

COMMON EUROPEAN METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS AS A MEANS OF LANGUAGE PLANNING (THE CASE OF ULSTER-SCOTS)

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The paper focuses on the common methodological frameworks regulating and facilitating teaching and learning of native, second and foreign languages, which has been introduced by the Council of Europe and used by the member-states (and beyond) for more than two decades. What makes the tools in question special is their applicability to any indigenous idiom, including the lesser-used languages spoken on the territory of Europe, and subdivided by the European Charter into regional and minority languages. The most fundamental of the abovementioned international arrangements is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which provides a common basis for the elaboration of syllabi, teaching materials as well as assessment programmes and tests. As is known, this framework features a system of common standards including six reference levels, which serve as a basis for the so-called European Language Portfolio, whose status changed in 2014 from mandatory to advisory. The Council of Europe Language Policy Division is responsible for elaborating the common strategy and tactics in the field of language teaching. Although most lesser-used languages enjoy coordinated support from the national and regional governments, many of such idioms remain in the state of endangerment. Special attention is paid to the role of the abovementioned frameworks in supporting regional and minority languages of Europe through teaching and learning. The notions of *plurilingualism* and *multilingualism* imbedded in the said frameworks and constituting their conceptual basis are examined in particular. An analysis of the concept and the phenomenon of *plurilingualism* is carried out as regards its connection with the lesser-used languages and their protection. The case of Ulster Scots in Northern Ireland is considered as an illustration.

Key words: *European Language Portfolio, lesser-used languages, multilingualism, plurilingualism,*

INTRODUCTION

The Council of Europe has introduced a number of common tools to be used across the European Union and beyond, i.e. in geographical Europe, in order to optimize and unify the teaching of native, second and foreign languages. The tools in question are applicable to any indigenous language (including the lesser-used ones) spoken on the territory of Europe, and the most fundamental of such tools is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages adopted in 2001 and providing a common basis for the elaboration of syllabi, teaching materials as well as assessment programmes and tests (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). The common strategy and tactics in the field of language teaching is elaborated by the Council of Europe Language Policy Division.

The approach applied by the Council of Europe is based on the important conceptual and terminological innovation introduced within the abovementioned framework and consisting in distinguishing between multilingualism, a concept of societal character, and plurilingualism, which deals rather with individual peculiarities of mastering languages.

METHOD

A number of European lesser-used languages in state of endangerment may benefit and in fact have already benefited from these innovations. The European Charter leaves it to the choice of local authorities whether to classify such languages as regional or minority ones, providing no definition of both classes (cf. European Charter).

The tools of implementation of the abovementioned approach in the field of supporting lesser-used languages of the EU and beyond through teaching and learning are an indispensable help for language planning.

Our paper reflects the initial stage of the study in which we consider in the abovementioned context the case of Ulster-Scots in Northern Ireland as a typical European minority language. Our study combines a sociolinguistic aspect with that of applied linguistics, i.e. linguistic didactics.

Further below we will briefly highlight some key points.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Plurilingualism and Lesser-used Languages

As is known the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, or CEFR, is a project proposed and elaborated by the Council of Europe to achieve its goals of language education policy. Language education in Europe is carried out under the terms of the European Cultural Convention, which provides a framework for intergovernmental cooperation among the member states. Governments commit themselves to taking the necessary measures to promote the teaching of one another's languages in the other states party to the convention (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, Article 2). All the activity in this field has been guided by broad policy which includes the maintenance and promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity, the protection of language rights, the promotion of deeper mutual understanding for living together in multicultural Europe, language skills for participation in democratic citizenship processes in national and European contexts, and language-learning for social cohesion. Therefore, developing plurilingual skills is both a necessity and right for all the citizens of the European countries, those of the EU, in particular.

Plurilingual skills are formed continuously in the course of individual's life and career, with school providing the necessary basic formal teaching.

A series of medium-term programmes has focused on policies and tools to support the development of plurilingualism in citizens and linguistic diversity in European multilingual societies as a means of language planning.

The concept of plurilingualism is inseparable from the CEFR and its functioning. As is known the concept of 'multilingualism' refers to the presence in a geographical area of more than one language or 'variety of language'; individuals in an area may be monolingual, speaking only their own language (variety), or they may be plurilingual, with several languages. 'Plurilingualism' refers to the repertoire of languages (or varieties of language) which many individuals use, and is therefore the opposite of monolingualism. It includes all languages: mother tongue or first language and any number of other languages (Sheils, 2006, 10). Plurilingualism assumes the existence of a complex and composite competence in communities of language-users.

As an illustration of the meaning of plurilingualism, an adult European with at least a secondary education might be expected to have in his or her repertoire at a given age: a 'national' language spoken and written to the standard norms of the country; a variety of the first language spoken according to the norms of the region and/or generation to which he or she belongs; a regional or minority language that he or she speaks and writes where appropriate; one or more foreign

languages understood, but not necessarily spoken, to a basic or intermediate level; or another foreign language with a higher level of proficiency.

