

# ARE MODELS OF MULTILINGUALISM TRANSFERABLE FROM WESTERN TO CENTRAL/EASTERN EUROPEAN CONTEXTS?

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*The study of multilingualism is becoming ever more urgent as the ongoing rise in the rate of migration into and across Europe increasingly adds to existing levels of language diversity and contact in Europe. Critically examining the diverging sociolinguistic settings in Western and Central/Eastern Europe, this paper discusses issues pertaining to the transferability of models of multilingualism. It argues that language management practices need to involve critical analyses of language in society that take into account the historic conditions of language (ideological) contexts.*

*Keywords: models of multilingualism; transferability of language policy; language ideology; language practices; Western and Central/Eastern Europe; Baltics.*

## 1. Introduction

Multilingualism is becoming an ever more prominent phenomenon in Europe, challenging Romantic notions of linguistic homogeneity. As, increasingly, transnational movements of people within Europe further add to existing levels of language diversity and contact, most countries see themselves confronted with the challenge (how) to address issues of linguistic and cultural pluralism. In addressing this issue, this paper explores whether models of multilingualism are transferable from Western to Central/Eastern European contexts. Our primary point of reference in the West will be Switzerland, which is often hailed as an example for its handling of linguistic and cultural diversity within a multilingual state. We shall also consider aspects concerning the transferability of international frameworks and laws from Western to Central/Eastern European contexts. The analysis will focus on the following components of language policy (see Spolsky 2005, 257f): sociolinguistic ecology; language practices; the system of beliefs about language held by the speech community and its various members; language ideology. One of the main conclusions will be to point out the need for situated, critical analyses of language and society in post-Soviet settings, analyses that take into account the historic conditions of language (ideological) contexts (Blommaert 1999; Dini 2005) for a successful

deployment of bottom-up language management practices (see Hogan-Brun 2005a) in support of existing levels of multilingualism.

## **2. Multilingualism and the nation-state: approaches and challenges**

Most countries are hosts to diverse speech communities. Historically, multilingual language groups have evolved in a number of ways. These can be the result of conquest and the subsequent incorporation of speakers of different languages into a single political unit, of voluntary or enforced migration, or of colonisation (Spolsky 1998, 52f). The unique blend of multilingualism in many Central/Eastern European countries echoes such a variegated past. Other multilingual states, such as Switzerland and Belgium, came into existence through a federation of different language communities. In our days, growing movements of people within Europe further adds to existing levels of language diversity and contact in most European countries (cf. Extra & Yarmur 2004).

Increasingly, many states see themselves confronted with the challenge (how) to address issues of linguistic and cultural pluralism. Essentially, this issue tends to clash with national ideologies based on Herderian notions of 'one nation, one state, one language' (see elaborations by Wright 2000, 15f; May 2001, 57f; also Barbour & Carmichael 2000), that become established in the 19th century and persisted in the political and popular conception of nationhood until late modern times. In Western Europe, this was a prolonged process. With more recent nations, or in settings where independence was re-established, decisions pertaining to the role of language have important symbolic or political meaning and have tended to be enshrined in a language clause in the Constitution or in a language law. Here, an additional provision for the rights of linguistic minorities often extends such laws along guidelines set by international framework conventions (as elaborated by Hogan-Brun & Wolff 2003; see also Grin 2004; Nic Craith 2003; Adrey 2005). Often, national constitutions aim at establishing linguistic homogeneity, where a single language is selected to be official (France, Austria, Greece, Norway, Poland, to name a few); others nonetheless recognize bilingualism (Canada, Finland, Luxembourg, Ireland), or multilingualism (South Africa, Singapore)<sup>1</sup>. When there are two or three significant languages involved, the solution tends to be territorial: in both Belgium and Switzerland, the languages are made official according to their demographic distribution (Spolsky 2005, 258f).

Fishman (1977) proposes ethnic and linguistic diversity as a normal condition that is necessary and desirable if we are to celebrate the human race in all its manifestations. It is one of the primary goals of the sociology of language, as he coined it (or sociolinguistics) to assert principles of linguistic and cultural pluralism (Coupland & Jaworski 1997, 324). In the following section we shall explore how this ideal is dealt with in quadrilingual Switzerland. In doing so, we shall dwell on the following questions: What are the conditions that have led to this peculiar way of dealing with diversity in the wrong multilingual state? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Swiss model? Subsequently, in the penultimate section, we shall consider whether this model is transferable to Central/Eastern European contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on language planning in national contexts see Kaplan & Baldauf (1997, 324-340).

