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Does Integrating Europe Need Polylingualism and Multiculturalism?

Vladimir Bilovesky

Faculty of Humanities of Matej Bel University, Slovakia
40 Tajovského Str., 974 01 Banská Bystrica
PhD (Translation Studies), Associate Professor
E-mail: vladimir.bilovesky@umb.sk

Abstract. The European integration process is not happening away from us. The issue of integration is currently one of the subjects most widely discussed. It affects all of us. We have not fully come to terms the effects of integration yet. The article discusses it within the context of language diversity in Europe.

Keywords: integration process; language diversity in Europe; culture; European culture; Common European Framework; Multilingualism.

Introduction

The European integration process is not happening away from us, away from the cultural, economic or political area which we are deeply familiar with. Other areas, meaning other states, which we may only be familiar with thanks to short term holidays or business trips, seem distant, remote and strange. The issue of integration is currently one of the subjects most widely discussed by local and foreign politicians as well as by economists, teachers and the architects of national educational systems, because this phenomenon of today's Europe – whether we like it or not – affects all of us. It affects each individual, each citizen of the European geographical area, each culture, nation and state but also each national language within the area. We have not fully come to terms the effects of integration yet.

The integrating European economy interferes with the social, political and cultural context of the geographical area. We would be wrong to assume that such interference is just unidirectional. The social, political, cultural and economic changes caused by integration intersect and create an environment for *a new European order.* Political integration can be seen – in a simplified way – as a change of various laws and acts and their standardisation for the sake of a single *European standard or norm.* At the same time, national cultures intersect as well. All European countries affected by the integration process are adopting the same social, cultural and fashion trends. National governments need to do their best to prevent the gradual disappearance of differences, distinctions and peculiarities typical of national cultures or countries and to further develop and enrich European cultural heritage. In spite of these efforts we may not be able to avoid a kind of general *European culture,* which still may be significantly different from American culture. However, Americanisation has greatly affected not only European cultures but also other cultures of the world. At the same time, we cannot overlook the beginning of the process of establishing of a *universal, uniform lifestyle, universal mode of communication, universal behaviour, universal fashion and universal language.* The integrating Europe has also been affected by the worldwide globalisation process. Only the explicit recognition of the importance of distinction and uniqueness in all aspects of European cultural heritage can curb the increasingly powerful effects of globalisation on Europe. We would be naive to think that we can avoid this process. However, our goal is not to assess the positive and negative features of the European integration process but to point out its effects on language learning in Europe and on the future of language legacy in the European area.

Language Diversity in Europe

The ongoing European processes have resulted in the formation of Europe to form the European Union as an institution founded on the principle of unity in diversity. This means a diversity of cultures, traditions, faith and languages. Article 22 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights adopted in 2002 states that the Union respects language diversity, and Article 21 prohibits discrimination, including discrimination based on language. If we are to respect the diversity of cultures, traditions and languages we need to remember that language is human cultural heritage, capable of further cultivation of human lives. "Language as a universal environment of human existence implies its reflection of a person as a whole, a person as a physical, mental and spiritual being; it is also a physical phenomenon involving audio, phonetic, formal and morphological aspects, it has its own psyche (soul), which is consists of meanings, and semantics, and it has its own "spirit", which is the content of a text. Just as one overcomes one's own limitations only after recognising one´s own relations to the overall existence, one's own place in the universe (making one a spiritual being), in the same way meanings of words, sentences and statements in language acquire their content ("spirit") only within the body of text" [1]. Human language is a remarkable communication system which has developed along with people and the cultural environment in which they live. This is a trait which unmistakably differentiates a person from the rest of nature. Every modern language is closely connected to thinking, with the culture of its bearer.

The fundamental values of the European Union include: respecting the rights of individuals, openness toward other cultures, tolerance and acceptance others and respect for language diversity. These values do not only apply to the twenty-three official languages [2] of the European Union, but also to the many regional and minority languages spoken by a part of the European population. The European Union is attempting to make Europe a place in which diversity is seen as a source of a great wealth of culture, traditions and art.

