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## Paradigm Shifts, Geostrategic Considerations and Minority Initiatives

Much of the analysis of ethnolinguistic minorities is case specific and concerned with the particular state or national context within which such minorities operate. This paper adopts a broad conceptual stance by focussing on how policies aimed at improving the position of ethnolinguistic minorities in Europe have been subject to broad and profound multi-level influences. These range from policies and practices which have their origin within the minority communities themselves, to the state, the European level and beyond. This paper will identify significant paradigm shifts and highlight structural tensions which derive from neo-liberal and social democratic perspectives coming into conflict as a result of closer European integration and globalization. It will conclude by identifying six salient research themes which may inform more robust policy initiatives capable of building on best practice minority policy in several EU contexts.

Key words: geostrategy, language, minority policies, multilingualism, neo-liberal, research paradigms

## *Spremembe paradigm, geostrateška razmišljanja in manjšinske pobude*

*Analiza etnolingvističnih manjšin večinoma temelji na posameznih primerih in obravnava konkretno stanje oziroma nacionalni kontekst, znotraj katerega delujejo. Članek, ki temelji na širšem konceptualnem pristopu, se osredotoča na politike, ki so usmerjene v izboljšanje položaja etnolingvističnih manjšin v Evropi, in opisuje njihovo izpostavljenost širokim in odločilnim vplivom z več ravni. Ti vplivi obsegajo tako politike in prakse, ki izvirajo znotraj samih manjšinskih skupnosti, kot tudi z državne in evropske ravni. Članek razkriva pomembne premike paradigm in osvetljuje strukturne napetosti, ki izhajajo iz konflikta med neoliberalnimi in socialnodemokratskimi perspektivami kot posledico intenzivnih evropskih integracijskih in globalizacijskih procesov. Za konec ponuja šest temeljnih raziskovalnih področij, ki utegnejo v prihodnosti zaznamovati konkretnije politike, ki bodo sposobne graditi na najboljših praksah manjšinskih politik v različnih okoljih Evropske unije.*

*Ključne besede: geostrategija, jezik, manjšinske politike, večjezičnost, neoliberalizem, raziskovalne paradigme*

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## 1. Introduction

Policies aimed at improving the position of ethnolinguistic minorities in Europe have been subject to broad and profound multi-level influences ranging from within the minority communities themselves, to the state, the European level and beyond. This paper will identify significant paradigm shifts and highlight several structural tensions which derive from both neo-liberal and social democratic perspectives coming into conflict as a result of closer European integration and globalization.<sup>1</sup> It will conclude by identifying six salient research themes which may inform more robust policy initiatives capable of building on best practice minority policy in several EU contexts.

One of the critical determinants of the success of minority language policies is the degree to which they could be embedded within the public sector of the local state. Thus initiatives related to bilingual or multilingual public services in the statutory education (Čok et al. 1999), health and local government spheres (Williams 2008) were launched as a result of minority pleading and civil society demands. However, language policy now has to be reformulated within a reconfigured state.<sup>2</sup> Following a series of crises from the late 1960s to the 1970s, the state reinvented and reconfigured itself along neo-liberal lines, without completely abolishing the Welfare State, with consequences along the following four dimensions which are detailed in turn: political ramifications, territorial reorganization, administrative reforms and new patterns of central-local fiscal relations (Loughlin & Williams 2007).

## 2. Political Ramifications

The current emphasis on localization, subsidiarity and devolved government has resulted in a decentralization of decision-making from central government to a more local level of civil society and representative government (Williams 2009). This has required minority language policy to be refashioned, less as a response to one or more interest groups' demands, and more as a public good, part of the mainstream of social and political decision-making. However, this transition is not without its problems; for inherent in the treatment of minority languages as a public good are the strictures of neo-liberalism which places a strong emphasis on market forces, competition and citizen choice.

