METANET4U and META-NORD). Currently, the EU-project CRACKER (2015-2017) supports selected META-NET activities such as the maintenance and extension of META-SHARE and the META-FORUM conference series (Rehm 2015).² Since its inception in 2010, one of META-NET's key goals has been mono-, cross- and multilingual technological support for all European languages as well as fostering innovative research and development by providing strategic guidance and recommendations along with a small number of priority research topics (Rehm/Uszkoreit 2013).

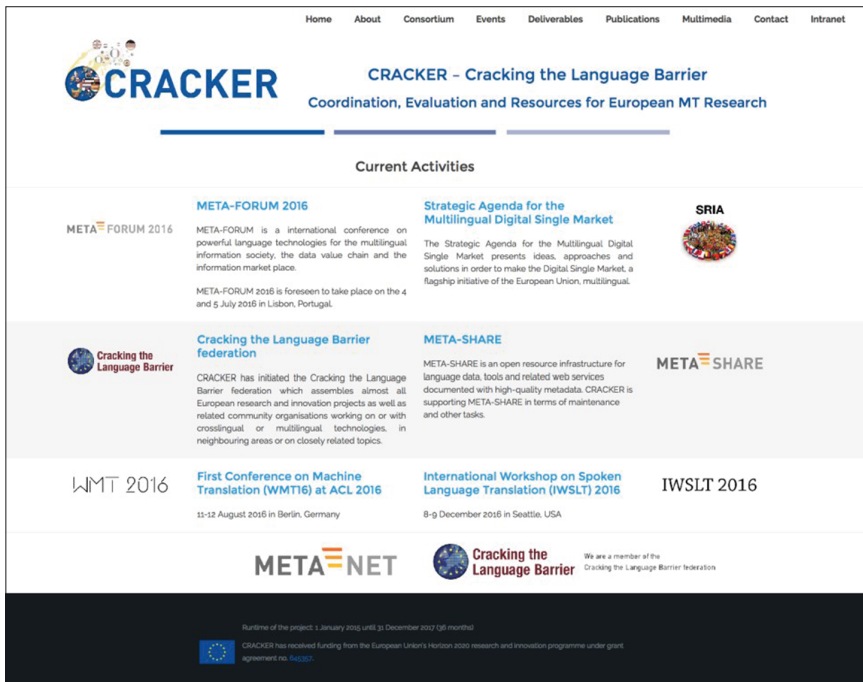


Fig. 1: The landing page of the CRACKER website

¹ www.meta-net.eu.

² <http://cracker-project.eu>.

3. The Danger of Increased Fragmentation among Communities

Parallel to META-NET, multiple stakeholders have for several years now been investing much time and resources into organising events and awareness raising activities, developing roadmaps and strategies, and communicating to key decision makers on specific aspects of the overall topic of *Multilingual Europe* (including, but not limited to, language technologies, language resources, language learning, industry and innovation, minority languages, under-resourced languages, etc.). In some of these areas, we have been able to establish very fruitful and constructive cooperation and collaboration, with some stakeholders inviting others to their events, often on a regular basis. A certain amount of community building has indeed successfully taken place, due to, among others, EFNIL activities (including the annual EFNIL Conference) and META-NET activities (including the annual META-FORUM conference). Nevertheless, to the non-initiated outsider, the wider community around the complex *Multilingual Europe* topic is still very much fragmented. Unfortunately, this continues to be a serious issue and also a challenge, especially when the mutual goal of all stakeholders is to communicate complex topics and suggested solutions, such as roadmaps and strategy papers, to administrators, politicians and other key decision makers with the shared goal of triggering change processes to improve the situation.

4. The Digital Single Market as a multilingual challenge

Fostering the Digital Single Market (DSM) is one of the top priorities of the European Union.³ The fully integrated and connected DSM is expected to add 340 billion Euros to European GDP and to create hundreds of thousands of new jobs. The European Commission wants to realise the DSM mainly through regulatory activities, including three policy areas or pillars (EC 2015): 1) better online access to digital goods and services for consumers and businesses (helping to make the EU's digital world a seamless and level marketplace to buy and sell through harmonised consumer rules, removing geo-blocking, copyright reform, etc.); 2) an environment where digital networks and services can prosper (by designing rules which match the pace of technology and support infrastructure development); and 3) by endorsing digital as a driver for growth, i.e., ensuring that Europe's economy, industry and employment take full advantage of what digitalisation offers.

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/digital-single-market/>.

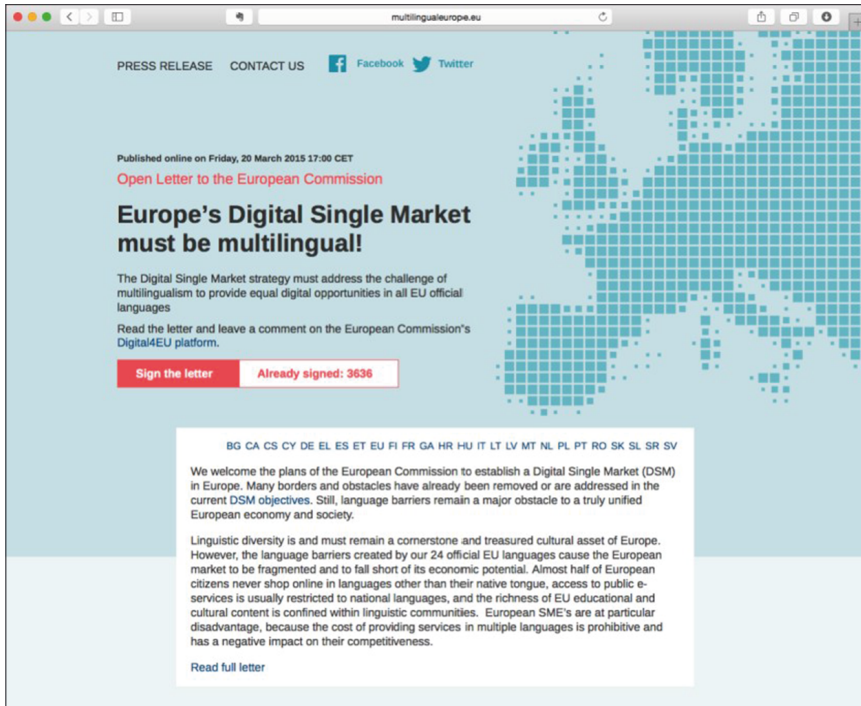


Fig. 2: The open letter campaign “Europe’s Digital Single Market must be multilingual!”

In early 2015, it transpired that the EC’s DSM Strategy, eventually published shortly after META-FORUM 2015 on 5 May 2015 (EC 2015), would most probably *not* contain a component dedicated to the language or multilingualism issue – even though we had already indicated in our META-NET Strategic Research Agenda for Multilingual Europe 2020 (Rehm/Uszkoreit 2013) that a truly unified digital *single* market can only exist when language barriers have been overcome through LT. As a reaction, we organised an online open letter campaign in March 2015, urging the EC to take the language issue into account for the final version of the DSM strategy.⁴ Within a few days, the open letter campaign managed to collect more than 3,000 signatures including those of researchers, professors, industry professionals, translators, administrators, officials and several Members of the European Parliament (see Figure 2).

As emphasised in the open letter, language barriers remain a major obstacle to a truly unified European economy and society. Linguistic diversity is and must remain a cornerstone and cultural asset of Europe. However, the language barriers

⁴ <http://multilingualeurope.eu>.

created by the 24 official EU languages cause the market to be fragmented. About half of European citizens never shop online in languages other than their native tongue and access to public e-services is typically restricted to national languages. European SMEs are particularly disadvantaged because the cost of providing services in multiple languages is prohibitive and has a negative impact on their competitiveness.

To overcome these barriers, Europe does not need to abandon its linguistic diversity. Technological development has brought solutions to automate translation and other multilingual processes. Although not perfect, these technologies already bring immense benefits, enabling multilingual and cross-lingual access to websites and e-services, extracting information from multilingual data, and boosting the efficiency of translators.

Yet online machine translation and language technology services are dominated by global non-European companies which primarily focus on English and a few other of the world's largest languages, more or less neglecting or ignoring European languages with less economic power. As a direct consequence, almost half of Europe's citizens are digitally disadvantaged due to their mother tongue (Rehm/Uszkoreit 2012).

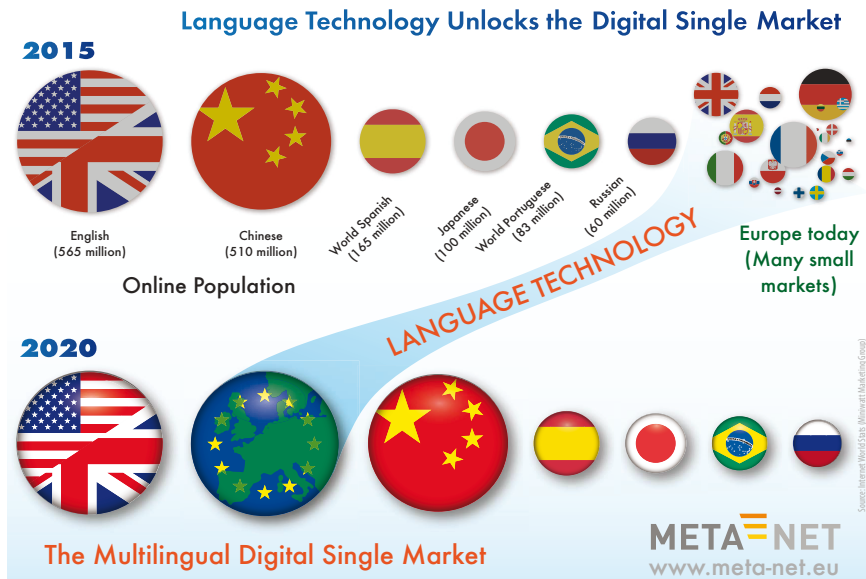


Fig. 3: Unlocking the Multilingual Digital Single Market

The market alone is unable to address this challenge, which requires immediate and concerted action at the level of the European Union. Europe needs a strategy to remove language barriers, enabling EU businesses and citizens, and providing equal digital opportunities for all EU language communities. Only if the EC's strategy includes the use of technological solutions for bridging language barriers can the full potential of the DSM be unleashed. These solutions should include, among others, a set of digital services for all EU official languages which is available to all European citizens, businesses and organisations. These services will allow technology and service companies to create numerous solutions to cover a variety of market needs and requirements.

Such technological solutions, based on European research results and industry innovations, will provide all European citizens, businesses and public institutions with access to high-quality machine translation and additional sophisticated language solutions for businesses, consumers and cross-border public services (see Figure 3). If the EC's strategy for the Digital Single Market does not recognise multilingualism as both a challenge and an immense opportunity for economic growth and social cohesion, the DSM will consist of more than 20 isolated markets that do not have any bridges between them. To address the question of technology solutions for the multilingual DSM, we have been working on the Strategic Agenda for the Multilingual Digital Single Market (Section 6), the first version of which was presented at META-FORUM 2015.

5. META-FORUM 2015 and the Riga Summit 2015

META-FORUM is META-NET's annual conference series. Previous events took place in 2010 (Brussels), 2011 (Budapest), 2012 (Brussels) and 2013 (Berlin); initially the conference series was co-funded through the EU-project T4ME, i.e., the Network of Excellence that created and was the core of META-NET. The two main goals of META-FORUM are community building and outreach to the wider research and industry community, as represented, for example, by the 800+ members of the Multilingual Europe Technology Alliance (META).

META-FORUM 2015⁵ took place on 27 April, the first conference of the series organised as a one-day event due to time constraints as a result of the other events organised under the larger umbrella of the Riga Summit 2015 on the Multilingual Digital Single Market.⁶ The idea of organising a larger, high-level event with a three-day programme focused around the topic of the EU's Digital Single Market flagship initiative, headed by Vice President Andrus Ansip, was born in a meeting with representatives of the European Commission and the two CSAs LT_Observatory and CRACKER in Luxembourg on 21 October 2014.

⁵ www.meta-net.eu/events/meta-forum-2015/.

⁶ <http://rigasummit2015.eu>.

Indeed, the Riga Summit was the first tangible indicator that a wider group of stakeholders had finally reached a turning point in terms of working together towards a mutual goal; it was jointly organised by META-NET (through CRACKER), LT-Innovate (through LT_Observatory), Tilde and the EC. At the Riga Summit, consisting of META-FORUM 2015, the Riga Summit Plenary Day, the Multilingual Web Workshop 2015⁷ and the CEF.AT⁸/ELRC⁹ Conference, about 350 participants from several communities came together and presented as well as discussed many different topics around Multilingual Europe and the Multilingual Digital Single Market.

On the last day of the summit, the participants prepared and signed a short one-page document, the Declaration of Common Interests (Riga Summit 2015 Declaration). In this declaration, the representatives of 12 organisations – BDVA, CITIA, CLARIN, EFNIL, ELEN, ELRA, GALA, LT-Innovate, META-NET, NPLD, TAUS, W3C – state that they stand united in their goals and interests to:

- support multilingualism in Europe by employing language technology in business, society and governance, to create a truly Multilingual Digital Single Market,
- exchange and share information in their efforts to promote their goals and interests at local, national and European levels,
- raise awareness in society at large using channels available to their associations, alliances and societies.

Furthermore, the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding among the organisations was planned as a step towards forming a “Coalition for a Multilingual Europe”. A few months later this ‘coalition’ was put together as the “Cracking the Language Barrier” federation (see Section 7).

One of the highlights of META-FORUM 2015 was a panel discussion with representatives of EFNIL and NPLD in which a position paper jointly written by these two organisations was presented (NPLD/EFNIL 2015). Another highlight was the official unveiling of the Strategic Agenda for the Multilingual Digital Single Market, presented in more detail in the following Section 6.

6. The Strategic Agenda for the Multilingual Digital Single Market

Building upon past activities, in particular the *META-NET Strategic Research Agenda for Multilingual Europe 2020* (Rehm/Uszkoreit 2013), the EU-projects CRACKER and LT_Observatory teamed up in early 2015 and prepared the

⁷ <http://www.multilingualweb.eu/documents/2015-riga-workshop/>.

⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/connecting-europe-facility>.

⁹ www.lr-coordination.eu.

Strategic Agenda for the Multilingual Digital Single Market – Technologies for Overcoming Language Barriers towards a truly integrated European Online Market (MDSM SRIA 2015). The very first version of this document, Version 0.5 dated 22 April 2015, was publicly unveiled at META-FORUM 2015 and the Riga Summit 2015 (see Section 5).

We recommend setting up a strategic programme to enable the Multilingual Digital Single Market (MDSM). Due to space restrictions, it is only possible to provide a brief summary of the main components of the SRIA. The setup of the ambitious strategic programme consists of three layers (see Figure 4). On the top layer we envisage a set of focused *Technology Solutions for Businesses and Public Services*. These innovative application scenarios and solutions are supported, enabled, and driven by the middle layer, which consists of a small group of *Services, Infrastructures and Platforms* that provide, through standardised interfaces, data exchange formats and component technologies, with different services for the translation, analysis, production, generation, enrichment and synthesis of content and information. The bottom layer connects the infrastructures to innovative *Research Themes*. These provide concrete scientific results, approaches, technologies, modules, components and algorithms that can then be used to enable the second and, ultimately, the top layer. Furthermore, we plan to intensify work on core resources and technologies for language production and analysis, because we need to improve the basic technologies for all languages. In order to equip every language with a set of core resources and technologies, we suggest, among others, intensifying knowledge and technology transfer between larger research centres and groups working on technologies for under-supported languages.

The SRIA, together with background information such as, for example, a fact sheet¹⁰ on the Multilingual Digital Single Market (excerpts shown in Figures 5 and 6), was delivered to EC Vice President Andrus Ansip and all other EC Commissioners as well as other high-ranking EC officials via email. A response was received on 8 June 2015. The letter, addressed to the Network Manager of META-NET, takes into account our awareness raising campaign and the Resolution and Declaration documents prepared at the Riga Summit. VP Ansip thanks the community for bringing to his attention the open letter campaign and the SRIA. Furthermore, VP Ansip invites “the European [LT] community to further develop the ideas presented in the draft Strategic Agenda for the multilingual Digital Single Market”.

¹⁰ <http://cracking-the-language-barrier.eu/documents/>.

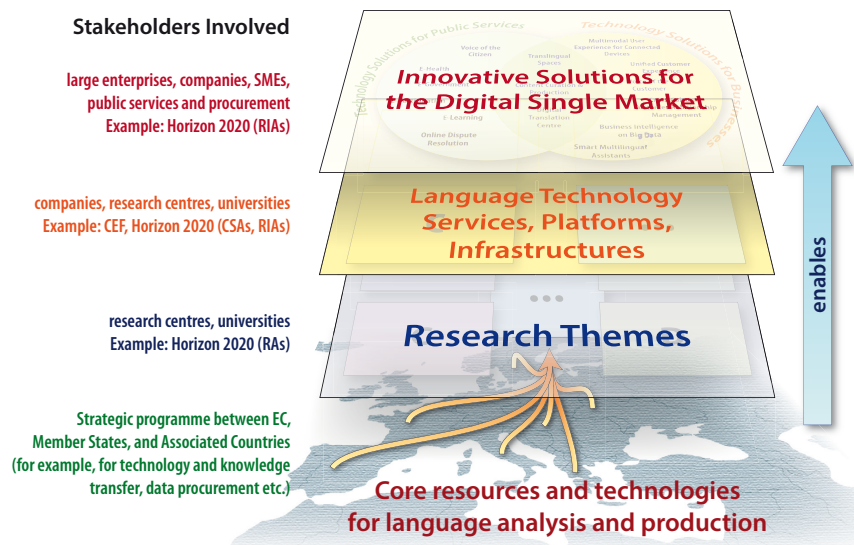


Fig. 4: The multi-layered programme for the Multilingual Digital Single Market

If we are able to secure support from the European Commission, the strategic programme will not only unlock the multilingual DSM, it will provide the European language technology community and also several different industries with the ability to compete with other markets and, subsequently, achieve multiple benefits for the European economy and future growth, as well as for our society and citizens. The plan put forward in the SRIA can only be realised through close cooperation between all stakeholders and tightly coordinated collaboration. Awareness and political will are required to take us to a leading position in this technology area. This major dedicated push also needs to include the political determination to modify and adopt a shared, EU-wide language policy framework that includes an important role for language technologies.

As Europeans, we urgently need to ask ourselves some crucial questions. Can Europe afford continued language-blocking, market fragmentation caused by language borders, language discrimination, and, eventually, digital language extinction? Can we afford to have our information, communication and knowledge infrastructure so dependent on monopolistic services provided by foreign, non-European companies, effectively constituting technological lock-in? What is Europe's fall-back plan in case the language-related services provided by these non-European companies that we rely upon are suddenly switched off, or even more serious access or security issues arise? Is Europe actively making an effort to compete in the global landscape for research and development in language technology? Can we expect third parties from other continents to solve our trans-

lation and knowledge management problems in a way that suits our specific communication, societal and cultural needs?

Language Technology made for Europe in Europe will significantly contribute to future European cross-border and cross-language communication, economic growth and social stability while establishing for Europe a leading global position in technology innovation, securing Europe's future as a world-wide trader and exporter of goods, services and information. Only a large, coordinated push of this magnitude will be able to unlock a truly multilingual Digital Single Market.

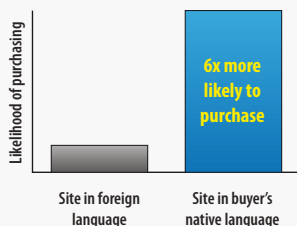
7. The Cracking the Language Barrier Initiative

At the beginning of 2015, six new EU-funded Machine Translation projects were launched, financially supported by the call Horizon-2020-ICT-17, entitled "Cracking the Language Barrier".¹¹ One of the original goals of the CRACKER project was fostering community building within this group of projects. The start of this community building activity coincided with the Riga Summit 2015 (see Section 5) where a first meeting of the ICT-17 group and two related FP7 projects was held. In this and several follow-up discussions it became clear that a significant extension of the scope of the intended community would be worthwhile, by not only including the ICT-17 and FP7 projects in the emerging initiative but also other relevant Horizon 2020 projects, as well as longer-term and more sustainable European organisations and associations.

In CRACKER we decided to address the danger of increased fragmentation among communities (see Section 3) by creating one umbrella initiative that, ideally, would include all current and recently ended EU-supported projects and, in particular, all stakeholder organisations. Instead of the term "coalition", as initially suggested in the Riga Declaration document (Riga Summit 2015 Declaration, see Section 5), we use the term "federation" to emphasise that this is an initiative *from* the community *for* the community. One of the federation's main principles is that all members operate on an equal basis.

¹¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/h2020/topics/289-ict-17-2014.html>.

Customers are **six times more likely to buy** from sites in their native language.



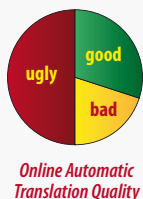
English is not the answer

52% of EU customers **do not purchase** from English-language sites.

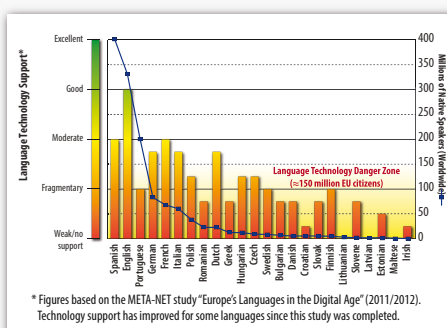
Adding even a few languages to an SME's website beyond English can have a **major impact on revenue**. Large organizations today often localize products and websites into fifty or more languages to increase market share.

Most EU languages address less than 3% of the market, fundamentally **limiting SMEs** operating in countries where those languages are spoken.

The native languages of approximately **140 million EU citizens are in the Language Technology Danger Zone**, where language technology is inadequate to support the DSM.



Current online automatic translation provided by US tech giants does not solve the "language problem": **less than 30% of automatically translated content is truly useful** for online commerce.



Only three European languages (Spanish, English, and French) meet at least the "moderate" level of language technology support.

Fig. 5: Several facts around the Multilingual Digital Single Market (1/2)

The federation's name was picked by simply reusing the name of the call Horizon 2020, ICT-17. It was not considered necessary to invent an overall new community brand. The strategic objective of "cracking the language barrier" (or working with or on multilingual or crosslingual technologies) can be considered the shared core of all participating projects and one of the main strategic goals that all participating organisations firmly stand behind.

The Cracking the Language Barrier federation is designed as a self-organising organisation. There are no plans at the moment to establish any kind of governance structure, even though this may become necessary in the medium to long term. It is organised around a short multi-lateral Memorandum of Understanding (Cracking the Language Barrier MoU). To quote the Memorandum of Understanding, its purpose is

to establish one umbrella initiative for all projects and organisations working on or supporting the idea of cracking the language barrier. The MoU contains a non-exhaustive list of general areas of collaboration [see below]; all projects and organisations that sign this document [...] are invited to participate in these collaborative activities. (Cracking the Language Barrier MoU)

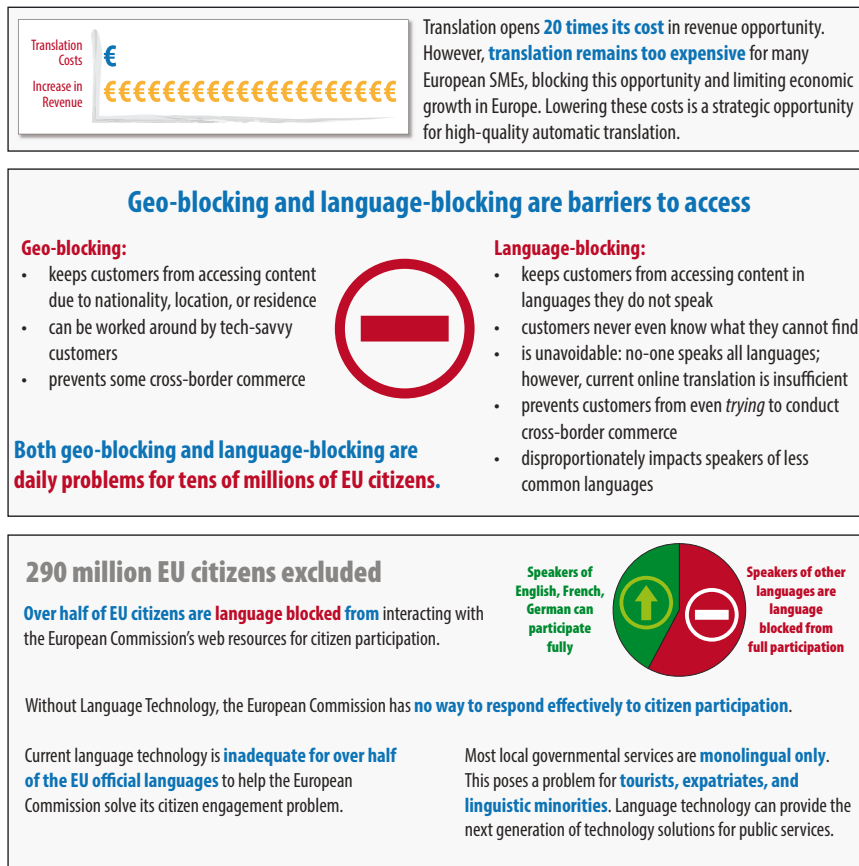


Fig. 6: Several facts around the Multilingual Digital Single Market (2/2)

Any interested European project or organisation that is considered relevant to the initiative can join the federation by signing the multilateral Memorandum of Understanding. In doing so, a project or organisation declares its commitment to cooperation and collaboration according to the non-exhaustive general areas of collaboration. Participation is optional and open to any European project or organisation working on or with crosslingual or multilingual technologies, in neighbouring areas or on related topics.

At the time of writing, the Memorandum of Understanding has been signed by nine organisations and 20 projects:

- Organisations: CITIA, CLARIN, EFNIL, ELEN, GALA, LT-Innovate, META-NET, NPLD, TAUS;
- Projects: CRACKER, EUMSSI, EXPERT, Falcon, FREME, HimL, KConnect, KRISTINA, LIDER, LT_Observatory, MixedEmotions, MLi, MMT, Multi-JEDI, MultiSensor, PHEME, QT21, QTLeap, ROCKIT, XLiMe.

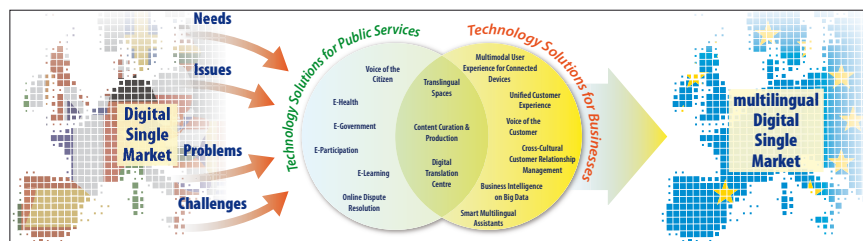


Fig. 7: Realising the Multilingual Digital Single Market

In addition, several other organisations and projects have been approached about participation in the initiative and the group of members is expected to grow. Interested projects are already approaching us because they want to join the federation.

An initial website for the initiative was launched in August 2015. On the website each project and organisation that participates in the initiative is allocated at least one page. This way, the initiative itself can be established as one overarching brand and activity without undermining the importance and status of the participating organisations and projects. Figure 8 shows the landing page of the Cracking the Language Barrier federation’s website.¹² Each member is showcased with a brief description, further details, contact information and a link to their own website. Furthermore, the website contains an events calendar and a section on which shared documents such as the Riga Declaration (Riga Summit 2015 Declaration) or the Multilingual Digital Single Market SRIA (MDSM SRIA) are available for download. As a first common activity, the website also features the virtual home¹³ of the LREC 2016 Workshop “Translation evaluation – From fragmented tools and data sets to an integrated ecosystem” which will be held in Portorož, Slovenia, on 24 May 2016; this workshop is a joint activity by CRACKER, QT21 and the Cracking the Language Barrier federation. Additional features are planned, e.g., a joint newsletter and a joint blog.

¹² www.cracking-the-language-barrier.eu.

¹³ www.cracking-the-language-barrier.eu/mt-eval-workshop-2016/.

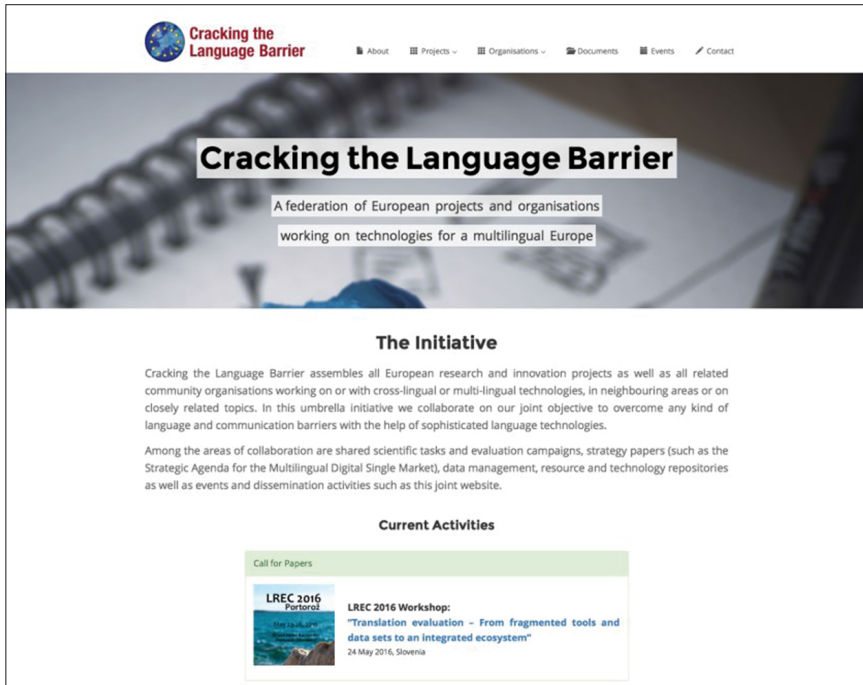


Fig. 8: The landing page of the Cracking the Language Barrier's federation website

With regard to handling and streamlining communication and coordination among the participating projects and organisations of the federation, email distribution lists were set up (e.g., to announce new members, workshops, conferences, evaluations, etc.). Any project or organisation that signs the Memorandum of Understanding is added to the mailing lists with as many representatives as they like.

By signing the Memorandum of Understanding, all members of the federation express their intention to collaborate and to cooperate with one another. A first set of areas of collaboration was discussed and agreed upon at the meeting of all EU-projects funded through Horizon 2020, call ICT-17, on 28 April, 2015, in Riga.

- **Internal communication:** all projects and organisations participating in the activity are invited to use the email distribution lists as internal communication channels, to exchange news and information (e.g., about upcoming events, recent funding opportunities, shared evaluation workshops, new developments on the European level, etc.).
- **External communication and dissemination:** all projects and organisations participating in the activity are invited to collaborate in terms of events, publications and scientific dissemination, for example, by participating in

each others' events, evaluation campaigns, shared evaluation workshops, by actively using and promoting "Cracking the Language Barrier" activity in dissemination emails, posters, presentations, panel discussions and publications, and by exchanging and harmonising communication plans.

- **Website:** all projects and organisations participating in this activity are featured on a dedicated website; the website also includes additional information such as, for example, a list of upcoming events and the Memorandum of Understanding.
- **Data management and repositories for language data, language tools and language technologies:** all projects and organisations participating in the activity are invited to join forces and to collaborate in terms of harmonising data management plans (metadata, best practices, etc.) as well as data, tools and technologies distribution through open repositories.
- **Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda:** projects and organisations are invited to collaborate by providing input and feedback with regard to the current and any future versions of the Strategic Agenda for the Multilingual Digital Single Market (SRIA version 0.5, see MDSM SRIA) or related strategic documents such as, for example, roadmaps.
- **Shared tasks and evaluations:** projects and organisations are invited to participate in the shared evaluation workshops organised by CRACKER and QT21, among others.

This list of areas of collaboration, also contained in the Memorandum of Understanding, is not meant to be exhaustive. Additional topics can be suggested or initiated by all projects and organisations.

8. Conclusion and invitation

Despite rapid technological progress (including uptake in digital services) and many years of work by several stakeholder organisations, Europe is only just starting to recognise the potential and importance of language technologies for its future growth and digital infrastructure. The European Union has a unique opportunity for strategic investment in the future of our continent by stimulating further progress in this field and eventually overcoming language barriers through multilingual technologies that are deeply embedded into our future IT. Digital communication and information technologies play an ever increasing role in our society, forcing the European Union to decide if it wants to contribute to the development of the field or whether it can afford not to. One specific area in which we can already see some positive uptake is the inclusion of automated translation technologies in public e-services, as supported through the CEF programme (Connecting Europe Facility). This is a good first step, but more need to be taken.

While the Cracking the Language Barrier federation is still in its infancy, the current membership base of nine participating organisations and 20 projects is very promising and demonstrates the growing interest among all stakeholders in taking the much needed next steps by working together instead of operating in isolation without broader coordination (also see Soria et al. 2013; Mariani 2015). In addition to a few projects that have not yet signed the Memorandum of Understanding, the initiators hope to assemble all of the 12 organisations that have signed the Riga Declaration (Riga Summit 2015 Declaration).

With the publication of the Horizon 2020 Work Programme 2016/2017 the European Commission has, unfortunately, dropped language technology as a stand-alone topic; however, LT is included in the Big Data call ICT-14 where it is envisaged as an enabling helper technology for crosslingual data value chains. The language and multilingualism topics are also disregarded in the Digital Single Market strategy, published in early May 2015. At the same time we are entering an era in which Artificial Intelligence and smart language-related technologies play an increasingly decisive role in applications such as machine translation (e.g., Google Translate, Bing Translator, Yandex Translate), interactive dialogue systems (e.g., Apple Siri, Microsoft Cortana, Google Now, Amazon Echo) and arbitrary web interfaces where natural language processing components including, among others, search suggestions, information extraction, spell-checking etc. are, by now, indispensable components that users expect to be available.

Therefore, one of the next important steps is to significantly step up our communication activities and collaborate more closely and in a more coordinated way. One tangible forthcoming document will be the next iteration of the Strategic Agenda for the Multilingual Digital Single Market. A key proposal is to have the next version prepared, published and endorsed not only by the two EU-projects LT_Observatory and CRACKER but by the whole Multilingual Europe community, as assembled in the Cracking the Language Barrier federation. This next version of the SRIA is currently scheduled to be presented at META-FORUM 2016 in Lisbon on 4/5 July 2016.

We would like to invite interested organisations, projects and other stakeholders with a vested interest in the topic of Multilingual Europe to get in touch with us regarding active participation in the Cracking the Language Barrier federation.

