



European Federation of National Institutions for Language

Sabine Kirchmeier / Tamás Váradi (eds.)

Linguistic diversity and language planning

The effect of societal and
technological factors

Contributions to the EFNIL Conference 2024 in Budapest

Preface

This publication compiles insights from EFNIL's 21st conference in 2024 in Budapest, focusing on the intersections between linguistic diversity, language planning and the influences exerted by societal and technological factors. The book explores a range of topics, from the EU's commitment to multilingualism and the changing role of national languages to the challenges faced by minority languages in a digital age, drawing on case studies from various European countries.

Merit-Ene Ilja opens by highlighting the European Union's deep commitment to multilingualism as a fundamental part of its identity and operational practice involving 24 official languages. The article emphasises how technological advancements pose challenges by favouring dominant languages but also create opportunities through tools like eTranslation. She describes the EU's legislative frameworks that protect the right of citizens to communicate with EU institutions in their own language as well as the importance of educational strategies to foster multilingualism from an early age.

In her opening speech, Sabine Kirchmeier highlights EFNIL's involvement in the European Language Equality (ELE) project, which has compiled an extensive inventory of digital language support for 87 European languages. She points out that a clear digital hierarchy exists among these languages, with English being the best equipped, followed by the most widely spoken national languages, while less widely spoken national languages as well as regional and minority languages receive limited attention.

Guy Berg examines multilingualism in Luxembourg, where three official languages, Luxembourgish, French, and German, are used simultaneously. He illustrates both the benefits and challenges across various domains. The benefits early language acquisition in schools, which opens up study opportunities abroad, the country's status as a significant financial centre and advantages in the recruitment of staff, especially in the health sector. Challenges include the considerable burden on students to learn multiple languages as well as unrealistic language demands on the job market. He concludes, however, that the benefits of multilingualism in Luxembourg far outweigh the challenges.

In her contribution, Jutta Ransmayr focuses on multilingual learners in the Austrian educational sector, including challenges, policies and recent developments. She notes that Austria lacks a central institution for language policy, leading to reactive rather than systematic policies. Ransmayr discusses the controversial implementation of "German support classes" (Deutschförderklassen), criticised for segregating students with insufficient German skills and for viewing multilingualism as a deficit rather than as a resource.

Javier Hernández Saseta delves into multilingualism and technology in the context of the European Commission's interpretation services. He explains that

the EU's 24 official languages, 3 alphabets and over 60 regional/minority languages underscore the importance of linguistic pluralism for democratic participation and social cohesion. The Directorate-General for Interpretation relies on highly skilled human interpreters but also leverages Artificial Intelligence (AI) to foster linguistic diversity and accessibility. Saseta emphasises that the main drivers for their work are efficiency, accessibility and language equality, with a particular focus on supporting low-resource languages by training AI models on diverse linguistic data.

Frieda Steurs addresses the case of Dutch, Frisian, Papiamentu and Afrikaans in the Netherlands, detailing the cooperation with the Fryske Akademy on the development of a digital dictionary of Frisian (*Wurdboek fan de Fryske taal*). She also highlights the recent recognition of Papiamentu as a regional language under the European Charter in 2024 and the agreement between the Dutch Language Institute and the National Language Institute Curaçao to build a lexical data infrastructure for Papiamentu.

Magnus Ahltop of the Language Council of Sweden discusses the positive and negative effects of language technology on minority languages. He argues that proper language technology is essential for written communication and provides a historical overview of how writing systems, typewriters, modern computer systems and smartphones have impacted the writing and use of minority languages. Using Meänkieli as an example, he illustrates how incorrect spell checking or predictive input based on a similar majority language (Finnish) can be detrimental to language preservation.

Tinatin Bolkvadze presents an overview of multilingualism in Georgia, tracing its history and examining the impact of Soviet and post-Soviet language policies. She highlights how Georgian was established as the state language early on so that standardised Georgian coexists with unwritten languages like Megrelian, Laz and Svan. She explains how Soviet linguistic policy (1921-1991) made Russian the dominant lingua franca, despite Georgian's official status, and how it influenced the adoption of Cyrillic alphabets for minority languages.

In the same context, Katharina Dück explores the role of German as a minority language and of its language policy actors in Georgia, focusing on the interplay between language repression and preservation efforts. She explains that German speakers in Georgia are descendants of either skilled specialists (who spoke near-standard German) or Swabian farmers (who spoke a Central Swabian dialect). Dück highlights a long phase of language repression (1939–1990) during the Soviet era, where public use of German was stigmatised, leading to a generation with limited acquisition of German. Despite this, many descendants of German migrants are actively trying to preserve their language and culture.

Ina Druviete provides an update on the language situation in Latvia, 35 years after the re-establishment of Latvian as the official language. She emphasises that Latvian language policy aims to restore its sociolinguistic functions and foster a

socially cohesive society within a complex ethno-demographic and geopolitical context. Regular sociolinguistic research shows a significant increase in Latvian language proficiency among residents. However, she notes persistent challenges, particularly the widespread informal use of Russian, often at the expense of Latvian, which stems from the legacy of Soviet occupation and Russification.

Johan Van Hoorde asks whether we should re-think our approach and policies regarding super-diversity and national languages. He defines “super-diversity” as a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon encompassing migration, internationalisation, mobility and digitalisation that challenges traditional concepts of community building and national identity tied to language. Van Hoorde argues that people increasingly belong to multiple social realities simultaneously (e.g. migrants maintaining ties to their home country through social media). He asserts that multilingualism is now the rule, not the exception, and that many citizens require three languages (their minority first language (L1), the national language and an international lingua franca like English) and calls for a new profile for national languages, shifting emphasis from being a constituent of national identity to serving as a contact language or “bridging capital” that facilitates interaction between diverse identities.

For this volume, we have received articles from two young researchers who were awarded the EFNIL Master’s Thesis Award in 2024. It turns out that the topics they had chosen for their theses fitted very well into the overall theme of the conference so that their presentations added to the exploration of societal and technological factors that influence linguistic diversity and language planning.

Welmoed Sjoerdsma investigates differentiation by L1 in the Frisian course in secondary education in Fryslân in the north of the Netherlands. She notes that Frisian is a minority language, with wide variation in proficiency among its speakers: while it is understood by most people, fewer can speak, read, or write it. The *Taalplan Frysk 2030* aims to improve Frisian education, with core curriculum goals differentiating between students based on their L1s. However, research, including observations and interviews with teachers, revealed that no significant differentiation was observed in the classroom between Frisian-speaking and Dutch-speaking students in terms of their teachers’ language use, encouragement or assistance.

Lisza-Sophie Neumeier investigates second language practices among young adults across educational, professional and recreational settings. She highlights the key role of English in the EU and its status as the most widely spoken and taught second language in Austria. Her results show that nearly one third of young working adults use English daily in a professional context and approximately one quarter of all students do so for their studies, primarily for receptive tasks like reading academic literature, where English acts as a gatekeeper for academic knowledge. Neumeier concludes that English serves as the “default additional language” in Austria, underscoring its essential role in professional, academic and leisure pursuits in the contemporary European context.

The third winner of the Master's Thesis Award was Joana Pena-Tarradellas, from the Universitat Pompeu Fabra who presented her thesis "Are Coercive Language Policies Fair? A Normative Approach Building on the Multilingual Convergence Mode" at the conference. All masters's theses are available on the EFNIL website (<https://efnil.org/projects/masters-thesis-award/>).

As there were particularly many good candidates for the award in 2024, the jury decided to give three of them an honourable mention. These were:

- Sol Tovar (University of Regensburg): *"Never heard of zir": Exploring what lies behind pre- and early-service EFL teachers' acceptance of non-binary pronouns in both.*
- Ellen Brösterhaus (University of Münster): *Crosslinguistic Influence in the L3 Acquisition of Dutch Syntax – A Study with First-Year Learners Testing the L2 Status Factor Hypothesis.*
- Mona Schwitzer (University of Vienna): *The schooling of pupils with refugee experience at Viennese schools.*

The 2024 conference has demonstrated that with the societal changes caused by increasing mobility, globalisation and digital technologies, national languages in Europe face a significant shift in their traditional roles and statuses. While they have historically served as fundamental markers of national identity and dominant forces in the public domain, education, government and media, they no longer function as the sole mother tongue for a large proportion of citizens, particularly in urban areas, but still play an important role as bridging or contact languages.

At the same time, there is an increasing awareness in many European countries and in the EU of the need to preserve linguistic richness and multilingualism, leading to efforts to support regional and minority languages.

Technological advancements present both risks, by potentially marginalising languages with fewer digital data, and opportunities, by enabling new forms of language support and accessibility.

In support of the languages at risk of marginalisation, EFNIL has adopted a "Statement on the access to media and communication devices in all European Languages". The statement is addressed to the European Commission and the European Parliament as a plea to support national governments in gaining access to media content and communication devices in the languages of their citizens. The statement is printed in the appendix of this volume and available in 15 languages on EFNIL's website: <https://efnil.org/documents/statement-on-the-access-to-media-and-communication-devices-in-all-european-languages/>.

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Sabine Kirchmeier

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Introductory statements

Merit-Ene Ilja

Linguistic diversity and language planning

The effect of societal and technological factors on linguistic diversity

1. Introduction

Linguistic diversity and language planning are crucial areas of focus in an increasingly globalised world. In this context, it is imperative to consider the challenges but also the opportunities that affect linguistic diversity, including linguistic, technological, legislative and educational factors. In this article, I will focus on actions that the European Commission is undertaking to support and uphold linguistic richness within the European Union.

2. Multilingualism: Linguistic diversity

As the Australian journalist and author Hugh Lunn put it: “Language tells us who we are: because we are the words we use.” I myself come from a small language community but we have been successful in preserving our identity and culture. Today – also thanks to the fact that Estonian became an official EU language in 2004 – Estonian is on par with the other smaller and bigger languages that form the family of 24 official EU languages.

Multilingualism or linguistic diversity is at the heart of everything that we do in the EU and the European Commission and an integral part of our *modus operandi*. People working for the European Commission use more than one language during their daily work. More importantly, however, every day the European Commission puts its commitment into practice to communicate with all EU citizens in their own language. In fact we consider this both an absolute obligation and an unconditional responsibility.

Respect for linguistic diversity is a sign of civilisation. The founding fathers of the European Union realised this all too well. This is why the very first regulation, adopted in 1958, was about the languages to be used by the European Economic Community. This was testimony to the fact that languages are at the very root of our shared European identity. In fact, nothing expresses and puts the EU’s motto “United in diversity” better into daily practice than multilingualism.

Today DGT provides translation and other language services in the EU’s 24 official languages and in other languages as needed, notably Ukrainian, as well as

an editing service during the drafting process to make language clear, correct and concise.

I personally oversaw the gradual phasing out of the Irish derogation, ensuring that translation and interpretation services across all EU institutions were prepared to integrate another less widely spoken language. This was a lengthy and steady process, requiring close cooperation with the Irish authorities and innovative solutions. For example, we engaged with universities and language fairs to promote EU institution jobs and encouraged the learning of Irish from primary through to secondary schools and university.

Last year DGT organised a series of translation capacity-building seminars for the Translation Coordination Units of the Western Balkan countries as well as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. DGT also held a Brussels masterclass in cooperation with the Regional School of Public Administration of the Western Balkans, focusing on quality management, terminology and the use of computer-assisted translation tools. DGT also provides translations (including into Ukrainian and Russian) for documents related to the Commission's initiatives in response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

3. Technological factors

Technological advancements present both challenges and opportunities for linguistic diversity. On the one hand, digital communication platforms often favour dominant languages, potentially sidelining smaller languages. On the other hand, technology can be leveraged to support linguistic diversity through tools like automated translation, digital archives of endangered languages and social media platforms that connect speakers of minority languages.

To support digital multilingualism, DGT developed its own machine translation system eTranslation, which it runs in collaboration with two other Commission services (DG CNECT and DG DIGIT) under the Digital Europe programme. eTranslation is the European Commission's online machine translation tool. It is a leading example of a secure use of artificial intelligence, complying with EU intellectual property rights and data protection rules and providing large-scale translation when human translation is not feasible. From January to June 2024, eTranslation saw record levels of use, with 2 to 3 million pages produced daily. This resulted in an unprecedented figure of almost 355 million pages translated in 2024.

The use of eTranslation on EU platforms continues to expand, with the number of Europa websites using the eTranslation widget increasing to 170. At the same time, DGT made it easier for eligible users to integrate eTranslation into their websites or IT applications. eTranslation serves both EU Institutions and, as part of the Digital Europe Programme, the broader EU. Besides EU institutions,

eTranslation is available to public administrations, academia, EU freelance translators, small- and medium-sized businesses, non-governmental organisations and projects funded by the Digital Europe programme located in an EU Member State or in countries associated with the programme.

The eTranslation web page can be used to translate short texts or full documents in all common formats. IT applications and websites can connect to eTranslation to reach out to the European public in their own languages. Over 100 Commission websites, such as those on Migration policy and the Taxation and Customs Union, are already doing so. Even the EU Council Presidency now uses it to make sure information is available in all EU languages.

The DGT AI Language Services Advisory also offers expert guidance to EU institutions and eligible users across EU Member States. As the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, stressed: “We will make available massive amounts of data in all EU languages because AI should work also for non-English speakers. This is the new frontier of competitiveness”.

In addition to eTranslation, DGT continues to work on other AI-powered language services and officially launched a new service, eBriefing, using AI to generate first drafts of briefings based on a series of inputs. In parallel, DGT continues to explore the new avenues opened by generative AI (visit <https://language-tools.ec.europa.eu/> for further details). This was done under the Digital Europe programme (DEP), one of the objectives of which is to support excellence in EU education and training institutions in digital areas by encouraging their cooperation with research and businesses. The goal is to improve the capacity to nurture and attract digital talent whilst fostering an ecosystem that will help drive innovation and digital breakthroughs.

Following 2023’s development access to the MeluXina supercomputer in Luxembourg, DGT was granted one year access to high-performance computing to further explore the use of the technology and work towards building an institutional multilingual large language model, i.e. the component that enabled the recent progress in generative AI. The aim is to use the model to promote the availability of data for low-resource languages as well, tapping into DGT’s vast multilingual data corpora.

4. Legislative and policy considerations

Legislative frameworks are fundamental in shaping the landscape of linguistic diversity and language planning. Since its inception, the EU has advocated for the right of citizens to contact European institutions in their own language and to receive a response in that language. This principle is cherished and protected in EU Treaties. In fact, the EU’s first piece of legislation, still in force, clearly states that all EU regulations and other documents of general use by its citizens must

be drafted in the Union's official languages. This was a conscious choice by the founders of the European Union to make sure people could gain access to laws and information about the EU in their own language.

The role of translation and linguistic inclusivity in the European Commission is crucial as it ensures that all citizens can access and participate in the democratic processes of the Union. Our teams of expert translators, interpreters and language professionals work tirelessly to facilitate cross-border communication and cooperation among EU institutions and Member States.

5. Educational strategies

I reside in Luxembourg, a small nation located in the centre of Europe where it's possible to purchase a baguette using at least four different languages, if not more. Children attending schools in the Luxembourgish education system speak a minimum of three languages, including German and French, but they commonly converse in the local language, Luxembourgish.

One may wonder why languages are so important. Languages are as old as human civilisation. Throughout history, languages have facilitated contacts between people, cultures and civilisations. Knowing other languages offers a window to other cultures, other civilisations, other ways of thinking, leading to a better understanding between people. That's why teaching language skills is crucial for the EU.

Educational systems play a critical role in fostering multilingualism. Incorporating multiple languages into curricula from an early age can help students develop proficiency in more than one language. However, this requires substantial investment in teacher training, resource development and curriculum design. Additionally, technological solutions, such as language learning apps and online resources, can supplement traditional education methods, providing accessible and engaging ways to learn new languages.

Education is arguably the most powerful tool for promoting linguistic diversity. Multilingual education models, such as immersion and bilingual programmes, can help students become proficient in multiple languages while fostering an appreciation for linguistic diversity. Moreover, integrating cultural studies into language education can deepen students' understanding of the cultural contexts of different languages, promoting respect and appreciation for linguistic diversity.

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture (EAC) leads and drives forward development in areas that resonate deeply with European citizens. Through their policies, programmes and initiatives, they look after the interests of millions of learners, teachers, researchers, sportspeople and athletes, artists and young people. On top of providing a shared vision of teaching and learning needs and responses in the EU, from early childhood education and care to schools and higher education, EAC ensures the strategic implementation

of three EU flagship programmes: Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps and Creative Europe. Furthermore it promotes culture, cultural heritage and diversity as a crucial part of European identity and values. In partnership with EAC, DGT promotes languages from the translation perspective, with Juvenes Translatores, a translation contest for schools, and with the European Master in Translation (EMT), a quality label for university studies in translation.

6. Conclusion

As we look to the future, it is clear that there are still many challenges ahead in promoting linguistic diversity. The proliferation of digital platforms and the rise of English as a global lingua franca may pose a threat to the vitality of many European languages. However, we believe that by working together, sharing knowledge and embracing innovation, we can overcome these obstacles and ensure that the linguistic richness of Europe remains a source of strength and inspiration for generations to come.

Europe is more than an internal market; it is a community of people and values, a mosaic of different kinds of diversity: cultural, religious and linguistic.

In conclusion, the European Commission is committed to embracing and promoting linguistic diversity within the Union, addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities that come with our multilingual society. Through advancements in technology, dedicated portfolios and ongoing support from our Directorates-General, we will continue to celebrate and safeguard the rich linguistic diversity that makes Europe unique.

Sabine Kirchmeier

Opening speech

Dear colleagues, dear guests, dear friends, dear representatives of the European Commission, dear hosts from the Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics

Nagy öröm számomra, hogy üdvözölhetem Önöket itt Budapesten az EFNIL 21. konferenciáján, amely a nyelvi sokszínűség és a nyelvtervezés nagyon fontos témájával foglalkozik.

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you here in Budapest to EFNIL's 21st conference on the very important topic of linguistic diversity and language planning. Budapest is an amazing city – with its impressive buildings and parks, to say nothing of its baths, and I hope that you will have an excellent stay here.

The preparations for this conference were not easy. As most of you know, we originally planned to hold this event in Tbilisi following a very kind invitation from our Georgian colleagues. And believe me, I was so much looking forward to going to Georgia. However, many colleagues approached us with concerns, and indicated that they would not be present physically if the conference took place there.

So, the whole point of arranging our conferences – bringing together language institutions from all over Europe to meet and exchange views and ideas, to strengthen personal bonds, to enhance communication and cooperation and, last but not least, to create an atmosphere of mutual inspiration – was in danger of being jeopardised.

I extend my humblest apologies to our Georgian colleagues, who had already made great progress in planning the activities and who, together with the Executive Committee, had developed the theme of this conference: Linguistic Diversity and Language Planning. I am truly sorry that we had to disrupt our plans, and I sincerely hope that a conference in Georgia will be possible at some point in the near future.

As you can see from the programme, we have placed the presentations from Georgia by Giorgi Alibegashvili, Maka Tetradze and Tinatin Bolkvadze in prominent positions to honour their contribution to this conference.

Finding another site for the conference was not an easy task, and, therefore, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to our colleagues from the Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics: Veronica Lipp and our general secretary, Tamás Varadi, as well as Alexandra Kis and Réka Dodé from our secretariat, for standing up for EFNIL and, at a very short notice, relocating the conference to Budapest.

Thanks also to Edina Pest, communications manager of the Hungarian Research Centre, for supporting the secretariat.

Linguistic Diversity and Language Planning is a broad topic – as we will see. The title is a contradiction in terms – it encompasses, on the one hand, the wish to promote freedom of speech and the role of each language as a vehicle for expressing not only thoughts and ideas but also the cultural richness and historical and personal background of its speakers. On the other hand, we need to support common foundations for mutual understanding, for language acquisition and for barrier-free communication to and among all citizens of a state.

As you know, EFNIL has been an active partner in the European Language Equality project (ELE),¹ which was also strongly supported by the European Commission. Among many other things, the project compiled an inventory of digital support provided by digital corpora, translation tools and artificial intelligence applications, etc. for each of the 87 European languages that were covered in the project. The inventory, which is available in the European Language Grid,² contains more than 8,000 corpora, almost 4,000 digital tools and about 3,000 conceptual resources such as dictionaries, terminology data and wordnets.

On the website of the project and also on the European Language Grid, a dashboard is provided that shows the number of resources recorded for each language and you can clearly see the hierarchy that exists among the 87 languages. Perhaps some of you have seen it before. It ranks the languages investigated according to a score based on the availability of language resources, tools and services, language models, projects and organisations.

It shows that the digitally best equipped European language is English with a score of 80,000, followed by German, Spanish and French, with scores between 30,000 and 40,000, so about half the size of the English score. Then we have languages like Portuguese, Italian, Dutch, Finnish, Swedish, Polish and the Baltic languages, etc., which score between 10,000 and 20,000 – once again about half of the previous ones. Further below that level, we see languages like Turkish, Ukrainian, Icelandic and Maltese, and there are even lower scores for Welsh, Luxembourgish, Georgian, Sami languages and Frisian etc.

We can see that the best served languages are the national languages, but even among them there is a hierarchy, and all of the many regional languages and recognised minority languages seem to receive very little attention.

We can agree with David Crystal³ that one of the factors that causes language death is the lack of a digital presence of a language. The fact that more than 80 languages are listed in the graph shows that they do have at least some digital presence and thereby a good chance of surviving.

¹ <https://european-language-equality.eu/>.

² <https://live.european-language-grid.eu/>.

³ Crystal, D. (2000): *Language death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This is not least due to the fact that over the last 20 years, national governments, language institutions and the European Commission have become very aware of the threats that minority languages face, and quite a number of initiatives have been launched to support their digital presence to preserve language diversity and the linguistic rights of their citizens.

But this is only one aspect of linguistic diversity – there is also the aspect of new language communities appearing due to migration and the general mobility of people in Europe and in the world, coupled with the aspect of multilingualism and language learning.

In this conference, we dive into all of these intriguing problems and questions and explore how language planning institutions and governments are coping with this increasing diversity as well as what new insights researchers can give us. I am sure that we will have some very enlightening discussions.

Let me remind you that we also have presentations by this year's winners of the EFNIL Master's Thesis award to conclude the conference. All three of them relate strongly to the theme of the conference, which I now declare open.

Nagyon köszönöm!

Linguistic minorities and majorities – policies and their effect

Guy Berg

The beauty of multilingualism: The benefits and challenges of linguistic diversity

Abstract

Luxembourg's sociolinguistic reality shows that the simultaneous use of several languages within a heterogeneous community can be highly beneficial to society as a whole but that it may also entail a number of challenges. The benefits and challenges of the country's traditional multilingualism are illustrated in a couple of selected domains of language use such as language instruction and everyday interaction. The benefits seem to outweigh the negative aspects. The concurrent use of three official languages in daily life has initiated an ongoing shift from triglossia to institutionalized and stable trilingualism.

The title illustrates my conviction that the simultaneous use of several languages within a heterogeneous community can be highly beneficial to society as a whole. However, it also entails a number of challenges. I will try and underpin this statement by briefly illustrating the sociolinguistic situation in my home country of Luxembourg.

Let me start with two epigraphs. The first one reads as follows:

C'est le peuple qui sait les deux langues qui finira par ne plus parler la sienne.
(The nation who knows the two languages will end up no longer speaking its own.)

This was the position of the Belgian historian Godefroid Kurth in his book *La frontière linguistique en Belgique et dans le Nord de la France* published in 1896. The author concluded that it is better for an individual to stick to one single language. This statement reflects a common view at the time according to which bilingualism may have detrimental effects on an individual's personality.

The second epigraph says:

Luxembourg is truly (...) a magical land of castles (...) and a super-welcoming citizenry able to speak just about any language that's thrown at them.

This is a statement made by the American author Mike McQuaide in his book *An American in Luxembourg* published in 2017. Mike had taken up residence in the country a couple of years before. The statement is a kind compliment from a monolingual American experiencing the variety of languages in Europe.

The two epigraphs illustrate two opposite positions: the first one clearly rejecting the use of more than one language by a linguistic community and advocating for monolingualism, the second one testifying to the beauty of multilingualism and the positive mindset of a contemporary multilingual society.

More than one hundred years separate the two statements. The Belgian historian would probably be surprised to experience today's Luxembourg with its three official languages, namely Luxembourgish, French and German.

The population of the country comprises about 670,000 individuals. On working days, it grows by 200,000 commuters from France, Belgium and Germany who have their workplace in Luxembourg. The country hosts more than 180 nationalities. Almost 50% of the population are non-nationals.

In former times, the country was made up of two linguistically distinct districts: the so-called German district and the Wallonian or French-speaking district. The population in each district was basically monolingual. Legislation was written down and published in both languages, French and German. The Luxembourgish language was the spoken vernacular of the so-called German district. After the Belgian Revolution, the French-speaking district became part of Belgium as the Province de Luxembourg in 1839.

With this partition the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg was reduced to its former so-called German district. Despite this new reality, the country decided to stick to its traditional linguistic system with French and German for most written purposes and Luxembourgish basically as the spoken vernacular. This constellation resulted in a triglossic language community. The triglossia developed over time, and nowadays multilingualism is seen as a matter of course.

It is generally associated with benefits and opportunities. Sometimes, however, the concurrent use of several languages may also generate serious challenges. Let us have a look at some selected domains of language use and identify both benefits and challenges. The domains are language instruction, the job market, the health and social care sector and everyday interaction:

LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

a) Benefits

- Students get acquainted with all three languages early in primary schools. English as the fourth language is added in secondary schools. These also offer language courses in Italian and Spanish. Some of them have an extended offer with Japanese, Chinese and Russian.
- Language instruction goes together with cultural diversity as the students become familiar with the cultural background of the countries concerned.
- Proficient language skills enable school leavers to study in a French-speaking country (France, Belgium, Switzerland), in a German-speaking country (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) or in the Anglo-Saxon area.

b) Challenges

- Having to attend classes in several languages throughout school can be a burden for pupils. Less gifted students risk failing in their attempt to reach the expected language skills.
- Lessons in other subjects such as natural sciences, history, economics, or philosophy are potentially neglected due to the huge amount of time taken for language instruction. These subjects would profit if less weight was put on language lessons.

JOB MARKET

Here I take the example of the financial industry.

a) Benefits

- Luxembourg has developed into an important European and international financial center over the last few decades. This rise is partially due to the country's linguistic diversity. Local banks and other financial service providers are oriented towards international financial markets. The market players work with their international clients in various languages. They are familiar with the rules and financial regulations of other countries.
- People with proficient language skills are best placed to find a good job in this business.

b) Challenges

- Employers often have excessive, not to say unrealistic, expectations in their job advertisements in terms of language skills. Knowledge of the three official languages is often seen as a must. Additional languages may be required as well. I remember a job ad requiring perfect knowledge of French, German, Luxembourgish, English, Dutch, Italian and Portuguese. The job offered was that of a gardening assistant.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SECTOR**a) Benefits**

- Many members of the health and social care sector are multilingual. However, the country lacks enough local staff in the sector as well as qualified personnel to look after patients or people in need of care and in retirement homes. The language system allows the sector to recruit human resources from neighboring countries – Belgium, France and Germany – to compensate for this shortage.

b) Challenges

- The downside is that many of these employees commuting from abroad are monolingual, speaking either French or German. This hampers communication between doctors or nurses and their patients.

- Individuals in need of care want to talk about their physical or mental issues in their mother tongue. It may be difficult for a patient to voice his or her concerns in another language. For this reason, medical staff from abroad are encouraged to attend language courses in all three official languages.

EVERYDAY INTERACTION

a) Benefits

- Multilingualism is a major means to facilitate the integration of foreigners who settle down in the country. They can choose among several languages for their daily communication.
- Multilingualism also contributes to the cohesion of the resident population with its more than 180 nationalities.

b) Challenges

- Non-nationals sometimes have problems understanding the unequal status of the official languages, especially with regard to Luxembourgish as the language of everyday communication among nationals. Communication within a group of people may take on a more formal touch if a non-national requests that the conversation takes place in one of the other official languages.
- Many non-nationals attend Luxembourgish language courses to acclimatize to the country. However, they often complain that they do not get an opportunity to practice the language as natives automatically switch to the language of their interlocutor to facilitate the conversation.

These examples illustrate the complexity of living in a country where institutionalized multilingualism is part of the system. Many positive aspects must be put into perspective with less positive ones. My personal impression is, however, that the benefits outweigh the challenges by far.

Conclusion

Multilingualism is an essential part of the country's identity and the use of three official languages is generally seen as an advantage. From a linguistic point of view, the presence of French and German turns out to be highly beneficial to the national vernacular. The combined endoglossic and exoglossic relationship with these languages allows Luxembourgish to constantly enlarge its vocabulary and become more diversified. This results in a broader and increasingly extensive use of the language in many domains. Nowadays Luxembourgish is recognized as a language in its own right. It was recognized by law as the national language in 1984 and raised to constitutional status in 2023. Thus the coexistence of several official languages has initiated a slow but continued and ongoing shift from a triglossic constellation to an institutionalized and stable trilingualism. This sociolinguistic stability is based on a concurrent, pragmatic and respectful use of all three languages in daily life.

Jutta Ransmayr

Multilingual learners in the educational sector in Austria: Challenges, policies and recent developments

Abstract

This article examines the landscape of multilingual education in Austria, focusing on the legal frameworks, linguistic diversity and evolving educational policies. It discusses the challenges faced by multilingual learners, including the contentious implementation of segregated “German support classes”, and highlights the tension between promoting German as the primary language of instruction and respecting linguistic diversity.

1. Preliminary remarks

This contribution aims to provide an overview of current language policy developments related to language teaching and learning within Austria’s educational landscape. In this context, language policy is understood as the regulation of the societal status, use and promotion of languages encompassing various domains such as education, minority rights and the official language (Rindler Schjerve/Vetter 2012, 115).

First and foremost, it should be noted that Austria has not established a central institution responsible for language policy to this day. Instead, language policy is the result of diverse, often unsystematic and reactive measures that are frequently triggered by conflicts or political interests (de Cillia 2024; de Cillia/Busch 2006). As a consequence, diachronic documentation and a comprehensive overview of language policy measures are not centralised but must be compiled from various sources. Regarding official census data on the languages spoken in Austria, the available data are relatively outdated: the last official census that considered the factor of “everyday language” in the Austrian population was conducted in 2001. According to this census, Austria appears to be an almost exclusively German-speaking country, with 95.5% of Austrian citizens reporting German as their first language. However, when the entire population, including non-citizens, is considered, the proportion of German first-language speakers drops to approximately 89%. Notably, nearly 9% of respondents indicated having both German and another language as their first languages.

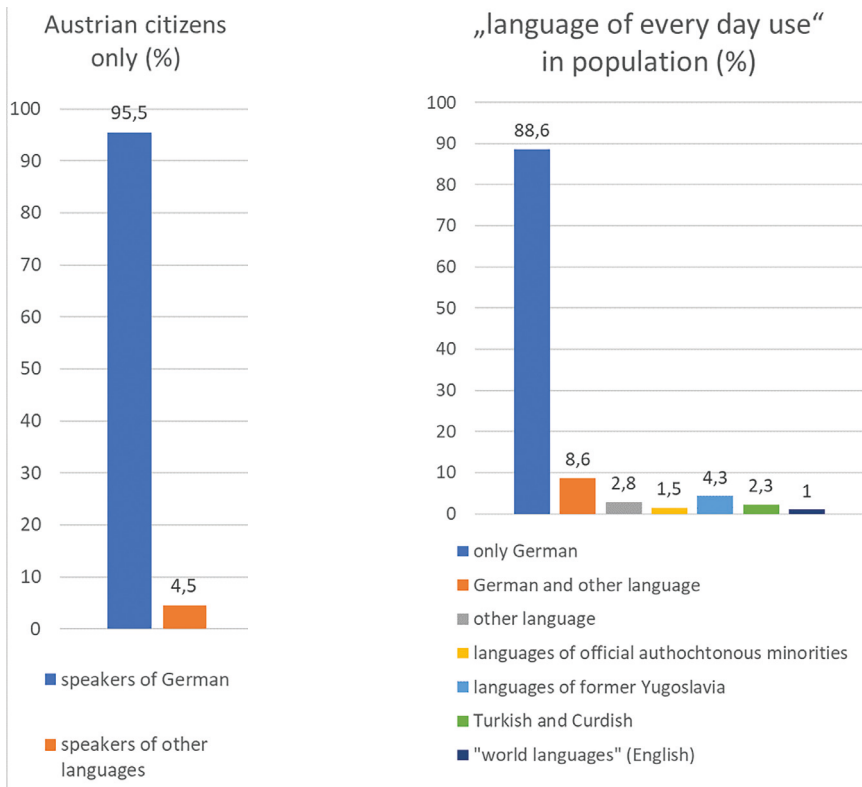


Fig. 1: 2001 census: languages spoken by Austrian citizens and by the population as a whole (source: Statistik Austria 2002)

In this context, key reference sources include not only publicly available statistics (primarily from Statistik Austria, as illustrated in Fig. 1) but also the language policy inquiries conducted by the Association for Applied Linguistics (*VERBAL – Verband für Angewandte Linguistik*) in Austria. Since 2001, *VERBAL* has carried out and published a scientific assessment of language policy developments at ten-year intervals (Busch/de Cillia 2003; de Cillia/Vetter 2013; Vetter/de Cillia/Reisigl 2024). The volume published in 2024 examines various aspects of current language policy developments in Austria and, together with publicly accessible statistics, provides an essential foundation for the present paper.

2. General legal framework concerning languages in Austria: A brief introduction

German has traditionally played a dominant role in Austria and was established as the state language by the Federal Constitution of 1920. This status was reinforced by Article 8 (Paragraph 1) of the Federal Constitution and further legislation that prescribes German as the official and instructional language. At the same time, Article 8 (Paragraph 2) of the Federal Constitution stipulates Austria's commitment to linguistic and cultural diversity, which is particularly significant for its autochthonous minorities. Since 2005, Paragraph 3 of Article 8 has also recognised Austrian Sign Language (ÖGS) as an official language.

The status of Austria's autochthonous minority languages (Burgenland Croatian, Slovenian, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak and Romani) is primarily regulated by Article 7 of the 1955 State Treaty and the subsequent "Ethnic Groups Act" (*Volksgruppengesetz*) of 1976. Notably, Article 7 of the State Treaty guarantees minority rights such as access to primary education in their own language and the use of minority languages as official languages in specific regions (Hilpold 2016). However, the practical implementation of these rights has frequently been subject to political disputes. A prominent example is the so-called "Ortstafelsturm" in Carinthia in 1972: after a law had finally been passed specifying where bilingual place name signs should be erected in some areas with Slovenian-speaking populations, the signs were promptly vandalised (de Cillia/Wodak 2006). A consensual resolution on this issue was only reached in 2011.

Alongside the legal status of the German language, Austrian German as a variety of German has been increasingly emphasised since the 1990s. This is reflected, among other things, in the inclusion of specifically Austrian expressions, known as "Austriazisms", in Austria's EU accession treaty (Muhr 2021). The political and cultural emphasis on the distinctiveness of Austrian German is closely linked to national identity formation (Reisigl 2003, 128ff.).