This paradigm shift in the delivery of minority language service, obligations and rights also seeks to "free" minorities from increased government intervention

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and control. This recalibration of the role of minority policy throws up a series of new tensions and stresses, which are rarely analyzed even if they are sometimes articulated. The standard interpretation is that parts of the state, which used to bear a large part the cost of minority language education, popular culture, representation in the media, etc., are now transferring some of the resource allocation responsibility back to the community and civil society. In consequence, several of the gains made in the past generation in relation to minority language television, communication and the media, for example, are being undermined or threatened by more cost-effective arguments calling for the removal of “artificial subsidies” and majoritarian support for minority interests in plural societies.<sup>3</sup>

As a counter to these pressures a second trend influencing policy formulation may be identified. It is related to a European political philosophy which stresses solidarity and adopts an essentially social democratic notion of the role of the state in correcting market failure through political intervention by the state to support the weakest or differentiated sections of society. In many respects this is what selected devolved governments within Europe have sought to do in relation to the treatment of their minorities. The changed political context, from state-level to national or regional-level decision making, makes the minority language policy more acute and pertinent. But it can also reduce the amount of resources available for implementing elements within the policy and making nationalist political leaders more sensitive to the non-nationalist electorate, so that when they are not in office they make extravagant claims regarding language revitalisation and the need for stronger policies which are not necessarily realised once they are in power. It can also limit the degree to which the central state takes responsibility for the fortunes and promotion of the selected minority language, which may now be under the jurisdiction of the devolved polity. In such circumstances the neo-liberal analysis demands a dramatic retrenchment in state spending and a transfer of responsibility from the central state apparatus back to the community and the voluntary sector.

Conservative politicians throughout Europe have ridiculed the left’s ability to manage the economy and to reverse spiralling unemployment, and they have presented the core of the problem as a bloated state apparatus, redefining the origins of the fiscal crisis as deriving from government overspending, high public debt and unsustainable structural deficits (Cramme & Diamond 2011). The left’s belief that it would rejuvenate support for the interventionist state has miscalculated the populist mood that it was the state itself which was the problem. As Cramme and Diamond (2011) observe, “/f/ or although voters were concerned about vested interests in the financial system and soaring inequalities driven by unregulated financial markets, their confidence in the capacity of the

state to act was at rock bottom.” Current fiscal pressures, a crisis in the Eurozone and broad swings in the international stock markets all conspire to render state intervention as simultaneously both essential and less effective than would have been predicted in calmer times. In consequence a political spin on largely economic and resource-dependent challenges renders the state’s leaders rather vulnerable to charges of impotence if not incompetence. A typical political reaction is to rein in spending on the one part of the domestic economy which the state controls, namely the public sector. This has a differential impact on minority language services, for in the period of post-war growth, many language revitalization and promotion efforts have been largely located within the public sector, forging a new inter-dependence between the fortunes of the languages and the health of the public sector segment of a state’s activity. When the public sector is threatened, almost inevitably the majority seek to reduce expenditure on “opt-out” minority policies, which may only be resisted if they are covered by robust legislation pertaining to the language régime or have been mainstreamed already as part of the collective social good.

### 3. Territorial Reorganization

A second structural change has been a tendency towards political decentralization, as distinct from previous administrative deconcentration. This has been accompanied by the emergence of regions as key actors: political regions in Italy, France, Spain, Belgium and, later, Sweden; administrative regions in England, Greece, Finland, Portugal and Ireland. Allied to this has been a tendency towards the quasi-federalization of regionalized systems, the emergence of the “state of autonomous communities” (*Estado de las autonomías*) process in Spain; the devolution programme of the United Kingdom and the attempts to reform the German federation (Loughlin 2009). This reorganization has profound consequences for the manner in which the local state delivers key public services such as education, public health and welfare, but it also has ramifications for the range of languages used to deliver bilingual and multilingual services and impacts on identity politics in ways hitherto unimagined, leading to the sanctioning of multiple identities and quite complex cross-cutting electoral and interest group alignments at the regional and local level.