At a later or earlier point in time, the languages or the levels of proficiency might be different, depending on further education, work experience, individual interests and activities.

Plurilingualism varies throughout life, and the choice of languages and levels attained may depend on one's needs, interests and geographical location. A plurilingual repertoire is not a uniform concept and the CEFR allows for the definition of distinct competences at different levels, and that can be particularly valuable in planning a more diversified approach to language teaching and assessment to help learners develop their plurilingual potential.

The CEFR aims to provide coherence and transparency in language education by offering a common basis for the elaboration of curricula and syllabi, teaching and learning materials, and examinations. It offers common reference points to facilitate national and international coordination in planning language-teaching and in relating examination results to common European standards or benchmarks.

The descriptors in the levels can be used in many ways, e.g. for syllabus design, teacher assessment, self-assessment, examinations, etc.

The fact that small steps can be created and built up to be placed in an internationally transparent system, and the fact that different skills or competences can be defined and assessed separately, might be helpful in promoting the learning of a greater range of languages by individuals, including less widely learnt idioms, regional and minority languages in particular. That can, for example, facilitate the inclusion of more languages in a school timetable if there is a policy of valuing and recognising all levels of achievement in a language, including partial competences. The common reference levels are being used for policy-planning at national level in most EU countries and are taken into account in the non-EU countries of Europe.

Coverage of more languages in the educational process based on a universal system of competences is, of course, one of the aims of the European Language Portfolio (ELP). The ELP was also launched in 2001 and has made good progress since that time, particularly in the formal education sector. It is a concrete tool for relating the framework levels to language-learners according to their age and stage of development (European Language Portfolio).

This learners' document is designed to assist them in recording their competences in a uniform transparent manner and in managing their lifelong language learning. It therefore has a pedagogic function and a reporting function, both of which are fundamental to all portfolios.

There is no single uniform ELP. It is used in many different contexts and has different forms of presentation, but all conform to a set of basic principles and include three parts: language passport, which provides an overview at a specific point in time of one's proficiency in various languages according to the CEFR levels; language biography, which allows learners to plan, monitor and self-assess their progress over time; and dossier, which can contain evidence of claims made (project results, etc.) or certificates from courses taken. Models exist for younger learners, adolescents and adults.

The abovementioned instruments are intended to promote and support the development of plurilingualism — the lifelong development of the individual's plurilingual repertoire. Obviously, the development of a plurilingual competence includes an awareness of why and how one learns the languages chosen — motivation and a degree of learner autonomy are essential for lifelong language learning. Of course, there is no single model of a plurilingual repertoire, which will vary depending on an individual's needs and interests and be influenced by where he or she lives or moves to. Plurilingualism is a dynamic concept — evolving and changing according to one's needs throughout life. It also takes into account the fact that different languages are not learnt in isolation, and that they can influence one another, both in the learning process and in communicative use — hence, a coherent, transversal, integrated approach can be useful in formal education contexts.

The Case of Northern Ireland

The Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe addresses policy issues in such a global context and offers concrete suggestions for coherent approaches to the language curriculum. It assists national or local authorities in looking at all languages in education – official language, mother tongue, regional and/or minority languages, sign languages as well as foreign languages (Gogolin, 2002). Such an activity, known as language education policy profile — is under way for many countries and regions of Europe (the first being the region of Lombardy in Italy).

Having chosen as an example the region of Northern Ireland of the United Kingdom, we will present a short account of Ulster-Scots as one of the local idioms in terms of its involvement into the educational system.

As is known, Ulster-Scots goes back mostly to the western and south-west-central dialects spoken by the so-called 'planters' who migrated to Northern Ireland during the reign of King James VI (James I after the Union of the crowns). Naturally, the dialects of Ulster-Scots are historically

most closely associated with the dialects of the south-west of Scotland and have a number of common features with them (Macafee, 1983, 119).

Ulster is the only region outside the administrative territory of Scotland, where there is a compact Scots-speaking language community. Compact settlements of the speakers of Scots exist here in the counties of Antrim, Eastern Donegal, Derry and Tyrone (Adams, 1964, 1-4). Ulster-Scots used to be neglected for a long time and only attracted public attention in 1990's – at the final stage of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Recently, discussions have been underway to raise the status of Ulster-Scots and to elaborate an appropriate language planning to protect it from assimilation by local Englishes. Spoken Ulster-Scots, unlike its literary variety, is definitely an endangered idiom still facing extinction. Although it still retains its speech community, the latter having been shrinking because of natural aging (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2022).

In the social history of Ulster-Scots, the period from the early 1990s (and especially after the conclusion of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998) to the present day has been marked by the growing interest in this idiom on behalf of the local Protestant nationalists and the turbulent activities of language enthusiasts and the local educational institutions. Language planning acts as a tool of constructing the identity of the Ulster-Scots-speaking community and addressing its 'roots'. These developments constitute an important dimension of the ideology and activity of the local nationalism. Ulster-Scots enjoys some support and affirmative action both from the responsible state bodies and certain social organisations. However, despite its being mentioned in Good Friday Agreement ('All participants recognize the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.') (Belfast Agreement, 1998, 19) and other official documents, its official status is still very low.