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Reports on different countries

Can official websites be accessible to all? A Swedish language policy perspective

**Abstract: Kan offentliga webbplatser göras tillgängliga för alla?
Ett svenskt, språkpolitiskt perspektiv.**

Enligt språklagen (2009:600) ska offentlig information och service finnas tillgänglig på svenska för alla som bor i Sverige. Språket i offentlig verksamhet ska vara enkelt och begripligt. Enligt lagen om nationella minoriteter och minoritetsspråk (2010:724) har de nationella minoriteterna i Sverige rätt att kommunicera med myndigheterna på finska, meänkieli och samiska i särskilda geografiska områden. Myndigheterna ska främja och synliggöra alla nationella minoritetsspråk, också romska och jiddisch. Motsvarande gäller det svenska teckenspråket. För att nå ut till nyinflyttade med viktig information behöver myndigheterna också använda på flera andra minoritetsspråk.

Ansvaret för uppföljningen av språklagen ligger på Språkrådet. Som en del i det arbetet har vi undersökt språksituationen på internet i Sverige (Domeij 2010) och tittat på hur språkteknologi kan användas för att möta medborgarnas språkliga behov på nya sätt (Domeij m.fl. 2011). Utifrån det har vi utarbetat en vägledning med praktiska råd till myndigheter och andra organisationer om hur de kan arbeta med flerspråkig webbinformation (Språkrådet 2012). Vi har också utforskat metoder för att undersöka den flerspråkiga tillgängligheten på myndigheters webbplatser (Domeij & Spetz 2012) med utgångspunkt i vägledningen.

I artikeln redogör vi översiktligt för detta arbete och de resultat det gett hittills.

1. A multilingual perspective on accessibility online

How do Swedish public authorities communicate with the population of today's multilingual and multicultural society? How should texts in Swedish and in other languages be designed to reach as many people as possible? Are authorities living up to the Language Act's requirement of comprehensibility? If not, what should they do in practice? It is an extremely important and topical issue that we at The Language Council of Sweden need to examine in order to evaluate the accessibility of information and services on public authority websites. This is both as part of the Language Act (2009: 600) follow-up and as a basis for recommendations.

Having accessible public authority texts for the entire population does not mean the same thing today as it did a few decades ago. Over one million Swedes now have a foreign background, and many of them have a mother tongue other than Swedish (Parkvall 2009). It is estimated that there are between 150 and 200 languages in Sweden today. Despite the changes in the composition of the

population, web accessibility has so far been considered almost exclusively from a monolingual perspective, focusing on people with disabilities and the elderly. Very little has been done to improve web accessibility for people with a mother tongue other than Swedish (SIKA 2008).

However, the emergence of a language policy over the past decade has strengthened requirements so that state and municipal authorities are also responsible for accessibility from a linguistic perspective. For example, the Language Act states that public authorities should use language that is simple and comprehensible. Furthermore, the Act (2009:724) on National Minorities and Minority Languages states that people who belong to national minorities have special rights to use their own language.

Despite the increase in requirements and the need for language accessibility, our experience is that there is a lack of knowledge and common principles for how authorities should tackle communications from a language policy and multilingual perspective. It is not just a question of which public authority information should be translated into which languages, but also how the information in Swedish should be designed to include people with other mother tongues.

The Language Council of Sweden has been working on putting together and formulating these kinds of principles and methods for some years. In a previous project we carried out an initial survey of the accessibility of public authority websites from a multilingual perspective (Domeij, 2010). To give support to authorities and public organisations in their work with multilingual accessibility, the publication *Vägledningen för flerspråkig information* [*Guide for multilingual information*] (2011) was drawn up as a result of this project, with guidelines on how authorities should manage information and services online with regard to different people's linguistic needs and rights.

The next step has been the development of methods to evaluate the multilingual accessibility of public authority websites. The results from this method project will be presented and discussed below with a special focus on Swedish from a multilingual perspective.

2. Research by observation and survey

In our efforts to evaluate public authorities' linguistic accessibility online, we wanted to gain knowledge about both the results of work on accessibility and the processes behind it. By gaining better insight into how any preparatory work is structured, there is the opportunity to examine if the efforts to improve the website are adapted to the target group. Such a perspective is particularly important for authorities with local target groups, for example municipalities where population composition, linguistic needs and rights can vary greatly in different parts of the country.

Against this background, we chose to make a detailed observation of three public authority websites (Arbetsförmedlingen, Skatteverket and Försäkringskassan) according to an established chart, and to send out a survey on multilingual work on the internet to 23 selected authorities. Most of the selected authorities have a broad national target group and are authorities we presume many people will encounter in their daily lives. Some authorities were included because they had special assignments in connection with the County Administrative Board of Stockholm and the Sami Parliament's monitoring of the Minority Act.

In addition to finding out more about the authorities' accessibility work, we wanted to examine how suitable observation and survey is as a tool for periodically evaluating official language accessibility online.

3. Easy-to-read Swedish, not for people with other mother tongues

Because the survey's focus was on public authorities' multilingual information, a large part of the survey results relate to information in languages other than Swedish. But through the survey we could also collect information on how authorities deal with information in Swedish from an accessibility perspective. Among other things we asked the authorities if they use texts in easy-to-read Swedish which are particularly adapted for persons with a mother tongue other than Swedish. None of the twelve authorities who replied to the survey did, but all except one authority replied that they had texts in easy-to-read Swedish on their website which are aimed at a mixed target group, including people with reading difficulties that have Swedish as their mother tongue and people with mother tongues other than Swedish (regardless of reading ability).

When it comes to the public authorities' working processes there was only one authority which appeared to have conducted a user survey: CSN (the Swedish Government authority in charge of financial aid for studies). Two test groups were involved in the research: one group of people with Swedish as their mother tongue who have dyslexia, and another group of people with mother tongues other than Swedish who do not have dyslexia. Both groups had to search for information on the authorities' websites using texts in easy-to-read Swedish, among other things. The results showed that there were some differences in how the groups understood the easy-to-read texts. One such difference is the experience of the "phrase adapted line break", i.e. the short lines that characterise texts in easy-to-read Swedish. The short line breaks seemed to work better on the Swedish native speakers with dyslexia who thought that the short lines made the text inviting and easy to read, while on the other hand the test group with a mother tongue other than Swedish felt that line breaks made it more difficult to achieve coherence in the texts.

Even though CSN's survey was conducted on a small scale and would need to be supplemented with additional and more comprehensive surveys, it can be seen as an indication that there is good reason to examine the needs of people with other mother tongues when it comes to public authority information in Swedish and, where the needs are all different, what the consequences are for the design of texts aimed at various groups and at the population as a whole.

As mentioned above, user surveys were unusual among the authorities who replied to the survey. Some, however, had used other types of input in connection with their multilingualism work. These involved, for example, statistics from the authority's ordering of interpreters or information from the telephone exchange about callers. Such input is useful to determine what languages other than Swedish are requested by the authority's target groups. However, it does not say anything about the need for easy-to-read texts in Swedish for the same audiences.

4. Isolated information without context

The three authorities whose sites we observed were Arbetsförmedlingen (the public employment service), Försäkringskassan (the social insurance agency) and Skatteverket (the tax agency). We examined a number of things including which languages the authorities used in their communication on the internet, what information they offered in different languages, and which services and communication channels they offered in the different languages. We also looked at the form in which the information is presented: in writing, speech or pictures, in special easy-to-read format (Lundberg and Reichenberg, 2008) or in other so-called alternative formats. We noted if there was a speech synthesiser for speech output and an automatic translation function on the website, and looked at how the pages in different languages were made visible and structured. In this article, we mainly focus on how the Swedish language is used to reach as many people as possible from a multilingual perspective.

Two of the web sites (Arbetsförmedlingen and Försäkringskassan) offered information in easy-to-read Swedish in a special format, with line breaks after each phrase. All of them had a speech synthesiser for speech output in Swedish, and on Arbetsförmedlingen's website it was possible to order the fact sheets and brochures in an alternative format produced to order (easy-to-read, Daisy, MP3, Braille, sign language or other specified format).

The scope of the web pages that are available in an easy-to-read format and in languages other than Swedish is very limited in relation to the quantity of information and services on the website as a whole. It is usually a case of one or a few pages with basic information about the authority and how you can contact them and links to more specific information on a given subject or a given case, often in the form of downloadable fact sheets and brochures. Försäkringskassan offers information in easy-to-read Swedish only in downloadable format. Arbets-

förmedlingen has easy-to-read information and information in other languages both on the website and in downloadable format. These types of web texts are often only in written format, in contrast to other pages on the website where text is usually combined with images. This applies particularly to the easy-to-read pages, which almost invariably consist of written information in easy-to-read Swedish in a special format with line breaks after each phrase.

Links and references to other information, services and contacts do not work in practice, since these are rarely available in the current language or in the easy-to-read format. A translated instruction on how to request an introduction guide may, for example, refer to a service that is only available in Swedish. The same applies when the authorities provide links to each other's websites in matters relating to the establishment of new arrivals. In this process Arbetsförmedlingen and Försäkringskassan (as well as Migrationsverket) have complementary services and support. Despite this, the links did not work from a linguistic point of view from one authority's website to the other at the time of the observations. This indicates weaknesses in user adaptation and collaboration between the authorities in their multilingual accessibility work which cannot be entirely blamed on the general difficulty in managing multilingual information and services.

In general, a few individual texts are "translated" into easy-to-read Swedish or other languages, instead of a more thorough design of the whole website bearing in mind that large parts of the population are in need of information and services in a more accessible and comprehensible format.¹ The translations that have been done are not always justified by a target group's need for the service; a clear example we saw was information for new arrivals in Meänkieli (a national minority language only spoken in the north of Sweden, formerly known as Tornedal Finnish). Such shortcomings make the texts seem like disjointed shards of information that reach for the wider context, all too often without success. Links and references to other information, services and contacts do not work in practice since the content referred to is rarely available in the current language or in the easy-to-read format. This raises questions about multilingual access to information and services about authorities, and how it can be improved.

Despite the observed shortcomings, we found several good examples of how websites work with multilingual accessibility in a way which corresponds well to the recommendations in the *Guide for multilingual information*. A significant example is Försäkringskassan's multilingual telephone service, where people can book calls in 11 different languages on the internet. Those who prefer to ask their questions in writing can do so via Facebook, not just in Swedish but also in English, Arabic, Finnish, Polish and Spanish.

¹ 25% of the population are estimated to have such extensive reading difficulties that they cannot assimilate the contents of a typical news story in full accordance with the requirements in class 9 (the end of compulsory schooling) according to The Swedish National Agency for Education's report 115 from 2006.

5. Swedish for all?

Arbetsförmedlingen's website clearly stood out as the most ambitious in terms of both the number of languages and the accessibility adaptations, as well as the scope of the material. At the same time we can observe a clear example here of a working practice where simple and comprehensible information was created in Swedish from the beginning, taking into account the linguistic needs of the whole population, including people with Swedish as second language. Simultaneously, digital media's multimodal possibilities and resources are used to increase comprehension and make content as available as possible (see e.g. Holsanova 2010). Information in other languages is offered in parallel to Swedish as a complement and alternative that is directly accessible from the Swedish text.

In Figure 1 there is an example of an introductory text in Swedish which clearly, simply and effectively presents the content in a bulleted list. The text is presented in a comprehensible context with related texts that are sorted into subjects under different tabs and menu choices. The text, which is directed at people that are new to Sweden, informs them about what Arbetsförmedlingen can help with and refers to a film where graphic images are combined with speech and text to communicate information in a concrete, instructive and straightforward manner that speaks to all of the senses and takes account of different linguistic needs. The same text is also offered in translation in nine languages where the choice of language is well justified on the basis of the current migration trends: large contact languages like English, French and Arabic are used, as well as Somali, Farsi and other languages spoken by large groups of newcomers.

The screenshot shows the website's interface for newcomers. On the left is a vertical menu with options like 'Ta del av våra aktiviteter', 'Ersättning vid arbetslöshet', 'Få extra stöd', and 'Ny i Sverige?'. The main content area is titled 'En plan för din väg mot jobb i Sverige' (A plan for your way to a job in Sweden). Below the title are tabs for 'Gäller detta dig?', 'Om Arbetsförmedlingen', 'Boende', 'Försörjning', and 'Etableringslots'. The main text, 'Tillsammans hittar vi ett jobb till dig', explains that the agency can help find a job and lists five bullet points: finding a job, Swedish lessons, education, trying professions, and reporting to the agency. A green button 'Välkommen till Sverige' and a blue button 'Starta filmen' are prominent. At the bottom, there are icons and text for 'Mer material på andra språk' in nine languages: Arabic, English, French, Somali, Tigrinya, Dari, Farsi, Russian, and Sorani.

Fig. 1: Example from Arbetsförmedlingen's website

Looking at the film referred to in figure 2, you can clearly see how the agency approached multilingualism in several ways to make information as accessible as possible. On the one hand different modalities were used (text, voice and image) and comprehensibility adjustments (easy to read) were employed to reach out to as many people as possible in Swedish. On the other hand, the user was given the option to change the language as necessary at the same time.

This example shows how the possibilities of multilingual communication can be used and explored in a way that corresponds well to the *Guide for multilingual information*. It is not just about translating individual texts into other languages, but about starting with a Swedish text which can be understood by as many people as possible through different accessibility adaptations, in parallel with texts in other languages. The good example from our observation shows that some of our authorities are already on the right path with this work. But it is still unclear how useful the results of this work are. There is an urgent need for studies on this to increase knowledge about multilingual accessibility, evaluate the results of the ongoing linguistic accessibility work and provide a basis for better recommendations.



Fig. 2: Different languages and modalities

6. More research is needed

The central question is how authorities' information and services should be designed to be comprehensible and accessible to as many people as possible, taking into account the diverse linguistic needs and conditions of the population in today's multilingual and multicultural society. We need to know more about how the multimodal texts, accessibility adaptations and tools that are available con-

tribute to increased comprehensibility and accessibility for different user groups. See Domeij/Karlsson (2013) and Domeij et al (in press); see also Kress (2003) and Warschauer (2003).

As we saw in the survey, it is hoped that the specially designed easy-to-read texts that many authorities use will work just as well for people with learning disabilities as for people with different mother tongues who are learning Swedish as second language. There is very little research into how useful these texts are for different groups, and the few user surveys which have been done give no clear answer (Forsberg, 2012 and Funka Nu, 2006). It is therefore urgent that more studies are done about which groups need specially-adapted easy-to-read texts and how these texts should be designed to better meet their needs. It is obviously not only about text design, but also about clarifying which information and services different groups find useful in accomplishing their tasks.

In the same way, it is hoped that various language technology tools – such as text reading with speech synthesis, speech recognition and automatic translation – will contribute to greater accessibility, but few have examined the matter in user studies (see e.g. Eskenazi 2013). On the contrary, user problems related to technical limitations, false expectations, and poor interaction design are reported, especially regarding automatic translation and speech recognition where technology development has not come as far as automatic speech output (see e.g. Domeij et al 2011). When it comes to automatic speech output, which is a useful and appreciated tool for many dyslexics when reading on the web, more research is needed on how usability can be improved and how texts should be designed to suit both written and spoken versions. The density of information available in most official written texts on the web today is not suited particularly well to speech output, whether a human or a machine is reading. In many cases the impression is that these tools are used on government websites as a simple way to formally meet the demands of increased accessibility without much thought.

The need for research on how different forms of communication and tools contribute to increased accessibility in user situations is great. We need to learn more about whether and how an easy-to-read text, a translation or an automatic speech output function really contributes to increased accessibility. Nyström Höög (2009) asks in the anthology *Medborgare och myndigheter* [*Citizens and authorities*] for “new research that charts online reading and designs information about clear language advice from this knowledge” (Höög 2009: 11) and refers to the few studies of comprehensibility conducted on the use of websites by various groups of citizens (Hanell 2009; Salö 2009). In the same anthology, Olle Josephson emphasizes the importance of such research: “Anyone who seriously explores this tangle will have much of substance to say about how a society like Sweden steps into multilingualism – what future language historians will in all likelihood describe as the most important change in 2000s in Sweden”.

7. A model for the evaluation of linguistic accessibility

The purpose of our study, as mentioned above, has been to develop methods to evaluate and monitor the accessibility of public authorities' websites from a linguistic perspective over time. We think that the combination of methods that we have tried – survey and observations – could be used as part of a model for regular monitoring of authorities' web accessibility. It is important that assessments are carried out over a broad base of government agencies and at regular intervals in order to be able to monitor results over time, point to trends and be able to set them against the language policy of the authorities they relate to. Through regular assessment it is also possible to identify the specific support needs of authorities in their multilingualism work.

The survey and the observations we used complemented each other well. Through the survey we could get answers to questions about preparatory work, quality work and follow-up work while through our observations we could examine the results of this work in detail. Through the observations we were also able to see how authorities work with language accessibility via other modalities such as images and film, as well as how the information was structured on the website.

To get an in-depth understanding of the authorities' work processes it would be necessary to add to these methods by using interviews with the authorities as a follow-up model. The follow-up should also include methods for assessing the text quality of the authorities' texts, in Swedish and other languages, starting with the authorities' responsibility for plain language. To get a clearer understanding of how useful texts are, the assessment would need to be completed with user surveys and usability tests where the texts are tested on the target groups. In exploring the quality and usefulness of authorities' texts there is, as we pointed out earlier, a great need for cooperation with and between universities and colleges.

In conclusion, a model for monitoring authorities' linguistic accessibility needs to include a number of different aspects. This means that the model needs to involve agencies who are experts in the relevant areas. This includes, for example, people with knowledge of different languages, plain language reviewers, experts in easy-to-read texts and user experts. Studies in these areas already exist by a number of agencies, but there is a need for a collaborative model that can ensure a consistency of approach between the various agencies' evaluations so that results are more comparable than they are today.

Another type of cooperation that needs to be developed is between authorities in the same sectors. For example, in the web observations it became clear that Migrationsverket, Försäkringskassan and Arbetsförmedlingen all have a responsibility to receive people who are new to Sweden, which constitutes an important part of their web accessibility work. These authorities would have much to gain from collaborating to develop multilingual information and services for these

groups on the web. At present different choices are made, and authorities refer to each other in texts in a language which is on one website but not on the other. If we could see this work in a wider perspective from the starting point of the target groups' needs, there is great potential for coordination gains and improved services.

The purpose of measuring authorities' multilingual accessibility, in addition to raising the question of linguistic accessibility in itself, was to provide certain quantitative metrics to make measurable comparisons over time. Given that accessibility will primarily be measured with respect to the authority's specific target groups, however, the regular measurements should not put too much emphasis on the quantitative aspect. Instead, one way to illustrate and help authorities to increase their accessibility is to highlight good examples within the different groups of authorities, such as municipalities, county councils and government agencies. There are authorities that are already working from a multilingual accessibility perspective as an integral part of their information work, which bodes well for the future.

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Aino Piehl / Eivor Sommardahl

Working towards clear administrative language in Finland – bilingually

Abstract: Swedish

Finland har två officiella språk, finska och svenska. Medborgarna har även rätt att välja vilket av de två språken de vill använda i kontakter med statliga myndigheter. De språkliga rättigheterna vid kommunikationen med regionala myndigheter är däremot beroende av om kommunen är enspråkig eller tvåspråkig. På både statlig och kommunal nivå spelar översättningen mellan finska och svenska således en viktig roll för myndighetsutövningen.

Översatta texter är som känt exakt så klara och begripliga som originaltexten är. Därför uppstår frågan om man vid översättning av en text samtidigt kan förbättra kvaliteten på originaltexten. Enligt finländska erfarenheter är svaret ja – vid översättning klarnar ofta också ursprungstexten märkbart.

I det handlingsprogram för ett bättre myndighetsspråk som den finländska regeringen lät utarbeta 2014 ingår flera förslag till åtgärder som kan förbättra såväl lagspråket som myndigheternas språk och kommunikation. Här betonas bland annat vikten av att myndigheterna är uppmärksamma på sina textprocesser och den totala textproduktionen. Också översättningen ska ses som en viktig del av produktionskedjan och av kvalitetsarbetet.

Abstract: Finnish

Suomessa on kaksi virallista kieltä, suomi ja ruotsi. Aasukkaat voivat käyttää kumpaa tahansa asioidessaan valtion virastoissa. Kunnallisviranomaisten kanssa kielen valinta riippuu siitä, onko kunta yksi- vai kaksikielinen. Jotta viranomaiset voivat antaa palvelut asukkaankielellä, tarvitaan paljon käännöstyötä.

Käännetyt tekstit ovat tunnetusti juuri niin selkeitä ja ymmärrettäviä kuin lähtötekstinsä. Asiaa voi ajatella toisinkin päin: voiko käännösprosessia käyttää myös alkutekstien laadun parantamiseen? Suomen kokemusten perusteella niin voidaan tehdä: kääntäjien kommentteista on paljon hyötyä virkatekstien selkeyttämisessä.

Hallitus teetti vuonna 2014 Hyvän virkakielen toimintaohjelman, jotta lainsäädännön, asioinnin ja viranomaisten viestinnän kieleen saataisiin parannusta. Ohjelmalla halutaan saada viranomaiset kiinnittämään enemmän huomiota siihen, että kirjoittaminen ja tekstien tuottaminen on prosessi, jonka järjestäminen vaikuttaa merkittävästi tekstin laatuun. Myös kääntäminen on tärkeä osa tätä prosessia.

Over the past few decades, the debate in Finland over clear and effective communication between authorities and the general public has grown increasingly intense. In part, the impetus for this lively debate can be traced to the rise of electronic communication systems and services. At the same time, however,

public authorities in Finland have become increasingly aware of the need to revise their entire text production process. As the amounts of text have continued to grow, so too have the demands for accuracy.

Finland's tradition of producing official, administrative texts in both Finnish and Swedish – the two official languages of Finland – has its roots in the late 19th century. In most cases, one of the two versions of an administrative text is always a translation, and the Finnish and Swedish versions live in symbiosis with each other. Writers who wish to compose clearer administrative texts need to take into account that words and names must work in both official languages. Fortunately, it turns out that using two languages is more than simply a necessary cost – it can also be a clear advantage.

1. Intertextuality and power

The main issue affecting plain language use in public communications is the overall responsibility. Who bears responsibility for plain administrative language, and who has the power to implement it? Are all public employees responsible for their own texts? Yes, they are, at least according to an administrative language survey sent out to Finnish political parties in 2011 by the Institute for the Languages of Finland (Piehl 2011).

So politicians seem to think that the best way to work towards plain language is for public employees to be responsible for their own texts. Clearly, politicians are unfamiliar with the conditions under which administrative texts are written. Employees at large agencies and other public organisations, on the other hand, know all too well that the language used in the workplace is a result of more than one person's work. In any given community, the effects of previously produced texts are evident in new texts as well.

Decisions on language use often go beyond the decision-making power of a single agency; linguistic expressions and formats are derived from external sources, such as from legislation, EU regulations or international agreements. Such interlinked and mutually influential texts are known as intertexts, which are capable of forming text chains (cf. Bahtin 1986: 94; Fairclough 1992: 84–85, 103).

Text chains can be seen in cases where terms have drifted from one text to another. For example, the term *SGEI-palvelu* (SGEI services), originally coined in the context of EU regulations, is now in full use in Finland's state and municipal administration. SGEI stands for Services of General Economic Interest. The corresponding Finnish term used in Finnish-language EU regulations, *yleisiin taloudellisiin etuihin liittyvät palvelut*, is too long and unmanageable for anyone to use in Finland. That is why many have turned to the English acronym SGEI. Of course, this is not a good solution, since the acronym may be incomprehensible to Finns.

Intertextuality makes it impossible for each individual public employee to take a decision to improve administrative language. The power lies with those who decide on the texts that are located at the beginning of the text chain. In order to influence the texts, the people involved will often need to make changes in their work arrangements and processes. Many of these changes will require an authority to enact laws, issue administrative decrees and draft guidelines for administrators on how to write and on how to organise the writing process.

2. Soft and hard power: adherence to norms and examples

The power to set norms that dictate how language should be used or written could be likened to hard power, a concept developed by Joseph Nye, an American political scientist (cf. Nye 1990; Piehl 2016). Nye uses hard and soft power as concepts to describe intergovernmental relationships of power and influence. He highlights the potential of soft power compared to hard power. For instance, states can gain influence through means other than coercion, such as through appeal and attraction, or by presenting a persuasive example of a recommended course of action.

This same phenomenon can be observed in the task of improving administrative language. Legislation and regulation are not always the most effective methods. Norms are sometimes followed only formally, which basically undermines their desired impact. Soft power, on the other hand, especially the power of example, can arouse true motivation to really transform established practices.

Through soft power, the language use of just one public employee, one unit or one agency can affect the entire administrative language, provided that people want to follow their example and no norms stand in the way. For example, a few years ago the Social Insurance Institution of Finland started using the informal singular form of address (*sinä*) in its official client letters. The move was met with much appreciation, and many other public agencies in Finland have since followed suit.

Success stories, encouraging feedback, positive publicity and increased operational efficiency can convince other agencies of the benefits of improving their administrative language. And when clear administrative language becomes standard practice, it can eventually be adopted as a binding norm.

3. Governments and private organisations tasked with plain language work

Plain language work is organised in different ways across different countries. Some countries, such as Finland, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland and the United States, have enacted statutes that oblige public authorities to use clear adminis-

trative language. In Anglo-Saxon countries such as the UK, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, the government buys plain language services from private organisations, foundations and companies.

There are also countries where government agencies or national institutions for language (such as EFNIL members) take care of the plain language work. This approach is used in the Nordic countries and Estonia, and in Germany and Switzerland in the case of plain legal language. Of course, these countries also have organisations and companies that provide public authorities with plain language services. It is necessary to have a broad range of plain language service providers, since plain language principles can be designed both top-down and bottom-up, using both hard and soft power.

4. Institute for the Languages of Finland – an expert in administrative language

The Institute for the Languages of Finland is a public agency responsible for the language planning of Finnish and Swedish, the two official languages of Finland. This responsibility also includes working towards and promoting clear administrative language. The Institute has helped public authorities improve their language use ever since the 1970s, when the movement to improve administrative language really began to spread. The Institute was a member of the Committee on Administrative Language, a state working group appointed in 1979 to explore means to make administrative language in Finland more understandable.

The recommendation by the Committee formed the basis for Finland's first statute concerning the quality of administrative language, that is, the Decision on Administrative Language adopted by the Finnish Government in 1982. The decision effectively appointed the Institute for the Languages of Finland as the official expert organisation for administrative language planning in Finland. Later, in 2003, the obligation stated in the decision was included in section 9 of the Administrative Procedure Act as a "requirement of proper language". It stipulates that "an authority shall use appropriate, clear and comprehensible language" in both Finnish and Swedish.

5. Swedish Language Board

The Swedish Language Board, established in 1960, is a coordinating body under the Prime Minister's Office with more than 55 years of experience in fostering clarity and comprehensibility in the Swedish used in Finland. At first, the Board had only limited power, because it served for an undefined term without officially set tasks or working methods. It was not until 1988 and a new government resolution that the Board acquired permanent status as a language planning body with prescribed tasks. At the same time, a representative of the Institute for the Lan-

guages of Finland was appointed to serve on the Board. The Board was tasked with drafting guidelines and rules to combat linguistic inaccuracy and poor-quality translation from Finnish into Swedish. The Board was also given responsibility for harmonising Swedish legal language in Finland.

Today, the Swedish Language Board continues its work to coordinate the revision and translation of legal language and to issue recommendations on proper writing, style and terminology. The recommendations are published in a bulletin on language guidelines (*Språkråd*) and above all in a handbook on Swedish legal language (*Svenskt lagspråk i Finland*, or *Slaf*), which has become the most important linguistic aid for anyone who, using Swedish, drafts, writes or translates laws and other decrees in Finland. The recommendations issued in the handbook are applied by, for example, the Finnish Government, the Unit of Legislative Inspection at the Ministry of Justice and the Parliamentary Office. The handbook is essentially the go-to guidance for just about anyone who writes and translates Swedish language texts of a legal and administrative nature in Finland. The first edition of the handbook was published in 1986 and the fourth edition is due in 2016.

6. Government Administration Department

The Government Administration Department, a provider of joint administration and specialist services to Finnish ministries, is the latest official body to be established with direct influence over the quality of administrative language in Finland. Among other things, the Department, which was established in 2015, was tasked with overseeing the quality of administrative language at the various ministries.

The Department includes the Translation and Language Division, which is further divided into the Swedish Language Unit, the Foreign Languages Unit and the Language Services Unit. The Swedish Language Unit is the largest of the three units, responsible for functions such as translating government proposals, decrees and documents required in government and ministerial policy-making. The Unit also translates texts into Swedish for the Office of the President of the Republic of Finland.

The Foreign Languages Unit translates texts mainly into English but also into Russian and other languages. Translation of Finnish legal texts into English accounts for an important part of the Unit's work. Taken together, the Swedish Language Unit and the Foreign Languages Unit translate between 60,000 and 90,000 pages each year. Translation into Swedish accounts for 60 per cent, translation into English for 30 per cent and translation into other languages for 10 per cent of the total volume.

The Language Services Unit houses terminologists and language technology specialists. The Unit performs valuable work to compile and develop terminology in several languages within government administration and to build terminology and text databases.

7. Action plan for clear administrative language

The past five years have been exceptionally busy for plain language professionals in Finland. Some time ago, the Institute for the Languages of Finland made the observation that the requirement of proper language, as stated in the Administrative Procedure Act, had not been sufficiently met. The Institute therefore urged the Finnish Government to take action to improve administrative language use. In the run-up to the 2011 parliamentary elections, the Institute launched a campaign to encourage the Government to include clear administrative language in its programme.

The lobbying worked, and the new Government appointed a working group to draw up an action plan with proposals on ways to ensure that administrative language is clear, appropriate and comprehensible. The action plan for clearer administrative language was completed in 2014 (Hyvän virkakielen toimintaohjelma 2014; see also Piehl 2014). The working group behind the plan consisted of representatives of agencies, universities and organisations and was chaired by Professor Pirkko Nuolijärvi, Director of the Institute for the Languages of Finland. One group member, the secretaries and the specialists were also from the Institute.

The action plan was based on a number of surveys carried out in both Finnish and Swedish. The surveys explored the use of administrative language practices in central and local government. They also looked at how language use is taught at higher education institutes. Additionally, the working group carried out a survey of people's views on and experiences of administrative language in Finland.

The objective of the action plan for clear administrative language is to shift the focus from individual texts and language design to the prerequisites and circumstances for writing. The idea is to make public authorities conscious of the fact that language is an essential element of their administrative work. Authorities should set goals for their language use and monitor the progress of those goals, just as with other important operational areas.

In addition, the action plan encourages authorities to be active and to strive for increased collaboration within the framework of language use. In all, the plan lists 28 proposals and recommendations. Ten are aimed at individual agencies, eight at public administration as a whole, five at the Finnish Government and five at educational institutes.

8. The recommendations of the action plan

To improve the prerequisites for good writing, the plan includes a proposal to introduce an act on place names and to build a joint terminology and text database for public authorities. The proposal is targeted at the Finnish Government and government administration, because it cannot be realised without their decisions to support it. Official decisions are also needed to draft common rules of pro-

cedure on the formulation of names, terminology and job titles as well as joint guidelines on clear legal language. The Institute for the Languages of Finland has already teamed up with the Ministry of Justice to draw up instructions for those who draft laws.

The action plan also proposes that the Finnish Government should launch a campaign to increase awareness of the plan's proposals. The Institute for the Languages of Finland ran such a campaign in 2014-2015 in collaboration with the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education and Culture. The campaign succeeded in encouraging many agencies to take action for clearer administrative language. During the campaign, a number of agencies were recruited to try out recommendations and disseminate information on their work to improve administrative language. Examples of good practice were collected with a competition that awarded prizes to the best improvements made to administrative language.

9. Individual agencies and local government

The action plan is also aimed at encouraging individual agencies to change their internal procedures and incorporate clear administrative language visibly into their operational planning and evaluation processes. The recommendations have been summarised into a set of house rules for agencies to use. The list of rules can also be viewed as a process that starts with setting goals for language quality and outlining a plan to achieve those goals. This is then added to the same documents that include objectives and measures concerning the agencies' other operations.

Agencies are urged to appoint a coordinator for clear administrative language and set up a clear language team, so that everyone will know who to turn to. The team can then analyse what kind of help the agency's staff will need to produce good texts, add guidelines to the agency's intranet and organise training on clear language use.

10. Include text writing in process descriptions, implement routines for feedback

The action plan also advises government agencies to take into account texts and clear writing in their process descriptions. Most agency functions usually include some drafting of texts. Decisions, evaluations, plans, etc. are all produced in text format, yet process descriptions rarely take account of the stages involved in writing the texts.

Translating texts, coining new terms or names for organisations, collecting feedback on and monitoring the performance of texts, and revising texts are all important and indispensable stages of any operational process. An organisation's

process descriptions should reflect this, but they seldom do. In 2012, the Finnish Ministry of Justice published a process description for law drafting that, following a proposal by the Institute for the Languages of Finland, explicitly mentioned translation and planning of measures concerning the language of translations as stages required in drafting new laws. The agencies that participated in the campaign for better administrative language, in turn, decided to include translators in teams that were tasked with text revision.

The action plan further suggests that individual agencies should implement strategies to make text drafting easier by taking language planning into consideration when acquiring new text production systems. It is important to make sure at an early stage that the texts used in such systems can be easily edited without undue costs or effort.

The plan highlights the importance of monitoring and ensuring the quality and performance of texts. Feedback should also be collected in many different ways from a variety of sources. In multilingual administration, it is well worth utilising the expertise of translators in improving administrative language. A number of Finnish agencies have done so successfully. Agencies could still, however, focus more on making giving and utilising feedback part of their routine processes.

When setting out to improve texts in the workplace, it is often a good idea to consult all members of the organisation. Customer service staff, for example, will know what types of expressions often need to be explained to customers. In particular, new employees should be encouraged to give feedback on old, accustomed linguistic mannerisms. The advantages of feedback should be discussed openly, so that everyone will understand that proposals for improvement are not intended to question the writer's competence.

11. Use easy-to-read language and illustrations where necessary

Sometimes the situation calls for more than just plain language. There are various special groups of people – older people, young people, immigrants and people with disabilities – that may need simplified, easy-to-read language. The action plan for clear administrative language reminds government agencies to consider the need for using easy-to-read language on a case-by-case basis. For example, one of the prize winners in the clear administrative language campaign was a large hospital that had started to use easy-to-read language in all of its patient communications. The hospital had received much positive feedback about its decision.

