TEACHING AND LEARNING LESS WIDELY SPOKEN LANGUAGES IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe
From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education

Reference Study

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Preface

This text, part of a series published by the *Language Policy Division*, is clearly significant in its own right because it deals with certain influential factors in the organisation and sociolinguistic foundations of language teaching and in the linguistic ideologies at work in problems related to the languages of Europe. It is however part of a larger project since it is one element of a collection of publications focused on the *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe: From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education*.

This *Guide* is both a descriptive and programmatic document whose purpose is to demonstrate the complexity of the questions involved in language teaching, often dealt with in a simplistic manner. It aims to describe the processes and conceptual tools needed for the analysis of educational contexts with respect to languages and for the organisation of language learning and teaching according to the principles of the Council of Europe.

There are several versions of this *Guide* for different audiences, but the 'main version' deals with a number of complex questions, albeit in a limited framework. It seemed necessary to illustrate these questions with case studies, syntheses and studies of specific sectors of language teaching, dealing in monographic form with questions only touched upon in the *Guide*. These *Reference Studies* provide a context for the *Guide*, showing its theoretical bases, sources of further information, areas of research and the themes which underlie it.

The *Modern Languages Division*, now the *Language Policy Division*, demonstrates through this collection of publications its new phase of activity, which is a continuation of previous activities. The *Division* disseminated through the *Threshold Levels* of the 1970s, a language teaching methodology more focused upon communication and mobility within Europe. It then developed on the basis of a shared educational culture, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (published in its final version in 2001). This is a document which is not concerned with the nature of the contents of language teaching but rather with the form of curricula and syllabi for language teaching. The *Framework* proposes explicit referential levels for identifying degrees of language competence, and thus provides the basis for differentiated management of courses so that opportunities for the teaching of more languages in schools and in lifelong learning are created. This recognition of the intrinsic value of plurilingualism has simultaneously led to the development of an instrument which allows each learner to become aware of and to describe their language repertoire, namely the *European Language Portfolio*. Versions of this are increasingly being developed in member States and were at the heart of the European Year of Languages (2001).

Plurilingualism has been identified in numerous *Recommendations* of the Council of Europe as the principle and the aim of language education policies, and must

be valued at the individual level as well as being accepted collectively by educational institutions. The *Guide* and the *Reference Studies* provide the link between teaching methods and educational issues on the one hand and policy on the other, and have the function of making explicit this political principle and of describing concrete measures for implementation.

Riitta Piri discusses in this study the special case of teaching languages which are not widely spoken, languages where the pool of native speakers is relatively small, and which are not widely taught. She shows that there are needs for teaching such languages as Europe grows in complexity and presents an analysis of the characteristics and issues which need to be considered. In some senses, there is no difference between these languages and any others, since the learning process is the same. On the other hand there are often special difficulties which have to be overcome, including the supply of qualified teachers and appropriate teaching materials, and Piri shows how these difficulties can be overcome, drawing on a case study from her own environment.

This specific aspect of the problems of language education policies in Europe gives a perspective on the general view taken in the *Guide* but nonetheless this text is a part of the fundamental project of the *Language Policy Division*: to create through reflection and exchange of experience and expertise, the consensus necessary for European societies, characterised by their differences and the transcultural currents which create 'globalised nations', not to become lost in the search for the 'perfect' language or languages valued at the expense of others. They should rather recognise the plurality of the languages of Europe and the plurilingualism, actual or potential, of all those who live in this space, as a condition for collective creativity and for development, a component of democratic citizenship through linguistic tolerance, and therefore as a fundamental value of their actions in languages and language teaching.

Jean-Claude Beacco and Michael Byram

1. Introduction

The idea of studying and teaching languages other than the major international languages is often rejected. The reason is usually the fear that they would take away classroom hours from other subjects. It would be a waste of time and energy. At the same time, concern has been expressed that children should learn to speak, write, read and understand these languages in addition to world languages. But we do not all have to learn every language. There are, for example, people who are proficient in several languages, a living proof of researchers' claim that the more languages we learn, the easier it is to learn new ones, especially those in the same language family.

As cooperation between European countries grows, it would seem that the country or the linguistic area which can count among its population people, even a small number, who can directly communicate with people in another European country would do better than others. Friendly relations are needed with friends across the border, and if friends are found a bit farther away, all the better. As a colleague of mine said to me when I started at the Ministry of Education, 'The smaller the country, the larger the outside world', stressing the importance of plurilingualism and multiculturalism. Just understanding a 'smaller' or 'minor' language is something to strive for, because even modest language skills are an asset and a joy. I fondly remember an official, who, presenting himself to me, added in Finnish: 'Olen itävaltalainen poika' (I'm an Austrian boy).

In this context, when we speak of a 'small' language, it is not important whether it is a national language, a minority language or the language of an immigrant group. The term 'small/smaller language', as used here, means a national, regional or minority language which, unlike 'major/world' languages such as English, French, German, Portuguese or Spanish, is not used in global or wider European communications.

The line between a small and a major language is by no means unambiguous. For instance, Russian is a big language, but in some countries (e.g. Finland and the Baltic states) it is used by a minority and in that context is considered a small language. It is characteristic of European languages that even languages which are considered small may, in fact, be 'big' in the sense that they are spoken by a large number of people and are languages of sophisticated civilisation and literature. Learning a small language is a valuable addition to an individual's and society's language reserve and promotes appreciation and protection of the European cultural heritage.