Is Commenius´ Point That "*The number of languages you know is the number of times you are human"* Still Valid?

In its statement on *Multilingualism in the EU: European Commission calls for action to promote languages* from 22 November 2005 the European Commission reconfirmed its interest in promoting multilingualism and polylingualism. The Commission was inspired by John Amos Commenius´saying that "*The number of languages you know is the number of times you are human"* The previously mentioned document considers various aspects of the European Commission's language policy and defines a new strategic framework for multilingualism and polylingualism as well as proposals for specific measures. These measures involve three areas in which languages are necessary for everyday life in the European Union. They are: society, economy and relations of the European Commission to European citizens. The European Commission addresses its Member States and encourages them to actively improve language teaching, learning and use.

According to the most recent survey by Eurobarometer half of European citizens speak their mother tongue as well as being capable of communicating in at least one foreign language [3]. The survey further indicates that women are more likely to master a foreign language than men, young people more than those older ones and the urban population more than the rural population. In its statement, the European Commission emphasises that it is necessary for all of the Union's citizens to have language skills. In order to fulfil this strategic vision, the European Commission has adopted measures promoting further development of European citizens´ language skills. The measures include programmes such as *Socrates* and *Leonardo da Vinci*, by means of which the Commission invests 30 million EUR a year in language training, student and teacher mobility and in student groups' exchange.

The Commission proposes that Member States adopt national action plans to promote polylingualism. Such plans would serve to improve foreign language teachers' training and to provide foreign language instruction from a young age and, teaching of various subjects in a foreign language. Education is the key to increasing polylingualism.

The European Union's objective in the field of language is to create an environment which will enable the free use of every language and create conditions for learning of many languages. The Union has set an ambitious goal, according to which as many people as possible should speak two

other languages besides their mother tongue. The EU is aware of the dominant position of English, but attempts to prevent the potential reduction of Europe´s language diversity to English only. It was based on this fact that the EU has set the above goal. According to the most recent data available, only 25% of Europeans state that they speak two other languages beside their mother tongue. The European Union will pursue an increase of this percentage as soon as possible.

In order to point out the political aspect of language diversity within the Union and its consequent significance for school-based instruction, learning, lifelong learning, competitiveness, employment, justice, freedom and security, polylingualism was assigned its own, separate agenda on 1 January 2007.

The *European Year of Languages* announced by the European Commission and the Council of Europe in 2001 contributed to the rising awareness of the importance of language learning and 26 September was declared the *European Day of Languages.* This should serve to help European citizens recognise the importance of language learning, to familiarise them with the languages spoken across Europe and to support lifelong language learning. Events organised during the *European Day of Languages* offer information on various language learning methods.

Speaking of polylingualism, we need to point out the difference between polylingualism and multilingualism. Multilingualism means speaking many languages or the coexistence of different languages within a society. Multilingualism can be easily achieved through offering various languages in schools or within the educational system, through encouraging students to learn more than one foreign language or through dethroning English from its dominant position English in international communication. However, polylingualism emphasises the fact that an individual language experience in one's own cultural context develops from the language used within one's family through a language used within the society and further to languages of other nations (whether learned at school or through direct contact with a language), while a language learner does not strictly consciously differentiate between these languages and cultures, rather the learner develops a communication competence combining all their knowledge and language experience, which are in mutual correlation and interaction. Such a person can flexibly use various parts of this competence in different circumstances, which enables them to communicate effectively with a given partner. Communication partners can for example switch from one language or dialect to another and use their ability to express themselves in one language and to understand another. By recognising international words in a new form, such a person can even use his or her knowledge of many languages in order to understand written or spoken communication in a language which one is unfamiliar with. People with limited language skills can still use them to help those with no communication skills and become mediators between people who do not speak a common language. If no mediator is available, a certain level of communication can still be achieved through the use of the people´s combined language repertoire of these people and through experimenting with ways of expressing themselves in different languages or dialects using paralingual means (facial expressions, gestures, etc.) in order to substantially simplify their language.