The territorial reorganization of the European state thus simultaneously opens up new spaces for inter-regional interaction, especially across border regions long ravaged by the twin effects of continental warfare and the rise and collapse of communism, and as a consequence of increased global trade, political and

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commercial activity and investment and humanitarian relief, including refugee processing and disaster-relief, between Southern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. The Mediterranean focus for inter-regional co-operation across a wide and growing range of policy-initiatives augurs well at a spatial planning and commercial level, but could intensify the current host of social and humanitarian challenges which are consequent to mass migration and unregulated trade and mobility. Clearly compounding all these issues, and in part determining the scale, intensity and timing of these newer patterns of activity are the geostrategic and militaristic engagements of both imperial and regional powers in the Middle East and North Africa. Régime change, civil war, insurgency and organised terrorism act as contributory factors to global insecurity; they must also, however, be considered as causes of major patterns of displacement and migration, which in turn render the policies of receiving EU states more vulnerable and complex, as they have to cope with a much more differentiated clientele now – a clientele which can expose the underlying stresses already present in society. Moreover in a rather direct way, such new migrants can over time strengthen the languages of wider communication at the expense of the regional minority languages unless the local state is sufficiently robust and innovative in its implementation of education, health and social welfare policies in and through the target language.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. Administrative Reforms

Consequently within several officially bilingual contexts – e.g., Catalonia, Ireland, and Wales – there have very recently been administrative reforms to give salience and purchase to minority language policy. In Catalonia such reforms have resulted in a new system whereby the Parliamentary Affairs and Juridical Sections more closely scrutinise parliamentary and political activity, giving a new impetus to the Social Council for the Catalan Language and providing legal advice to the government on language policy. In addition the Language Resource Service promotes resources to facilitate the use of Catalan, viz. teaching resources for immigrants, language engineering tools, and official certificates as part of European framework of language evaluation. The Promotion of Language Use Service promotes Catalan within information and communication technologies (ICT) and media. The Information and Dissemination Service is charged with informing civil society and government circles about the work of SPL. Also the Institute of Catalan Sociolinguistics is responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of language policy. Beyond these promotional and policy-related agencies lies the *Oficina de garanties lingüístiques* which functions as a one-stop-shop for the public to enquire about language rights, and to lodge official complaints about non-

compliance with the language law. In turn the Oficina forwards complaints to the appropriate department which will carry out an inspection and if necessary levy a fine. These reforms represent a determination to make language policy work and provide additional resources to support the monitoring, evaluation and regulatory functions this implies (Puigdevall Serralvo 2006; Querol & Strubell 2009).

Administrative reforms also have to cope with larger constitutional realities, such as the recent Spanish Constitutional Court judgement on the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia. This prohibits the use of the term “nation” to refer to Catalonia, and denies the prime role of Catalan as the “*llengua pròpia*” thus reinforcing the hegemony of Spanish (Strubell & Boix-Fuster 2011).

In Ireland, the recently adopted 20-Year Strategy for Irish Language (2011) has real implications for the language policy itself, the relationship between the main agencies of the state *Foras na Gaeilge* and *Údarás na Gaeltachta* in delivering distinct parts of the strategy, and the ethnolinguistic vitality of the native heartland of speakers within the *Gaeltacht*. However, timing is all-important, and the economic downturn threatens to curtail the adoption in full of all the measures and policy instruments outlined in the strategy.

In Wales, following the enactment of Legislative Devolution, which created a Parliament for the first time in modern Welsh history and cabinet portfolio changes since the May 2011 national election, Welsh language policy has been transferred from the Department of Culture to the Department of Education. Further the Welsh Language Board will be replaced by an Office of Language Commissioner in 2012. These are profound changes to the manner and means by which both the promotional and regulatory aspects of official language policy will be discharged.

However, in each of these cases rhetoric, instrumentalism and inconsistent implementation seem to surface as incongruent elements of language management practices.

## 5. New Patterns of Central-Local Fiscal Relations

The logic of the neo-liberal discourse avers that the contemporary state is an enabling agency, which by seeking to minimise citizen dependency on the state



apparatus releases the full potential of its citizenry. This is to be done by shifting a range of social responsibilities from the welfare state back to the realm of civil society. Nominally this shift is about the empowerment of civil society and the strengthening of the capacity of para-public and voluntary agencies to deliver services formally provided by the state. But deep within this new construct is a commitment to cutting public costs, to weaning minorities away from their medium-term dependency on the public purse and to state subsidy for their separate, if not necessarily equal, education provision, t.v. and broadcasting system and local authority services. But as David Marquand (2004) has demonstrated, often this logic leads to a diminution of the quality and frequency of services and the disenfranchisement of the poorer, marginal sections of society. Some aspects of minority language policy appear to be doubly disadvantaged because they are unduly dependent on the public sector and the local state and they often serve a minority within a minority. As John Walsh (2011) has asked: what price minority language rights in a recession? Key to the answering of this question is the degree to which the state is willing to underpin the resource and budgetary allocation required to sustain, if not improve, the range and quality of services contained within minority language policy.