Language policy issues often become questions of human rights and linguistic and cultural rights. This is why policy-makers want to, or have to, take a stand on them. Another reason why small languages need special attention is that, as a rule, they do not have economic power behind them, nor are the market forces conducive to their survival. Yet, lack of people proficient in a small language may

quite unexpectedly turn out to be a burning issue. This was seen in Finland in the nineties, when no one could explain the upheavals taking place in Romania. Ministries were criticised, and the media were in confusion before speakers of Romanian could be found. This gave rise to a debate about the need for a databank on people proficient in smaller languages.

2. Why do small languages matter?

The growing appreciation of smaller languages stems from the work done by the Council of Europe and the European Union to safeguard linguistic diversity in Europe. Each language has an intrinsic value, and when a language dies out, some of its culture also dies. It is highly unlikely in the foreseeable future that Europeans would take a unanimous decision to raise one language above all others to be used in all international communications as the *lingua franca*, as Latin was in the Middle Ages.

Diversified language programmes and multiculturalism have also gained impetus from the following facts and events.

There are a number of new nation-states in Europe which have official languages of their own and seek actively to develop them as languages of communication in their own right. Each of these countries is also planning its language policy and education system, in which the teaching of foreign languages is an essential component (e.g. areas in the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia). It is also evident that many conflicts are associated with the assertion of ethnic and linguistic identities.

Many single language communities have seen it necessary to promote linguistic plurality and to accord a certain status to languages of neighbouring countries (e.g. Hungary, Austria, Sweden). Some regions have created a common labour market (e.g. the Nordic countries).

The enlargement of the European Union is imminent and that is one reason for developing relationships. Before long, what are currently the languages of our neighbours will become official languages of the European Union, and in the process they will acquire a new status. This will mean new neighbours and new neighbouring languages across the borders of the EU.

There are also other reasons for countries to maintain close relations with their neighbours (e.g. Poland with Ukraine, Italy with Slovenia) and to intensify regional partnerships (Austria with Hungary, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Poland). People whose forebears have immigrated a long time ago may wish to maintain skills in their language and contacts with natives of the country of origin (e.g. Poles in France). Furthermore, a country's national language policy sometimes entails promoting contacts with and between speakers of certain languages within the country (e.g. the German-speaking population in Belgium or the different linguistic groups in Switzerland).

There is a great deal of permanent and temporary migration in Europe. Authorities want to recruit immigrant languages into the service of the recipient country and help returning migrants to maintain and upgrade the language proficiency they have acquired abroad. The growing numbers of immigrants have added to the ethnic and linguistic wealth of European countries (e.g. Russians and Estonians in Finland).

The computerisation of society, the free flow of goods and services, the free flow of information, the creation of field-specific networks, supranational political institutions and the internationalisation of business, all have different linguistic implications.

Even countries which are predominantly monolingual and whose own language is an international language (e.g. Germany and France) increasingly need people proficient in other languages. They seek ways to enhance language instruction by means of innovations (e.g. bilingual teaching, early language instruction).

All these fall under the general theme of linguistic pluralism (Truchot, 1998). Linguistic pluralism can be understood as the wealth or potential of a linguistic community. Communities - whether local or regional - have 'untapped wealth' if they do not put their less widely used or minority language(s) at the disposal of their own community, region and government, and thereby Europe as a whole.

3. Language and community

For a small or minority language to be able to prevail and develop in the midst of social changes, this language and its learners need special attention and special treatment. This entails political decisions. The status of a language may be promoted as the mother tongue, a second language, a foreign language or as the language of instruction, but it is not always necessary, or indeed possible, to adopt all these approaches. A speaker of a majority language may need to learn a minority language as a foreign language. Officials, for instance, may be required to know the language, or proficiency in the language may be regarded as an extra merit in job recruitment. Language increments in salary and other incentives add to the motivation to develop skills in a language (e.g. Swedish in Finland).

Concern over the fate of a language unites Europe in a concerted effort, especially when the speakers of the language are few. Nearly every nation state contends with similar questions: How will smaller languages, local languages, minority languages survive? How can we enable and encourage schools to teach smaller languages as foreign languages or use them as languages of instruction?

4. Why do plurilingualism and multiculturalism matter?

Today plurilingualism and a diversified language programme are important education and language policy aims for several reasons. A policy that favours the use of a single foreign language or only 'world' languages as the means of

international communication easily leads to a homogeneous culture and reduces linguistic diversity. When a language dies, the society loses part of its cultural heritage, wisdom and life experience. What can be expressed in one language, cannot be repeated in an other language in exactly the same way. By the same token, just as we foster natural diversity, we must look after the diversity of our culture.

People speaking different languages, even if they live close to each other in the same country, often remain distant, in extreme cases hostile, to each other if they feel the other group is working against their interests. In such cases, bilingual people are excellent bridge-builders between the groups. Not only are they proficient in both languages, they are also familiar with the two cultures and modes of thinking involved. Direct contacts between people living on the opposite sides of a national border, especially between younger generations, are a good means of promoting cross-border cooperation. A new generation never carries the same historical burden as their predecessors, whose past experiences are still fresh in memory.

There are also economic reasons for promoting linguistic pluralism. Despite extensive international trade and the globalised world economy, it is self-evident that the best language in trade is the language spoken by the client. In fact, 'winning a speaker is winning a client, a customer, a consumer; it is also a way of getting staff accustomed to a company's culture, all of which must be objectives in the context of globalisation' (Truchot, 1998). For instance, a study on the language needs of businesses in Upper Austria shows that between 10% and 20% of businesses felt they needed employees who have a good command of Czech or Hungarian, languages supposedly lacking international usefulness (de Cillia, 1998).