The action plan also proposes that agencies increase their use of visual means to present and describe complex permit or application processes. Lastly, the plan urges officials and agencies not to produce unnecessary texts. Spending time on

the writing process rather than rushing through it also hugely improves text quality. That is why the action plan suggests that agencies should produce fewer and shorter texts to allow more time for the drafting of important texts and other work.

12. Clear communications builds up confidence in authorities

In today's Finland, the public's trust in government authorities rests upon soft rather than hard power. The administrative language traditionally used in Finland is often nothing less than an obstacle to good communication with the general public and even between authorities. Many Finnish authorities now aim at producing understandable and reader-friendly texts so as to make their official communications and work easier. The argument that communicating in a way that can be generally understood somehow chips away at the communicator's authority just doesn't stack up. After all, public administration can only gain its legitimacy by attending to the affairs of the public efficiently and smoothly.

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Ari Páll Kristinsson

Language in public administration in present-day Iceland: some challenges for majority language management

Abstract

Stjórnsýslan á Íslandi stendur frammi fyrir svipuðum úrlausnarefnum og gerist annars staðar í álfunni. Enda þótt íslenska sé lögum samkvæmt eina opinbera tungumálið er hún alls ekki eina mál stjórnvalda og stofnana í samskiptum við borgarana. Til skýringar er það rakið hvernig Vegagerðin notar ensku á skiltum, að hluta til ásamt íslensku. Víkið er einnig að tungumálum minnihlutahópa á Íslandi. Greint er frá stöðu Íslands sem EES-ríkis og þýðingum lagatexta. Sagt er frá þeirri nýjung í íslenskri löggjöf að kveðið er á um einfalt og skýrt málfar í textum hins opinbera. Rakin eru dæmi um viðleitni opinberra aðila, annars vegar Ríkisskattstjóra og hins vegar Landspítalans, til að koma skilaboðum skýrar á framfæri við notendur þjónustunnar. Öll viðleitni til málskýrðar í opinberum textum fer vel saman við hinar auknu kröfur í samfélaginu um gagnsæi í ákvörðunum og óskir um endurskoðun á efni og orðalagi stjórnarskrárinnar.

1. Introduction

The challenges facing Icelandic language management today are similar in nature, while different in detail, to the sociolinguistic, economic, political and judicial issues in other European states. Language management needs to take into account, among other things, the status of English as a communication language, as well as the issue of linguistic diversity and current demographic developments.

The outline of the paper is as follows. In section 2, the status of Iceland and Icelandic vis à vis the EU and EU judicial language is discussed. Section 3 contains a discussion on recent legislation concerning the status of Icelandic as the official language in Iceland, and addresses the status and presence of English in Iceland and in Icelandic administration. The situation of some linguistic minorities in Iceland is also briefly described. Section 4 addresses the issue of ‘plain language’, and the legal provision on ‘plain language’ in public administration. Two recent cases of efforts to ensure clarity of communication in Icelandic administration are described, and the role of digitalised administration is touched upon. Section 5 contains some concluding remarks on plain language against the backdrop of increased demands for transparency in administration.

2. Iceland vis à vis the EU, and Icelandic legal language vis à vis EU texts

As an EFTA-nation, Iceland has been a member of the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement since 1994. The EEA agreement is between Iceland, Norway, and Liechtenstein on the one hand, and the EU on the other.

Negotiations for Iceland's membership of the EU were opened in 2010. Accession would have involved the recognition of Icelandic as one of the official languages of the EU. However, membership negotiations were stopped in the wake of the parliamentary elections in Iceland in 2013. The current situation (2015) is explained on the website of the Icelandic Foreign Ministry in the following way:

A dialogue has taken place between the EU and Iceland on Iceland's status as a candidate country. It clarified that the government has no intention of resuming the accession process, that any commitments made by the former government in the accession process are superseded by the new policy and that the EU should take action in view of the fact that Iceland can no longer be considered a candidate country [...] At the same time, emphasis is placed on reinforcing the implementation of the EEA Agreement and on closer collaboration with the EU on that basis. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015)

The implementation of the EEA Agreement in Iceland has, among other things, entailed large scale translations to incorporate EEA legislation into national law. At present, the Translation Centre of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has a staff of 34 people. The implementation of the EEA Agreement continues to be a priority in Iceland, as shown in the citation above, even if the present government of the country is unwilling to continue negotiations for EU membership. Therefore, in the foreseeable future, the Translation Centre will continue to translate into Icelandic the regulations, directives, decisions and recommendations adopted under the EEA Agreement. Consequently, EU related texts will, directly and indirectly, continue to have some effects not only on Icelandic legislation as such, but also on Icelandic terminologies, and possibly on Icelandic legal language use.

On the whole, this is no bad news for Icelandic language management. In a vast number of fields of science and technology, Icelandic terminologies have been greatly enriched over the past quarter of a century, thanks to the translation and terminology work of the specialists at the Translation Centre, and their co-operating specialists in various ministries and other administrative bodies. This has brought considerable benefits to the adequacy of the Icelandic language for political, economic, technical and scientific discourse.

No serious research has yet been carried out into the influence of EU texts on Icelandic judicial language in general; for example regarding the clarity, or otherwise, of legal texts. In popular Icelandic language policy discourse, concerns have occasionally been raised about some putative negative linguistic effects that are

believed to be traceable to EU sources, in particular regarding the clarity of texts, and sentence length. The proponents of such views have yet to prove that this has influenced texts that are originally written in Icelandic.

Hopefully, plain language initiatives in the EU, affecting the original documents that are subsequently translated into all the languages of the EEA Agreement, will prove successful.

However, one must acknowledge that there is a limit as to how far this can be achieved. The purpose of many legal and scientific texts is to describe highly complicated subjects. Complicated matters must often be rendered in every detail in law, and if this entails complicated texts, then there is no easy way round the problem (either in the original texts or in translation), since one is obliged to comply with the originals. In other words, if someone sometimes needs to read a paragraph more than once in order to fully grasp the content, the problem is not necessarily just a linguistic one.

3. Icelandic vs. English on Icelandic territory and in Icelandic administration

3.1 Overview

Icelandic is *de jure* the sole official language of the Icelandic state and municipalities, and it is also the first language or native language of about 90% of the present inhabitants.

While all travellers in Iceland – students and business people alike – encounter some presence of English in daily life in Iceland, English is not recognised as an official language.

In Icelandic legislation there are some occasional examples of legal provision where English has been granted limited status in administration along with Icelandic. Such examples involve aviation control, some specific technical standards, some international agreements that only concern a limited number of people, and applications for international registration of trademarks (Hilmarsson-Dunn/Kristinsson 2013, 140-141).

English is the first foreign language in the curriculum at elementary schools, and Danish is the second foreign language at school. Icelandic and the Scandinavian languages are not mutually intelligible. For historic, geographic and cultural reasons, Danish and the other Scandinavian languages enjoy in a few instances special status in Icelandic administration and information settings.

Official Icelandic language policy, drafted by the Icelandic Language Council and approved unanimously by Parliament in 2009, is strongly coloured by the threat that English is taking over in more and more spheres of daily life in Iceland (Íslenska til alls 2009). In particular, concerns are raised about the language of international businesses that operate branches in Iceland, and about the language

of computers and software. This not only concerns the private sector, but the public sector as well; in particular the question of the language of instruction in tertiary education, and language choice in academic publishing. In all these sectors, and many others, Icelandic is perceived to be yielding to English. Icelandic language technologies are still underdeveloped, and even if a group of experts had already presented a realistic plan for the future of Icelandic language technology, only about 10% of the necessary funding is allocated in the national budget for the year 2016.

3.2 Legislation

In 2011, the Icelandic Parliament passed a “Law on the Status of Icelandic and Icelandic Sign Language” (*Lög um stöðu íslenskrar tungu og íslensks táknmáls*). The legislation was instigated, at least in part, by the Icelandic Language Council. Since 2011, legislation has stated explicitly that Icelandic is the official language (Art. 1); that Icelandic is the language of schools, of Parliament, of the courts, of central and local government authorities, and other institutions (Art. 8); and that Icelandic is the language of Iceland in the international arena (Art. 12). (A separate article is devoted to plain language, and this is addressed in section 4 below.)

Among the effects of the 2011 legislation is that if Icelandic official bodies use English and not Icelandic in administration today (where this is not explicitly sanctioned by other legislation), one can now refer to Articles 1 and 8 of the language law if one wishes to complain.



Fig. 1: An Icelandic traffic sign (2015). The English word ‘CLOSED’ signals that a road has been temporarily closed to all traffic

There was an incident in 2013 which can perhaps serve as an example. This was also, in a sense, a test case for the effectiveness of the 2011 legislation relating to language choice in public administration in Iceland.

In September 2013, the Icelandic Road and Coastal Administration put up new digital traffic signs showing only the English word *CLOSED* if a road had to be closed to all traffic due to storms or poor driving conditions (see Fig. 1).

Previously there had been old fashioned signs in both English (*No entry*, *Impassable*, etc.) and Icelandic (*Allur akstur bannaður*, *Ófært*, etc.) see Figure 2. Thus, until recently, a ‘parallel language policy’ had in fact been followed in such cases.

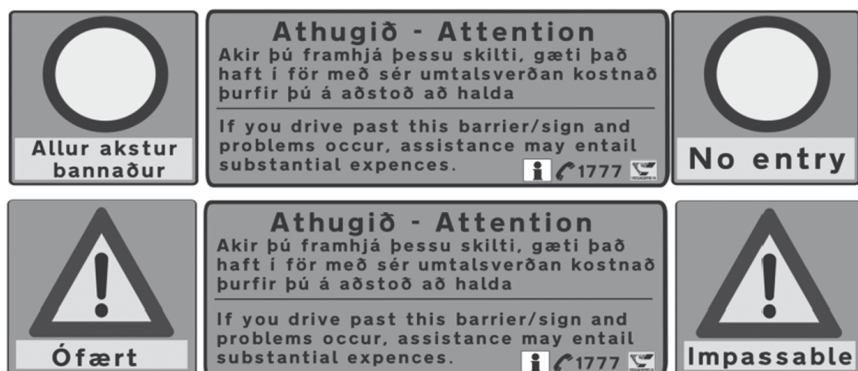


Fig. 2: Old fashioned Icelandic traffic sign. An English/Icelandic parallel language policy was pursued



Fig. 3: A shop in downtown Reykjavik: advertising signs partly in English and partly in Icelandic

The Icelandic Language Council objected to the policy change by the Road and Coastal Administration, and pointed out that the Administration was breaking the 2011 law on the official status of Icelandic. The administration promptly started to reprogram the new digital signs in accordance with the objection from the Icelandic Language Council. This seems to have taken some time, however; there are (in 2015) at least some ‘English only’ signs still left, such as the one in Figure 1.

It is estimated that about 1.5-2 million tourists will visit Iceland in 2016. They come from a variety of different countries; from the UK and the USA and also from France, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, China, Japan, Spain, Italy, etc. The language of the Icelandic tourist industry is mostly English.

3.3 Linguistic minorities

From the account above, it would seem that as far as language status in Iceland and the question of language choice in public administration is concerned, there are two languages involved: the only official language, Icelandic, and English, the *lingua franca* of today. However, there are two types of linguistic minorities in Iceland that can only partly be reached through Icelandic or English, or may not be reached at all.

Firstly, there is the speech community of Icelandic Sign Language. It is the only officially recognised traditional minority language in Iceland. Icelandic Sign Language is the first language of about 300 people, and some 200 people in addition (carers, relatives of deaf people, researchers etc.) have acquired communication skills in Icelandic Sign Language.

Many of the first language users of Icelandic Sign Language have adequate receptive skills in written Icelandic for understanding plain texts in Icelandic, but for active communication with the authorities they need sign language interpretation, and they have the right to enjoy this free of charge, up to a certain limit. Their rights are set out in principle in the 2011 legislation.

Secondly, Iceland’s demography has undergone rapid change over the last two decades. As of January 1, 2015, first and second generation immigrants constituted around 9.4% of the Icelandic population, as opposed to 2.1% in 1996 (*Statistics Iceland*). The immigrants in Iceland, 31,000 in number, speak more than 100 different languages as their first or native language. Slavic and Baltic languages are the most common, along with English; and Thai, Vietnamese, and Filipino are also very common native languages of immigrants in Iceland. Most immigrants have learnt Icelandic to some extent, and quite a few speak excellent Icelandic. Some prefer to communicate with native Icelanders in English only and this appears to cause very few problems; which is interesting from the point of view of Icelandic language management. However, there are always some individuals who need to have important information from the authorities presented to them in their native language, for example in Lithuanian, Polish, Vietnamese or Thai.

3.4 Conclusion

To sum up this section, there are a number of challenges that face administrative bodies in Iceland in their choice of communication language, even though legislation has been in place since 2011 which provides for Icelandic as the only official language of Iceland, and the language of the government and municipalities.

4. Plain language

4.1 General remarks

It has been maintained time and again in Icelandic language planning discourse that one of the benefits of linguistic purism – which has played a major role in the standardisation and elaboration of function of Icelandic – is that it produces more easily comprehensible vocabulary, as opposed to adapting borrowed lexical items such as Latin and Greek based terminology. Thus, proponents of linguistic purism in Iceland have argued for the coining of Icelandic neologisms – not only for the sake of linguistic purity and language preservation for their own sake, but also because of the supposed usefulness of native word formation in terms of semantic transparency, as many borrowings are opaque to native speakers. This implies that vocabulary, and not style, is seen as the major issue in grasping the content of Icelandic texts.

However, concern has also been raised among members of the Icelandic speech community that official documents demonstrate poor and complicated style. Icelandic popular language discourses contain anecdotes on official forms that are supposedly hard to fill in, and on the strange wording of some administrative texts, as well as ridicule of professional jargon and neologisms.

4.2 Legal provision on plain language (2011)

The law on the status of Icelandic and Icelandic Sign Language (2011) contains a provision on plain language. Art. 10 reads like this (English translation below):

10. gr. *Málfarsstefna ríkis og sveitarfélaga.*

Mál það sem er notað í starfsemi ríkis og sveitarfélaga eða á vegum þeirra skal vera vandað, einfalt og skýrt.

‘Article 10. *Language policy of central and local authorities.*

The language used by central and local authorities in the execution of their tasks, or on their behalf, should be in accordance with good usage, simple and clear.’

This was the first time that the notion of plain language was explicitly mentioned in Icelandic legislation on language.

4.3 Two examples of plain language initiatives

4.3.1 The tax authorities

Every adult citizen in Iceland receives an annual report from the Icelandic tax authorities about whether she/he has to pay additional tax for the previous year, or, conversely, if the authorities owe her/him (for example if the authorities had made her/him pay too much tax in advance). The results that the Internal Revenue send out show a ‘minus’ sign in front of the sum if the government owes money to the citizen, while there is no ‘minus’ sign in front of the sum if the citizen owes the government. It seems counter-intuitive to most people that a sum which an individual is going to receive is shown with a ‘minus’ in front. This has been criticised as an example of opaque messages from the authorities. The directorate has now reformed the written communication with citizens, providing another results page along with the original one. In the new sheet, blue is used to indicate a sum that the citizen will receive, while the sum is in red if she/he owes the government.

The Icelandic tax authorities have in fact been excellent pioneers in many respects as far as digital administration is concerned. Tax return forms are mostly filled out and delivered online and generally, excellent explanations are provided.

4.3.2 The pregnancy and maternity wards at The National University Hospital

In 2015 the The National University Hospital hired a team of people to investigate how women who seek services in the pregnancy and maternity wards at the hospital experience their visits, whether the information provided is adequate, how easily they can find rooms and services on arrival in the hospital buildings, etc. The investigation team invited a sample of the female population in the country to take part in the survey. Among the results were that some signs in the pregnancy and maternity wards were imperfect, and sometimes there were, for example, no signs to show which floor of the building one found oneself in.

From the point of view of Icelandic language management, it was interesting to learn that it proved problematic for some of the participants that the hospital in some cases used the purist Icelandic term *ómskoðun* (‘ultra-sound scanning, ultrasonography’). In common Icelandic usage, the more frequent word for this is the borrowing *sónar*. (A Google search for the string *fór í ómskoðun* ‘went for an ultrasound’ in web pages in Icelandic gives about 850 results, while the string *fór í sónar* ‘went for an ultrasound’ gives about 45,000 hits.) On the hospital’s information website there are some instances of parallel usage, with a slash stroke between the two variants: *ómskoðun/sónar*. However, in most cases only the purist Icelandic word *ómskoðun* is used there. According to news reports, there are plans to react to the results of the survey by making signs with the word *sónar* more visible.



Fig. 4: Ultrasonography at a pregnancy ward

This case is interesting in that it may be interpreted as a counterexample to the dogmatic stance in traditional Icelandic language policy discourses, mentioned above, that native word formation is superior to borrowings in terms of semantic transparency. The *sónar* example suggests that using the purist lexical item, *ómskoðun*, may be counterproductive if plain language is the goal.

4.4 Digitalised administration

Administration in Iceland is increasingly digitalised, and the use of paper documents is decreasing. Computer use is widespread. Iceland has the highest percentage of Internet users in Europe – about 96.5% (Internet Live Stats 2015). It should therefore be technically feasible to use computers, digital files and websites in every field of administration in Iceland. Whether this enhances plain language efforts satisfactorily in the future is another matter.

5. Concluding remarks

Popular discourse and criticisms concerning complicated and opaque official documents may, in part, mirror a power struggle in society – a struggle over who is in charge of the reality that language is supposed to describe and who decides on which concepts are used, their semantic content, and how they are combined.

In the wake of the economic collapse in Iceland in 2008, there were heated debates about the need for strengthening democracy and transparency in Icelandic society. There was a call for ‘direct democracy’, for online referendums and for frequent opinion polls on a variety of matters. Also, there were complaints that the current constitution is not written in ‘common style’, and that it contains ‘too many legal terms’, with the result that the constitution is comprehensible only to

lawyers and to the ‘elite layers’ in Icelandic administration. In Iceland, a political party known as ‘The Pirates’ have digital administration, transparency, open data access, and direct democracy on the top of their political agenda. According to polls in late 2015, the Pirates are the most popular party in Iceland, scoring about 35%.

Demands for transparency in administration go hand in hand with aims of plain language in general.

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Multilingualism – a governmental perspective

Abstract

Switzerland is a “Willensnation”, namely a nation born from a willingness to live together despite linguistic, cultural and religious diversity. The Swiss language situation is complex. The country has four language regions and national languages (German, French, Italian and Romansh). Of the twenty-six cantons, twenty-two are monolingual, three are bilingual (French/German) and one is trilingual (German/Italian/Romansh). So despite its multilingualism, the Swiss linguistic model is predominantly monolingual.

At the federal level, besides the *national* languages, the Swiss constitution refers to the *official* languages: they are German, French and Italian (as well as Romansh when communicating with persons who speak Romansh). Any person dealing with the federal authorities may do so in the official language of their own choice and receive a response in that language. Given this situation, Swiss public administration has to make substantial efforts in order to guarantee its plurilingualism, as well as to be representative of Switzerland’s microcosm.

To reach this goal, the Swiss government has chosen an Inter-Comprehension Strategy. Employees of the federal administration should be able to work in the official language of their choice and have the language skills required for multilingual communication. Thus, Swiss public administration should be “multilingually receptive”: an employee has to be able to understand his or her colleagues even if he or she does not speak their language fluently.

This paper has three parts: first, it provides an overview of Swiss language complexity and Swiss public policy; secondly, it presents a point of view regarding a policy-based approach to multilingualism; finally, it suggests ways to collaborate and to create an international network of public administrations or similar functions.

1. Overview

1.1 The four language regions and the main languages spoken in Switzerland

The national languages of Switzerland are German, French, Italian and Romansh. Swiss multilingualism is characterised by seventeen German speaking cantons, four French speaking cantons, one Italian speaking canton, three bilingual German/French cantons and a trilingual Romansh/German/Italian canton.

Figure 1 illustrates the four language regions. Data from 2014 reveals that 64.9% of the Swiss population are German speakers, 22.6% are French speakers, 8.3% are Italian speakers and 0.5% are Romansh speakers.

Thus, despite its multilingualism, the Swiss linguistic model is predominantly monolingual.

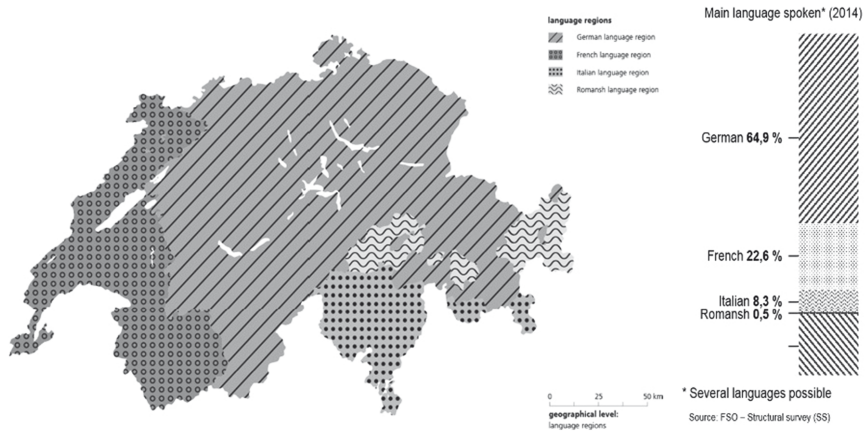


Fig. 1: Language regions in Switzerland

1.2 Swiss language policy

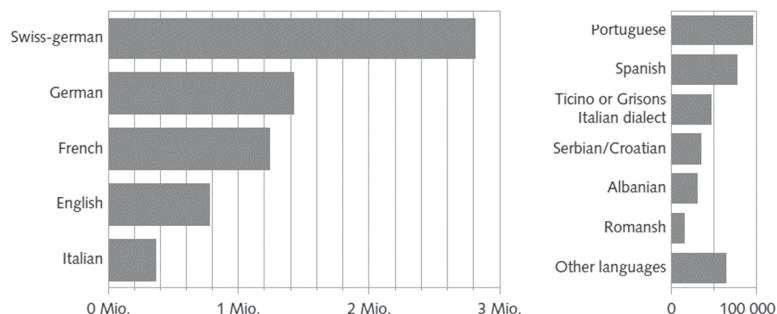
Because of this complexity, a governmental perspective has to ensure action across many areas to reinforce plurilingualism. Swiss language policy is accordingly based on five pillars and can be summarised as follows:

- **Develop** institutional plurilingualism, especially through:
 - translations of official documents,
 - procurement policy;
- **Promote** official languages (German/French/Italian) in public administration,
- **Encourage** comprehension and exchange between language communities,
- **Support** the bilingual cantons financially,
- **Protect and promote** the Italian and Romansh languages and cultures in the cantons of Ticino and Graubünden.

1.3 Languages at work and Swiss public administration as an employer

Languages usually spoken at work, 2013

In number of speakers



Employed persons, persons interviewed could indicate more than one language.

Source: FSO – Structural survey (SS)

© FSO, Neuchâtel 2015

Fig. 2: Languages usually spoken at work in Switzerland

Figure 2 shows that many languages are spoken daily at work in Switzerland. Against expectations, the language spoken most frequently (66.2%) is a Swiss dialect of German (which itself consists of at least 22 dialects), followed by German in its official form (33.4%), then French (29.1%), English (18.2%) and Italian (8.7%). Romansh, the fourth national language, is spoken at work by 0.35% of the active working population.

This makes communication in Switzerland even more difficult. The German learned at school is the official version, not the dialect. Thus, the use of Swiss-German risks creating barriers to labour market entry and to comprehension between linguistic communities.

Swiss public administration therefore has to make substantial efforts to guarantee its plurilingualism due to the use of Swiss-German at work and in society and also to the fact that, despite its multilingualism, the Swiss linguistic model is predominantly monolingual.

In this sense, Swiss public administration needs to be a microcosm of Switzerland, establishing a balance between linguistic communities and official languages and acting as a mediator between different parties.

In numerical and cultural terms, Swiss public administration should ideally be representative of the Swiss population and the four language regions as a whole. By this we mean developing and promoting plurilingualism in the public sector and ensuring that it is embedded in actions undertaken all over the country, in all fields of activity and at all institutional levels. Everyone involved is required to assume responsibility and take up this challenge.

2. The Swiss policy-based approach to multilingualism

2.1 The representation of linguistic communities in the Swiss federal administration

As already mentioned, at federal level the official and working languages are German, French and Italian, as well as Romansh when communicating with persons who speak Romansh.

	2008	2012	2013	2014
Total number of civil servants	34,293	34,559	35,259	35,853
German	72.6%	71.6%	71.4%	71.3%
French	20.4%	21.4%	21.5%	21.6%
Italian	6.7%	6.7%	6.8%	6.8%
Romansh	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%

Fig. 3: Distribution of civil servants by language, 2008-2014

These figures are based on information given by civil servants about the mother tongue which they declared when they joined public administration. Therefore, we do not know what other languages they speak and at what level.

The situation appears balanced (see paragraph 2.2 for targets), but in reality the figures vary widely between different departments, federal offices and top management. For example:

- Only 4.2% of employees in the National Office of Statistics are Italian speakers (the minimum target is 6.5%).
- Only 4.9% of employees in the office responsible for procurement procedure are French speakers (the minimum target is 21.5%).

Does that mean that Italian or French speakers are not interested in finance, in procurement or in taking part in important decisions? This is obviously not the case. If Swiss public administration wants to promote plurilingualism and to encourage minorities, it has to promote internally, combine training with career plans and put plurilingualism at the heart of the organisation.

These are the most important challenges that Swiss public administration is facing at this time.

2.2 The targets indicated by the 2014 Regulation (see the legal framework, www.plurilingua.admin.ch)

According to article 7 of the revised Regulation, which has been in force since October 2014, the representation of the various linguistic communities should aim to achieve the following targets:

German	68.5% - 70.5%
French:	21.5% - 23.5%
Italian:	6.5% - 8.5%
Romansh:	0.5% - 1.0%

These ranges, based on the 2010 Swiss Population Census, apply to the federal administration, the departments, the federal offices and their top managers. If we succeed in achieving these ranges, linguistic representation will be more balanced.

The 2008-2014 data relating to the mother tongue of the personnel of the Swiss confederation show that overall the objectives relating to representation of the linguistic communities have been reached in the federal administration.

However, further action is still needed. Major disparities between departments and between administrative units (federal offices) remain. With the exception of some administrative units, the Italian and Romansh speaking communities are particularly under-represented. Furthermore, the data shows that the representation of the various linguistic communities is not balanced within the upper salary levels (see details in the *Evaluation Report* of March 2015, www.plurilingua.admin.ch).

2.3 The Inter-Comprehension Strategy (see the Legal Framework, www.plurilingua.admin.ch)

In order to guarantee Swiss plurilingualism, as well as to ensure national cohesion and to achieve the goal of a federal administration which represents Switzerland in terms of its microcosm, the Swiss government has chosen the Inter-Comprehension Strategy.

Firstly, citizens may contact federal authorities in any one of the four national languages and receive a response in their own language.

Secondly, employees of the federal administration must be able to work in the official language of their choice and have the language skills required for multilingual communication. For example, senior managers must have a good working knowledge of at least one second official language and passive knowledge of a third official language.

Thus, Swiss public administration should be “multilingually receptive”; an employee has to be able to understand his or her colleagues, even if he or she does not speak their language fluently.

3. Framework for implementation and challenges

3.1 Overview of aims

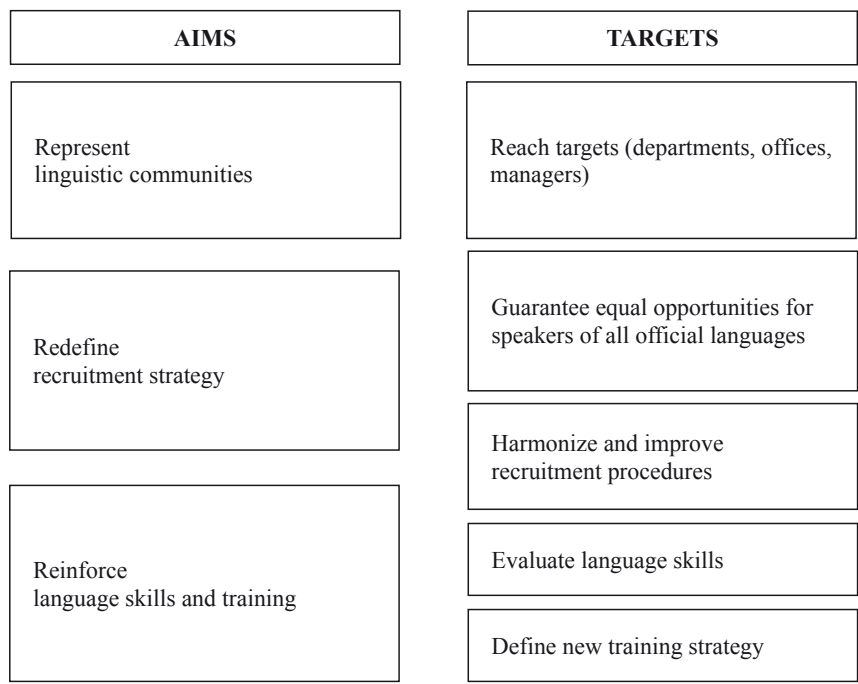


Fig. 4: Overview of aims

This chart shows the relationship between the various steps in the process of implementation. The focus is on developing a more transparent information system in order to:

- evaluate the aims and objectives of the revised regulation;
- monitor implementation;
- define the overall future strategy.

To achieve this, all the different elements of language policy which contribute to achieving a plurilingual public administration need to be included.

Implementing the key points allows us

- firstly, to establish a clear set of priorities;
- secondly, to transform recommendations into practical steps.

Thanks to this work, we can develop a system where plurilingualism becomes a common thread linking the implementation of various policies.

3.2 The challenges of implementation

To achieve our objectives, we all need to motivate and convince others. Governing by decree is not an option.

The trade-off between ideals and reality and the coherence between internal and external strategies have to be guaranteed.

Priorities, aims and objectives need to be turned into effective, efficient and concrete actions and results by building bridges between linguistic regions, external national organisations and the Swiss federal administration.

In summary, this work is underpinned by outlining the benefits and working together. By outlining the benefits, we mean that the new linguistic requirements of the Swiss Confederation as an employer help us to:

- show the benefits and advantages of linguistic skills;
- understand their economic value;
- reinforce national cohesion.

To reinforce the impact of our internal roles and processes we also need to be active at the international level by:

- sharing good practice;
- creating a dedicated network of public administration and organisations with similar functions;
- bringing together policy makers and researchers in a specific network.

Walery Pisarek

The *Jasnopsis* (“clear writing”) project and other recent endeavours to improve communication between public institutions and citizens in Poland

Abstract

Improving communication between administrative bodies and the public involves identifying and removing the barriers to mutual understanding. In linguistic terms, there are three main types of barriers: 1) ethnic, 2) stylistic, and 3) physiological. Since 1945, Poland has been a relatively unitary country linguistically (according to the last 2011 national census, 98.5% of the population speak Polish at home). **Ethnic** linguistic barriers in public communication in Poland were reduced by the Act of 6 January 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities and on Regional Language. Interest in **stylistic** barriers in public communication has intensified in Poland during the last decade. On the initiative of various state institutions (including the Ministry of the Interior, the Ombudsman, the Ministry of Culture and the President's Chancellery), several events have taken place since 2010 including a Congress on Official Language, a social campaign on “Citizen-friendly official language” in 2012 and a public debate in the presidential palace entitled “Can official language be citizen-friendly?” (www.prezydent.pl/dialog). In this spirit, in 2015 the Prime Minister's Chancellery launched a website – www.citizen.pl – and the Ombudsman continued to implement the recommendations of the Riga conference “ICT for an Inclusive Society” to improve conditions for the participation of people with physiological disabilities in digital communication. The growing interest in the comprehensibility of official messages has led to the development of automatic methods of measuring their accessibility, using “readability formulas”. Currently, so far as Polish texts are concerned, two programs of this type compete against each other in the network: the older *Logios* from Wrocław (www.logios.pl) and the newer, more advanced *Jasnopsis* from Warsaw (<http://jasnopsis.pl/aplikacja>).

Streszczenie

Poprawa komunikacji między urzędami a ludnością wymaga identyfikacji a następnie usunięcia barier utrudniających porozumiewanie się. Ujmując problem w kategoriach językowych, można wyróżnić ich trzy główne kategorie tych barier: 1) etniczne, 2) stylistyczne, 3) fizjologiczne. Od 1945 r. Polska jest krajem względnie jednolitym językowo (według ostatniego (z r. 2011) spisu powszechnego 98,5 % ludności mówi w domu po polsku). Ewentualne etniczne bariery w publicznym komunikowaniu się w Polsce redukuje ustawa z 6 stycznia 2005 r. o mniejszościach narodowych i etnicznych oraz o języku regionalnym. Zainteresowanie barierami stylistycznymi w publicznym komunikowaniu się nasiliło się w Polsce od roku 2010. Z inicjatywy różnych instytucji państwowych (m.in. Ministerstwa

Spraw Wewnętrznych, Rzecznika Praw Obywatelskich, Ministerstwa Kultury i Kancelarii Prezydenta RP) odbyły się konferencje poświęcone urzędowej polszczyźnie, jak Kongres Języka Urzędowego i publiczna debata w Pałacu Prezydenckim “Czy język urzędowy może być przyjazny obywatelom?” (zob. www.prezydent.pl/dialog) oraz kampania społeczna “Język urzędowy przyjazny obywatelom” z roku 2012. W tym duchu w r. 2015 Kancelaria Premiera uruchomiła stronę internetową www.obywatel.pl, a Biuro Rzecznika Praw Obywatelskich wprowadzało w życie rekomendacje konferencji ryskiej “TIK na rzecz społeczeństwa integracyjnego” w zakresie poprawy warunków uczestnictwa osób fizjologicznie niepełnosprawnych w komunikacji cyfrowej. Rosnące zainteresowanie zrozumiałością urzędowych tekstów przyczyniło się do rozwoju automatycznych metod mierzenia ich dostępności za pomocą specjalnych programów. Obecnie, jeśli chodzi o mierzenie zrozumiałości polskich tekstów, współzawodniczą ze sobą w sieci dwa programy tego typu starszy Logios z Wrocławia (www.logios.pl) i nowszy, bardziej zaawansowany Jasnopis z Warszawy (<http://jasnopolis.pl>).

The improvement of communication between authorities and the public – indeed the improvement of public communication in general – requires the identification and removal of barriers on the road towards mutual comprehension. So far as language is concerned, these barriers fall into three broad categories:

- 1) Ethnic,
- 2) Stylistic,
- 3) Physiological.