### 3. The multilingual context in Switzerland

Despite its relatively small population of seven million, Switzerland has four national languages, namely: German, French, Italian and Rheto-Romansh. According to the last Swiss national census (Census 2000), 63.7 % speakers of Swiss German declared it to be their main language (in dialect form); for 20.4 % of the population this was French, for 6.5 % Italian, and for 0.5 % Rheto-Romansh. Just over one tenth of the overall population (10.8 %) consider another language to be their first tongue, in descending order: 6.5 %, Serbo-Croatian 1.5 %, Albanian 1.3 %, Portuguese 1.2 %, Spanish 1.1 %, English 1 %, other 2.8 % (World Factbook). These people mainly live in urbanised areas, particularly Zürich, Basle and Geneva.

It is always the case that historical factors are crucial in understanding the mechanisms of a language situation. In the Swiss context, a diachronic perspective helps to explain the roots and weaknesses of Swiss quadrilingualism. The Swiss Confederation was founded in 1291 as a defensive union ('coalition de résistances'; Watts 1997, 280) of three small German-speaking communities in the central Swiss Alpine valleys. The subsequent growth of Switzerland to its current boundaries was one of slow accretion. These three cantons were gradually joined by other (German, French, and Italian and Rheto-Romansh speaking) ones, in an attempt to resist the imperialism of the surrounding, more powerful states France and Austria. The boundaries, which contained speakers of four languages, were recognised at the Congress in Vienna in 1815. This then led to the establishment of the Swiss national constitution in 1848. Since this happened when surrounding nation-states were being formed on the basis of the one language/one nation-state ideology, Switzerland had to legitimise its multilingual existence. Hence the supposedly destabilising nature of Swiss multilingualism had to be turned into an advantage and construed as a worthy trait. Switzerland became a 'nation of will' (*Willensnation*) that is precisely defined by its linguistic diversity (Grin 1998, 2). By 1874, the official status of German, French and Italian was confirmed in a revised version of the Federal Constitution; Rheto-Romansh however was only granted national status in 1938 (Watts 1997, 281). The main factor that has contributed to the continued maintenance of the management of linguistic diversity in Switzerland is the fact that neither its German, French, Italian or Rheto-Romansh speaking parts ever belonged to the neighbouring countries Germany, Austria, France or Italy. There has consequently not been any *reapprochement* to kin states by language groups as can be observed in some Central/Eastern European countries.

Administratively, Switzerland is divided into 26 cantons (*Kantone*). They are allowed linguistic autonomy according to the Swiss constitution (Article 47, Appendix) and designate their own official languages (Article 70, Section 2, Appendix). Seventeen cantons chose German, four French, three both, one Italian, and one Rheto-Romansh, Italian and German. The bilingual cantons (Fribourg-Freiburg, Biel-Bienne, Wallis-Valais) and the trilingual canton (Graubünden/Grigioni/Grischun) are struggling to find a way to draft a language item for their constitution, and they receive support from the Federation in the fulfillment of their particular tasks (Article 70, Section 4, Appendix).

The three institutional principles of language territoriality, language freedom, and language subsidiarity represent the pillars of diversity management in Switzerland (Grin 1999, 3f). According to the territoriality principle, cantons are empowered to ensure the extent of language homogeneity on their territory (Article 70, Section 2, Appendix). Entitlement to language free-

dom (Article 18, Appendix) means that residents are provided with the fundamental right to use any language of their choice in the private spheres, in commerce and business. The subsidiarity principle works on the basis that language policy happens at the level of the cantons; it is therefore highly decentralised. In the Retho-Romansh speaking areas, decision-making is in fact devolved to the smallest communities. Since education also is a cantonal matter (Article 62, section 1)<sup>2</sup>, the consequence is that schooling is provided in the medium of the territorial languages only. This contrasts with the education system found in the Baltic countries, where existing multilingualisms are supported through various models of minority language-medium education.<sup>3</sup>

This territorial arrangement, which is characterised by a symmetry *de jure* between the cantons, has worked since the 1848 Constitution for the management of linguistic and cultural diversity within a loosely federated, multilingual state. However, this localised system also entails some challenges (see also Watts 1997; Grin 1999; Stotz 2006, forthcoming), which will now be briefly touched upon.