The same rationale of requiring knowledge of major languages in global and European cooperation applies to different smaller languages. The current emphasis on multilingualism and multiculturalism also concerns the national, regional and local languages of Europe. We must take care of all languages, but smaller languages need more looking-after than the world languages. But does learning smaller languages take more time and effort than others?

5. The general principles of language teaching and learning also apply to small languages

When policy-makers are faced with decisions concerning language instruction, they often encounter different attitudes, conceptions and opinions with regard to language learning – notions which are not necessarily true, at least not any longer. The progress in teaching methods, equipment and media has been enormous over the past few decades when foreign language learning and skills have come to concern everyone, not just academics. This is why we do well to question old conceptions and look for research findings which enable us to

conceptualise problems. This clears our thoughts and gives new insights into the matter at hand.
The first step in formulating a policy for foreign language instruction could be to find out which questions could be further illuminated by researchers and which can be decided by policy-makers in that particular context. Researchers can provide information about factors which promote and facilitate language learning, as well as about language needs. The need for a given language or for foreign languages in general can be gauged fairly easily and fast: both where the language is needed and what kind of language skills are needed. It is possible to determine the needs of local business and other operators who have contacts with areas where a given language is used. Such surveys have been conducted in different parts of Europe since the 1960s. They generally concern language needs in business and relate to language skills needed in working life (Piri, 2001).

The following questions are a good starting point when we examine the teaching of smaller foreign languages within the formal education system. How many foreign languages can a person learn? At what age should language instruction begin? What is the expected outcome? What should the proportion of languages in the curriculum be? Which languages are easy/difficult for children to learn? Should language learning begin with an easy language or a difficult one? What are the special features of language learning at an older age? How can the motivation to learn (smaller) languages be encouraged? Some of these questions can be answered by linguists, others may be illuminated by the experiences of other countries. The solution to many of these issues can be found in the geopolitical situation, traditions, national languages and the degree of internationalisation of the country and above all in the social and education policy lines into which language instruction is incorporated. It is also important to consider what are the factors that support and motivate language learning.

There is no limit to the number of languages a person can learn. At least there is no scientific proof one way or the other. It is impossible to know all the needs of every individual at the start of their life: this will come clear in the course of time. The only thing we know for certain is that everybody will need languages. It is naturally preferable that all citizens know as many as possible. All other things being equal, it is always the person with a better command of languages who is preferred because of the cultural and other knowledge language proficiency entails. If this person knows a less widely known language, he or she stands above the others.

The number of languages taught in school is a question of discretion. It depends on the many factors which compete with languages and language learning over the time and resources available. How many languages should be taught ultimately depends on the language needs of each country. For the Council of Europe and the European Union, the starting point is that every European should have an opportunity to learn at least two languages in addition to their native language. One of these languages could well be a smaller language, a language spoken in a neighbouring country (region), or a language spoken in a region with

which the country has contacts for one reason or another (e.g. trade, town twinning).

In many countries pupils can learn three or four languages at some level of secondary education. The number of languages on offer depends on policy-makers, but the number of elective languages actually studied is up to individual pupils and their parents. To be able to make judicious choices, parents need guidance and information.

An opportunity to learn languages, and especially less widely studied languages, arouses curiosity and sometimes even great expectations in the learner. This is why teaching must be well planned, so that the hopes raised in children, young people and their parents are not disappointed (Blondin et al. 1998). The learning of a smaller language should not start without proper preparations if it is expected to continue.

The Council of Europe and the European Union both stress the importance of starting language learning at an early age. There are positive experiences of early language learning from all over Europe. The higher the quality of teaching and the more suited the teacher is, the better the experiences. An early start usually also means longer language studies. The first foreign language is actually the spearhead for other languages. This is why the first foreign language generally takes more time to learn than the second or third. This, at least, is the experience when the child's own language does not belong to the same language family as the first foreign language (as is the case with Finnish language speakers). To some extent this is a question of language awareness, which then can help with the learning of new languages, even several of them. It also facilitates the learning of a smaller language.

When a pupil learns a language for a longer time, from the primary level onwards, he or she often develops an interest in the countries where the language is spoken. This is why it is important that the first, and most proficient, language is not the same for everyone and that there are citizens, employees and volunteer workers everywhere in Europe who are able to communicate with people and communities which speak smaller European languages.

There are many reasons for the different degree to which foreign languages are taught. The decisive factor is the quality and level of language skills aimed at. Experience has shown that the more frequent the contact with the language studied, the better the learning outcome. The number of weekly language classes generally varies between two and four. Faced with a choice between learning one language or several, one of which is a smaller language, a learner may well opt for the latter alternative. Experience has namely shown that when a student has internalised various language learning strategies with the first language, he or she no longer needs to dedicate so much time to learning another one. If the foreign language belongs to the same family as the native language, it is all the easier to learn. The methods used to study and learn a second or third language may differ

if the aim is to optimise the use of time to achieve given learning outcome. The Council of Europe is working on this and on the development of good teaching methods suited to learning kindred languages.