I will discuss briefly the endeavours of the Polish state authorities and their institutions to remove each of these. Let us begin with the ethnic barriers, in other words with a situation where the authorities communicate in Polish but some citizens don't understand this language, as their mother tongue is German, Belarussian, Lithuanian etc.

Poland was for centuries a multicultural, multilingual, and multifaith country. However after World War II, under the Soviet model of Central European states, Poland became a unitary state, both nationally and in terms of language. Shortly after World War II, a programme of ethnic segregation began to be implemented in the eastern and western provinces of Poland within its new borders. Accordingly, the former pre-war legislation dating from 1924 on the state language¹ was replaced on 30 November 1945 by a Decree clearly stating that Polish was the state language of Poland, and the only language of public administration.

The planned ethnic segregation in Central Europe was not fully implemented, and individuals and families who had declared themselves to be Polish in 1945-1946 and remained within the Polish state began to declare themselves to be Ukrainian or Belarussian when this ceased to carry the risk of deportation from

¹ The laws of 1924 on the state language and on the official language of the courts, prosecution offices and notaries granted the status of an auxiliary language to some other languages (Belarussian, German, Lithuanian, Ukrainian) in some provinces of Poland.

Poland. And so, surprisingly, it started to become apparent that the population of the Polish state was not as ethnically homogeneous as had been thought; it has its own minorities.

Nevertheless, the latest National Census in 2011 recorded 38,522,000 Polish residents of whom 36,522,000 declared that they speak only Polish at home, and only 596,000 (i.e. less than 1.5% of the total population) who declared that they did not speak Polish at home. If we take into account that half of those who say that they do not speak Polish at home are people who use the Silesian language (which is considered to be a dialect of Polish), one can venture the opinion that – at least statistically – ignorance of the Polish language is not the most important obstacle in public communication between citizens and the administrative authorities in Poland. The interests of linguistic minorities are protected by the law of 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities and on Regional Language. According to this law, a minority language or a regional language is used in 33 municipalities in Poland,² in addition to the Polish language, in communications between citizens and the authorities.

1. Against stylistic barriers

Complaints about the incomprehensibility of official communications in Poland date back to at least 1918, i.e. to the beginning of the Second Republic. Criticism about the difficulty of the language used in official documents and in many communications in the press and on the radio was heard in the 1950s, 60s, 70s and so on. From the 1960s we start to see psychological and linguistic studies and research on the intelligibility/difficulty of Polish texts used in public communication. Most of these studies and research were inspired by American publications on readability formulas, by the theories on elaborated and restricted codes of B. Bernstein or by the critical opposition of *bürgerliche* vs *proletarische Öffentlichkeit* of O. Negt and A. Kluge.

A reminder of these experiences would be interesting, but as the title of my contribution uses the word *recent*, I will confine myself to a discussion of key initiatives for the intelligibility of language in public communication in Poland in the last 5 years, i.e. since 2010. In that year, the Council for the Polish Language assessed, on its own initiative, the intelligibility of the websites of seven Polish ministries. The report which followed this assessment concluded that the texts on these sites are “written in the typical bureaucratic style”; that “the authors show no consideration for the users”; that “they abuse fashionable foreign words”; that “they don’t follow the rules of Polish spelling”; and so on.

² A list of these municipalities is published by the Ministry of Administration and Digitization: https://danepubliczne.gov.pl/dataset/urzedowy_rejestr_gmin_w_których_jest_używany_język_pomocniczy.

At that time, the issue of the intelligibility of messages in public communication had become a subject of interest in Parliament, in the President's Chancellery and in Government. In 2012, the Office of the Senate, together with the Ombudsman and the Institute of Public Affairs, launched a social campaign under the slogan "Citizen-friendly official language". Within this framework a web campaign, *Petition – your right*, was also included, which promotes the submission of demands by the public to the authorities at various levels; the main tool of the campaign became the website www.petycje.edu.pl.

In the interests of better communication with citizens the Prime Minister's Office began training civil servants to formulate written and spoken official messages in a simple manner. As a newspaper (*Rzeczpospolita* from 28.05.2012) reported, "The government has declared war on bureaucratic splutter". At the same time the University of Warsaw launched a postgraduate course, "Polish language in government and business", on the Internet.

In October 2012 a Congress on Official Language took place in Warsaw, involving linguists, lawyers, representatives of central and local government and of the media, and translators of EU documents. Its co-organisers were the office of the Ombudsman, the Senate, the Governor of Mazovia Province, the Head of the Civil Service, the Council for the Polish Language and the National Cultural Centre, under the patronage of the President of Poland, Bronisław Komorowski. The Congress ended with the adoption of a Declaration which recommended the setting up of psycholinguistic training for officials in the field of intelligible public communication in speech and writing, the development of appropriate advisory publications, and – most importantly – instilling in officials a sense of responsibility for effective communication.

A key document for a modern model of communication within official departments and between official departments and the public is the "European Code of Good Administrative Behaviour" (ECGAB), which promotes the transformation of the role of government from controlling to supportive. The initiators of the Polish campaigns to improve public communication generally rely on Art. 22 of the European Code of Good Administrative Behaviour, prepared by the European Ombudsman in 2005:

1. The official shall, when he or she has responsibility for the matter concerned, provide members of the public with the information that they request. When appropriate, the official shall give advice on how to initiate an administrative procedure within his or her field of competence. The official shall take care that the information communicated is clear and understandable. (Art. 22 of the European Code of Good Administrative Behaviour)

A few months after the Congress on Official Language (25 February 2013), the presidential palace in Warsaw hosted a public debate with the aim of answering the question "Can official language be citizen-friendly?" (a record of this debate is available on the Internet at www.prezydent.pl). The participants in the debate,

invited by the President, answered “yes” and pointed to the causes and sources of the “unfriendliness” of official language, manifested in its “incomprehensibility”.³

At these conferences and congresses, or after them, the following jocular maxim could be encountered: “According to the Polish Constitution, the official language in the Republic of Poland is Polish, but this doesn’t mean that the Polish language is official (here: ‘bureaucratic’)”.

Perhaps the most recent government action to support “simple and user-friendly communication of officials with citizens and citizens with officials” is the governmental program “Citizen”, whose main tool will be a web-based service, <https://obywatel.gov.pl/>, launched on 31 July 2015.⁴ Prime minister Ewa Kopacz announced that the launch of this service fulfilled a promise she had made after taking office in 2014. Under the slogan *The end of official newspeak*, the Chancellery of the Prime Minister has prepared two publications containing guidelines for citizen-friendly communication. They are being sent to all directors general and will be promoted among officials throughout Poland.

2. Against physiological barriers

According to the Declaration approved unanimously on 11 June 2006 at the conference “ICT for an Inclusive Society” in Riga, Latvia,

Many Europeans still reap few or no benefits from ICT and there are resistant gaps in ICT use. For instance, 57% of individuals living in the EU did not regularly use the Internet in 2005; only 10% of persons over 65 used the Internet, against 68% of those aged 16-24; only 24% of persons with low levels of education used the Internet, against 73% of those with high levels of education; only 32% of unem-

³ It was pointed out that, inter alia, one of the factors leading to the incomprehensibility of official texts is a sense of power over reality, extending to a sense of power over words. So *cancellarisms* are invented and consciously put into circulation by officials. Lawyers are also subject to the temptation of organising reality using specifically defined words; their contribution to the blocking of communication between administration and the publics are *jurisms*. The academics with their *scientisms* follow behind the lawyers. An important source of neologisms and neosemantisms in Polish contemporary bureaucratic lexis is the European Union with its *bruxelisms*. One can therefore expect that particularly difficult vocabulary will characterise official texts where bureaucracy, law, science and the influence of the EU combine; for example, the texts of the policy documents of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. My personal experience confirms these expectations.

⁴ Administrators of the portal “obywatel.gov.pl” invite potential users to use it as follows: “Each time you want to carry out a transaction, we regard it as our service for you. We want you to conduct your business quickly and efficiently, that’s why we have collected our services together in one place. We describe in a simple and accessible way what you have to do; what you need to prepare; where you need to go; and what you can do without leaving home.” Obywatel.gov.pl is “a good source of information about the services that the state provides to you”.

ployed persons used the Internet, against 54% of employed persons. Only 3% of public web sites surveyed comply with the minimum web accessibility standards and guidelines, hindering access to web content and services for people with disabilities, who comprise some 15% of the EU population. (“ICT for an Inclusive Society” Declaration 2006)

There are specific issues characterising those portals dedicated to overcoming communication barriers which arise not so much from the closed and obscure nature of the messages, or from physical causes such as distance, walls, storms etc., as from the disability or partial disability of users. Among this group are two Polish portals: the community service “dostepnestrony” (“accessible pages”)⁵ and the Polish Academy of Accessibility, supported by the government. Both of these portals and the government program “Obywatel” (“Citizen”), mentioned earlier, go back to the conference in Riga and its ambitious target to reduce by half the differences in Internet usage between the women, lower education groups, unemployed and “less-developed” regions etc., between 2005 and 2010.

Since the emergence in Poland of the digital exclusion problem, the Office of the Ombudsman has monitored issues relating to the accessibility of websites for people with disabilities, and undertakes interventions within its jurisdiction.

In 2010 for the first time the Office of the Ombudsman estimated the accessibility of public administration websites for people with visual disabilities. The results of this evaluation (done with the participation of blind and visually impaired consultants) revealed a failure of public authorities to comply with accessibility standards when creating and editing services. (Office of the Ombudsman)

The most recent public report on the accessibility of the websites of public institutions (“The accessibility of websites of public institutions”) was produced by Piotr Witek and Michał Dziwisz in 2013 and made available by the Office of the Ombudsman in December 2014. Their report includes a double test of approximately 3,000 objects created between 2012 and 2013:

The report shows the most common irregularities in website construction and the barriers faced by people with disabilities. The report also includes a summary of the qualitative changes and trends occurring over six months in the availability of online public administration services, and, on this basis, forecasts and estimates the state of accessibility of public websites at the end of May 2015.⁶

Taking into account the results of comparative studies from the years 2012 and 2013, the authors conclude:

⁵ The portal “dostepnestrony.pl” (“accessible pages”) was created as the result of cooperation between the Friends of Integration Association and the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities. It is co-financed by the European Union.

⁶ *Dostępność witryn internetowych instytucji publicznych dla osób z niepełnosprawnościami. Analiza i zalecenia.* Warszawa 2013, 6.

Based on the survey, analysing the pace of the changes made over six months and assuming that the speed of the processes remain unchanged, it can be assumed that on 31 May 2015 – at a time when **all** public bodies should be available at all online services for the disabled and otherwise digitally excluded – **only 7.8%** of sites owned by public bodies will be considered accessible, and **32.3%** of portals will have intermittent problems with access to public information.⁷

But in spite of this:

Comparison of the results of research conducted in the last quarter of 2012 and in July 2013 allows the following conclusions:

- More and more public websites are being made accessible to the digitally excluded.
- There was an increase of 1.5% in the number of accessible sites over the six months.
- The increase in the number of services with intermittent problems with access to public information over the six months amounted to 2.3%.
- The direction of change is positive, but the pace is clearly insufficient.
- **If the current growth rate is maintained in 2015, only 7.8% instead of the assumed 100% of public services will be available to those digitally excluded.** [emphasis added]
- Awareness of the obligation to provide information in forms adapted to the individual needs of citizens with disabilities is still too low among government employees.

With this in mind it is necessary to increase the pace of adjustment of public web sites to the WCAG 2.0 standards and to the needs of people at risk of digital exclusion.⁸

For this purpose it is necessary to carry out systematic training and regular checks of the level of accessibility of public websites.⁹

Probably, Poland is not alone among EU countries in terms of delays in the implementation of the recommendations of the Ministerial Conference on “ICT for an Inclusive Society” in Riga.

⁷ *Dostępność witryn internetowych instytucji publicznych dla osób z niepełnosprawnościami. Analiza i zalecenia.* Warszawa 2013, 31.

⁸ *Dostępność witryn internetowych instytucji publicznych dla osób z niepełnosprawnościami. Analiza i zalecenia.* Warszawa 2013, 40.

⁹ In this connection the definition of “communication” in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 13 XII 2006 r. should be remembered. Art. 2 stipulates that: “*Communication* includes languages, display of text, Braille, tactile communication, large print, accessible multimedia as well as written, audio, plain-language, human-reader and augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, including accessible information and communication technology; *Language* includes spoken and signed languages and other forms of not spoken languages”.

3. *Logios and Jasnopis*

The nationwide, pan-European and even global (bearing in mind the American “Plain Writing Act” of 2010) interest in the accessibility of messages in public communication has contributed to a renewed interest in the research on readability from the 1950s and 60s. I am thinking here about the American experiments, formulas and publications by Edgar Dale and Jeanne Chall, Rudolf Flesch, Robert Gunning, George Klare and Wilson L. Taylor. The methods and formulas which they developed to measure the readability of the media were adapted at the time (ie. in the 1960s) to the Slavic languages in Central Europe by Walery Pisarek in Krakow and Joseph Mistrik in Bratislava, among others. The idea of measuring the readability of administrative and commercial communication was revived in Poland at the time of discussions about the official language (Broda/Ogrodniczuk/Nitoń/Gruszczyński 2014; Charzyńska/Dębowski 2015).

At the beginning of the second decade of this century, young linguists from the University of Wrocław in collaboration with computer scientists from the Technical University of Wrocław transplanted onto Polish soil the ideas of the Plain Language Movement and offered their services to the state administration in assessing the intelligibility of official documents. In 2012 their activities were institutionalised as the Laboratory of Simple Polish Language at the Institute of Polish Philology at the University of Wrocław. Its head is Dr. Thomas Piekot. Under his guidance, a model or “formula” for measuring the “fogginess” of Polish language texts has been elaborated, based on Robert Gunning’s readability formula (Gunning 1952). The original Gunning formula, designed to measure the readability of English texts, had to be adapted to the Polish language, which differs from English in, among other things, its inflections and the average length of words.

The Wrocław formula allows its users to categorise Polish utility texts¹⁰ into 7 categories, depending on their degree of “fogginess”, from the simplest to the most difficult. The fog index runs from 1 to more than 22 and is associated with education measured by years of schooling. So texts in which the rated fog index is between 1 and 6 correspond to those with primary education, while texts whose index is 22 or more can only be fully understood by a person with a doctorate.

¹⁰ By utility texts are understood non-literary texts, intended to serve public information and instructions.

4. Seven categories of Polish utility (i.e. non-literary) texts according to their “fogginess” (acc. to www.logios.pl)

Degree of “fogginess”	FOG index	Texts suitable as reading material for people with an education level ...
I	FOG 1-6	Primary school
II	FOG 7-9	Middle school
III	FOG 10-12	Matriculation
IV	FOG 13-15	Undergraduate (Licentiate)
V	FOG 16-17	Master’s degree
VI	FOG 18-21	Postgraduate studies
VII	FOG 20 or more	Doctorate

Wrocław readability researchers have developed a computer program to automatically measure the “fogginess” of Polish texts. This program is freely available on the Internet at “logios.pl”. **According to this program, the FOG index of the Polish version of my contribution is 18, and so it is a “very difficult” text, suitable for postgraduate students.**

In 2015 a similar, though more advanced, computer program to measure the readability of Polish utility (i.e. non-literary) texts has been announced and made available by the researchers from the University School of Social Psychology in Warsaw and the Institute of Computer Science of Warsaw University. That is the “Jasnopis”, mentioned in my title. It is the outcome of a project subsidised by the Polish National Science Centre in 2012-2015. The aim of the project was firstly to identify text peculiarities that hamper understanding by the reader, and secondly to create a computer tool to measure the degree of difficulty or readability of the Polish utility (i.e. non-literary) texts. Adopting this task – as the authors of Jasnopis explain – was justified by the enormous amount of very difficult texts in the public arena, the need to increase social awareness in this respect, and the wish to change the state of affairs in various institutions such as the Office of the Ombudsman, the Ministry of Regional Development, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Administration and Digitization, the Ministry of Education, the Agency for Enterprise Development, the Social Insurance Institution and others. In these institutions, a need was identified for an empirically verified tool that would be able to evaluate objectively and quickly the readability of a text, taking into account the specificity of the Polish language and providing results that could be compared with results obtained by other methods. According to the authors of Jasnopis, it meets those conditions satisfactorily.

From the linguistic point of view, a verbal text consists simply of lexical units (words or morphemes) and ways of combining them into larger structures. To simplify this, we can say that since in the text there is nothing but vocabulary and syntax, i.e. words and sentences, the causes of language difficulties in any verbal expression must be sought in hard (“difficult”) words and tough sentences. Underlying all readability formulas is this simple truth. The differences between them in this respect boil down to differences in the criteria for “difficult” words, and assessing the part played by vocabulary and syntax in reducing the readability of the text. Most readability formulas assume the average length of a sentence in a text (measured by the number of words) to be a statistically reliable indicator of the difficulties of its syntax.

The indicator of difficulty of vocabulary in most readability formulas is based on the length of words, not on the average word length measured in syllables, but on the percentage of unusually long words in the text. In the English language, words which have three or more syllables are assumed to be difficult; in the Polish language, those having four or more syllables.

The “Jasnopis” program, in analysing a text:

- defines its difficulty on the seven degree scale;
- distinguishes its “difficult” words (four or more syllables, except for words considered to be generally known);
- distinguishes its over-long sentences;
- distinguishes its over-difficult paragraphs (relative to the difficulty of the whole text and in relation to the selected class of difficulty);
- suggests proposals for possible changes to difficult words (synonyms, hyponyms, hypernyms);
- also offers indexes of clarity, statistics, graphs of lexical similarity and a linguistic model of paragraphs, and assesses compliance of the style of the paragraph with the style of the entire text or its compatibility with the chosen style.

The authors of the competing programs – i.e. *Logios* and *Jasnopis* – say that both of them are still under development and construction. Both are used partly by the same institutions, among them the Government Legislation Centre, the Centre of Information of the Ministry of the Interior etc.

5. Final comments

In conclusion, it is impossible not to ask about the consequences of all these endeavours, efforts, treatments, examinations and prescriptions for understandable communication; “plain language movements”; programmes like *Logios* and *Jasnopis*; fora for accessible cyberspace; academies of accessibility etc., etc.

In my opinion, the situation gets worse with every decade, and probably the language used by the political or economic powers and by science will never be commonly understandable. But we have to strive for it, because without our efforts, public communication will become even more obscure.

There are 24 different official languages in the EU. Presumably nobody knows them all. Our Paneuropean communication is based on interpretation and translation. Maybe within each ethnic language, we will need each year more interpreters and translators from professional into the current (plain) language, and vice versa.

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Language use in public administration – theory and praxis in Slovakia

Abstract¹

This paper deals with the relationship between the Slovak language and the Slovak nation as articulated through institutional discourse, which falls somewhere between the language of public administration and the language of politics. There is an act relating to the Slovak language in Slovak legislation which leads to a requirement to define language in a specific way. This manifests itself in a strict language scheme which employs terms like “language regularities”, “language rules” and “language laws”. In order to distinguish so-called correct expressions from incorrect ones, which is important in public administration praxis, a simple model of language and language norms has been set in.

Public institutions use the concept definition of language, based on a very specific ideology, namely “systemism”. Language is seen as a structure of clear grammatical and lexical rules, even if the actual use of the language contradicts these in numerous cases. The paper analyses this official language ideology and explores specific cases where the system of “language rules” has been used to justify the refusal of some language users’ requests – for example a petition to change the name of a village, and a request from women for the right to choose their surname.

Abstrakt: Používanie jazyka vo verejnej správe – teória a prax na Slovensku

Príspevok sleduje prepojenia medzi slovenským jazykom a slovenským národom, tak ako ich vyjadruje inštitucionálny diskurz (diskurz, ktorý sa nachádza medzi diskurzom verejnej správy politickým typom diskurzu).

Slovenská legislatíva operuje zákonom o štátnom jazyku, a tak aj silnou potrebou presnej definície jazyka, používajúc pojmy ako jazykové zákonitosti, pravidlá, jazykové zákony. Úsilie oddeliť tzv. správne jazykové formy od nesprávnych viedlo k vytvoreniu jednoduchého modelu jazyka a jeho fungovania, čo vyhovuje potrebám štátnej správy.

Inštitúcie tak narábajú s konceptom jazyka, ktorý je založený na veľmi špecifickej ideológii systemizmu. Jazyk sa považuje za štruktúru gramatických a lexikálnych pravidiel, o ktorých pravdivosti sa dá jednoznačne rozhodnúť (hoci v mnohých prípadoch je jazyková prax odlišná). Autori štúdie sa v analýze oficiálnej jazykovej ideológie sústreďujú na prípady, v ktorých sa takzvané systémové jazykové pravidlá použili ako argument pri odmietnutí požiadaviek používateľov a používateľiek jazyka (petícia za zmenu názvu obce, ženy požadujúce právo na možnosť slobodného výberu tvaru svojho priezviska a podobne).

¹ This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the contract No. APVV-0689-12.

The aim of this paper is to provide an insight into the management of language led by the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, based on a content analysis of key documents. The authors also focus on the conflict between regulations (with a range of legal powers) and real language practice. We identify specific problematic issues in the protection afforded to the official or majority language, i.e. the state language as used in Slovak legal discourse. The article contributes to the debate on the non-compatibility of professional and legal concepts (norm, disposition, codification).

According to the *bon mot* of Juraj Dolník, professor at the Faculty of Philosophy at Comenius University, “it is always good when language or its regulation is linked with power.” He adds, however: “Yet not with any power, only with the power of knowledge.” This paper depicts the Slovak experience of what happens when language collides with a different kind of power (usually the state), which strives to subject the language to its utilitarian goals and interests.

A good example of the symbiosis of the three-way relationship between language, its regulation, and power, is the political situation of language in Slovakia. When talking about this issue in different countries it is important to consider their language-related legislation, although this may change over time depending on the changing policies of individual governments. During the era of the independent Slovak Republic (from 1993), the long-discussed Act on the State Language was adopted in 1995 (under Vladimír Mečiar’s rule). The Act included sanctions, i.e. financial penalties for breaking the law. However, the sanction element was revoked by the next government, led by Mikuláš Dzurinda (1998), only to be revived again by a change under Robert Fico’s rule in 2009, followed by a short interruption in 2011 when the range of sanctions was narrowed. (The proposed law to cancel the sanctions was apparently too controversial to be discussed in the Slovak national parliament). The issue of “the language act in Slovakia” became the subject of international attention during this period (for more detail see Ondrejovič 2010).

The so-called Central Language Committee at the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, as the advisory body, played a vital role in the whole procedure. The committee took a decisive part in the preparation of the language Act. What was unique about the Central Language Committee was the fact that it had started – at least originally – as a professional commission (including linguists from different universities and the Slovak Academy of Sciences, with a diverse spectrum and orientation), yet after its fundamental reconstruction in 2007, it became a political body rather than a body representing the linguistic professional community.

To sum up, since the emergence of the independent Slovak Republic, each government, regardless of its political orientation, has revised the content of the Act on the State Language, which vividly illustrates the political role of language in Slovak social discourse.

1. Act on the State Language and its limits of definition

Bearing in mind that the Slovak language is the most important attribute of the Slovak nation's specificity and the most precious value of its cultural heritage, as well as an expression of sovereignty of the Slovak Republic and a general vehicle of communication for all its citizens, which secures their freedom and equality in dignity and rights in the territory of the Slovak Republic [...] (The Act on the State Language, Article 1)

The introductory article of the Act on the State Language spells out the position of the Slovak language within the Slovak Republic. The expression "state language" itself is relatively unusual in the international context (English: majority language, German: Mehrheitsprache), and despite the possibility of replacing it by a synonyms such as "majority" or "official" language, Slovak legislation continues to use the expression "state language". The state language as the main attribute of the Slovak nation, referred to elsewhere as "state-forming" (Act on the Merits of Andrej Hlinka in the State-forming Slovak Nation and the Slovak Republic – 531/2007 Collection of Laws), may be considered as the national civil principle present in the legal discourse. The protection of language in these social and political conditions is directly conditioned by society's attitudes and opinions towards language and its functioning, i.e. language ideology (see Van Dijk 1998; Wodak 2007). It gives legitimacy to the protectionist approach towards the Slovak language, which, in our opinion, is best expressed by the wording of Article 2 (3) of the Act on the State Language:

Any interference into the codified form of the state language which is in contradiction with its dispositions is inadmissible. (The Act on the State Language, Article 2 (3))

The codified form of the state language is announced and published on the website of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, which also decides what is deemed contradictory to its dispositions. The wording of the Act raises additional questions: we are interested in what is meant by "interference" with the codified form and the "dispositions" of the language. The Slovak term "law" (zákon) is etymologically and morphologically very close to the term "disposition" (zákonitosť). Although "disposition" is used in the official English translation, it fails to do justice to the relationship between the two expressions (zákon and zákonitosť) which both refer to the concept of legality. Therefore, we believe that expressions such as "natural laws" or "principles" should be considered.

2. The norm as a problem

The expression "natural law" bridges the gap between the "norm" in language and the "norm" in the legislation process; we guess we are facing a situation

where the understanding of the language norm is minimised to conform with the needs of legislation. The need to reduce the norm of standardised language is even more pressing, as the Act on the State Language implies sanctions – in the spirit of “where is law, there must be a sanction.” The experts at the Ľudovít Štúr Institute of Linguistics (J. Dolník, S. Ondrejovič, K. Buzássyová, S. Mislovičová, more recently J. Vrábľová, and L. Satinská) have expressed the opinion – mainly in interviews in printed and electronic media – that the use of language should not be linked with punishment, as citizens will not build a positive relationship with the language through fines.

The most common argument used against such opinions is the argument asserted by the “powers that be”, as well as by certain sections of society, that law without sanctions is toothless, a mere unenforceable piece of paper. The question, however, is whether language-related acts have a place in the area of so-called “hard legislation”. The situation in Europe and the rest of the world does not suggest that it should be necessary; only seven – including Slovakia – out of 26 EU countries have laws implying sanctions. Natural language expresses our relationship with the world, and interfering with it may be very problematic.

Year	Number of Sanctions awarded
2007	1
2008	3
2009	0
2010	2
2011	1

Tab. 1: The table depicts the number of fines imposed for breaching the Act on the State Language (out of a total number of 33 suggestions). Source: Report on the State of Use of the State Language in the Territory of the Slovak Republic 2012

The original idea behind the legislation (and its revisions) was the poor state of the literary language (or *codified form of the state language* as it is called in the terminology of relevant documents in Slovakia) that needed to be improved, but the whole story was obfuscated by political mists. Thus the case became a political or politico- legal issue to such an extent that it is difficult to find anything “purely linguistic” in it (cf. Vrábľová 2014). The politicians’ polemic on the revision of the state language act increasingly focused on legal issues about whether it would affect the rights of minorities or not. Yet there were other issues that linguists had been concerned with from the very beginning, namely that the revision of the law interferes in the language culture via direct language-related political measures, despite the fact that its task is, as stated by Dolník (2009), to

“create optimal conditions for standard performance of language and its research.” It is untenable for those in a position of political power to decide upon the codified norm as, by means of this law, it not only defines where to apply “the codified form of the state language”, but also which sources should be its points of reference (i.e. which are the officially codifying works).

In the Slovak language environment, language is referred to as “literary” and “codified”. These terms are often used interchangeably, although in theory “literary” is a much broader concept than “codified”: the latter deals with only one part of literary variety. The norm as implicit, unconscious knowledge stored in the minds of the members of a language community, or as an abstraction based on the notion of general or common speech generally used in a broad area (e.g. Nebeská 1996), is not sufficient for the needs of legislative practice.

In this kind of discourse, it is also necessary to define who sets the norm, i.e. which language authorities influence the process of codification. The article under which “the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic *approves* the codified form of the state language and publishes it on its website” represents a problem for contemporary Slovak linguistics (or for part of it, to be more precise). While in the past a political body merely asserted the codification, leaving the approval process to the experts (compare with e.g. Novák 1934), nowadays it is the ministry that, in line with the law, *approves* the codification and *publishes it on the Internet*. So, if the orthographic or orthoepic committee (with a nationwide scope, including representatives of all the important universities or academic institutions in Slovakia) agrees changes to the codification, this may not be enough – the final decision rests with the Central Language Committee. The codification process is set out in the Act on the State Language, yet the word “publishes” was substituted for the word “announces” without any official revision of the law, just in the form of an announcement (number MK – 1973/2014-110/10343, available online at www.culture.gov.sk/posobnost-ministerstva/statny-jazyk/zverejnenie-kodifikovanej-podoby--2c4.html).

3. Conflict between Legislation and Democratic Language Practice

We can see a certain tension between the phenomena within so-called language laws or principles (zákonitosti) and real language practice. The following cases from language practice clearly illustrate this discrepancy. It is interesting to follow the principle of power, namely the application of the article mentioned above, on the inadmissibility of introducing modifications into the codified form of the Slovak language. “*Power does not necessarily derive from language but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and in the long term*” (Wodak-Meyer 2009). In this second section we will illustrate the conflict of power exerted by language on three cases.

The Act on the State Language binds the Ministry of Culture to implement a report on the use of language which is submitted to the National Council of SR on a bi-annual basis, being *de facto* the only source of information considered to be made by professionals. The language issues, as described in the texts published by the Ministry of Culture, are two-fold: 1) the absence of the Slovak language in certain spheres, which leads to a lack of understanding; 2) the form of Slovak language used, which inhibits understanding because it deviates from the codified norm. “Serious communication problems are also involved by not knowing the language system (norm)” (Report on the Use of State Language Situation 2012).

Here is the list of communication problems as described in the Report:

- 1) the speech is not in accordance with the system of Slovak language;
- 2) communication breakdowns;
- 3) reinterpretation of received speech code (into the norm in force) is necessary;
- 4) fluent communication is corrupted.

According to the unknown authors of the Report, linguistic mistakes make the transfer of communication more difficult because the recipient of the communication has to translate it into the correct codified version of the language. As a result, the norms (the order, organisation system) need to be respected in official and public contact.

Apart from that, the excerpt of the document quoted above is the only part written in a professional style. In addition, it is anonymous and cannot be considered plausible when compared to any theory of communication.

Another document that has been analysed – the “Conception of State Language Management” (2001) – concluded that the problem is a consequence of the “toothless” legislation. Therefore, introducing sanctions will increase the quality of the state language. The logic behind the argument is as follows:

1st premise – the condition of the state language is grim.

2nd premise – there are no sanctions for not observing the Act on the State Language.

3. Conclusion – it is necessary to introduce sanctions in order to improve the level of the state language.

We consider this logical reasoning to be flawed, as there is no logical link between the premises.

Both the 2012 and 2014 reports on the usage of the state language find the position regarding the level of knowledge of the state language as generally unfavourable in various observed areas (kindergartens, elementary, high schools, schools with Hungarian as the language of instruction, media sphere). The criterion used is mastery of the codified form of the state language. The report also contains a list of “typical” notorious mistakes, e.g. using expressions considered as “bohemisms”. We cannot say that using these words hinders understanding,

because of their frequency and classification into a certain style. Yet, the norm of the codified form of the language – described in the “Rules of Slovak Orthography” (2000), “Short Dictionary of Slovak Language” (4th edition 2003), “Morphology of Slovak Language” (1966) and “Rules of Slovak Pronunciation” by Ā. Král’ (the newest edition 2009) – views it as a problem.

There are other recent language norms of the Slovak language – more up-to-date and more specific than the ones listed above – but, for some reason, the “power” excluded them from the list of codifying texts. This is particularly the case with the “Dictionary of Contemporary Slovak Language”. With its 250,000 entries, it will be the most complete description of the vocabulary of contemporary Slovak language (the third volume is so far in print, out of the planned six volumes in total). The explanation of the spokesperson of the Ministry of Culture of SR as to why the Ministry did not accept it as one of the official codifying texts, and why this title is not even mentioned as a recommended text on the Ministry’s website, is rather curious. In the Ministry’s opinion, the dictionary does not distinguish between the literary and non-literary lexis, *ergo* it may not serve as a codifying text. And yet anyone who scans through the “Dictionary of Contemporary Slovak Language” can easily see that the literary lexis is distinguished from the non-literary one not only through qualifiers, but also by different colours. Perhaps it is the simple fact that the words are to be found in the dictionary that causes problems. Thus, we may see a conflict between language practice and a more normative approach towards language. Lately, the dispute has led to a culmination in more than one case.

4. Word-formation of Feminine Surnames

In the Slovak language, most female surnames are formed by adding the suffix *-ová* to a male surname (e.g. male Kováč, female Kováčová). According to the Act on Register Offices, women with Slovak nationality are obliged to use this form of surname. However, many factors (travelling, living and working abroad) led them to reject this form of surname. In 2012, the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic prepared a draft law, based on which female Slovak citizens could ask to modify their surname and write it without the suffix *-ová*, without having to register as a different nationality (which was the way women had by-passed the regulation).

During the inter-departmental comment process about the Act on Register Offices in April 2013, the Ministry of Culture (within which the section of the state language operates) qualified this request as unlawful, referring to the “Catch 22” clause: “Any interference into the codified form of the state language which is in contradiction with its dispositions is inadmissible.” One year prior to that, the Ministry of Culture had explained the ideological background in the report as follows:

New elements in society and efforts to draw closer to foreign culture are manifested through language as well. Apart from the excess use of foreign words, particularly English words and anglicisms, it also rejects the use of the suffix *-ová* in feminine surnames, which in reality (in the case of some holders) formally signifies the rejection of Slovak citizenship or makes the identity (gender and nationality) of their holders ambivalent [...]. (Report on the State of Use of the State Language 2012)

5. Law vs. Referendum

The State Language Act was also used as an argument in considering the request of the inhabitants of the town of Tešedíkovo, who organised a local referendum regarding the change of the town's name. The historical name of the town, Pered (with the first record dating back to 1237) was replaced by Tešedíkovo in 1948 (according to the Hungarian historian Samuel Tešedík, who had never lived in the town and who has no link whatsoever with the place). The majority of the inhabitants have Hungarian nationality and 66.36% (1,341) said 'yes' to the question "Do you agree with changing the name Tešedíkovo to the historical one – Pered?", with 33.64 % (679) against. The Ministry of the Interior did not implement the results of the referendum by changing the name (which is not required by law); instead they opted for "considering also other circumstances and facts". (The reaction of Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák is available online: www.most-hid-regiony.sk/HTML/wpcontent/uploads/pdf/Kalinak_pered.pdf).

These circumstances were, once again, the State Language Act, which stipulates that the "official names of municipalities and their districts are conducted in the state language" (*ibid.*), so the Terminology Committee of the Ministry of the Interior of SR, supported by the position of the Ministry of Culture of SR, "do not recommend the change of the name". The grounds for it are as follows: the name Tešedíkovo is a registered name, since it is a municipality name, while the name Pered is not registered; which is why requesting its registration is not in accordance with the state language.