One of the consequences of localised language policy is the fact that the linguistic boundaries in Switzerland are sharp in nature. On the whole, it is fair to say that Swiss national multilingualism in Switzerland does not necessarily result in individual bilingualism or multilingualism (see also Watts 1997). Living in Switzerland tends to mean speaking mostly Swiss German (on a diglossic level, where dialects are mainly used for oral communication, with Standard High German serving for written purposes)<sup>4</sup>, French or Italian<sup>5</sup>. In the Retho-Romansh speaking area, the presence of Swiss German is strong, which has led to language attrition of Switzerland's fourth national language<sup>6</sup>.

With no official language policy at state level, there are significant infrastructural differences between the four national languages. Originally, only German, French and Italian were designated as official languages. The difficulties of status and use for Retho-Romansh led to a recent overhaul of the constitution's regulations on languages to provide more support for this community. According to the new regulations (Article 70, Section 1 of Appendix), Retho-Romansh is now also an official language (but only) for communicating with persons of that language. Along a similar vein, the Federation has also committed itself to support the measu-

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<sup>2</sup> The Federation however legislates on professional education (Article 62, Section 1, Appendix) and supports universities and institutions of higher learning (Article 62, Section 2, Appendix).

<sup>3</sup> For comparative information on different models of schooling found in the Baltic states see Hogan-Brun & Ramonienė (2004).

<sup>4</sup> Swiss German (*Schwyzerdütsch*) is an overarching term for a large variety of regional dialects spoken in that part of Switzerland. They are a geographical rather than sociological phenomenon and represent a core value of local cultural integrity. Their use frequently presents a comprehension problem in interactions with speakers of French or Italian, even if they are proficient in Standard High German (*Hochdeutsch*). For more information on attitudes towards Swiss German dialects see Rash (2000).

<sup>5</sup> In the Italian speaking part of Switzerland by contrast, the use of the Lombard dialects is more restricted, and Provençal French is hardly heard any more (Watts 1997, 276f).

<sup>6</sup> Retho-Romansh is formed of five distinct dialects. The area lacks a major cultural and commercial centre, which further hampers efforts to preserve its culture and language.

res taken by the Cantons of Grisons and Ticino to maintain and promote Retho-Romansh and Italian (Article 70, Section 5 of Appendix), whose inadequate public visibility has been blamed on the rigidity of the territorial principle.

With the enormous increase in migration, which, as noted above, has resulted in the fact that roughly one tenth of the resident population do not consider one of the Swiss national languages as their main one, there are concerns that migrant children should be offered mother tongue education in Switzerland. Such an extension of language rights for the alleviation of migrant children could then logically also be applied to Swiss nationals to enable them to be taught in a language other than that of their own territory.

Another much debated area of concern is the fact that some cantons have introduced English as the first additional language to be taught in primary schools, thus relegating the study of other national languages to second place. This fact may well affect harmonious inter-community understanding and relations in the long run, as it de-legitimises the languages of the other autochthonous communities in the country.

In the face of these challenges, it has widely been argued (Watts 1997; Grin 1999; Stotz 2006, forthcoming) that the low-key approach to language policy maintained by the federal government is no longer sufficient, and that a shift to a more active language policy may well become necessary.

#### **4. Is a transferability of the Swiss multilingual model possible?**

The question that concerns us here is whether the Swiss model of multilingualism is transferable to Central/Eastern European contexts. This hypothesis seems of limited validity, for the following reasons: There is no separate national consciousness amongst speakers of German, French, Italian or Retho-Romansh. The differences in Switzerland are based on well-anchored linguistic *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977, 78) alone, without the corollaries of plural identities. The transferability of the Swiss model seems fundamentally limited due to its particular historic, cultural, geo-linguistic and demo-linguistic conditions and configurations. To be successful, the application of the territoriality principle must have its roots in an uninterrupted geo-linguistic historic tradition. It is not likely to work in contexts where an external language has been used to impose a changed language hierarchy. As far as subsidiarity is concerned, this needs to be based on a federal system. Through the decentralisation of power, language policy is then adopted to local conditions, which empowers communities to actively determine the management of their language environment. These historically rooted facets are the central characteristics that underpin the Swiss model of multilingualism.

