

MULTILINGUALISM AS A COHESION FACTOR IN THE EUROPEAN CULTURE

1. EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

Many European languages have their origins in three Indo-European language groups: the Romance languages from the Latin of the Roman Empire; the Germanic languages, whose original language was spoken in Southern Scandinavia, and the Slavic languages, derived from the Protoslav branch, which existed for over 3000 years before evolving into a variety of other languages during the period between the VI-IX centuries AD¹. In general, all the current languages in Europe settled during the Middle Ages. Until then, the various languages had evolved rapidly because there was only a small percentage of people who could read and write. With so few people being able to read, it was normal for languages to be passed from generation to generation orally, making its evolutionary process more expedient than what it currently is today.

Romance languages were, and still to this day are spoken mainly in Southwestern Europe and in Romania and Moldova (Spanish, French, Portuguese and Italian are Romance languages, as well as other languages that are not so widespread as Catalan or Sardinian).

Germanic languages have their roots in Northern and Northwestern Europe, and in some areas of Central Europe; to this group belong German, Dutch, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Icelandic, as well as Frisian, which is considered a minority language.

Slavic languages are spoken in Central Europe, the Balkans, Russia and West of Russia. Because the area suffered numerous invasions over several centuries, languages were strongly differentiated from each other, which is the reason for the current division into three distinct groups: Western, Eastern and Southern. Polish, Czech and Slovak, as well as Sorbian and Kashubian became West Slavic languages, Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian became East Slavic languages, and Slovenian, Serbian, Croatian, Macedonian and Bulgarian became South Slavic languages.

Apart from these three main divisions (Romance, Germanic and Slavic languages) there are three other notable languages in Europe. The first language is Greek, and is the official language of Greece and

¹ PRICE, G., *Encyclopedia of the Languages of Europe*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford (United Kingdom), 1998, p. 436.

Cyprus. There are the Baltic languages (Latvian and Lithuanian), and finally, the Celtic languages (Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh, Breton and its dialects), which were formerly widespread not only in the British Isles but also throughout much of continental Europe. However, they are now considered minority languages in their respective countries².

There are however, non Indo-European languages that are spoken on the continent, an example of some of these languages are Uralic languages, which got its name from the Ural Mountains, the supposed birthplace of the people who started speaking these languages. Some of them are Estonian, Finnish and Hungarian, spoken in their respective countries with the status of official language, as well as in other parts of Russia and Scandinavia as minority languages.

Another non Indo-European language also spoken is Basque, whose origin is uncertain and controversial: It is considered to be a pre-Indo-language, and the oldest text in Basque goes back to the eleventh century, which reflected the donation of the monastery Ollazábal (Guipúzcoa) by Garcia Azenáriz and his wife to San Juan de la Peña. The letter contained Latin formula, but the details of the constraints are written in Basque³.

To indictae this, a map on the following page shows where European languages (each in a different color) and their geographic distribution across the continent can be identified. It also tells of the relation of each language with its abbreviation as reflected on the map, in alphabetical order. These refer to the code of two and three letters used to identify the major languages of the world, as recognized by the ISO 639-1 (two letters), ISO 639-2 and ISO 639-3 (two of three letters). The abbreviations on the map in parentheses refer to those languages that are spoken only by a minority population within a given region. As for Norwegian, according to Norwegian law, there are two official forms of written Norwegian: Bokmål (literary language) and nynorsk (new language).

² HUBERT, H., *Los celtas y la civilización céltica*, Akal, Madrid (Spain), 2000, p. 38-39.

³ PRICE, G., *Encyclopedia of the Languages of Europe*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford (United Kingdom), 1998, p. 25.



Source: Urion Argador

Arm: Armenian av: Avar, aze: Azerbaijani, ba: Bashkir, be: Belarusian, bg: Bulgarian, br: Breton, ca: Catalan, cau: Languages of the Caucasus, ce: Chechen, chm: Mari, cs: Czech, csb: Casubian, cv: Chuvash, cy: Gaelic, da: Danish, deu: German, el: Greek, eng: English, et: Estonian, eu: Basque, fi: Finnish, fra: French, fy: Frisian, ga: Irish, gag: Gagauz, gd: Scottish Gaelic, geo: Georgian, gl: Galician, hr: Croatian, hun: Hungarian, inh: Ingush, is: Icelandic, ita: Italian, izh: Ingrian, kbd: Kabardian, krl: Karelian, kv: Komi, lad: Ladino, lez: Lezgian, lt: Lithuanian, lv: Latvian, mdf: Moksha, mk: Macedonian, myv: Erzya, nds: Low German, nld: Dutch, no: Norwegian (nn: nynorsk, nb: bokmål), oc: Occitan, os: Ossetic, pol: Polish, por: Portuguese, rm: Raetho-Romance, ron: Romanian, rup: Aromanian, rus: Russian, sc: sardo, se: sami septentrional, sk: eslovaco, sl: esloveno, spa: español, sr: Sardinian, sq: Albanian, sv: Swedish, tr: Turkish, tt: Tartar, udm: Udmurt, ukr: Ukrainian, vep: Veps, wen: Sorabian, xal: Kalmyk, yi: Yiddish, yrk: Nenets.