There have been other petitions related to the codified version of the Slovak language. The inhabitants of the city Nitra, the so-called Nitránia, asked to call themselves Nitránčania. Nitrán is a product name of salami, and one of the organisers, Gontko, said in a Slovak newspaper. "We are not Nitránia; we are not some sort of salami, as they try to present us in The Linguistic Institute of Ľudovít Štúr. Our goal is to return to the name our grandparents and parents were used to." Later on he added a metalinguistic statement. "It is important to consider how language is actually used, and to look for a way to preserve people's real traditions – not to modify language norms in an artificial way," said Gontko.²

² Available on: webnoviny.sk/slovensko/nitrانيا-spisuju-peticiu-chcu-sa-vol/412231-clanok.html.

In any case, the Linguistic Institute is not competent to change the norm of codified language (as was mentioned above). The efforts of Nitra's inhabitants illustrate the problem from a sociolinguistic point of view. It clearly shows the frustration of language users (literally asking for two versions of their designation as citizens in the dictionary) and the misunderstandings related to the perception of the Act on Language Law.

Language reflects power structures – and language has an impact on power structures. Language can be seen as an indicator of social and therefore political situations – and language can also be seen as a driving force directed at changing politics and society. (Wodak 2007, 1)

The examples quoted imply that the selection of the most prestigious language variety plays a distinctive role when referring to the State Language Act (quite apart from the supervision of the presence of the state language in the territory of the Slovak Republic, as often declared by politicians).

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Anne Kjærgaard

The organisation of the plain language movement in Denmark¹

Abstract

I sammenligning med flere af vores nordiske naboer synes klarsprogsindsatsen i Danmark at lade noget tilbage at ønske. Sprognævnene i Sverige, Norge og Finland synes således at spille en langt mere aktiv rolle i arbejdet med at sikre et klart og forståeligt sprog i information fra offentlige myndigheder til borgere. I artiklen argumenterer jeg imidlertid for at klarsprogsindsatsen i Danmark faktisk er ganske betydelig. Den er bare organiseret på en anden måde end i Sverige, Norge og Finland. Jeg identificerer de vigtigste aktører i det danske klarsprogsarbejde: diverse ministerier og styrelser, Dansk Sprognævn, uddannelsesinstitutioner, private konsulentfirmaer der assisterer offentlige institutioner og private firmaer i klarsprogsarbejdet, offentlige institutioner og private firmaer der arbejder for at gøre deres tekster mere forståelige og imødekommende, og (i et vist omfang) NGO'er. En af de centrale pointer i artiklen er at Dansk Sprognævn spiller en mere tilbagetrukket rolle end i de øvrige lande når det drejer sig om det praktiske arbejde med klarsprog i offentlige institutioner og private firmaer. Til gengæld tilbyder en række private firmaer bistand til private firmaer og offentlige institutioners arbejde med klarsprog.

When it comes to the status of plain language, Denmark would appear to be lagging behind some of our closest neighbours. The language councils in Norway, Finland and Sweden all focus much more strongly on plain language than we do in Denmark, and have as one of their main objectives to monitor and improve the written language of public authorities.

The aim of this article is to map the Danish plain language movement by identifying the main players in the field. To some extent, I also provide an outline of how they each contribute to plain language work in Denmark. I will go into some detail in my description of the role of varying ministries and government agencies and the Danish Language Council in the plain language movement. However, my descriptions of the role of educational institutions, private consultants, organisations implementing plain language and NGOs are less detailed. Each of these

¹ In my presentation at the EFNIL conference 2015 in Helsinki, I described the organisation of plain language work in Denmark, and provided an account of the results of my postdoctoral project "Text revisions in practice in the Danish public administration: An investigation of the effect that revising a tax letter has on its readers". In this article, I focus on the organisation of plain language work in Denmark, and hopefully the results from my postdoctoral project will be published elsewhere.

latter groups consists of a number of agencies. For example, the term “educational institutions” covers a number of universities and departments within those universities, as well as other educational institutions. To provide a more thorough overview of how such organisations carry out – and have carried out – plain language work would require individual research, and is beyond the scope of the article.

I will argue that work on plain language in Denmark is not as limited as one might conclude from comparing the plain language work conducted by the Danish Language Council to that of the Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish language councils. To some extent at least, the differences are due to the way plain language work is organised in Denmark.

In Swedish and Norwegian, there is a well-established term for plain language: *klarspråk*, literally *clear language*. However, the corresponding term in Danish, *klarsprog*, is not in common use. It is included in only a couple of Danish dictionaries. Jervelund et al. (2012) define the term as “clear and unambiguous language”,² and Jarvad (www.nyeordidansk.dk) defines it as “expressing oneself straightforwardly without beating about the bush.” However, both of these dictionaries are edited by employees at the Danish Language Council, and the term is not very common outside the council.

Nevertheless, there is a strong effort in Denmark to make public authorities and private companies write texts that are “good,” “understandable,” “accessible,” “clear” and “accommodating”. This effort is often closely linked to a critique of the style of language used by public authorities. As pointed out by Jensen (1998), the critique focuses on two different “stylistic trends.” Firstly, the so-called “kancellistil” (literally “chancellery style”), which is inspired by Latin and German administrative traditions and characterised by long sentences with many subordinate clauses, long adverbials in front of the main clause and a vocabulary inspired by German (cf. Jensen 1998, 36). Secondly, the language that characterises different professional groups, for example psychologists, biologists, economists and architects. Traditionally, employees in Danish public administration have been legal professionals, but over the past few decades, members of other professional groups (such as psychologists, biologists, economists and architects) have become employed in public administration. The language codes of such professional groups have as their primary function to “describe and explain a diverse and concrete reality through generalisation, systematisation and categorisation. This takes place based on underlying professional and theoretical frameworks targeted at receivers of the same background as the sender of the text” (Jensen 1998, 61).

² Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own.

³ Chancelleries in Danish public administration were abolished in 1848.

In this article, I will refer to the striving towards “good,” “understandable,” “accessible,” “clear” and “accommodating” language and texts as a striving towards plain language. Thus I will assume that the *concept* of plain language is well-established in Denmark, even though there is no well-established *term* in Danish that refers to it.

1. Ministries and Agencies

In 1969, the Danish Ministry of Justice published a set of guidelines on the language of legislation and regulations (Vejledning om sproget i love og andre retsfor skrifter). The modern plain language initiative in Denmark began with these guidelines.⁴

The guidelines contain some general views on the language used by Danish public administration. For example, the guidelines begin with the statement that “[w]ith regard to the formulation of the language of legislative texts and regulations, one must keep in mind that everyone the text addresses should easily be able to read and understand it”. Alongside such general recommendations, specific wordings and formulations (for example particular phrases and the passive voice) are advised against, and others are recommended. The guidelines are thus more than a general declaration of intent, as they point out particularly problematic features and provide alternatives to these features. Furthermore, these guidelines reject the type of language that was traditionally praised as “the right way” of expressing oneself when writing on behalf of the state administration (the so-called *kancellistil*).

In 1975, the State Information Office (Statens Informationskontor) was established. According to the circular regarding the office, it was to “provide advice and promote exchange of experiences in connection with governmental authorities’ information business” (quoted from Hamburger 1988, 153). In 1978, the name of the office was changed to the State Information Service (Statens Informations-tjeneste), but the tasks undertaken were basically the same. The circular regarding this service says that it “operates as an adviser to the government authorities with regard to all kinds of information” (quoted from Hamburger 1988, 153).

In 1981, the State Information Service published the closest we have come to a Danish plain language bestseller, the booklet “No beating about the bush, please!” (“og uden omsvøb tak!”) (Statens Information 1991). The booklet was first published in 1981 in a style and layout that (at least from a contemporary perspective) is much more inviting than the 1969 guidelines. It was republished seven times, most recently in 1991. The intended audience was employees in the Danish state administration writing all kinds of texts to citizens (rather than just legislation and

⁴ For a historical overview from the time before 1969, see Hamburger (1988) and Jensen (1998, 28–44).

regulations, as was the case in 1969). The sections on words and sentences are inspired by the guidelines from 1969, but are much more detailed. Furthermore, there is a section on how to structure texts aimed at citizens. This means that “No beating about the bush, please!” covers more aspects of texts and the writing process than the 1969 guidelines.

In the Notes of Guidance to the Act on Public Administration (*Vejledning om forvaltningsloven*) from 1986, the section Drawing Up Notes (*Udformning af skrivelser*) is clearly inspired by parts of the 1969 guidelines, but is much shorter. Apart from the introductory sentence recommending that “everyone the text addresses should easily be able to read and understand it” (a verbatim repetition of the 1969 guidelines), it says that “[i]n addition to this it [the text] should be phrased in a kind and considerate manner and tone.” This addition is quite interesting, as it is explicitly concerned with the tone of the text and the relation that the text creates between sender and receiver. To all appearances, this addition dates back to 1971 when the ombudsman reminded the state administration about the 1969 guidelines. At that time, the ombudsman also added that texts from the state administration to citizens “are likely to be perceived as an expression of governmental attitudes towards complainants, applicants etc.; the text should therefore not only be easy to read and understand, but the linguistic form should also be kind or considerate” (quoted from Karker 1973, 67).

The State Information Service changed its name for the last time in 1991 to State Information (*Statens Information*), after which it became part of the National IT and Telecom Agency (*IT- og Telestyrelsen*). Responsibility for the follow-up and development of language in the public sector was then passed to this agency. The National IT and Telecom Agency held a number of seminars on efficient public communication, dealing with issues such as accessibility and language policies in public institutions. The agency also collected a number of language policies from various organisations, compiled advice and guidance for people working with digital communication, and made the materials accessible on the internet. The agency also established the competition Top of the Web (*Bedst på nettet*), in which the quality of public sector websites was evaluated annually.

The National IT and Telecom Agency was closed in 2011, and the initiatives undertaken by the agency were transferred to the Danish Agency for Digitalisation (*Digitaliseringsstyrelsen*) who chose to continue the Top of the Web competition until 2013. The competition was then abolished. According to the Agency, they chose to focus on usability and accessibility in the mandatory digital self-service solutions that are being continuously developed in Denmark (cf. www.digst.dk/Moedet-med-borgeren/Bedst-paa-Nettet).

The attempt to ensure usability and accessibility in mandatory digital self-service solutions is reflected in the guide Good Self-Service (*God selvbetjening*, accessible at <http://arkitekturguiden.digitaliser.dk/gods selvbetjening>). The guide

contains a number of requirements that should be met by mandatory digital self-service solutions, including a description of the requirements that the language should meet. The requirements are partly a repetition of the content of the 1969 guidelines. For example, writers are recommended to “use a simple and clear language” and to explain “all technical terms”. There are, however, also recommendations that are linked specifically to mandatory digital self-service solutions. For example, the solutions are required to “give meaningful feedback on errors,” in case a citizen types a piece of information in a field where this piece of information cannot be entered (<http://arkitekturguiden.digitaliser.dk/godselsvbetjening/kravbanken/Sprog>). Furthermore, text writers are recommended not to use “complicated legal language”. They are also recommended to “[e]xplain the law instead of quoting it and provide links to relevant information if there is a need for further elaboration” (<http://arkitekturguiden.digitaliser.dk/godselsvbetjening/kravbanken/Sprog>). The comments on how to handle legislation are interesting. They seem to indicate that the 1969 attempts to make legislative language easier to understand have not been successful enough to make it possible to actually quote directly from legislative texts.

Plain language has also played a role in the Ministry of Culture over recent years. The Ministry has published two reports about the status of the Danish language, “Language at stake” (“Sprog på spil”) in 2003 and “Language in time” (“Sprog til tiden”) in 2008. Both reports were written by committees appointed by the Ministry. The intended audience was politicians discussing issues relating to aspects of Danish language, and the reports also aimed to create a public debate about Danish and other languages in Denmark. Both reports included a chapter about language use in the public sector, and they both recommended a continuous effort to improve and monitor the quality of language use in the public sector.

Based on the account above, the story of how plain language has been handled in Danish public administration appears to show an issue that has been dealt with by an impressive number of different ministries and agencies, all characterised by frequent changes of names. One of the most interesting aspects of the story is, however, that plain language – and the related critique of language that is not plain (enough) – has actually played a role in Danish public administration over the last five decades. What is also interesting is how the scope of the task has changed. In the 1969 guidelines, the issue was plain language in legislation and regulations. From 1975, when the State Information Office was established, the scope of the task widened as the focus moved from legislation and regulations to all types of texts sent by the state to citizens. When State Information was closed in 1991, the scope of the task gradually became narrower again, and is currently a question of language use in digital mandatory self-service solutions. (Digital mandatory self-service solutions are indeed increasingly used in the contact between citizens and public institutions in Denmark, although they are certainly not the only channel in use).

2. The Danish Language Council

The Danish Language Council was established in 1955, and is a governmental research institution under the Danish Ministry of Culture. The council has three main functions:

- 1) to monitor the development of the Danish language by, for example, collecting new words;
- 2) to answer questions from public authorities and the general public about the Danish language and language use;
- 3) to investigate the accepted conventions regarding the orthography of the Danish language, and to edit and publish the official dictionary of Danish standard orthography (Retskrivningsordbogen).

Over the years, plain language has received some attention in the Danish Language Council. When drawing up the 1969 guidelines, the Ministry of Justice asked the council for assistance and the guidelines were written in cooperation with the council.

The council has also worked on a number of other plain language issues. In the mid-1970s, the Council made a linguistic revision of a draft for a simplified version of the Danish tax return and its accompanying instructions. This task was undertaken following a request from the State Information Office and the Danish Tax Authority (Statsskattedirektoratet).

In 1973, the Ministry of Housing (Boligministeriet) requested the council to make a linguistic revision of a number of rental contract drafts. An employee from the council returned 48 pages of detailed feedback. In their polite letter of thanks, the Ministry of Housing advised the council that they planned to send future drafts to them for review. The rather exhausted employee who had written the feedback (and who is by now long retired) has added in handwriting on the archived letter “and then we have to start all over again!” This comment suggests that the council did not have the resources to go through the immense number of document drafts from public authorities. Allan Karker, chairman of the Council from 1973-84, decided that the council should not undertake such large and time-consuming tasks, and left it up to employees to decide if they wished to carry out such tasks in their spare time (personal communication with Pia Jarvad, senior researcher at the Danish Language Council). After this decision was made, the council primarily answered specific questions, for example whether the Patient Insurance agency (Patientforsikringen) should use the formal address *De* (which is only rarely used in spoken Danish) or the informal form *du* in their rulings (question from 2008). The council has, however, also accepted larger projects, for example for the Audit Department (Rigsrevisionen) in 2013 and 2015. Out of consideration for the private firms offering advice on plain language (and bearing in mind the resources available at the council), the council restricts itself to larger

tasks that can contribute to the general advice or research carried out by the council. Employees are still free to undertake projects in their spare time.

The council also takes part in the organisation of the plain language conferences held every second year by the language councils of the Nordic countries. The first conference was held in Stockholm in 1998, and the next will be held in Copenhagen in 2017. All the conference reports are accessible at <http://ojs.statsbiblioteket.dk/index.php/ksn/issue/archive>.

Over recent years, the Council has supplemented its plain language work with an increased focus on research. My PhD thesis (Kjærgaard 2010) reports on two case studies investigating language campaigns in the Municipality of Copenhagen and in the Courts of Denmark, approaching them as organisational change projects. In my postdoctoral project, I tested whether traditional plain-language guidelines actually result in better understanding by readers. This project draws on data from the Danish Tax Authority, which has made an extensive effort to revise its letters to private citizens (Kjærgaard 2015).

3. Educational institutions

To the best of my knowledge, nobody has provided a general overview of the role plain language has played in educational institutions in Denmark – and such an overview would constitute a research project in its own right. In what follows, I present a couple of examples, taking into account both teaching and research conducted at educational institutions.

In 1971, Erik Hansen, professor of modern Danish at Copenhagen University (and chairman of the Danish Language Council 1985-2002), published the book “Ping- og Pampersprog” (the title translates literally into something like “Bigwig and Apparatchik Language”) in which he criticises the language of public authorities for being unclear. Since the 1970s, plain language has played a role in the teaching of students studying Danish at Copenhagen University. Currently students at the Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics (where students of Danish are enrolled) can take an MA degree in language and communication consulting (sprog- og kommunikationsrådgivning). Plain language is not a subject in its own right, but it is touched upon as part of the course Fact Writing and Speaking (Faglig formidling). The aim of this course is to teach students to adapt any text or other communication product to the relevant rhetorical situation and recipient. The goal is to create appropriate and efficient communication using the language, style, composition and genre which most effectively meet the objectives of the communication. The importance of using clear language is dealt with as part of the course (my correspondence with Gitte Gravengaard, associate professor at the Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics, Copenhagen University).

From the 1970s until the beginning of the 1990s, the Danish Language Council contributed to a course about how to write legislative texts (“lovteknik”) at the Danish School of Administration (Forvaltningshøjskolen). The Danish School of Administration trains managers and employees with administrative functions in the state administration, regions and municipalities. Accordingly, it was – and is – a teaching institution with significant impact on the training and education of administrative staff. The course was targeted at law graduates who (at least at the time when the course was offered) were not taught to write legislative texts as part of their Danish law degree (personal communication with Pia Jarvad, senior researcher at the Danish Language Council). The course lasted approximately a week and the Danish Language Council was in charge of the part of the course dealing with the style and language that should be used in legislative texts. The Danish Language Council contributed to the course until 1993, when the course was discontinued.

At the Faculty of Law, Copenhagen University, students at MA level currently have the option of following a course in Legal Communication and Rhetoric (Juridisk kommunikation og retorik). According to the course description “[t]he course provides a basic understanding of legal text genres and the legal language characteristics and teaches you a critical approach to the traditional legal writing style” (<http://kurser.ku.dk/course/jjua55026u/2015-2016>). The course is not mandatory, but at least students are being offered an introduction to a critique of traditional legal language use.

As regards research carried out at educational institutions, Kjøller (in press) correctly draws attention to the fact that work on plain language has traditionally been done by linguists from university departments (typically Danish language departments) which had a strong focus on syntax in both teaching and research. In the sense that most plain language work in Denmark is strongly linked to the tradition of syntactic analysis, plain language work in Denmark is based on research. The focus on syntax is, for example, reflected in the recurrent focus on the use of the passive voice as a potentially problematic linguistic feature. In line with this, one of the classic critiques of traditional plain language guidelines (Løj/Wille 1985) argues that advice to avoid the passive voice is highly problematic.

The reach of plain language work was extended dramatically with Jensen (1990, second edition 1998), who emphasises that work on plain language cannot be solely viewed as a stylistic and linguistic problem characterising particular texts. Unclear texts should rather be regarded a symptom of an institutional context that somehow encourages – or at least allows – employees to write in ways that are not appropriate if lay recipients are expected to understand the texts emanating from the particular institution. This perspective is also taken up by Kjøller (1997), Kjærgaard (2010) and Pedersen (2014).

Another line of research that has received some attention is empirical testing of whether texts written in accordance with the traditional guidelines for plain language are actually easier to understand. Wille called for this kind of research as early as 2001. The question is touched upon in Pedersen (2004) and has also been addressed by Danish researchers quite recently: Balling (2013) and Inge-mann/Juul (in press) both test whether traditional plain language guidelines make texts easier to understand for actual readers. I have also pursued this topic in my own research, which I conducted at the Danish Language Council (see Kjærgaard 2015).

The examples of research addressing plain language mentioned above are far from an exhaustive overview of plain language research in Denmark. More research has been done, although the amount of research is not exactly overwhelming. However, works published within the last couple of years suggest that the interest in plain language is increasing within the Danish research community.

4. Private companies offering consultancy services

It has been beyond the scope of this article to present an overview of existing private companies offering consultancy services for plain language – not to mention the developments within this field over recent decades. However, as the implementation of plain language in organisations is carried out primarily by private consultants (and not by the Danish Language Council), it would be extremely interesting to subject this area to a closer analysis. Such an analysis could take a quantitative approach by focusing on the number of firms offering consultancy services, the number of employees in the firms, and the amount of time they spend on plain language work as compared with other tasks. The analysis could also take a more qualitative approach and focus on questions such as what different companies consider plain language to be, and how they attempt to implement plain language in organisations. Do they, for example, revise individual texts, or do they plan and carry out language campaigns involving larger parts of the organisation?

5. Organisations implementing plain language

This group of agencies includes at least two subgroups: public institutions and private companies who implement plain language, whether by hiring external consultancy firms or by having employees who are concerned with plain language. Recent research has provided a qualitative analysis of language campaigns carried out in two Danish public institutions, the Courts of Denmark and the Municipality of Copenhagen (Kjærgaard 2010). The focus in Kjærgaard 2010 is on the effects of the language campaigns, both on the texts that were written in

the organisations as well as on the attitudes towards the campaigns among the employees. The text analyses in Kjærgaard (2010) show that the texts written in the two institutions did not change significantly as a result of the language campaign. The results also show that both language campaigns – despite their good intentions – were subject to very strong organisational resistance from some employees. Such individual case studies of public institutions do not do justice to the complexity of the field. For example, the conditions surrounding language campaigns in private organisations are largely unknown. A more quantitative overview of the field could also be useful. For example, it could be interesting to find out how pervasive the striving for plain language is in public institutions and private companies. Is plain language aimed for by most institutions and companies communicating with private citizens, or does the striving towards plain language pertain to particular kinds of institutions and private companies?

6. Non-governmental organisations

Another – at least potentially important – agency in the plain language field is non-governmental organisations. For example, the Danish Consumer Council (Forbrugerrådet Tænk) is an independent organisation responsible for consumers' interests in Denmark. In 2015, they initiated a campaign advocating clearer and more comprehensible language in loan agreements from banks. It has been beyond the scope of this article to explore the extent to which non-governmental organisations promote plain language in Denmark. It is therefore impossible to estimate the significance of such organisations. I am not aware of similar initiatives from other NGOs, but possibly a closer analysis of the field would reveal more NGOs focusing on plain language.

7. Conclusions and implications

The aim of this article has been to map the Danish plain language environment by identifying the main players in the field. In this article, I have demonstrated that particular ministries and agencies, the Danish Language Council, educational institutions, private consultancy firms, organisations implementing plain language and – possibly – NGOs all contribute to the Danish plain language environment. Due to the size of the task, I have not been able to provide a thorough overview of the ways in which educational institutions, private consultancy firms, organisations implementing plain language and NGOs contribute to plain language work in Denmark. Such an overview would constitute one or more separate research projects and accordingly it has been beyond the scope of this article.

The point of departure for this article was the plain language work done in Denmark compared to some of our closest neighbours, that is Sweden, Norway and Finland. In comparison with these countries, the plain language environment

in Denmark appears rather lacking in scope. In this article, I have argued that the seemingly smaller and less active plain language environment is due to the fact that plain language work in Denmark is organised in a different way to that in some of our neighbouring countries. The Danish Language Council does not play as active a role when it comes to plain language work in practice as the language councils in Sweden, Norway and Finland. However, much work on plain language is conducted by private consultancy companies and by employees in organisations working with plain language. Unfortunately, this organisation of the plain language effort makes it very difficult to give an overview of the field. For example, it is unclear how many consultancy firms are working with plain language, and it is also unclear how common it is for public institutions and private firms to have employees that are in charge of plain language. This, however, does not change the fact that the Danish plain language environment is richer and more extensive than one could be tempted to conclude by only taking into account the activities undertaken by the Danish Language Council.

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Margrethe Kvarenes

Clear language in Norway's civil service: a joint initiative under changing political winds

Abstract

In this article I am going to take you through the major aspects of administrative language in Norway, as viewed by the Language Council of Norway. I will focus on “clear language” issues and describe what we mean by “plain language”, how a government-supported clear language project put wind in our sails, and how we adjusted the sails when the wind changed. I will also describe the success factors of the project, the lessons learned and the work ahead.

Abstract in Norwegian

Bokmål: I denne artikkelen vil jeg ta for meg de viktigste aspektene ved det offentlige språket i Norge, sett fra Språkrådets ståsted. Jeg vil fokusere på klarspråk og fortelle hva Språkrådet legger i begrepet, hvordan et klarspråksprosjekt støttet av én regjering ga oss vind i seilene, og hvordan vi justerte seilføringen etter skiftende politiske forhold. Jeg vil også gjennomgå prosjektets suksessfaktorer og hvilken lærdom vi tar med oss videre.

Nynorsk: I denne artikkelen vil eg ta føre meg dei viktigaste aspekta ved det offentlege språket, slik Språkrådet ser dei. Eg vil fokusere på klarspråk og fortelje kva Språkrådet legg i begrepet, korleis eit klarspråksprosjekt støtta av éi regjering ga oss vind i segla, og korleis vi justerte seglføringa etter skiftande politiske forhold. Eg vil óg gjennomgå suksessfaktorane i prosjektet og kva for lærdom vi tek med oss vidare.

The Language Council of Norway is the Norwegian state's consultative body on language issues. It implements Norway's language policy on behalf of the Ministry of Culture, and its overall mission is to strengthen the Norwegian language and language diversity in Norway.

We cooperate with public and private players on language policy measures, including the use of clear language in public administration, business and industry. We also monitor the use by government agencies of the two official Norwegian language varieties, *bokmål* and *nynorsk*. Our specific tasks include the administration of the correct spelling of our two language varieties; the promotion of the Norwegian language in specific fields such as language technology and terminology; and the promotion of Norwegian sign language and the national minority languages Kven, Romani and Romanes.

1. Our language situation at a glance

Norway has a huge variety of spoken dialects, but only two official written languages: Norwegian and Sami. The Norwegian language exists in two official written varieties, the *bokmål* (“book language”), which is influenced by the Danish language and is currently the preferred written standard of 86% of the population,¹ and the *nynorsk* (“new Norwegian”), which is based on the Norwegian dialects and is the preferred variety of 8% of the population. 5% report that they use both varieties to an equal extent.²

As for Sami, there are three main Sami languages in use in Norway today, namely Northern Sami, Southern Sami and Lule Sami. Sami is the official language in 9 municipalities in Norway, and within a certain geographic-administrative area Norwegian and Sami have equal status. Within this area, any person has the right to use and receive an answer in Sami when communicating with the authorities.

2. The use of Bokmål and Nynorsk in the public sector

2.1 In theory ...

By law, the citizens of Norway have the right to choose the language variety they prefer, and to receive information from the authorities in their preferred variety.

The central authorities should reply to any citizen in his or her preferred language variety and ensure that their overall text production does not drop below 25% in either of the two varieties. All official forms should be available in both language varieties.

Each local municipality, on the other hand, makes an official choice whether to use bokmål, nynorsk or to be neutral. Accordingly, certain rights arise for citizens in the respective communities, entailing certain duties for the local administration.

2.2 ... and in practice ...

Although the minority variety nynorsk is protected by law and its use is monitored, few of the government agencies meet the legal requirement. In practice this means that far less than 25% of their texts are written in nynorsk. This is probably due to the fact that too few civil servants master nynorsk sufficiently: 90% of civil servants (in central authorities) prefer to use bokmål at work, whereas only 5% prefer nynorsk, and 5% report that their preference varies.³

¹ The Language Council’s survey on the population’s use of *bokmål* and *nynorsk*, 2015

² The Language Council’s survey on the population’s use of *bokmål* and *nynorsk*, 2015.

³ The Language Council’s survey on the central government’s use of *bokmål* and *nynorsk*, 2015.

3. Plain language work in the public sector

The Language Council has some ten years of experience in the field of clearer administrative language. This field is referred to internationally as “plain language” work. This term refers to the language itself (or its style), and implies a specific type of language to be used in a particular text; whereas we prefer to use the term “clear language”. This contextualises the written words and tells us something about whether a particular text is clear to its *intended audience*.

There are several local, regional and international ways to define clear or plain language. The International Plain Language Federation posts this definition on their website (2015):

A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information. (www.iplfederation.org)

As you can see, this definition refers to “plain language” or “clear language” not as a style, but as an approach to writing which puts the reader first.

4. What is the problem with written administrative communications in Norway today?

During the union with Denmark (1524-1814), the Danish king's chancery set the style for written communication in Norway. In fact, Norwegian administrative language – although it is perfectly correct Norwegian – is still influenced by the language of the Danish court. This style, which we call *chancery style* (Norw.: kansellistil), contains many elements of administrative jargon and legalese.

I should stress that this is mainly a problem for *bokmål*, since *nynorsk* is based on dialects and thus its wording and syntax is, by its very nature, closer to how people actually speak.

Although the *chancery style* still has a standing among bureaucrats, its defenders are diminishing in number. The public in general find this style alienating. Our work in the field of clear language involves making civil servants aware of the fact that their language culture – this style – which seems a good and precise tool for them in their work, creates unnecessary distance between writer and reader and causes misunderstandings. As a result, citizens may fail to understand their duties and rights and be unable to participate fully in society. This is both a democratic problem and an economic problem, as unclear communication is inefficient and expensive.

As already stated, the central authorities are required to reply to any citizen in his or her preferred language variety; make sure that all forms are available in both language varieties; and ensure that their overall text production does not drop below 25% in either of the two varieties. Another problem with authorities' written communication is that although they are bound by these legal requirements, many state agencies fail to fulfil the law. Thirdly, writing skills seem to be eroding.

5. A brief history of clear language work in Norway

Norway has experienced several clear language initiatives from the 1950s onwards. Each decade has seen a degree of interest from politicians in improving and clarifying the language used in the public sector. In recent years, a red-green coalition government in 2005 set clear ideals for the public sector: it should be built on openness and the ability for citizens to participate and get involved. In 2006, the Ministry of Culture established a permanent team of five people within the Language Council of Norway whose goal was to work towards the increased use of nynorsk in the state agencies and to promote better and clearer administrative language regardless of language variety.

6. Where are we today?

Compared to what Sweden and Finland have achieved in terms of well-structured clear language work and research, Norway might not be the Nirvana of clear language (this unofficial title is held by Sweden). But we have learned a lot from our Nordic neighbours along the way, and also from the international clear language community.

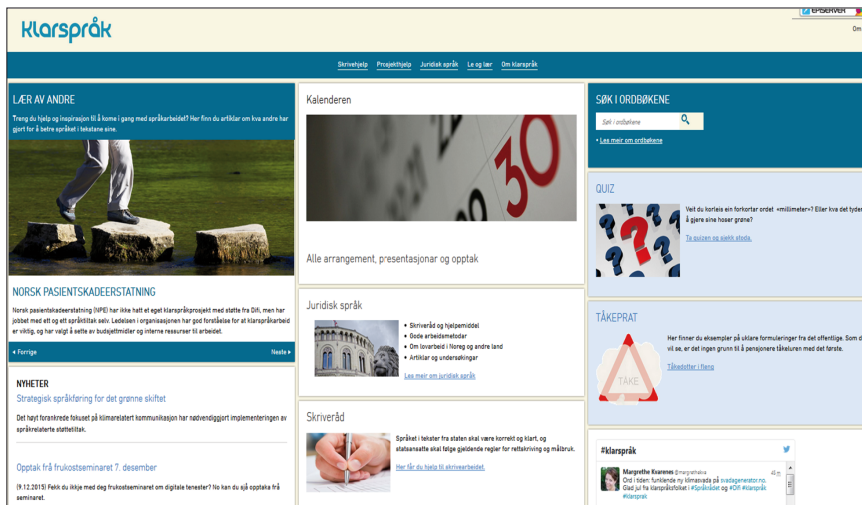


Fig. 1: The website www.klarsprak.no with the pool of knowledge (“Lær av andre”), writing tools (“Skrivehjelp”), project tools (“Prosjekthjelp”), news (“Nyheter”), events (“Kalender”), quizzes and gobbledygook generators (“Le og lær”) and special advice on legal language (“Juridisk språk”)

Today we have a well-structured work programme which rests on several pillars:

- the website www.klarsprak.no, which is a toolbox for both writers and project managers,
- free language support and guidance for clear language start-up projects,
- a separate project and toolbox for clear language in legal texts,
- a pool of knowledge on www.klarsprak.no, with free project descriptions, plans and model documents for downloading,
- clear language awards.

7. Political backing

Since 2008/2009, the “Plain language in Norway’s Civil Service” project, which developed the website and the other main pillars, has been funded by central government. It has been affected by political developments over the past 8-10 years.

Norway has a multi-party system, with numerous parties which must co-operate to form coalition governments or minority cabinets. To take a step back, in 2005 the Norwegian Labour Party formed a red-green coalition government with the Socialist Left Party and the Centre Party. The post of Minister for Government Administration and Reform was handed to Mrs Heidi Grande Røis of the Socialist Left Party. She was particularly involved in empowering and involving the public, and stated that “unclear official communication should be the authorities’ problem, not the citizens’”. The Ministry acted on this by asking its brand new Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi) to plan a two year programme for plain language in the civil service, and asked the Language Council of Norway to become involved.

8. A good formula

The co-operation of the two agencies proved to be a good formula. The Language Council offered its language skills and staff who were experienced in promoting and teaching clear language. The Agency for Public Management and eGovernment offered project management skills, a solid knowledge of the public sector, a broad network and experience in organising events. Only with the combined skills and efforts of these two agencies have we been able to reach such a broad audience and create high quality language and communication tools.

9. “Plain language in Norway’s civil service” – main approaches

The programme’s overall *raison d’être* was to facilitate the public’s participation in matters that concern them, in the interest of democracy, transparency and equal opportunities.

The programme was based on the following main approaches:

- gather knowledge,
- share good news and good practice,
- guide and advise,
- develop tools,
- more carrot, less stick.

With a yearly budget of € 500.000, plus the manpower of some 3-4 people, we were able to offer

- local project grants,
- free training courses, seminars and conferences,
- free advice on how to start and run clear language projects,
- seminars (both start-up and advanced),
- conferences,
- free language advice,
- the online toolbox www.klarsprak.no,
- The Clear Language Award.

All grant recipients had to consent to freely sharing their experiences and documents, which has provided useful content for the pool of knowledge (“Lær av andre” – Learn from others) on the website www.klarsprak.no.

10. General Elections 2009: A small change required lobbying

After the General Elections in 2009, the red-green coalition remained, but the Socialist Left Party lost the Ministry of Government Administration and Reform to the Labour party. The new Minister at first was not too aware of the clear language programme, but she changed her tune when she was faced with surveys showing that 1/3 of the population had difficulties understanding authorities’ letters, and detailing the savings potential of clearer administrative language.

The Minister got on board and even had her own stamp made, “Needs clear language”, which she used to stamp documents from her own department that she thought needed clearer language and better drafting. She extended our original two-year project until the end of 2013, and established a sub-project for better language in laws and regulations.