Austria's language policy concerning migration and integration has undergone significant changes in recent decades. Since the 1990s, the focus has increasingly shifted towards requiring migrants to demonstrate proficiency in German. Measures such as the "Integration Agreement", introduced in 2003, mandate that immigrants from non-EU countries must pass language tests in order to obtain long-term residency in Austria. This emphasis on German is often justified as a necessary measure for integration, while the promotion of migrants' heritage languages remains a secondary concern. As a result, multilingualism is perceived less as a resource and more as an obstacle (de Cillia/Vetter 2013).

It is frequently pointed out that language policy in Austria is often influenced by short-term political interests rather than being planned strategically in the long term. This reactive approach is particularly evident in minority language policy, which often gains attention only in response to conflicts. Similarly, language pro-

motion in the context of migration is used more as a means of control rather than as an opportunity for fostering a more inclusive society (de Cillia 2024). Another critical issue is the status of minority languages and the insufficient promotion of multilingualism. While the legal framework exists for protecting autochthonous minority languages, its implementation and practical measures to encourage their use remain lacking. For migrant languages, there are virtually no legal provisions that could strengthen their role in society (Reisigl 2007, 33ff.). Consequently, Austria's language policy tends to ignore a holistic approach to linguistic diversity.

3. Languages and (school) education

German is not only enshrined as the state language in the Austrian Constitution but is also designated as the primary language of instruction by educational legislation. As a result, German remains the dominant language of education in Austria. However, the six recognised minority languages enjoy special protections within the education system. These languages are offered as subjects or used as the language of instruction in some schools in certain regions. In the 2020/21 academic year, for instance, approximately 2,000 students were taught in Slovenian and about 1,700 in Burgenland Croatian. The province of Burgenland also has regulations supporting mixed-language kindergartens, while similar elementary educational provisions are lacking in Carinthia. Despite these regional initiatives, intergenerational transmission of autochthonous minority languages appears to be declining as language acquisition increasingly shifts from family to school settings, posing a threat to linguistic diversity (Melchior/Doleschal 2024, 130).

On a more fundamental level, the terms “ethnic group” (*Volksgruppe*) and “linguistic minority” are increasingly up for debate. The term “ethnic group” was legally established by the Ethnic Groups Act of 1976 and is defined by criteria such as Austrian citizenship, mother tongue, cultural characteristics and historical ties to the country. However, scholars question the continued relevance of this definition. Instead, the term “linguistic minority” is regarded as more flexible and less territorially bound, making it more suitable for contemporary linguistic realities (Melchior/Doleschal 2024, 120). Nonetheless, the Ethnic Groups Act remains the legal foundation for language policy, although its emphasis has varied significantly depending on government priorities. Over the past 15 years, government programmes have demonstrated clear differences in their commitment to minority languages. The 2008-2013 SPÖ-ÖVP government (Social Democratic Party of Austria-Austrian People's Party coalition) proposed concrete measures such as revising the Ethnic Groups Act and supporting intercultural projects while later administrations, particularly the 2017-2019 ÖVP-FPÖ coalition (Austrian People's Party-Freedom Party of Austria), included only general affirmations of minority rights without specific measures (Melchior/Doleschal 2024, 123).

A significant milestone for multilingualism was the 2013 reform of teacher education, which integrated multilingualism as a cross-cutting theme. However, the training of bilingual teachers remains limited to specialised programmes primarily offered at university colleges of teacher education in Carinthia and Burgenland (Melchior/Doleschal 2024, 125).

The promotion of multilingualism also includes fostering the first languages of multilingual students. In Austria, this is implemented through “mother tongue instruction”, which has been part of the regular school system since the 1990s. Renamed “first language instruction” in 2023/24, it aims to support the linguistic and cultural identity of students whose first language is not German. Despite its formal integration into the school system, first language instruction faces challenges. Teachers are often utilised as support staff for German language instruction rather than fulfilling their intended role. Moreover, participation rates remain low; in 2018/19, while instruction was available in 26 languages, only about 20% of eligible students participated. Uncertainty regarding eligibility criteria may contribute to low enrolment numbers (Fleck 2024, 121ff).

Training programmes for first language teachers remain insufficient, particularly for languages such as Turkish, Arabic or Farsi. While some European languages have dedicated teacher training programmes, others lack institutional support. It is crucial to recognise first languages as being valuable in their own right rather than merely as tools for acquiring German (Fleck 2024, 133). Additionally, efforts should be made to expand teaching materials and training programmes.

Data on students with first languages other than German reveal stark contrasts between Vienna and the rest of Austria. Between 2009/10 and 2020/21, linguistic diversity in Austria’s schools increased significantly. In primary schools, the percentage of students with a first language other than German rose from 23.2% to 31.0%. In Vienna, the figure was notably higher, increasing from 51.8% to 58.6%. Similar trends can be observed in general secondary schools, where the national percentage rose from 20.9% to 33.8%, and in Vienna from 62.8% to 77.2%. In grammar schools, the rise was from 14.1% to 21.6% nationally and from 29.3% to 40.5% in Vienna. Across all school types, the national average climbed from 17.7% to 27.2%, while in Vienna, it rose from 42.2% to 53.3% (see Fig. 2).

These figures reveal the increasing presence of multilingual learners, especially in urban centres like Vienna, which acts as a multicultural hub. This shift underscores the need for adaptive educational policies that address the linguistic and cultural needs of a diverse student population.

	Austria 09/10	Austria 20/21	Vienna 09/10	Vienna 20/21
primary school (age 6-10)	23.2	31.0	51.8	58.6
general secondary school (age 10-14)	20.9	33.8	62.8	77.2
grammar school (age 10-18)	14.1	21.6	29.3	40.5
all school types	17.7	27.2	42.2	53.3

Fig. 2: Pupils with first languages other than German in Austrian schools (%) (Vetter 2024, 198)

Another aspect relating to the multilingualism of students from multilingual backgrounds in the Austrian education system is the educational policy decision to introduce so-called “German support classes” (Deutschförderklassen), which are politically, socially and didactically controversial. Instead of consistently promoting multilingualism, political measures have often focused on “sufficient” German proficiency as a prerequisite for access to mainstream education and residency rights. Experts argue that this approach frequently frames multilingualism as a deficit rather than as a resource (Cataldo-Schwarzl 2024, 137). Additionally, language support in Austria is increasingly equated with the promotion of German, a development that contradicts political commitments to fostering multilingualism.

The introduction of German support classes in 2018 marks a turning point that has led to a paradigm shift in educational policy. These classes were established to segregate students with insufficient German proficiency until they acquired an adequate level to follow regular lessons. However, from a language didactics perspective, this segregative measure has been critically assessed as it contradicts research findings that emphasise the effectiveness of integrative and additive support measures (Cataldo-Schwarzl 2024; Dirim/Müller/Schweiger 2021). Besides the lack of scientific evidence demonstrating a higher effectiveness of German support classes compared to additive language support, their implementation also presents numerous organisational and administrative challenges, such as inadequate teacher training and a lack of school autonomy. Moreover, the psychological, emotional and social development of affected students is negatively impacted by their separation from regular classes. The use of assessment tools such as MIKA-D, which serves as the basis for placement in German support classes, has also been criticised for failing to provide a comprehensive evaluation of students’ abilities (Cataldo-Schwarzl 2024, 143; Dirim/Müller/Schweiger 2021; Spiel et al. 2021). Scholars have further observed the increasing normalisation of right-wing populist discourses in public debate with concern, where migrants are often portrayed

as being a burden on the education system (Wodak 2015). These developments may contribute to the perception of language support measures primarily as instruments of assimilation in the future.

One educational sector that is often overlooked yet equally important for (linguistically) successful educational careers of children is early childhood education, which is also considered here: kindergartens and similar institutions are increasingly regarded as places of early education and language support rather than mere childcare facilities. Today, kindergartens are understood as the first educational institutions with a clear mandate aimed at both preparing children for school and integrating them into society (Blaschitz/Dorostkar 2024, 177).

The evolving role of early childhood education is closely linked to international educational assessments such as PISA, as well as to societal challenges posed by migration and globalisation. According to educational framework plans, early and regular attendance at kindergartens is intended to mitigate potential difficulties in educational trajectories, such as insufficient German proficiency. The *Bundesländerübergreifende Bildungsrahmenplan für elementare Bildungseinrichtungen* (Interstate educational framework plan for early childhood education institutions) highlights the significance of early language support and its influence on students' entire educational careers (Charlotte Bühler Institut 2020, 4). According to Statistik Austria (2023), 32.5% of children in Austrian kindergartens speak a language other than German as their primary language, with this proportion rising to 58.7% in Vienna. This underscores a key task for kindergartens: promoting German proficiency to ensure that children have a strong command of the language upon entering school. Legislators assume a direct correlation between early childhood education attendance and improved German language proficiency, although this connection has not yet been scientifically substantiated (Blaschitz/Dorostkar 2024, 179).

A key focus of Austrian language policy in early childhood education is, thus, German language support. In addition to mandatory language assessments and a compulsory year of kindergarten before primary school, further training programmes for early childhood educators have been introduced to address this priority (BMBWF 2018). Institutional guidelines, such as the educational framework plan, place a strong emphasis on German, often at the expense of other languages, an approach often criticised by linguists, noting that despite the high levels of multilingualism among both children and staff, these linguistic resources are not adequately utilised (Blaschitz/Dorostkar 2024, 181). Instead, kindergartens often reflect a monolingual ideology in which German is promoted as the only relevant language. This practice is reinforced by institutional guidelines that explicitly prioritise German (Weichselbaum 2022). Multilingual approaches or the use of children's first languages are rarely implemented in practice, which is detrimental to the development of a comprehensive concept of language education (Blaschitz/Dorostkar 2024, 182).

As the final subtopic within the broad thematic complex of “multilingualism in (school) education in Austria”, school-based foreign language learning is examined in relation to European multilingualism objectives. Since 2011, developments in Austrian foreign language instruction have been characterised primarily by competence orientation and standardisation. However, these measures primarily benefit the so-called “first modern foreign language”, namely English. Consequently, this focus has led to the marginalisation of other foreign languages (Vetter 2024, 197).

A key priority of Austria’s foreign language education policy has been the implementation of the Council of Europe’s Language Education Policy Profile (LEPP) (BMUKK/BMBWF/ÖSZ 2008). The prioritised topics included early language learning, teacher education, bilingual education and the promotion of migrants’ first languages. Competence orientation in foreign language instruction is aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). For English, the dominant foreign language, comprehensive materials and task pools have been developed, including those provided by the Austrian Centre for Language Competence (OESZ). However, the exclusive focus on English remains problematic, as other foreign languages such as French or Italian do not receive comparable support (Vetter 2024, 203). In secondary education, the dominance of English is particularly evident: 99.8% of students in lower secondary learn English, whereas the percentage for other foreign languages is relatively low. Despite efforts to diversify language offerings, the options remain limited. Few students learn two foreign languages simultaneously, with the majority focusing solely on English. This situation contradicts European multilingualism goals, which advocate for broader linguistic competence (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2023, 74; Vetter 2024, 215).

4. Conclusion

This brief overview of language policy developments and measures concerning multilingualism in the learner context in Austria has attempted to discuss, on the one hand, a range of legal provisions that multilingual learners can benefit from, and, on the other hand, to critically examine those that appear less conducive to the promotion of multilingualism.

Austria’s legal framework reflects a strong commitment to recognising and safeguarding linguistic diversity, with the Federal Constitution of 1920 providing the foundational basis for this approach. Despite these provisions, challenges remain in collecting and maintaining up-to-date data. The last census that included the factor “language of everyday use” was conducted in 2001, resulting in a gap in comprehensive demographic data on linguistic diversity. This absence may hinder the country’s ability to tailor policies effectively to current linguistic reali-

ties. Furthermore, it must be noted that the establishment of a central institution for language policy could systematically plan and implement measures. Such an institution could contribute to better promoting linguistic diversity in Austria and reducing the marginalisation of minority languages. Additionally, it would be desirable for political representatives to recognise societal multilingualism as a resource, rather than marginalising it through a one-sided focus on promoting German.

Despite legislative measures aimed at promoting multilingualism, the education system continues to prioritise the promotion of German proficiency as the language of instruction. Mother-tongue instruction is limited, often dependent on regional availability and political will. The debate surrounding language use in schools has intensified with proposals advocating “German-only” policies, which extend beyond classroom instruction to include breaks and extracurricular activities. Critics argue that such policies are pedagogically unsound and risk undermining linguistic diversity by imposing rigid linguistic boundaries.

Overall, while some recent educational policies have posed challenges, they have also opened up new possibilities, as seen with the much debated German support classes. Despite the varied criticism of these classes, there is an opportunity to further develop these measures in the spirit of inclusive language support. This requires a stronger integration of scientific findings and evidence-based educational policies that better address the needs of multilingual students. A similar approach applies to early childhood education: to establish a consistent language education framework that spans from early childhood education through to secondary education, there is a need to further develop the training of early childhood educators, better equipping them to address the challenges of language support.

Only through a systematic and long-term language policy can Austria’s multilingual reality be adequately reflected in educational institutions, ensuring that multilingualism among learners is properly acknowledged and leveraged as a resource.

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Multilingualism and linguistic diversity – the perspective of multicentric languages

Javier Hernández Saseta

Multilingualism and technology in the context of the European Commission's interpretation service

As we all know, the European Union is home to 24 official EU languages. In order to ensure democratic participation and ownership, it is essential that citizens are able to access information and participate in decision-making processes in their native languages. This is exactly what the linguistic services of the EU take care of. The European Union is also home to 3 different alphabets as well as more than 60 regional and minority languages, which contribute further to the richness of European culture. Linguistic pluralism is also essential in a societal context since it fosters mutual understanding and respect among different communities, promoting social cohesion and peaceful coexistence, which is particularly crucial given the current geopolitical situation.

I represent here the Directorate-General for Interpretation of the European Commission, which provides services to several EU institutions, bodies and agencies as well as the European Commission and enables multilingual meetings to take place in all 24 official languages of the EU. DG Interpretation employs a team of highly skilled interpreters, whose main task is to convey messages (sometimes very technical, sometimes highly sensitive in political terms) from one language to another in quite a significant number of meetings every day.

While human skills remain our most valuable asset, we cannot ignore the new opportunities and challenges that the most recent technological developments are bringing into the landscape. We are firmly convinced that the latest developments in new technologies can contribute not only to linguistic diversity but also to accessibility. That's where Artificial Intelligence (AI) comes into play. Indeed, the European Commission has been a strong advocate of harnessing all the potential benefits of the new tools, supporting research, innovation and the deployment of language technologies to break down language barriers while preserving and promoting multilingualism.

At the European Commission, we have developed a range of AI language tools that comply with the "responsible AI" principles of fairness, transparency, inclusiveness, accountability, privacy and security. At DG Interpretation in particular, we have a specific expertise on spoken languages, which means we have been focussing our work on speech-to-text (live transcription) and text-to-speech (creating voiceovers using high-quality neural voices) technologies.

But before I give you a quick overview of some of the tools that we have developed at DG Interpretation – obviously in collaboration with some other depart-

ments of the European Commission, in particular the Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology and the Directorate-General for Translation – let me just mention a couple of points relating to the rationale behind our work as I think it’s important for us all to remember that the tools we develop have the core values of the European Union at their heart and we always work in a spirit of inclusiveness and collaboration.

Indeed, the main drivers for our work have always been efficiency, accessibility and language equality, and I will explain why. Efficiency is fundamental because our aim is to find truly cost-effective multilingual solutions that enable democratic participation for our citizens across the EU. We also work to develop tools that will increase accessibility for users. And by accessibility we mean several things. First of all, accessibility for the hearing impaired, who might benefit from the transcription of meetings or closed captions, especially when a sign language interpreter is not available. But we also mean accessibility for people who are less proficient in a foreign language than others or who have difficulty understanding certain accents. In these situations, AI could provide help through closed captions or voiceovers, thus bridging any possible communication gaps.

But what is especially important for the EU is language equality. While existing commercial solutions tend to focus their efforts on the big global languages, the work done at EU level is aimed at supporting so-called low-resource languages as well. This is why we have trained our models on data in different languages to make sure that our speech technologies are inclusive and accessible to all EU citizens, regardless of their native language. By supporting the official EU languages, we promote linguistic diversity and equal opportunities for communication and participation. This commitment to language equality is at the heart of our mission as a language service dedicated to promoting and supporting multilingualism in the EU. I want us to keep all of this in mind as I believe that it’s particularly relevant for this panel, which is right at the intersection between society, technology and multilingualism.

As I already mentioned, at DG Interpretation, we have specific expertise on spoken languages but we also work in conference organisation and meeting management – we run conference infrastructure and meeting rooms – and therefore have a unique view on how to combine these new technologies with existing meeting room infrastructure. So I’m going to give you some examples of what we are working on and explain the peculiarities of our models and how they are adapted to our specific needs. I’m also going to stress the added value of having the European Commission, as a public institution, develop them and make them available as open-source components across the EU, thanks to the Digital Europe Programme.

One example is speech-to-text technology. Speech-to-text involves live transcription in the languages used and interpreted in meetings and conferences to

provide captions and subtitles. Our project consists in developing a web portal for real-time transcriptions during events. We use automatic speech recognition to transcribe speech into text, without human intervention. This can be done in real time during a meeting or with a recording after an event. For example, the audio from the microphones in the meeting room is sent to the speech recognition system to be transcribed and the resulting transcriptions arrive back in the meeting room to be displayed on large screens, on participants' laptops or tablets. This happens so fast that the participants in the room can follow the transcriptions in real time. Transcripts can then be edited almost immediately after the meeting. Generative AI can also be used to further process the transcription. For example, we have developed a functionality that uses a Large Language Model (LLM) to create minutes based on the transcriptions produced by the portal.

As mentioned above, this improves accessibility in live events and could be an option in case no sign language interpreter is available. But it also improves overall communication and facilitates the consumption of audiovisual content. It enables non-native speakers to understand certain languages and it allows multilingual video files to be subtitled.

Now you might wonder what the difference is between the basic AI models that Microsoft or other commercial providers provide. And where the added value of this work is. We have observed that the basic AI models that commercial providers offer are good for general situations but in our environment, where specific terminology is used, the results are much better when we use these custom models. Indeed, our live portal uses custom language models that have been specifically trained for EU terminology. The custom models produce better quality output than generic models, especially when it comes to EU terms or the names of commissioners, for example. We also update our models regularly with acronyms and the names of political figures, etc.

Another advantage is that the portal is extremely versatile and can be adapted to both hybrid and online meetings; it also guarantees security and confidentiality in the cloud and on site in case of confidential meetings. It can be deployed in a variety of physical environments as well, from smaller settings such as a small meeting room in a small municipality to large event venues with audiovisual infrastructure. It is also "provider agnostic". This means that different automatic speech recognition systems, both commercial and open source, are compatible with the portal. For example, for widely used languages, a commercial provider might have better solutions while for lesser-used languages, an open-source provider, or something developed in the Member States where a specific language is spoken, might work better.

The portal will eventually be made available as an open source to universities, SMEs and public administrations, who will be able to use it in their own environments, so it has enormous potential to be used in all Member States and

in all languages. The custom speech recognition models are already available in eight languages: English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch and Polish, with Greek available soon. The live transcription portal uses these models to provide transcriptions and real-time closed captions. These models can also power any application that would need to use voice to interact with users, such as chatbots or services that provide more accessible content.

We are also working on a pilot web portal for creating voiceovers using high-quality neural voices. It facilitates the creation of audio content in all official EU languages as well as in the languages of candidate countries to support multilingual audio content in the European Commission. It is already being used in the Commission to create multilingual eLearning courses for customs officials. This technology improves efficiency when creating eLearning content, helps reduce costs and promotes multilingualism, inclusion and accessibility.

But none of this has been easy to achieve, and this is why I think it's important to also give you a bit of an insight into how we got into it, and how the expertise of our interpreters, in collaboration with many colleagues in the European Commission, has been and continues to be paramount for its success. In 2020, in the middle of the first COVID-19 lockdown, our colleagues started working on this project. Obviously, linguistic resources were essential for building these innovative applications. Luckily, the EU had already undertaken major efforts to collect high-quality linguistic data sets, including data for low-resource languages.

We therefore proceeded to train the models to better understand our complex and unique EU-specific terminology. And this is where our trained linguists played a vital role in data validation. We customised the models from Microsoft by uploading textual and audio resources validated by our interpreters. They started correcting the audio and transcription, checking the main recurrent errors so the model could learn from them (for example, the name of a Commissioner in their own language vs. in other languages). We observed a significant reduction in error rate, especially in lower-resource languages.

As new terminology and new names appear constantly, the models need to be maintained over time and these operations are still regularly carried out by our interpreters. For instance, each new EU Presidency brings with it new political initiatives and new names. We, therefore, need to update our resources and retrain the language models to better fit the changing environment and our interpreters are fundamental in evaluating and maintaining the custom models.

And this is something I want to stress, because a lot is being said about the future of linguistic professions in this new landscape dominated by AI. But we need to keep in mind that when we're dealing with LLMs, interaction with the models happens in a natural language, not in a programming language. It takes a specific skill set to be able to do this, and linguists have this very skill set. This field is something between a science and an art and it has been said that, in this

new landscape, linguists are the new programmers, which is something that I find very interesting.

I want to end by highlighting that the speed of technological progress creates new challenges for multilingualism but it also offers many opportunities. Indeed, we have seen that technological advancements have made it easier for people to access information and communicate in their native languages but we have to remain mindful of the investments that are still needed for lesser-used languages, to ensure that they are not marginalised. This is why our focus is to keep fostering linguistic diversity while bridging the gap between widely used and lesser-used languages.

Thank you.

The effect of societal and technological factors on linguistic diversity

Meeting the societal and technological challenges to linguistic diversity: The case of Dutch, Frisian, Papiamentu and Afrikaans

Abstract

The Dutch Language Institute (INT) is responsible for Dutch language infrastructure and keeps track of the development of Dutch as it is spoken and used in the Netherlands, Flanders, Suriname and the Caribbean area (Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao). At the same time, these areas are multilingual: in the Netherlands, Frisian has an official status along with and equal to Dutch in the province of Friesland while in the Caribbean area, Papiamentu, a Portuguese/Spanish-based creole, is an official language. In this paper, I will address the cooperation of the Dutch Language Institute with both the Frisian Academy (FA) and the National Language Institute in Curaçao (NTIC) to safeguard and promote the languages at stake. Our technological expertise is shared with both institutes. Some examples will be given of the development of a Frisian dictionary and the creation of a digital language infrastructure for Papiamentu. I will also present the language portal “Taalportaal”, a website that collects existing information on the grammars of Dutch, Frisian and Afrikaans. This opens the gateway to technological support for other indigenous African languages.

1. The Dutch language, the Netherlands and its multilingual society

Dutch has approximately 25 million native speakers, with about 5 million people speaking it as a second language. It is the official language of the Netherlands and of 60% of the Belgian population. It is the largest Germanic language after English and German, larger than all Scandinavian languages combined. Dutch is number 6 in Wikipedia’s list of most used languages and the 8th largest language in the EU.

Dutch is an official language in the Netherlands, Belgium, Suriname and the Caribbean (Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten). Dutch is also an official language of several international organisations such as the EU, the Union of South American Countries and the Caribbean Community. Dutch is taught at more than 175 universities in 40 countries. About 15,000 students study Dutch at foreign universities.

Dutch is strongly supported by language technology. Part of the European infrastructure CLARIN-ERIC, CLARIN-NL¹ is the Dutch community for digital linguistic infrastructure, including language resources. It was developed in the course of several infrastructure projects, namely CLARIN-NL (2009-2015),

¹ <https://clarin.nl/>.

CLARIAH-SEED (2013-2014), CLARIAH-CORE (2015-2018), CLARIAH+ (2019-2024) and SSHOC-NL (2024-2028). The results of these projects have been integrated into the CLARIAH website and are accessible through the CLARIAH Tools portal and the INEO portal. CLARIAH develops, facilitates and stimulates the use of Digital Humanities resources and infrastructures. These resources are presented to researchers and other professionals in an insightful and user-friendly way.²

Consortium partners in these projects include the Data Archiving and Networked Services (DANS), the Fryske Akademy, Huygens ING, the Dutch Language Institute, the International Institute of Social History, the Meertens Institute, the National Library, the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, the Free University Amsterdam (VU), Utrecht University, Radboud University in Nijmegen, the University of Groningen, Leiden University and the University of Amsterdam (UvA).

The Dutch Language Institute is a CLARIN B-centre (a technical centre providing extensive services to the scientific community) and a CLARIN K-centre (a knowledge centre). The computational and linguistic expertise required for building a digital language infrastructure for Dutch is shared with other linguistic institutes. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the know-how shared with the Frisian region, the Caribbean area and South Africa.

2. The status of the different languages spoken in the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Dutch is the official language of the Netherlands. Dutch Sign Language (NGT) and Frisian, the second official language in the province of Friesland, are both recognised by law in the Netherlands. Through European agreements, the Netherlands has also recognised Limburgish, Low Saxon, Yiddish and Sinti-Romanes as regional or non-territorial languages.

The Netherlands is signatory to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages,³ the European convention for the protection and promotion of languages used by traditional minorities. Together with the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, it constitutes the Council of Europe's commitment to the protection of minorities. Regional or minority languages are part of Europe's cultural heritage and their protection and promotion contribute to the building of a Europe based on democracy and cultural diversity.

We will first explore what this means for Frisian, a language spoken in the north of the Netherlands.

² <https://www.clariah.nl/>.

³ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages/about-the-charter>.



Fig. 1: The languages of the Netherlands

3. The Frisian language family

The Frisian languages comprise Westerlauwers Frisian, Sater Frisian and North Frisian, a group of three closely related languages belonging to the North Sea Germanic branch of the West Germanic languages and spoken along parts of the Dutch and German North Sea coast. The languages are closely related to English and are also sometimes classified as Ingvaemonic languages. Besides the fact that the Frisian languages share strong lexical similarities with English, the North Sea Germanic languages have also undergone their own characteristic Ingvaemonic sound shifts (see Fig. 2).

The Fryske Akademy is situated in Leeuwarden, the capital of the province of Friesland. It is a research centre recognised by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). The Fryske Akademy conducts, shares and facilitates scientific research on Frisian from an international and multidisciplinary perspective. This concerns both pure and applied research. The focus is on Frisian, multilingual society, regional history from an international perspective, minority languages and cultures and the development of digital infrastructures from a cross-disciplinary and comparative perspective. The linguistic research focuses on three aspects of language and multilingualism:

- Multilingual society,
- Language variation and change,
- Language description and standardisation.

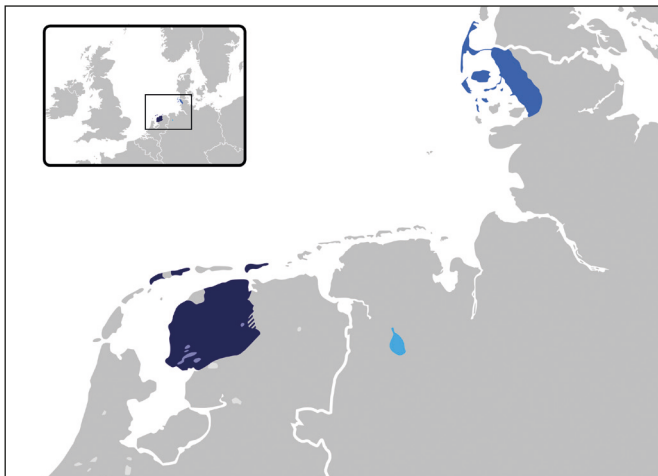


Fig. 2: The Frisian language family

The dictionary of the Frisian language (*Wurdboek fan de Fryske taal*, WFT) describes modern Frisian from 1800 up to 1975. It is a scientific descriptive dictionary containing over 120,000 keywords in 25 volumes and was created by the Fryske Akademy in close cooperation with the Dutch Language Institute. The digital version was added to the historical dictionaries at the Dutch Language Institute in mid-2010 (CLARIN-NL project). Both institutes cooperate on many computational linguistic issues.

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Historische woordenboeken
Nederlands en Fries

Gestructureerde
Taal-
Bank

Basiszoeken Uitgebreid zoeken Zoeken in bronnenlijst **Resultaat** Help & Info

Zoekvraag = modern Nederlands trefwoord (zondag); zoek in: WFT

Totaal gevonden: 1 - WFT: 1

Nr.	Wdb	Mod. Ned. trefwoord	Origineel trefwoord	Woordsoort	Betekenis
1	WFT	zondag	snein	znw. m./v.	Zondag.

Help... Sorteren... Exporteren... Afdrukken...

Eerste Vorige ... 1 ... Volgende Laatste

Fig. 3: The integrated dictionary portal with the Frisian dictionary

toon ook: subbetekeningen | citaten

SNEIN

Woordsoort: zww, m/v.
 Modern-Nederlands lemmavorm: zondag
 Uitspraak: snaj, snuj, (deel NWO.) snein
 Datering: ca. 1807-
 Flexie: Plur. sneinen.
 Dialect: Schiermonnikoogs snajt, Terschuilinges snu:n, Hindeloopers sunda.
 Etymologie: Aenderlent zondag, Dute Sonntag, Engels sunday.
 Literatuur:
 G. JONKES, *Beak*, 131, 132, 1948
 F. DREYER, *Beak*, 125, 126, 1952
 H.T.J. MEDEMA, *Taal en Tongv.*, 123-126, 1971

☒ Zondag

☒ 1. zevende dag van de week.

☒ Figuurlijk:
 Der sitte gâns sneinen yn 'e ierpels, er zitten veel kale plekken in het aardappelveld. L. POSTMA, *Pomp.*, 20, [1953].

☒ **DIJ, OY SNEIN**, op de genoemde zondag, die zondag.
 De Sneins dâg is yn wille trochbrocht mei kûljen, iten en drinken, sjongen en dounsen. R.W. CANE, *Sw.*, 34, [1920].
 Hy makke der hwat fan, dy sneines. Y. POORTINGA, *duveldei*, 213, [1967].

☒ **WETE SNEIN**, witte zondag.

☒ 1). de eerste zondag in de vasten.

☒ 2). de eerste zondag na Pasen.

☒ **SNEIN OP SNEIN**, elke zondag.

☒ **SNEIN EN DEI**, alle dagen, altijd.

☒ Zegwijzen:

☒ 2. hoofdstuk van de Heidelbergse catechismus dat gewoonlijk op zondagmiddag in de kerk behandeld wordt.

☒ Spreekwoorden:
 Samenstellingen: boere-, doop-, frij-, kryst-, merke-, nachtmiele-, novimber-, palmanien-, paimtôksnein, passy-, peaske-, pinkster-, septimber-, trijeflâchheid-, ûtsnein.

Koppelingen:
 Volg artikel: sneedsk.
 Volgend artikel: sneedtschik

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Fig. 4: Detailed information on the lexical item 'snein' (Sunday)

4. The Caribbean area and the Kingdom of the Netherlands

The Dutch Caribbean refers to the New World territories, colonies and countries (both former and current) of the Kingdom of the Netherlands located in the Caribbean Sea. It comprises the constituent countries of Curaçao, Aruba and Sint Maarten (the “CAS” islands) and the special municipalities of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba (the “BES” islands).



Fig. 5: The Dutch Caribbean area

Papiamentu is a Portuguese-based creole spoken in the Dutch Caribbean. It is the most widely spoken language on the ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao). Spelled *Papiamento* in Aruba and *Papiamentu* in Bonaire and Curaçao, the language is largely based on Portuguese as spoken in the 15th and 16th centuries and has been influenced considerably by Dutch and Venezuelan Spanish. Due to lexical similarities between Portuguese and Spanish, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of some words. Although there are different theories about its origins, most linguists now believe that Papiamentu emerged from the Portuguese-based creoles of the West African coast as it has many similarities with Cape Verdean Creole and Guinea-Bissau Creole.

On 1st January 2024, the Kingdom of the Netherlands recognised Papiamentu as a regional language under the European Charter, in the same way as Frisian is recognised. The Ministry of the Interior stated: “Speaking Papiamentu is very important for speakers of the language to express their identity and culture. It is therefore important to protect Papiamentu for current and future generations of speakers. Today, an important step was taken in this regard by officially recognising Papiamentu in the European Netherlands under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.”

One year earlier, in 2023, a new language institute was founded in Curaçao: the National Language Institute Curaçao (NTIC).⁴ It is a pioneering institute marking a new era of language policy on the multilingual island of Curaçao. The NTIC aims to promote multilingual coexistence in this unique society where Papiamentu, English, Dutch and Spanish thrive in education, the workplace and everyday life.



Fig. 6: Logo of the National Language Institute Curaçao

In 2023, an agreement was signed between the Dutch Language Institute and the NTIC. The two institutes will work together to build a lexical data infrastructure for Papiamentu consisting, on the one hand, of structured lexical information and, on the other hand, of (digital) corpus material for further description and study of

⁴ <https://nticuracao.org/en/about/>.

the language. The parties want to share knowledge with regard to developments in the field of (lexical) digital databases for projects aimed at education and government in their own language community. This memorandum specifies the optimal technical support for the creation of this infrastructure and the provision of any software necessary for this purpose by the Dutch Language Institute.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL 'https://taalportaal.org/taalportaal/topic/'. The page title is 'banko di papiamentu'. The interface includes a search bar, a 'Choose a table' dropdown, and two main data tables.

Table 1: lemmas

lemma_id	lemma	entry_type	part_of_speech	gloss	spellsys_id	ok	approved	standardized_cw	standardized_bq	comment	subset	sources	superlemma	superlemma_id
2833	chokamata	Word	NOU-C	phon		☐	☒	☒	☒			["Buki di Oro"]		
10960	mata	Word	NOU-C	phon		☐	☒	☒	☒			["Buki di Oro"]		
10979	matá	Word	NOU-C	phon		☐	☒	☒	☒			["Buki di Oro"]		
10081	matadero	Word	NOU-C	phon		☐	☒	☒	☒			["Buki di Oro"]		
10062	matadó	Word	NOU-C	phon		☐	☒	☒	☒			["Buki di Oro"]		
10963	maragallá	Word	NOU-C	phon		☐	☒	☒	☒			["Buki di Oro"]		
10964	maragallés	Word	NOU-C	phon		☐	☒	☒	☒			["Buki di Oro"]		
10965	maragallé	Word	NOU-C	phon		☐	☒	☒	☒			["Buki di Oro"]		
10966	maragallé	Word	VRB(finiteness-ger)	phon		☐	☒	☒	☒			["Buki di Oro"]		
10967	matansa	Word	NOU-C	phon		☐	☒	☒	☒			["Buki di Oro"]		

Table 2: paradigm

wordform_id	lemma_id	wordform	pronunciation	prosodics	part_of_speech	approved	standardized_cw	standardized_bq	comment
23560	10979	matá	matá	VRB(finiteness-imp)		☐	☐	☐	
25026	10979	matá	mátá	VRB(finiteness-fa.mood-imp)		☐	☐	☐	
25292	10979	matá	matá	VRB(finiteness-part)		☐	☐	☐	
30658	10979	matando	matando	VRB(finiteness-ger)		☐	☐	☐	

Fig. 7: The database of Papiamentu as created at the Dutch Language Institute

5. Dutch and Afrikaans: sister languages with a strong connection – developing a language portal for the official South African languages

Taalportaal⁵ is a comprehensive and authoritative scientific grammar of Dutch, Frisian and Afrikaans written and compiled by linguists for linguists. It is a collaborative effort carried out by the following partners: the Meertens Instituut, the Fryske Akademy, the Dutch Language Institute, Leiden University and Viva, the virtual institute for Afrikaans (see Fig. 8).