It is questionable whether an application of such principles would contribute to a harmonious co-existence in post-imperial contexts. Whilst the four languages have national status in the Swiss model, multilingualism in post-Soviet settings involves (formerly dominant) minority languages that have a different status in the life of these nations. In the Baltic countries, where mechanisms have been put in place to correct the effects of Soviet language imperialism, it is now in the interest of the minority representatives to learn their state language. The growing prestige of the titular languages has propelled their increasing use and, as has been widely observed, numerous minority representatives claim to have acquired relevance proficiency

(for comparative figures see Hogan-Brun 2003, 122). Such a large-scale move to the titular languages that is associated with shifting values becomes symbolic for some, and this process can be described as socially motivated. It is a response to the psychological realities of people's lives, where a changed of linguistic habit becomes a passport to a new identity<sup>7</sup> of individuals who have become accustomed to the hegemony of their national language and feel that it is a critical part of their new selves (see also Hogan-Brun & Ramonienė 2005, 437).

However, it is precisely the recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity that figured as an area of concern during the course of EU admission negotiations. But the recommendations that were made under Western monitoring regarding minority language and citizenship rights clashed with local language ideologies that sought to redress past colonial language relations. The issue arose as to whether the international frameworks and laws used by Western actors were adequately suited to take account of the effects of past colonial settings (for an in-depth discussion see Hogan-Brun 2005a, 371f). Whilst these instruments are considered valuable in the West, they were developed to set standards that are largely based on Western models of multiculturalism for the promotion of respect for ethno-cultural diversity. However, as Will Kymlicka (2001, 22) observes, it must be borne in mind that Western ideals of multicultural citizenship are quite recent; since ethno-cultural diversity is no longer seen as an existential threat to states in the West, such ideals 'have gradually moved out of the <security/loyalty> framework into the framework of <normal politics>.' For many formerly colonialised countries however, the treatment of (previously dominant) minority groups is still viewed primarily in terms of (state) security. Hence whilst more liberal ideas towards minority rights went hand-in-hand with the 'desecuritisation' of ethnic relations in the West (Kymlicka, 2001, 22), such a paradigm shift is not (yet) likely to be achieved in the former Soviet republics, for the following reasons: the titular nations feel that they have been victimised by their (previously dominant) minorities, and there is a fear that the latter lack loyalty, and that they will collaborate with their powerful kin-state (Russia). Hence, a more centralised model of the nation-state may persist there for some time to come. The question of a possible transferability of international frameworks and policies or of particular models of multilingualism from Western to Central/Eastern European contexts then can be a delicate matter. Such discussions must always involve situated, critical and diachronic analyses to take account of human agency, political intervention, power and authority in the formation of particular (national) language ideologies (Blommaert 1999, 7), and this applies fundamentally to post-imperialist or post-colonial contexts. Such an approach will serve to counteract a tendency to simplify and 'sanitise' language histories (May, 2003, 128f) in debates on the relationships between language and power/social structure.

## 5. Conclusions and Outlook

To summarise, this paper has sought to critically explore the applicability of a possible transfer of multilingual practices from Western to Central/Eastern European contexts. An in-depth analysis of the Swiss way of handling linguistic and cultural diversity (within a quadrilingual state)

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<sup>7</sup> This phenomenon has been observed elsewhere too; see e.g. Coupland on Gal (1997, 326).

has shown that this model grew out of the specific historically rooted and territorially anchored sociolinguistic ecology there. Whilst this official multilingual model contrasts with the monolingual system found in many Central/Eastern European countries, the actual language practices in Switzerland differ from those in the post-Soviet republics, where a diverse multi-ethnic mix has led to more widespread individual multilingual repertoires.

With a focus on the Baltic countries, we have argued that a good example has been set there to couple a decision on language status with language management activities in education that support existing multilingualisms. Here, the task has been set to ensure that members of the main sidestream groups and their children know and are capable of using the variety that has been selected as the official language, and that they are also provided with an opportunity to develop what is considered the appropriate plurilingual proficiency for their community.

