The educational challenge of multilingualism in Europe

25ème Conférence adressée aux enseignants grecs en Europe, le 7 mars 2016
PhD Kari Kivinen
As part of its efforts to promote mobility and intercultural understanding, the EU has designated language learning as an important priority, and funds numerous programmes and projects in this area. Multilingualism, in the EU’s view, is an important element in Europe’s competitiveness. One of the objectives of the EU’s language policy is therefore that every European citizen should master two other languages in addition to their mother tongue.
The recommended framework defines eight key competences and describes the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to each of these. These key competences are:

1. **communication in the mother tongue**, which is the ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and to interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative way in a full range of societal and cultural contexts;

2. **communication in foreign languages**, which involves, in addition to the main skill dimensions of communication in the mother tongue, mediation and intercultural understanding. The level of proficiency depends on several factors and the capacity for listening, speaking, reading and writing;

Native speaker

of all the languages!
Isabelle, Bruxelles, 14

- The heart is Spanish (because I feel Spanish)
- The brain is French (but it doesn’t mean that I think in French), I just have to use a lot the French to live in Belgium,
- The feet are Belgian, because I live in Belgium.
- The hands are English, because English language is important to communicate with people (really often).
Mother tongue/Dominant language/Home language

• The language which a person has grown up speaking from early childhood.

• (As a rule, interpreters are supposed to translate between their mother tongue and another language)

• German is the most widely spoken mother tongue in Europe (18%) followed by English and Italian with a 13% share. 12% of respondents indicate that they speak French as their mother tongue.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language(s)</th>
<th>% Mentions</th>
<th>Other Official EU Languages</th>
<th>Other Languages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BE Dutch, French, German</td>
<td>56%, 38%, 0.4%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CZ</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>DK</td>
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<td>DE</td>
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<td>EE</td>
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<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>ES Spanish, Catalan, Galician, Basque</td>
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<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FR</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>IE English, Irish</td>
<td>94%, 11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT</td>
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<tr>
<td>CY</td>
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<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>LV</td>
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<td>1%</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>LT</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>LU Luxembourgish, French, German</td>
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<tr>
<td>HU</td>
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<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT Maltese, English</td>
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<td>0.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>NL</td>
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<td>AT</td>
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<td>PL</td>
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<td>95%</td>
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<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>SK</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>FI Finnish, Swedish</td>
<td>94%, 5%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
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<tr>
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<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>RO</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>TR</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
MEDIAN NUMBER OF LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY THE EU POPULATION

MORE MAPS AT: JAKUBMARIAN.COM
Monolingualism

• In Europe, linguistic repression is now considered a politically out-dated, costly “solution”, although the use of languages other than national/official may still be penalised or restricted, particularly where there are serious tensions between communities.

• As a result of advances in democracy, imposed monolingualism is now held to be illegitimate and even illegal.

  Council of Europe, 2007

• UNESCO : « L’unilinguisme est un handicap intellectuel »
AVERAGE NUMBER OF LANGUAGES Spoken BY THE EU POPULATION

MORE MAPS AT: JAKUBMARIAN.COM
Bilingualism

• The term ‘bilingual’ refers to an individual who uses two or more languages or dialects in his or her everyday life, regardless of the context of use. Taking this definition into account, more than half of the world can be considered bilingual (Giussani, Roux, Lubrano, Gaini and Bello, 2007: 1109)

• Bilingual typically use their two languages with different people, in different context and for different purposes.

• Balanced bilinguals with equal and strong competence in their two languages are rare

• In terms of ability in two languages, the four basic dimensions are listening, speaking, reading and writing.
Bilinguals get all the perks. Better job prospects, a cognitive boost, and even protection against dementia. Now new research shows that they can also view the world in different ways depending on the language they are operating in.

In the past 15 years there has been an overwhelming amount of research on the bilingual mind, with the majority of the evidence pointing to the tangible advantages of using more than one language. Going back and forth between languages appears to be a kind of brain training, pushing your brain to be flexible.

Just as regular exercise gives your body some biological benefits, mentally controlling two or more languages gives your brain cognitive benefits. This mental flexibility pays big dividends especially later in life: the typical signs of cognitive ageing occur later in bilinguals - and the onset of age-related degenerative disorders such as dementia or Alzheimer’s are delayed in bilinguals by up to five years.
Multilingualism

• ... the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives. (EC 2007:6)

People can be called multilingual (or plurilingual) if they know two or more languages, whatever the level of competence.
Multilingual individuals

• Most multilingual people master their various languages to different degrees. Moreover, what can be considered their stronger or weaker language may change from one context to another and in the course of their lives.

• Some multilingual people may be better in one language for writing formal texts but better in another, even one they cannot write, for talking casually to relatives, expressing emotions or telling jokes.