Funding for the creation of Taalportaal was provided by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) for Dutch and the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns, the Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging, Noordwes-Universiteit and the Dagbreek Trust for Afrikaans.

⁵ <https://taalportaal.org/taalportaal/topic/>.

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Taalportaal

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Q

DUTCH	FRISIAN
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Phonology

Segment inventory ▾
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Phonological processes ▾
Phonology-morphology interface ▾
Word stress ▾
Accent & intonation ▾
Clics ▾
Spelling ▾

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Inflection and derivation ▾
Allomorphy ▾
The interface between phonology and morphology ▾

Syntax

Preface and acknowledgements
Verbs and Verb Phrases ▾
Nouns and Noun Phrases ▾
Adjectives and Adjective Phrases ▾
Adpositions and adpositional phrases ▾

Meertens

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VIVA

VIRTUELE INSTITUUT VIR AFRIKAANS

Taalportaal is a comprehensive and authoritative scientific grammar of Dutch, Frisian and Afrikaans, written and compiled by linguists, for linguists. It is a collaborative effort of the following partners:

Funding for the creation of Taalportaal was provided by [NWO](#), the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research for Dutch, and the [Suid-Afrikaans Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns](#), [Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging](#), [Noordwes-Universiteit](#) and [Dagbreek Trust](#) for Afrikaans.

Fig. 8: The homepage of Taalportaal

Taalportaal brings together information on the grammar of Dutch, Frisian and Afrikaans online in an accessible and scientifically sound way. Sater Frisian (another variant of Frisian) was added in 2023. Such a language portal is as yet unique in the world. The grammatical subfields of phonology, morphology and syntax – traditionally distinguished – have been integrated into one portal and optimally linked by means of cross-references. This makes it possible for linguists to find connections that might otherwise remain hidden.

Following the installation of a democratic regime under the presidency of Nelson Mandela, 11 official languages were recognised in South Africa in 1997. In 2022, another language was added, namely South African Sign Language (SASL).

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Taalportaal

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DUTCH	FRISIAN
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Dutch > Morphology > Inflection > Nouns > Case > tot-INFINITIVE-s toe construction

Case in the tot-INFINITIVE-s toe construction

The old genitive suffix -s is used in combination with the infinitive in sentences like the following:

- tot sterven-s toe
until die-INF-s to
'to such an extent that it may lead to dying'
- tot braken-s toe
until vomit-INF-s to
'to such an extent that it may lead to vomiting'
- tot schreeuwen-s toe
until shout-INF-s to
'to such an extent that it may lead to shouting'

These are prepositional phrases of the form [tot INFINITIVE-s toe]. The ADPOSITIONtoe is an allomorph of tot used when this word is used postpositionally.

Fig. 9: An example of grammatical information for Dutch in Taalportaal

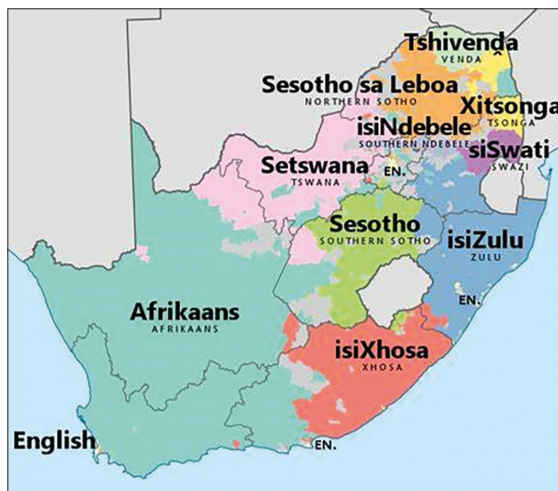


Fig. 10: The official languages of South Africa

The distribution of the languages is as follows: IsiZulu 24.4%, IsiXhosa 16.3%, Afrikaans 10.6%, Sepedi 10%, Setswana 8.3%, Sesotho 7.8%, Xitsonga 4.7%, Siswati 2.8%, Tshivenda 2.5%, IsiNdebele 1.70% and Sign Language 0.02%; English is spoken by 8.70%.

Following the success of Taalportaal, Viva took the initiative to start a project to include the different official languages of South Africa in a new version of Taalportaal. The source code of Taalportaal was also exchanged with SADiLaR⁶ for a Language Portal of South African languages. SADiLaR is the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources and is a member of the CLARIN network.

The screenshot shows the Taalportaal website interface. At the top, there is a header with the logo and navigation links. Below the header, there is a search bar and a table of contents. The main content area is titled 'A general introduction to Afrikaans' and contains a detailed overview of the language. The left sidebar contains a table of contents with links to various sections like 'General', 'Phonology', 'Morphology', and 'Syntax'.

Fig. 11: Taalportaal with information on Afrikaans

6. Conclusion

Language institutes do not operate in isolation but have an open eye for the multi-lingual world and the languages spoken in a particular community. For the Dutch Language Institute, this means cooperating and sharing expertise for regional and co-official languages in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and at the same time supporting the new language situation in South Africa.

⁶ <https://sadilar.org/en/>.

Magnus Ahlthorp

Positive and negative effects of language technology on minority languages

Abstract

Technology has historically had both beneficial and detrimental effects on languages. In our lifetimes, computers and computer-based communication have gone from obscure to mainstream, even indispensable. Having technology thwart you when you write your language can be devastating and make you not want to use it. Being instead nudged by helpful keyboards, good spell checkers and predictive language models can increase your enjoyment and make you write it more. This chapter will give a brief tour of the history of language technology in a broad sense, from typewriters to modern smartphones, and describe the challenges faced by many languages today that lack the proper tools.

1. Introduction

In most of human society in 2025, language technology in some form or another is necessary for almost all written communication. Language technology can be more or less language dependent and using language technology that fits the language can be very beneficial. Two examples are tools which check spelling and grammar, which quite obviously need to be tailored to a specific language, but many other language technologies also affect the way we write and, maybe most importantly, what languages we use. Missing or less fitting language technology can have very detrimental effects on written use of a particular language. In other words, access to proper language technology encourages the use of some languages and discourages the use of others.

Language technology can be understood as technology that in some way facilitates either language production or reception or as technology that processes language data. Using this fairly broad definition, everything from writing systems and writing tools to computer-based large language models could be included. I will not consider speech and sign language systems to be technology in this sense, nor will I discuss pre-20th century language processing techniques such as cryptography.

In this chapter, I will give a brief tour of the history of language technology in this broad sense and describe the challenges faced by many languages today that lack the proper tools, taking one of the Swedish national minority languages, Meänkieli, as an example.

2. Pre-19th century language technology

Early writing tools like styluses, chisels, brushes and pens were used to make marks on clay, stone and wood as well as paper and various paper-like materials. Scripts have often been developed for one or a few combinations of these. For example, scripts depending on the directionality of a stroke are more difficult to reproduce with tools where making an asymmetric stroke is not the natural way of using the tool. Later cuneiform script uses a wedge-tipped stylus that makes an inherently asymmetric stroke and brushes can easily, but do not have to, make asymmetric strokes (Sampson 1985, 51-53).

The availability of tools and writing surfaces, therefore, somewhat limits the type of script. Scripts have been adapted to new writing methods when tools have been impractical or not available, but with its curved, asymmetric strokes that often use horizontal strokes, writing Chinese using writing tools meant for carving runes (only capable of producing non-directional, straight lines with horizontal lines prohibited) would be very difficult. It is still possible to carve Chinese characters in wood and stone, and this was done for printing and rubbing purposes, but it is much more time consuming than writing with a brush.

Movable type was the first technology that massively restricted the writing systems that could be used with it. Gutenberg's main invention was the mass production of metal types from a limited number of dies (Steinberg 1996, 8). With large quantities of identical types, the production of medium series of printed material became practical. When a number of pages had been printed, the types could be reused, or even easily recast if the next project required a different amount of a certain type. The design of the original letter form was still a laborious task, though. A scribe could easily add diacritics or other slight modifications to an otherwise familiar script, and the same could be done when carving wood or stone for printing or rubbing, but doing that for movable type would require a new original, something a printer presumably would seldom commit to for a single customer. There was, however, no real upper limit to the number of characters a printer could stock, or at least no threshold where it would become much more expensive.

3. Typewriters

The typewriter was gradually developed during the 19th century, and by the end of the century it had become commercially successful (Beeching 1974, 4-32). With typewriters, written text could be produced as quickly and legibly as from a printer, albeit not as beautifully. In contrast to printers, typewriters could be used for one-off texts, like letters or internal documentation. However, while movable type printing was constrained in terms of the number of characters normally available, the typewriter both introduced this limitation to a wider audience and, at the same time, constrained it still further.

A typewriter has a fixed layout (except for later special variants like the IBM Selectric) and usually has quite a limited number of characters, around 100, produced by around 50 keys and a shift key (Beeching 1974, 39). The small number of characters that a typical typewriter is able to produce, combined with the fact that there is no way to extend the character set, unlike with movable type, severely constrains the languages that are typeable. Given a typewriter made for a Latin script, there is no way of typing text in, for example, Greek. Chinese script would not even be expressible with a 100-character typewriter, even if the characters were changed. Special typewriters capable of writing Chinese characters were needed for this and became available at the beginning of the 20th century (Beeching 1974, 138).

Even though it is quite language specific, one property that the typewriter has is that the output is *repairable*. By this, I mean that characters can be typed on top of each other, producing combinations that, in many situations, are at least passable. For example, a common way of producing the German and Swedish letters *ä* and *ö* on typewriters without those keys was to type an *a* or *o*, back up using the backspace key and then type a double quotation mark ("). On typewriters without an exclamation mark (!), this could be imitated by using an apostrophe (') and a full stop (.). This was formalised in some keyboard layouts by having keys (for example diacritics) that did not advance the carriage so that the next character could be typed directly without pressing backspace. If no combination of characters was sufficient to produce the desired character, a small adjustment, if somewhat impractical, could be made with a pen or pencil directly on the paper, either immediately or after taking the paper out of the typewriter.

Manually repairing the output often made typewriters useful for typing text in minority languages, provided the minority language used the same underlying writing system as the local language for which typewriters were available and repairs were either rare enough or able to be entered through the keyboard. However, typing (for example) Yiddish on a Swedish typewriter is not possible unless the typist (and reader) is willing to compromise and use a transcription system (Yiddish uses Hebrew script).

4. Computer systems

Starting with the telegraph in the 19th century, written language has regularly been encoded digitally, meaning that characters have been converted to numbers in a standardised way. Digitally encoded written language became important as an input method when computers started to be used in the middle of the 20th century. A fundamental feature of digital encoding is that a key press on a keyboard does not have a direct mechanical effect on a lever that strikes a piece of paper but is first converted into a number, sent somewhere electronically, maybe processed in a computer and finally converted from a number to pixels on a screen or marks on paper.

This means that in order for a character to be transmitted, it has to be assigned a number. Far into the 1980s, the most widely used standard for this was ASCII, an American standard with only 128 possible combinations, whereby only 95 could be used for actual characters. Being an American standard, it prioritised punctuation characters and was not able to represent hardly any written language other than English in a satisfactory way. National variants of ASCII were produced that replaced punctuation characters with characters necessary for the national language or languages. Minority languages were often not taken into consideration. This also meant that documents produced on a computer using one standard showed up with completely different characters on computers using another standard. The situation was improved somewhat by the introduction of extended standards, such as “Code page 437” on the IBM PC, a standard that doubled the number of possible combinations to 256, increasing the usable number of characters to 223 but using 24 of those as various graphical characters like lines and corners. Computer systems using this could fully represent the German and Swedish orthographies in addition to English. Other (incompatible) standards were available for other European languages and, for example, Hebrew, as well as some languages using Arabic scripts. The real change came in the late 1990s and early 2000s with the adoption of Unicode, capable of encoding just over a million different characters. Not all written languages are covered by Unicode, however, and seven previously uncovered scripts were assigned numbers as late as September 2024 (Unicode 2024).

Two unique properties of written language in computer systems compared to handwritten, printed or typewritten text are the lack of repairability and transparency. Since all characters need to be representable within the numbering scheme of the computer system, there is no room for improvisation. In other words, it is not possible to grab your pen, add a diacritic to a character on your screen and have it show up on the receiver’s screen. This brings us to the second property: the lack of transparency. When you have a piece of paper in your hand, you can look at the result from the printer or the typewriter and see exactly what the receiver will see, whether you hand it to them personally or send it by mail. This is not possible when computer systems handle text. You have to put your faith in the system that the text will look the same.

Unicode has limited support for repairability by allowing *combining characters* that work much like the above-mentioned typewriter keys that do not advance the carriage and, therefore, type a character in the same position as the previous one. Common combinations are supported by most systems but some combinations that are only used by smaller languages might not be displayed in the same way on all systems.

One advantage that computer systems have over typewriters is the extended possibility for what I call *key depth*. A shift key on a typewriter makes it possible for each key to print two different characters, in most cases an uppercase letter and a lowercase letter. Since computer systems do not have any mechanical restrictions

on the connection between the keyboard and the output, they have more freedom in adding additional shift-like keys. The most famous ones are probably the AltGr (IBM PC) and Option (Macintosh) keys that, together with the shift key, provide access to (possibly) four different characters per key, what I call *key depth 4*.

Computer systems were also able to offer more advanced language technology techniques, like spell checking and predictive input. While predictive input was first mostly used for Chinese and Japanese (Tanaka-Ishii 2007), where it is almost a necessity, it is now widely used in smartphones.

5. Smartphones

In 2007, the modern smartphone was introduced with a front surface covered fully (or almost fully) by a screen responding to light touches by one or more fingers (so-called capacitive sensing) in contrast to previous phones and pocket computers (personal digital assistants) with pressure-sensitive screens and an array of physical buttons, often arranged as a small keyboard. The pressure-sensitive screens were generally not suitable for text input using fingers, often requiring the use of a stylus or a fingernail to generate enough pressure and, therefore, users mostly relied on a physical keyboard for speed. The newer capacitive touchscreens respond quickly to even light touches, which is why they are used in smartphones that exclusively make use of on-screen keyboards.

The prevalence of on-screen keyboards has had at least two consequences for inputting written language: *keyboard flexibility* and *keyboard imprecision*. On the one hand, since smartphone keyboard keys are only arbitrary rectangles on a screen, they can represent any keyboard without the hardware being changed. If the user uses, for instance, both Swedish and Yiddish, the necessary characters can be displayed on the keys depending on the keyboard type chosen by the user and even the key sizes can be changed to accommodate more or fewer keys as needed. Key depth can also be increased: by long pressing a key, several variants associated with that character can be displayed and then chosen by the user. Many smartphone keyboards have a key depth of around 10 for at least some keys, much larger than a standard computer keyboard. In Figure 1, the English (UK) keyboard on an iPhone has 9 different characters to choose from when long pressing the “a” key and just as many again when the shift key is pressed, i.e. a key depth of 9+9. Therefore, a smartphone keyboard offers much greater flexibility than a standard computer keyboard thanks to it being possible to change the keyboard layout without changing the hardware and thanks to the increased key depth.

On the other hand, on-screen keyboards are imprecise since there are no physical boundaries between keys and the keys are very small on a smartphone keyboard. Users are, therefore, not very precise when pressing the keys and the software is forced to guess what key was pressed. On a physical keyboard, there is no doubt which key was pressed but on a screen a finger can easily land between keys (with

the physical width of a finger being a contributing factor that complicates the analysis). In Figure 2, a sequence of two touches is recognised by the software, one directly on the “o” key and the other between the “a” and “s” keys. This is a Swedish keyboard and, therefore, the software uses its knowledge about the probabilities of letter combinations in Swedish and chooses “s” as its guess. In Figure 3, another sequence of two touches is recognised by the software, one directly on the “l” key and the other yet again between the “a” and “s” keys. This time the software guesses that “a” is the correct letter.



Fig. 1: Long pressing on the “a” key shows several alternative characters

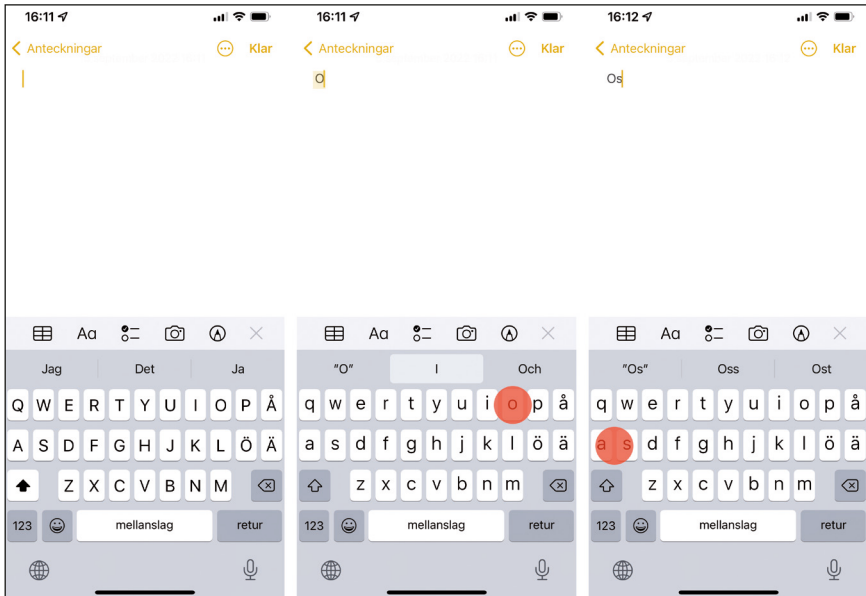


Fig. 2: Typing the character “o” followed by a touch between “a” and “s” on a smart-phone keyboard

The functionality for successfully inputting text on a smartphone keyboard is, thus, dependent on a statistical model of letter combinations for the specific language in which the text is being written. Suppose, for instance, that there was no Finnish keyboard available for one version of the iPhone and a Swedish keyboard was used for inputting Finnish text. The keyboards look exactly the same but when we started inputting Finnish on the Swedish keyboard, the software would try to guess the next letter based on statistics about Swedish. This would lead to subtle errors as the software pushed the user in the direction of Swedish orthography.

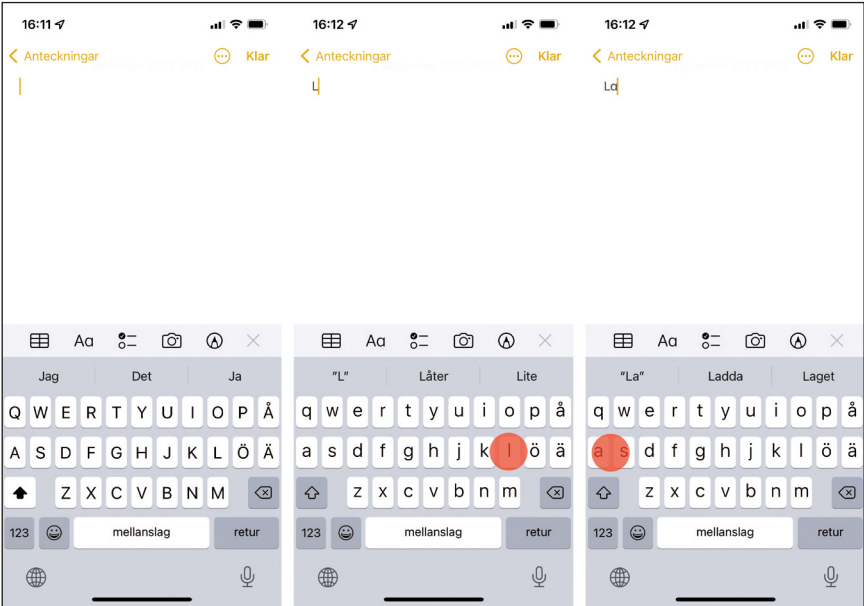


Fig. 3: Typing the character “l” followed by a touch between “a” and “s” on a smartphone keyboard

6. Consequences for small and minority languages

Table 1 summarises the differences between typewriters, computer keyboards and smartphones as typing tools. For each attribute, the typing tool that is most advantageous (or disadvantageous, in the case of precision) for minority languages is marked with a plus (or minus).

	Typewriter	Computer keyboard	Smartphone
Key layout	Fixed	Fixed	Flexible (+)
Precision	Precise	Precise	Imprecise (–)
Encoding	Direct (+)	Coded	Coded
Output	Repairable (+)	Fixed	Fixed
Key depth	≈ 2	≈ 4	> 6 (+)

Table 1: A comparison of different typing tools. Advantages and disadvantages for minority languages are marked with (+) and (–) respectively

The big advantage of the smartphone with respect to small and minority languages is that it has the possibility of flexible key layouts. Adding a keyboard for a language is only a matter of software since no new hardware is needed. This means that costs are lower, both for development and manufacturing, making the threshold lower for languages with few users. What is maybe an even more important consequence is that the user can enjoy the advantages of a fully customised experience, like the proper letters on the keys and extra keys when needed, but does not have to switch between different hardware devices.

Key depth, the number of characters accessible on each key, can also be an advantage, especially if the language does not yet have a keyboard of its own. The probability is then much higher that the language can be written using the keyboard of another language.

The imprecision of the keyboard is, however, a disadvantage if the language does not have its own keyboard. The user will be pushed in the direction of the chosen language and the difficulty of obtaining good statistical data about a language is an obstacle to creating a prediction mechanism and, by extension, creating a properly functioning keyboard. Statistical models are used to calculate the probability of a character given the previously typed characters and the quality of the model is highly dependent on the amount of text that is available for the language. There are often only small amounts of publicly available texts available in minority languages, something that can severely impact the quality of the models.

Neither does the smartphone have the advantages that the typewriter has of having a repairable output and a direct relationship between keys and outputted characters. The lack of repairability means that features in the written language that are not representable cannot be fixed afterwards. In practice, this means that a reliance on digital tools for written communication is dependent on software support for the language or, at the very least, that speakers of unsupported languages are severely discouraged from using these languages. The lack of a direct relationship to the outputted characters means that the user cannot trust that the receiver will be able to read the message.

In the example described above with the Finnish/Swedish keyboard, the user could just choose the Finnish keyboard instead of trying to type Finnish using a Swedish phone keyboard since this version of the iPhone does have that keyboard. But this is not the case for the other Swedish national minority languages, for example Meänkieli.

Meänkieli is a language spoken in northern Sweden that is most closely related to Finnish and Kven and more distantly related to the Sami languages, Estonian and Hungarian (Ahltorp et al. 2024, 23). It is written using the same set of characters as Swedish. Meänkieli and Finnish are similar enough that a Finnish spell checker might just “correct” the written Meänkieli to Finnish, not an ideal scenario for language preservation. Predictive input can similarly be disastrous if the wrong language is used as a basis for the suggestions. In general, no prediction and no spell checking are better than something that is incorrect, especially since users have been known to accept erroneous suggestions from automatic spell checking software (Domeij/Knutsson/Severinson Eklundh 2002).

Major differences between Meänkieli and Finnish include verb morphology, h-insertion and h-metathesis in non-initial syllables as well as many modern loanwords from Swedish (Ahltorp et al. 2024, 24). Of these, the h-insertion and h-metathesis are probably most obviously problematic since the insertion of a letter or the swapping of two letters compared to what, in this case, would be the Finnish norm looks like an otherwise common spelling mistake and would lead to false positives if a Finnish spell checker were to be used. One example (Ahltorp et al. 2024, 31) is *pilvheen* ‘cloud (in illative singular)’, which is *pilveen* in Finnish. Using, for example, a Finnish word list and morphology generator would incorrectly recognise this as a mistake. But even a morphophonological model that took this into account would also have to be able to deal with the variant with h-metathesis: *pilhveen*. A prototype of such a language model has recently been developed (Lejdebö Enwald 2024).

For languages like Meänkieli, where the basic script can be written with a Finnish or Swedish keyboard, someone writing the language does not have to face the same degree of obstacles compared to printing properly spelled Swedish at a typical British printer in the 19th century (“ä” would probably be missing) or even writing Swedish on a German typewriter (“å” would have to be repaired from “a”). Nonetheless, software nudging you in the wrong direction, towards a language that you are explicitly *not* trying to write, can be very frustrating.

Creating a smartphone keyboard for Meänkieli that works almost as well as, for example, the Finnish and Swedish keyboards is crucial for encouraging language use. Otherwise there is a risk that speakers of endangered languages will choose the path of least resistance and use a majority language with proper language support instead of their own language when the use of the endangered language is discouraged by the technology available. Conversely, good language

support for a minority language can increase the enjoyment and encourage speakers to write the language more. Increased pressure from society to use digital communication necessarily increases the pressure to use well-supported languages.

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Multilingualism and linguistic diversity

Multilingualism in Georgia

Abstract

A country located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Georgia has a rich tapestry of ethnic groups and language minorities. Throughout its history, Georgia has been home to many different peoples, often due to its strategic location, and has seen invasions, migrations and cultural exchanges. The ethnic composition of the country has evolved over time, with certain minority groups experiencing displacement, assimilation or cultural survival. The paper deals with the linguistic diversity of Georgia, which has a very long history. The article especially focuses on the diversity of languages arising in the 19th and 20th centuries as well as Soviet and post-Soviet language policy in Georgia.

1. Introduction

Georgia has always been a multilingual country. Georgian and foreign sources describe the migration of different peoples into ancient Georgia and ethnic diversity as well. *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (known in English as “The Georgian Chronicles” or “The Georgian Royal Annals”) is the principal compendium of medieval Georgian historical texts, essentially the official corpus of the history of the Kingdom of Georgia. The Chronicles consist of a series of distinct texts dating from the 9th to the 14th century. Leonti Mroveli is the author or editor of the first text in *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (“The life of Kings”).

Leonti Mroveli provides trustworthy evidence: “Six languages are in use in Kartli”. According to the same source, these languages are Georgian, Armenian, Khazarian, Assyrian, Hebrew and Greek. The author’s reference to the fact that Parnavaz “spread the Georgian language and no other language was spoken in Kartli except the Georgian language” must be understood in this way: Georgian was selected as the state language from those six languages. Other languages were also spoken but none of them was official except for Georgian.

A state language in a multinational country is selected mainly in one of two ways:

- 1) Any language can be declared a state language by decree or order. Such a solution aims at reducing language differences in the country or integrating ethnic minorities into national culture.
- 2) Several languages are recognised as languages through which official bodies work within the country and people speaking different languages communicate with each other. This is a more tolerant way and encourages thoughtful,

cultural pluralism, which becomes a key feature for the state. The choice of an official language is a political decision that is conditioned by many external linguistic factors, principally the number of speakers of this language (it is not necessary to be native to everyone who speaks this language) and the quality of its use (Stewart 1968, 532, 542).

King Parnavaz's decision to "spread" or declare Georgian as a state language was, of course, a political decision, based on the two extralinguistic factors just mentioned. In addition, the king's decision shows his intention to integrate other language speakers in Kartli into national, i.e. Georgian, culture. It may be assumed that Parnavaz had all the conditions in Kartli to make Georgian a bridge and not a barrier to cooperation for its multilingual population.

2. The Kartvelian diglossia

When characterising linguistic diversity in Georgia, we should first mention the South Caucasian (Kartvelian in the Georgian linguistic tradition) language family, which, in addition to Georgian, includes Megrelian, Laz and Svan. These are unwritten languages whose scope is now gradually moving beyond the everyday environment and entering a phase of emancipation. The relationship between these languages is a classic case of Ferguson's understanding of diglossia (Ferguson 1959). Georgian was already a standardised and codified language before the Christianisation of Kartli. It already possessed the features of integration and unification necessary for widespread communication and was a modernised language accepted and recognised by the Georgian Christian elite (cf. Ferguson 1968, 34). The language was already equipped with a specialised vocabulary related to Christianity and relevant discourses, namely translated books from the Old and New Testaments, hagiography and hymnography as well as original, translated and commented literature. By the beginning of the 5th century, Georgian had already acquired a significant social function, a means of national identification and cultural self-affirmation.

Alongside standardisation, modernisation is another aspect of language development. It aims at making a language similar to other developed languages and developing possible forms of discourse that correspond to the interests and goals of society (Ferguson 1968, 32; see also Jernudd 1971 and Rubin 1971). The languages of politically and technologically advanced peoples that contribute to the formation of a culture based on that language and influence the lives of other peoples socially, politically, technologically and culturally are considered developed languages. From the early Middle Ages onwards, one such language for the peoples of the Byzantine Empire or peoples associated with that empire was Greek. The Georgian political and cultural elite tried to equate Georgian with the possibilities of Greek, translating key Christian texts and exegetical literature

from Greek into Georgian. During the very early period of Georgian as a literary language, its essential internal features were noticeable: flexible stability allowing for culture-specific modifications and intellectualisation, with the codified variety of Georgian differing from its colloquial counterpart and distinguished from other Kartvelian languages by a high degree of artificiality, a common characteristic of normalised languages. The earliest samples of Georgian literary language show that by that period the language had already gained the function of unifying the speech community while, at the same time, protecting and distinguishing it from other speech communities (see Garvin 1959; Garvin/Mathiot 1960).

Georgian is a standardised language with a documented literary tradition going back at least fifteen centuries and, thus, it cannot be equalled or rivalled by printed literature in either Megrelian or Svan. Likewise, the Kartvelian diglossia has a centuries-old history. The status of Georgian as the state language has never been up for debate. Normally, the development of the social role of a literary language is characterised by two tendencies: 1) expansion and koineisation and 2) the establishment of a dominant role and performance of the function of a national feature (Gamkrelidze et al. 2003, 456). It is Georgian that performs the common national function in as far as it has become a foundation of Georgian statehood. It was Georgian that was one reason for establishing and changing political borders, localising centres and influencing migration. It, in turn, was influenced by the migration of Kartvelian tribes and their mutual interference on all language levels. These were the factors that conditioned the transformation of Kartli into Sakartvelo, the name of the country in Georgian, and Kartveli into the name of the language spoken there.

The Kartvelian diglossia started many centuries ago and state prestige, also the sense of pride in this stable language situation, has always been associated with Georgian. This language has an ideologised value. It unified and unifies the country, has been turned into a national symbol and has been identified with national values. This is how the Great Tradition creates an exoglossic society concerned with finding a respectable origin for its language, for the sake of which myths and genealogies have been composed and cultivated. In the Kartvelian diglossic hierarchy, this honour belonged to Georgian.

3. Multilingualism and legislation in Georgia

According to the Constitution of Independent Georgia (1918-1921) drafted and adopted by the Constituent Assembly of Georgia (1919-1921), “the state language of Georgia is the Georgian language” (Article 3). All four constitutions of Soviet Georgia (see the constitutions of 1922, 1927, 1936 and 1978) recognised Georgian as the state language of Georgia but Georgian could not completely change the function of Russian as the main official language of the Soviet Union in Georgia. According to Article 75 of the 1978 Constitution, Russian and other

languages of the population could be freely used in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Articles 157 and 158 determined the procedure for using the languages of official address in the Abkhaz Autonomous SSR and the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (region). (For more information on the relationship between Soviet language policy and the Georgian constitutions, see Bolkvadze 2005.)

Between 1921 and 1991 in Soviet Georgia, Russian was the dominant language of inter-republican communication, government and education. While Georgian was still the official language of the republic, Russian became the *lingua franca* across the Soviet Union.

The first post-Soviet constitution of Georgia was approved in 1995 but before that, amendments, including those concerning the function of languages in Georgia, were introduced by the Supreme Council of Georgia in 1990. The article on the use of Russian and other languages by the population was excluded from the 1995 Constitution, although in everyday life Russian still retained the function of the language of communication with the former Soviet republics and the working language of scientific work and international conferences.

4. Soviet linguistic policy and Georgia

The Soviet Union was a huge linguistic conglomerate. The linguistic diversity of the Soviet Union, often characterised as intricate and distorted (Lewis 1972, 17), was not the result of socialist rule but rather the heritage of Russian rule. Russian expansionist politics began in the times of Ivan the Terrible in the 16th century and the formation of a multilingual state was completed during the reign of Alexander II, although its conquest policy was continued successfully afterwards. “Russia is one of the states” – wrote Ilia Chavchavadze in 1881 – “where the peoples of different origins and languages live, and they live as a community in their homeland [...]. That is why one of Russia’s greatest political objectives is to arrange the living of different tribes one by one, and then – in the state [...] Russia did not have and has not yet researched and established where the right to nationality ends and where the right of state begins” (Chavchavadze 1991).

Only Russian people were recognised as official patrons of Russian state territory before the revolution while non-Russian indigenous populations were not considered to be the owners of their own regions, being considered simple inhabitants and nothing else. The situation changed during the revolution when anarchy posed a threat of disintegration to Russia. That is why, as Trubetzkoy writes, “the Russian people gave up the status of sole patronage of the country for the purposes of state integrity. The oldest relationship between Russians and non-Russian peoples residing in Russia has been changed by the rigorous logic of history. After that, the Russian people were no longer the only owners of state

territories, but one among those peoples who lived in Russia with already equal rights” (Trubetzkoy 1995, 417).

The Soviet Union included societies residing in, sometimes, diametrically opposed areas differing in their natural and climatic conditions and by their level of socio-economic and cultural development. Both the prominent nations and nomadic tribes coexisted in parallel. In short, it was a unitary state incorporating heterogeneous societies.

Persistent adherence to the policy of the “self-determination of nations” made it possible to obtain secondary and higher education in national minority languages preceded by the introduction of alphabets for national minorities and the selection of dialects for their literary languages, which was sometimes quite complicated. The newly created alphabets were first in Latin and Cyrillic and then entirely in Cyrillic. The use of Cyrillic as the basis for the new alphabets served several purposes: a common base for the newly created alphabets promoted the development of a homogeneous society, also created conditions for coexistence with the Russian language and simplified their learning. The last, i.e. the fourth period, of Soviet linguistic policy was a period of stable bilingualism (in some cases, trilingualism). Russian played a leading role thanks to high-level teaching. This was an integral part of state policy, strengthened by urbanisation, industrialisation and mixed marriages (Lewis 1972, 121-122).

5. Abkhazian

According to the Georgian Constitution, the state language in Georgia is Georgian, and in Abkhazia it is also Abkhazian.

The Abkhazian script changed its basic alphabet several times. Sometimes Cyrillic was used, sometimes Latin and sometimes Georgian. This changing Soviet language policy hindered a unified educational and information policy within Georgia, of course, and often led to confrontation between Georgians and Abkhazians. From 1938 to 1953, Georgian graphics served as the basis of the Abkhazian alphabet. In 1954, Abkhazians returned to Chochua’s Cyrillic-based system (1909), which, with some modifications, is still use. The most recent orthographic reform (in 1996) eliminated one of the major drawbacks of Chochua’s alphabet, unifying the rendition of labialised consonants by a single character instead of two different characters as was the case in the old alphabet (Chirikba 2003, 15-16).