More rigorous foreign language learning in Member States is necessary in the interest of greater mobility and more effective international communication. An important factor is respect for identity and cultural diversity, better access to information, more intensive personal interaction, improvement of work relations and deeper mutual understanding. To achieve these objectives, language learning inevitably becomes a lifelong task which needs promotion and facilitation by means of educational systems starting in kindergarten all the way through the adult education. In this respect it is necessary to create a common European framework for language learning on all levels with the purpose of supporting and facilitating cooperation between educational institutions in different countries, forming a good basis for mutual recognitions of language competence, helping learners, teachers, those developing curricula, examining committees and educational workers with concepts to direct and coordinate their efforts.

Multilingualism must be seen in the context of cultural pluralism of cultures. Language is not only an important aspect of cultures, but also an instrument enabling access to particular cultural expressions. Much of what has been mentioned also applies to a more general context: in the cultural competence of an individual, there are no distinct; cultures (national, regional, social) that an individual has accessed, they simply coexist and the individual compares them, recognises their contrasts and their active interaction. In this way one's enriched integrated multicultural

competence is developed, and multilingualism is only a part of it, mutually interacting with the other components.

The European Commission understands that with 450 million citizens (in 2007) from a wide variety of ethnic, cultural and language backgrounds, it is more important than ever to offer communication means to European citizens. The Member States of the Union are fully responsible for the structure and contents of their educational systems and training. The activities of the European Commission including educational and training programmes should complement and not replace tasks of the Member States in language learning.

With respect to the deepening cooperation and mobility in Europe, knowledge of foreign languages is a great advantage. This leads to the need of training for teachers of foreign languages and of encouraging the interest of students as well as of the general public in languages. By means of appropriate use of language and teaching skills, teachers can stimulate enthusiasm for languages which can last for the rest of one's life. Therefore teachers help fulfil the European Union's objective that all EU citizens need to speak two other languages besides their mother tongue. The European Commission understands this to be a very brave and ambitious goal, but not unrealistic. Foreign language instruction should begin as early as possible, even with preschoolers. It should then continue throughout school higher education as well as into adulthood. Children greatly benefit from learning languages at an early age. When encouraged in their natural ability to acquire language skills at an early age, they gain more time for learning and they are exposed to linguistic and cultural experience which can enhance their general development (cognitive, cultural, auditory, linguistic and personality) and their self-esteem. Teaching of languages at an early age can only be successful if teachers go through special training focusing on language teaching for the preschool age and for the first stage of primary school. Schools need to offer a wider variety of foreign languages and not be limited to English only. According to surveys by the European Commission, neglecting opportunities to use one's second or third language resulting in insufficient language skills can have adverse effects on the Union's economy. We believe that schools can also help to promote and explain the great importance of other European languages to us as European citizens. Language learning could help prepare pupils and students for their integration into a society which is open to other cultures and in which they can meet people from different cultural and language backgrounds. This will help develop their communication skills and ability to engage in cross-cultural dialogue. This need is also reflected in the document *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School.* School curricula in most countries offer all students the possibility to learn at least two foreign languages as part of their compulsory school attendance. In approximately 20 states, the study of foreign languages is compulsory for at least a year. A wide range of foreign languages is directly included in the curriculum in many states. English, French, German, Spanish and Russian comprise 95% of all languages taught in secondary schools in most of the states. The percentage of students learning Russian is the highest in the Baltic States. This Slavic language is to a certain extent also taught in Finland, Poland and Bulgaria. This proves that students tend to choose the most widely used languages. This may be due to pressure from their families or a lack of qualified teachers in other languages. English is taught in all EU countries. In 13 European states students learn English during their compulsory education and in other places for an even longer period with ongoing instruction at secondary schools. The proportion of students learning English at secondary schools is higher than 90% in all these states. German and French are the second most often taught languages. German dominates in the Nordic states and in Central and Eastern Europe, while French is more popular in Southern Europe. As already indicated, teachers should play a key role in fulfilling the ambitious goals of the European Union. It should be the responsibility of Member States to motivate teachers and thus facilitate the fulfilment of these goals. It appears that the language training of Europeans needs to focus on lifelong language learning.