Thus the conventional manner in which minority language policy has been conceived of since the mid-seventies faces a new set of challenges, which deserve close scrutiny as part of another cluster of variables we may designate as a second paradigm shift. This transition appears to be obviating either the primacy or the historical concern with bilingualism and promoting multilingualism as the new framework, the more inclusive and apparently democratic imperative of the day. The key parameters of this transition as identified by Gorter and Williams (2011, 16–17) within the Radein Initiative are set out below:

- ♦ bilingualism is replaced by multilingualism;
- ♦ English is the dominant language;
- ♦ migration increases linguistic diversity (regional minorities and immigrant minorities);
- ♦ revitalization is also an active process, e.g., in the case of the Basque, Frisian and Welsh languages;
- ♦ however, in city-regions, the locus of real multilingual interaction, urban governance issues often ignore or downplay the linguistic aspects and service-provision in health, education and legal affairs.

This is a major lacuna and one within which the geo-strategic implications discussed above will have their greatest impact in cities such as Barcelona, Bilbao, Dublin, Marseilles and Rome. For although regional and devolved governments clearly structure the framework of linguistic régimes, the new patterns of

contestation and resolution, together with the new discourses and narratives surrounding the question of what should be done, are animated by and played out in the larger metropolitan cores of the European space economy.

## 6. Significant Research Themes

In the face of these mounting problems and an economic climate which makes it more imperative that scarce resources and limited energies be expended in a manner which can be justified, it seems logical to argue for closer comparative international co-operation to systematically investigate these transformations and resultant tensions. I identify some of the more promising avenues for research as follows.

The most compelling in this field is an investigation of comparative language strategies. Research programmes should address three issues. First, a strategy for regulating language rights and responsibilities that promotes a minority language as a public good, which tackles systemic inconsistencies between policy domains and reforms by an often lacklustre local state implementation of government policy.<sup>5</sup> Second, a modernisation plan which would recalibrate the relationship between the promotion and regulation aspects and instrument of minority language policy as evidenced by the creation of Language Commissioners and Regulators in selected states, such as Ireland, Wales and Finland and a probable strengthened Language Commission in Kosovo.<sup>6</sup> Third, a strategy for reforming the research discourse which would take a far greater account of the needs and expectations of both regional minority (RM) and immigrant minority (IM) representative groups in tandem. Such a research strategy could build on the excellent comparative field-work investigations as outlined in Barni and Extra (2008).

The second research need would be a critical examination of the disjuncture and tension between the current European Union approach to multilingualism at an institutional level, and the apparently dwindling role which the European Union language policy attaches to indigenous minority languages. A critical strategic issue would be to identify the long-term implications of this move and the inherent consequence for the status, utility, freedom of action and sustainability of several such language communities.

The third research avenue would be a systematic analysis of the fiscal pressures in many regions which threaten the capacity of the local state and civil society



to maintain, let alone expand the range of activities which support the vitality of the minority language community and network of speakers. Fiscal uncertainty and the withdrawal of public subsidy tend to encourage the amalgamation of previously linguistic distinct social networks, out of school social activities and sports clubs in bilingual or multilingual societies, all in the name of economies and scale and serving the widest possible range of interests. From a majoritarian democratic perspective it is hard to gainsay such logic: better one well-provided swimming club for all in the community than two or three less well resourced clubs, so the argument goes. In educational circles, the refrain is often heard that it is better to provide a wider range of curriculum choice in a larger, dominant language school for the town or area, than two or three smaller and less-well provided for schools, which ultimately limits the educational experience of minority language pupils. The logic of scale, of economic efficiency and of long-term sustainability of service all come into play in such arguments and the hegemonic majority claims an exclusive monopoly on the logic of rational decision making. When minority language parents protest and seek to maintain the smaller, and perhaps less-well resourced, village school, they are accused of an emotional reaction and of risking the competitive edge which their children may derive from attending a larger multi-purpose school, albeit in a language not of their choice. Long term ideological disputes are often given urgency and currency by economic down-turns and fiscal straitening of local authority budgets, but – such is the power relationship involved – they are hardly ever conducive to the provision of new opportunities for minorities to flourish.