The Constitution of Soviet Georgia guaranteed the use of Abkhazian in official, informational, educational, medical and other spheres. Now that Abkhazia is an unrecognised state and under the political and economic control of Russia, the situation of Abkhazian is very difficult. The number of people who speak the language

is declining rapidly, as are the spheres in which the language is used compared to during the Soviet period.

Based on information from the Department of Statistics in the Ministry of Economy of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, the 1989 census (the last Soviet census) put the ethnic composition of Abkhazia as follows:

Ethnic composition	Population in thousands	%
Georgians	239.9	46%
Abkhazians	93.3	18%
Russians	74.9	14%
Armenians	76.5	15%
Other	???	7%
Total population of Abkhazia	525.061	

Table 1: Ethnic composition of Abkhazia according to the last Soviet census of 1989

The occupation of Abkhazia by Russia in 1992-93 dramatically changed the demographic situation in the autonomous republic. The level of migration in the local population increased while the total number of Georgian speakers decreased by 88.5% on the occupied territory of Abkhazia, the result of ethnic cleansing of Georgians. Georgian is currently a forbidden language in the self-proclaimed republic of Abkhazia. It is not used as a language of instruction or taught as a subject in schools in Abkhazia, despite the fact that Georgians live in the region.

With large-scale migration from villages to cities the accelerating urbanisation process in Abkhazia is one factor which is adversely affecting the functioning of Abkhaz: in the multi-ethnic urban communities it is losing the competition with Russian, which is a *lingua franca* in Abkhazia. Given the rapid process of linguistic assimilation in the diaspora that is happening in parallel, Abkhaz can be regarded as an endangered language (Chirikba 2003, 7-8).

The majority of Abkhazians in Abkhazia are bilingual, the second language being predominantly Russian. According to the last Soviet census of 1989, 78.8% of Abkhazians were fluent in Russian. This situation, along with other important political and economic factors, will increase the threat to the language and will contribute to the replacement of Abkhazian with Russian.

6. Georgian-Iranian language contacts

As the written sources testify, the oldest linguistic minorities in Georgia were Iranians, Jews, Greeks, Armenians and Turkish-speaking groups. Georgian-Iranian linguistic contacts are the most intensive and long-lasting links in the history of

Georgia. All words of Iranian origin used in ancient Georgian written sources and modern Georgian have been shown to belong to ancient and especially to Middle and New Iranian languages. Georgian had contacts with the North Iranian (Scytho-Alano-Ossetian), Northwest Iranian (Parthian) and Southwest Iranian (Middle and New Persian) language groups. Most of the words borrowed from these languages are now an integral part of Georgian, forming part of its basic lexical core. Iranian loanwords in Georgian were borrowed in different periods and from different dialects. Borrowed words include religious terminology, theophoric anthroponyms, personal names, zoonyms, administrative, social and military vocabulary and the vocabulary of everyday life as well as the names of plants and animals, weights and measures, etc. Sometimes Persian was used as a language of international relations. This fact is illustrated by ancient written sources preserved in Georgia and beyond. Modern Iranian languages spoken in Georgia are Ossetian, Kurdish and Tati.

7. Ossetian

The Ossetian alphabet was created and developed in various eras based on various scripts, namely Georgian (1753), Cyrillic (1798), Latin (1923), Cyrillic again (1937), Georgian (1938-1954); in 1954 the Ossetian alphabet returned to Cyrillic (McConnell et al. 2000, 357). One of the most important arguments for returning to Cyrillic was unification: the use of two different alphabets created two dialects of Ossetian and divided the Ossetians geographically. While Ossetians living in South Ossetia used the alphabet based on Georgian, Ossetians living in North Ossetia used Cyrillic. However, as printed material shows, having a common alphabet does not suffice for the development of a literary language. According to the *Sociolinguistic Encyclopedia*, 15 poems, 15 plays, 61 short stories and 4 novels were published in Ossetian in 1995, which was considered to be stabilised against the background of the more or less dominant Soviet printed word (McConnell et al. 2000, 359).

According to the constitution of Soviet Georgia, Ossetian was the official language of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region (oblast) along with Georgian. All decrees, declarations and orders of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and the autonomous region itself were to be issued in Ossetian and Georgian within the autonomous region.

Ossetian was the language of formal education and used as the language of instruction in primary, basic and secondary schools. The state of learning and teaching in Ossetian is well illustrated in the table below, which shows the number of schools in the Autonomous Region of South Ossetia. In the last years of the Soviet Union, Ossetian schools were also opened outside the district. For example, there were 30 Ossetian schools in the Khashuri region in 1991.

Types of schools in the South Ossetian Autonomous Region (oblast) by 1991	Number
Georgian	47
Ossetian	36
Russian	5
Georgian-Russian	3
Georgian-Ossetian	3
Georgian-Russian-Ossetian	6

Table 2: Types of schools in the South Ossetian Autonomous Region (oblast) by 1991

Nowadays an Ossetian Sunday School operates in Tbilisi and a Scientific-Research Centre of Georgian-Ossetian Relations is based at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. The teaching of and research into Ossetian have never stopped at Tbilisi State University since it was first established.

Ossetian is the language of news programmes on national public broadcasting in Georgia. It is taught in public schools in the villages of Areshferani and Poni in the Lagodekhi region, in the public school in the village of Tsitskanaantseri in the Kvareli region, in the public schools in the villages of Shavshvebi and Tsitelubani in the Gori region and in the public school of the village of Nigoza in the Kaspi region.

However, the present situation does not satisfy the demands of people interested in the study of Ossetian. There are no textbooks developed according to modern methods. Nevertheless, several very important dictionaries, phrasebooks and reading aids have been published, including Georgian-Ossetian parallel editions in Ossetian Narts for children and adults. The term *nart*, a saga or series of tales, comes from the Ossetian *nartæ*. The root *nar* is of Iranian origin, from Proto-Iranian ‘hero, man’. The scope of Ossetian language use, learning and teaching is narrowing day by day in the self-proclaimed Russian-controlled Republic of South Ossetia. Currently, the language of schooling and higher education in this self-proclaimed republic is Russian, with Ossetian only being taught as a school subject; only about 12 schools provide primary education in Ossetian. (For more on teaching Abkhazian and Ossetian in the Soviet and post-Soviet period, see Popiashvili 2024.)

8. Kurdish

The Kurdish spoken in Georgia belongs to the northwestern group of the Iranian branch of the Indo-Iranian language family. There are two main dialects: Kurmanji and Sorani, although Kurmanji is more commonly spoken by the Kurdish community in Georgia. Historically, many Kurds in Georgia trace their roots back to the 19th and 20th centuries when Kurds migrated from the Ottoman Empire and Iran for various reasons, including political instability, military campaigns and economic hardship. The Kurdish population in Georgia is mostly concentrated in Tbilisi and in some areas of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, which is known for its ethnic diversity. Over time, the Kurdish population in Georgia has integrated into Georgian society, with many members of the community speaking Georgian fluently. In urban areas, the younger generation may be less fluent in Kurdish, often prioritising Georgian and Russian. The Kurdish community in Georgia has faced challenges in maintaining their language and cultural practices. However, there are efforts to preserve Kurdish culture through festivals, community gatherings and publications.

9. The largest linguistic minorities in Georgia

The two linguistic minorities are Armenians and Azerbaijanians, of which Armenians live mainly in the Javakheti region and Azerbaijanians in Kvemo Kartli, although their places of settlement are not limited to these regions. Throughout the history of Georgia there have been migrations but the situation in the Soviet era was affected by the migrations and resettlements of the 19th and 20th centuries. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the ethnic composition of Georgia had undergone major changes as a result of coercion driven by military and political objectives in the post-reform period of the Russian Empire and subsequent colonisation driven by economic conditions. Organised, group settlement of non-Georgian speakers took place in the first half of the 19th century, while the 1860s were characterised by a gradual, spontaneous expansion of settlers. As a result, the number of non-Georgian speakers oriented towards Russia and Russian grew, which made it difficult for this part of the population to integrate into Georgian-speaking society from linguistic, cultural and political points of view.

9.1 Armenian

It is important to note that the compact settlement of ethnic groups on the territory of Georgia began after the Russian Empire's invasions into the Georgian kingdoms-princdoms. The policy of the Russian Empire at the time was to evict the

Georgian population from border regions and settle more loyal ethnic groups there. After the end of the Russo-Ottoman War, the Russian Empire forced Muslim Georgians living in Samtskhe-Javakheti to immigrate to the Ottoman Empire and then supported the resettlement of thousands of Armenians from Turkey to Samtskhe-Javakheti in 1829-1831. Armenian migrations from Turkey to Georgia continued throughout the 19th century. This process especially intensified in 1877-1889 after the Russo-Turkish war. At that time, many Armenians arrived in Georgia, mostly settling in the coastal areas of the Black Sea. A new large wave of Armenian refugees arrived in Georgia from Turkey in 1896-97. This process continued after 1915.

Armenian emigration to Georgia continued in the 20th century, only decreasing in 1959-1970 due to migration processes between the republics, especially in Armenia proper, as well as socioeconomic and ethnic factors. For example, graduates of Armenian schools in Georgia were eager to study at universities and vocational schools in Armenia. After graduation, most of these students started working in various fields of the national economy of Armenia. Other social and ethnic reasons include the desire to live closer to relatives and national culture, etc. The importance of economic factors that conditioned migration processes from Georgia to Armenia was especially noticeable in 1961-1967, when Armenia's economy was growing at a very high rate, which led to an intensification of migration, especially from Armenian-speaking villages in Georgia.

Today Armenians live in almost all regions as well as in the capital of Georgia. Samtskhe-Javakheti is a historical and geographical province in southern Georgia that is particularly characterised by a compact Armenian population. In 1944, the deportation of Muslims from South Georgia by the Soviet authorities contributed to an increase in the percentage of Armenians in some parts of this region. Currently, the absolute majority of the population of Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki are Armenian speaking.

9.2 Azerbaijani

The resettlement of various Turkish-speaking groups in Georgia reflected the cultural orientation of Azerbaijanis in Georgia. The ancestors of the Azeris of Georgia were influenced by Turkish, Iranian and Georgian cultures from the beginning. On the one hand, they considered themselves heirs of Muslim figures living in Georgia (Ebou Muhamd El-Husayin et-Tiflis, Bedr et-Tiflis, Gaazi Et-Tiflis, Hubei, etc.) and on the other hand, they associated their culture with the Turkish world and considered the "Book of Dede Korkut", the epic "Koroğlu" and Dastan love stories as the works created by their ancestors in the Oghuz world. At the same time, it should be noted that, in turn, the literary impulses that originated from the Turkish-speaking population of Georgia had influences outside the

country. For example, it is believed that one of the examples of Azeri renaissance literature – the Dastan novel “Shehriar” – was created in Georgia (Janiashvili 2008).

The Azerbaijani population in Georgia increased particularly in the second half of the 20th century, when they surpassed the growth rates of all other ethnic groups living in Georgia. See the table for the statistics of the Azerbaijani population in the 20th century in Georgia.

10. Solving Soviet problems in the post-Soviet period

During the Soviet period, Russian was generally used as the means of communication between the different linguistic communities and ethnicities of the Soviet Union. Armenian and Azerbaijani schoolchildren learned four languages at school: their mother tongue (i.e. Armenian or Azerbaijani), Georgian, Russian and a European language, mostly English. Although Georgian was spoken at a level suitable for their daily needs, Russian was compulsory. Not speaking Russian created serious obstacles for those who wanted to reach high positions in society; the same could not be said of Georgian. During the Soviet era, for example, fluency in Russian provided a wider territorial scope for employment than fluency in Georgian. In Armenian and Azerbaijani schools in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgian was either taught minimally or not at all, although it was included in the curriculum, with lessons conducted only formally. Schoolchildren who graduated from non-Georgian schools were limited both in their access to university-level education and in their ability to compete in the local labour market.

Certainly, all inhabitants of Georgia, irrespective of their ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, are invaluable and, thus, vital human resources and contributors to the country’s future. One of the main goals of present-day Georgian language policy is to create an endoglossic state where the national language is the native language of the majority of the population. However, in order to achieve this, it is necessary to expand the sociolinguistic functions of Georgian to help establish it as the lingua franca for the whole population. Another focus of present-day Georgian language policy is to support multilingualism in Georgia. This concerns the establishment and retention of national and cultural identity, which, in turn, requires social integration based on a mutual respect for language and culture. Thus there are two main directions in contemporary Georgian language policy: improving the teaching of the state language and protecting minority languages. The following are the latest activities currently being implemented by the state for these two directions (see Table 3).

Strengthening and popularising the teaching and learning of Georgian in formal and non-formal education	Protecting and promoting minority languages
– 145 consultant teachers have been sent to 125 schools; – 198 persons employed in the public sector were trained within the state language teaching and integration programme.	– Creating textbooks for Armenian and Azerbaijani language and literature; – Promoting Armenian and Azerbaijani kindergartens; – The “1+4” educational programme is part of a special preferential policy to facilitate the admission process for ethnic minority students. It provides them with the opportunity to improve their proficiency in Georgian before embarking on their chosen educational programme.
184 public schools are involved in the new bilingual programme.	

Table 3: Main directions of the modern language policy of Georgia

11. Russian

According to the 2014 census, Russians made up only 0.7% of Georgia’s population. As mentioned, the economic backwardness of Georgia in the post-Soviet period led to the exodus not only of the Russian-speaking population but also a significant number of Georgians to Russia for work.

Georgian emigration in Russia, despite the obstacles, of course, could not have a significant impact on a powerful political factor of Georgia’s separation from the Kremlin’s ideology. After 2003, when the Rose Revolution was followed by a linguistic revolution aimed at replacing Russian with English. English was declared the first foreign language in schools and its use as the most widely used international language and the first foreign language was strongly promoted, which reduced the use of Russian in everyday life. Gradually, people have grown up who do not know Russian or have very poor knowledge and who cannot use it to satisfy academic, scientific and informational interests in general. While the younger generation of Georgians may learn Russian as a second foreign language, they often do so with less enthusiasm as they seek to assert a distinct Georgian national identity separate from the Soviet past and Russian influence.

The situation changed after the Russian military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. When mobilisation was declared, a significant and uncontrolled migration began from the Russian Federation to avoid conscription, political repression and military involvement, which would lead to life-threatening duties required by the Russian state. Due to its proximity and relatively lenient visa policies,

Georgia became a popular destination for Russian refugees and immigrants. For this reason, the number of Russian-speaking people in Georgia increased. This led to the re-activation of functions of Russian that had long been absent. Now it still functions in Georgia in different domains: the election process, formal education, healthcare, information and communication as well as in cultural production and the penitentiary system; Russian business is also active in Georgia.

However, the presence of Russians in Georgia is politically sensitive due to ongoing tensions between the two countries. Georgia has a painful history with Russia, including the wars of the 1990s and Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, which resulted in the occupation of the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The long-term integration of this group into Georgian society remains a matter of debate. Given the ongoing conflicts and Georgia's geopolitical importance in the region, the future of Russian immigration and the sociolinguistic characteristics and functions of Russian in a new socio-demographic space but with an old history will depend on broader geopolitical shifts, the evolution of Georgia's relations with Russia and the continuing influence of other languages such as English.

12. The smallest linguistic minorities in Georgia

There are many small linguistic minorities in Georgia. We will focus on three of the smallest. Two of them, Tsova-Tush (Bats) and Kist, belong to the Nakh branch of the Northeast Caucasian language family (also called Nakh-Dagestanian). The other two members of the Nakh branch, Chechen and Ingush, show a high degree of structural and phonological overlap but are more closely related to each other than to Tsova-Tush. Tsova-Tush is the native language of approximately 300 adults, the vast majority of whom live in the village of Zemo Alvani in the eastern part of Georgia, just south of the Greater Caucasus mountain range. When speaking Tsova-Tush, speakers usually use the term *bac* (*bacav* 'a Tsova-Tush man', *bac-bi bats*, 'the Tsova-Tush') when referring to their people, and call their language *bacbur mot't*. Tsova-Tush is not mutually intelligible with Chechen due to its long separation from other Nakh groups and heavy influence from Georgian (phonology, grammar and vocabulary). (For more details see Schreur 2024.)

Kist, spoken by the Kists in Pankisi Gorge in Georgia, is a dialect of Chechen and mutually intelligible with other Chechen dialects. While it shares linguistic roots with Chechen, the Kist dialect has distinct features influenced by historical migration and contact with Georgian.

The third language, Udi, is spoken by the Udins, who moved to Georgia under the leadership of Zinobi Silikashvili (Silikov) and with the assistance of Joseph Stalin in 1922 from the Azerbaijani villages of Vartashen (modern Oguz) and Kishlag, fleeing the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. Currently, the Udi community (about 500 people) lives in the village of Zinobiani in the Kvareli municipality of the Kakheti region. The Udi village in Kvareli is named Zinobi in honour of

Zinobi Silikashvili. It is the only Udinian settlement in Georgia. Some scholars suggest that Udi is a descendant of Caucasian Albanian. (For more details see Jeiranashvili 1971; Panchvidze 1974.)

13. The lost colours of the Georgian linguistic mosaic

As mentioned, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when post-Soviet Georgia faced very serious economic problems, the population began to emigrate mainly to Russia, Europe and the USA. This led to a decrease in the overall population, which also affected the number of linguistic minorities in Georgia. The main reason for emigration was economic hardship. Added to this was the desire among non-ethnic Georgians to return to their historical motherland, who could also count on better opportunities in the countries of their ethnic origin. This applied to Greeks, Jews, Germans and Russians, which led to the loss of several colours in the linguistic mosaic of Georgia.

13.1 Greeks

The vast majority of the Modern Greek population cannot be regarded as direct descendants of the ancient Greek colonists who arrived in Georgia or as the descendants of Byzantine missionaries and craftsmen. Instead, the ethnic Greek population of Georgia mainly moved there in the 19th and 20th centuries from the regions where the so-called Pontian or Pontic Greeks lived. They can be divided into two groups speaking either Greek (Pontian/Pontic Greeks) or Turkish (Urums). The number of Greeks grew steadily from the first large-scale arrival of migrants in Georgia until the 1990s, mainly due to resettlement in the 19th century and later by natural reproduction. According to the last Soviet census of 1989, 100,000 Greeks (Urums) lived in Georgia, representing 1.9% of the total ethnic Greek population. Greeks were the majority in Tsalka, with 61.0% of the region's population. At present Greeks are less than 0.3% of the whole population of Georgia. (For more information see Giorgadze 2017.)

13.2 Jews

The ancient Georgian historic annals associate the appearance and settlement of the first wave of Jews with the conquest and devastation of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 BC. According to the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, “Nebuchadnezzar destroyed and devastated Jerusalem and the Jews, pursued by him, came to Kartli”. The governor of Mtskheta granted them part of the shores of the Aragvi River called Zanavi. Later, the Jews moved to other towns and cities that were centres of trade. The chronicle of Kartli's conversion dates the settlement of the Jews in Mtskheta to the year 169 BC. There is no doubt, however,

that there were “Hebrew regions” during the Hellenistic period in Mtskheta and Urbnisi, towns in Kartli, where, beginning from ancient times, the Jews maintained their cultural centres, the so-called “Hebrew sanctuaries”, which served as the first synagogues. Traces of the life of old Jewish communities have been preserved in the ancient Hebrew epigraphic discovered in Kartli.

It is clear that the Jewish community living in Georgia adopted Georgian from the very beginning and also adapted to Georgian folk rituals as well as to local popular customs and habits. At the same time, they remained deeply loyal to Judaism. The Georgian and Jewish populations enjoyed the same rights and their legal equality has never been violated. The Jews living in Georgia did not experienced harassment or persecution, either on a nationalistic or religious basis. In Georgia, for Georgian people, any manifestation of anti-Semitism has always been totally alien.

The Georgian Jews have preserved many historically unique manuscripts, the Lailash Bible being the most notable of them. This exquisite piece of art, written on parchment, is distinguished by its beautiful ornamentation and illuminated initials of a most elaborate shape. The Lailash bible was kept within the Jewish community and later preserved in the Lailash synagogue. It is often referred to as the Svaneti Bible and is surrounded by a number of legends created by both Jews and Christians. The Lailash Bible used to be an object of veneration for the population of Racha-Lechkhumi (the mountainous part of Georgia), regardless whether they were Jews or Georgians; in times of drought they implored it to send rain; in times of pestilence they asked it to cure them of illness; in wartime their only request was to grant them victory over the enemy.

Some independent translations by Old Georgian Jewish translators of biblical and other sacred books are known by the name “Tavsili”. The first such translations must have emerged in the 11th century. These translations were never written down and were passed on orally from one generation to the next. In particular, they were taught to future religious ministers. It is worth emphasising that these translations have a continuing significance not only for the history of the Georgian Jews, their culture and their spoken language but also for the history of Jewish communities and the study of the Hebrew in general. At the same time, these are the earliest examples of spoken Georgian and are immensely important for scholars of the history of Georgian and its dialectology.

These important examples of literary heritage were, unfortunately, unknown in scholarly circles until 2009. Enoch published two books: *Bereshit* (“Genesis”) (2009) and *Pesach Haggadah* (“Passover legend”) (2014); several manuscript versions of both texts exist. They are Jewish translations done by a Jewish translator for a Jewish people. (For a discussion of these translations and their significance, see Pinkus 1990.) These translations responded to the desire of Georgian Jewish spiritual leaders to have their own translation of the Bible instead of using Christian translations. The Old Georgian Jewish translators were followers of

literal translation. Enoch reached a conclusion, particularly about the “Tavsili” or *Bereshit* that “the translation is meticulously literal, including Hebraisms. The original translators apparently strove to be faithful to the original text, though not always with full accuracy”. Almost the same may be said about the translation of *Pesach Haggadah*: “The translation is literal [...] there are very few intentional deviations from the Hebrew original” (Enoch 2009).

Jews populated nearly all regions in Georgia beginning in ancient times; Jewish quarters could be found in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi, Sukhumi, Akhaltsikhe, Gori, Tskhinvali, Telavi, Signagi, Borjomi, Kareli, Surami, Breti, Tamarasheni, Oni, Chkhari, Zugdidi, Senaki, Bandza, Sachkhere and Lilashi as well as in many other cities, towns and villages in Georgia. (For more information about Jews in Georgia see Metreveli 2002.)

The Jewish population in general and outstanding Jewish public figures have time and again described Georgia as the most distinguished country in the world and the Georgians as a nation who, during twenty-six centuries of history, manifested only deep affection and respect towards Jewish people. Georgia can boast of never allowing a single instance of anti-Semitism throughout its history.

14. Conclusion

Although this article does not describe all languages spread across Georgia, the analysed languages and their hierarchy are sufficient to demonstrate the historical and contemporary linguistic diversity of Georgia.

The hierarchy of languages and language policy in Georgia differed in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. In the Soviet period, language policy was shaped and implemented by the Kremlin, which left its imprint on the language situation in post-Soviet Georgia. It was the Kremlin’s language policy, fomenting and supporting separatism, that separated the Abkhazian and Ossetian languages from Georgia, which makes us speak of a different *de facto* and *de jure* linguistic situation, which reduced the geographical area of the use of Georgian as the state language and narrowed the socio-cultural spheres of the use of Abkhazian and Ossetian, putting them in the status of endangered languages.

One of the results of Soviet language policy is that the linguistic mosaic of Georgia has lost its colours. Instead of struggling with the problems of a newly independent country, a significant proportion of some linguistic minorities preferred to return to their historical homeland, while some linguistic minorities still face the problem of not knowing the state language of Georgian. Eliminating this problem is the main task of modern language policy in Georgia, so that multilingualism becomes the basis for the linguistic and social integration of the Georgian population.

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Between language repression and language preservation: The role of German as a minority language and its language policy actors in Georgia¹

Abstract

The focus of this article is on the German-speaking minority in Georgia. They are descendants of ethnic Germans from the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union who had immigrated to the Transcaucasian regions in several phases since the end of the 18th century. German enjoyed a high reputation until the 1990s and was the most popular foreign language, especially in Georgia. At present, members of the Caucasian German minority have to contend with a globalised society in which pressure on the language from outside is constantly increasing. However, the Caucasian Germans continue to try to preserve their language and culture through various strategies, e.g. through regional consolidation, which takes place in groups such as the ‘Association of Germans of Georgia’ in Tbilisi. At the same time, the advantages of globalisation (e.g. visa-free travel between Georgia and Germany) and new media are now being used to support the minority group of Caucasian Germans across borders. This article presents the results of the language data I recorded from guided interviews with Caucasian Germans in Georgia. Firstly, it explores the different socio-situational circumstances, including linguistic repression, which play an important role in their language behaviour and language attitudes. Secondly, it reveals the various strategies of the minority and different groups of actors to strengthen and preserve the language, culture and identity of the Caucasian Germans in the context of language policy in the majority society.

1. Introduction

This article sheds light on various constellations in which varieties of German are present in Georgia, both in rural areas and in metropolises such as Tbilisi. It looks at the various groups of actors who have been pursuing the goal of preserving and promoting German language and culture in Georgia for a number of years and scrutinises their activities and impact based on data collected locally as part of the research project on German-speaking minorities in the Caucasus conducted by the Leibniz Institute for the German Language (IDS).

¹ This article appeared in a similar form in German in: Dück, Katharina (2025): Deutschsprachige Minderheit und sprachpolitische Akteure des Deutschen in Georgien [German-speaking minorities and language policy actors in Georgia]. In: Deutsche Sprache 53, 1, 45-63.

The next part of the paper is dedicated to a description of the varieties of German found in Georgia and their speakers along with the language contact situations arising from socio-historical and political developments in the Caucasus countries in the second half of the 20th century. Section 3 provides a brief overview of the current state of research followed by the methodological approach chosen for collecting and analysing the data. The fourth section is devoted to a discussion of the language policy activities of the four groups of actors that could be identified. In first position is the state, through the Georgian government and its agencies responsible for the promotion of German in Georgia; this is followed by cultural organisations such as the Association of Germans in Georgia ('Einung') and actors with a similar function to that of a cultural institution, such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Georgia. The third category consists of educational institutions such as the German International School in Tbilisi or the 'German Aunties' with their German kindergartens in Tbilisi, which can be seen as nuclei for the teaching of German language and culture. The fourth category includes actors that can be assigned to other organisations such as private companies and the media in particular. The fifth section then takes a closer look at an area not covered by the previous four categories of actors in the public sphere but which directly influences it, namely the area of private language use, especially in the family. Finally, the prospects for the vitality of German in Georgia are discussed resulting from the activities of the various groups of German speakers in Georgia.

2. Varieties of German in the present and language contact situations in Georgia

From an external perspective, the speakers of German in Georgia give the impression of a homogeneous community. Strictly speaking, however, at least two varieties of German must be distinguished, which differ considerably from each other and also relate to two different historical groups.

The first group of speakers are descendants of Germans who emigrated to the South Caucasus (Transcaucasia) as qualified specialists at the end of the 18th century and settled mainly as traders, pharmacists and doctors in the trading city of Tbilisi in Georgia (Songhulashvili 1997; Springform 2004) or as architects and engineers in the oil metropolis of Baku in Azerbaijan (Auch 2001). As a rule, these skilled workers were in Russian service at the time (Boden 2018, 184) and mixed with the local population. Some of their descendants still speak near-standard educational German, which can be attributed to the excellent secondary and higher education that their families valued and still value today.²

² Until 1925, for example, it was possible to learn German at St Peter and Paul secondary school in Tbilisi (Margvelashvili 2018), and the study of German was introduced at Tbilisi State University in 1955 (Paichadze 2017).

The second group of speakers includes descendants of Swabians who emigrated at the invitation of Alexander I at the beginning of the 19th century and who were mainly farmers, craftsmen, winegrowers and cattle breeders (Laubhan 2021, 173). Swabian emigration from Württemberg affected the area between Heilbronn and Tuttlingen to the Danube in the south, both sides of the upper reaches of the Neckar with Heilbronn in the north, Pforzheim and Freudenstadt in the west and Göppingen in the east. The emigrants spoke a Central Swabian dialect with slight variations due to their geographical distribution (Berend 2011, 103). They founded ‘closed’ German colonies in the southern Caucasus, where they lived for around 125 years (1817-1941) away from the German-speaking area (Königreich Württemberg (‘Kingdom Württemberg’)) and retained the language and culture they had brought with them from Württemberg.³ After the colonies were dissolved in 1941 and their inhabitants deported to Central Asian regions, they often ended up in mixed Kazakh-Uzbek-Russian-German settlements, where they were forced to pay monthly “stamp duty”, at least until the *Sonderkommandantur* was abolished. In contrast to the so-called ‘Russian Germans’ (*Russlanddeutsche*),⁴ they were allowed to return to their agricultural settlements in the South Caucasus by 1956 at the latest (Laubhan 2021, 210ff.). However, it should be noted that two of the former Swabian settlements, Alexandersdorf (founded in 1818, today Didube) and Neu-Tbilisi (founded in 1818, today the district of Chugureti), have since become part of Tbilisi so that some descendants of these Swabian settlers are now scattered throughout the Georgian capital. Most descendants of these Swabians now live in Germany again. Only those who had inter-married with Georgians, Azerbaijanis or Armenians before 1941 were able to escape the deportations⁵ or return⁶ to their home colonies after a period in prison labour camps.

³ The settlement areas of the Swabians in the southern Caucasus (there were once more than 30 main and secondary colonies) have been well researched, cf. Hoffmann (1905); Allmendinger (1989); Songhulashvili (1997); Auch (2001); Föll (2002); Haigis/Hummel (2002); Springform (2004); Paulsen (2016); Hertsch/Er (2017); Laubhan (2017); Tatarashvili (2018).

⁴ The term ‘Russian Germans’ (*Russlanddeutsche*) in use today is difficult and confusing: it was coined between the two world wars in the context of nationalist discourse in the Weimar Republic by migrants from Russia, more precisely from the USSR. For more on this topic, see Petersen/Weger (2017, 177-198). For more on the history of the Russian Germans, see Dinges (1923); Längin (1991); Stumpp (1991); Wiens (1993); Eisfeld/Herdt (1996); Eisfeld (1999); Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland e.V. (2006); Krieger (2013, 2017).

⁵ A woman of German descent could only escape deportation if her husband had a nationality other than German (Laubhan 2021, 210) whereby ‘nationality’ is to be understood here as a synonym for ‘ethnicity’.

⁶ The prison labour camp also included married couples in which the man was of German nationality (see previous footnote) and the woman was not. Men of German descent were generally suspected of collaborating with the National Socialists. Such couples, nevertheless,

For all Caucasian Germans, not just the Caucasian Swabians, there was a phase of language repression (1939-1990) in which a language other than Russian was not to be spoken in public in the entire Soviet territory.⁷ This led to a 'default generation' in the acquisition of German. The grandchildren's generation, who want to learn more German today, are faced with the difficulty that their parents are mostly not able to teach them German and their grandparents, who learnt German as their first language, are no longer around to do so. Nevertheless, many of the remaining speakers of the Caucasian German minority in Georgia (and also in Azerbaijan) are currently trying to preserve their language and culture in a globalised society in which pressure on the language from outside is increasing.

As can be seen from the outline of the historical context, the two groups are in different linguistic constellations today. In most cases, the first and second generations of the first group have Russian and/or the language spoken by the other parent as their first language (L1), namely a variety of near-standard German or Georgian. Their L2 is then either Russian (if German was the L1, for example) or a near-standard variety of German, depending on which language was acquired first by the parents. Georgian (or other languages such as Armenian, Azerbaijani or Ukrainian) was added as an L3 in the 1990s at the latest.

For members of the first and second generation of Caucasian Swabians who did not leave their home villages or were not allowed to return there, the L1 in most cases is either a Swabian dialect variety and/or the language of the non-German-speaking parent (often Georgian) and/or Russian. The L2 is then the language or variety of the parent who does not speak the L1 and/or Russian. In this group, the L3 is usually near-standard German, which most speakers refer to as 'literary German', 'standard German' or 'High German' and which they were sometimes still allowed to learn in the schools of the German colonies. From 1818, compulsory schooling lasted seven or eight years in the schools of the Transcaucasian colonies. Lessons were taught in German and the curriculum was (from 1832) adapted to that of Württemberg (Laubhan 2021, 196). The administrative language in the colonies was standard German and Swabian was the everyday language (*ibid.*, 200).

had the right to return to their ancestral German settlements ('German' is to be understood here in the sense of German 'ethnic' origin). If both the husband and wife were German, they and their children were denied the right to return forever. Families of different nationalities from Georgia or Azerbaijan were immediately settled in the abandoned houses (Laubhan 2021, 210).

⁷ The language repression policy in the former Soviet Union affected not only German but all other languages throughout the entire territory of the Soviet Union. As a result, Russian was given the status of a lingua franca. However, this did not prevent the languages of the autonomous republics being used (at least in part) in literature, newspapers, radio and television stations etc.

For both groups, Russian became the ubiquitous lingua franca in schools and vocational training and the dominant language in the public sphere by the 1930s at the latest. Due to the Soviet Union's policy of language repression, which affected both the Caucasian and Central Asian republics, both groups generally had a good command of Russian. It was only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union that the national language Georgian was increasingly used (as were Azerbaijani, Kazakh and Uzbek in the other republics), but initially more in a family context: In public, the two generations described in more detail spoke Russian until the 1990s. With the end of the language repression policy, family languages were reintroduced into the public sphere.⁸ However, the use of language differs not only according to country and community but also according to generation.

In the third generation (those born after around 1975), individual language contacts have decreased massively and the various languages remain isolated in the different areas: regardless of the variety, German is rarely, if ever, acquired in the family. The language of the family, everyday life and schooling is Georgian. English is usually learnt as the first foreign language at school from year one. Russian is most frequently chosen from the fifth grade onwards. German is in third place. As lessons in the third foreign language are subject to a fee, German generally cannot compete with English and Russian. When the descendants of German speakers in the Caucasus learn German there today, the reason for this is usually the hope of a positive professional side effect and not the desire to preserve their own culture.

3. State of research and methods

There are numerous studies on German-speaking minorities in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition to works on Germans in Ukraine (cf. Hvozdyak 2008; especially for Transcarpathian Ukraine cf. Melika 2002), Hungary (cf. Knipf-Komlósi 2008; Knipf-Komlósi/Müller 2019, 2021), Poland (cf. Lasatowicz/Weger 2008), the Czech Republic (cf. Dovalil 2017; Tišerova 2008; Tausch 2024), Latvia (cf. Marten 2024) or Romania (cf. Bottesch 2008; Scheuringer 2010; especially for Banat Swabian cf. Scheuringer 2016). Works by Berend (1998, 2011), Berend/Jedig (1991), Berend/Riehl (2008), Blankenhorn (2003) and Rosenberg (1994) should be mentioned in particular in relation to Russian-German dialects in Russia and the former Soviet Union.