Today's world offers ample opportunities to complement formal, systematic language teaching with real life situations in which the language is spoken, e.g. in the media or other genuine contexts. Language learning is also facilitated by the rapid progress in information and communications technologies (ICT). Direct contacts, different communication channels (telephone, telegram, telex, telefax, e-mail, databases) and the media (radio, television, the press) all develop language skills. There are many means of out-of-classroom language learning, such as traditional pen pal correspondence, teacher/pupil visits, pupil exchanges, school twinning, joint projects between schools and traineeships. Systematic teaching is naturally needed, but it does not necessarily have to take place in a classroom. Consequently, it may well be possible to reduce the overall number of classroom hours dedicated to learning a language at school, which in turn would leave time for learning more languages or other subjects, all the while keeping the learning outcome at the same level. This is the experience gained in the teaching of a less widely studied language with the help of television, radio and the internet. There are also students who have achieved good language skills without formal teaching. They are, however, the exception to the rule, because such achievement requires prior experience of language learning, good learning materials, high motivation and gritty determination.

If the aim is to achieve a functional skill in a small language, or at least a solid basis for further learning, sufficient time must be allowed for teaching and studying. Learning a language depends on many factors (same/different language family, facility for languages, cognitive maturity/age and motivation). It takes hundreds of hours to master a language. If the sights are set lower, the time needed is naturally shorter. One should be realistic with regard to the expected outcome. Even if the aim in learning a language is a 'partial skill', for instance an ability to read the language, or to speak it enough to cope with everyday situations, it would be advisable to teach the rudiments of grammar and syntax, that is, the most basic structures of the language. This is not grammar and syntax for their own sake, but because they are crucial for communication. Achieving this aim takes time.

Simplifying a little, we could say from experience that the early stages of language learning take from 100 to 150 hours. In that time the learner can achieve skills on which the next stage of more in-depth proficiency can be built. With such basic skills, learners can make themselves understood in spoken language in the familiar everyday situations, for example introducing themselves, ordering food, purchasing tickets etc. Communication would in this case be slow and hesitant and the speaker would often have to resort to non-verbal means. Pronunciation would clearly deviate from the spoken norm and comprehension would therefore require special effort. The message would not necessarily be understood immediately. The pupil could *understand* simplified speech relating to familiar

topics, but more complicated concepts would be incomprehensible. The pupil could *write* some basic phrases. Because of limited language skills, the message would also be very simple and brief. The pupil *could get the gist* of a simplified text and extract some individual ideas from texts dealing with general topics. Even the passive *vocabulary* would be limited to everyday and personal topics. The learner would not have a very versatile of *basic language structures* and could use individual words in arbitrary forms.

Despite these limitations, the learner would have skills in all the areas - speaking, understanding, writing and reading comprehension - mastering some structures and a limited vocabulary. On this basis it is possible to build more demanding language skills in lifelong learning. This first phase of language learning could be called 'survival' skills. More advanced proficiency will take several hundreds of hours to learn. It is worthwhile to note, as has already been shown above, that all contact with the language outside the classroom will improve language skills and reduce the time needed to achieve more advanced skills.

There are no research findings to help us decide whether the first foreign language should be an easy or a difficult one. Nor is there any unambiguous answer to the question which, if any, languages are easy or difficult to learn. Good results were achieved in the teaching and learning of Latin, German and French when proficiency in these languages was a yardstick of success. This despite the fact that these languages have what are perceived by learners as complex grammars. Experience has shown that it takes less time to command two kindred languages than two languages belonging to different families. This would indicate that it is more rewarding to learn a small kindred language (Finns learning Estonian, Czechs Byelorussian, Germans Flemish or Danish, and vice versa).

Further, the degree of difficulty of a given language is a personal question: motivation and attitudes towards people speaking the language play an important part. On the other hand, some research has shown that learning a language promotes positive attitudes towards speakers of that language. The study in question compared the attitudes of people who had learned languages with those of people who have no language training and found that even short studies in languages had this effect (Sajavaara, 2000).

In short, it is helpful if a pupil can study as many languages as possible at school, and one of these could and perhaps should be a small language. A person who has learned the rudiments of several languages in youth can develop varied and useful language skills on that basis later in life. This in turn shows the important role of language teaching in school.

6. Adult learners

It is also possible to learn languages later in life if the motivation exists, i.e. if a language is deemed necessary for social inclusion or important for personal, professional or other reasons.

Even the best language instruction at school cannot provide all the command needed in the course of life. This is why it is important to improve language skills later in areas needed for further education and training or in a job and even to be ready to learn a new language at an adult age.

It would seem that adults like to learn new things in new ways, but tend to prefer old learning and study methods in learning things they have studied previously. Yet the methods used in language instruction some decades ago were not very productive, at least with regard to communicative skills. For the language teacher, a mature student is a challenge because adults usually do not like to waste time on things they do not feel worth the effort. Adults tend to demand quick results, and their sense of achievement can be boosted with various level tests. Similarly, adult learners are often more critical of their own achievements than children, which also increases the likelihood of dropping out.

Important factors influencing language learning include the overall success in educational studies, linguistic talent, motivation, the degree of similarity between languages, the number and quality of learning opportunities available and taken, the quality of teaching, and the level of requirements in tests taken. Adults are motivated to study languages if their employers demand certificates of language skills or if their own work entails contacts with people abroad, including those speaking smaller languages.

Adults also need different opportunities to learn new languages. Research has shown that in firms with small staffs one person may need to speak several languages, including smaller ones. Adult education colleges and centres, adult education associations and other public or private institutions play an important part in disseminating knowledge about smaller languages. Similarly, the embassies, cultural centres and friendship societies of different countries are usually happy to provide information about language learning opportunities or even to arrange courses themselves. Town twinning can also include language learning activities (Lefranc, 2001). There are positive experiences of intensive courses arranged by businesses, of cooperation with continuing professional education centres where job applicants study, of cross-border traineeships, etc. It is also conducive to learning a smaller language if the teaching content is connected to the learner's work and people's everyday life (Raasch, 1998).