The fourth research theme would be an interpretation of the stress on the historical bilingual regions which have statutorily binding official language policies, which are challenged both by the majoritarian pressures of state citizens and the ever increasing immigrant demands for access to the work place and social equity; these tend on the whole to favour the state's hegemonic language. This is clearly evidenced in the health, educational and social welfare deliberations of contemporary Barcelona, for example, where attempts to maintain Catalan in the face of an increasingly diverse and growing immigrant population which encourages assimilation into a Spanish-speaking social nexus, tests both the resolve and the ingenuity of city leaders and public servants.

The fifth research theme would be a EU-wide comparative analysis of the relationship between the promotional and the regulatory aspects of minority language policy. Since the sixties many lesser-used language communities have consistently widened the range of opportunities within which their languages could be used, ranging from statutory education, through public administration and the media. In the past fifteen years or so many such communities have

pressed for an increased recognition of their language rights and have seen some success in the passage of language acts (Sandberg & Williams 2011). Today a greater emphasis is being placed on the regulation of these acquired rights and their systematic application, backed up in some cases by the establishment of Language Commissioners and more pro-active sections of a Ministry of Justice. Now we need to ascertain to what extent the balance between the promotional and regulatory aspects is being calibrated and to what extent our previous concern with input into language strengthening efforts is being matched by a systematic evaluation of the output, the results of such sustained initiatives and the provision of bilingual services in a clear and consistent manner within the local state.

The sixth theme would involve an innovative investigation of the role which ICT media and communication systems play in either reinforcing or marginalising the use of minority languages within the modern economy, society and entertainment sectors. A fascinating new development is the emergence of sustainable virtual communities of speakers, whose participants can overcome the friction of distance and realise what Webber (1963) so presciently described as “community without propinquity”. Typically such communities have been heralded for being able to sustain diaspora networks in regular contact with their source area interlocutors, but increasingly one may see the purchase of such *in situ* networks within the host area for sustaining active interest-group discussions and interactions across a range of topics. The Mercator network has a very rich data base and track record in this field while the initial enquiry instigated by the Ayuntamiento de Andoain (2011) would surely repay huge dividends if it were pursued systematically for many more minority language cases occupying e-space. Due diligence in the use of linguistically differentiated social network sites and new patterns of interaction, of gaining access to information and entertainment, all require sustained investigation, both to understand the scale and provision of such systems and to plan for their better adaptation from a multilingual perspective.

## 7. Policy Initiatives

Throughout Europe there are several good examples of best practice policy initiatives which have been fashioned in part as a reaction to the paradigm shifts identified at the beginning of this paper. The more significant examples, identified below, are worthy of consideration and adaptation elsewhere in Europe:

- ♦ devising efficient systems for the monitoring and implementation of language

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- legislation: The Ministry of Justice, Finland as an example;
- ♦ the compulsory teaching of the minority language in the majority school system: Slovenia as an example;
  - ♦ the need to maintain a separation between the promotion and regulation of official language affairs: *Foras na Gaeilge* and the Irish Language Commissioner in Ireland as an example;
  - ♦ the determination to strengthen weak “rewards and sanctions” elements of regulatory instruments: both Finland and Wales (post 2012) represent good practice;
  - ♦ better co-ordination between language policy and legislation in key areas such as health care, education and community planning: Catalonia since 2005 as a prime example.