Common European Framework of Reference as Part of European Union's Language Policy

The Common European Framework of Reference provides a single basis for developing a language learning curriculum and guidelines for developing teaching plans, tests, textbooks, etc. in all of Europe. It describes what learners must learn to be able to communicate in a foreign language and what knowledge and skills are needed for its efficient use. The description also covers

language´s cultural context. The framework defines levels of language skills which enable us to measure the progress of learners on each learning level and throughout their lives. The Common European Framework of Reference aims at overcoming the communication barriers between modern language experts, which are rooted in the differences between Europe´s education systems. The Common European Framework of Reference is based on the concept that communication involves the whole being and that verbal communication of language involves cultures. Therefore, the main objective of language learning is to enhance the favourable development of learners' personalities and to develop their sense of identity through an enriching experience with different languages and cultures. It is necessary to encourage both teachers and learners to integrate these numerous components into a healthy developing unit. The Common European Framework of Reference provides scales for measuring general language skill levels as well as language use and language competence specifications which will help practising professionals define the educational process and teaching objectives and describe achieved results in line with the changing needs, characteristics and possibilities of learners.

How can the Common European Framework of Reference be utilised?

The Common European Framework of Reference can be utilised in several areas. These include planning of language learning programmes with respect to their:

- prognoses based on previous knowledge/skills from previous learning experience, in particular with regards to the connection between primary, secondary, higher and further education,
- objectives, and
- contents.

Another area involves awarding certificates and considers:
- the contents of examinations, and
- evaluation criteria.

The document also emphasises planning self-learning including building awareness of learners´ knowledge setting realistic goals, selecting materials and self-evaluation.

The Common European Framework of Reference and the Criteria It Must Meet

The Common European Framework of Reference must be a comprehensive, transparent and coherent document. *Comprehensive* means that the Common European Framework of Reference needs to specify a wide range of language knowledge, skills and uses and empower all users to describe their objectives. The Common European Framework of Reference needs to enhance various dimensions of describing language skills and create a series of reference points (levels or steps) which will enable measuring of the learning progress. It is also necessary to remember that the development of language skills on the communication level also includes dimensions other than language (e.g. social and cultural awareness, having imaginative stimuli, emotional relations, acquiring learning skills, etc.).

Transparent means that information for users must be clearly worded, unambiguous, accessible and easy to understand.

Coherent means that there are no inherent contradictions within the description. With regards to educational systems, coherence requires that the following elements are in harmony:
- identification of needs,
- setting of objectives,
- determination of content,
- selection or development of materials,
- introduction of teaching and learning programmes,
- applied teaching and learning methods, and
- evaluation, testing and classification.

Creating such a comprehensive, transparent and coherent framework for learning and teaching languages does not imply a need to introduce a single uniform system. Rather, such a framework needs to be open and flexible so as to allow for the various modifications necessary in certain specific circumstances. The Common European Framework of Reference needs to be:

✓ multipurpose – applicable to various purposes related to planning and providing necessary material conditions for language learning,

✓ flexible – applicable in a variety of circumstances,

✓ open – capable of expansion and further improvement,

✓ dynamic – continuously developing in line with experience gained through its use,

✓ easily applicable – quickly, clearly and helpfully presented to its recipients, and

✓ non-dogmatic – not irrevocably or exclusively related to one of the many mutually competitive and contradicting linguistic or teaching theories or approaches.

Language Technologies

Language technologies are an important tool safeguarding Europe´s rich cultural heritage and a source of future economic growth.