One of the institutions that played an important role in the planning of policies in relation to Ulster-Scots is the Ministerial Advisory Group on the Ulster-Scots Academy (MAGUS), which was formed in March 2011 by the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure. Among other purposes MAGUS produces a holistic long-term development and research strategy for the Ulster-Scots sector, oversees the implementation of such a strategy, and progresses the Ulster-Scots Academy approach.

The abovementioned Ulster-Scots Agency was established as a result of the Belfast Agreement in 1998, together with Foras na Gaeilge which has the aim to develop Irish language education. These two boards form the Board of the North/ South Language Body. Concerning financial support, the Ulster-Scots Agency is funded by the Department for Communities in Northern

Ireland and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in the Republic of Ireland.

The Ulster-Scots Agency aims to promote the study, conservation, development and use of Ulster-Scots as a living language; encourage and develop the full range of its attendant culture; and promote an understanding of the history of the Ulster-Scots.

As regards education proper, the Ulster-Scots Agency offers to organise such cultural activities as after-school clubs, school drama, and both music and dance workshops.

There are centres for Ulster-Scots in Queen's University Belfast and the Ulster University, which also aim to develop further teaching and new project at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Skilled teaching staff is a real problem because Ulster-Scots is not included in primary and in-service teacher training. However, at secondary teacher training, students are allowed to incorporate Ulster-Scots work.

Learning materials for Ulster-Scots in primary education have been developed by the Ulster Scots Agency in collaboration with the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA): *Ulster-Scots for Primary School: Shared Language, Culture and Heritage*. This is a programme intended to revitalise the language, with the medium of instruction being English and the material available is for primary school (i.e. ages 6 to 11).

The actual situation with Ulster-Scots in practical education is as follows:

1) There exist a few learning materials for pre-school education, but no statistics on the use of Ulster-Scots in pre-school education is available. According to the Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education, children for whom English is an additional language and those who are being taught through the medium of Irish should be supported, but Ulster-Scots is not directly mentioned.

2) Ulster-Scots is not taught as a subject or used as a medium of instruction in primary school, but some schools teach it in the form of workshops or projects.

3) The same situation is characteristic of secondary school education, in which Ulster-Scots is also present only in the form of workshops and projects and maybe other extracurricular activities.

4) In higher education Ulster-Scots is also present on a semi-official basis. It is not offered as undergraduate programme, though may be included in some projects, such as the Education project or Poetry project, etc. (Hagan, Visser, 2020, 17-30).

In other words, the situation with Ulster-Scots is contradictory and unsatisfactory, because education as the most powerful tool of language planning is employed to a very poor extent. 25 years after the Good Friday Agreement, the support of Ulster-Scots is carried out mostly in the form of

extracurricular social and cultural activities and events, what reveals the lack of either belief in its prospects in the community or political will to change its status. The potential of the abovementioned methodological frameworks (i.e. CEFR and ELP) is practically not used. No matter how cheerless this situation is, it allows us to feel some optimism that the situation can change if the authorities introduce a more radical version of language planning. Moreover, the effectiveness of these frameworks is evidenced by the experience of other lesser-used languages, Irish in particular both in the Republic and in Ulster. Scottish Gaelic in the Highlands and islands of Scotland may also serve as an example of successful language planning employing educational tools.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of minority languages as a compulsory school discipline as well as a medium of teaching is obviously the most efficient means of revival and promotion of such idioms and it is of interest to consider the evidence of Ulster-Scots in this respect. Definitely, the effectiveness of using the capabilities of the abovementioned frameworks largely depends on the type of language planning the authorities carry out, in the UK language planning being rather liberal, with all that this entails.

In accordance with the frameworks in question, each minority or regional language has the right to exist in the educational space on a par with well-established majority languages. The support and preservation of the Breton language in France were facilitated by the spread of *Diwan* (English ‘seed’) public private schools; the creation of bilingual classes in public schools, departments of teaching Breton in universities, etc. However, these initiatives are practically not supported by the French central authorities at the level of approved language policy. In the UK, the Welsh language teaching and learning system is of more advanced character, and the government has made significant progress in education through the establishment of bilingual schools, which has contributed to an increase in the number of Welsh speakers.

Summing up the above, we can conclude that the ‘linguodidactic’ approach to language planning is indispensable for the preservation, support and dissemination of lesser-used languages. CEFR and ELP, aimed at self-assessment and tracking personal results, are considered to be expedient tools for the implementation of such a policy, what is proved by language activists’ experience across the continental Western Europe and the UK. Meanwhile, Ulster-Scots in Northern Ireland is at the initial stage of developing its social functions by educational means and engaging the abovementioned common European methodological frameworks could seriously contribute to the implementation of this task.

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