Research into the language(s) used by the Caucasian Germans – especially in the present-day settlements of Transcaucasia – is still a desideratum in linguistic research today, although Swabian, for example, in contrast to other German varie-

⁸ In the Soviet Union, there was no language ban in the form of laws, but the use of languages other than Russian, especially German, was stigmatised for being the 'language of the fascists' because it was outside the community of socialist peoples (Rosenberg 2001, 34).

ties in Russia (Berend 2011), mixed little or not at all with other German varieties in Russia until the pre-war period of the 1930s due to the comparatively closed settlements of the Caucasian Swabians (*ibid.*, 103, 105). In order to close this data gap in language contact research and variation linguistics, the author interviewed over fifty Caucasians of German descent (the generation who experienced the deportations, etc.) and two generations of their descendants in Baku (Azerbaijan), in Tbilisi's Didube (formerly Alexandersdorf) and Tschugureti (formerly Neu-Tiflis) districts, in Bolnisi (formerly: Katharinenfeld) as well as in various cities in Germany such as Bühl, Landau, Nagold, Neustadt an der Weinstraße, Offenburg, Pforzheim and Schwaikheim (Rems-Murr-Kreis). Primarily linguistic-biographical data was collected on the basis of formal, guideline-based interviews using questionnaires. The participants were asked about their language skills in German and/or Swabian, Russian, Georgian and Azerbaijani, about their language practices in different languages and about their social, cultural and media situation in order to be able to develop hypotheses about the connection between language and identity construction and about the effects of migration and repression on language acquisition and multilingualism. In addition, informal table talk with re-emigrated Caucasian Swabians in Germany was recorded that mainly deals with everyday life during their childhood in the former German villages in the Caucasus.

	Generation I 1917-1942		Generation II 1943-1973		Generation III 1974-1999	
	female	male	female	male	female	male
Azerbaijan			2			
Georgia	3	1	2	1		
Germany	9	4	15	6	2	2

Fig. 1: Distribution of interviews with informants (total)

The group surveyed is heterogeneous in terms of their educational level, the language of communication in the family, the language designated as the mother tongue and, above all, in terms of the social context of language use since the cultural and linguistic repression that took place in the former Soviet Union from the 1930s onwards has left a massive impression on all respondents from the generation that experienced it, as well as on the following generation, in all countries where the surveys were conducted. The corpus of interviews was therefore narrow in relation to the size of the sample observed and broad in relation to its internal diversity in order to collect differentiated statements about language skills, language contact and its effects, self-perception and the perception of others, language and identity. Since the identity constructions in connection with language

use and language representations within the minority group and, in particular, the mutual tension between self-awareness and external perception were of particular interest for the analysis, questions were asked about self-perception and the perception of people from the surrounding area. The answers to these questions were also placed in a social context characterised by the power relations in which they arose. For the close-up observations, only the interviews in Georgia are considered.

4. Actors of German language preservation in Georgia

Since the early 1990s, numerous measures have been taken both within the framework of Georgia's educational policy and by the church, the non-profit sector and individuals in Georgia and Germany to promote the learning of German and its associated culture in Georgia using various strategies to maintain or revive the vitality of the language. In order to better understand the language policy activities of the various groups of actors, they were categorised into the following groups based on the model by Kaplan/Baldauf (1997, 5-13), supplemented and expanded by Spolsky's domain-oriented 'Language Management' model (2009, 10-30). The first domain of language policy actors would be the state, represented by the government, including government agencies, ministries and public authorities. The second domain covers cultural institutions and associations that indirectly invest in the preservation of the language by promoting German culture. The third domain includes educational institutions, one of the most important sectors for the implementation of language and educational policy measures. The fourth domain includes other organisations, such as private companies. The fifth area examined is that of language management within the family since this domain is not covered by actors in the public sphere (see also Kaplan/Baldauf 1997) but is directly influenced by language policy decisions within the family (see Section 5). With the exception of the first area, the analysis is based on interviews that the author conducted with informants on site in 2017. Since German-speakers in Georgia do not form a homogeneous group, the analysis takes into account the perspectives and judgements of the informants and the group of speakers to which they belong.⁹ All interviews were conducted in German and have been translated into English for this article.

⁹ The approach adopted here does not deny the role of power relations in the various phases of selection, design and implementation. They are crucial to understanding what is being done and to identifying what can be done in a particular context (see Zhao 2011) to protect and promote a minority language (such as German in Georgia). Explaining such power relations is not the subject of this article, though, which is not to say that they do not exist.

4.1 The Georgian state

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is a Council of Europe agreement that protects minority languages traditionally spoken in a country. Georgia committed itself to ratifying this charter when it joined the Council of Europe in 1999. In 2013, a draft ratification of the document was submitted by experts from the Council of Europe and an interministerial commission from Georgia that recognises German as one of the 13 traditional minority languages in Georgia. To date, Georgia has not deposited the instruments of ratification with the Council of Europe. Moreover, given that the current political situation is such that EU accession talks have been suspended until 2028, as the new Georgian government announced on 28 November 2024 (see Tagesschau.de 2024), a binding declaration of ratification is not to be expected in the near future either. Yet such a declaration would be an important signal for preserving and developing the minority language of German (as well as other regional and minority languages) in Georgia in order to guarantee the linguistic diversity of Europe, which is the main goal of the Charter (see Grin 2003). According to Grin (2003), this circumstance raises the following question as to “why such a goal is worth subscribing to, apart from consideration of human rights or minority rights. The answer, quite simply, is that well-being (or “welfare”) is likely to be higher if Europe remains linguistically diverse than if it becomes linguistically uniform” (Grin 2003, 32).

In addition, and precisely for this reason, it would be particularly important in this draft for Georgia to refer to the different varieties of German that are spoken in Georgia. So far, it only refers to ‘German’ (without mentioning any varieties), which has a long tradition in Georgia. The fact that the Swabian variety was the most widely spoken of the German-speaking varieties in the Caucasus for over two centuries and is still relevant today is not mentioned. This lack of clarity, which is linked to the failure to distinguish between the German taught at Georgian schools and universities and the Swabian variety spoken by the descendants of one of the minority groups described above, is reflected in the political sphere, educational institutions, associations and society as a whole.

4.2 Cultural institutions

For those who live in a big city in Georgia, there are currently plenty of opportunities to learn and use German. This is largely due to organisations that, in our case, are primarily active in the cultural field. The goals of these cultural organisations are usually to promote German culture and language. Accordingly, the answers to the question about opportunities to use German are very similar for speakers whose ancestors once emigrated from German-speaking countries to the big cities of the Transcaucasus and who themselves live (again) in big cities:

Example (1): THTb, female, born in 1941 in Tbilisi, living in Tbilisi

KD on what occasions do you speak German in public

THTb *well* in *Einung*

KD hmhm

THTb in church

Without much thought – as example (1) of informant THTb shows – Caucasian Germans in large cities can always name several and different domains in which they currently use German as a contact variety. THTb states that she was born in the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi, as the daughter of doctors and spent most of her life there. She grew up with German as her L1 after being deported in 1941 until she was nine years old. After returning from her father's Kazakh place of exile in 1950, her parents spoke mainly Georgian and Russian to her because, according to her own account, her family was 'persecuted as Germans' until 1965¹⁰ and as such she 'could not speak in German'. After a long period of language repression in the Soviet Union, she was able to speak German outside of private use with her parents, and later with her children and grandchildren, namely in the 'Einung',¹¹ an association of Germans in Tbilisi,¹² as well as in the 'church', where she not only speaks German every Sunday, but also beyond that in the context of community life: in singing lessons, church celebrations, etc. This church has its roots in the Evangelical Lutheran religious community founded by the Swabian settlers in 1818. After the Soviet-wide ban on religion in the 1930s and the subsequent misuse and/or (partial) destruction of numerous churches, this Lutheran church was rebuilt in 1997 with its headquarters in Tbilisi (Tatarashvili et al. 2017, 39). Since then, services have been held regularly,¹³ mostly in German.¹⁴ While the sermon is delivered in German in most of the nine registered parishes in

¹⁰ The date 1965 is a little surprising in this context. As in one or two other places in the conversation, the numbers may have been transposed and the informant probably meant 1956. This cannot be clarified definitively.

¹¹ The Association of Germans of Georgia 'Einung' was founded in 1991. Currently, around 2,000 people are members of the association, most of whom live in Tbilisi <https://www.einung.org> (last access: 30-01-2025).

¹² The 'Association for the Preservation of German Cultural Heritage in the South Caucasus' should also be highlighted at this point. The purpose of the association is to preserve and promote German cultural heritage in the South Caucasus. The association's areas of activity are very broad and are carried out with success and media coverage. These include the restoration of historical buildings, objects and manuscripts, the organisation of cultural and scientific events, the promotion of German-language media and publications, and much more. See the association's Facebook page <https://m.facebook.com/1450379821848854/> (last access: 30-01-2025).

¹³ Divine services do not take place every Sunday in all parishes.

¹⁴ An exception is the Evangelical Lutheran parish in Borjomi, where the parishioners mostly speak Georgian <https://elkg.info/> (last access: 30-01-2025).

Transcaucasia,¹⁵ songs, prayers and psalms are performed in German, Russian and Georgian. (Depending on the location of the church, the latter could also be Azerbaijani or Armenian.)

The church has a particularly active community in the city of Tbilisi: in addition to the trilingual Sunday service, there is also a service for toddlers, a Sunday school, children's and youth groups, a women's and a men's group, Bible reading groups and a choir. Next to the church in Tbilisi there is a generously laid out parish centre that houses the administration and the parish office as well as a small home for the elderly, a soup kitchen and a social centre. The services provided by the church are, therefore, of great importance to many members of the German-speaking minority in Transcaucasia. They not only offer opportunities to hear and read German and to converse with other parishioners in German but for some informants they are the only place where German is used, the central and sometimes only domain reserved for German, as the following example illustrates:

Example (2): TKBa, female, born in 1947 in Bolnisi, living in Baku

TKBa when I, please, *Heiland* ('saviour')... now I speak so... I ask in German

KD oh, yes

TKBa yes, very much... I beg in German. My mother always begs in German, *Heiland* ('saviour') say

KD Hmhm

TKBa to God we say °h Swabian *Heiland* ('saviour') yes

TKBa is one of those informants¹⁶ whose ancestors were Swabian settlers; she no longer lives in the countryside, however, but in the Azerbaijani capital of Baku, where the Evangelical Lutheran Church also has a large community. Her case is particularly interesting because she was born in 1947 in the former German-speaking colony of Katharinenfeld (today Bolnisi) in Georgia and only emigrated to Azerbaijan under duress in 1991.¹⁷ The Evangelical Lutheran Church enables her to maintain her German language and culture in Azerbaijan. The Evangelical Lutheran Church has only existed again since 1997 but she was still able to speak German with her family before she emigrated, for example with her brother and mother, her parents having raised her bilingually in German and Russian. She, in turn, spoke German and Russian with her children. For her (and for a number of

¹⁵ In addition to the capital cities of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia (the headquarters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Transcaucasia are in Tbilisi), there is a congregation in Sukhumi (Abkhazia) and in five other cities in Georgia.

¹⁶ She is the only informant in the entire corpus who finds herself in this situation.

¹⁷ The informant reports that due to her Azerbaijani husband, the then-President of Georgia 'repressed' her and her family 'to Azerbaijan', which is why the family emigrated to her husband's homeland.

other informants), German is now the ‘language of faith’, the language of conversation with God in prayer and the language of the church. Outside of this domain, she no longer uses German – like a number of other informants. The dominant language of her everyday life is primarily Russian and Azerbaijani, whereby parish life apart from in services also takes place largely in Russian.

4.3 Educational institutions

The education sector is one of the main areas in which language policy measures can be implemented to promote German. From kindergarten, school and university to adult education institutions such as the Goethe-Institut, the acquisition and use of languages is expanded and influenced. In metropolises like Tbilisi, there are numerous other opportunities to systematically acquire, deepen and use German, albeit at different levels and in different areas, including leisure activities. Accordingly, these offers are mainly used by the academically educated and financially secure Caucasian Germans in large cities (but also by other groups), as reported by the informant THTb:

Example (3): THTb, female, born in 1941 in Tbilisi, living in Tbilisi

- THTb my granddaughter speaks very perfect German [...] yes, because she goes to the Goethe-Institut...
 uh...teach
- KD Hmhm
- THTb yes, and she speaks very good German.
- KD but you don’t speak German to your granddaughter?
- THTb yes, yes (laughs) more with my granddaughter than with, um, my son, because my granddaughter is, um, studying in a German school
- KD hmhm
- THTb here in Tbilisi, there are three German schools, actually

Systematic language acquisition outside the family domain has a long tradition in Georgia’s capital Tbilisi, especially for those Germans who once immigrated to the major cities of Transcaucasia as skilled workers. As mentioned by informant THTb, who belongs to this group, there are several German schools in Tbilisi, of which the German International School (No. 6) is particularly noteworthy. Founded in 2010, a special programme in German language and literature is offered by this private school, with German as the language of instruction from kindergarten to lower secondary (1st to 7th grade) (Boden 2018, 186). At eight others schools German can be studied with increased lessons from the third year up to the school leaving exam (*Abitur*) (Solomonischwilli 2016, 20) while at over 500 other schools throughout Georgia, German can be chosen as a subject from the fifth year onwards. In addition, there are two colleges (in Tbilisi and Aisi) where German can be studied

as well as one university in Kutaisi and two in Tbilisi, one of which offers a full degree programme in German studies (*ibid.*, 46). The Goethe-Institut in Tbilisi is particularly active in teaching German (including to children and young people). Finally, the aforementioned Association of Germans of Georgia as well as the Evangelical Lutheran Church offer German courses on a regular basis.

This – at least until recently – important¹⁸ status of German in the capital of Georgia is closely related to the “nucleus for the teaching of German language and culture, which radiated throughout the city” (Boden 2018, 186), namely the institution of the *Deutsche Tanten* (‘German Aunts’) (cf. Lejava 2020). These were women who had escaped deportation in 1941 because of their non-German husbands and had run private German-language home kindergartens from the early 1940s until 2004 (Schneider 2012). It was mainly the city’s academic elite who sent their children to these ‘Auntie’ kindergartens, where only German was spoken. The significant position of German as a foreign language in Tbilisi is also due to the influence of these extraordinary home kindergartens of the ‘German Aunts’, a purely Georgian phenomenon in the German settlement areas of the former Soviet Union (Boden 2018, 186). The children educated in these kindergartens often studied German language and literature or went to Germany to study. They now hold leading positions in Georgian politics, business and culture (*ibid.*) or work as teachers in schools or universities. Since the disappearance of these ‘Auntie’ kindergartens, the importance of German in Tbilisi has declined sharply.¹⁹ In everyday life, the various institutions offering language courses face very different challenges in conducting the courses, namely the language of the elite at school (with standard German) and the language of the people (often a Swabian dialect), e.g. at church.

In rural areas, the opportunities to learn and use German were and are relatively few or even non-existent, as the following examples vividly illustrate:

Example (5): FKBo, male, born in 1942 in Bolnisi, where he still lives, about the opportunities to speak German (see Fig. 1: Generation I, Georgia)

KD	Do you still have the opportunity to speak German here in town?
BMBo	No... now my sister... me and my sister
	Here are many families... Julia is over there...

¹⁸ In the post-war years, German still ranked second among foreign languages after Russian (Boden 2018, 186). In recent years, German has lost some of its importance. Fewer and fewer high school pupils are taking German as a foreign language. Accordingly, there are also fewer students of German studies. Courses at Ilia University were discontinued in 2017. This is also due to a lack of financial support for the language.

¹⁹ This is how Lali Kezba-Chundadse reported it during an interview at Ilia University on 4 October 2017. She is now head of the Department of German Philology at Ivane Javakishvili State University in Tbilisi. The German Studies department at Ilia University was closed in 2018.

KD	hm
BMBo	they have their... children, um, not taught
KD	hm
BMBo	everyone... now I am alone here in Bolnisi [...] I am the last of the Mohicans

Example (4): BMBo, male, born in 1947 in Bolnisi, living in Bolnisi, reports on other citizens of Bolnisi who have German ancestors (see Fig. 1: Generation II, Georgia)

FKBo I have no one

Almost all informants outside the metropolises in the South Caucasus who are also descendants of the Swabian settlers hold the view formulated in examples (4) and (5), namely that they are the last German in the village (in these cases, villages with a population of around 9,000) and have no opportunity to use German because there are no conversation partners, and this despite the fact that the Evangelical Lutheran Church also has a small community in Bolnisi and offers German language courses. The only ‘exception’ was two sisters, who each stated that she and her sister were the only Germans in Bolnisi. However, German is no longer used outside the family. Particularly in rural areas, the language repression policy of the former Soviet Union, the lack of institutional and financial support that has persisted for many years and the associated lack of or even decline in language acquisition have not infrequently led to monolingual language contact situations. German speakers feel isolated in rural areas. In everyday life, most people here speak Georgian.

4.4 Other organisations

The fourth category includes language support measures provided by actors such as private companies, which, as Kaplan/Baldauf (1997) point out, can be considered, albeit only implicitly, as language policy actors as institutions. One example is the newspaper *Kaukasische Post*, founded in 1906,²⁰ which was the only German-language newspaper in the Caucasus until it ceased publication in 1922. It has been published regularly again since 1994, under the direction of Rainer Kaufmann since 2012.²¹ The *Kaukasische Post* is currently published monthly in printed

²⁰ <http://www.kaukasische-post.com> (last access: 31-01-2025).

²¹ The German journalist, author and entrepreneur Rainer Kaufmann is an important figure in the promotion of German in Georgia. He founded the publishing house *KAROMedia* – which publishes the newspaper *Kaukasische Post*, German-language literature in Georgia and Georgian literature in Germany – the Swabian-Caucasian network *NETZWERKKaukasus*, the travel agency *ERKA-Reisen* and the hotel *Kartli*. He has organised numerous events on German culture in Georgia and Georgian culture in Germany.

form and is distributed primarily in the Georgian capital, Tbilisi. The option of an online subscription seems to be used in rural areas as well²² but speakers like FKBo or BMBo do not take advantage of this offer.

Furthermore, in the media sector, it is worth mentioning that informants such as BMBo state that they currently only use German in the form of digital consumption, by watching YouTube videos in German and reading German-language websites. He also regretted – as did other Swabians in the Caucasus – that the radio station *Deutsche Welle*²³ has been broadcasting only in English for about five years (statement from 2017), which makes the radio station uninteresting for him and other speakers of German.

BMBo, who belongs to the first generation of speakers in the corpus (see Fig. 1), was socialised in Swabian. He acquired this variety from his grandmother, with whom he spent most of his childhood. He learned Georgian from his parents, as it was the family language, and Russian at school, as was common practice throughout the former Soviet Union. At the age of 17, he began training as a pilot and flight instructor at the military academy in Tbilisi. While the domains were still clearly separated in Bolnisi, there was much more intensive language contact in the metropolis. Russian was the language of instruction and communication that he spoke with most of his fellow students, except with Georgians, with whom he spoke Georgian²⁴. In order to be able to communicate better with his students later on as an instructor, he also learned Armenian, Azerbaijani and Ukrainian from his comrades. He only rediscovered German in retirement, when he returned to his birthplace of Bolnisi, for purely private and nostalgic reasons.²⁵

5. Language use in the family

According to Kaplan/Baldauf (1997), the fourth category of language support measures by actors such as private companies reveals that an essential category is missing, namely one that creates the conditions for language policy actors in the first place. In doing so, it primarily impacts this fourth category but also all

²² Caucasian Germans now living in Germany use the online service to find out about Georgian news in Georgia and news related to Georgia in Germany as well as information about the German-speaking minority.

²³ <https://www.dw.com/de/georgien/a-19492759> (last access: 30-01-2025).

²⁴ The policy of linguistic suppression in the Soviet Union affected not only German but also all other languages in this huge, multilingual empire. Speakers were not allowed to speak Georgian in public any more than they were allowed to speak German.

²⁵ Such massive and rapidly changing language contact constellations within a lifetime led not only to quite striking language contact phenomena in the case of this informant but also, amongst the oldest generation of Caucasian Germans, not infrequently to confusion about their own linguistic identity(ies), which cannot be discussed here for reasons of space. See Dück (2023).

of the others,²⁶ which essentially constitute a language or political community (Spolsky 2012, 3, 5). The missing category is that of language management within the family according to Spolsky's 'Language Management' model (2009, 10-30). As a core domain of different language practices as well as different ideas of values and varieties in a confined space that affects the entire community, each family member has the opportunity to control or influence the language practices and beliefs of the other members (Spolsky 2012, 5).

For the group of Germans living in Georgia, this primarily concerns the decision as to whether German, or a variety of it, is passed onto the next generation within the family. And it is precisely this decision that influences the areas already considered, both directly, in terms of early childhood language acquisition, and when supply meets demand or opportunity, as is particularly the case in metropolitan areas, as we have already seen in example (3) in the area of educational institutions (here, again, the core answer as a reminder):

Example (6): THTb, female, born in 1941 in Tbilisi, living in Tbilisi – about passing on the language to her son and granddaughter (see Fig. 1: Generation I, Georgia)

- KD But you don't speak German to your granddaughter?
THTb yes, yes (laughs) more with my granddaughter than with, um, my son,
 because my granddaughter is, um, studying in a German school

The grandmother apparently supports the transmission of German primarily because her granddaughter also takes advantage of opportunities outside the family to learn German systematically. This also gives German a higher prestige: if it can be acquired within the education system, then it is not only a 'mere' heritage language but also a valuable foreign language. Furthermore, in such a case, the heritage language would no longer be in competition with the surrounding language and its pressure (Spolsky 2012, 7).

In contrast, the language policy within families in rural areas can hardly withstand the competing demands of the surrounding language and the pressure from outside (*ibid.*). Consequently, as expected, the following answer usually comes in rural areas when asked whether German is passed on:

Example (7): TSBo, female, born in 1944 in Bolnisi, where she is still living, about passing on the language to her children (see Fig. 1: Generation II, Georgia)

- KD And how did you talk to your children, in which language?
TSBo Russian and Georgian

In example (4), BMBo already expressed a similar view on the question as to whether ethnic Germans still have the opportunity to speak German in their com-

²⁶ Spolsky (2012, 3): "Each domain within a sociolinguistic ecology has its own variety of language policy, and each influences and is influenced by all the other domains".

munity: 'They didn't teach [German] to their... children.' Neither these two speakers nor any of the interviewees in rural areas had passed German onto their children.

In this context, two factors play a particularly important role: on the one hand, Caucasian Germans in the cities speak a standard variety while rural Caucasian Germans mainly speak Swabian. The pressure on Swabian is therefore higher (see also the remarks in Section 2 on the varieties of German in Georgia). This is because speakers in the big cities do not have to expend any additional energy learning another variety of German whereas the rural population does need to do so (see also the remarks by Spolsky 2012, 7f.). On the other hand – and this is related to the point mentioned above – speakers in rural areas require more resources overall to maintain their German variety and are therefore under greater cost-benefit pressure than those in metropolitan areas. They need to invest significantly more time and money – as well as having real opportunities, for example in the form of language learning opportunities – to justify the effort of language acquisition. To put it another way: if there is no support for learning German in rural areas – except for the Swabian variety within the family, which is rarely or never used in everyday life – then passing on the language makes little sense.

These considerations take up the importance of the continuity of language acquisition from Section 4.3: if (standard) German is already learned in the family, the probability of also acquiring German systematically in an educational institution increases, which in turn can reactivate the commitment of parents and grandparents to speak German with their children and grandchildren, leading to a double positive effect. This would also increase the likelihood of actively promoting the preservation of German – perhaps even as a stakeholder. Thus, the decision to use and preserve German within the family can influence other areas of language policy and have a significant impact on them.

6. Concluding thoughts

Although the term 'Caucasian Germans' might suggest otherwise, the German-speaking minority in Georgia is not a homogenous community. There are major differences between the inhabitants of the cities in Transcaucasia, who are often descendants of skilled immigrant workers and speak a standardised variety, and those who live in rural areas and whose ancestors were Swabian craftsmen, farmers and winegrowers who passed on their dialectal variety. Now it seems that most of the offers to promote German in Georgia are to be found in the cities and less so in the countryside, where, however, most of the speakers of the German-speaking minority in the Caucasus live.

The descendants of the first group who are still alive today generally acquired their knowledge of German systematically in educational institutions while the descendants of the second group mostly acquired their knowledge of Swabian

from their grandparents, although some of them did also acquire German in educational institutions at a young age. A major distortion in the use of these varieties of German can be seen when comparing the teaching and learning opportunities and practices of speakers in urban and rural areas, even if the latter include former German-speaking villages. Life in a German-speaking community is almost only possible in the metropolises of the South Caucasus. There, the spaces for preserving the German language and culture are used willingly but they are also getting smaller and smaller. In the countryside in contrast, the speakers of German live (supposedly) isolated in an environment that offers only a fraction of the linguistic and cultural manifestations of the big cities.

The Lutheran Evangelical Church seems to play a key role by offering spaces for multilingual encounters and exchanges in both urban and rural areas, with a focus on German, although Russian continues to play an important role in community life. In addition, the voluntary work of associations such as the *Einung* or the *Verein zur Erhaltung des deutschen Kulturerbes* (Association for the Preservation of German Cultural Heritage) as well as private initiatives such as those of the editor of the *Kaukasische Post* are actors seeking to foster relations between town and country in the form of social life, language courses and other projects in order to work on a ‘real’ community.

Overall, German in Georgia seems to be doing well due to the numerous initiatives of a wide range of stakeholders. However, since these measures are mainly taking place in metropolises such as Tbilisi and primarily focus on the standard variety of German, it is likely that the number of speakers of the Swabian dialect variety in the South Caucasus will continue to decline significantly.

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35 years since the re-establishment of Latvian as the official language: An update on the language situation

Abstract

This study examines the Latvian language situation, focusing on its role as the state language and its development over the 35 years since Latvia's restored independence. It assesses the changes in Latvian language skills, usage and language attitudes since 1988-1989, highlighting trends and challenges in language policy and its implementation. Regular sociolinguistic research and monitoring have revealed progress, such as increased Latvian language proficiency among residents, but also persistent issues, including the use of Latvian in informal communication and ensuring its priority over other languages in public and professional settings. Critical incidents, such as debates about language use in pre-election discussions and legislative amendments, underscore persistent societal tensions and the complexity of language policy in post-colonial contexts. This analysis contributes to global language policy discussions, emphasising that changes in language hierarchies are gradual and shaped by demographic and geopolitical factors. Legislative measures must be complemented by societal efforts to promote positive language attitudes and bridge historical divides, ensuring the long-term sustainability of Latvian as a cornerstone of national identity and security.

1. Introduction

As an active EFNIL member state, Latvia has repeatedly presented a model for language policy as a means for restoring lost sociolinguistic functions for Latvian and developing a socially cohesive society against the background of it being the official state language. The situation of language competition in Latvia has features that make it necessary to emphasise the need for clear and precise legal instruments because applying the principles of the free market or personal choice is insufficient to ensure not only the prioritisation of Latvian but even its maintenance. The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, the State Language Law, other laws and lower-level regulatory acts subordinate to them outline clear rules for the use of languages. They are considered adequate and sufficient to ensure the instrumental function of the language. But laws alone cannot ensure the integrative function of the official language. An equally important concept is one that is difficult to formulate in words, namely the symbolic value of language, in this case a value that goes beyond pragmatic benefit.

In the modern context, the Latvian social, political and ideological landscape is increasingly fragmented by new and challenging issues. The widescale development of digital technologies and the expansion of media networks, the polarisation of society, threats of military conflict, the transformation of culture, customs and traditions are all changing the concept of cohesion and a common perception of language policy, too. Concepts like “translingualism” challenge conventional views of language and linguistic identity. It is necessary to adopt a new approach to describing and evaluating language skills, language use and language attitudes, also taking current migration patterns at societal, social group and individual levels into account. By focusing on restoring the sociolinguistic functions of Latvian and fostering a socially cohesive society, Latvia demonstrates how official state languages can thrive amidst challenges such as globalisation, societal polarisation and linguistic competition.

2. The language situation past and present

The language situation in Latvia has undergone significant changes since 1988, influenced by political, social and cultural transformations during and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. There are ongoing efforts to balance national identity with inclusivity in Latvia’s language policy in a complex ethno-demographic and geopolitical situation.

When Latvian was restored as the sole official state language in 1988, the main tasks of language policy makers was clearly defined: to ensure the sustainability, linguistic quality and competitiveness of Latvian as the state language of the Republic of Latvia as well as to guarantee the development and use of the languages of historical minorities in Latvia. The first *Language Law* was adopted in 1989. Independence was regained on 21st August 1991, bringing about serious changes in language policy. The pre-independence *Language Law* was amended in 1992. The current *Official Language Law* was adopted in 1999 and has since been supplemented by several regulations passed by the Cabinet of Ministers. In 2014 the *Constitution of the Republic of Latvia (Satversme)* included a preamble specifying that the decision to designate Latvian as the state language was a matter of legal and political consistency and, therefore, the state’s policy should work to ensure that Latvian serves all the functions of an official language, including being the primary means of communication among all Latvian citizens and helping to unite the society. A detailed description of the language situation in Latvia can be found in previous volumes of contributions to EFNIL’s conferences (Druviete 2008; Druviete/Valdmanis 2018, 2023).

The language situation in Latvia has been monitored constantly since the adoption of the first post-independence *Law on Languages* in 1992: every five years, large-scale complex sociolinguistic research is carried out (recent publica-

tions include: Language Situation 2012, 2017, 2024). These studies analyse the Latvian language skills of residents as well as problems related to its acquisition, language use in various sociolinguistic domains and the proficiency and positions of various other languages in Latvia. More attention has also been paid to language positions in the working environment, as well as to the usage and acquisition of Latvian in the diaspora. The conclusions and recommendations for language policy are based on the results of both quantitative and qualitative surveys; the analysis is provided in the context of both the results of previous studies and other data sources.

The most recent sociolinguistic research was carried out within the framework of the State Research Programme “Letonika – Fostering Latvian and European Society” in the project “Use and Development of Modern Latvian” (VPP-LETONIKA-2022/1-0001). It was conducted by the Latvian Language Agency (member of EFNIL) in collaboration with the sociological firm SKDS in September and October 2023. A total of 1,113 respondents aged 15 to 75 were surveyed. The key findings are as follows:

- *Latvian language proficiency*: 94.6% of the respondents with a family language other than Latvian indicated at least basic knowledge of Latvian compared to 18-20% in 1989. The highest proficiency in Latvian is among individuals with higher education and public sector employees.
- *Foreign language proficiency*: 60% of respondents reported at least basic proficiency in Russian, although skills are declining in the younger generations (the language of education at all levels is Latvian; from 2026 Russian will not be offered as the second foreign language in general education schools). English is spoken by 51.8% of respondents, with its popularity increasing, particularly among young people.
- *Language use in the workplace*: Latvian is the dominant language in work environments (73.1%). Russian and English are also frequently used in professional settings.
- *Public and informal communication*: Latvian dominates in state and municipal institutions but Russian is still widely used in informal communication, quite often at the expense of Latvian. On streets and in shops, only Latvian is spoken by 40.3% of respondents (Valodas situācija 2024).

Although the position of Latvian has improved significantly since the restoration of independence, the functions of Latvian in socially significant domains, as well as prioritising its use in informal communication among Latvia’s residents, are still being questioned. The main issue lies in an underestimation of the problems posed by the parallel use of Russian on equal grounds in the context of Latvian language maintenance in a situation of language competition with the formerly dominant language. The current “Guidelines for State Language Policy (2021-2027)” acknowledge this issue:

In the context of European countries, the sociolinguistic situation in Latvia, and consequently the situation of the state language, is still influenced by the consequences of Soviet occupation—Russification. Alongside the state language, there remains a demand for the use of Russian in the public sphere, ranging from the simplest daily conversations in the service sector to communication at municipal and state institutions. According to the Latvian Constitution and the State Language Law, the Russian language is a foreign language, not more special or privileged than other foreign languages. (Pamatnostādnes 2021)

In recent years, the seemingly unexpected intensity of discussions in Latvia about specific language issues has deep historical roots. Linguistic tensions tied to language use, particularly in post-colonial contexts, have long simmered beneath the surface. Even a seemingly minor or unrelated trigger can heighten societal awareness of the importance of a language. However, when the geopolitical climate becomes significantly more tense, external events can profoundly influence all facets of language policy. Since 24th February 2022, Latvia's language policy has been impacted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has included acts of linguistic targeting of Ukrainian in occupied areas. Taking the fact into account that approximately 40,000 refugees, mostly women and children, have arrived in Latvia, information about language issues has reached the residents of Latvia directly and unmediated. Shared historical experiences and sociolinguistic empathy have played a direct or indirect role in shaping attitudes toward the use and quality of Latvian within the country (Druviete/Valdmanis 2023).

3. Language attitudes as a decisive factor

In recent years, the process of systemic change in the language hierarchy has been disrupted, slowed down or accelerated by seemingly unpredictable events that are, however, logically rooted in inconsistent state language policy, which has resonated widely in society. Facts or developments that sharply highlight problematic areas of language policy can also be described from the perspective of the so-called critical incident theory, not only in relation to individual cases but also to society as a whole, or at least to certain groups within it. Regarding the language situation, a critical incident can be defined as a striking and unexpected event that has the potential to impact established practices and society's ability to cope with systemic challenges (cf. Butterfield et al. 2005; Beeke 2011).

Critical incidents in language policy typically involve situations where language issues trigger widespread public reactions, conflicts or significant political changes. These incidents often reflect deeper societal tensions and issues of identity. Since regaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Latvia has experienced several critical incidents related to language policy. Among the most notable were protests against the transition to instruction in the state language in 2004 and 2005 (Language Situation 2012) and the 2012 referendum on the state language as

well as extensive discussions and polarisation surrounding language use during the COVID-19 pandemic (Liepa/Liparte 2022). Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the situation regarding language use has intensified, focusing increased attention on unnecessary parallelism and inappropriate linguistic attitudes, including among Latvians themselves. With the rise in popularity of social networking platforms, discussions have become much more active and visible. Against the relatively high level of "hot language attitudes" (Ehala 2011; Shum et al. 2023) over past decades, the year 2024 stood out in particular. Several events in public space provoked ripples in society and sharp clashes of opinions as well as pickets and protests that were widely covered in the mass media.

Among the most actively discussed issues were *Amendments to the Law on the Rights of Patients* (if the patient does not speak the official language and speaks a language that the medical practitioner does not understand, the patient will have to provide the translation, see <https://www.vestnesis.lv/op/2024/124.10>) and the *Labour Law* (proficiency in Russian cannot be considered reasonably necessary for performing job duties if the work involves the production of goods, provision of services or other activities within the domestic market of Latvia, see <https://www.vestnesis.lv/op/2024/196.2>). Active discussions took place on the use of other languages in information, the plans of the Ministry of Education and Science to consolidate the Latvian Language Agency with other structural units as well as several dozen episodes when customers or patients etc. were denied services in Latvian or when public disrespect or contempt was expressed toward Latvian.

4. Discussions on language in pre-election debates

Amid heightened attention to the (non-)use of Latvian and unsuitable parallelism (e.g. in public media) in the context of hybrid warfare, one particular incident stood out, namely a discussion about the seemingly minor issue of the language used during European Parliament pre-election debates. However, this discussion revealed such deeply rooted layers of linguistic attitudes based on vastly differing convictions that it cannot be considered merely a fleeting episode.