Politically supported programmes like ours are of course vulnerable to changes in the political landscape. As the General Elections of 2013 seemed likely to bring a change in government, preparations were made in advance. In 2012 Dr. Neil James, director of the Plain English Foundation in Australia, was invited to speak at a major clear language conference in Oslo, and also to meet with politicians and civil servants in the Ministry of Government Administration and Reform, to talk about how a major Australian clear language programme had fallen flat in 1996

because of a change in government⁴. Thus, when the political winds actually changed after the national elections in 2013, the project group was prepared to meet the challenges, and could adjust the sails accordingly. The election ended with a victory for the right wing of Norwegian politics, and a Right Wing coalition government was formed by the Conservative Party and the Progress Party. Now, how would the original red-green project, which had been based on transparency, dialogue and citizens' rights to participate, be viewed by the succeeding right wing government, which would focus on efficiency in the public sector and cutting administrative costs? Well, a comprehensive evaluation of the clear language project helped to convince the new Minister, Mr Jan Tore Sanner. The evaluation report demonstrated the work of the project with more than 60 government agencies, resulting in increased awareness and more knowledge about clear language, good results when projects are well rooted, and time and money saved.⁵ Here are some figures:

- 5,300 bureaucrats had attended clear language training courses;
- 85% of the agencies involved had made clear writing a permanent part of their skill development programmes;
- 50% of the involved agencies had or would introduce clear writing in their training programmes for new employees;
- 40% of the agencies involved had established a language service or systems for language quality control;
- 75% of the agencies had included clear language as an explicit goal in their strategies;
- 50% of the agencies had involved earmarked resources for clear language measures.

Lack of resources (time and money) was reported to be the most important obstacle, and it was seen as crucial to establish routines and good methods. The report further stressed that middle managers find it difficult to give priority to clear language in their daily work, and explained this by “the challenges that the middle managers [face in the] in operations of their departments without any dedicated resources and without the enthusiasm and attention that distinguished the project phase. Without a doubt, middle manager's ownership of clear language goals will be crucial to the success of the ongoing efforts”.

⁴ The publication “Språknytt” no 1/2013: www.sprakradet.no/Vi-og-vart/Publikasjoner/Spraaknytt/Arkivet/spraknytt-2012/Spraknytt-12012/Klart-sprak-i-heile-verda1/.

⁵ www.sprakradet.no/globalassets/klarsprak/kunnskap-om-klarsprak/evaluering-av-effektene-av-prosjektet-klart-sprak-i-staten-2013-2.docx.pdf.

11. New goals, same tools

The new government put forward eight priorities in its major programme, two of which are to make people's everyday life easier and to work towards a more efficient administration. The Minister has set out to “renew, simplify and improve” the public sector (Norw: “fornye, forenkle, forbedre”), and the clear language programme was swiftly presented to him as a natural, established tool to achieve this goal.

12. The road ahead

To meet the need for basic training, we are launching an online clear writing course in May 2016, together with the Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi). In line with the findings of the evaluation report, the course includes a module for middle management, addressing the questions “why?” and “how?” in order to get them on board, and provide them with tools.



Fig. 2: The online clear writing course's main structure: Who is your audience? / What is the text's purpose? / Create a good structure / Choose the appropriate words / Module for middle management

To raise clear language awareness and also provide tools for local administration (the municipalities), the Ministry of Local Government and Administration recently launched a five-year clear language programme for local administration. This programme has followed the model of the project *Clear Language in Norway's Civil Service*, where the main lesson learned is that we cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails.

Jutta Ransmayr

Monolingual country? Multilingual society. Aspects of language use in public administration in Austria

Abstract

Austria's federal constitutional law states that German is the official language of the Republic of Austria. But how does Austria meet the linguistic needs and rights of its non-German-speaking or multilingual citizens? What is the status of indigenous ethnic minority groups in Austria regarding language use in the various areas of public administration?

This national report will set out these and other aspects of language use and language policy in Austria.

1. Language(s) in Austria

One might assume that Austria is predominantly German-speaking and therefore considered to be a monolingual country. However, a glance at the last census from 2001 proves differently and shows that languages other than German are being used in everyday communication.

Austria's official language is German, as stated in article 8 of Austria's Federal Constitutional Law.¹ Article 8, paragraph (1) of the federal constitutional law specifies the German language as the official language of the Austrian republic – additionally, in paragraphs (2) and (3), the languages of minority ethnic groups are officially recognised and given particular attention.² In addition, in an amendment added in 2005 Österreichische Gebärdensprache (Austrian sign language) was recognised as an official language.

Art. 8

- (1) German is the official language of the Republic without prejudice to the rights provided by Federal law for linguistic minorities.
- (2) The Republic of Austria (the Federation, Länder and municipalities) is committed to its linguistic and cultural diversity which has evolved in the course of time and finds its expression in the autochthonous ethnic groups. The language and culture, continued existence and protection of these ethnic groups shall be respected, safeguarded and promoted.

¹ Bundesverfassungsgesetz B-VG-BGBl. Nr. 1/1930, as last amended by BGBl. I Nr. 81/2005.

² Amendments BGBl. I Nr. 68/2000 and Nr. 81/2005.

- (3) The Austrian Sign Language (Österreichische Gebärdensprache, ÖGS) is a language in its own right, recognized in law. For details, see the relevant legal provisions.

Apart from these three major linguistic provisions, there are no further regulations stated in the constitution regarding Austria's official or national languages or the subject of language rights (BMUKK/BMWF/ÖSZ 2008a: 22). In the last census of 2001, 88.6% of the resident population stated that they use only German as an everyday language, 8.6% stated that they use German and another language, and only 2.8% said that they used a language other than German as their everyday language.

As shown below in table 1, the indigenous minority groups totalled 1.5%; about 4.3% of the resident population mentioned the languages of the former Yugoslavia (Bosnian, Croatian, Macedonian, Serbian); and about 2.3% mentioned Turkish and Kurdish. All in all, more than 60 different languages were counted³. If we interpret these linguistic statistics, we observe that Austria is a multilingual country, despite the dominant role of the German language (de Cillia 2012: 171).

However if only Austrian citizens are taken into account, the overall picture changes drastically to an even more dominant position for the German language. 95.5% are German speakers, while the number of speakers of other languages is below 4% and speakers of all the indigenous minority languages only amount to 1.1% (de Cillia 2012).

Everyday language	Resident population	Austrian citizens
	total: 8.032.926	total: 7.322.000
German	7.115.780 88,58%	6.991.388 95,48%
Languages of the Austrian autochthonous ethnic groups	119.667 1,49%	82.522 1,13%
Austrian sign language	approx. 10.000	
Languages of the former Yugoslav states	348.629 4,34%	41.944 0,57%
Turkish, Kurdish	185.578 2,31%	61.167 0,84%
World languages	79.514 0,99%	43.469 0,59%

Table 1: Resident population – everyday language – nationality (2001)

³ Statistik Austria (2002).

Within Austria's resident population, the actual number of speakers of languages other than German is relatively small, as figure 1 illustrates. Nevertheless, a number of legal provisions have been made to ensure and protect the linguistic rights of certain minorities.

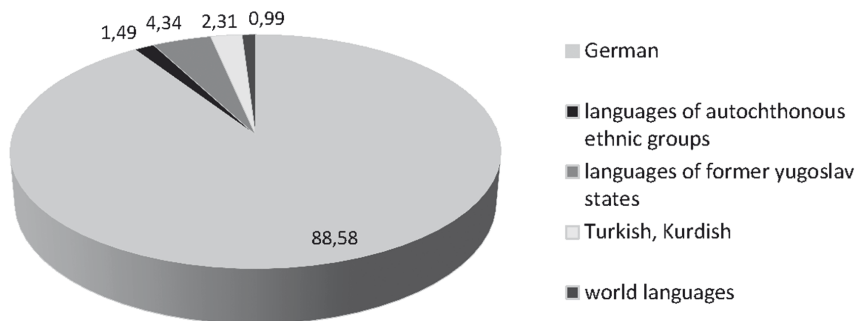


Fig. 1: Languages of resident population 2001 in %

2. Status and support of regional and minority languages

The basis for the protection of linguistic minorities in Austria dates back to the Austrian monarchy, which aimed to provide a legal framework to look after the rights of minorities (Haarmann 1993:110).

Today, apart from the German-speaking majority in Austria, there are six officially recognised indigenous minorities, as well as migrational minorities who have come to Austria for work reasons over the last 40 years. Additionally, there are approximately 10,000 deaf people in Austria using Austrian sign language as their mother tongue. The six recognised indigenous minority groups are the Croatian ethnic group in Burgenland; the Slovenian group(s) in Carinthia and Styria; the Hungarian group in Burgenland and Vienna; the Czech group in Vienna; the Slovakian group in Vienna; and the Roma ethnic minority group in Burgenland (BMUKK/BMWF/ÖSZ 2008a: 23). Table 2 shows the numbers of speakers amongst Austria's resident population and Austrian citizens respectively:

Everyday language	Resident population	Austrian citizens
Hungarian	40.583	25.884
Slovene	24.855	17.953
Burgenland-Kroatisch	19.412	19.374
Czech	17.742	11.035
Slovakian	10.234	3.343
„Romanès“	6.273	4.348
„Windisch“	568	567
Austrian Sign Language	6.273	no numbers

Table 2: Languages of the Austrian autochthonous ethnic groups⁴

Whereas Slovene, Hungarian, Czech and Slovak are languages of Austria's neighbours, Burgenland Croatian is the language spoken by the descendants of the Croats who emigrated to Burgenland in the 16th century, and is different in certain respects from the variety spoken in Croatia. It should be noted that according to the 2001 census younger members of these groups increasingly tend to assimilate into the majority population, giving up their distinctive linguistic and cultural identity (BMUKK/BMWF/ÖSZ 2008b).

Apart from the legal provisions in the constitutional law mentioned earlier, there are other essential legal documents concerned with the status and protection of ethnic minority groups as defined by law. These are Article 7 of Austria's state treaty⁵ (Vienna 1955) and the *Volksgruppengesetz* (1976)⁶.

Article 7 of Austria's state treaty explicitly refers to the Slovenian minority ethnic group in Carinthia and Styria, and the Croatian minority in Burgenland. It lays down their right to primary school education in their respective mother tongues, and to a number of secondary schools commensurate with their numbers. The *Volksgruppengesetz* of 1976 stipulates, among other things, the establishment of *Volksgruppenbeiräte* (advisory councils for ethnic minority issues), which resulted in the official recognition of several more minority ethnic groups later on (BMUKK/BMWF/ÖSZ 2008: 23).

⁴ Statistik Austria (2002).

⁵ <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10000265>.

⁶ https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblPdf/1976_396_0/1976_396_0.pdf.

As stated in Austria's federal constitutional law, German is the language of teaching and education in Austria's schools⁷, unless there are differing legal provisions for schools for linguistic minorities. These exceptions mostly concern schools of the Slovene, Croatian and Hungarian minorities in Carinthia, Burgenland and Styria (de Cillia/ Wodak 2006: 31).

Language laws for Carinthia (1959) and Burgenland (1994) provide regulations for Slovene, Burgenlandkroatisch and Hungarian. There is a substantial number of bilingual classes at primary school level, whereas the opportunities at secondary schools can still be considered unsatisfactory; there are more bilingual facilities at some academic secondary schools and at upper secondary level (Klagenfurt/ Celovec and Oberwart/ /Felsőőr/Borta). Some language regulations concerning education for minorities in Burgenland date back as far as the 1930s. For the Czech and Slovakian groups, the *Komensky-Schule* in Vienna, a private school, provides schooling opportunities (BMUKK/BMWF/ÖSZ 2008: 24).

There are differences within Austria from federal state to federal state and between different languages as well, outlined in the language education policy profile. (2008b: 38): The organisation of kindergartens, which in Austria are not within the purview of the federal government but are the responsibility of the Bundesländer, varies within the regions. In Burgenland "kindergarten law" regulates bilingual care and education at kindergarten level and sets a minimum time-frame for children to receive care in the language of their own ethnic group. In Carinthia, however, a *Kindergartenfondsgesetz* lays down guidelines for language teaching for the managing bodies that run bilingual or multilingual kindergartens. At the compulsory schooling stage, children are registered automatically for bilingual tuition in Burgenland, but their participation may be cancelled by their parents. This is provided for through a law which regulates schooling at primary and secondary schools as well as teacher training, the "Minderheitenschulgesetz" (the minority school law), which applies to both the Hungarian and the Croatian minorities in Burgenland (Fischer 2003). In Carinthia, on the other hand, all children have a right to bilingual schooling but their parents must take the initiative in registering them. The number of primary schools that provide bilingual education, the number of children in bilingual classes, the percentage of children from ethnic minorities in bilingual classes, and the supply of secondary schools are all evidence that in both federal states provision works well for Croatian and Slovene. In Carinthia, language regulations and laws for schools have been causing conflicts since 1945. Nevertheless, there is wide acceptance of bilingual schooling in Carinthia with two thirds of pupils coming from German-speaking families, despite the problematic status of minorities.

⁷ §16 Abs. 1 SchUG.

The Croatian Centre for Culture and Documentation in Eisenstadt has produced language courses not only for Croatian but also for Hungarian and Romani. Some vocational schools close to the border with the Czech Republic and Slovakia offer courses in Czech and Slovak respectively. As regards Romani, a project was launched in 1993 to codify Burgenland Romani and to develop teaching materials. Romani is taught in schools on a voluntary basis, and not all Roma pupils attend Romani lessons since parents sometimes consider English and German to be more important than Romani.

3. Status of other languages

Among the non-German-speaking resident population, immigrant minorities play an important part in Austria's linguistic landscape. They are strongly represented in Austria's schools. The percentage of speakers of languages from the former Yugoslavia has doubled since the 1991 census and the percentage of Turkish speakers has increased by 50 percent (de Cillia 2006: 22). Figure 2 below shows the most common first languages of residents whose first language is not German:⁸

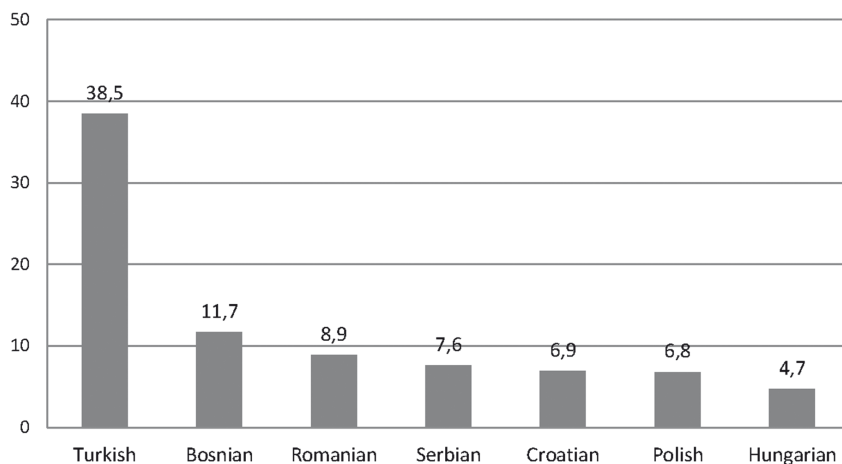


Fig. 2: Most common first languages if German is second language (%)

3.1 Dealing with multilingualism at schools

The percentage of students with first languages other than German is strikingly higher at primary schools and at general secondary schools, compared to academic secondary schools. Vienna has the highest percentage of school students whose first language is not German. This is illustrated in figure 3:

⁸ Statistik Austria (2002).

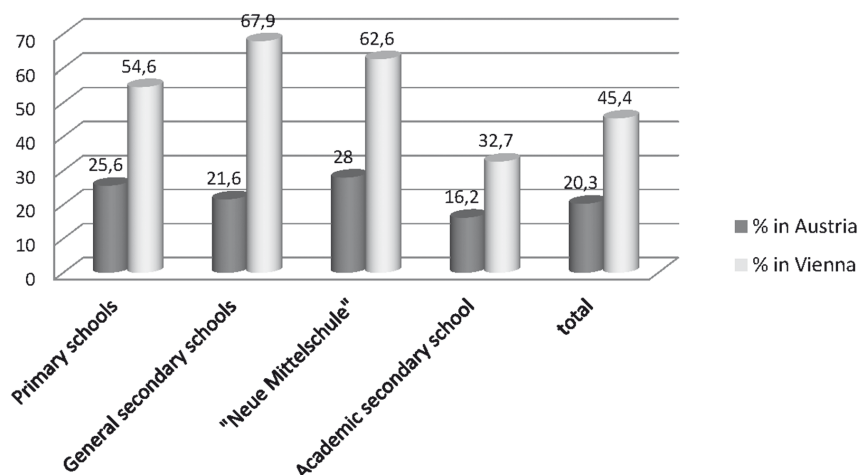


Fig. 3: School students with other first languages than German (%)

The situation at Austrian schools can therefore be characterised as one of multilingualism. In terms of numbers, school students at Austrian schools who are not part of an indigenous minority far outnumber the pupils who come from one of the recognised minority groups. To provide for the (linguistic) needs of these school students, there is mother tongue teaching in migrants' languages at Austrian schools. Pupils whose mother tongue is not German may attend „Muttersprachlicher Unterricht“, which aims at broadening and strengthening those children's mother tongues. In the academic year 2005/06, approximately 26,000 pupils attended „Muttersprachlicher Unterricht“. In 2007/08, 19 different languages were taught by 316 native speaker teachers. Among the languages taught were Albanian, Arabic, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (BKS), Bulgarian, Chechen, Chinese, Hungarian, Italian, Macedonian, Persian, Polish, Romani, Romanian, Russian, Slovakian, Spanish and Turkish (de Cillia 2010: 10).

3.2 Other laws and regulations concerning other languages than German

On the subject of language rights, there are scarcely any other regulations or legal provisions, apart from the ones mentioned in sections 1 and 2. There is no general regulation in consumer law making it mandatory to use the German language for product descriptions or warnings (except for children's toys). Moreover, there are no quota regulations in Austria's media law (e.g. to provide for a certain percentage of Austrian productions on TV or radio) which would amount to indirect support of the German language (BMUKK/BMWF/ÖSZ 2008: 22). Austria's pub-

lic broadcasting company (ORF) broadcasts about 5 hours of radio programmes per week, and 30 minutes of television programmes per week are broadcast in the official minority languages.⁹

As for other situations in everyday life, such as communication with authorities, there are some authorities (e.g. school boards, social and health security services, revenue offices) which offer forms and information brochures in foreign languages, including the two main migrant languages (Turkish and BKS). Apart from this, there are no laws or regulations guaranteeing further language rights (e.g. for administrative bodies and authorities) or translation services (e.g. at hospitals). There is one notable project „video interpretation for non-German speaking patients“ at Vienna hospitals, which has been successfully implemented.

3.3 Integration agreement

Special regulations concerning the official language (German) were laid down in the last decade (1998 and 2005, respectively), involving knowledge of the German language and citizenship. In amendments to legal provisions regarding nationality and citizenship in 1998, knowledge of German was stipulated for the first time for persons applying for Austrian nationality. Because of the so-called “Integrationsvereinbarung” (integration agreement), applicants need to prove German language skills corresponding with their circumstances, plus (since 1998) basic knowledge of Austria’s democratic structures and history and (since 2006) to pass an exam (level A2) in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). For third-country nationals, attendance at an „integration course“ in German language was made mandatory in 2003 and a level of A1 needed to be demonstrated; this was raised to A2 in 2006. Before moving to Austria, language knowledge at levels A1 and A2 is required for temporary residence; B1 has been necessary for permanent residence since 2011.¹⁰

The integration agreement and its amendments were severely criticised by experts and committees in Austria, as the necessary language course provisions were not adequately available. Furthermore, the costs were not fully covered by the state, making it hard for applicants to meet the necessary requirements on economic grounds. In addition, from an educational viewpoint, the linking of learning to punishment (losing one’s residence permit) is seen as highly counter-productive and a major barrier to successful learning (Krumm 2002: 39).

⁹ <http://volksgruppen.orf.at/>.

¹⁰ <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20004468>.

4. Austria's treaty of accession to the EU (1995)

Austria became part of the European Union in 1995 after a referendum held in 1994. Prior to Austria's European Union accession, language and Austrian identity were the subject of highly emotional public and media debates. Fears among the Austrian population of a loss of Austria's linguistic identity, which underpinned these debates, led to the development of an additional document, Protocol no. 10, which is part of Austria's accession treaty. This protocol, on the use of specifically Austrian expressions in the German language within the framework of the European Union, lists 23 "typically Austrian expressions" for foods (e.g. *Marille*, *Erdäpfel*, *Topfen*) which must be included in an appropriate way in German language legislation within the EU (i.e. *Hackfleisch/Faschiertes*). Of course, this was mainly a way of managing the insecurity and doubt among Austria's population concerning EU membership prior to the referendum held on 12 June 1994 (de Cillia/Wodak 2002: 21). Despite the small number of „typically Austrian terms“ listed in this document (which has more symbolic value than anything else) Protocol no. 10 still has some linguistic significance as it officially emphasises that Austrian Standard German is a variety of German in its own right. It is therefore unique in the European Union as such, as no other EU member state has a similar linguistic contract document.

5. Conclusion

This report has tried to provide a brief overview of some of the most important aspects of language use in public administration in Austria, discussing the existing legal framework and the language situation of linguistic minorities in Austria. Summing up, it can be stated that Austria – in fact a multilingual country – has successfully developed a language policy for schools and for education aimed at doing Austria's plurilingualism justice. There is, however, still room for finding more profound and beneficial (rather than restrictive) ways of dealing with languages other than the official languages which are in use in Austria in everyday life and in particular in Austria's education system, especially as there are further challenges to be met in view of the current refugee crisis in Europe.

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Language use in public administration in Ireland – public service, private choice

Abstract

Pléann an páipéar seo staid reachtúil agus bhunreachtúil na Gaeilge in Éirinn, thuaidh agus theas agus cíorann sé fíorleibhéil úsáide na teanga i seachadadh seirbhísí poiblí agus roinnt de na tosaí a imríonn tionchar ar roghanna teanga. Déantar roinnt moltaí d'fhonn an leibhéal úsáide sa réimse seo a ardú.

This paper discusses the current legal and constitutional position of the Irish language in Ireland North and South, and examines the actual levels of use of Irish in public services and some of the factors influencing language choice. Some suggestions are made for increasing the level of usage in this sphere.

1. The legal and constitutional position

The Irish language is unusual among lesser-used languages in the high level of state protection it enjoys; in particular, the recognition afforded to Irish by the republic's constitution as “the first official language” (with English as the second official language) is notable. It also has a level of official status at European level.¹

The Article in the Constitution which affords this status also contains the following paragraph:

Provision may, however, be made by law for the exclusive use of either of the said languages for any one or more official purposes, either throughout the State or in any part thereof.²

Two points should be made about this additional paragraph. Firstly, it can be seen to arise from another unusual feature of the status of the Irish language; namely, that at the foundation of the state, a decision was made not simply to attempt to protect the Irish language in the few small remaining Irish-speaking areas (the Gaeltacht), but to revive the language throughout the rest of the largely

¹ For logistical reasons – primarily lack of capacity in the translation sector – when Irish initially was granted official status in 2007 it was granted a derogation from the Regulation determining the languages to be used, but the most recent Regulation (Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2015/2264) of the 3rd of December 2015 sets out a timetable for ending this derogation – see <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32015R2264>.

² https://www.constitution.ie/Documents/Bhunrecht_na_hEireann_web.pdf.

English-speaking jurisdiction. Suzanne Romaine points out that Ireland is unique in being the only European country that has attempted to restore the national language by “declaring Irish its national language in the hope of re-establishing it as the language of everyday life” (Romaine 2008, 17). One might therefore assume from the paragraph highlighted above that Irish alone might be used for official purposes within these Irish-speaking areas.

Secondly, while the preceding text would lead one to assume that outside the Gaeltacht it was proposed to provide services bilingually, this clause could also be used to deny the provision of certain services in Irish (outside the Gaeltacht, but also perhaps even within the Gaeltacht), were a particular administration so minded. All that would be required would be a piece of legislation. In practice, however, administrations have not availed themselves of this constitutional and legal loophole (such is the support for and goodwill towards the language among the public that this would be unacceptable), but the move away from the clear and unequivocal support for the language evinced in the Constitution to a legalistic, schematised inventory of detailed provisions has proved problematical, as we shall see.

This constitutional protection has, since the foundation of the State, underpinned all the other legislative provisions, policies and official statements reflecting official State views and aspirations on the use of the Irish language. Chief among such State interventions was the decision to include the Irish language as a core subject in the education system. This has had a quite dramatic effect on the numbers of people who report being able to speak Irish in the Irish Censuses – the percentage has more than doubled since the foundation of the State (see figure 1) to over 40%.

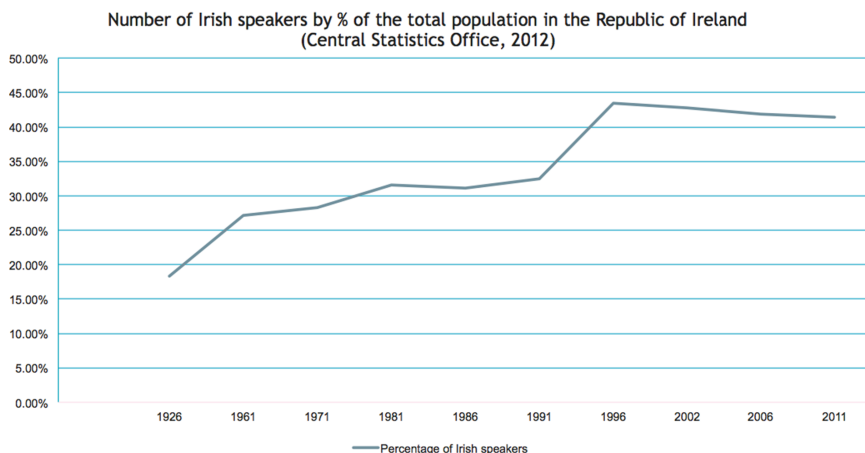


Fig. 1: Number of Irish speakers by % of the total population in the Republic of Ireland (Central Statistics Office 2012)

Apart from the statutory support for the language in the area of education, other legislation which has evolved over time concerns broadcasting and public services (such as access to the courts through Irish etc.). Many of these developments, such as the provision of an all-Irish radio station (1972) and subsequently an Irish-language television channel (1996) were the result of ‘civil rights’-type campaigning which took the Constitution at its word and insisted that deed follow that word. (Paradoxically, this type of campaigning – influenced by the African-American civil rights model and the subsequent civil rights movement in Northern Ireland – was the converse of the ‘top-down’ model cited by Romaine earlier.)

Not all the developments were favourable to the language, however. In 1966, the 50th year of the celebration of 1916, an organisation called the “Language Freedom Movement” railed against many aspects of the State’s support for the language. Subsequently one very germane, explicit support relating to public service provision was abolished: the statutory requirement for proficiency in Irish for employment in the Irish Civil Service was abandoned in 1974.³

Perhaps because of resistance to the State’s attempts at language governance, and perhaps because this is always the way, some parts of the public service were less inclined to provide services through Irish than others. Thus, in more recent times, discussions about how best to codify the types and level of public services which the public could expect through Irish, with the aim of gradually increasing them, culminated in *Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla*/the Official Language Act of 2003. Drawing on international best practice in bilingualism, this piece of legislation contained an extensive schedule of public bodies to whom it applied; a detailed arrangement involving the ratification by a Government Department of Language Schemes which these bodies were to prepare, setting out the level of service they offered; and the creation of an Office of a *Coimisinéir Teanga* or Language Commissioner (a borrowing from the Canadian experience) to oversee the operation of the Act. We shall report later in greater detail on the experience of the two Language Commissioners, but from *Foras na Gaeilge*’s own experience one consequence of the Act was our withdrawal of match-funding (50/50%) for Irish-language officers within a number of local authorities in the Republic, as these were now regarded as having an explicit statutory obligation (rather than an implicit constitutional one) to provide services through Irish. Since the mid-1990s this funding had been provided in the South by *Foras*’ forerunner, *Bord na Gaeilge*, in an attempt to increase service provision through Irish in local authorities. However the part-funding of such officers in Northern Ireland commenced in 2006 and continues to the present day, as the legislation (The Official Languages Act, 2003) does not of course pertain there.

³ Circular 43/1975: <http://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/finance/1975/43.pdf>.

Since 2003, the most significant development regarding the status of Irish was the announcement by the Government of a *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030*, which had as one of its main aims “to increase the number of people who use State services through Irish and who can access television, radio and print media through Irish”.

In Northern Ireland, ability levels in the Irish language are much lower than in the Republic, mainly due to the fact that it is not a core subject in the education system. The 2011 Census reported that some 11% of the population had some knowledge of Irish; the comparable figure for the South was 41%. Neither does the Irish language in Northern Ireland enjoy the same level of protection as in the South – but since the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, in particular, the language has been afforded a greater level of official recognition than heretofore.

In March 2015, responding to the reorganisation of local authorities in Northern Ireland (from 26 to 11), Foras na Gaeilge developed a *Treoircháipéis/Guidance Document* on the provision of Irish language services. Considerable emphasis was placed on the grounds for requiring the provision of such services, citing:

The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement (1998);

The British-Irish Agreement Act (1999);

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;

The St. Andrews Agreement Act (2006);

The Programme for Government 2011-2015 of the Northern Ireland Executive; and (in particular) provisions within

The Local Government (Northern Ireland) 2014; which pertain to the international obligations cited above.

As previously mentioned, Foras na Gaeilge provides match-funding to a number of Irish language Officers (currently 3), and there are four and a half (one part-time post) other such officers also working in local authorities in Northern Ireland.

2. Actual levels of usage in public service and factors affecting these

Given the foregoing, it could reasonably be expected that there would be a moderately to fairly high level of usage of public services through Irish, particularly in the Republic. The reality, however, is quite different.

An overarching consideration when discussing the question of the low levels of use of public services through Irish is the issue of the low levels of usage of the Irish language *itself*, despite comparatively high levels of ability. For example, while 41% of those over 3 years of age in the Republic were reported in the 2011 Census as having ability in the language (almost 1.8 million people), only 77,000

of those spoke Irish on a daily basis outside of an educational context. The figure for those speaking Irish weekly is only marginally higher at 110,000. For a city such as Dublin, this equates to about only 1.5% of the population using Irish on a daily basis.⁴

As an example of a widely-used public service we selected the Revenue Commissioners in the Republic, and sought information from them on the level of usage of their Irish language services. Of their 2.4 million clients, only 4,000 of them chose to deal with their affairs fully through Irish – less than 0.2% of its client-base.

2.1 Language choice

We have elected to try to explore these contradictions by considering the interaction of the citizen with the state within the framework of a language event, to examine the factors affecting the citizen's language choice. While there have been subsequent refinements (Grosjean 1982; Blom/Gumperz 1972), Fishman's trinity of **group**, **situation** and **topic** (Fishman 2000) is a useful framework.

The question of **group** or interlocutor brings to the fore primarily the level of ability, not only of the citizen her- or himself, but also that of the person on the other side of the desk. We have already mentioned ability levels among the general public in both the Republic and Northern Ireland, but Irish-language competence among the Civil Services – and the public perception of this – will be crucial in language choice. This is where serious difficulties arise.

If we examine firstly the level of competence on the 'official' side of an interaction relating to public services, we find a challenging situation. While a requirement for proficiency in Irish was abolished in 1974, a countervailing procedure was subsequently introduced to ensure that Irish-speaking staff would be available at all grades in the Civil Service by awarding bonus marks in internal promotion competitions for ability in both languages. However, the Language Commissioner's Annual Report for 2011 found that this procedure was not in fact being operated. In a particular case relating to the Department of Social Protection, which was investigated by the Commissioner's office, the Commissioner noted the failure and added:

That in itself is a matter of concern but the situation is made worse by the knowledge that the practice of failing to award bonus marks correctly is common throughout the Civil Service.

⁴ www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile9/Profile,9,What,we,know,full,doc,for,web.pdf.

The Annual Reports of the Language Commissioner have not become more hopeful in recent years. In fact, the first Language Commissioner retired before his term of office was completed and, in what was effectively his resignation speech, stated:

Despite the enormous goodwill of the vast majority of the people of this country, the language continues to drift further to the margins of society including within much of the public sector; bringing it back to the mainstream is no simple procedure. (Former Language Commissioner Seán Ó Cuirreáin in the office's Annual Report for 2013)

Ó Cuirreáin's swansong, shortly before stepping down from the Commissioner's role, was an appearance on 22 January 2014 before a Government Committee in which he was roundly critical of the operation of the Official Languages Act, 2003; the (then) recently enacted Gaeltacht Act (2012); and the Government's commitment to the Irish language generally. The parliamentary record shows that no representative from the Government parties attended the Committee meeting.⁵ Among the many salient facts and figures quoted by Ó Cuirreáin, one in particular stands out. Of the staff in the Department of Education – a department of strategic importance in terms of language governance in Ireland – just 1.5% of them claimed competence in Irish. Ó Cuirreáin also noted that new, recent Government proposals to increase competence in the public service would actually take 28 years to double this within the Department to just 3%.

There is little need to labour further the point being made about the 'official' side of the desk, but a final thing to note is that Irish language speakers have reported difficulties even using the Irish form of their name when dealing with public bodies (Coimisinéir Teanga 2011, 13).

The customer side, however, is not without complexity either. Recent research commissioned by Foras na Gaeilge⁶ shows a very high level of support for the language among the general population, with a marked increase since the previous such survey in 2001.

For clarity's sake the information is presented here in a three-point scale with **In Favour** (of the language) on the left, **No Opinion** in the centre and **Oppose** on the right:

⁵ www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/irish-language-being-driven-to-margins-of-society-1.1665540.

⁶ The survey was commissioned by Foras na Gaeilge with advice from Prof. Pádraig Ó Riagáin, the surveying done by Amárach Research and the analysis of the results by the Economic and Social Research Institute. The analysis has been published on the ESRI and Foras na Gaeilge websites.