The comparison of adults' language skills is facilitated by information about the equivalence of different language tests and recognition by means of the proficiency scale provided in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*. This scheme is well suited for comparing language certificates awarded in smaller languages and facilitates recognition, whatever the manner in which the language skills in question have been acquired. In addition, the Council of Europe has recently developed the *European Language Portfolio* which helps language learners in different parts of Europe keep track of their language skills.

Those designing language courses increasingly use this scheme as the basis for planning instruction and certificates.

7. Language policy and language teaching policy

The Council of Europe and the European Union have systematically invested both material and intellectual resources in the teaching of languages, especially small languages. In the border areas all over Europe there are various cross-border language projects. School curricula are often so flexible that they offer a variety of language options at different levels of schooling. Pupils can choose different languages as their first, second, or even third foreign language. English, German, French and Spanish have already established their place in foreign language learning, but in addition, there are good examples of smaller languages available at different stages of schooling.

Small languages should be used as far as possible in the media and other public contexts. This sensitises the public to listening to less frequently heard languages and makes them want to recognise and learn at least some words and phrases. We have all experienced this, especially in the case of two related languages. Anybody who knows one of the Germanic, Romance, Slavic or Scandinavian languages finds it much easier to learn another language from that family. This can be supported by means of a media policy developed for the purpose and the presence of a language in as many forms/situations as possible (Raasch, 1998). Language learning in border regions is stimulated by day-to-day contacts and the frequent occasions for language use they offer (advertisements, newspapers, the media, etc.).

Cross-border cooperation, with the student exchange schemes, study and job prospects it offers, also encourages people to learn their neighbours' language. There must be concrete incentives for choosing a given small language. Early language learning, different bilingualism projects and intensive courses and programmes create conditions for diversifying language programmes by including smaller languages. It is true that parents may have difficulties in accepting that their children start their language learning with a small neighbouring language or even a minority language. This is especially true when proficiency in this language is not valued in the community and its speakers are seen to have a lower social status than others.

There have been both national and regional information campaigns with a view to overcoming such attitudes, as well as direct contacts with pupils' homes. A group learning a smaller language sometimes includes a native speaker of that language, which is a great help. On the whole, people increasingly appreciate the aim of maintaining and strengthening linguistic and cultural identities. This also includes ensuring that people have instruction in heritage languages as well, and immigrant languages are often small languages.

Some countries have launched sensitisation projects. This means that language learning begins in pre-school or primary school with the introduction of several languages instead of one. The aim is to sensitise the child to plurilingualism. The experiences gained indicate that this kind of teaching could open the way to plurilingualism and multiculturalism to an extent which is not possible if language choices are left entirely to parents. Free choice seems to favour major languages (Blondin et al. 1998).

8. Teaching in a foreign language

Teaching in a foreign language, or content and language integrated learning (CLIL), can be thought of as a generic 'umbrella term', which can be used to denote anything from teaching a subject by the medium of a foreign language to brief uses of a foreign language in teaching other subjects. The term also applies to bilingual teaching. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe are generally smaller-language countries and could benefit from CLIL. For example in Estonia, which is officially a monolingual country with a large Russian-speaking minority, Russian-speaking parents may put their children in an Estonian-speaking kindergarten in order to make sure that they get to master the mainstream language, Estonian. Education in Estonian for Russian children is readily available.

CLIL is also suited to teaching older students, particularly in vocational or professional education, and is a good 'fresh start' to small-language learning if a student has not done well in languages earlier. Compared to major world languages, learning a new small language may be more motivating because proficiency in it is not only considered exotic but makes those proficient in it stand out. On the other hand, learning a subject in a foreign language may be a welcome fresh approach to pupils who have bad learning experiences.

CLIL can also be adopted with short courses, in preparation for cross-border projects and in pupil/student exchanges (either physical or virtual exchanges). A new method may be useful in tackling in an indirect way problems rooted in history as well as other forms of prejudice. It provides a platform for 'learning by doing', for boosting confidence in the use of a small language in contacts with speakers of that language, and in general for developing attitudes as well as providing information. In the case of mature learners, the instruction can be directly connected with the communication skills they need at the workplace. Border-region schools can offer cross-border courses dealing with issues of common interest.

The methodological benefit in CLIL is that it frees language teaching from traditional methods. For example, in CLIL classes the meaning of an unknown word can be inferred from the context. Pupils should in fact be encouraged to work independently with the help of dictionaries. They could look for key words and key contents in the text and identify phrases and words in context either

alone or in groups. Overall, CLIL promotes independent learning and study. Native speakers of the language of instruction can make a valuable contribution.

There are many ways to teach in a foreign language. It is not necessary to attempt to pre-construct ready-made models for different environments because the circumstances are different in all countries and regions.

9. How to prepare decisions

Education is often financed from public funds. This is why it is necessary to make sure that the political will for the instruction of a smaller language exists nationally or locally. It is also useful to survey the need for and availability of support.

The expression of political will may take various forms. One is that decision-makers assign the planning of language instruction to a group of experts. This enables the decision-maker to monitor and steer the planning. Certain conditions and limitations may be placed on the work of the expert group. One possible guideline is to require that the planning safeguards the status of smaller languages, such as those of neighbouring countries/regions. Attention should also be paid to the special conditions in the area and the need to ensure that pupils can continue studying the same language from one form and level of education to another. The expert group could also be assigned the task of surveying the language needs in the country/region/town with regard to cultural policy, international relations, specific trade relations or other labour market needs.