• Some may know two or more languages so well that they may pass as monolingual native speakers of each of their respective languages in all situations and under all circumstances. Such cases are extremely rare.
MOST SPOKEN SECOND LANGUAGES* IN THE EU BY COUNTRY

*LANGUAGES PEOPLE CAN SPEAK WHICH ARE NOT THEIR MOTHER TONGUE

MORE MAPS AT:
JAKUBMARIAN.COM
SECOND MOST SPOKEN SECOND LANGUAGES* IN THE EU BY COUNTRY

*LANGUAGES PEOPLE CAN SPEAK WHICH ARE NOT THEIR MOTHER TONGUE

MORE MAPS AT: JAKUBMARIAN.COM
THIRD MOST SPOKEN SECOND LANGUAGES* IN THE EU BY COUNTRY

*LANGUAGES PEOPLE CAN SPEAK WHICH ARE NOT THEIR MOTHER TONGUE

MORE MAPS AT: JAKUBMARIAN.COM
Multilingual communities

Some communities of people are officially monolingual, bilingual or multilingual, in the sense that formal communication is conducted in one, two or more languages.

• For example, the Region of Brussels Capital is officially bilingual French-Dutch, but Brussels residents have hundreds of distinct native languages.
• This multiplicity of native languages or of languages known by the members of a community — whether a family, an organization, a firm, a school, a neighbourhood, a town, a region or a country — can be called linguistic diversity.
• Communities that are officially multilingual or in reality linguistically diverse may vary greatly in the extent to which their members are multilingual.
  – At one extreme, the various language groups that make up the community are unable to communicate with one another
  – the other extreme, they are all fluent in each other’s languages.

A truly multilingual community is one whose members are themselves multilingual. Brussels will be truly multilingual when all its residents will be multilingual to a varying but significant degree.
## Languages spoken in Brussels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Languages spoken</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2011</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>95,5</td>
<td>95,6</td>
<td>88,5</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>33,3</td>
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<td>29,7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>33,3</td>
<td>28,3</td>
<td>23,1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>10,1</td>
<td>6,6</td>
<td>17,9</td>
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<td>Spanish</td>
<td>6,9</td>
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<td>German</td>
<td>7,1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>4,7</td>
<td>5,7</td>
<td>5,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>3,3</td>
<td>1,5</td>
<td>4,5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2011, the Taalbarometer of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel.
Multilingualism/Plurilingualism

• it is a *competence that can be acquired*
  – plurilingualism cannot be considered the privilege of a “gifted” elite.
• being plurilingual does not mean mastering a large number of languages to a high level,
  – but acquiring the ability to use more than one linguistic variety to degrees for different purposes (conversation, reading or writing, etc.).
• it is regarded as a changing repertoire.
  – The degree of proficiency in the varieties in the repertoire may change over time, as may its composition.
• it is considered a repertoire of *communicative resources* that speakers use according to their own needs.
  – The linguistic varieties of which it is composed may have different functions: in the family, at work, in official or everyday situations, showing affiliation to a community, etc.
What are the advantages of multilingualism for individuals?

The most obvious advantage of multilingualism for individuals is that it amplifies their communication potential.

1. Professionally, competence in more than one language often increases the probability of finding a job or of accessing better jobs.

2. Culturally, being multilingual facilitates the discovery of different cultures, their literatures and traditions.

1. Socially, it opens up the possibility of richer contacts both when travelling abroad and with fellow members of one’s own multilingual community and thereby tends to foster mutual understanding, tolerance and trust.

1. For mixed families, it has the further advantage of enabling children to maintain an intimate bond with their extended families and a strong connection with their cultural roots, without this preventing them from integrating into the local community.
What are the advantages of multilingualism for individuals II?

• A growing number of recent studies have documented a range of cognitive and even neurological advantages of early multilingualism if properly managed.

• Multilingual children tend to score better in terms of mental flexibility, creativity and analysis, and they tend to keep these advantages later in life.

• Some recent studies have shown that, owing to their increased neuro-cognitive flexibility, multilinguals are significantly less prone to develop dementia related symptoms such as Alzheimer, or they develop them at a later age and suffer from them to a less severe extent than monolinguals do!

For more information see: www.marnixplan.org
What are the disadvantages of multilingualism for individuals?

The main disadvantage of multilingualism for individuals is the time and effort it takes to learn a new language, particularly when developed later in life. In addition a possible disadvantage of multilingualism is that

• Multilinguals’ mastery of each of their respective languages, when measured separately, tends to be lower than that of monolingual speakers of these languages.

• Multilinguals may have a smaller active vocabulary in each of their languages than monolinguals.

• The influence of their other languages may seep through when multilinguals speak or write in one of their languages, and cause them to have an accent or make occasional grammatical errors. (This phenomenon is known as interference).

For more information see: www.marnixplan.org
What is the best method for learning a new language?

- There are many different methods for learning a language, each with its advantages and disadvantages. What is best for an adult need not be best for a child!

- Most important is that the method chosen should match the situation, character and purpose of the learner.

- Thus, informal learning through communicating with native speakers, for example by living abroad, may lead to excellent communicative skills, whereas formal classroom teaching may result in a more correct grammar and a more precise vocabulary.
Language acquisition – never ending process!

• The learning of another language, just like mother tongue acquisition, is a process that will never be completed!

• The best way to keep learning — and to maintain what one has learned — is to keep practicing the language, both passively and actively.