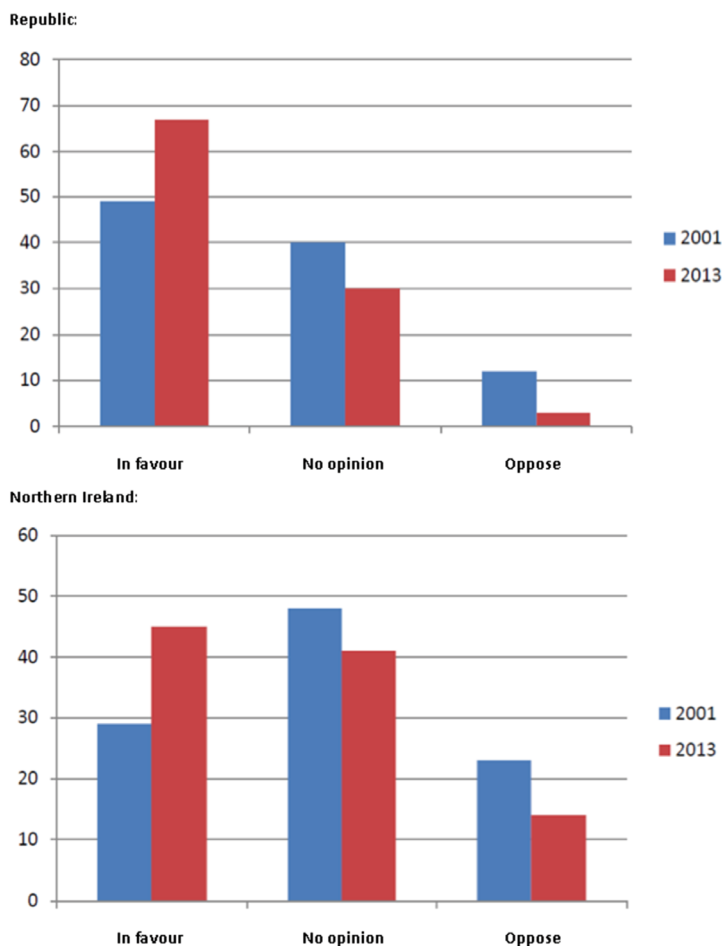


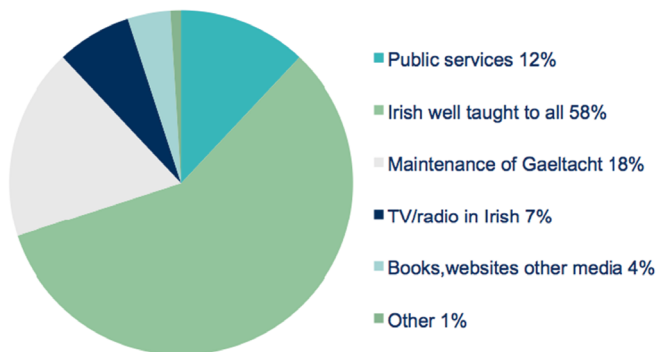
Fig. 2: Level of support for the language among the general population

The survey also provided a more nuanced description of language ability than that in the Irish Census of population, indicating 57% with knowledge of the language in the South as opposed to 41% in the Census returns for the Republic. Very high levels of attainment were reported among about 11% of the population, and near native-speaker ability in about 3% in the South. The respective figures in the North are, as one might expect, lower, at 2% and 0.5%.

Considering this, however, it is not surprising to find that 37% of those in the Republic stated that the Government was not doing enough to promote the language. The figure in Northern Ireland was 29% and both of these figures represent an increase in dissatisfaction since the previous survey.

When respondents' view were sought on the single most important Government intervention which would support the language, access to public services was not of primary importance.

Republic:



Northern Ireland:

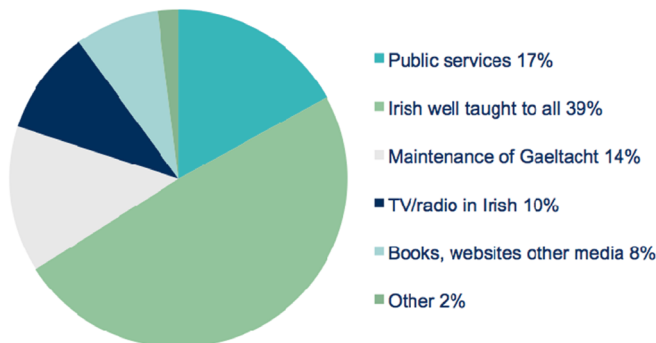


Fig. 3: Respondents' view on the single most important Government intervention which would support the language

The overwhelming concern in both jurisdictions is that the language be taught well to all children. There is a slightly higher level of demand for public services through Irish in Northern Ireland than in the Republic. Public Services are the second most desired item in Northern Ireland (though not a close second), while they are the third in the Republic (behind support for maintenance of the Gaeltacht).⁷

⁷ It should be noted that the "none" (i.e. do NONE of these to support the language) figure was significantly higher in Northern Ireland, reflecting a minority but still significant opposition to such initiatives. The figure for "none" was 1.5% in the Republic, while it was 22.8% in Northern Ireland.

This may well lead us back to the other two elements Fishman mentioned as influencing language choice: **situation** and **topic**. Accessing public services is of its nature a formal activity, usually involving (possibly imposing) public buildings; a higher level of formality regarding time and modes of address; a greater likelihood of written rather than verbal communication; a certain register; and with quite possibly a specific vocabulary relating to the matter in hand (building regulations, discussion of an illness, parking fines and suchlike) etc. These are considerations which are likely to lessen the probability that all but the most accomplished speaker will seek to conduct the transaction through Irish. And there is also – as we have seen – the matter of the customer’s perception as to the level of ability of the person on the other side of the desk before whom one is, let us not forget, effectively presenting oneself as a supplicant in these situations.

An additional point concerning **topic** might be an association – common in post-colonial countries – between English and bureaucracy. As an aside, and because every presentation should contain at least a little poetry, the 20th century poet Michael Hartnett – who wrote in both Irish and English – had an interesting if jaundiced view of language choice for particular functions, believing that the Irish language was ideal for poetry while English was – and I quote – “the perfect language to sell pigs in”. It is, as I say, an amusing aside, but there are persistent prejudices about the appropriate functions for certain languages, and these are worthy of consideration.

3. Suggestions for improvement

The operation of The Official Languages Act, 2003 is under an official review which commenced in 2011. As this is the main vehicle for improving the provision of public services through Irish in the Republic, it is timely to examine possibilities for change. The new (second) Language Commissioner, Rónán Ó Domhnaill, has commented⁸ on the review and has expressed a desire to move from the complex arrangement of separate ‘Language Schemes’ for each individual organisation (of which there are some six hundred) to a universal set of services, or bands of levels of service, with the aim of organisations improving their performance over time. At the moment, a citizen might need to consult the Language Scheme for a particular organisation to ascertain what level of service through Irish she or he might expect – an unwelcome complexity.

The Commissioner has also stressed as an absolute necessity an insistence on the requirement of competence in the Irish language when recruiting staff. Obviously, this would need to be an accelerated recruitment programme to bring change about throughout the public service even in the medium term.

⁸ Annual Report of the Language Commissioner for 2014, 4-5.

For our own part, given the human resources constraints in the short term, we would suggest that the incorporation of an Irish language option in the development of the growing number of public services offered electronically would be a way to make a positive contribution.

Were the measures above taken in the Republic, an awareness campaign aimed at the general public about language rights, to encourage people to seek and use services through Irish would then be timely; it is perhaps not a priority at the moment.

In Northern Ireland, a *Strategy to Enhance and Protect the Development of the Irish Language 2015-2035* touched on many of the issues raised in this paper and resulted in a consultation on draft legislation for the Irish language (in Northern Ireland) being held from February to May 2015; the matter remains under consideration. The draft contained elements common to the provisions in the South, such as **official status**, a **Language Commissioner**, obligations for **Public Bodies** and a set of **Language Schemes**. There are certainly lessons to be learnt from the experience in the South.

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Language use in public administration
in Luxembourg

Abstract

Luxembourg is well known for both its multilingualism and its international and linguistically diverse population. A significant number of its working population commute into Luxembourg each day from Belgium, France and Germany, returning home each night. So how is this multilingualism manifested? And how do local government departments and ministries communicate with – and indeed cope with – such a linguistically diverse population? This is particularly pertinent when considering official documents and communications – are they written in one specific language, e.g. Luxembourgish?

The Grand-Duchy is a multilingual country, where a multinational society lives and works. Therefore Luxembourg is destined to be a paradise for languages, something which is reflected in the law. Each citizen decides which language will be used at home, but the official languages of the country, *Luxembourgish (L)*, *German (G)* and *French (F)*, are clearly defined. Hence it is interesting to look at the theory and practice of language use in the public administration departments of Luxembourg.

Luxembourg is a country with many international identities. The population of Luxembourg as at 1 January 2015 was 562,958, of whom 304,279 were Luxembourgers and 258,679 were foreign citizens. The demography is illustrated below in chart 1.

Total	562,958		
Luxembourgish	304,279		
Foreign citizens	258,679	Portuguese	92,100
		French	39,400
		Italian	19,000
		Belgian	18,800
		German	12,800
		UK	6,000
		Dutch	4,000
		Other EU	29,600
		Outside of the EU	36,000

Chart 1: Population of Luxembourg

Most people come from a Romance-speaking country. The Portuguese community consists of 92,000 people; the French community of 39,400; the Italian community of 19,000; and the Belgian community of 18,800. 12,800 residents have German nationality, 6,000 people come from the UK and there are 4,000 citizens of the Netherlands. Other EU Member states are represented by a further 29,600 inhabitants and 36,000 come from outside of the EU (see STATEC 2015a). In addition, in 2013 there were 161,300 commuters who worked in Luxembourg: 40,700 Belgians, 79,900 French and 40,900 Germans (see STATEC 2015b).



Fig. 1: Homepage of the Community Centre on the internet

The homepage of the national Community Centre on the internet is available in five languages: French, Luxembourgish, German, English and Portuguese. This reflects the multilingual situation in Luxembourg, ie the three official languages of Luxembourg, then Portuguese (representing the biggest proportion of foreign citizens), and finally English which is used as a global language by other foreign citizens.

1. Luxembourg's multilingualism as regulated by law

General language policy is regulated in Luxembourg by law. In the language law of the 24th February 1984, the first article declares that the national language of Luxembourgers is Luxembourgish, although that doesn't mean that everybody who has a Luxembourgish passport can actually speak or write very good Luxembourgish (see *Languages in School*). Article 2, on the language of legislation, specifies that legislative acts and their executive regulations are written in French. When the legislative and regulatory acts are accompanied by a translation, only the French text is authentic. Articles 3 and 4 deal with administrative and judicial languages. Administrative and contentious or non-contentious judicial matters can use Luxembourgish, German or French, subject to special provisions on certain matters. Article 4 also states that should a citizen submit any formal application in Luxembourgish, French or German, the administration should wherever possible,

use for its response the language chosen by the applicant. The answers should be within the bounds of possibility (see Service Central de Legislation 2015).

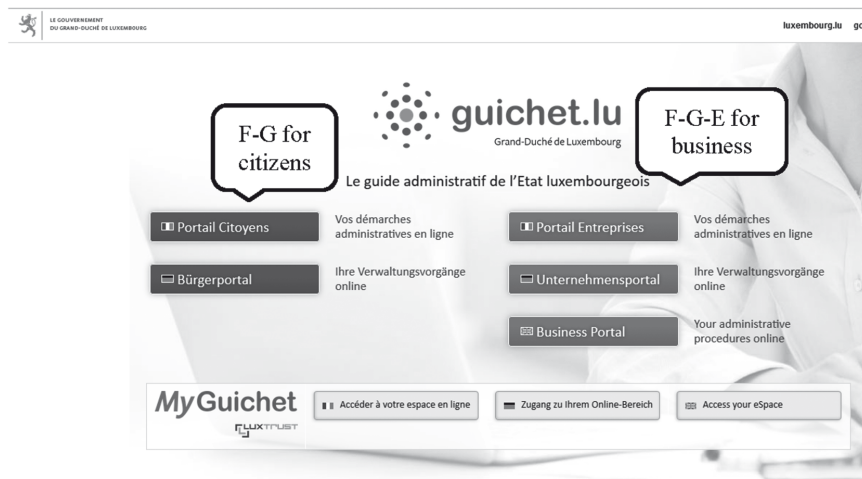


Fig. 2: Official homepage – the administrative guide of the Luxembourg government

The official homepage of the administrative guide of the Luxembourg government gives residents the choice between French and German. Although Luxembourgish is an official administrative language, it does not appear in the choices. However, businesses can choose between French, German and English, even though English is not legally an official administrative language of Luxembourg.

The Luxembourgish language has not yet been written into the current Constitution, but will be added to the new one. The House of Representatives handed the following suggestion to the Council of State: “Art. 4 (1) The Language of Luxembourg is Luxembourgish. The law stipulates the use of *Luxembourgish*, *German* and *French*”. (Proposition de révision portant instauration d’une nouvelle Constitution – Document Nr. 6030, 03.10.2015). The date when this law will come into force is not yet known.



Fig. 3: The official homepage of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg

The official homepage of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg is available in three languages, French, German and English, even though English, again, is not an official language according to the law. Nevertheless it is used as a lingua franca for non-Luxembourgish residents.

2. Multilingualism in Luxembourg

The use of the official languages in Luxembourg was clearly mapped by a survey in 2004. French was used by 99% of the 1,708 people surveyed as their first language; Luxembourgish by 82% as their second language; and German by 81% as their third language. The letters in the chart stand for the languages: F=French, L=Luxembourgish, G=German, E=English, I=Italian, P=Portuguese, S=Spanish, D/F=Dutch/Flemish.

Nation	N	F	L	G	E	I	P	S	D/F	Other
Lux.	1,044	99%	99%	99%	80%	32%	11%	18%	12%	5%
Port.	298	98%	50%	39%	38%	25%	100%	29%	2%	4%
Other	366	97%	62%	68%	77%	45%	16%	28%	23%	19%
Total	1,708	99%	82%	81%	72%	34%	28%	22%	13%	7%

Chart 2: Language use by nationalities in Luxembourg (Fehlen 2009, 77)

1,708 people were surveyed to classify the languages most frequently used. Of the 1,044 Luxembourgish nationals, 99% answered that they were able to use the three official languages of Luxembourgish, German and French. Of the biggest foreign community in Luxembourg, the Portuguese, 98% answered that they were able to use French, 50% were able to use Luxembourgish and 39% were able to use German (see Fehlen 2009, 77). However the use of languages in everyday life is more complex, because the three official languages of the country, L (Luxembourgish) and G (German) and F (French) are not the only ones in spoken and written use. Luxembourg is a country of immigration, and so additional languages are used in everyday life. As well as Portuguese and Italian, these include English and various languages from the former Yugoslavia (see Gilles et al. 2010, 64).

In 2011, 476,614 people were asked in a census from STATEC and Fernand Fehlen (Fehlen et al. 2013b) et al. which language they use most in their everyday life (see Chart 3). 55.8% of the residents of the Grand-Duchy speak Luxembourgish as a main language, 15.7% speak Portuguese and 12.1% speak French. Among Luxembourg nationals, 88.8% speak Luxembourgish as a main language in everyday life, 4.2% speak French and 1.1% speak German. However only 8% of foreign citizens speak Luxembourgish in everyday life. French is used by 23.4% and German by 5.9% (see Fehlen et al. 2013b, 1).

Language	Frequency	Percentage
Luxembourgish	265,731	55.8%
Portuguese	74,636	15.7%
French	57,633	12.1%
German	14,658	3.1%
Italian	13,896	2.9%
English	10,018	2.1%
Other languages	40,042	8,4%
Total	476,614	100%

Chart 3: Frequency of the languages in Luxembourg (Fehlen et al. 2013b, 1)

3. Luxembourg and the EU

Luxembourgish is the only national language without official EU status, but it is enshrined in the law of the country and will soon be written into the constitution, so that citizens have the right to make enquiries in the national language. Luxembourg could ask for the Luxembourgish language to have official EU status, but this would be without an official EU translation service, and if a translation were required, the state of Luxembourg would have to pay the costs.

4. Language in court

French is the exclusive legislative language. Judgments and letters are in French (more of a tradition), but evidences can be in the three official languages: Fr. – Ge. – Lu. Some judges accepts also English, but if not, there must be an official translator. The lawyer can plead in the 3 official languages: Fr. – Ge. – Lu. If the opposing party doesn't understand, they need to find an official translator in their language. Mostly French or Luxembourgish, German is rare. In practice, the judges and prosecutors often take in their texts quotations from the police report, which is usually written in German. This is the case especially in penal cases. The guilty party always gets a translator to defend himself if he can't speak any of the three official languages. An appeal can be requested in every language of the country.



Fig. 4: Homepage of the government

Nowadays, although the spoken language and the speeches in Parliament are in Luxembourgish, the written texts are in French. Also, it is worth pointing out that the homepage of the Luxembourgish government is only in French.

5. Languages at school

At school, children are taught the alphabet in German, and during the 2nd year of primary school they start learning French. Nevertheless, teaching staff normally speak Luxembourgish to children (see Presse- und Informationsamt der Luxemburger Regierung 2008). Nowadays, primary school teachers take the lead by writing letters to parents in Luxembourgish; or if two languages are required, Luxembourgish and French (see Fehlen 2009, 45).

However, this elevation of Luxembourgish as a national language has hardly practical consequences, either with regard to a further standardization either to an increased use in the school system, in which the media only serves as an auxiliary language in the classroom. (Gilles 2010, 64)

In addition, at school, parents, teachers and education authorities can request an intercultural mediator who translates into languages other than French, German, Luxembourgish and English. The languages a mediator can be called to translate are: Albanian; Creole (*Cap Verde*); Chinese; Italian; Iranian; Portuguese; Serbo-Croatian; Russian; and Arabic. More languages are available on demand. Mediators can help in class with oral and written translations and all types of information regarding education (Men.lu 2015).

6. Languages in everyday life

There is a difference between spoken and written languages in Luxembourg, especially amongst Luxembourg nationals. Most official communications are written in French, but spoken mostly in Luxembourgish. The local population request more and more frequently to be served in their national language, Luxembourgish. This is particularly pertinent in everyday life when frequenting shops, as many of the workers are actually border workers and rarely speak Luxembourgish at all; rather, French is the most common language for communication.

In their private correspondence, Luxembourgers express themselves in Luxembourgish up to 40% of the time, in French 35% of the time and in German 2% of the time. As for age, young people under 25 write in Luxembourgish up to 67% of the time, and only 22% of the time in French and 6% in German. Even though Luxembourgish is virtually absent from schools, the use of written Luxembourgish is increasing, especially amongst the younger and well-educated Luxembourgers who tend to use Luxembourgish whilst the less educated typically prefer German (see Fehlen 2009, 45). Social media has helped to promote and encourage the momentum towards writing in Luxembourgish and the population has more recently started to answer e-mails in Luxembourgish, but written letters are still most often in French. The profession with the most written correspondence in Luxembourgish is teaching (see Fehlen 2009, 46).

7. Conclusion

The Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg has three official languages, Luxembourgish, French and German, which have been part of language legislation since 1984. Each language has its status. Luxembourgish is the national language, but does not have an official EU status, French is the legislative language, and the administrative languages are Luxembourgish, French and German.

Luxembourg has 562,958 citizens of whom 304,279 are Luxembourgish people and 258,679 are foreign residents. The country is multinational, with many languages being used in everyday life. As well as the official languages, the level of use of English and Portuguese is also high. For example, the national Community Centre website is in five languages. Besides the three official languages (Luxembourgish, French, and German), there is also Portuguese, which represents the largest foreign community in Luxembourg, and English, which is a lingua franca for other foreign citizens. More and more websites are becoming trilingual or even multilingual.

Likewise, at school the government takes into account the linguistically diverse population. Parents with a native language which is not one of the three official languages get help by being offered an official translator. Moreover, Luxembourg-

gish is occupying an increasingly important role, culminating in it being formally written into the new Constitution. In the Luxembourg Parliament Luxembourgish is now the most frequently spoken language, although the written texts are still in French. The theory and practice of the official languages can vary from one interlocutor to another, but social media is responsible for an increase in written and spoken Luxembourgish.

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Panel discussion

Sabine Kirchmeier / Anne Kjærgaard /
Margarethe Kvaraenes / Aino Piehl

Language use in public administration – what do we want?

This section was organised as a panel discussion with the aim of exploring some of the tensions and problem areas that can be found in language policy approaches with regard to plain language and multilingual language policies. Four main topics were introduced and the panellists were asked to contribute experiences, thoughts and ideas.

The topics were:

Plain language and the citizen

How plain can you be? Does plain language endanger or enhance respect for public institutions?

Plain language and economy

Are plain language strategies expensive or does plain language save time and money? And how is (or could) this be measured?

Plain language and multilingualism

How can plain language strategies support multilingual practices and vice versa?

Plain language and politics

How can we ensure a political focus on clear communication for all citizens in Europe? Could stronger cooperation between public institutions in Europe on plain language strategies (multi- or monolingual) and their effects have a positive impact?

The concluding discussion tried to explore whether EFNIL could play a role in enhancing the communications of public institutions in the future.

Participants in the discussion were Aino Piehl (FI), Margarethe Kvaraenes (NO), Cecilia Robustelli (IT) and Anne Kjærgaard (DK), and the discussion was led by Sabine Kirchmeier.

In the following report, the contributions from the panellists for each main question are grouped together. Note that not all panellists made individual contributions on all subjects.

1. Plain language and the citizen

How plain can you be? Does plain language endanger or enhance the respect for public institutions?

Anne Kjærgaard pointed out that it is difficult to be plainer than the matter you are writing about allows you to be. Plain language is not about simplifying a complex reality. It is about conveying this reality without making it even more complex than it already is.

Whether plain language endangers or enhances respect for public institutions probably depends on the national culture – plain language possibly has the potential for both. In Denmark we tend to have a rather informal way of addressing each other, which reflects a rather informal tone of communication in general, but this does not seem to endanger respect for public institutions. Of course it is important to strive towards clear and correct language that also conveys information in a polite and appropriate way. Language can be plain and also convey information in an inappropriate way, for example by being impolite. That is obviously not what public institutions should aim at.

The argument that plain language can undermine respect for public institutions is from time to time put forward as an argument against it. The underlying assumption is that it is better to write in a complicated way if that is what it takes to ensure the respectability of a given institution, than to try to ensure that people understand what they are being told. This argument is highly problematic: information from public authorities is often very important and can have potentially vital consequences for people's personal lives. There is no excuse for conveying that type of information in a language that people cannot be expected to understand. A public institution that does not attempt to make itself understood does not deserve respect from the general public.

Margarethe Kvaraenes stressed that the degree of plainness partly depends on culture. There are cultural differences in Europe regarding the role which authorities play vis-à-vis their citizens. For instance in Middle and Southern Europe authorities might tend to take a more formal position, being more authoritative in their communications, and thus creating more distance.

The fact that very few contributions on international clear language conferences originate from Middle and Southern Europe could indicate a lack of interest in plain language issues. At the same time, the interest in plain language issues in the Nordic countries is high. One could say that authorities' efforts towards a more dialogue-based contact with citizens reflect the Nordic countries' egalitarian culture. To pick an example, the Norwegian tax authority operates from the assumption that citizens want to pay their taxes and get it right. The theory seems to be that if you show faith in people, you create commitment. The tax authority's communication with taxpayers reflects this view. Once again, it depends on culture: in the Nordic countries, authorities seem to gain respect by being more

transparent, whereas in other, more southern cultures, authorities might lose respect by being more “populist” in their communication.

Aino Piehl concluded that there are several ways to communicate plainly. The degree of plainness must always depend on the requirements of the current situation. In the recent Finnish campaign Clear Language for Administration, a plain language prize was awarded to a health care institution that communicates with all its patients in easy-to-read language which is meant for special groups, e.g. people with disabilities, the old and infirm, and immigrants. The easy-to-read policy received universal applause, and no one complained about information being given in language that was too simple. It is, of course, essential to assess the needs and skills of the target group accurately, and it is preferable to test if this assessment is correct rather than to rely on the assumptions of the authors and their peer group. Probably respect for public institutions grows out of the quality of services and communications rather than a ceremonial style in language.

2. Plain language and economy

Are plain language strategies expensive or does plain language save time and money? And how is (or could) this be measured?

Anne Kjærgaard pointed out that plain language strategies are an investment. Successful strategies should save time and money. It is important to emphasise that this is not only about the recipient. There are also benefits for the organisation (that is the public institution or private firm), and plain language work should be designed to take these into account.

Exactly how the effects of plain language strategies can be measured depends on the goals of the particular organisation. At the Danish Tax Authority they counted the number of calls from citizens regarding specific letters. They observed that after they had re-written a letter, the number of calls concerning that letter decreased – presumably because the recipients understood the letter better. This is just one example of how hard evidence on the beneficial effects can be provided.

Margerethe Kvarenes was convinced that plain language strategies can save time and money. But one must not underestimate the effort it takes to a) convince someone to make a change and b) to actually write in a shorter, more concise, more targeted way. So there is an investment to be made, but there are also long term benefits. There have been some surveys showing this, and there are methods available. For any measurement it is crucial to know the existing situation, for instance by retrieving figures from the helpdesk on how many questions or calls a specific letter generates. Then, after having introduced and distributed a revision of that same letter, one can repeat the questions and measure the results of the plain language effort.

Aino Piehl mentioned that it has actually been shown that good communication – appropriate contents, clear language, suitable tone of voice – does save a considerable amount of time (for examples see *Writing for Dollars, Writing to Please* by Joseph Kimble 2012). This does not only apply to communication between authorities and citizens. Significant improvements in efficiency can also be achieved by improving communication between authorities. The Institute for the Languages of Finland has found in studies it has conducted that authorities are often dissatisfied with the communications they receive from other public agencies.

Organising, writing better, creating support systems for writers (e.g. text banks) and training and motivating personnel takes time and costs money in the beginning. In the long run it pays to change old practices for more effective ones. The gain can be measured in many ways: counting the number of phone calls or email enquiries about letters, instructions etc. before and after the change; measuring the time taken to read documents before and after; counting the number of recipients of letters who comply with instructions or answer letters, or the speed with which they respond; comparing the feedback the authority receives before and after the change, etc.

3. Plain language and multilingualism

How can plain language strategies support multilingual practices and vice versa?

Margarethe Kvaraenes stated that in a very practical sense, plain language is an advantage when you have to present a text in several languages. If the original uses clear language and a logical structure, the interpretation and translation into other languages becomes far easier. In this process, it is also common to discover flaws and ambiguities in the original, which can be amended accordingly.

Aino Piehl confirmed that multilingualism is an excellent plain language tool. If multilingualism is practised by translating texts into other language(s), ensuring regular interaction between writers and translators will produce both better source texts and better translations. Translators must understand the message, and if they are able to give feedback to writers and discuss issues with them, it helps writers to see where their texts need clarifying (or modifying in some other respect, such as tone). If feedback is included in the process, writers will be better motivated to receive comments and make changes in their texts. If a text can be written simultaneously in two or more languages, potential problems become apparent and can be solved during the writing process.

The cost of translation is often considered when public authorities decide which information will be presented in several languages. If the source texts are written clearly, translating is easier and can be done more quickly.

4. Plain language and politics

How can we ensure a political focus on clear communication for all citizens in Europe? Could stronger cooperation between public institutions in Europe on plain language strategies (multi- or monolingual) and their effects have a positive impact? And what role could EFNIL play here?

Margarethe Kvarenes: The Nordic Clear Language Network, where each Nordic Language Council has one representative, is of great use for its members. The network has had some support by the Nordic Council in the past, but it is unclear how much the Council will focus on clear language issues in the future. To spread plain language research, good practice, tools and experience to areas outside the Nordic region, it would be useful to have a plain language group within EFNIL.

Aino Piehl: Plain language is a field of activity that is mostly deemed as good and useful by politicians but is seldom prioritised. In spite of delays, misunderstandings etc, administration keeps rolling along even with difficult texts. It has been difficult to engage politicians to really see plain language as a key element in good governance, though politicians and authorities have agreed since the 1970s that official language must be clear; this has been required by Finnish law since 2003 and before that, this obligation was decreed by a government decision dating from 1982.

5. Does EFNIL have a role to play with regard to plain language?

There was strong agreement amongst the participants in the panel and in the audience that EFNIL should engage more in the language of public administration. Ensuring a political focus on clear communication in competition with lots of other important topics is difficult in every country. EFNIL could address the governments of the member countries by issuing a common statement, perhaps in an open letter, that stresses the importance of plain language for citizens' rights; the inclusion of all residents; and, last but not least, the efficient functioning of administration. A plain (or clear) language network inside EFNIL could help to develop such an initiative.

At the general assembly following the conference, EFNIL decided to establish a special interest group for language use in the public sector.

Special reports

Karlijn Waterman

PETRA-E

1. Introduction

PETRA-E is a European literary translation project, supported by Erasmus+ and initiated and facilitated by the Nederlandse Taalunie, which is carrying out the project with seven European partners. EFNIL is one of the ‘dissemination’ partners of PETRA-E. EFNIL members will help to disseminate and distribute the results of the project, including the publication of the Framework of Reference for Literary Translation. *In my presentation in Helsinki I have given an outline of the aims and results of the project and have asked EFNIL members for their support. (We still need that support, so please look at the last part of this article for details.)*

2. Literary translation

It is hard to overestimate the importance of literary translation in a multilingual, multicultural Europe. Just imagine which books would not be available to a wider European audience without the work of literary translators. Literary translators play an essential role in spreading and developing ideas, stories and insights between different languages. Their ability to fulfil this role strongly depends on the availability of proper education and training. PETRA-E helps to identify domains for training and to create educational opportunities.

3. Aims of PETRA-E

The short term aim of the PETRA-E project is to develop a Framework of Reference for Literary Translation. The longer term aim is to enable stronger collaboration in the field of the education and training of literary translators in Europe. For more detailed information, the Framework and its introduction please look at www.petraeducation.eu.

4. Framework

4.1 An analytical model

The PETRA-E Framework contains a competence model, a learning line, and (implicitly) qualification criteria for situations in which competences are to be tested. As a competence model, it enumerates the competences – i.e. knowledge,

skills, and attitudes – that a literary translator should possess in order to qualify as a competent translator. As a learning line, the Framework shows the steps and levels leading to the acquisition of these competences. The PETRA-E Framework is based on five levels: a beginners level, an intermediate level, an advanced level, a professional level, and an expert level (in short: LT1 to LT5).

The Framework is intended to serve as an analytical instrument, i.e. it does not aim to encompass a single, comprehensive ‘literary translation competence’. Instead, it distinguishes a whole range of competences. ‘Competence’ refers to ‘the proven ability to apply knowledge and skills’: everything that a literary translator is capable of doing. This implies not only expertise and skills; attitude plays an essential role, too. Any competence is therefore a combination of knowledge, skills and attitude. In this respect, the PETRA-E Framework is open to change: new sub-competences might be added to existing ones when they appear necessary for a certain competence profile. The *transfer competence* occupies a central position in the Framework. Whether a competence is seen as a core competence or an additional competence depends on the institutional setting in which it is implemented and on views about the requirements a literary translator should fulfil.

4.2 Education and training

Why do we need a framework for literary translation? All translators agree that their profession involves many different skills. However, the road to becoming a literary translator is unpredictable. The PETRA-E Framework of Reference for the Education and Training of Literary Translators (in short: PETRA Framework) aims to identify these specific skills, that have never been systematically mapped out. The Framework has been developed for teaching and learning use. It describes the competences that a literary translator *might* realise. It will help teachers, programmess, schools and learners to identify the competences and steps to develop new competences. In addition, it will help to validate informally acquired knowledge and skills.

5. Collaboration

In the longer term, agreement on the skills and competences and the different levels of literary translation will also enable collaboration between schools, universities and other training institutions. This is essential because this field is a highly dispersed, small-scale domain of both formal and informal, academic and non-academic programs and courses. Stronger collaboration will improve the quality of education since it enables schools and universities to collaborate in developing training for competences that is currently lacking. In that way they can make available training for every possible language combination and develop better instruments that make use of digital media.

6. Project content

The project is being carried out in different steps and will generate different outputs.

The Reference Framework on the Education and Training of Literary Translators. The Framework will be published in seven languages and will be distributed (digitally and in print) and made widely available. All partners will apply the Framework to their educational programs, courses and/or curricula.

The Framework will be distributed all over Europe among all relevant European partners. An online help desk and FAQ will be available to support new users.

A database of schools and programmes on literary translation in Europe. This will be an updated version of the list compiled by CEATL a couple of years ago.

The project partners put a lot of effort into disseminating the results of the project. We are organising:

- 2 ‘multiplier events’, in Norwich and Leipzig;
- at least 15 demonstrations and presentations at conferences and meetings;
- 2 social media pages or groups on the Framework.

The Framework, the introduction and all dissemination activities have been discussed and prepared at four project conferences with project partners and stakeholders such as translators, teachers and publishers.

7. How can you help us?

EFNIL as a Europe-wide network is our ideal dissemination partner. In Helsinki I asked for your support. We still could use your help in disseminating and distributing the results of our project. How can you help us?

- By distributing the Framework and its introduction to relevant organisations in your country yourself or by sharing addresses and e-mail addresses with us.
- By helping us to find opportunities to launch or present the Framework at conferences, meetings and other occasions (September 2016-June 2017).
- By sharing our initiative in general with relevant people or organisations such as schools and universities teaching translation, organisations of translators or publishers, and policy makers.
- By linking to our website: www.petraeducation.eu.
- By helping with updating and correcting the list of translation programmes.

The Framework, its introduction and the database of literary translation programmes are available at www.petra-education.eu. Please contact me for all information or help: Karlijn Waterman kwatman@taalunie.org or petra-e@taalunie.org



Fig. 1: Printed version of the Framework in 7 languages (photo copyright by Laura Cristaldi)

8. The project partners

Universiteit Utrecht (UU) – Faculty of Humanities

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU LEUVEN) – Faculty of Arts

Nederlandse Taalunie/The Dutch Language Union (NTU)

Fondazione Universitaria San Pellegrino (FUSP) – Translation Department

Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) – Department of Dutch Studies

British Centre for Literary Translation (BCLT) – University of East Anglia (UEA)

Deutscher Übersetzerfonds (DÜF)

Conseil Européen des Associations de Traducteurs Littéraires (CEATL)

Dissemination Partners: EFNIL & RECIT

Bessie Dendrinos

Is ‘Multilingualism’ taking a back seat in the EU? Time for action

1. Prologue

This paper is based on a talk I gave at the at the 2015 conference of the European Federation of National Institutions for Language (EFNIL) in Helsinki. I was invited to speak about the European Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism (ECSPM),¹ on which I am serving as one of the two EFNIL delegates and recently as its president. My talk was not intended to be a direct contribution to the topic of the conference (“Language use in public administration: theory and practice in the European states”) –which dealt with the social benefits of rendering information in public documents in language and discourse that everyone for whom the texts are intended can understand (cf. Dendrinos/Marmaridou 2001). Yet the issue of intelligibility is not only about the *type of language* used in the texts of public administration, but also about *which language or languages* are used in the texts. The question about language choice is especially pertinent today in the European Union (EU), a *de facto* multilingual polity with increasingly multilingual populations. In this sense, then, the paper that follows is indeed linked to the topic of the conference, even if the link is circumlocutory. In presenting the ECSPM’s roadmap, this paper makes the important point that the European Commission’s interest in multilingualism is decreasing. The empirical evidence

¹ Member organisations of the ECSPM: Association of Language Testers in Europe, Conseil européen des associations de traducteurs littéraires, European Coordination of Independent Producers, Community Media Forum Europe, CultureLink Network, European Association for the Education of Adults, European Association for Terminology, European Language Equality Network and Eurolang, European Council of Artists, European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education, Youth for Understanding, Eŭropa Esperanto-Unio, European Federation for Intercultural Learning, European Federation of National Institutions for Language, The European Forum for Vocational Education and Training, European Theatre Convention, European Union of National Institutes for Culture, Fundación Academia Europea de Yuste, Federation of European Publishers, Federal Union of European Nationalities, Literature Across Frontiers, European Platform for Literary Exchange, Mercator Network of Language Diversity Centres, Réseau européen des centres internationaux de traduction littéraire, Association des états généraux des étudiants de l’Europe, Education @ Internet, European Union of Associations of Translation Companies, European Association for Health Information and Libraries, Association of European Border Regions, Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity.

comes from the EU's public administration texts; that is, non-binding policies and recommendations in which multilingualism is increasingly construed as having to do with language teaching and learning in schools, rather than as a multi-dimensional social practice with many facets.