Widening our perspective, we have shown that, overall, some countries have evolved a more flexible approach to ethnic relations in the West than is currently the case in Central/Eastern Europe. However, policies that promote multiculturalism are a relatively recent Western phenomenon and still have a long way to go until they produce a 'model of integration that permits recognition of sameness as well as difference' (Nic Craith 2004, 16).

Some scholars have expressed an optimistic outlook for the future of the Baltic countries and their role in Europe. Yves Plasseraud (2003, 380) considers the deep-rooted cultural pluralism and linguistic diversity there 'a richesse <écologique> formidable' that has the potential to become 'un terrain d'expérimentalité d'un nouveau multiculturalisme' to provide 'une <recette balte>, à la fois originale et innovante' This is certainly an interesting proposition; however, as Bernard Spolsky (2005, 266) puts it,

'[I]t seems clear [...] that determining a working language management plan for the complex sociolinguistic situations of the Baltic nations will depend first on the fruits of the developing sociolinguistic studies of the current linguistic ecology, second on appreciation of the attitudes and beliefs of the citizens, and third, on an honest appraisal of the major forces affecting the linguistic and socioeconomic environment'

## **Appendix**

### **Extracts from the Swiss Constitution**

#### **Article 18 Freedom of Language**

The freedom of language is guaranteed.

#### **Article 47 Autonomy of the Cantons**

The Federation preserves the autonomy of the Cantons.

#### **Article 62 Education**

- (1) Education is a cantonal matter.
- (2) The Cantons ensure a sufficient primary education open to all children. This education

is compulsory, and shall be placed under state direction or supervision. It is free of charge in public schools. The school year begins between mid-August and mid-September.

### **Article 63 Professional Education and Universities**

- (1) The Federation legislates on professional education.
- (2) It operates technical universities. It may create, operate, or support other universities and institutions of higher learning. It may make its support conditional upon taking coordination measures.

### **Article 70 Languages**

- (1) The official languages of the Federation are German, French, and Italian. Romansh is an official language for communicating with persons of Romansh language.
- (2) The Cantons designate their official languages. In order to preserve harmony between linguistic communities, they respect the traditional territorial distribution of languages, and take into account the indigenous linguistic minorities.
- (3) The Federation and the Cantons encourage understanding and exchange between the linguistic communities.
- (4) The Federation supports the plurilingual Cantons in the fulfillment of their particular tasks.
- (5) The Federation supports the measures taken by the Cantons of Grisons and Ticino to maintain and to promote Romansh and Italian.

Source: The Swiss Constitution (revised form, in force from 1 Jan 2000), available on [http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/ic/sz00000\\_.html](http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/ic/sz00000_.html)

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## **AR PERKELIAMI VAKARŲ EUROPOS DAUGIAKALBYSTĖS MODELIAI Į VIDURIO/RYTŲ EUROPOS KONTEKSTĄ?**

**Gabrielle Hogan-Brun**

### **S a n t r a u k a**

Dėl spartėjančios migracijos į Europą ir jos viduje vis didėja jau ir taip šiame kontinente esanti didelė kalbų ir kultūrų įvairovė, daugėja kalbų kontaktų, todėl daugiakalbystės tyrinėjimai tampa vis būtinesni. Šiame straipsnyje kritiškai analizuojant besiskiriančią sociolingvistinę situaciją Vakarų ir Vidurio/Rytų Europoje svarstomi klausimai, susiję su galimybe perkelti daugiakalbystės modelius iš Vakarų šalių į Vidurio ar Rytų Europos kontekstą. Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas Šveicarijos daugiakalbystės modelis, kuris dažnai traktuojamas kaip sektinas lingvistinės ir kultūrinės įvairovės palaikymo daugiakultūroje šalyje pavyzdys. Analizuojamos Šveicarijos modelio stipriosios ir silpnosios pusės, diskutuojama, ar toks modelis gali būti perkeltas į kitą aplinką. Straipsnyje teigiama, kad kalbos vadybos praktika turi būti paremta kritine kalbos visuomenėje analize, atsižvelgiant į kalbinio konteksto istorines aplinkybes.

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