It was worth examining this in detail, as the incident had the potential to become a turning point in the implementation of Latvia's language policy, provided that decision makers are able to view the issue not just as an isolated event but in a much broader context. Discussions on language use in pre-election debates were a marked indicator of language attitudes and language policy trends. In short, public TV had planned to broadcast the European Parliament election debates not only in the official state language of Latvian but also in Russian. Moreover, more airtime would be allocated to debates in Russian than in Latvian.

Several political forces running in the EP elections subsequently announced that their candidates would not take part in such debates because such a position

would contradict the constitution, which designates Latvian as the only state language and establishes the principle that the language of societal cohesion and political participation is Latvian. More than 80 articles appeared in printed and digital media within three weeks, not to mention hundreds of remarks in social networks.

The Russian-language debate was opposed by prominent public figures, who signed a petition to cancel this plan:

It is clear that such actions effectively equate the Russian language to the state language, with far-reaching consequences. Most participants in the discussion will be Latvians who, in their own country, will have to engage in the humiliating practice of seemingly voluntarily abandoning the state language to speak in a foreign language—one that is, moreover, the language of an aggressor state and, historically, the occupying power of Latvia. This fact is unrelated to the level of proficiency in Russian among the discussion participants. Even for those participants whose native language is Russian, they must speak in the state language during broadcasts intended for the entire society, especially in public media, as they are Latvian citizens and represent the Latvian state. Allowing generously for some participants to speak Latvian and use an interpreter would not soften the situation. This approach would still perpetuate the unacceptable practice of diminishing the role of the Latvian language in society and reinforce the erroneous assumption that the parallel use of Russian has a supposedly positive effect on social cohesion. If it is deemed necessary to reflect the content of debates taking place in Latvian in other languages, including English, it is possible to create special summaries or utilise options like simultaneous translation or subtitling on LTV7 [minority channel on public TV]. It is possible to ensure equal accessibility to content for all Latvian residents rather than offering a different program for debate shows in Russian. (Priekšvēlēšanu debates 2024)

Former president of Latvia Egils Levits, previously a judge at the European Court of Justice (2004 to 2019), posted a series of statements, later republished or summarised by several news portals. Among other things, he stated: “Politically, it is a bad sign that Latvia, as an EU member state, discusses Europe not in its own state language, which is also one of the official EU languages, but in the state language of Russia. This indicates that not everyone has understood the geopolitical space we are in”. Levits also emphasised that Latvia must no longer perpetuate the paradigms of Russia’s colonial legacy. “Latvia is a democratic, lawful, and Latvian national European state, whose citizens are united in one democratic participation space by a common state language, which everyone must know. This must also be respected by public media” (Levits 2024).

As the situation escalated, the current President of Latvia, Edgars Rinkēvičs, expressed his opinion on language usage in public media on facebook.com:

Unfortunately, as often happens in an emotional surge, the discussion is happening on multiple topics simultaneously, losing focus. The first—the use of the state language and minority languages in state processes. The second—media independence, particularly that of public media. The third—how to more effectively engage with those who remain within the orbit of Kremlin propaganda (it must be

noted that these include both non-Latvians and Latvians). [...] On the use of the state language. The Constitution stipulates that the language of public and political processes is the state language. Therefore, public pre-election debates must also take place in Latvian. Some argue that many things were previously conducted in Russian. That is true, but as events progress, circumstances, significant portions of public opinion, and attitudes change (what was once acceptable may no longer be, and vice versa). These changes have accelerated especially with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The world and society evolve; this is one of the reasons why humanity has moved from the Stone Age to space exploration and begun developing artificial intelligence and quantum physics. While recognizing that minority languages can also be used for communication, as provided by the Constitution and laws, it must be remembered that there is more than one minority group in Latvia. (Rinkēvičs 2024)

The Editorial Board of Latvian Television considered that there were no grounds to cancel the planned pre-election debate. Latvian Television (LTV) considered these activities as a targeted effort to influence not only editorial decisions but also to undermine public confidence in the public service broadcaster. In a public statement, LTV said: "We must admit that when planning the content, we did not foresee the reactions that would be generated before these European Parliament elections by inviting MEP candidates to participate in debates where the main language is Russian". In a statement to the media, the editor-in-chief said: "However, LTV has listened to the views expressed by public groups and the arguments of experts, reassessed the situation and the practicalities of hosting the debate in internal discussions, and decided that the debate with the candidates for MEP in Russian should be canceled" (LTV cancels 2024).

As a result, the TV debates were conducted in Latvian and no alternative content was created in Russian but the unified content was reflected in minority media, not only in Russian but also in Ukrainian, Polish and other languages.

While the debate about the language used in pre-election discussions may initially seem like a minor incident, and to observers who have not delved into the situation, it may seem exaggerated and incomprehensible, it gains significance in the context of issues such as the (non-)use of Latvian and parallellingualism – particularly in public media – that undermines the status of Latvian as the state language. This issue became especially pressing in the context of hybrid warfare as it exposed deeply entrenched attitudes towards language shaped by divergent beliefs. Consequently, this incident cannot be dismissed as an isolated event and has been thoroughly analysed, as it may represent a potential turning point in Latvian language policy. However, it is up to the decision makers to recognise the broader implications beyond the immediate circumstances. It is crucial to remember that there are no trivial issues in language policy. The episode involving the language used in pre-election debates illustrates this principle effectively as it encapsulates the challenges and weaknesses of Latvia's linguistic environment and policies in a concise yet impactful way.

5. Conclusion

At the highest levels of state governance, language policy is guided by scientifically grounded studies, regular monitoring of the linguistic environment and adjustments to priorities based on these findings. The decision to eliminate or merge the primary institution responsible for implementing state language policy with another entity sends a clear message: the state language is no longer regarded as a fundamental guarantee of Latvia's existence and security. Such a shift signals a significant change in the country's core values, with predictable consequences for both domestic and international policy. Years of dedicated and systematic efforts in language policy can be undone by a single poorly considered decision.

The future of Latvian will be shaped by a combination of factors, with the key determinant being the collective ability of its speakers to sustain its use despite challenges posed by linguistic competition. The attitudes of Latvia's population toward language are influenced by a complex mix of socio-psychological factors, reflecting elements of post-colonial mentality and minority language self-sufficiency. The legacy of nearly five decades of occupation and Russification continues to affect even post-independence generations, despite the state's comprehensive language policies and regulatory frameworks, ranging from the Constitution to Cabinet of Ministers regulations for implementing the State Language Law. Consequently, language-related conflicts are likely to arise again, especially during the adoption of new laws or other critical incidents in society. This dynamic has been impacted by both internal and external influences. For example, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shifted attitudes toward Russian in Latvia, potentially increasing linguistic tensions temporarily while also fostering the long-term strengthening of Latvian as the state language.

Recent events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, war and migration, have highlighted weaknesses in Latvian language policy, prompting a return to discussions from earlier periods (1988-1992 and 1995-1999) about issues such as language use in private organisations, employment, communication by public officials in foreign languages and language in education. Additionally, the growing use of English in society presents a new challenge, competing with Latvian in informal interactions and certain sociolinguistic domains. Therefore, the main conclusions and recommendations for Latvian language policy makers should be as follows:

- 1) Beyond specific legal provisions and instances of language use, the surrounding narrative and framing of events can have a significant and lasting impact on public perceptions and behaviour. In areas of language conflict – of which Latvia, in its post-colonial situation, is undoubtedly one – it is crucial not only to gather statistical data but also to analyse and interpret them while considering the broader historical, geopolitical and psychological context.

- 2) All language-related laws and decisions should be evaluated for their influence on the actual status of the state language. Decisions regarding language must be scientifically grounded, carefully considered within a broader societal context and effectively communicated to the wider public.
- 3) In discussions about language policy, opinion leaders should clearly differentiate between issues of language use and language quality, avoiding oversimplifications or false equivalences, such as equating the impacts of Russian and English on Latvian.
- 4) Basic knowledge about languages and their societal functions should be integrated into formal education, with opportunities for ongoing learning. Public education efforts should include accessible materials – such as brochures, posters, infographics and online tutorials – that explain the aims and implications of language policies. Media outlets should play a role in fostering language awareness by analysing language-related events within a broader policy context. Public campaigns, awards, contests and discussions, such as the Latvian Public Media Award and the “Think about how you speak!” campaign, are also crucial for engaging the public in language policy.
- 5) Greater alignment and coordination are needed between strategies for social integration, the guidelines of state language policy and the actions required to implement those guidelines effectively.

But how can a sociolinguistic analysis of the 35-year-long struggle to restore the status of Latvian contribute to the global theory and practice of language policy? The most important conclusion is that changes in the linguistic landscape and language hierarchies are slow and gradual processes, heavily influenced by the ethno-demographic composition of the population and the geopolitical situation: it is not enough to have a well-considered system of language acquisition and language-related laws and regulations. There is still a huge gap between Latvian language skills in the minority population and the actual use of Latvian in interpersonal communication and in the services. The hopes of the independence restoration era – that the generation born after 1990 would be free from the linguistic habits of the Soviet occupation period – have not been fully realised. The historical memory of ethnic groups can play both a facilitating and inhibiting role in changing language hierarchies. While legislative acts are significant, the decisive factor is the language attitudes of society. Encouraging a positive approach to language, while openly addressing the complexities of the linguistic landscape, continues to be a key priority in Latvia's language policy.

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Super-diversity and national languages: Should we re-think our approach and policies?

Abstract

This article examines the influence of linguistic and other types of diversity on our national languages and its effects on language policy. The first part describes the characteristics of today's super-diverse society and how it has influenced our principles and concepts of community building and social organisation. This description then underpins a tentative analysis in the second part of the consequences that all this has for the status and position of our languages.

Field research in super-diverse neighbourhoods within urban regions in the Dutch-speaking area shows that Dutch continues to play a central role as a communication bridge between different sub-communities. Therefore there seem to be no compelling reasons to believe that our national languages are threatened or doomed to marginalisation due to increased diversity. However, their function and profile in society are changing.

In conclusion, the article argues for a new profile for our national languages, with less emphasis on the relationship between language and national identity and more on its connecting function as a lingua franca between partial identities, in the context of a culture of *conviviality*, i.e. the ability to live with and in differences with each other.

1. Introduction and preliminary remarks

In this article I will try to reflect on *linguistic diversity and language planning* from a general social and political point of view, in other words considering what increasing linguistic diversity in our European society means for the role and position of our traditional, so-called national languages and for the policies that are being pursued for this type of language.

It seems self-evident that most or even all of our European countries and societies are characterised by increasing linguistic diversity. In part it is caused by the ever increasing influx of people from other language areas and other cultures, both from within and outside Europe, which is especially noticeable in traditional working-class neighbourhoods in large urban areas.

However, migration is not the only cause or aspect of this increased linguistic diversity. Other aspects also play a role, including the internationalisation of business and companies as well as of science and academic structures, the massive increase in mobility (including economic migration and tourism) and, of course, the enormous impact of digitalisation, along with new social media. All of these phenomena contribute to new patterns of communicative behaviour, with an in-

creasing proportion of people's social interactions with others taking place in very diverse social settings, both material or physical ones as well as digital or virtual environments.

Needless to say, this increasing linguistic diversity is only one aspect of a much larger, so-called super-diversity: differences in language are closely connected to differences in cultural backgrounds, customs, attitudes and beliefs, etc. The interaction of more and more citizens no longer takes place exclusively in one language and within a single language area, but in a diversity of social settings and in different languages. All this calls for new language and sociocultural skills, constituting a challenge to the traditional role and position of our national languages.

My analysis and the resulting proposals for a change in approach are, of course, based on a critical observation of the situation in my own language area. I am convinced, though, that the situation in the Netherlands and Flanders will be highly comparable to many of the surrounding countries such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy and the Scandinavian countries. All of these are characterised by the presence of a national language that, for many decades, has boasted an indisputable status as the dominant language in the public domain, as the language of education, of government and legislation, as the language of the workplace and the media. All of these countries have been confronted with similar social changes in the post-war period, including comparable immigration flows and changes in industry and business.

I am aware that the situations in some other language areas may be less comparable, especially in countries with an official language that has not had the same unquestionably dominant position. Think of Luxembourg, Ireland or Malta. Perhaps there will also be important social differences between countries with an immigration surplus and other regions that, on the contrary, see more people leaving.

Yet I dare to hope that this article can serve as a referential basis for other language areas to evaluate their own language situation regarding the increasing diversity of their society and to determine their own strategies to meet these important challenges of our time.

2. Increasing linguistic diversity and more: Aspects and dimensions of super-diversity

Let us first consider the phenomenon of super-diversity, which, as already stated, constitutes a major challenge to our traditional concepts of community building and, closely related to that, to the status and position of our national languages, which are traditionally considered fundamental markers and assumed basic elements of national identities.

The term "super-diversity" refers to the complex, multi-dimensional character of the kind of diversity we know and experience in contemporary society. The concept emphasises the interplay between a multitude of factors that shape our

interactions and experiences and, in doing so, also shape our identification patterns and, thus, our individual and collective identities. These factors include: ethnicity and nationality, citizen status (citizen, legal foreign resident, illegal immigrant, refugee, etc.), language and language variety, religious affiliation, cultural attitudes and beliefs, gender, sexual orientation, age and, finally, socio-economic position, education and occupation. In their interplay, factors such as these create complex and multiple interaction patterns between individuals and their environment, with often multiple and sometimes ambivalent identification patterns and loyalties.

The social influence of these phenomena can hardly be overestimated. Diversity in itself is certainly not a new phenomenon. Our societies have always been diverse. Consider linguistic diversity expressed through the presence of regional and minority languages and dialects or social varieties even within the domain of our national languages. The minority languages not only include languages such as Frisian or Breton, which do not have the status of national languages in any state, but also languages such as Hungarian and Romanian in countries other than the country where they are the national language. European history and, in particular, the complicated process of creating and dissolving states and empires has had its consequences. For many centuries Europe has been a cultural and linguistic patchwork.

Relatively new factors have now supplemented that traditional diversity and added even greater complexity. One of those factors is undoubtedly the massive increase in internal mobility within Europe, in economic contexts but also beyond. Think of tourism and the elderly in countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands that have created real retirement colonies in southern Europe.

In part, this increased mobility is the result of a conscious, desired and explicitly pursued political goal of European unification: a Europe without internal borders with free movement not only of goods but also of people. Politicians and other social forces may have been insufficiently aware of the vast influence of this unity drive on each of the constituent countries and societies and the changes it causes within those societies.

And, of course, there is also migration from language areas and cultures outside Europe. These are also related to the increasing internationalisation of our economies. It is not only business and companies that are characterised by this increasing internationalisation but also the academic world and the world of science, even beyond our European borders. "Globalisation" is the term that is commonly used to describe this phenomenon.

And finally, there is the influence of the revolution caused by new digital technologies. New ICT tools are bringing about drastic changes in our communication patterns, where our interaction no longer has to be limited to our immediate physical environment or with people belonging to our own language community and fellow citizens but increasingly also takes place in new, virtual spaces and within communities that are not limited to our own living environment. For exam-

ple, as a jazz enthusiast, I participate in social media groups made up of fellow enthusiasts worldwide. Such interactions influence my personality and identity, perhaps even more so than my belonging to a language community or a nation. The social sciences often describe these new forms of communicative behaviour as the nexus between online and offline communication, i.e. offline-online merging, interaction or intertwining.

It is important to realise that these new patterns are not exclusively the domain or, rather perhaps, the privilege of a small, highly educated and multilingual elite. Many people even from so-called less privileged classes are participants in this nexus. Migrants from Turkey, Syria, Morocco or Ghana, for example, are part of our society, interacting with their immediate environment in the country where they live, but also stay in touch with family and networks in their country of origin via social media. This also remains the case for their children and grandchildren, who were born and raised in the so-called *host country*, which is and has always been their home country in every sense, where they grew up, went to school, started a professional life and pay taxes. That is precisely one of the important aspects of super-diversity, namely that people can belong and continue to belong to multiple social realities at the same time.

Precisely for this reason, we cannot pretend that migrants will throw off their old language, culture and customs like an old, worn-out suit that no longer serves any purpose and will completely and exclusively adapt to their new environment. In other words: they want to and can integrate as long as this does not mean that they have to assimilate completely and unilaterally.

Thus, people are increasingly part of complex networks, even outside their immediate environment. This is not only the case for individuals but also for cities and urban regions as such. The interaction of these urban areas is no longer predominantly limited to their immediate geographical environment, their so-called *hinterland*. Increasingly, they function as nodes in global and cross-cultural networks, with people, companies and organisations in contact with other regions worldwide, acting equally as nodes in that same network. The metropolitan areas in almost all European countries are becoming increasingly and clearly multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual, as places and spaces where the local and global dimensions of our contemporary world visibly meet and converge.

3. The impact of super-diversity: A new social reality at odds with our traditional patterns and concepts of social organisation and representation as well as of society building

The consequences of these changes on our society are immense. They have given rise to a new social reality, compared to the society as we knew it up to 40 or

50 years ago. The term often used to describe this new reality is *network society*. This new model is at odds with our traditional concepts of social organisation, especially with the nation state as the basis for society building. In this traditional approach, the nation state is regarded – declared and more often undeclared – as a more or less homogeneous (or, to be more precise, as a homogeneously experienced and projected) entity, also in a linguistic sense, as a self-standing and, in principle, autonomous container within which (almost) all major social processes take place and are regulated. Interactions that go beyond the container of the nation state were seen as relatively limited and as taking place mainly within international coordinative bodies and structures (bilateral relations, trade treaties, military alliances, etc.). Participation in this was believed to be the exclusive domain of limited elites such as ministers, diplomats, high-ranking civil servants and CEOs of larger companies.

As previously indicated, these autonomous containers of social organisation, representation and legitimation were assumed to be largely homogeneous, with the vast majority of persons and other agents (companies, organisations, etc.) assumed to belong to a shared and widely recognised national identity, with citizens having almost everything in common and – at least from a society-oriented perspective – differing from each other only in relatively limited and non-crucial aspects. Naturally, language and cultural background occupy a central position within that ideal of homogeneity. The national languages and their policies, in particular their status planning, were and are to this day closely linked to that traditional, idealised concept of the largely homogeneous and autonomous ‘*sovereign*’ nation state. Like the states to which they belonged, their language areas were also considered to be sovereign, with the national languages as uncontested, dominant rulers within their own territory.

All of this is now at odds with social reality in its contemporary manifestation. To grasp and explain the enormous impact of this, I would like to refer to two concepts introduced by Manuel Castells Oliván, perhaps the greatest authority when it comes to the study of the information society and globalisation. He argues that with regard to the space in which the social and communicative interaction of people and organisations with the outside world takes shape, the traditional *space of places* has had to make way for a more complex and multiple *space of flows* in which, as indicated earlier, physical places of interaction and social processes have been supplemented with a variety of virtual spaces.

This new reality of a globalised network society is at odds with our traditional approaches to and patterns of society building and social organisation: real-world interaction within the socio-economic reality as we know it today permanently and decisively transcends, perforates and penetrates the existing scales of political organisation and representation. The old container of the nation state is, therefore, increasingly becoming an empty shell since most social processes take place above and beyond it. Almost all crucial aspects of social life and social challenges deci-

sively escape the authority and power mechanisms of so-called ‘sovereign’ states. Think of the most important economic processes, population problems and migration flows related to them, issues such as safety, traffic, depletion of natural resources and, of course, environmental issues. All of these crucial areas almost completely escape the autonomous decision-making power of ‘sovereign’ nation states, which are, therefore, almost forced to limit themselves to micromanagement.

4. How this new social reality affects our concepts about language and language skills and influences the linguistic landscape

What does all of this mean for the linguistic landscape in Europe and beyond, and for the relationship between people and language? It is crystal clear that this new social reality described briefly above has consequences for our languages, their relationships, the power differences between them and even for our very concepts of language as a social phenomenon. All of this constitutes a crucial challenge for how we as a society deal with languages and language education and how we regulate their use. Our changed communication and interaction patterns have decisively changed the linguistic landscape, even if we are not yet sufficiently aware of this. Large numbers of people have different communication needs compared to speakers of 40 years ago. Those needs require new types of linguistic knowledge and skills.

4.1 Territoriality of national languages in crisis

What has been said above about the loss of effective sovereignty for nation states can be repeated for national languages and their territories. The new social reality is at odds with the traditional concept of the territoriality of our national languages, i.e. the idea that – like the states themselves – they have their own territory in which they are indisputable and uncontested, if not as sole rulers then at least as dominant forces, as a constituent of a national character and as the language of public space, legislation and administration, education, media and the like. These territories are increasingly perforated, penetrated and challenged by the presence of other languages. Whether we like it or not, we have to accept that our national languages will have to share their traditional territories with other languages and will necessarily lose their exclusive dominance.

4.2 Multilingualism as the rule, monolingualism as the exception

For large numbers of citizens in our society, a good command of the standard language, the national language, will no longer be sufficient for complete social

functioning in society and to be efficient and effective in all communicative and interactive settings. Large groups of people must have at least a good command of English in their professional lives and sometimes also of other languages. Speakers of minority languages such as Breton or Frisian will continue to be unable to ignore the national language but will also need the international lingua franca. Thus, if they maintain the language of their identity, they will not be able to settle for functional bilingualism (minority language and national language), which was previously possible for many of them, but they will need at least three languages. The same applies to the growing number of citizens with a foreign cultural background and origin, both from within and outside Europe. In addition to the national language and their original language, they may also need to master other foreign languages, at least English, in order to participate in our modern society as full citizens in every sense. And again: this applies not only to the first generation but also to subsequent ones.

The result is that more than ever we can no longer lock our citizens into a monolingual habitus. In other words, multilingualism is the rule, no longer the exception. And as indicated earlier, multilingualism is no longer the prerogative of a social and intellectual elite, nor does it only concern the traditional high-prestige languages from a one-sided Western point of view but also, increasingly, other languages: not only our traditional European high-prestige languages, like English, French, German, Italian and Spanish, but an increasing number of languages that have never been able to claim high prestige in the West, even though some of them are, in every respect, age-old cultural languages.

4.3 Mother tongue status and conceptualisation under discussion?

Closely linked to the above phenomena, our traditional concepts of language proficiency and competence also seem to be in crisis, especially our views on ‘*mothertongueness*’,¹ i.e. our conceptualisation of the nature and essence of what we call someone’s ‘*native language*’. This approach – declared and again more often undeclared – assumes that almost every person has a basic, fundamental language. This is usually the language we call our *mother tongue*, in which every person is expected to acquire the highest possible language proficiency. It is the language that people not only use in practical terms to communicate with others but in which they also think, feel, dream and represent the world. A language that is irreplaceable at the core of our humanity.

¹ I use this word as a literal translation of the Dutch word ‘moedertaligheid’, which can be used as an abstract word to refer to how the notion of a ‘native language’ or ‘mother tongue’ is conceptualised, its status and position and our concept of how a native language differs from non-native languages.

In this view, all other languages that people acquire, learn and use over the course of their lives are considered complements to that basic language, either as a second language (L2) or as a foreign language (FL), with the well-known functional difference between those two types.

This distinction between mother tongue and the rest is problematic for more and more people because they live in different realities at the same time, with specific languages and language competences for each of these realities. As categories of persons with these mixed realities we cannot only think of children from mixed-language families and children with a different home language than the language of the environment, including dialects of the standard language, but also, and increasingly, of people needing domain-specific language competencies. My daughter, for example, is a brain researcher and tells me that she does not have the necessary language competence in Dutch – her so-called mother tongue – to write a dissertation or article about her own research field simply because she has never done it or learned to do so. Most probably Dutch does not even have the right terms to represent her professional content. So here, too, we are dealing with fragmentation, functional and domain differences, social contexts and the like. These make the distinction between a fundamental language and linguistic complements increasingly difficult. Everything always interacts.

4.4 Language competence: being competent in (a) specific language (s) or also and mainly acquiring (meta)competence with regard to languages and their functions, roles and the social contexts in which they operate?

All of this also changes the language-proficiency requirements we must or can set and forces us to re-evaluate our views on language competence. This has traditionally been regarded as the ability to use a language grammatically, stylistically and pragmatically correctly in all social situations and associated registers for all domains of human knowledge and activities.

That ideal not only applies to one's own standard language but also to learning foreign languages. According to this ideal, our command of those languages should be as close as possible to that of a native speaker. Moreover, both mother-tongue and foreign-language education strongly focuses on the higher registers of use, in particular on literary and intellectual language use, and pay insufficient attention to the lower registers and informal language. I noticed this very clearly when I travelled to Ireland immediately after finishing my academic training in Dutch and English language and literature. In a pub in Tullamore I came into contact with a group of tourists from Scotland and found that I could debate politics, philosophy or Shakespeare but did not have the register knowledge to chat, tell jokes and laugh with my Scottish drinking brothers!

This lack of attention to lower registers of use and informal language varieties is the result of a more or less elitist view of language proficiency that pays insufficient attention to functional criteria for language acquisition, for example the question as to whether someone wants or needs to use the language effectively and, if so, in what social situations. For example, I hear French-speaking compatriots of mine who make the effort to learn Dutch to improve their professional functioning within government administration and to be able to converse with their Flemish colleagues in Dutch, for instance, often complain about the fact that even after that effort, they cannot communicate with those Flemish colleagues and continue to not even understand them. That is because Flemish people – especially in informal situations – do not speak the standard variety of Dutch but a dialect or an intermediate variety between standard and dialect. The same kind of complaints can be heard from Italian-speaking Swiss learning German who still cannot understand their German-speaking Swiss compatriots and, of course, from people in my environment with a migrant background. As a person with a Turkish or Moroccan background, you will do your best to learn and speak Dutch well, only to find out that in Bruges or Courtrai almost no one speaks that language and you will never be able to socialise completely in that environment and with these people, because your variety of Dutch is too formal and for this reason it will not give you the desired sense of belonging to that community.

Our views on language competence will, therefore, at least have to be supplemented with functional criteria, whereby language competence must be increasingly regarded as the ability and capacity to make conscious and appropriate choices from a large linguistic repertoire that spans different languages and different varieties of those languages. Language competence can, therefore, be defined as the ability to select the most appropriate language variety for each social situation and for each type of interaction. This also implies dealing with and making use of partial competencies, such as domain-related language knowledge, passive language knowledge, (at least passive) familiarity with informal language varieties and the like. It is my conviction that this register competence will become more crucial than ever in our modern super-diverse society!

5. National languages and language policy: Rethinking our principles?

What does all this mean, not only for our languages but also for language policies to be pursued? It goes without saying that, with its greater diversity, our society continues to need sufficient social cohesion and enough sense of togetherness between citizens and other agents who form our society. It is also a fact that currently, this increasing diversity often leads to social tensions, putting pressure on social cohesion. Suspicion and distrust towards minority groups has not diminished in

recent years in Europe, and that is an understatement. This negative attitude not only concerns groups with a different language and cultural background but also diversity phenomena such as colour, gender and sexual orientation. We can, therefore, ask ourselves whether and how language policy can promote cohesion by transcending differences and strengthening the above-mentioned sense of togetherness.

It is clear from the previous section that our national languages are confronted with major social changes. They are rapidly losing their status as an undisputed and indisputable monopoly – or at least their position as dominant forces – and have to share their space, in contact, sometimes in competition, with other languages. They are increasingly unable to present themselves as the mother tongue of the vast majority of citizens, especially in urban areas. I live in one of those so-called multicultural neighbourhoods in The Hague. The Transvaal district and nearby Schilderswijk are neighbourhoods that symbolise multicultural issues throughout the Netherlands. In these neighbourhoods less than 10%(!!) of the population appears to be native Dutch. The others come almost literally from all four corners of the world, especially from the Hindustani community with roots in Suriname (present in these neighbourhoods for many decades, traditionally as the dominant non-native group), from Turkey and the Middle East, from the Maghreb countries but increasingly also from sub-Saharan Africa. Over the past ten years, the district has also become increasingly and intensively populated by labour migrants from Eastern Europe, especially Poland and Bulgaria.

This example shows how far political-social discourse is from reality on the ground. The public debate discusses multicultural issues almost exclusively in terms of a dichotomy between native and immigrant, between Dutch and foreign, in other words between an *'us'* and a *'them'*. Our example clearly demonstrates that this *'them'* is enormously diverse and cannot be summarised under a single denominator, neither linguistically nor religiously, nor in terms of cultural attitudes or behavioural patterns. It is to be expected that this linguistic and cultural diversity will only increase and will also manifest itself in other regions, with the result that national languages will be regarded less and less as the mother tongue of the population and, closely linked to this, as collective identity markers for society as a whole and will only be able to maintain themselves as vehicular languages. I will come back to this in more detail later.

The question now is how, as agents of language policy, we should deal with this new reality. Should these changes be seen as a threat to our national languages? Are they threatened with extinction or marginalisation? Can we maintain or restore their dominant status and – if that is possible – is that also desirable? What about the much-needed social cohesion in our society? Can national languages and the language policies we implement for them contribute to this? I will look for answers to these questions in the coming paragraphs.

Let me begin by stating that these are complex phenomena with far-reaching consequences for society. It is, therefore, obvious that the policy choices to meet

these challenges will not be simple and straightforward either and that there will, in any case, be a large amount of uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of any possible approach. Those who say otherwise are deceiving us, often consciously as a part of a political or social agenda. If we opt for an evidence-based approach with our language policy, we will have no choice but to monitor our policy measures permanently and, if necessary, make adjustments based on findings 'on the ground'.

Many aspects are necessarily uncertain. However, there are very good grounds to assume that the idealised concept of a (largely) monolingual and monocultural nation state has become untenable. In our fragmented society with a wide range of identities and identitarian characteristics and with a lot of room for individual choices and preferences (as *self-determination* and, therefore, as a crucial *positive* value in an open society!), there can simply no longer be an overarching identity that binds all citizens and that can be actively shared. Ignoring that reality and trying – unilaterally and top-down – to impose or restore a national identity with a common basic language as one of its foundations will almost certainly prove to be counterproductive. Any policy attempt in that direction will necessarily create or reinforce a clear-cut distinction and divide up society into an '*us*' (native speakers, original citizens with an almost completely shared linguistic and cultural repertoire and background) on the one hand and a '*them*' on the other, i.e. everybody else who does not or does not fully share this background with us.

After all, any attempt to restore an organic, harmonious society (in fact a projected ideal image that never actually existed!) denies the complex reality of the mixed and fragmentary identities and the multiple forms of belonging described above. A policy that insists on this risks being a factor of what sociologists refer to as '*othering*'. Instead of restoring social cohesion, such a policy will, therefore, almost certainly further undermine social integrity and lead to more division and social tension. Moreover, such a policy poses a threat to the human dignity and personal freedom of large groups within our population who do not fit into that ideal image and who – for good reasons – refuse to conform. After all, we are dealing with articulate people with their own will, preferences, choices and determination, and not with willless objects of heteronomous policy.

The crucial question is, therefore, whether other approaches are possible, whether alternatives exist. To answer that question, it is worthwhile studying which communication and interaction patterns really occur in the super-diverse neighbourhoods that we have in many of our cities, such as the neighbourhoods in The Hague where I live. How do these communities function, how do they communicate and which languages play a role? It is obvious that these patterns will be diverse and will differ depending on the function, the sub-communities involved and the places of interaction (e.g. a mosque or Hindu temple, community centre, supermarket, Turkish or Moroccan cultural centre, etc.). The language people use in one situation will almost necessarily differ from the language used in other situations.

This type of research already exists in our language area, such as the fieldwork carried out by the Babylon research team at Tilburg University² under the inspiring leadership of the late Prof. Dr. Jan Blommaert. An example of this type of fieldwork can be found in *Superdiversiteit en democratie*³ (Maly et al. 2014). The book reports on the results of field research in super-diverse urban regions in Belgium, especially in Ghent and Antwerp. One of the most important and clear results is that Dutch is the contact language, the lingua franca if you like, between all the different sub-communities such as the Turkish, Moroccan, Ghanaian, Polish or Bulgarian, which live together in relatively small but densely populated urban regions in the cities mentioned above.



Fig. 1: Cover of the book *Superdiversiteit en democratie* (Maly/Blommaert/Ben Yakoub 2014)

² The *Babylon Center for the Study of Super-diversity* no longer exists as a separate research institute but Prof. Blommaert's colleagues and pupils are still involved in this type of research.

³ In English the title would read as *Super-diversity and democracy*. It is no coincidence that the title links super-diversity as a social reality with democracy and democratic practices.

Among other things, Blommaert examined the neighbourhood in Oud-Berchem in Antwerp. That is the neighbourhood where he lived and listened to and looked at the language expressions that he could find around him, including through linguistic landscape analysis. His conclusion is clear: “*Anyone who wants to appeal to a broad audience and, therefore, transcend all boundaries of diversity uses his or her very own form of Dutch*”.⁴ Indeed, here, too, it was not the canonised form of standard Dutch that he heard and read in the quarter where he lived but a language that, as Blommaert reports, has ‘a bewildering multitude of forms’, ‘from standard language, professional jargons to a smattering of words and expressions, pronounced with a strong accent’. So it is an impure, imperfect Dutch but it is that language and no other that fulfils the function of a communicative bridge between the sub-communities. Blommaert coined the term *ecumenical Dutch* to refer to this kind of language. It is Dutch and no other language that ensures cross-border contact in this type of neighbourhood and is, therefore, able to create togetherness and solidarity across the boundaries of the sub-communities, thus strengthening social cohesion. The national language appears to be essential for the coexistence of cultures, for *conviviality*.⁵ It can, therefore, be expected that Dutch and other national languages will continue to fulfil their essential social role, even in the super-diverse society of tomorrow.

This type of research and these results show that there is an empirically supported basis for a (partly) different approach to the traditional one, which is dominated by mainly ideological a-priorisms and which still forms the main policy basis of the established political and social power centres (parties, governments, ministries, city councils, etc.) in our countries.

⁴ I have translated a quote of Blommaert’s into English and put it in italics as if it were an actual quotation. The full quotation reads as follows: “*Nu moeten we goed weten wat we bedoelen met ‘Nederlands’. De taal bestaat immers uit een verbijsterend veelvoud aan vormen in deze buurt, van verheven standaardtaal, beroepsjargons tot een mondjesmaat woorden en uitdrukkingen, uitgesproken met een stevig accent. Veel of weinig Nederlands, correct of fout: het doet er niet toe. Wie een breed publiek wil aanspreken, en dus alle grenzen van diversiteit wil overstijgen in deze buurt, die gebruikt zijn of haar geheel eigen vorm van Nederlands*”, or in English: “Now we need to know what we mean by ‘Dutch’. After all, the language consists of a bewildering multitude of forms in this neighbourhood, from fine refined standard language and professional jargons to a smattering of words and expressions pronounced with a strong accent. Much or little Dutch, correct or incorrect: it doesn’t matter. Anyone who wants to appeal to a broad audience and, therefore, transcend all boundaries of diversity in this neighbourhood uses his or her very own form of Dutch”.

⁵ I use the term *conviviality* as a specialist term as used in social and cultural sciences and in sociology to refer to the ‘willingness and ability of individuals and groups to coexist peacefully, collaborate, and interact positively despite cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and other forms of diversity’.