2. The tensions of multilingualism

In the complex setting of the EU's public administration, European Commission officers – commonly lacking expertise in language policy and cognisance of the deeply political and ideological nature of language-related matters – are empowered to take decisions concerning language(s) and language learning and to plan and execute policies designed to “promote multilingualism and linguistic diversity.” For many of those officers, who are also charged with organising projects and events around languages, the promotion of multilingualism means forging the Barcelona objective of “mother tongue plus two foreign languages for every EU citizen” – not necessarily in a politically sensitive manner – while multilingualism is ideally equated with polyglotism. In my own experience with high and low ranking officers in the Directorate General of Education and Culture (DG EAC) with whom I have had the opportunity to collaborate – who increasingly have a background in economics and finance, rather than in language or cultural studies – the image *par excellence* for this concept of ‘individual multilingualism’ is that of a young man [*sic*] who has learnt several languages by having lived and/or studied in privileged circumstances. The common experience of immigrant youngsters, whose survival depends on communicating in more than two or three languages, is unintentionally suppressed.

“Plurilingualism” is a distinct notion from that expressed by the term (individual) multilingualism, although the discourse around language skills and competences in the Commission does not make the distinction. However, plurilingualism – referring to speakers with a multilingual repertoire who can concurrently resort to a range of resources such as different languages and other modes of “meaning making” including images, gestures, sounds, etc. to achieve optimal communication – is an expedient concept. Defined in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe 2001: 4-5) and in various publications (e.g., Bernaus et al. 2007; Dendrinos 2004, 2012), this concept could prove especially useful in language education policies and recommendations for multilingual classrooms. Yet it is more or less absent from official policy texts.

Missing from most language policy texts also is the social dimension of multilingualism; that is, when more than one or two languages have official status in a community, or when languages have different functions in a society. “Social multilingualism” is lost in the mist of “linguistic diversity” – frequently portrayed in conflictual terms. For example, there are positive images of languages as

Europe's cultural wealth, but also negative images of languages being an obstacle to the ideal of European unity. Increased multilingualism in the EU institutions themselves is often portrayed as being unmanageable (cf. Krzyzanowsky 2010).

Conflictual EU discourses, surfacing now and again, result in debates such as whether or not only the selected 'core' languages will be the *de facto* working languages of the EU institutions. Sometimes, the conflictual discourse stems from ambivalence as to whether multilingualism is to be promoted for its symbolic or its instrumental value (cf. Moore 2011). Increasingly, of course, according to Krzyzanowsky (2014) who has, on his own and with Wodak (2011), critically analysed EU discourse on multilingualism, progressive economisation is becoming a very real part of how Europe's languages are portrayed and argued for.² This, I would like to suggest, is true of the discourse around education policy too. Economisation is becoming an integral ingredient of the Commission's vision for education, articulated in its Communication on "Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes."³

This document on educational reform in Europe, which silences the cultural value of education and emphasises its economic and instrumental value for the job market, has been criticised for this very reason by the ECSPM and for additional reasons by the civil society for life-long learning (EUCIS-LLL). It has even been the subject of criticism from the European Trade Union Confederation, who in their position paper (5-6/3/2013) remind the Commission that

the role of education is much broader than simply fulfilling the economic targets of European and national strategies and this kind of rethinking or redefining of the purposes of education is unacceptable. It underlies the fact that education should prepare individuals both for life and for the labour market and it should be independent from continuously changing economic and ideological objectives. (European Trade Union Conference position paper March 5-6, 2013)

As the economisation of the discourse on languages and education is intensified in Europe, as well as in the US;⁴ as reforms in education are ever more focused on providing young people with the skills they are supposed to have to find a job in

² The discourse is similar in the USA, where Americans' foreign language deficit – as serious as that of the British – is beginning to be represented as an important economic barrier. This is the reason why the American Academy of Arts and Sciences has recently formed a national commission to examine the current state of language education and conduct the first recent national study on foreign language learning in the USA. The foreign language crisis in the USA was the starting point in the public talk I was invited to give at the Department of Applied Linguistics of the University of Massachusetts, under the title "Global economy and the urgent need for languages: American and European responses to foreign language learning exigency" (19 November 2015).

³ Commission COMM (2012) 669 final, Strasbourg, 20.11.2012.

⁴ We read on the US Committee for economic development's webpage: "In order for America to succeed in the 21st century, our students must receive a well-rounded education that includes high-quality language learning [...] As we move to reform education in this country,

the global market-place; as the role of the English language in development and economic growth is becoming naturalised; and as concerns about greater efficiency and competitiveness become obsessions, the ECSPM may have an important part to play.

The timing for new efforts from the ECSPM is crucial, because there seems to be a consistently decreasing interest in multilingualism in the European Commission. As noted by de Vries on the website of the “Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity” (NLPD): “The Commission has gone from having one entire portfolio on Multilingualism (Leonard Orban 2007-2010), to a Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth (Androula Vassiliou 2010-2014), to no portfolio on Multilingualism.” Interestingly, when Jean-Claude Juncker took up office as president of the Commission, the unit dealing with ‘Multilingualism Policy, Skills and Qualification Strategy’ was moved from the Directorate General of Education and Culture (DG EAC) to the Directorate General of Employment. What is more, the multilingualism policy officers were transferred to a section of a unit of the DG EAC, entitled ‘Schools and educators; multilingualism’.

De Vries goes on to note that the NLPD “shares the Commission’s view of stimulating growth and jobs in the current economic and social scenario and believes that languages can greatly contribute to stimulate Europe’s economy” but that it also “needs to remind the Commission that all European languages – official languages as well as regional, minority and small-state languages – serve for much more than economic purposes. The new Commission’s focus on multilingualism gives a utilitarian, market-oriented approach to the languages of Europe, which will only prioritize big, hegemonic languages and will leave a remarkable number of lesser-used languages – small-state, regional or minority language – aside.”

3. The (dis)engagement of the European Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism

The launch of the ECSPM in 2009 was acting upon the Lisbon Treaty, which introduced a new form of political participation in the democratic life of the European Union: ‘the citizen’s initiative’ (Art. 11[4] TEU). According to Diamandouros (2010: 19),⁵ this was to make an important contribution to the empowerment of EU citizens, provided it meant seeking genuine dialogue and debate on policy with civil society organisations, which might sometimes disagree with or criticise institutional decisions.

the US must continue to learn from the best practices of other countries in order to deliver a world-class education that prepares American graduates to be linguistically literate and culturally competent.” (<https://www.ced.org/policies/education/category/foreign-languages>).

⁵ Nikiforos Diamandouros is a former European Ombudsman.

The role of the ECSPM was linked to the European Commission's 2008 Communication on "Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment". Unlike more recent Commission statements which concentrate on *jobs and economic growth*, this focused on *people* and more specifically on people's "ability to use several languages, to access culture and participate as active citizens, benefiting from better communication, wider employment and business opportunities."⁶

With the support of a body such as the ECSPM (consisting of non-governmental organisations and networks active in the support of EU languages, the promotion of linguistic diversity in formal and non-formal education, culture and the arts, the media and other sectors of the civil society in Europe), the Commission aspired "to help Europeans understand that the EU's linguistic diversity is an asset rather than a barrier, and find ways to manage intercultural dialogue." The Mandate issued by the Commission required the civil society body that was formed to work collaboratively, with a view to:

- raising awareness of the value and opportunities of the EU's linguistic diversity;
- encouraging the removal of barriers to intercultural dialogue and social inclusion;
- achieving the Barcelona objective to communicate in two foreign languages in addition to one's mother tongue.

The partner organisations were organised into four working groups that met regularly in Brussels, with travel and accommodation subsidy from the Commission, "to participate in structured dialogue concerning multilingualism" on the basis of the priorities set out at the ECSPM inaugural summit and to propose ways for

- 1) promoting multilingualism for social cohesion and intercultural dialogue;
- 2) providing opportunities for migrants to learn the language of the host country and to cultivate their own at the same time;
- 3) taking advantage of the media which have the potential to open channels for intercultural dialogue;
- 4) enhancing multilingualism policy to secure the rights of all European languages;
- 5) securing life-long language learning opportunities for all citizens. (European Union 2012: 5)

Following the submission of the ECSPM's recommendations regarding these issues to the Commission,⁷ just before its first Mandate was terminated, a thought-provoking paper was written by Suzanne Romaine (2013), setting out a question about the role that the ECSPM might play in creating "a more coherent and

⁶ COM (2008) 400 final, Brussels, 16.7.2008 (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52008DC0566>)

⁷ Available at: www.poliglotti4.eu/docs/publications/CSPM%20Pol_icy%20Recommendations_FULL%20VERSION.pdf.

holistic EU policy on language and multilingualism,” which several scholars of multilingualism have argued is needed (Krzyzanowsky/Wodak 2011; Moore 2011; Phillipson 2011; Wodak 2009). Romaine (*ibid.*) maintains that the EU’s decision to launch a civil society platform for multilingualism could prove important, because it “heralds a potentially momentous sea change” regarding EU language policy. She also poses an interesting question in the same paper, wondering if the ECSPM will manage to redefine the role played by multilingualism in identity-building, both in terms of actual multilingual communicative practices and the symbolic meanings attached to multilingualism by civil society and EU institutions. Her question is still valid and even more timely than before, given that the sought-after European identity⁸ has become very fragile, battered by the economic and refugee crisis in the Schengen zone. What Wodak (2008) calls “communicating Europe” is proving to be increasingly challenging.

Before the ECSPM was officially re-launched in 2012, a few of its members went into partnership to secure an EU-funded project through the Commission’s Lifelong Learning Programme. The Poliglotti4.eu project, as this was called, was aimed at “systematically considering multilingualism and developing/implementing appropriate multilingual policies at grass-roots level everywhere in Europe,” and focused on three areas of civil society, involving “a large proportion of the population that is not in formal compulsory education: lifelong learning; pre-school; social-community services for social inclusion, so as to continue its work to promote multilingualism by way of following European policy developments.” But the activities of the Poliglotti4.eu project⁹ followed EU policy developments rather than questioning them or acting in a systematic fashion to promote the Commission’s 2008 stipulations regarding multilingualism. And this despite the fact that these were progressively being abandoned, as the global economic recession and Europe’s economic crisis were affecting the meaning of multilingualism, trapping it in the EU’s discourses of escalated economisation and its larger political projects (cf. Krzyzanowsky 2010).

With the 2012 Mandate, the ECSPM was engaged to act “in a way that aligns with the new challenges and priorities that the European Commission has outlined for the coming years, with a special concern for considering the new Erasmus+ programme, as well as the Commission’s Rethinking Education strategy”.

Extending its partnership from 22 to 29 organisations so as “to bring know-how and enhance the Platform’s scope”, the ECSPM was asked to function as “a forum for the exchange of best practices in early and life-long language learning, in language teaching and learning within formal and non-formal education settings, in language use by the media and institutions aiming at the dissemination

⁸ There are numerous published works resulting from research on the discursive construction of European identity; e.g., Weiss (2002), Oberhuber et al. (2007), Strath/Wodak (2009).

⁹ To be accessed from www.poliglotti4.eu.

of cultural achievements, as well as by translators and other civil society stakeholders". It is clear that the ECSPM was being directed away from policy issues, as it was required to perform tasks which were of interest to the DG EAC, to which the ECSPM was assigned,¹⁰ and through which funding was then made available for two assemblies a year to discuss the issues on an agenda prepared by the unit dealing with Multilingualism policy issues. The tasks were the following:

- to exploit innovative ways for the development of language competences with a view to achieving the Barcelona objective of "mother tongue plus two" for every European citizen;
- to extend good practices linked with early language learning to other levels of education with special regard for vocational education and training, as well as to adult learning;
- to help the elimination of linguistic barriers for the purposes of mobility particularly for disadvantaged groups through strategies that could be included in a policy handbook regarding migrants' linguistic integration and social inclusion;
- to facilitate the exchange of information on accessible language learning resources;
- to expand opportunities for social and professional mobility through language acquisition;
- to explore the possibility of forming a language knowledge alliance;
- to explore how to best make full use of the Erasmus+ programme.

The period between 2012 and 2013 was particularly important, because a number of substantial EU-funded language-related projects that had been sponsored by the Commission had come to an end. I am referring especially to the *European Survey of Language Competence* and the *Language Rich Europe* projects. Unlike other more scholarly undertakings – such as the DYLAN project¹¹ – the results of these, and of the 2012 opinion poll published in the *Eurobarometer*, were widely disseminated by the Commission and used to support what seemed to be turning into the major focus of EU multilingualism policy: "learning two languages in addition to the mother tongue."

Undoubtedly the period between 2012 and 2014 was crucial for the Commission's altered stance on multilingualism, encoded in its new-fangled represen-

¹⁰ The ECSPM was directly linked and reported to the 'Skills and qualifications strategies; Multilingualism policy' unit, which provided it with management services and supported the funding of assemblies in Brussels and members' participation in events organised in different places in Europe to celebrate multilingualism.

¹¹ DYLAN: a project funded under FP6 of the European Union, embracing 20 research institutions in 12 European Countries which ran for five years (2006-2011), and sought "to identify the conditions under which Europe's linguistic diversity can be an asset for the development of knowledge and economy" (www.dylan-project.org/).

tations. The slogan appearing on the Commission's languages-related web page changed from "Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment" to "Supporting language learning and linguistic diversity." This re-branding mirrored a definite shift from promoting multilingualism as an aspect of the "unity in diversity" ideal to the practicality of foreign language skills. Complementing this expediency with a market-value label on it were two other important initiatives. One was the mustering of all old mobility programmes into one basket called Erasmus+, which "aims to modernise education, training and youth work across Europe." The second large-scale initiative was the "Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes" declaration. This second initiative steers Europe towards "investment in education and training for skills development" because it is "essential to boost growth and competitiveness." In articulating what the usefulness of languages in education is, the "Rethinking education" document assists the multilingualism re-branding process, now stripped of its symbolic value, just as languages are: "In a world of international exchanges, the ability to speak foreign languages is a factor for competitiveness. Languages are more and more important to increase levels of employability and mobility of young people, and poor language skills are a major obstacle to free movement of workers. Businesses also require the language skills needed to function in the global marketplace."¹²

The Commission's new policy-in-practice appeared on the DG EAC's webpage, where it states that the EU's multilingualism policy now has 2 facets: "to help support the learning of languages across Europe, and to promote linguistic diversity (http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/index_en.htm)."¹³ Though this was a crucial period for multilingualism, especially because of the increasingly narrow definitions of it, for the ECSPM it was a period of inactivity. The member organisations collectively were rather disoriented, as they were trying firstly to understand and interpret what the Commission expected of them, and secondly to negotiate expectations regarding their role.

When I was elected president in 2014, several important changes had already occurred, and many of the symbolic attributes of multilingualism had already been purged. Multilingualism is now linguistically constructed as a state of "having the language skills and competences necessary for a knowledge based economy."

¹² Commission COMM (2012) 669 final: 5.

¹³ With regard to language learning, it is stated that "one of the EU's multilingualism goals is for every European to speak two languages in addition to their mother tongue" and it recommends that children are introduced to two foreign languages in school from an early age (because "better language skills enable more people to study and/or work abroad, and improve their job prospects" and because it helps them "trade effectively across Europe"). It also endorses the "innovative, scientifically proven methods of speeding up language learning with content & language integrated learning (CLIL) and computer-assisted language learning (CALL)".

The information collected from an open-ended structured questionnaire which I distributed to ECSPM members, regarding what each considered as the most important and realistic tasks to be undertaken, was not put to use, as the ECSPM were first waiting to find out where we stood with the Commission, given that the previous Mandate was expiring. It was important to understand our relationship with the Commission; whether our services were in demand; and whether we would have funding for meetings and working sessions.

Aware of a reduced interest in our contribution, and still unsure about where we stood, I made an effort in my new capacity as president to negotiate with officials in the Commission a new role for us and a different, more economical way of operating. Instead of spending money to bring all delegates of member organisations to Brussels, I suggested that we be partly funded to develop an electronic platform on an ECSPM website to be designed with the intention of functioning as an advocate for a multidimensional notion of multilingualism (in education, in the public space, in arts, culture and translation, in the media and technology). In submitting a written proposal for this, I recommended that the e-platform could be home to a forum operating as a “Multilingualism Alliance,” and also contain an e-repository, with powerful searching and easy key-stroke editing, to store, classify and disseminate information, policy and other language related documents; recommendations about language teaching, learning and testing; research findings; scholarly publications and results of EU-funded languages, as well as social practices in EU member states that promote multilingualism in different ways. Our new role would be to advise the Commission on language policy issues and assist in implementing the 2008 multilingualism policy in a politically sensitive manner, acting as mediators between the EU polity and national authorities.

Several months of administrative changes within the Commission passed before I received a courteous message informing me that there was a shared view in the Commission that the ECSPM “in its present form and structure has outlived its role” and that, in the time that had elapsed, the Commission had developed “bilateral contacts with several members on various topics that concern individual organisations.” Therefore, it concluded that “the DG EAC does not think it is necessary to renew the Mandate of the ECSPM but wishes to pursue cooperation with civil society organisations in the field of language teaching and learning in more flexible ways; confirms its interest in remaining in contact with individual member organisations that have an interest in promoting language education along the lines proposed; invites these organisations to propose contributions to the September edition of the School Education Gateway and to the Commission’s social media channels; will open the possibility for relevant organisations to participate in one or several events and network fora”. Furthermore, the message provided information about the priorities of DG EAC in the field of language policy for the period 2015-2017, outlining their priorities as follows:

- To increase the efficiency of language teaching by supporting the introduction of innovative methods such as CLIL, the use of ICT and new media;
- To improve the relevance and comparability of language testing, including promoting the use of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*;
- To support schools in making better use of migrant and minority languages and providing support to learners with special linguistic needs, also to make schools more inclusive;
- To support language teachers and the language competences of other teachers;
- To explore the potential of bilingual teaching options in regions whose inhabitants use more than one language;
- To promote the introduction of language learning and multilingual awareness in early childhood education and care.

4. Moving into the future

Even though the ECSPM has no renewed Mandate, it is still considered a partner of the DG EAC (http://ec.europa.eu/languages/information/csp-contact-list_en.htm). However, it is now independent from a directive and this may very well be a ‘blessing in disguise’, as the proverb goes. It necessarily exerts pressure on member organisations to reconsider their collective role as a civil society platform – the emphasis being on *civil society* rather than on *platform*, so as not to obscure the meaning of what a civil society body is and what it is supposed to do. That is, a civil society of organisations and networks with expertise and know-how is not merely a podium to voice opinions. Rather, it is a sphere of social interaction between a national (and in this case a supranational) state on the one end and organised groups and institutions independent of the state on the other. The latter function on a voluntary basis and at least to some extent they are self-reliant.¹⁴ Such a body usually includes non-governmental organisations, but also independent mass media, think tanks, academic units, and other social groups that form a dense, diverse and pluralistic body – such as the ECSPM – functioning as a partner in governance. The idea of partnership implies that a civil society is not in tension with the state (or in this case, the supranational state – the EU

¹⁴ The concept of civil society can be traced back to Western antiquity (when it was used as a synonym for the ‘good society’ and Socrates taught that conflicts within society should be resolved through public argument using ‘dialectic’, a form of rational dialogue to uncover truth). Though its role in the political sphere has been ardently debated, in the 20th century civil society has increasingly been called on to justify its legitimacy and democratic credentials. In the 1990s, with the emergence of nongovernmental organisations and new social movements (NSMs) on a global scale, civil society became seen as a key terrain of strategic action to construct ‘an alternative social and world order’.

administration) even when it criticises it, but, acting *independently* of it, its role is to make governance at all levels more accountable, responsive, inclusive, effective, and hence more legitimate. Moreover, a successful civil society, formed by organisations that have common needs, interests and values, develops through a fundamentally endogenous and autonomous process, controlled neither by the public sector (administration in governance) nor the private sector (businesses and corporations). When it is controlled by either side, it is doomed to fail in its mission. Civil societies can be successful and play a leading role in activating citizen participation in discussing, shaping and/or influencing policy.

The challenge presently facing our civil society body – whether it remains intact with its present partner organisations or it is enriched with new or alternative membership – is to understand how its role was limited by its dependence on the governing administration and to decide how to redefine its role as a vital social agent contributing to the shaping of a more inclusive language policy and facilitating the implementation of the EU multilingualism policy in a politically sensitive manner. To respond to this challenge, I have put forth a proposition that our member organisations contribute annually a small amount to be used specifically for the design, development and maintenance of a website which will allow us to be visible to stakeholders and EU officials, and which will contain an e-platform that can facilitate economically viable electronic communication between partners and an enlarged body of professional organisations concerned with the theory and practice of multilingualism.

The ECSPM now has an official secretariat in Copenhagen, Denmark, and is aspiring to have a statutes plan in the near future. Those contributing to the website development will collaborate in setting the revived ECSPM's priorities, which may coincide or depart from the priorities of the DG EAC or of other DGs that we will be approaching for collaboration when our website has been established, and we are in a position to present and promote what we stand for. Finally, I have accepted the challenge of setting out to the delegates of our member organisations a proposal that will be a point of departure for our collective action plan. This will focus on issues that deal with the following four wide-ranging areas from the perspective of multilingualism: 1) Languages and language policy issues, 2) Language teaching, learning and assessment, 3) Translation, terminology & ICT, and 4) Arts, culture, media & publishing. ECSPM member organisations work in one or more than one of these areas.

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Italo Rubino

The Italian language in EU institutions and the REI

Abstract

L'italiano è lingua ufficiale , e quindi istituzionale, anche in altri paesi, quali la Svizzera, la Slovenia e la Croazia, oltre alla Repubblica di San Marino e la Città del Vaticano. Ma lo è anche nelle istituzioni europee fin dalla loro fondazione.

L'impegno a produrre testi chiari e comprensibili a tutti i cittadini è ben presente anche tra i traduttori delle istituzioni europee, che hanno intrapreso varie iniziative per farvi fronte, tra cui la creazione di una rete con gli esperti nazionali denominata REI, Rete per l'eccellenza dell'italiano istituzionale.

1. Italian as an official language in Europe

Not everyone is aware that Italian is an official language not only in the territory of the Italian Republic, but also in other countries, although with varying status: at *national* level in Switzerland, San Marino and Vatican City; at *regional* level in Slovenia and Croatia; and at *international* level in the European Union.

This means that if we want to analyse the features of the Italian language used in public administration, we also have to include its use in other contexts. I will examine here the particular case of the “institutional” Italian used in the EU institutions and bodies.

The legal basis for the compulsory use of Italian – as well as of all the other official languages of EU countries – in all EU institutions and bodies is Council Regulation No 1/58, still in force, which states: “Regulations and other documents of general application shall be drafted in the official languages”. This principle was reinforced by the “Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union” (2009), which states “Citizens have a right to address the official EU bodies in any of the EU’s official languages and to receive a reply in that language”.

The intention of the first EU legislators was that all citizens should understand directly the decisions and laws that would apply to them and be able to interact with EU institutions and bodies in their own language. It was a logical principle of democracy and of the legitimacy of the EU institutions.

2. The Italian language in the EU institutions

To publish all legislation and important information documents in Italian (and, of course, in all the other official languages of the European Union) was a huge

challenge. To address this, all the EU institutions and bodies – i.e. the Council, the Commission, the Parliament, the Court of Justice, the Court of Auditors, the Social and Economic Committee, the Committee of Regions, the Central Bank, the Bank of Investments, the Agencies – set up their own translation service.

As a result, more than 200 Italian translators currently work across the range of EU institutions.

Taking into consideration only the European Commission (more precisely its Italian Translation Department), there were about 1,200,000 pages translated into Italian between 2000 and 2015, the vast majority of which were published and became national law.

We can thus consider the EU as one of the biggest centre of “institutional” Italian in the world.

3. Language policy in the EU institutions: the theory

In order to ensure harmony and clarity in its legislative process, the EU institutions developed over the years a series of guides, such as the “Joint Practical Guide of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, for persons involved in drafting European Union legislation” (several times updated) and the “Interinstitutional style guide” published by the Office for Official Publications (regularly updated), which were supported by internal style guides and editing rules published by language departments of the Parliament, of the Commission and the Council.

They all recommend that the drafting of a legal act must be **clear**, i.e. easy to understand and unambiguous; **simple** and concise, i.e. avoiding unnecessary elements; and **precise**, i.e. leaving no uncertainty in the mind of the reader.

These essentially common sense recommendations reflect general legal principles such as the equality of citizens before the law (in the sense that the law should be accessible to and understandable for everyone), and legal certainty (in that it should be possible to foresee how the law will be applied).

The common goal is making available to European citizens legislation which makes clear the objectives of the European Union and the means it deploys to attain them, hence contributing to the legitimacy of EU institutions and the transparency of its decision-making process.

4. Language policy in the EU institutions: the practice

The environment in which these common sense principles and intentions have to be applied is a very complex and complicated one. Texts are drafted, often under intense time pressure, by many authors with different cultural and intellectual backgrounds, and are often unclear.

Apart from the Guides, other solutions have been identified and applied (though not always systematically, mainly because of lack of time): the editing of originals by author Directorates General; the editing of originals by the Directorate-General for Translation (DGT); and the adoption of a quality assurance policy (guidelines on revision, reviewing, cross-reading, spot-checking) by the DGT itself.

5. The Italian-language Department's contribution

The Italian translators in the EU institutions are well aware that all the legislative acts they translate will be directly (in the case of regulations) or indirectly (in the case of directives) published and applied at national level, and therefore they recognise the importance of and the need for Italian-speaking citizens to accurately understand what is expected from them.

Therefore, they do not limit themselves to the application of the general rules of the EU Institutions and the DG Translation, but have taken their own initiatives. These include:

- An enhanced quality assurance policy with frequent internal seminars to make colleagues aware of the existing Guides and adopt shared approaches to revision and reviewing;
- training initiatives and events, both linguistic and thematic (in order to maintain an excellent level of mother tongue competence and also to acquire knowledge of the subject matters);
- linguistic coordination of translation services across all institutions (regular meetings, training events and reciprocal consultation on terminology);
- the setting up of a permanent network with national experts and bodies (REI).

6. Mother tongue: how to maintain excellence?

Almost all translators and assistants are long-term expatriates. They keep their mother tongue up to date by a number of different means:

- systematically reading newspapers, magazines and books, and watching Italian television (via cable and satellite);
- listening to national radio via the Internet;
- frequently visiting their country (via an internal training scheme and private visits);
- attending activities organised by the Italian Consulate and the Italian Institute for Culture;
- maintaining contacts with linguistic and technical experts in the Directorates-General;
- creating a permanent network with national linguistic and thematic experts (the REI Network).

7. **Rete per l'eccellenza dell'italiano istituzionale (REI)** **(Network for the Excellence of Institutional Italian)**

This was founded in 2005 by the Italian Department with the participation of the Accademia della Crusca (the historic National Body for Italian language) as a *trait d'union* between Italian-speaking EU translators, Italian academies and Italian-speaking linguistic and administrative institutions (from Italy, Switzerland, Slovenia and Croatia).

Its mission is:

- promoting the use of clear, simple and user-friendly institutional Italian for drafting and translating legislative texts;
- keeping the knowledge of the Italian language among EU translators and assistants up to date;
- providing EU translators with terminological support;
- organising study days once a year alternatively in Brussels, Luxembourg and Italy.

This network contributes to the quality of the translations in several ways:

- individual contacts with members (across a wide variety of specialisations);
- the results of the activity of four specialised working groups, i.e.:
 - Linguistic Gender Equality (chair: Mrs. Cecilia Robustelli);
 - Observatory on Italian language beyond national borders (chair: M. J.-L. Egger);
 - Economic and financial affairs (chair: Mrs. M.T. Zanola);
 - Legal matters (chair: Mrs Guggeis and Ioriatti);
 - In-house workshops and seminars for members (on EU premises).

To ensure the communication and dissemination of its work, the REI relies on a set of modern tools: a functional mailbox; a web site, now totally re-designed; an online sub-site hosted by the EUROPA site; collaborative spaces like Yammer, Facebook, Twitter, etc.; online publication of presentations, speeches and contributions from seminars and study days; and paper publication of the most interesting presentations from the study days (the “Quaderni” book series).

8. **Plain language: some limits**

We all agree today on the need for all institutions, both national and international, to use common, plain language in order to guarantee transparency and democratic interaction with citizens.

However, in the particular case of the EU institutions there are some limits. For the sake of legal certainty and concordance it is necessary to respect first the terminology of the Treaties; then the terminology of the adopted legislation;

and finally to use specific, precise wording (e.g. for technical and financial terms). The domains regulated by EU legislation are sometimes very technical, for example:

- *Health*: clinical research on cancer, cardiovascular diseases, neurological diseases (in particular those linked with ageing, such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's);
- *Food, agriculture and biotechnology*: genomics, proteomics, metabolomics, systems biology and converging technologies for micro-organisms, infectious diseases in animals, including zoonoses;
- *Environment and climate change*: prediction of climate, earth and ocean systems changes, etc.

Another huge obstacle to the use of plain language in EU documents and publications is the specificity of EU legislation, which often deals with new issues and concepts that do not exist in national legislation. Nevertheless, clarity can be achieved by accurately defining these new concepts.

In conclusion, we can state that the Italian translators in the EU institutions contribute as much as they can to the efforts for a clear legislative and communication style, but *cum grano salis*, in the sense that they have to apply some rules which are unavoidable in the particular, unique context of the EU environment.

For more information:

Web: ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation

Facebook: [com/translatingforeurope](https://www.facebook.com/translatingforeurope)

REI: <http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/rei/>

European Federation of National Institutions for Language (EFNIL): Members and associate member institutions

For detailed information on EFNIL and its members see www.efnil.org

Member institutions grouped by country

Austria	<i>Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum</i> , Graz Austrian Centre for Language Competence <i>Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften</i> , Wien Austrian Academy of Sciences
Belgium	<i>Service de la langue française</i> , Bruxelles French Language Service <i>Nederlandse Taalunie</i> , Den Haag Dutch Language Union (Flanders and The Netherlands)
Bulgaria	<i>Българска академия на науките, Институт за български език</i> , Sofia Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Institute for Bulgarian Language
Croatia:	<i>Institut za hrvatski jezik i jezikoslovlje</i> , Zagreb Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics
Cyprus:	<i>Πανεπιστημίου Κύπρου</i> , Nicosia University of Cyprus
Czech Republic	<i>Ústav Českého národního korpusu Univerzity Karlovy</i> , Praha Institute of Czech National Corpus, Charles-University
Denmark	<i>Dansk Sprogævn</i> , København Danish Language Council
Estonia	<i>Eesti Keelenõukogu</i> , Tallin Estonian Language Council <i>Eesti Keele Instituut</i> , Tallin Institute of the Estonian Language

- Finland ***Kotimaisten kielten keskus / Institutet för de inhemska språken***, Helsinki/Helsingfors
Institute for the Languages of Finland
- France ***Délégation Générale à la langue française et aux langues de France***, Paris
General Delegation for the French Language and the Languages of France
- Germany ***Institut für Deutsche Sprache***, Mannheim
Institute for the German Language
Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung, Darmstadt
German Academy for Language and Literature
- Greece ***Κέντρο Ελληνικής Γλώσσας***, Thessaloniki
Centre for the Greek Language
- Hungary ***Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, Nyelvtudományi Intézet***, Budapest
Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Research Institute for Linguistics
- Ireland ***Foras na Gaeilge***, Dublin
(the all-island body for the Irish language)
- Italy ***Accademia della Crusca***, Firenze
(the central academy for the Italian language)
CNR – Opera del Vocabolario Italiano, Firenze
The Italian Dictionary
- Latvia ***Valsts valodas komisija***, Riga
State Language Commission
Valsts valodas aģentūra, Riga
State Language Agency
- Lithuania ***Lietvių Kalbos Institutas***, Vilnius
Institute of the Lithuanian Language
Valstybinė Lietuvių Kalbos Komisija, Vilnius
State Commission for the Lithuanian Language
- Luxembourg ***Institut Grand-Ducal, Section de linguistique***, Luxembourg
Grand Ducal Institute, Linguistic Section
- Malta ***Kunsill Nazzjonali ta' l-Ilsien Malti***
National Council of the Maltese Language

Netherlands/ Belgium	<i>Nederlandse Taalunie</i> , Den Haag Dutch Language Union
Poland	<i>Rada Języka Polskiego</i> , Warszawa Council for the Polish Language
Portugal	<i>Instituto Camões</i> , Lisbõa (The institution for the promotion of Portuguese language and culture)
Romania	<i>Academia Româna, Institutul de Lingvistica</i> , Bucureşti Romanian Academy, Institute of Linguistics
Slovakia	<i>Jazykovedný ústav Ľudovíta Štúra Slovenskej</i> , Bratislava Slovak Academy of Sciences, Ludovit Stúr Institute of Linguistics
Slovenia	<i>Ministrstvo za kulturo – Sektor za slovenski jezik</i> , Ljubljana Ministry of Culture, Section for the Slovenian Language
Sweden	<i>Språkrådet</i> , Stockholm The Swedish Language Council
United Kingdom	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> , Oxford <i>The British Council</i> , London

Associate member institutions

Iceland	<i>Íslensk málnefnd</i> , Reykjavík Icelandic Language Council
Norway	<i>Språkrådet</i> , Oslo Norwegian Language Council