## 8. Conclusion

In order for these policy initiatives to be emulated elsewhere there is a need for a more systematic comparative analysis of both language policy and language strategy. This could either be undertaken at a macro-regional level, such as South-East Europe, or at an EU or Council of Europe level. It is not assumed that the principles of best practice will be adopted automatically, for all sorts of intervening variables influence the contours of policy in practice and the manner in which ethnolinguistic vitality may be sustained and interpreted (Yagmur 2011). But at a time when there is great pressure on the domestic state's economy it seems rational to look for inspiration and guidance from those contexts which have managed a certain degree of success in implementing minority policy.

The current concern with legislation, empowerment and rights suggests another paradigm shift from minority language promotion to regulation. This normative shift is seen at many levels from the international treaty obligations and conventions (de Varennes 1996, 2009, 2011), to the more rigorous application of state-level legal protection of minorities (Constantin 2010) and in the growth of Language Commissioners, Human Rights Tribunals and Constitutional Regulators of Minority or Official Language services (Williams forthcoming). While welcoming the greater specification of minority language rights it is evident that the broad scope of language vitality should not be reduced to an identifiable set of language rights alone. Neither should language acts be seen as a substitute for the more routine fundamental aspects of holistic language promotion and planning. But even when legislation may not be as robust or as empowering as minority activists expect, it may be that the spirit of legislation

could be a significant under-valued means by which Language Policy and Language Planning is promoted. So much of what passes as an official language régime depends on the articulators and implementors of policy that it is entirely possible for a rather weak legislative enactment to be made into a robust tool for policy implementation, as was the case of the Welsh Language Act (1993), and conversely for a strong piece of legislation, such as that which obtained in the Law of the Use of Languages in Kosovo (2006), to be rendered rather ineffective due to a lack of capacity and resources to implement the official languages mandate (Williams 2010).

Thus inherent in this transition, whereby minority languages are increasingly treated as a public good and embodied within a codified legal system, are the dictates of the market, where the neo-liberal emphases on choice, individualism and competition, are to be realised as social fact. So many of the problems associated with the survival and well-being of minority languages are to do with their relative scale, historical disadvantage and contemporary dependence on the public sector, that it requires fresh innovative and strategically bold initiatives to challenge this position. The ideas and the will are often not lacking; what may be lacking is the systematic comparative evidence required to convince decision-makers and policy formulators that there are alternative ways of approaching multilingualism in Europe, so that the needs of the few are not necessarily subjugated to the demands of the many.

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## 20 Notes

<sup>1</sup> This analysis is based on a broader study of minority language policies drawing on the experiences of cases such as the Basque Country, Catalonia, Friesland, Finland, Ireland, Slovenia and Wales.

<sup>2</sup> While this concept is open to varying interpretations I interpret the reconfigured state as one which is more amenable to the twin forces of subsidiarity as sub-state governance and to cultural diversity whether in the form of an official policy of multiculturalism or of a *de facto* toleration of different ethnolinguistic groups as permanent entities within society.

<sup>3</sup> This is certainly the case in Wales for both Welsh and English language broadcasting is facing challenges. Thus S4C's freedom of action and financial independence has been threatened by its having to work very closely with the BBC. The intervention of Mr Hunt, the UK Minister of Media Culture and Sport, has reduced S4C's funding from 2013, when its income will come from the license fee and be channeled through the BBC Trust. Osmond (2011) reports that spending by ITV 1 Wales and BBC Wales on English language television programmes fell from £37 million in 2005 to £25 million in 2010, a drop of 33 per cent in five years. The decline became more marked toward the end of the period by 13 per cent between 2009 and 2010, from £28 million in 2009 to £25 million in 2010.

<sup>4</sup> This is clearly the case in Italy and in its relations with France and other neighbours. It is also a major challenge for the Spanish state, particularly acute in Catalonia and Valencia.

<sup>5</sup> I am currently undertaking such a research programme on behalf of the Network for the Promotion of Linguistic Diversity. The programme looks at significant language strategies in Spain, the UK and Ireland, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand; it asks to what extent such strategies are based on long-term data collection, systematic evidence and the like and to what extent the outcomes of such strategies are measured systematically in terms of their collective impacts.

<sup>6</sup> While Kosovo has since May 2007 had a Language Commission, it is severely depleted in terms of its ability to act by a shortage of finance, personnel and capacity to discharge its mandate, as determined by the Law on the Use of Languages, Article 32.

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