It can be said that policy-makers have three kinds of instruments at their disposal for achieving their aims. These are statutes (legislation, directives, administrative decisions, etc.), finance, and information, or in everyday parlance: the stick, the carrot and the sermon, as seen in Figure 1.

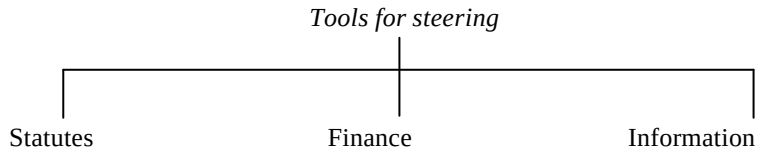

Figure 1. Statutes, financial resources and information steering (Vedung 1998)

Including a language in the programme of a school/schools or a pupil/pupils requires statutes, directives or other political decisions. It also requires financial resources for the teaching staff, teaching facilities, learning materials and information targeted at the different parties concerned.

The proposals put forward by the expert group have a better chance of being implemented if the members represent a wide range of fields and sectors (e.g.

language instruction, research, education policy and educational planning) according to the needs of each country or region. It also helps if the person chairing the group is a very senior national or regional/local official. This helps to ensure that the proposals are implemented even if the political power relations change. This procedure also applies to the instruction of small languages.

The following is an example of a development model for planning or preliminary discussion.

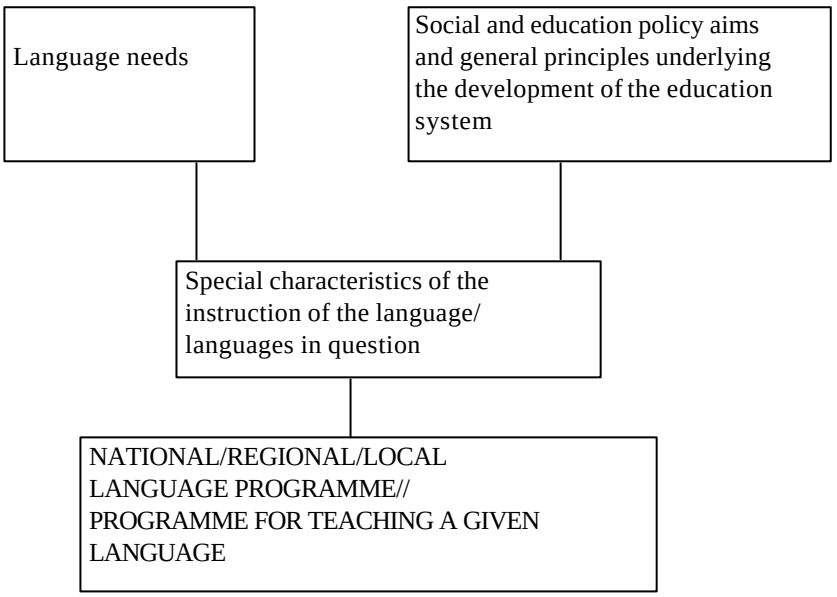

Figure 2: Key elements in the development of a language programme

Figure 2 shows that the planning could start with language needs and social and education policy aims. The language needs could be gauged by means of research. They would thus mainly involve research findings, whereas social policy and education policy are matters of will and the discretion of policy-makers. It is not useful or necessary to develop language programmes solely based on expert opinions, because politicians' views and commitment are crucial. For one thing, language instruction is a question which also affects international relations. The proposals should derive from language needs and from political will. They should take account of the special characteristics of language learning (content and culture). The expert group could also give their opinion about the steering tools needed in implementation. In addition, the proposals could concern certain key factors, e.g. the availability of language teachers and learning materials.

It is well-known that different languages are differently placed with regard to language programmes and communications. It is possible, however, to achieve a

constructive division of labour between languages. A smaller language may be in a pupil's language programme side by side with a major international one (e.g. English, French, German, Spanish). However, the smaller language often needs a teaching plan of its own, which could highlight proficiency in some specific aspect of that language.

Any deliberation concerning languages to be included in language programmes should cover all levels of general, vocational and adult education, because continuity is essential for gaining proficiency in languages. In the case of a smaller, less frequently studied language, special attention must be paid to ensuring continuity; a change of schools should not disrupt language learning. Vocational education and training should make it possible for students to start a new language or new languages and to continue with a smaller language studied in the previous school form. Universities should make it obligatory for students of all subjects to study one or several languages, with special emphasis on language for specific purposes.

Experience shows that quality teaching helps maintain interest in a smaller language. This does not mean that shorter courses in a smaller language targeted at an enthusiastic group of students should not be arranged, but they too must be well planned. The length of the course, as well as other aims and plans, must be made known to all the parties concerned.

Some scholars have devised models which can be used in the planning and formulation of language policy and language programmes on a longer term (e.g. Kaplan & Baldauf 1997; Takala, 1972/ 1998; Piri, 2001).

10. Different parties' roles in language programme issues

Depending on legislation and the degree of centralisation in administration, decision-making may require that a language programme should be submitted to parliament or regional or local councils. These political bodies may outline policy and issue resolutions on different questions: whether or not to promote the instruction of smaller languages; what languages should be promoted and where; how to encourage pupils to study smaller languages; and whether to use information or legislation to achieve the aims. If the programme of a country or a region includes both major and smaller languages, the most productive procedure is to aim at a reciprocal relationship in language instruction. This means for instance that in Dutch- and German-speaking communities German-speakers learn Dutch and Dutch-speakers German.