6. Towards a new profile for our national languages?

The above leads to the conclusion that there is a need for a new type of profiling for our national languages as well as for a new policy practice that meets that profile. By profiling I mean a kind of *marketing* of our national languages, that is the way in which we present them to society as instruments for social functioning. This profiling must recognise diversity in our society as an inescapable and permanent reality and not as a temporary phenomenon, or as a problem that must be combated and reduced as quickly as possible. After all, it is not up to political policy agents to determine how people shape their individual lives and their identities or with which social connections and groups they want to identify.⁶ Governmental restraint in this regard is a basic principle for an open, democratic society with respect for individual choices and the freedom of its members. Or, to put it philosophically, this means opting in principle for the greatest possible autonomy and for refraining as much as possible from employing models of heteronomy. Research carried out by Jan Blommaert and others shows that there are opportunities for this.

The following shifts in emphasis apply as basic principles for the new language profile:

- from overarching community language to contact language between the various (sub)communities;
- from a constituent of national identity to a regulator of the interaction between different identities;
- from a factor of *othering* to an instrument of encounter.

This new profiling must fit within a new, broader social approach to the phenomenon of diversity as such. Diversity should no longer be seen – as is now implicitly and often explicitly the case – as a problem in itself but, on the contrary, as wealth and value. This also requires a different attitude from society as a whole. In this approach, the ability and willingness to deal with differences and the ability to live together in diversity must be considered essential elements of good citizenship in our contemporary society that must be actively pursued.

In order to better characterise this new profiling of our national languages and to better indicate in what respect it differs from the way we have hitherto thought about those languages, I would like to use a few terms and concepts which were introduced by the American political scientist Robert Putnam. As is well known, he argues that people as social beings need *social capital* in order to fully participate in community life and achieve shared goals with others. That capital is to be understood as a nexus of networks, shared norms and values, trust and the like. To

⁶ Of course, this should always happen within the boundaries of the rule of law and recognising the same right to self-determination for everybody else, acknowledging that our freedom is always limited by the freedom of the others.

achieve this, people must, of course, also have the necessary knowledge, attitudes, skills and instruments required for the effectiveness of that interaction, including languages and language skills. Putnam makes a distinction between two types of social capital, namely *bonding* capital and *bridging* capital. Both types are necessary for full human functioning as social beings. They interact and can reinforce each other.

Bonding capital concerns groups with which we share many characteristics (language, culture, religion, etc.), where we interact with people who are very similar to us and with whom we, therefore, feel intimately connected. Bridging capital, on the other hand, relates to interactions across and beyond these intimate connections of which we are a part (through origin and through our own personal choices) and therefore concerns society as a whole, including interaction with persons and other agents who do not belong to our own intimate groups. In the renewed profile that is advocated, our national languages present and profile themselves primarily as *bridging social capital*, as a communicative instrument above and beyond the various sub-identities. These partial identities themselves are not questioned or problematised and no pressure is exerted on people to revise their group identifications and partial identities and, therefore, to abandon the languages associated with them. In other words, in this approach, learning and using the national language as bridging capital does not have to hinder or threaten the continued existence and nurturing of one's own identity language as *bonding social capital*. There is, therefore, no question of a substitution policy but only of a model of addition in which the existing linguistic repertoire is supplemented with new varieties that are linked to specific functions, in this case the overarching social functioning, for example, as a citizen who participates in the democratic process, and, of course, also for professional functioning. The emphasis on complementing rather than replacing languages may cause less resistance from people with a different language and cultural background.

Furthermore, I argue for much more attention to the functional aspect. We need to take into account the precise characteristics of real-life interactions and needs for which people must be able to use the national language. This does not always have to be the most highbrow form of the standard language. Excessive emphasis on the higher, intellectual-cultural language registers and on mastery of the most formal language forms may not be necessary for people for their actual social and professional functioning and may also be counterproductive. The imposed criteria and standards are often too high and are, therefore, often not achieved by those involved. Maintaining and imposing them can then itself become a factor of failure among groups with a different language and cultural background, including many people with a relatively low level of education. It may become a factor of guilt and reinforce a negative self-image and thus threaten to become a factor of social discrimination itself. More attention to effective needs in people's real, daily lives will encourage rather than discourage.

Finally, I would like to make a case for a bidirectional approach to multilingualism. I have already indicated that acquiring knowledge and skills in the national language does not necessarily have to hinder the love, knowledge and cherishing of one's own community language. This should also create space to use those languages effectively in learning situations, both in formal classroom education and in many informal learning situations. Recent research shows that functional multilingualism from early childhood improves intelligence, not only in terms of language acquisition but also in terms of other cognitive domains. The increasing tendency in European countries to ban the use of these languages at school, even in informal situations such as talking during breaks on the playground or playing sports, must, therefore, be rejected as counterproductive. The only effect achieved with this kind of approach is to reinforce the impression among people from minority groups that something about their personality, origin, or social class is not good and is not welcome at school, that they are children of a lesser god, so to speak.

This bidirectional orientation also means that speakers of the national language must be given opportunities and be actively encouraged to come into contact with the other languages present in their living and working environment, to show interest in them and to learn them. This is also related to functional criteria. Conviviality consists of reciprocity, of approaching each other. In our multilingual society it means that it should not only be the other person who learns our language, but also vice versa. Foreign-language education should, therefore, not be limited to traditional European languages. And here, too, it should not always be a matter of complete mastery of the highest registers of use of a language but of partial, functional forms of knowledge, sometimes even passive knowledge. Just to give one example, as a construction worker, my brother may have a greater need for knowledge of Polish and is, therefore, better off learning (some) Polish than, for example, German or French, which he will almost never have to use in effect because he is mainly on building sites with Polish colleagues and is in contact with them every day. And in neighbourhoods like the one I live in, it might also be a good thing that people have opportunities to learn something of the other languages around them, be it only for wishing each other a good morning or for buying a loaf of bread in the local Turkish shop. After all, social cohesion is a matter of trust and that grows when there is a palpable willingness on both sides to meet each other, to approach each other, to enter each other's territory.

7. Conclusions

As indicated earlier, there are no ready-made answers to the new challenges that increased linguistic diversity is posing to our national languages and our language policies. We will have to look for answers and, in doing so, will at least have to

look at what really happens in super-diverse neighbourhoods, what types of interaction actually occur and which needs really exist. This must provide starting points for looking for strategies that can be effective and actually contribute to the stated goals of integration and strengthening the social fabric in our society, whereby suspicion, resentment, distrust of sub-communities towards one another and tension between them can and should be reduced as undesirable, society-threatening phenomena. Nowadays, on the contrary, these feelings of tension and distrust are being widely evoked – often consciously, to serve political agendas – and contrasts are being magnified.

The new social cohesion cannot be thought of in any other way than as *conviviality*, also called *convivialism*, in other words the ability and skill to live together in and with differences and to deal well with those differences. Language and language policy can play a role in this, but should be part of a larger, more comprehensive approach, which should also include other policy aspects and areas. Language and language policy can contribute but will never be able to do the job alone.

The starting point is that super-diversity is an inescapable reality which we will have to try to come to terms with, whether we want to or not. Let me quote here a great Italian writer, philosopher and semiologist. That is, of course, Umberto Eco:

L'Europa sarà un continente multirazziale o, se preferite, 'colorato'. Se vi piace, sarà così; e se non vi piace, sarà così lo stesso. (Eco, 2019)

[Translated into English: *Europe will be a multiracial continent or, if you prefer, a coloured one. If you like that, it will be like that. And if you don't like that, it will be like that anyway.*]

It is for this reason, namely the inescapability of diversity, but, of course, in the first place as a principled choice for humane and democratic values, that I argue for a *culture of conviviality* in which the super-diversity of our society is accepted as a reality and diversity as such is considered a *positive value* as a condition for an open, democratic society that is based on the self-determination of its members and supports every individual in the process of acquiring their self-determined identity. This culture of conviviality and diversity will not come about by itself. All citizens will have to be influenced in this direction, being encouraged to experience and shape this culture, and they will have to be able to develop and acquire the necessary attitudes and skills to this end. Living in conviviality and dealing with diversity will have to be seen as essential skills for contemporary good citizenship. Many social forces will have to contribute to this: the media, civil-society organisations, education, including informal forms of instruction, and the like. These required skills will also have to receive explicit attention in the socialisation of children towards fully-fledged adult citizens. Language policy must be an important element in this total approach.

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EFNIL Master's Thesis Awards

Differentiation by L1 in the Frisian course in secondary education

Abstract

In 2015, the province of Fryslân and the national Dutch government decided on a plan to improve the quality of Frisian in education: *Taalplan Frysk 2030*. Based on the large variation among inhabitants of Fryslân regarding their level of (West) Frisian, the curriculum's core goals differentiate between students on the basis of their L1s. However, the Inspectorate of Education has concluded that not enough differentiation is taking place in Frisian language classes in secondary education. How do the teachers differentiate, is this observable in their lessons and what are their positions towards differentiation? This study concludes that differentiation is not observed in the classroom but that teachers have many different views on differentiation. Furthermore, this study points towards problems and possibilities regarding the goal of the Frisian course and the extent to which the domain of speaking is covered.

1. Introduction: The case of Frisian

West Frisian (henceforth referred to as 'Frisian') is spoken in the province of Fryslân located in the north of the Netherlands. There is large variation in how well people speak Frisian. Almost all inhabitants of Fryslân understand the language (93.1%), fewer people speak it (64.1%), fewer are able to read Frisian (52.9%) and even fewer are able to write in Frisian (15.9%) (Provinsje Fryslân 2020). In the province, Frisian is the minority language, the majority language being Dutch. Dutch is the high variety, meaning it is spoken mostly in formal situations such as at work or at school. Frisian is the low variety; it is mostly spoken at home with family and friends (Gorter/Cenoz 2011). Many inhabitants of Fryslân hold negative attitudes towards the low variety Frisian. This is the case for Dutch-speaking people, but also Frisian-speakers hold negative attitudes towards their own language (Belmar 2019). Nevertheless, many Frisians report that they consider Frisian to be their mother tongue and feel personally attached to the language (Provinsje Fryslân 2020).

Since 2014, language acquisition planning regarding the minority language Frisian should be maintained by the provincial government in Fryslân rather than the national Dutch government (Ynspeksje fan it Underwiis 2019). One result of this change is *Taalplan Frysk 2030* ('Language Plan Frisian 2030'), a plan to improve education in and around the Frisian language in the province of Fryslân at all levels of education by the year 2030. The goal of the plan is to give every young person in the province the chance to learn the language (Taalplan Frysk 2030 n.d.).

Since the beginning of the 20th century efforts have been made to teach Frisian in Fryslân, although the manner in which and the extent to which Frisian is taught has changed significantly over the last 100 years (Gorter et al. 2008). In 2018, primary and secondary schools had already been required for a long time by law to teach Frisian. For primary education this was required in all classes and for secondary education only in lower secondary (*ûnderbou*). Most schools taught Frisian in 2018 for less than one hour a week (Varkevisser/Walsweer 2018). In 2023, despite the efforts of the first years of *Taalplan Frysk 2030*, schools spent even less time teaching Frisian than in 2018 (Varkevisser/Visser/Walsweer 2023; Varkevisser et al. 2023).

At the time of this research, a number of core goals (last updated in 2006) were being formulated for lower secondary education, the process of updating the core goals and thus the curriculum for the Frisian course in secondary education having started in 2018 (Varkevisser/Walsweer 2018). According to the plan, these core goals are to be implemented in 2025 (Kurrikulum.FRL 2023). The core goals differentiate between students based on their language background. Six core goals are goals for all students (core goals 1, 2, 3, 4a, 5a and 6a) and three are only targeted at students who have Frisian as their mother tongue (core goals 4b, 5b and 6b) (Varkevisser/Walsweer 2018).

The wish for differentiation based on language background is not only apparent in the core goals; it is also underlined by the Educational Inspectorate of the Netherlands. In 2019, the Frisian course in secondary education was investigated by the Inspectorate, focusing, among other things, on differentiation. The inspectorate found that students could name more examples of differentiation than their teachers but that the teachers were most positive about how they differentiate; however, not many examples of differentiation had been observed during class. The report drew two important conclusions about Frisian in lower secondary education: in the limited time available to teach Frisian, it is not unexpected that the students do not really learn the Frisian language; moreover, no differentiation is made between students based on their L1 (Ynspeksje fan it Underwiis 2019).

2. Background: Second language acquisition

Differentiation is a well-known concept in the field of Instructed Second Language Acquisition (ISLA), the field within applied linguistics concerned specifically with L2 teaching. Loewen/Sato (2019, 3) describe ISLA as “any situation in which someone (e.g. teacher) or something (e.g. textbook) is involved in helping an individual learn an L2”; thus it entails everything that concerns a systematic attempt to help in the process of L2 learning.

There is not one uniform idea of which type of instruction facilitates L2 learning best (Ellis 2005). A leading school of thought within applied linguistics

and ISLA is that of communicative language teaching (CLT). Over the last few decades, language has been increasingly viewed as a communicative tool rather than merely as a system and the importance of the learner has been emphasised (De Bot et al. 2005). This research adheres to that perspective as well as to a socio-cultural (Vygotsky 1978) and a dynamic usage-based perspective (DUB; Verspoor/Phuong Nguyen 2015) on language learning. The former (Vygotsky 1978) entails a perspective on language learning in which language is learned through communication but alongside meaningful contexts, learners also need a (social) goal (De Bot et al. 2005). DUB, in turn, is a combination of two views on language learning: a usage-based approach, in which the process of language learning is viewed as being based on language as a communicative tool and according to which language is learned best by using it in real life (Tomasello 2000), and a complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) approach, in which speakers and their unique sets of language knowledge are seen as a complex dynamic system. These systems are complex because they are all made up of countless other, non-linear subsystems; they are dynamic because each of the subsystems is variable. They change and reorganise themselves constantly, and it is a system depending on how it is formulated and defined (De Bot et al. 2005).

Within these perspectives on SLA, the language classroom is seen as a CDS, as are its teacher(s) and students. In an attempt to reduce the research-pedagogy gap, i.e. the gap between applied linguistics research and the language classroom (Loewen/Sato 2019), this research focuses on differentiation in the Frisian language classroom in lower secondary education. Lower secondary was chosen because the course is mandatory for all students and thus the individual differences and the need for differentiation are large. This results in the following research question: how does the Frisian language teacher in lower secondary education differentiate between students based on their language background? In order to answer this question, two subquestions were formulated:

- 1) Is differentiation between students based on language background observable in the interaction between the teacher and the students and, if so, how?
- 2) What are the Frisian language teachers' views on differentiation in the classroom based on language background?

3. Methodology

Data were collected in two different ways. Firstly, a lesson observation was carried out in seven different Frisian classes with seven teachers in six high schools. In these lesson observations, the teacher was asked to indicate the home languages of the students by filling in a map of the classroom with different colours corresponding to different home languages: Dutch, Frisian or other. Then the class was observed by the researcher using an observation form developed by the researcher

based on the observation tools ERCOP (Smit 2021) and ICALT (Van de Grift 2007). Based on communicative, sociocultural and dynamic usage-based perspectives on language development, specific attention was paid to interactional feedback, particularly (interactionally) modified input, confirmation checks, clarification requests, comprehension checks, recasts, language-related episodes, negotiation of form and negotiation of meaning. In addition, attention was paid to the use of the target language, conscious decisions of differentiation and the degree in which the teacher actively assisted students with different home languages. The observations focused especially on the role of the teacher in teacher-student interaction. While observing, the researcher noted the number of times certain examples of differentiation were observable in the teacher-student interaction with Frisian-speaking students as opposed to Dutch-speaking students. The students speaking different languages at home were excluded from the analysis.

Secondly, a qualitative interview was conducted with the teachers directly following the lesson observation. This interview should shed light on the teacher's educational background, what the teacher had learned about differentiation based on language background during their teacher education programme, how the teacher claims to differentiate between students based on their language background and how the teacher wishes to differentiate between students based on their language background.

4. Results

As for the use of the target language Frisian, the lesson observations showed that the teachers spoke Frisian almost all of the time during class and that there was no significant difference between how much the teacher spoke Frisian to Frisian-speaking students versus Dutch-speaking students as confirmed by a Mann-Whitney U test ($p = 0.1736$; Sjoerdstra 2023). The same is true for the categories of conscious differentiation and teacher assistance: Mann-Whitney U tests confirmed that there was no significant difference between the manner in which the teacher encouraged the student (Frisian or Dutch) to speak Frisian in class ($p = 1$), the manner in which the teacher actively assisted the two groups of students during individual work ($p = 1$) and the manner in which the teacher actively assisted them during group work ($p = 1$; Sjoerdstra 2023). Lastly, almost no examples of interactional feedback were observed by the researcher.

Regarding the qualitative interviews, the results were as follows. Five out of the seven teachers had finished their education to become a Frisian teacher; the other two still had to complete it. The teachers had different experiences in either teaching or working with the Frisian language. Just over half of the teachers (4/7) indicated that they did not remember well what they had learned about differentiation during their education to become a Frisian teacher and that what they did remember was to have learned about differentiation in general and not only based

on language background (also 4/7). Five of the seven teachers indicated to have learned mostly about differentiation in different types of education they had followed or during their work life. When asked about their knowledge of differentiation, three did not give a clear answer. The other teachers named differentiation based on language background, that they can differentiate between students based on many differences or they gave the example of differentiating based on students' knowledge levels.

The teachers were able to name many examples of differentiation they used in their classes, as can be seen in Table 1 (first published in Sjoerdsma 2023).

Teacher	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6
1	x	x		x		
2		x	x		x	x
3			x		x	x
4				x	x	
5	x	x			x	
6	x	x	x		x	x
7	x	x			x	x
Teacher	D7	D8	D9	D10	D11	D12
1	x			x		
2		x		x		x
3			x		x	
4	x		x			x
5	x		x		x	
6	x					
7						

Table 1: Teachers' methods for differentiation based on students' language background

- D1 – differentiation mostly in the domains of speaking and listening
- D2 – having different levels in assignments
- D3 – students can choose whether to answer in Frisian or Dutch
- D4 – differentiation when grading assignments
- D5 – differentiation based on gut feeling
- D6 – mapping students' home language(s) at start of school year
- D7 – teacher does not differentiate for grammar rules or learning new words
- D8 – making use of creative assignments
- D9 – teacher lets Frisian-speaking and Dutch-speaking students work together to help each other
- D10 – differentiation depends on the class
- D11 – teacher has multilingual approach
- D12 – differentiation mostly in the domains of speaking, listening and reading

The same is the case for wishes the teachers have for how they would like to differentiate, as can be seen in Table 2 (first published in Sjoerdstra 2023).

Teacher	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5
1	x	x	x		
2			x	x	x
3			x		
4			x		x
5	x				
6				x	
7			x	x	
Teacher	E6	E7	E8	E9	E10
1					
2					
3	x				
4		x			
5			x	x	x
6					
7					

Table 2: Teachers' wishes and ideas about differentiation in Frisian class

E1 – individual differentiation

E2 – practical problem: examinations

E3 – setting up different groups based on students' levels

E4 – more time to teach the class

E5 – other teaching materials

E6 – Frisian-speaking students should teach Dutch-speaking students

E7 – practical problem: lesson schedules

E8 – more teaching in the domain of speaking

E9 – focus on meaning

E10 – a multilingual approach to teaching in class

5. Discussion and conclusion

As for the lesson observations, almost no examples of differentiation were observed in class. There were no differences between how the teachers approached the Frisian-speaking students and the Dutch-speaking students and almost no examples of interactional feedback. This can be explained by a number of things. Firstly, the settings during the lessons were quite traditional. The teacher spoke the most and the students only responded. In a communicative approach, the focus is more on the language learner. In a language learning environment in which the focus is

more on the language learner, the learner should have been motivated to speak the target language more. This was not visible during the lessons. Secondly, the average observed lesson was 52 minutes with 22 students, raising the question as to the degree to which it is possible for the teacher to give each student the individual attention they need.

As for the teachers' views on differentiation, almost all teachers indicated doing this based on their gut feelings. Even though almost no differentiation was observed during the lessons, the teachers had many different ideas on how they differentiate and how they wished to do this. The examples the teachers gave about differentiation had different goals, however. Some methods of differentiation were meant to help the students reach a higher level in a specific domain of the target language, such as having different levels in assignments (D2) or grading assignments differently (D4). Other methods of differentiation had a different goal, namely to improve students' attitudes towards Frisian, such as making use of creative assignments (D8) and a multilingual approach (D11). One thing that becomes clear is that to the teachers, the goal of the Frisian course is not only to teach the language but also to improve language attitudes.

The unclear goal of the Frisian course does not only become clear via the examples of differentiation. It is also apparent in how it is sometimes viewed as an L1 course and sometimes as an *mvt* (short for *moderne vreemde talen*, 'modern foreign language'). In the interviews, some teachers indicated that they were not always aware of Frisian teaching being that different from Dutch teaching. On the other hand, some teachers approached Frisian as an L2 course, just like English, German or French. Some teachers were adamant about not differentiating between students in grammar or vocabulary teaching: in their classes, students learn them in the same way as they would in another L2 course.

What is clear is that the focus of the course is not on the domain of speaking: "the students do not learn to speak Frisian in the Frisian course" (Sjoerdstra 2023). In order for students to actually learn to speak the target language, it is imperative that this be taught properly in school. A communicative approach can be helpful in integrating Frisian into other aspects of education, for example through practices associated with Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) or Content Based Instruction (CBI). While this is a huge and slow process that involves changes in the (lifelong) views of teaching professionals on language learning, the first results of this approach appear to be positive in both primary (Varkevisser/Visser/Walsweer 2023) and secondary education (Varkevisser et al. 2023). "Taalplan Frysk 2030 is only the start: let us work towards the goals for 2030 and much further" (Sjoerdstra 2023).

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Lisza-Sophie Neumeier

English across classrooms, careers and cafés: Exploring second language practices in educational, professional and recreational settings among young adults in Austria

Abstract

The current study investigates the extent of English language use in tertiary education settings, at the workplace and in recreational contexts. By focusing on young adults aged 18 to 35 in Austria who are not enrolled in formal English language courses, this study expands the literature on informal second language learning (ISLL) to cover a new participant group. A questionnaire was taken by 653 participants categorised into tertiary students, working young adults and working students. The results reveal daily use of English in university settings for a quarter of all students and English used for professional purposes by roughly a third of all working young adults. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that young people who were studying, mostly members of Generation Z, had significantly higher engagement with ISLL in recreational contexts compared to working young adults. These findings highlight the integral role of English as an essential skill for academic, professional and free time-related pursuits.

1. Introduction

According to the European Union's founding principle of multilingualism, all official languages of member states are recognised as EU languages, resulting in a total of 24 EU languages at the beginning of 2025 (European Union 2025). Despite Brexit in 2020, English continues to carry a considerable weight in the EU as it is one of the treaty and working languages of the EU's institutions, in addition to being an official language in Ireland and Malta (Herbert 2023, 35). The key role of English in the EU is also reflected in the fact that it constitutes the most widely spoken and taught second language in its member states (European Commission 2024; Eurostat 2024; Sherman 2017).

This is also the case in Austria, a central European country with 9.1 million inhabitants (Statistik Austria 2025). While the status of English as a *lingua franca* in Austria cannot be disputed (Smit/Onysko forthcoming), the extent of English language use in different areas of life and different population groups in Austria has only been researched in a fragmentary manner to date. There is a body of research on informal second language learning (ISLL), i.e., English language use in free time contexts by second-language learners outside their formal language

classes (cf. Dressman 2020) in Austria (e.g., Ghamarian-Krenn/Schwarz 2024). However, research on the English language practices of tertiary students not enrolled in formal language courses is limited. Equally, it is unknown whether English is relevant for young people beyond the realm of education, more specifically in the world of work. Furthermore, while ISLL engagement is typically high among Austrian students, potential differences in ISLL involvement among tertiary students, working young adults and young people who are both working and studying have not been explored.

Therefore, a mainly quantitative survey study was conducted among 653 young adults in Austria aged 18 to 35.¹ to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do young adults in Austria engage with English in educational and professional contexts?

RQ2: Are there differences in informal recreational second language learning practices between tertiary students, working young adults and working students?

Due to its descriptive nature, RQ1 does not require a hypothesis (McCombes 2023). Regarding RQ2, it was hypothesised that significant differences exist in recreational English-language use between these three groups as the subgroups likely follow very individual daily routines.

The article at hand will first set the scene by outlining the status of English in Austria and classifying its functions according to Onysko's (2016) *Language Contact Typology (LCT) of World Englishes*. Section 3 then scrutinises the role of English in educational, professional, recreational and public contexts in Austria. The methodological design is covered in Section 4, followed by a presentation and discussion of the findings in Section 5. Lastly, conclusions are drawn concerning the role of English in the 21st century in Austria.

2. English in Austria

The Austrian constitution establishes German as the country's official language while also granting official recognition to Austrian sign language as well as Croatian, Hungarian and Slovene in specific parts of the country (oesterreich.gv.at 2023). As stated in the EF's latest English proficiency index (EF 2024, 7-8), for which proficiency levels in 116 countries and regions were measured and evaluated, Austria is in the top ten of highly proficient countries, with Vienna in third place in the international capital city ranking. Although omnipresent in many different domains of life in Austria (Smit/Schwarz 2019), English has not been granted official status. To classify the role of English in individual countries, in the past, many scholars relied on Kachru's (1985) three-circle model of world Englishes. The model categorised countries regarding the status of English into

¹ This study is part of a larger study investigating ISLL and foreign language enjoyment (see Neumeier submitted, 2023).

the norm-providing inner circle (e.g., the USA), the norm-developing outer circle (e.g., India) and the norm-dependent expanding circle (e.g., Brazil) in relation to a country's "types of spread, patterns of acquisition and functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages" (e.g., Brazil; Kachru 1985, 12, 16). Hence, Austria would be situated in the expanding circle. Forty years later, this classification might be outdated, especially in Europe. As the categorisation of the present-day status of English requires an innovative, multifaceted model, Smit/Onysko (forthcoming, 1) propose the use of the *Language Contact Typology of World Englishes* (LCT; Onysko 2016).

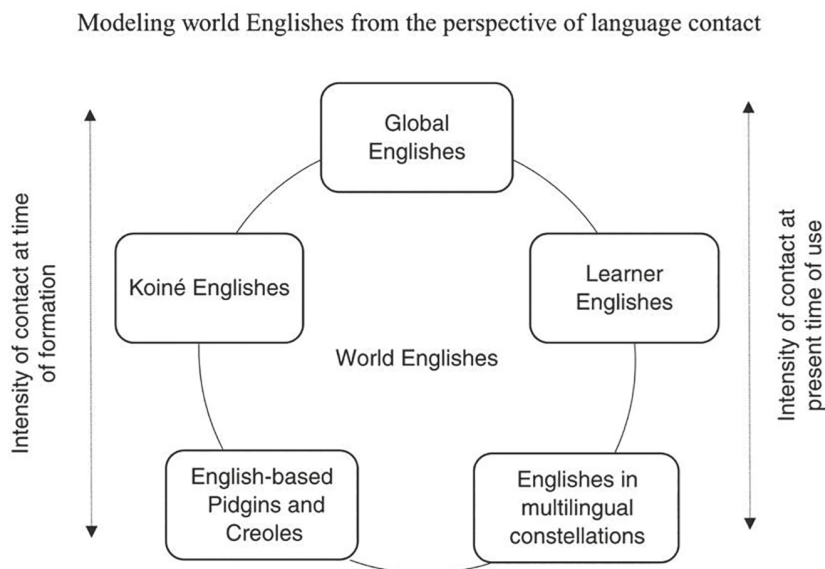


Fig. 1: Language Contact Typology of World Englishes (Onysko 2016, 213)

The LCT is a classification model that posits the ubiquity of contact between different languages and codes, which is a prerequisite for the development of language. Five contact settings are proposed but only two are relevant in the Austrian setting (Smit/Onysko forthcoming): *Global Englishes* express the prevalence of English in different areas of life without official recognition (e.g., anglicisms) while *Learner Englishes* comprise characteristics of the speaker's first language (L1) in educational settings and English as a lingua franca scenarios (Onysko 2016, 212-214). The types of *Englishes in multilingual constellations*, *English-based Pidgins and Creoles* and *Koiné Englishes* do not apply to the current context. The prominence of *Global* and *Learner Englishes* in educational, professional and recreational settings will be outlined below.

3. English in educational, professional and recreational contexts

In Austria's education system, English takes on a prominent role as it is the only area with explicit language planning and policies, usually serving as the primary second language taught in formal language classrooms (Smit/Schwarz 2019, 295; Vetter 2024, 204). Although one of the main aims of kindergartens is to enhance children's German language proficiency, there are some kindergarten groups across the country that incorporate bilingual elements of English or other languages into their routines (e.g., Stadt-WIEN.at 2022). In primary school, English has been a compulsory subject since 2002/2003 (De Cillia/Haller 2013, 159) with a recently implemented target proficiency level of A1 after the fourth grade (*Primary School Curriculum* 2023, 66; Virtuelle PH 2022). English as a foreign language (EFL) is also taught regularly in all grades in secondary education (Vetter 2024, 202). Additionally, some secondary schools offer English-medium *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL) classes, which is "a dual-focused educational approach in which an **additional language** is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language" (Coyle et al. 2010, 1, emphasis in original). Upper secondary technical colleges were the first school types where CLIL was implemented as a mandatory subject in 2011, followed by other vocational schools (Smit/Onysko forthcoming, 3; Dalton-Puffer/Smit 2013, 547). Moving on to tertiary education, Gaisch et al. (2021, 281) state: "English has made it into Austrian higher education institutions (HEIs), and it is here to stay". To describe this setting, the terms EMI (English-medium instruction) and EME (English-medium education) have been used frequently in the past. However, to provide a more holistic and inclusive conceptualisation of English use among different stakeholders at tertiary level, including students, teachers and administrative staff, Dafouz/Smit (2020, 3) have proposed the term EMEMUS (English-Medium Education in Multilingual University Settings). The term also addresses the fact that in addition to English, there is at least one other language that plays a role in the university setting (Smit/Grau 2024, 97). While teaching and learning in English is not required by official language policies, EMEMUS has become an integral part of university life in Austria as it serves as a lingua franca for academic purposes and helps to internationalise tertiary education (Smit/Grau 2024, 96-98). A study by Gaisch et al. (2021, 300) further underlines the presence of an implicit bilingual language policy of German and English in higher education, especially in the areas of conducting and publishing research, where English also serves as academic lingua franca (Dannerer 2018, 180). Furthermore, the use of English and German has been observed in the areas of postgraduate study programmes, internal HEI communication, financing and marketing (Gaisch et al. 2021, 300). Most studies on EMEMUS in Austria have focused on stakeholder perceptions while less attention has been paid to the extent of English use (Smit/Grau 2024,

101). For a detailed account of EMEMUS in Austrian higher education, see Smit/Grau (2024). Against this backdrop, it can be concluded that English fulfils a vital function in Austria's education system – from pre-primary to tertiary education.

Although English serves as a lingua franca in international workplace settings in Austria, such as in HEIs as well as multinational companies (e.g., Bank Austria; cf. Stajic 2015) and organisations (e.g., United Nations), research on the role of English in a professional context or BELF (Business English as a lingua franca) in Austria is mainly limited to tourism contexts. With about 150 million overnight stays in Austria in 2023 (Statistik Austria 2024), it can be inferred that the tourism industry generates numerous employment opportunities. Here, English is the primary medium of choice to communicate with international tourists, service providers and multilingual employees in the tourism sector (Smit/Onysko forthcoming, 8). Examples of tourism-related ELF interactions would be English-language walking tours (e.g., “Viennese women stories” by Prime Tours 2023) or communication among kitchen staff in an alpine hotel restaurant (cf. Gonçalves 2020).

The role of English in the public sphere is also mirrored in Austria's linguistic landscape, which describes “a space's public and private signs including shopfronts, billboards, advertisements, business and personal names, graffiti, and other legible text” (Malloy 2023, 87). A small body of linguistic landscape research in Austria indicates that German is not the only language present. Especially in urban regions, among a multitude of languages and translanguaging practices, English is prominent (Smit/Onysko forthcoming, 8; Soukup 2020, 71-72).

Over the last decade, the number of studies examining how English is used informally by pupils and students in recreational settings in Austria has increased. Scholars have used various terms to define the context, such as Extramural English (EE; Sundqvist 2009), language learning beyond the classroom (Benson 2011) or informal digital learning of English (IDLE; Lee 2021). For the present purpose, informal second language learning (ISLL) will be employed as it functions as an umbrella term. ISLL can be defined as the uninstructed, mainly incidental acquisition of a second language by engaging in naturalistic recreational, professional or educational activities that feature the target language (Dressman 2020, 1; Schurz 2022, 48). The studies conducted in the Austrian context that examined informal second language learning, mainly quantitatively, revealed interesting trends among young people's English language use (Ghamarian-Krenn/Schwarz 2024; Miglbauer 2017; Schurz 2022; Trinder 2017). The patterns will be illustrated using the first comprehensive study in the Austrian context by Schwarz (2020). The study explored EE practices and connections to vocabulary development among 201 academic upper-secondary school pupils between 15 and 16 years of age. The mixed-methods study showed that over 96% of them engaged with at least one EE activity almost daily. Music, audiovisual media and other (receptive)

online activities were among the most popular EE practices. The study demonstrated that the frequency of EE use had a positive impact on receptive vocabulary knowledge (Schwarz 2020, 340-343).

High levels of English language use in leisure settings are also reflected in the increasing number of English-language free time activities offered online and in predominantly urban areas in Austria. Opportunities for English exposure span across media (e.g., news in English on the FM4 radio station, newspaper sections of *Der Standard* and *Salzburger Nachrichten* or English bookstores), entertainment (e.g., English cinema or plays), sports (e.g., sports courses held in English), communities (e.g., choirs, churches or book clubs) and culinary domains (e.g., pub quiz evenings; Smit/Onysko forthcoming, 11).

In essence, the functions of English in Austria are multifaceted and diverse, suggesting an unofficial language policy of “globalized bilingualism” of German and English in Austria (Smit/Schwarz 2019). In Austria, the extent of English language use in the world of work and in EMEMUS contexts remains to be addressed. While recreational ISLL engagement has been frequently studied among secondary school pupils, who typically attend EFL classes, young adults at different stages of their educational and professional careers – particularly those not currently enrolled in formal English-language instruction – remain an understudied participant group.

4. Methodological design

Against this background, it is essential to investigate English language use across different educational and professional contexts in young people’s lifeworlds. Additionally, the survey study seeks to detect potential differences in recreational ISLL among participants at different educational and professional stages in their young adulthood.

4.1 Participant groups

To address this niche, the current study investigates the role of English in educational and professional settings among young adults who live or have lived in Austria for most of their lives. A broad definition of young adulthood, from “roughly 20 to 35 years of age” (American Psychology Association n.d.) was chosen. The sample was divided into three participant subgroups:

- 1) tertiary students,
- 2) working young adults,
- 3) working students.

Since around 80% of tertiary students in Austria also work while studying (Statista 2019), the third participant subgroup includes those with a small side job of up to

a maximum of 7 hours per week. Speakers of English as a first language as well as students of English and American studies or translation studies were excluded from the survey due to their high natural interest in the language, which could have biased the results.