• Nevertheless, formal teaching has a role to play, and all methods are not equally effective
What is the best method for teaching a new language?

• *Mother tongue-based multilingual education* (MLE) is still the most common language teaching model
  – *Traditional classroom methods*, focus often on the learning of rules of grammar and lists of vocabulary.

• *Immersion education* involves teaching some non-language subjects in a language different from the home language of the pupils, in which the other subjects are taught.
  – *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL), or *Enseignement d’une matière par intégration d’une langue étrangère* (EMILE) are systematically used in a number of national schools all over in Europe, and at secondary level in the network of European Schools.

• In *complete immersion (language bath) method*, 100% of class time is spent in the foreign language.
Can the media improve our language proficiency?

• Yes! TV broadcasts and films in another language are definitely good ways of improving an individual’s proficiency, especially in cases where exposure to the language in everyday life is limited.

• For children in particular, the combination of spoken words with visuals may increase interest in what is being said.

• For viewers who can read, subtitles either in their best language or in the language of the broadcast can greatly facilitate the learning of both structures and vocabulary.

• The internet has gradually become an easily accessible means for encountering and practicing languages other than one’s mother tongue. The possibility of communicating with people all around the globe has multiplied the opportunities not only to read but also to speak and write other languages.

  – Social networks and online message boards, in particular, require the internet user to actively participate in online conversation – so, internet has created a formidable tool for language learning.
The Role of the parents

• Language planning
  – which languages to speak at home?
  – which languages to choose outside of school (day care, Au pair, nursery school, travels, relatives, friends)?

• Language use
  – In the bilingual family, the both parents should speak systematically their languages for their children!
  – The expatriate families should support actively the language development of their children by all the possible measures (magazines, books, films, computer games, etc)!

• Language choices & school
  – Choice of the School.
  – Choice of the main teaching language.
  – Choices for the second, third and fourth language.
  – Choice of after-school activities
  – Student exchange

• Language support
  – Interest, follow-up, and support when needed
  – Crises management
Different types of Schools

• National school systems
  – Luxemburgish system (Letz – DE – FR + EN)
  – Belgian system (FR+NL/EN, NL+ FR/EN)
  – Finnish system (FI or SW + SW or FI, EN )

• CLIL Schools (L1+ pupils learn a subject through the medium of a foreign language)

• International Schools (EN, L2, + )
  – Language bath schools (starting 100% with unknown language)

• European School system (L1, L2 and teaching through L2, L3, L4, + )
  – Partly CLIL approach
  – SWALS (Students without language section)
Languages in the European school system

• All the official mother tongues of 28 EU countries + Maltese and Gaelic are taught
• Schools have 3-16 language sections
• Students without language sections = SWALS

• 3 vehicular languages: English, French, German
  – European Hours in primary and
  – History, Geography, Economy, Art, Music, Sport etc are taught in the vehicular languages in Secondary school cycle
• L2 starts at 1st primary
• L3 starts at 1st secondary
• L4 starts at 4 secondary
• L5 = Complementary course 6-7
• + Latin (s2-) and ancient Greek (s4-)
The European Framework of Reference in the syllabus of the European Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BASIC PROFIENCY LEVEL IN DIFFERENT CYCLES</th>
<th>Early education</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary 3</th>
<th>Secondary 5</th>
<th>Secondary 7</th>
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<tr>
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<td>A2</td>
<td>B1</td>
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<td>C1</td>
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<td>A1</td>
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<td>ONL</td>
<td>A 1.1 oral</td>
<td>A 1.2</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>B2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Language learning problems

High expectations should be avoided
  – Language learning is a slow process.
  – Individuals are learning languages at their own pace.
  – Sometimes bilingual pupils are slower in the first phases of language learning

Learning difficulties are difficult to detect
  – dyslexia, dysphasia, and other language deficits are detected normally relatively late, at the age of 6-8.

Refuse
  – language learning is often linked to the identity. Sometimes children do not want to learn a language for specific reasons.

Semilingualism
Reminder:

The importance of mother tongue!

• It is difficult to overestimate the role of the mother tongue/dominant language in the language development

• It is better that the child is able to express his/her feelings in one language than that s/he is unsure to use any language
Summary of benefits:
Study on the Contribution of Multilingualism to Creativity (2009)

• a greater potential for creativity amongst those who know more than one language, when compared with monolinguals.
• bilinguals are able to see the world through different lenses.
• bilinguals tend to be better in problem-solving which is cognitively demanding.
• Language awareness gives the potential for enriched information processing.
• It is reported that knowing more than one language may help the brain sharpen its ability to focus.
• Multilingualism is reported as helping to nurture interpersonal communication awareness and skills.
• interface between multilingualism and age-related mental diminishment.
Conclusions

• The communication in the mother tongue and in foreign languages are desired EU key competences;
• The European objective of mother + 2 has not yet been achieved;
• Speaking more than one language has cognitive benefits that extend from childhood into old age;
• Being multilingual facilitates the discovery of different cultures, their literatures and traditions;
• It is never too late to learn a new language!
References & Links

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LINKS

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