Europe is becoming a world leader in language technologies. The European Commission organises language experts and information and communication technology experts from all of Europe. It focuses on the following areas:

➢ *i2010 Initiative* – European Information Society – this initiative focuses on ensuring that Europe is not divided between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not have such access. The i2010 Initiative has three main priorities:

- information space (i2010 presents a vision of information society offering widely available, safe and fast communication),

- investment and innovation in research (Europe needs to bridge the gap between information and communication technology research in Europe and its main competitors),

- integration (the European information society must provide high quality public services and improve the living conditions of all its citizens, while remembering those who do not have access to digital technologies).

European Research Programmes

➢ *eContent (2001–2005)* – market incentives; the objective of eContent was to encourage the growth and development of the digital content industry in Europe. It included a wide range of projects serving to increase production of such content in multilingual and multicultural environment.

➢ *eContentplus (2005–2008)* – eContentplus was a continuation of eContent and was launched in early 2005. It covered a smaller area and focused on public interest matters such as education, culture and information in the public sector in which – if we depended on market forces alone – digital content would not develop or would only very slowly.

Information and communication technologies can contribute to enhancing European cultural diversity, which is in fact already happening. A mobile phone, for example, is not yet capable of translating what we say into a chosen target language; however, machine translation technologies have already been helping professional translators to work more effectively.

By reducing the cost of working in several languages, these technologies help to protect language diversity as well as reduce the cost of work on the pan-European market for European businesses and other organisations.

With the development of new language technologies, the Europe´s abundant cultural heritage becomes available to all regardless of language or place. This opens a great potential of European culture, history and art. European culture becomes accessible to all citizens of the old continent. Language technologies can ensure that European languages, culture and art will assume a respectable position in the globalising Europe and globalising world.

Speaking a foreign language broadens the scope of one's cultural values and traditions, enriches our world with the knowledge of something new, something different or even foreign. "However, the primary goal is not to acquire new knowledge but to acquire the ability to reflect on what is one's own and what is foreign, on the difference in values, to conduct a dialogue about the meaning of traditions and their blending, about the possibilities of understanding others, about overcoming misunderstanding or hostility, about solidarity and about the meaning of being together, about togetherness" [4].

Language facilitates dialogic understanding not only between people, but also between cultures, and it facilitates tolerance of diversity. Consequently, a foreign language should not be

seen as a goal but as a tool. It opens wide windows of opportunity and enables us to encounter different, foreign cultural, social, economic and political environments, their history and present.

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2. The 23 official languages in the EU are abbreviated as follows: BG Bulgarian, CS Czech, DA Danish, DE German, ET Estonian, EL Greek, EN English, ES Spanish, FR French, GA Irish, IT Italian, LT Latvian, LI Lithuanian, HU Hungarian, MT Maltese, NL Dutch, PL Polish, PT Portuguese, RO Romanian, SK Slovak, SL Slovenian, FI Finnish, SV Swedish.
3. This percentage varies in different states and social groups: 99% of Luxembourg citizens, 93% of Latvian and Maltese citizens, and 90% of Lithuanian citizens speak at least one foreign language while a prevailing part of Hungary (71%), the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (70%), Spain, Italy and Portugal (64% each) only speak their mother tongue.
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УДК 81

Нужны ли многоязычие и мультикультурность объединяющейся европе?

Владимир Биловески

Факультет гуманитарных наук, Университет им. Матея Бела, Словакия
974 01, г. Банска Быстрица, ул. Таёвского 40
Кандидат филологических наук (перевод), доцент
E-mail: vladimir.bilovesky@umb.sk

Аннотация. Процесс объединения Европы затрагивает интересы всех европейцев. Проблематика единения является на современном этапе одной из самых обсуждаемых тем. Она касается каждого из нас. Результаты объединения мы пока ещё не достаточно полно осознаём. Статья отражает данную проблематику в контексте языкового разнообразия в Европе.
Ключевые слова: процесс интеграции; языковое разнообразие в Европе; европейская культура; общие основы; мультилингвизм.