Employers can promote proficiency in smaller languages by means of incentives, such as salary and study visits, while educational authorities and schools can use pupil and student exchanges and similar means. Proficiency in a regional or other smaller language can be made a requirement of competence. Staff development schemes could include an account of the development needs in smaller languages. Similarly, staff development training should be used to ensure that

personnel meet all the quality requirements concerning languages. Local administration too should look upon language skills as a quality factor and see to it that it has a sufficient number of officials speaking minority languages. National and local officials and employees in the private sector should be encouraged to use minority languages as far as possible. If both parties understand each other's language, even though they cannot speak them, each can use his or her own language. Interpretation can be developed by means of information and communications technologies.

It is also possible to use a government grant system. One form of support would be to grant extra state aid to bilingual communities because providing education in two languages requires more teaching staff and more teaching groups than in monolingual teaching. In some cases, sponsors can be found in the country in question or abroad.

Another means of developing services which demand skills in a minority language is to use volunteer workers, who may benefit professionally or economically from their input, opportunities for inexpensive study trips, book donations, etc.

11. Teachers

In the initial stages of small language instruction, it may be necessary to make do with teachers who are not formally qualified but have the aptitude, which is of primary importance. At the same time, retraining and continuing professional education must be made available (e.g. instruction in Finnish language and culture for teachers moving back to Finland from abroad).

Such formally unqualified teachers could be teachers of other languages who have a sufficient command of a smaller language or native speakers of a smaller language who have some teaching qualifications.
In time, it might be necessary to set up a specific degree programme for teachers of smaller languages. The content of their training could to some extent differ from that of other language teachers. Because of the different educational backgrounds and the limited number of small-language teachers, it may sometimes be impossible to arrange totally separate education for these teacher trainees. In the development of teacher education content, different interest groups proficient in a given small language and well versed in the culture(s) concerned could be of great help in the training of teachers of that language.

Teacher trainees could also produce materials for general use and devise syllabuses geared to teaching smaller languages. Teachers should also be trained in the use of information networks and to disseminate materials through them. Where the terminology is lacking in a smaller language, it needs to be developed by teacher trainees and their educators.

Sometimes it may be useful to provide teacher trainees specialising in smaller languages with such extensive skills and competencies that they can also work in

other countries or teach immigrants and returning migrants. The ideal teacher training would enable for instance expatriates returning home after longer stays in a foreign country to teach the language of that country to migrant children or their mother tongue to returning migrants after only some, or without any, supplementary training. One such case would be a person who has been trained in the host country to teach the language as a second or as a foreign language. This could be possible despite the fact that teaching a language as a mother tongue or as a foreign language involves very different teaching situations. The obstacle is not always language skills, but the ability to switch from one situation to another.

12. Teaching material

It is a great help to teachers if they have access to suitable teaching materials, such as textbooks, exercise books, recordings, teachers' guides and so on. In recent years various materials have increasingly been offered in electronic format.

However, publishing small-circulation materials may be economically unviable, and therefore such materials are not always readily available, and public authorities should support the production of the teaching materials needed for the purpose, because small language teaching is very significant in terms of cultural and education policy. The materials should be edited and written by experienced professionals. Some regions have hired staff specifically to compile learning materials for small language teaching or assigned professionals to organise the publication of learning materials in the region. Such a group of professionals could also supervise the quality of educational materials in cooperation with the community speaking that language. Two or more countries can prepare teaching and learning materials in cooperation. Embassies sometimes help in finding educational materials.

Materials intended for other countries usually need editing. All learning materials should be adjusted as far as possible to the learners' ages and capabilities. For instance, the content of educational materials may originate in another country or region, that is, in another cultural environment, and therefore needs editing. Revision is also needed, when materials have been designed for native speakers, if the language is taught as a second/foreign language.

The question of learning/teaching materials could be taken up in the training of teachers specialising in smaller languages. For instance, modules relating to the editing and publication of learning materials should be included in initial or continuing teacher training, depending on the circumstances. This kind of experience would provide additional competence to the future teacher of a small language and help create studies and work flexibly. Teachers of small language(s) could also form resource pooling circles. This would make their various skills and competencies available to material production, for instance by means of

information and communications technologies. Similarly, there is growing demand for material suited to independent studies, especially for adults.

The question of educational materials may complicate teaching, if it is not addressed at the planning stage. Suitable and stimulating materials can be found in various genuine contexts: newspapers, brochures and other information materials. It is sometimes possible to find sponsors or other kinds of help for material compilation. Postcards, letters and train, bus and theatre tickets contain useful vocabulary and bring a breath of fresh air from the area where the language is spoken.

Norway offers a good example of material production. In 1999 the Norwegian Ministry of Education launched a three-year project geared to produce material for teaching a small language (Finnish as a foreign language in basic education). The material will be available digitally on the net. The reason for the digital format was that the teachers involved were working at schools which were very distant from each other. The material was the joint effort of eight teachers, who had to take into account the geographical location and cultural background of the groups learning the language. The teachers work in different parts of northern Norway, Sweden and Russia. The current number of pupils is 1000. The teachers produced the material alongside their actual teaching jobs, and the financial aid was used to reduce their teaching load (50%). The material is also available to teachers and learners in other countries (http://skolenettet.ls.no).

The teacher of a small language should not be left alone to tackle the question of teaching materials. Work already done in this area by others should be made more widely available. The best reward for a teacher is to see his or her former pupils stretching the boundaries as speakers of a small language.

13. A practical example of small language instruction

The following is a detailed description of a Finnish-Russian cross-border project.