In addition to the languages that are spoken today, there were many other languages and dialects in Europe that were once spoken, but disappeared over time. In fact, although no one knows the exact number of extinct languages, due to the possibility that there are currently unknown descendants of languages considered extinct or that there are unknown languages nowadays. The estimated number of languages and language groups that became extinct throughout history in Europe is estimated to be thirty. They included Mozarabic (Spain), Etruscan (Italy) or the language of the Isle of Manx (UK).⁴ Similarly, there were about ten languages nearly disappeared on the continent, such as León (Spain), which has only passive speakers, and the Livonian (Finland), which has no speakers under the age of 50, or Judeo-Italian languages which have very few speakers.⁵ However, just as some languages disappear, there are other languages that are thriving becoming increasingly more prevalent in the European territory, which are spoken by newly arrived migrant communities to Europe.

2. MULTILINGUALISM IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The successive enlargements of the EU have made the linguistic environment that surrounds the Union become more complex. Due to the open borders within the Schengen zone and the free movement of persons within the EU, European society is becoming increasingly intertwined with citizens of other countries. Citizens of the European Union can not only travel more comfortably with regard to VISAS and bureaucracy, but it is easier to study or work in different countries as well. However, there are still some requirements that must be met when living in a neighboring country, either temporarily or permanently. This is of course to speak the local language, which is a major reason that motivates people to learn and study foreign languages.

In 2006, according to a survey by Eurostat, 56% of Europeans claimed to speak another language besides their own, and 28% spoke two languages fluently along with their mother tongue. In addition, approximately 1 out of 10 participants in the same survey had the skills to hold a conversation in three foreign languages. However, 44% of Europeans, admitted that they could not speak any other language besides their mother tongue. Compared with the results obtained in 2001, the percentage of those who knew at least one foreign language increased nine percent (from 47% in 2001 to 56% in 2006). The number of EU citizens that knew at least two languages other than their mother tongue increased by

⁴ SALMINEN, T., "Unesco Red Book on Endangered Languages: Europe – General Bibliography", September 1999: http://www.helsinki.fi/~tasalmin/europe_index.html (24-06-10).

⁵ SALMINEN, T., "Unesco Red Book on Endangered Languages: Europe", September 1999: http://www.helsinki.fi/~tasalmin/europe_report.html (24-06-10).

two percent, from 26% to 28%, and the proportion of those who knew at least three foreign languages made up to 3%. This progress reflects that fewer Europeans still did not have foreign language skills five years ago. It declined from 47% in 2001 to 44% in 2006.⁶

Within the Europe there are five current languages that have the highest number of native speakers. These five languages are also the most studied in the secondary schools in Europe. In order of demand, they are English, French, German, Spanish and Russian, which accounts for 95% of the languages being studied. Students in the Baltic countries and Bulgaria are the ones who make up the largest number of students studying Russian. Students generally choose to study the languages that are used most throughout the world, and can be attributed both to family pressure and the lack of teachers qualified to teach other languages. Thus, there is clear evidence in the high percentage of students studying English and this trend has grown steadily between 2004 and 2008, often to the detriment of students who chose to learn German or French.⁷

As for nationalities, 99% of the people in Luxembourg, 97% of Slovaks and 95% of Latvians dominate at least one foreign language. Small countries with several official languages are the places where multilingualism is higher, as well as in countries whose languages are not widely disseminated. On the other side of the spectrum, Ireland and the United Kingdom, where only 34% and 38% of citizens respectively speak another language other than their mother tongue (the main reason in both cases is because English, their native language, is considered to be a 'lingua franca' in which they can communicate with much of the rest of the world's population, so they may not feel the need to learn other languages). Similarly, Italy (41%), Hungary (42%), Portugal (42%) and Spain (44%) are other countries where they have a lower percentage of speakers who can speak multiple languages. This could be due to the lack of importance that their respective societies have traditionally placed on learning a foreign language.

With regard to age, there seems to be a trend towards young people studying a second language as they are encouraged to learn and study other languages according to the same Eurostat survey. These results are furthered by the fact that, 61% of Europeans over 55 years old claimed they do not to want to learn or use a foreign language.

⁶ EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Europeans and their Languages – Eurobarometer n° 243*, Directorate General for Education and Culture, Brussels (Belgium), 2006, p. 8.

⁷ EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe*, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, Brussels (Belgium), 2008, p. 11.