4.2 Instrument design and distribution

To investigate how young adults in Austria engage with English in different contexts in their daily lives, a mainly quantitative survey including some open-ended items was chosen as a research instrument. As research on English-language use in educational and professional settings in Austria is limited, there are no prior scales that could have been employed for this endeavour. Therefore, the focus was laid on the quantity of time spent with each of the four language skills (i.e., listening, reading, speaking, writing). The recreational ISLL scale was based on previous research and validated using confirmatory factor analysis (see Neumeier submitted).²

Scale	Closed items	Open items	Reliability analysis
Educational English language use	4	1	$\alpha = .927$
Professional English language use	4	1	$\alpha = .901$
Recreational English language use	49	1	subscales ranging from: $\alpha = .6$ to $.77$
Total	57	3	/

Table 1: Construction of the scales

As displayed in Table 1, the survey items relevant to this study consisted of 57 closed items (four items each for educational and professional English-language use, 49 for recreational ISLL) and up to three open-ended items, varying per subgroup. A control item was also included to prevent response bias (Field 2017, 1046f.). Additionally, items asking for demographic participant data were included (e.g., age, gender, field of study/occupation).³ The participants indicated

² The descriptive results of the recreational ISLL scale are presented in detail in Neumeier (submitted); in the current study, the data are only used to answer RQ2 (differences in recreational ISLL between the three subgroups).

³ As this study was part of a larger project, an additional scale on foreign language enjoyment, which is not discussed in this article, formed part of the original survey as well (see Neumeier, submitted).

the frequency of their educational, professional and recreational English-language activities on a Likert scale [1 = (almost) never, 2 = a few times a year, 3 = a few times a month, 4 = a few times a week, 5 = (almost) daily]. Depending on the subgroup, the participants were asked to complete different parts of the survey. Working students were the only subgroup to fill in all three scales.

The items were tested in a pre-piloting phase using three think-aloud protocols, which were employed to elicit the verbalisation of cognitive processes, such as decision making while doing the questionnaire (Schellings et al. 2013, 967). After each think-aloud protocol, the items were improved. Expert feedback also led to improvements. The quantitative pilot study was conducted with 13 people per subgroup, as suggested by Julious (2005). Reliability analysis with the pilot data revealed that the scales' reliability was acceptable to satisfactory according to Field (2017, 1050; see Table 2).

Since German was presumed to be the strongest language for most target participants, the questionnaire was in German.⁴ The flexible online survey tool, *CheckMarket* (Medallia n.d.), ensured data protection according to the GDPR, convenient administration, resource efficiency, flexibility (branching) and an elegant modifiable user interface. The sampling strategy of non-probability sampling was employed, specifically a combination of purposeful convenience and snow-ball sampling (Dörnyei/Taguchi 2010, 61-62.). The questionnaire was distributed through various channels and remained open from 3rd March to 4th April 2023.

4.3 Data analysis

After an initial inspection of the data, the items were normalised by dividing the aggregated scale values by the number of items on the scale. A range of descriptive and inferential statistical analyses was conducted with the data set in SPSS (IBM Corp. 2022) and JASP (JASP Team 2023). The descriptive statistics covered mean values, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis and plots, which were examined to detect first patterns in the data (see Neumeier 2023, for detailed results). Inferential statistical tests commenced with Shapiro-Wilk tests to distinguish between normally and non-normally distributed data, which is an assumption of parametric tests. As the tests showed that the data relevant to the current research interests were not normally distributed, the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test (the equivalent of dependent or paired samples t-test), Mann-Whitney U test (the equivalent of an independent samples t-test), Kruskal-Wallis test (the equivalent of ANOVA) and post-hoc Dunn's test using Bonferroni corrections to detect differences in the data set were used (Goss-Sampson 2019, 80; Field 2017; Loewen/Plonsky 2015). Statistical analyses were conducted at an alpha

⁴ A translation of the items in the three scales can be found in the appendix.

level of $\alpha = .005$. The qualitative data from the open questions were coded using qualitative content analysis in MAXQDA 2022 (Kuckartz/Rädiker 2019; VERBI Software 2021). Iterative coding led to the creation of activity categories (e.g., *phone/video calls*) and broader domains (e.g., *communication*).

5. Findings

This section combines the presentation of the study results and discussion. Quantitative and qualitative data will be presented and analysed.

5.1 Participants

The questionnaire was filled in by 661 people but 25 participants were omitted from the analysis due to early dropouts or incorrect control items, leading to a final sample size of 636 participants. Table 2 depicts the distribution of gender, age and membership of generations of the participant subgroups.

Variable	N	Female	Male	Diverse	Mean age	SD	Gen-Z	Millennials
1. Students	211	147	62	2	22.81	3.07	191	20
2. Working young adults	187	136	49	2	28.10	3.65	55	132
3. Working students	238	160	75	3	25.21	3.9	157	81
Total (%)	636 (100)	443 (69.7)	186 (29.3)	7 (1.1)	25.26	4.1	403 (61.7)	233 (35.7)

Table 2: Gender, mean age and generation according to the three subgroup

[Note. The total may not always equal 100% due to rounding and missing values from early dropouts.]

The distribution of the three participant subgroups was roughly balanced, with the mixed group of young adults who were studying and working at the same time having the most participants. As far as gender is concerned, more than half of the sample identified as female (69.7%), 29.3% as male and seven as diverse. The participants' age ranged from 18 to 35 with an overall mean age of 25.26 ($N = 636$, $SD = 4.1$). To be able to compare the results of the younger generation "Generation Z" with their older cohort "Millennials" (Seemiller/Grace 2019), the distribution of generational membership was also inspected. This study follows Eldridge's (2023) definition of generational boundaries: people born between 1997 and 2012 are classified as Gen-Z and people born between 1988 and 1996 represent Millen-

nials. In the current sample, the ratio of Gen-Z participants (N = 403, 63.4%) to Millennials (N = 233, 36.6%) was almost two thirds to one third. The most prominent fields of study in the student sample were *education, teaching & psychology* (41.06%, N = 85), *economy & management* (26.57%, N = 55) and *health, psychology & social care* (13.04%, N = 27). The most frequent professional fields for the working young adults were *office work, marketing, finance, legal & security* (25.27%, N = 47), *science, education, research & development* (19.89%, N = 7) and *social care, health & beauty* (19.89%, N = 37). For the working students, the most frequent fields of study were *education, teaching & pedagogy* (43%, N = 103), *economy & management* (16%, N = 37) and *health, psychology & social care* (14%, N = 33) while the most frequent occupations were *science, education, research & development* (32%, N = 76), *office, marketing, finance, legal & security* (22%, N = 52) and *tourism, hospitality & recreation* (13%, N = 32).

With regard to English in educational contexts, the two subgroup samples of students and working students were employed for the analysis. For the analysis of English in a professional context, the two subgroup samples of working young adults and working students were drawn on. Hence, working students fulfilled a dual role in the analyses.

5.2 English in professional contexts (RQ1)

Daily use of at least one of the four skills (*listening, reading, speaking, writing*) in a professional context was reported by 30.1% of all working young adults and working students (N = 419 to 421).⁵ This result further underscores the important role of English in Austria in addition to the official language German, confirming the previously mentioned globalised bilingualism (Smit/Schwarz 2019, 309) and contact type of *Global Englishes* (Smit/Onysko forthcoming) in work-related settings. Yet there was considerable variation in professional English-language engagement, as approximately 50% of all working young adults stated that they used English for professional purposes from (almost) never to (almost) daily (M = 2.75, SD = 1.35, IQR = 2.5), which mirrors the fundamental differences between language use in different occupations. The stacked bar chart below displays the frequency distribution of the four skills.

⁵ The data presented here combines the answers of the subgroups of working young adults and working students. The sample size varies due to dropouts during the completion of the professional English-language use scale.

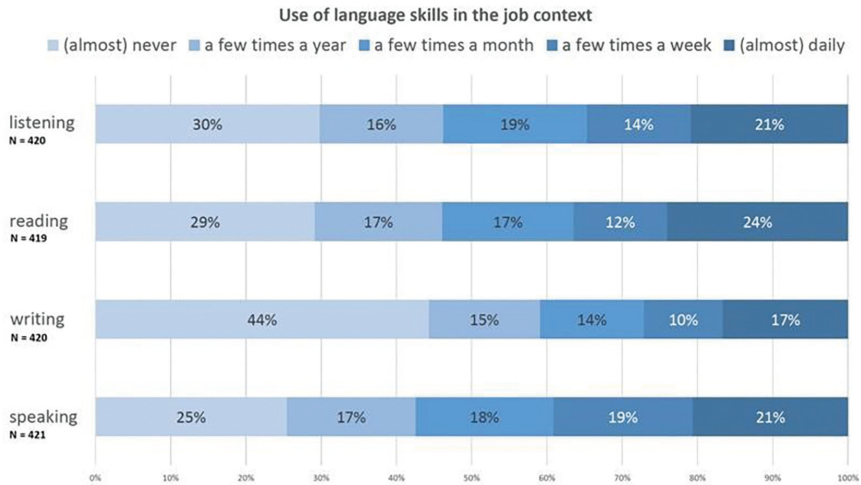


Fig. 2: Distribution of the four skills in professional English-language use

Individually, every skill was used daily by 17% to 24% of working young adults. Over half of the participants needed *listening* (54%), *reading* (53%) and *speaking* (58%) at least a few times a month in their professional context. As these three skills, which are required for spoken interaction, were used at a similar rate, frequent profession-related communicative scenarios in which English functions as a lingua franca among speakers of different languages could be responsible for this result. *Writing* was the least used skill since only 41% of participants needed to write a few times a month and 44% indicated that they rarely ever write in English for their work. Although *writing* was used least often by the participants in the sample, the other productive skill, *speaking*, was used most often, i.e., at least a few times a year by two-thirds of all participants. The results of a Wilcoxon signed-rank test showed that among the working participants, receptive language skills ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.43$) were used significantly more frequently than productive ones for professional purposes ($Z = 8925.5$, $p < .001$). However, the effect size was small ($r_B = .32$). This result could imply that more work time is spent on tasks featuring information processing and uptake. The participants were also asked to disclose the tasks for which they used English in an open-ended question. The word cloud below displays the settings and activities in relation to the frequency of their occurrence.



Fig. 3: Word cloud depicting professional English-language activities

The most salient activities were *communication with clients, patients and suppliers* (76 instances), *communication with colleagues* (54 instances), *emails* (23 instances) and *research* (12 instances) as well as *phone/video calls*, *literature research* and *teaching English* (11 instances each). Using qualitative content analysis, the mentioned activities were allocated to the following domains:

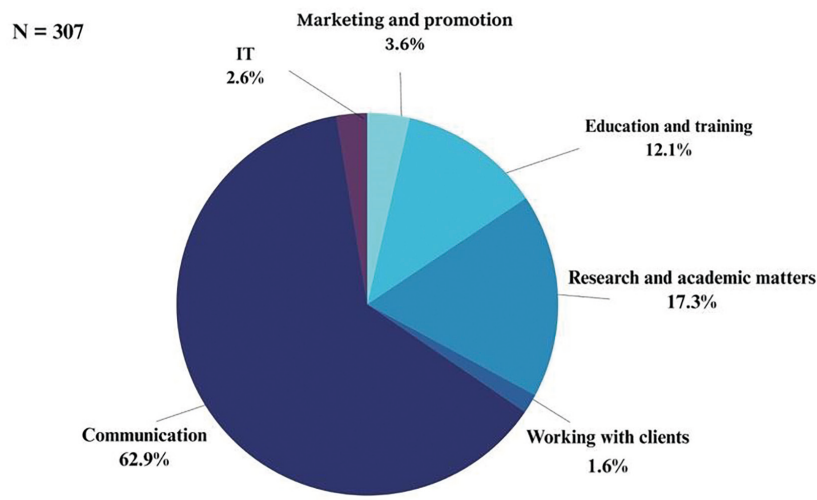


Fig. 4: Domains of professional English-language activities

The majority of activities (62.9%) centred around *communication* (e.g., video/ phone calls or parent-teacher meetings), followed by *research and academic matters* (17.3%; e.g., writing reports or presentations) and *education and training* (12.1%; e.g., professional development or tutoring). The domains of *marketing and*

promotion (e.g., social media and content creation), *IT* (e.g., software and programming) and *working with clients* (e.g., wine tasting or guided tours) made up the remaining activities. These domains are in accordance with the most salient professions of the participants in the sample, namely *education, teaching & psychology, economy & management* and *health, psychology & social car*.

5.3 English in educational contexts (RQ1)

In tertiary education settings, daily use of at least one of the four skills was reported by 25.3% ($N = 443$) of all students, including the working students.⁶ Similar to professional English language use, the sample showed variability as approximately half reported using English for their studies from a few times a year to a few times a week ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.23$, $IQR = 2$). The distribution of the use of the four skills is illustrated in Figure 5 below.

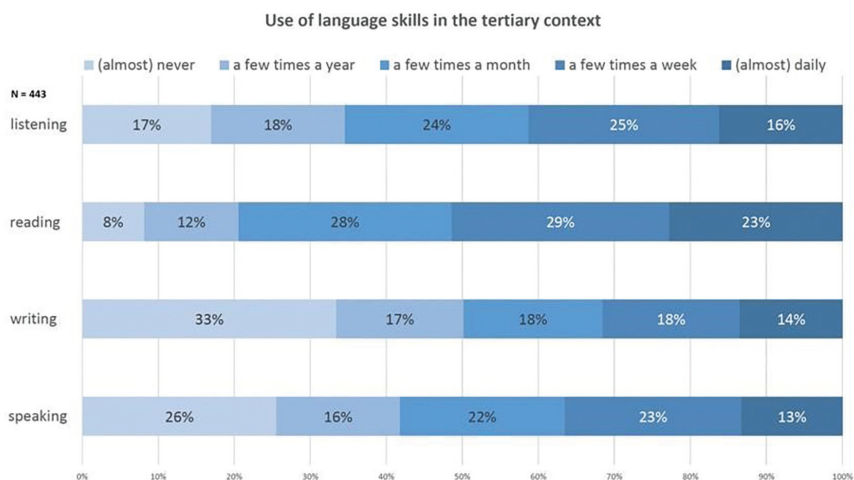


Fig. 5: Distribution of the four skills in educational English-language use

Individually, all four skills were used (almost) every day by 13% (*speaking*) to 23% (*reading*) of the participants enrolled in a tertiary study programme. Moreover, around half of the students needed all skills at least monthly, with *reading* (80%) being the most important, followed by *listening* (65%), *speaking* (58%) and *writing* (50%). It does not come as a surprise that a Wilcoxon signed-rank test revealed that students used receptive skills ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.2$) significantly more often

⁶ The data presented here combine the answers of the subgroups of students and working students.

than productive skills ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.36$) for their studies ($Z = 2368$, $p < .001$). The effect size was medium to large ($r_B = -.86$). The frequent need for the receptive skill *reading* could be explained by large quantities of mandatory reading materials assigned in university courses as well as literature research for written productions. In many disciplines, English has become the number one language for publishing research in Austria (Dannerer 2018, 180). The same reason could account for the higher rate of the *writing* skill as written productions by students could sometimes be expected to be submitted in English in view of increasing EMEMUS in the form of English-medium courses or even programmes in Austria (Smit/Grau 2024, 99). This inference is supported by participant answers displayed in Figure 6, for which the participants were prompted to think about English-language activities which they pursued regularly for their studies. The activities are displayed according to their frequency in the word cloud below.



Fig. 6: Word cloud depicting educational English-language activities

It is salient that *literature*, mentioned by 157 students, was the number one activity. Since English is the international language for publishing research (Kuteeva 2023, 90), this outcome had been anticipated but it also emphasises the role of English language proficiency as a gatekeeper for academic knowledge. *Academic writing* was reported in 28 instances, followed by *university courses* in 26 cases. *Communication with colleagues & lecturers* was reported by 16 students and *video tutorials* by 13. The activities were classified into the following domains depicted in the pie chart below.

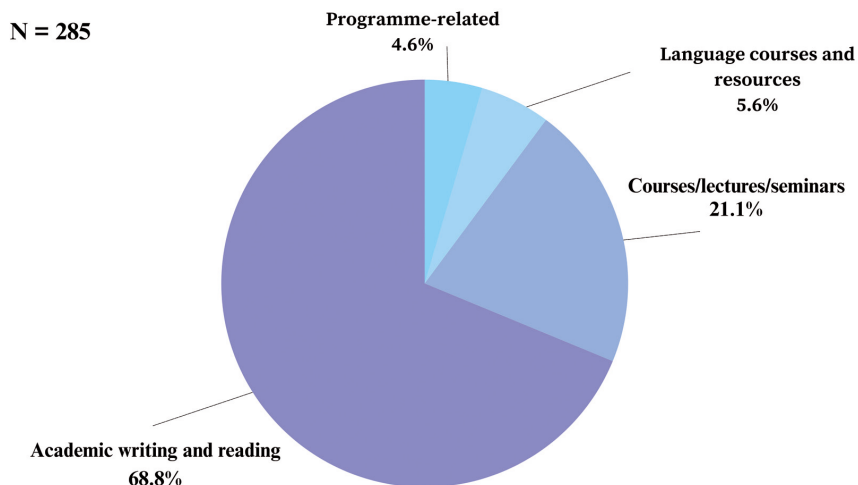


Fig. 7: Domains of educational English-language activities

It is not surprising that *academic reading and writing* (e.g., reading literature or thesis writing) accounted for the vast majority of educational English-language activities, as illustrated in Figure 7. Tasks associated with university *courses/lectures/seminars* made up 21.1% (e.g., communication with colleagues or lecturers). *Language courses and resources* (e.g., Business English or Italian-English dictionary) and *programme-related* aspects (e.g., students in EME programmes) constituted the remaining activities. The fact that more than half of the students (65%) indicated that they needed *listening* at least a few times a month may be due to EME courses, which also feature the activities of participating in *university courses* and *communication with colleagues & lecturers*. Similar bilingual language practices in HEIs, especially in the areas of publishing and postgraduate study programmes, were also described by Gaisch et al. (2021, 297). The rise of different aspects of EMEMUS among the stakeholder group of students in Austria's HEIs is certainly reflected in these results.

5.4 Differences in recreational ISLL between the subgroups (RQ2)

Nearly all participants (95.3%, or 622 out of 653 young adults) demonstrated (almost) daily engagement with English in the free time context. Overall, recreational ISLL engagement showed consistent patterns ($M = 2.41$, $SD = .61$, $IQR = .837$) among the participants. The most common activities, which are pursued almost daily by most of the participants, are *listening to music* (85%), *using English phrases in L1* (57%), *watching TikToks or Reels* (53%), *reading social*

media postings or comments (53%) and *singing (along to) English songs* (52%). Similar to most other studies, the most prominent activities are often receptive and include audiovisual content (Neumeier 2023, 100).

Although recreational ISLL levels among all three participant groups were generally high, a closer inspection of the mean values of the three subgroups was necessary to detect potential differences. Descriptive statistics revealed subtle differences between recreational English language use among the three subgroups: students ($M = 2.48$, $SD = .59$), working young adults ($M = 2.28$, $SD = .61$) and working students ($M = 2.47$, $SD = .59$). As the data were not normally distributed, a Kruskal-Wallis test was used to compare the subgroups. The hypothesis of differing recreational ISLL levels between the three subgroups was confirmed as the test exposed significant differences ($H(2)=11.644$, $p = .003$). Pairwise comparisons using the post-hoc Dunn's test with Bonferroni corrections demonstrated that compared to working young adults, students ($p = .006$) and working students ($p = .004$) used English significantly more often in their free time. This significantly higher use of English in recreational settings by participants who were studying could be connected to lifestyle of the subgroups concerned. For instance, it is possible that in contrast to people who are working full time, students have more free time at their disposal, leading to more opportunities for English-language use in their free time. However, this might not be the case for working students.

Higher recreational ISLL levels among students and working students could also be connected to the composition of the three subgroups with regard to the generations: almost all students (90.52%) and more than half of the working students (65%) were members of Gen-Z while the participant subgroup of working young adults was mainly represented by Millennials (70.59%). To test this hypothesis, a Mann-Whitney U test was employed to detect potential differences in recreational ISLL between members of the two generations. The results demonstrated a significant difference between them ($U = 56496.500$, $p < .001$). Recreational ISLL was significantly more often pursued by members of Gen-Z ($M = 2.49$, $SD = .59$) compared to Millennials ($M = 2.28$, $SD = .6$). These results are possibly connected to the upbringing of Gen-Z since they were the first generation to grow up as “digital natives” in a globalised and digitalised world (Eldridge 2023). As this generation was exposed to English in authentic settings earlier through digital technology and (social) media compared to the generation of Millennials, it could be inferred that members of Gen-Z started an earlier and more intense routine of engaging with English-language content (online).

6. Implications and conclusion

Building on research into ISLL, this survey study examined the under-researched areas of educational and professional English language use among 636 young adults between the ages of 18 and 35 in an exploratory and holistic manner. While

young people in this age group typically no longer attend formal English language instruction, authentic exposure to and use of English in the tertiary context and the workplace setting were of specific interest. Furthermore, differences were investigated in leisure-related English language use between students, working young adults and working students.

The results revealed that approximately one quarter to one third of the participant sample engaged with at least one skill in English in the context of their studies (25.3%, N = 443) or work (30.1%, N = 421) every single day. Receptive language skills were required significantly more often than productive skills in both study and work contexts, suggesting that information processing accounts for a substantial proportion of the time spent with English. Especially when it comes to academic literature, the findings suggest that in many cases, English language proficiency at a level where understanding of academic language is possible is required by students to pursue their studies. Hence, in the context of academic literature, English actually functions as a gatekeeper for information that is not available in German. Nevertheless, the most prominent domains in both contexts, i.e., *communication* in work-related settings and *academic reading and writing* in study-programme-related settings also require productive English skills. Hence, while information processing is crucial, the need for productive language use remains essential for key academic and professional tasks. English also permeates the recreational context: as hypothesised, differences in English language use between the subgroups were detected since students and working students alike, both predominantly composed of members of Gen-Z, had significantly higher levels of ISLL in free time contexts. This potentially echoes the differing lifestyles between members of Gen-Z and Millennials among the participants.

Despite its contributions, there is also a set of limitations to the study at hand. Firstly, as with any study relying on non-probability sampling and self-reported data, the results are prone to desirability and self-selection bias. Secondly, the considerable differences in the scope of the three scales complicate comparisons between the educational and professional English language use scales and the recreational ISLL scale, as the latter is much more comprehensive. Thirdly, as indicated above, language skills are rarely used in isolation: in the salient example of communication – depending on written or spoken communication – at least two skills are necessary simultaneously.

As research on how English is actually used in educational and professional settings in Austria is rare and the current findings mainly provide a general descriptive overview, ethnographic approaches to academic and BELF workplace communication would be promising. Especially in spoken interaction, examining potential translanguaging practices would be intriguing. Less intrusive research could be conducted with publicly available online data from social media feeds from universities or company web pages to find out how (much) English is used for academic and business communication. The dominance of English in global

web content (approximately 60% in January 2023; Statista 2023) suggests that Austrian social media users likely encounter English-language content for professional purposes in their feeds, for example in the form of advertisements. Moreover, research on the role of English across different domains of life in other European contexts would be interesting.

In conclusion, this widespread use of English in Austria across *classrooms, careers and cafés*, especially among younger generations, implies that English serves as the “default additional language” where globalised bilingual language practices occur (Smit/Schwarz 2019, 309). Furthermore, the study has confirmed the presence of the contact types of *Global* and *Learner Englishes* (Smit/Onysko forthcoming), emphasising that even after Brexit in 2020, English remains relevant in all walks of life in the present-day European context.

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Appendix

Educational ISLL

- I speak English in the context of my studies
- I write in English for my studies
- I read in English for my studies
- I listen to English for my studies
- I use English for the following activities related to my studies: [open-ended item]

Professional ISLL

- I speak English in the context of my job
- I write in English for my job
- I read in English for my job
- I listen to English for my job
- I use English for the following activities related to my job: [open-ended item]

Recreational ISLL

I listen to English-language music
I watch English-language music videos
I sing (along to) English songs
I go to concerts with English-language music
I read English song lyrics (e.g. on Spotify)
I write English song lyrics
I watch movies in English
I watch series in English
I watch YouTube videos (not music videos)
I watch documentaries in English
I watch English-language films, series, videos, etc. with English subtitles
I use English-language keywords when doing internet searches (e.g. via Google)
I watch English-language TikToks or Reels
I produce digital content in English to post online (e.g. TikToks, Insta postings, blog postings, podcasts, etc.)
I play computer games (single-player) in English
I play computer games (multi-player) in English
When I play computer games with other players, I use English in the chat
When I play computer games with other players, I speak English via TeamSpeak, Mumble, etc.
I play mobile games in English (e.g. Clash of Clans)
I program in English
When I use dating apps, I communicate with my matches in English
I use apps that are based on artificial intelligence in English (e.g. ChatGPT)
I read books in English
I listen to podcasts, audiobooks or radio stations in English (e.g., FM4)
I read newspaper or magazine articles in English (online or offline)
I read informative or instructional texts in English (e.g., recipes)
I read English-language short stories
I read English-language fanfiction
I read comics or mangas in English
I read blog or forum entries in English
I read emails in English (not related to work or my studies)
I read direct messages in English (e.g., via WhatsApp, Insta, etc.)
I read English-language postings and comments on social media
I write stories in English
I write poetry in English
I write fan literature in English
I write blog entries or forum posts in English
I write emails in English (outside of work and educational contexts)
I write English messages via SMS, WhatsApp, Signal, Facebook Messenger, Insta DMs, etc.

- I write posts or comments in English for social media
- I write lists or notes in English
- I write a diary in English
- I speak English with other people (offline)
- I make (video) phone calls in English (outside of work and education contexts)
- I send voice messages in English
- I use English words or phrases when I speak in German
- I think or speak to myself in English
- I daydream in English
- I play board games in English
- I pursue other leisure activities in English, namely ... [open-ended item]

Appendix

Statement on the access to media and communication devices in all European Languages

This Statement is addressed to the European Commission and the European Parliament as a plea to support national governments in gaining access to media content and communication devices in the languages of their citizens.

Statement on the access to media and communication devices in all European Languages

The members of the European Federation of National Institutions for Language (EFNIL) note that the situation for European languages has changed significantly in the digital age and there is an increasing demand by European citizens to access electronic communication devices and media in their own language.

EFNIL is concerned that the language practices of international corporations constrain the linguistic diversity of the European Union, endanger the maintenance of European multilingualism and are not in accordance with the principles of the European Parliament resolution of 11 September 2018 on language equality in the digital age (2018/2028 (INI)).

The language practices of international corporations interfere with national language legislation and standardisation work. International corporations who distribute electronic communication devices in the European Union do not in all cases offer to European consumers the choice of all the official languages of the European Union or the official regional languages of the member states in electronic communication devices, such as spell checkers, automatic translation, and other language technology based software solutions that are sold independently or as part of another device or product.

We also note that even if language support is offered, not all language technology products respect and support the official national rules for spelling, grammar, terminology etc. that public institutions in most European states are obliged to follow.

The same is observed for streaming service providers, which offer their products and content via the internet. Some companies offer products and services on the European market which allow the user to choose between multiple varieties of English, but do not offer subtitles or dubbing for all of the 24 official languages of the European Union or allow adding language plug-ins (spell checkers etc.) for the languages that they do not support.

The European Union needs to ensure that its citizens have access to media platforms and services in all European national and regional languages. We urge

the European Union to adapt the relevant directives (e.g. Directive 2010/13/EU on audiovisual media services, Directive 2002/21/EC on a common regulatory framework for electronic communications networks and services) to this situation.

We fear that the lack of availability of popular media content in national and regional languages will lead to a diminished role of the languages that are not supported. There is a severe risk that these languages will experience changes in their status and use, at least in some parts of society, in favour of the more dominant languages. This may especially affect children, people who experience challenges with the acquisition of the official state languages, and persons working in or studying fields where English already has established itself as the dominant language, such as technology and science.

We believe that the recent developments in artificial intelligence, e.g. the use of large language models, have the potential to further accelerate these trends, as the availability and especially the quality and performance of large language models in languages other than English is already rather limited.

Call for action

EFNIL therefore calls for an initiative on the European level demanding that national legislation should be respected wherever media content or communication devices are offered to European citizens, to support European governments as they strive to secure access to technology for all citizens in their own language.

Examples of insufficient digital services in official European Languages

Online streaming services such as Netflix, Disney+, Amazon Prime

European legislation (Directive 2010/13/EU on audiovisual media services) requires that media companies provide adequate translation of their content in the official language(s) of the country where their company is registered. However, with the advent of online content, especially online streaming services, the service provider may be placed in one country, but distributes products and services all over Europe. As a consequence, the provision of adequate translation of content into other languages is left to market mechanisms, which tend to exclude languages with smaller numbers of speakers or provide content of very low linguistic quality (automatically translated subtitles etc.). In this way, current EU legislation has the side effect that it encourages non-compliance with the national language provisions that aim to protect the interest of the citizens.

This problem concerns, for instance, official languages in Slovenia, Croatia, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia.

Spell checkers in services such as Google Documents, Apple OS

Many spell checkers are based purely on artificial intelligence and probabilities gathered from random sources and do not take into account the norms of each language. Suggested spellings are frequently erroneous or redundant. Such an example is the spell checker in Google documents, which does not comply with the official spelling rules for Slovene. Even if high-quality spell checkers or similar products have been developed on a national level for an officially recognised language, international system providers, such as Microsoft and Google, do not allow the integration of these tools to be used as individual or local plug-ins.

The problem concerns, for instance, official languages in Norway (New Norwegian), Slovenia, and many minority languages, regional languages and officially recognised languages in all parts of Europe, for instance Greenlandic.

User interfaces on smart devices such as Apple OS, iOS and Android

Apple smartphone devices do not offer support for 5 out of the 24 official EU languages in interfaces on smart devices, such as Apple OS, iOS, Carplay etc.

This problem concerns, for instance, Estonian, Latvian, Maltese, and Slovenian.

Maltese is also absent from the default language list of Android, and the official writing and reading of place names and street names in Maltese is not available on Google Maps.

We acknowledge that newer versions and updates of the services from time to time include more languages, however, the current situation, where even official EU language users have to wait 4 to 8 years before new technology becomes available in their mother tongue, is absolutely unacceptable.

Adopted by EFNIL's General Assembly 23 September 2024.

European Federation of National Institutions for Language (EFNIL): Member institutions

For detailed information on EFNIL and its members see www.efnil.org

Member institutions grouped by country

Austria	<i>Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum</i> , Graz Austrian Centre for Language Competence <i>Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften</i> , Wien Austrian Academy of Sciences
Belgium	<i>Ministère de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Service de la Langue française</i> , Bruxelles/Brussels Federation Wallonia-Brussels
Bulgaria	<i>Българска академия на науките, Институт за български език</i> , Sofia Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Institute for the Bulgarian Language
Croatia:	<i>Institut za hrvatski jezik</i> , Zagreb Institute of Croatian Language
Czech Republic	<i>Ústav pro jazyk český Akademie Věd České republiky, v.v.i.</i> , Praha/Prague Czech Language Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences
Denmark	<i>Dansk Sprognævn</i> , København/Copenhagen Danish Language Council
Estonia	<i>Eesti Keele Instituut</i> , Tallin Institute of the Estonian Language <i>Eesti Keelenõukogu</i> , Tallin Estonian Language Council
Finland	<i>Kotimaisten kielten keskus, Institutet för de inhemska språken</i> , Helsinki/Helsingfors Institute for the Languages of Finland

France	<i>Délégation Générale à la langue française et aux langues de France</i> , Paris General Delegation for the French Language and the Languages of France
Georgia	<i>Tbilisi State University</i> , Tbilisi State Language Department
Germany	<i>Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache</i> , Mannheim Leibniz-Institute for the German Language <i>Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung</i> , Darmstadt German Academy for Language and Literature
Greece	<i>Κέντρο Ελληνικής Γλώσσας</i> , Thessaloniki Centre for the Greek Language
Hungary	<i>Hungary ELTE Nyelvtudományi Kutatóközpont</i> , Budapest ELTE Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics
Ireland	<i>Foras na Gaeilge</i> , Dublin The all-island body for the Irish language
Iceland	<i>Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum</i> , Reykjavík The Árni Magnússon Institute of Icelandic Studies
Italy	<i>Accademia della Crusca</i> , Firenze/Florence The central academy for the Italian language <i>CNR – Opera del Vocabolario Italiano</i> , Firenze/Florence Italian Dictionary Institute
Latvia	<i>Latviešu valodas institūts</i> , Riga Latvian Language Institute <i>Latviešu valodas aģentūra</i> , Riga State Language Agency
Lithuania	<i>Lietuvių Kalbos Institutas</i> , Vilnius Institute of the Lithuanian Language <i>Valstybinė Lietuvių Kalbos Komisija</i> , Vilnius The State Commission for the Lithuanian Language

Luxembourg	<i>Institut Grand-Ducal</i>, Luxembourg Grand Ducal Institute <i>Zenter fir d'Lëtzebuenger Sprooch vum Ministère fir Educatioun, Kanner a Jugend</i>, Luxembourg Center for the Luxembourgish Language of the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth
Malta	<i>Il-Kunsill Nazżjonali tal-Ilsien Malti</i>, Floriana National Council of the Maltese Language
Netherlands	<i>Instituut voor de Nederlandse Taal</i>, Leiden Dutch Language Institute <i>Nederlandse Taalunie</i>, Den Haag/The Hague Union for the Dutch Language
Norway	<i>Språkrådet</i>, Oslo The Language Council of Norway
Poland	<i>Rada Języka Polskiego przy Prezydium Polskiej Akademii Nauk</i>, Warszawa/Warsaw Council for the Polish Language
Romania	<i>Academia Română</i>, Bucureşti/Bucharest Romanian Academy
Slovakia	<i>Jazykovedný ústav Ľudovíta Štúra Slovenskej akadémie vied</i>, Bratislava Ludovit Štúr Institute of Linguistics, Slovak Academy of Sciences
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European Federation of National Institutions for Language

Sabine Kirchmeier / Tamás Váradi (eds.)

Linguistic diversity and language planning

The effect of societal and
technological factors

Contributions to the EFNIL Conference 2024 in Budapest

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This publication compiles insights from EFNIL's 21st conference in 2024 in Budapest, focusing on the intersections between linguistic diversity, language planning and the influences exerted by societal and technological factors drawing on case studies from various European countries.

The articles demonstrate that with the societal changes caused by increasing mobility, globalisation and digital technologies, national languages in Europe face a significant shift in their traditional roles and statuses. Their role as markers of national identity and dominant forces in the public domain, education, government and media, is challenged where they no longer function as the sole mother tongue for a large proportion of citizens, particularly in urban areas. However, in these situations, national languages still play a vital role as bridging or contact languages.

We see an increasing commitment in European countries and the EU to preserve linguistic richness and multilingualism, leading to efforts to support regional and minority languages. To this end, technological advancements present good opportunities, by enabling new forms of language support and accessibility, but also the risk that languages with fewer digital data are left behind.

*Edited by Sabine Kirchmeier, President of EFNIL,
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