Case: Finnish-Russian School of Eastern Finland

Background: Finnish politicians and authorities have been trying to encourage Finnish pupils to choose Russian as their first foreign language for 30 years. Russian is considered a difficult language, and has a low status in Finland as an immigrant language. Certain elements of Russian culture, such as songs and folklore, are popular in Finland.

Finnish local authorities have fairly wide autonomy. The government finances private schools and municipal schools according to the same nation-wide principles. Pupils usually have all the same benefits (meals etc.).

In 1995 the Finnish Ministry of Education initiated a programme with the aim of making knowledge of and expertise in cross-border relations with Russia one of

Finland's assets in the EU. An important part of the programme was to enhance proficiency in the Russian language. The Minister of Education invited the senior education authorities from three border towns, Lappeenranta, Joensuu and Imatra, to discuss the need to establish a Finnish-Russian school in the east of Finland.

Following these negotiations, the Ministry of Education set up a committee to plan the school. It was composed of members appointed by the towns concerned and education policy experts. One of the members had language teacher qualification and experience of language planning, another was a National Board of Education official responsible for the instruction of Russian in Finland. The mandate of the committee was to explore the possibility of establishing a school comprising the primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels; to propose a form of administration for the school (private or municipal); to prepare the necessary amendments to legislation; to gauge the need for instruction in Russian and other requirements of cross-border cooperation; and to make a cost estimate of the project.

The committee proposed that units teaching classes 5-9 (11-15-year-olds) be established in the three towns. The location of the upper secondary school (classes 10 -12) would be decided later. The priority and focus of the school would be entrepreneurship and good proficiency in Russian, which would be taught as a foreign language five hours a week in the fifth class, gradually decreasing in subsequent years. In addition, some of the subjects would be taught in Russian.

When admitted to the Russian school, the pupils would have studied English since the third class (from the age of 9). Swedish, which in Finland is compulsory for all pupils, and German, would be optional languages. The school would primarily be intended for Finnish-speakers, but also some Russian-speakers could be admitted. The school would be the regional resource centre in Russian language and culture and sell its services to local business as far as possible.

The political decisions were made according to the committee proposals. Parliament passed the necessary amendments (mainly concerning Swedish as an optional language), and the three towns took the necessary decisions. A detailed curriculum was devised by the National Board of Education and local education authorities. The National Board expert on Russian instruction was appointed to chair the school board. Most of the pupils have studied English or Russian for two years when they begin the Finnish-Russian school, where the instruction of both languages is based on prior studies. Pupils can also study German and Swedish as optional languages. The school started in 1997.

The upper secondary school (three years) will start in 2002. This schooling leads to the national matriculation examination like all upper secondary schools in Finland. As yet there are no decisions concerning the changes needed in the matriculation examination because of the Finnish-Russian school (at least with regard to Swedish as an optional language). The upper secondary school also

operates in all the three towns, because parents were not willing to send their children to another town, though this would have made it possible to concentrate operations. Provision specific to this school, such as different subjects taught in Russian, is generally in the form of distance teaching given simultaneously to all the three units.

The results are that there are usually enough new pupils to fill one class. All those willing are admitted. Most pupils study Swedish because as yet there is no decision concerning exemption from compulsory Swedish in the matriculation examination. The school has not yet started its services, which are best suited for secondary pupils and the initial development has needed considerable planning time. The school has both Finnish and Russian speaking subject teachers, though there is a shortage of qualified Russian-speaking subject teachers. Both teacher groups have attended in-service training. The government has granted extra funding each year; sponsorship has been modest.

Commercial and personal contacts with Russia have increased in the past few years. There is cooperation relating to Russian language and culture and their teaching, as well as study visits and exchanges.

Within the scope of this cross-border project, the school authorities of Lappeenranta, Imatra, Joensuu and Vyborg (Russia) have signed an agreement concerning cooperation in curriculum development (literature, mathematics, arts, ethnography) and teaching material exchange. The next step will be pupil and teacher exchanges. The cooperation has the backing of parents and local business on the Finnish side of the border. One problem has been that visas are required in travel to and from Russia.

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Information about other projects in neighbouring languages is also available on the net. (e.g. www.cicero-net.nl).

14. Conclusion

The example above relates to the planning of a small language in border areas. Although learning smaller languages is also important elsewhere, this is a good example in that it contains many aspects of preparing political decisions concerning the teaching of smaller languages which have wider relevance. As has been emphasised above, arranging the teaching of a smaller language requires a stated language need, the existence of political will, verified financing as far as possible, and careful planning and preparation. The planning should involve both education policy, language policy and language teaching experts. It would also be useful if officials responsible for the region and local conditions could make their contribution to the preparations. It also helps to ensure the quality of teaching if the parties concerned have together made sure that teachers of that language are available. One thing which must be taken into account is the need for teachers' in-service training. Cooperation with the country/region where the language is spoken also provides opportunities for pupils to try speaking the language in a genuine environment and may motivate other teachers to learn that language, even though they do not need the skills in their jobs (for example, a teacher of one of the major languages). Contacts with the country/region in question may also help with acquiring learning materials.

In many cases, the teaching of smaller languages and the preservation of threatened languages makes great demands on the education system. At times these demands may feel unreasonable. Society and the school cannot, however, take responsibility for keeping up an individual's language skills, if that person does not feel that it is important. The education system, even individual schools, do, however, play an important role in the presentation of smaller languages. Although the school system is not all-powerful in preventing a language from declining, it is one of the most significant influences.

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