2.1 Reasons to Promote Language Learning

Learning a new language is justified by the needs of communication, as well as facilitating the mobility of citizens between countries, and strengthening economic growth and integration. Proficiency in foreign languages not only opens doors to other cultures, but it also reinforces the practical ability of citizens to enrich their cultural contacts maintained when traveling or working abroad. Furthermore, the European Union implicitly encourages the learning of other languages because knowing another languages makes the individual more aware of other cultures different from their own one. It also allows them to meet citizens who speak it as a mother tongue, and form a bond a with that person, country, and cultureThis can help prevent citizens from both countries entering into conflict or war, something that the EU ensures that will not happen among its member states.

3. HOW CAN MULTILINGUALISM BOND THE EUROPEAN CULTURE

Cultural diversity in Europe is reflected through language, literature, performing arts, visual arts, architecture, crafts, film, and broadcasting. All of these manifestations together, which are normally related to a country or a particular region, are still part of the common European cultural heritage. Specifically, language is a natural and direct expression of any culture. The uniqueness of each language and cultural heritage of each nation is an oft debated topic in today's globalized world.

Despite not being united by a common language, there are other aspects of continetnal Europe that do unite Europeansas more than 8 out of 10 Europeans are satisfied with the life they lead⁸. Health, work, and study are the most important aspects in Europeans' lives and peace is the value that best represents the citizens of the Member States.

Although only half of all Europeans really feel part of Europe, only 38% say that they share a common European identity. The lack of this identity could be a result of the increase in the number of EU Member States over the last 50 years, as well as to the controversy regarding the accuracy of its geographical boundaries. As E. Ohlendorf points out:

⁸ FOUNDATION EUROFOUND, "European Quality of Life Survey", November 2008: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/press/releases/2008/081119.htm> (24-06-10).

“Identity means complete equality between two things, an essential equality. European identity would in this sense be an essential equality of all the inhabitants of Europe. But what do we mean by Europe? A geographical definition of Europe is not simple and there is (so far) no clearly defined political territory of Europe. How then can people have an essential equality with something that cannot be defined exactly? ”⁹.

Besides, “most of the inhabitants of our continent feel, in a higher or lower degree, Europeans, but most of the inhabitants feel in a clearer and stronger way that they are inhabitants of France, Spain or Germany or, also, Catalonia, Scotland, Brittany or Flanders”, as J. C. Ocaña highlights¹⁰. Hence the need to seek common points between them for the construction of the European project.

For European citizens, the EU concept does not represent the idea of a multilingual and multicultural continent, but rather the freedom to travel, study and work in other states.¹¹ This view of what mobility represents may be the reason why the attitude of young Europeans is more positive than the one of adults when it comes to foreign languages, since it is young people who prepare themselves with their studies to perhaps work in other member countries. This might not be the case for adults who once they have a steady job, and have a family, might not be so receptive to working in different countries. Therefore, based on the principle that in Europe the majority of the inhabitants are adults (Europe has a low birth rate compared to other continents) and the picture of the European inhabitant who speak more than one language is younger than 30 years old, it appears that not many Europeans enjoy the benefits of multilingualism. But it is important to stress that there is broad consensus among European citizens that the benefits of speaking a foreign language in the various fields of modern day life are many. In the last five years, more and more Europeans are using foreign languages in daily life situations, such as communication with friends and relatives, reading, as well as for work, both written

⁹ OHLENDORF, E., “La identidad europea como objeto de estudio y enseñanza”, in *Eduvinet*, 1998, p. 1.

¹⁰ OCAÑA, J.C., “La aparición de una identidad europea”, in *Historia de la Unión Europea*, 19th May 2003, p. 70.

¹¹ EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Public Opinion in the European Union – Eurobarometer n° 63*, Directorate General for Education and Culture, Belgium (Brussels), 2005, p. 106.

and spoken¹². Not only has the number of speakers of foreign languages increased, but also the level of mastery of these languages, as mentioned above.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Multilingualism enriches the individual and promotes understanding among all citizens from different countries, whereas monolingualism insulates the citizen of a country from other countries. The variety of languages that exist in Europe make it difficult to understand one another if people do not speak the languages of others, so it is necessary to have a positive attitude towards learning, first as a form of enrichment, and second to encourage integration. Learning should not consist only of studying the most widespread EU languages, but also to enable and promote the learning of other languages from an early age to all EU citizens alike. Thus one could learn Danish and Czech instead of English and French from primary school without a later detriment in their working life, for not speaking some languages already predetermined, as it happens nowadays. There must be a positive attitude towards learning other languages from all citizens. It must also be noted that the labor system could benefit from multilingualism as well. If companies have employees that cover and work throughout Europe it can help them increase their business performance. There must be a conscious change within the EU to move away from official languages of the EU, something that can only happen if the dependence on English and French above all other languages ends.

¹² EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Europeans and their Languages – Eurobarometer n° 243*, Directorate General for Education and Culture, Brussels (Belgium), 2006, p. 44.

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