

Minority Language Laws in the EU: Process and Problem of Policy Implementation

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"Does not the sun shine equally for the whole world? Do we not all equally breathe the air? Do you not feel shame at authorizing only three languages and condemning other people to blindness and deafness? Tell me, do you think that God is helpless and cannot bestow equality, or that he is envious and will not give it?"

Constantine the Philosopher (Cyril), 9th Century A.D.¹

Formation of the European Union is seemingly a first political act of such vast magnitude in perhaps the whole of our history of bringing in so many independent nations so closely together. When we try to foster unity at large, we basically intend to inhibit and expand multiplicity and plurality. But on the contrary, it often creates situations for a possible disrespect, negligence, or even of an uncongenial environment for maintenance of diversity in general. Linguistic minorities in the European Union face similar adverse conditions. The minority language laws in the EU although guarantee equal rights for all regional and minority languages and linguistic groups of the Union, there are immense practical difficulties in implementation, as often with any idealistic or pluralistic policy of this kind.

One of the founding principles of the European Union is respect for the diversity of the Union's languages: "European languages are equal in value and dignity and form an integral part of European culture and civilisation". The Union promotes measures to safeguard its unique linguistic diversity as proposed in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992). Policy of promoting multilingualism and talking of protection for minority languages is nothing new. What is new is the new environment and new challenges, which a united Europe presents to the existing minority-language situation in the member states.

Problem Areas

Problems are manifold so far as realization of lofty pluralistic goals of the minority language laws of the EU is concerned, especially those associated with language attitudes, language and education, development of separate written forms or orthography and development of literacy programs, declining linguistic groups, penetration of English into the local and international linguistic practice, and issues of community languages, etc. To this, we may add the growing tendency of homogenisation enforced by development in general and spread of information technology in particular. Lack of experience in dealing with multiplicity of this kind, which the 25 countries put together, could pose, as one entity in the EU, is another problem. Policymaking has never been as arduous a task as the implementation part of it.

The ascendancy and perceived threat of the English language, globalization, concurrent processes of political integration and disintegration, and the current blossoming of regional identities and concomitant European renaissance of minority languages within the framework of the European Union are factors driving the present linguistic developments in the EU. Nationalism, instrumental in shaping modern Europe, remains an effective force reshaping the

¹ As quoted in Fishman, Joshua A. (ed.), 1968, *Readings in the Sociology of Language*, The Hague: Mouton and Co. N.V. Publishers, p. 589.

linguistic landscape of Europe today. On the policy front, however, what explains best the European case is “a naïve and romantic belief” that “language, like culture, is, or ought to be, a simple reflection of mysterious social consensus”². Avoidance of arguments and silence on contentious linguistic issues does not embrace acceptance of plurality, this we must confess.

Defining ‘Minority’: Lacking Protection

“The very notion of ‘minority’ brings in the picture of underprivileged, dominated, subservient people who somehow miss the boat of progress and development. The notion of ‘minority’ also brings home the idea of smallness”.³ And nowhere else does this idea of smallness finds more relevance than with the minority or regional languages of the EU. About 40 million citizens of the Union⁴, which is obviously to increase with the expansion of the EU due this year, regularly use a regional or minority language.

The customary definition of regional or minority language is that used in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, an international treaty supervised by the Council of Europe and adopted by many EU Member States, i.e. “languages traditionally used by part of the population of a state that are not dialects of official languages of the state, languages of migrants or artificially created languages”.

This definition covers many languages and a wide variety of social, political and linguistic situations. Out of all regional or minority languages in the EU, which are distributed in some 59 linguistic population groups, only six have more than one million speakers and only two over half a million.⁵ Catalan, for example, is spoken by some 7 million people in Spain, France and the town of Alghero in Sardinia. Most Catalan speakers live in autonomous communities of Spain where it is spoken by the majority of the population and has official status alongside Spanish. Saami, in contrast, is a family of languages spoken by indigenous peoples in northern Finland, Sweden, Norway and the Kola Peninsula of Russia, some members of which have only a few hundred speakers and are in imminent danger of extinction.

This definition also includes communities who speak a language closely similar or identical to the official or majority language of a neighbouring State. Examples are the German speaking communities of Belgium, Denmark, France and Italy and the Danish-speaking community of Germany, the Albanian and Greek speaking communities of southern Italy and the Croatian and Slovenian speaking communities of Italy and Austria. While these languages are not in danger per se, owing to their official status in a neighbouring country, the vitality the language and its associated cultural heritage in such regions is subject to pressures similar to those of minority languages like Breton or Gaelic.

In addition to the territorial languages described above, the definition includes Yiddish and the languages of the Romani and Sinti people, which are traditionally spoken throughout Europe.

Special cases are Irish and Luxembourgish, which, despite their official status as national languages in their respective countries, in varying degrees share many of the characteristics of regional or minority languages.

² Ager, Dennis, 2003, *Ideology and Image: Britain and Language*, Clevedon & Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, p.1.

³ Abbi, Anvita, “Forgotten Indian Heritage: Languages of Minority Communities of India”, Koul, Omkar N. and L. Devaki (eds.), 2000, *Linguistic Heritage of India and Asia*, Manasagangotri, Mysore: Central Institute of Indian Languages, p. 13.

⁴ According to *IDESCAT & EUROMOSAIC* Report, there are 36 regional or minority languages in the European Union, which have a total of about 20 million speakers. (As on <http://www.caib.es/counselleries/educacio/>)

⁵ *Ibid.*

In total, over 60 indigenous regional or minority language communities can be identified. Although the social, economic and political situation of such communities may vary enormously, there are many factors that bring them together across the European Union.

Languages Spoken by European Union Citizens⁶

Language	Acquired as First Language, i.e. Mother Tongue	Learned as Second Language	Total
	(In %)	(In %)	(in %)
English	16	31	47
German	24	8	32
French	16	12	28
Italian	16	2	18
Spanish	11	4	15
Dutch	6	1	7
Swedish	2	1	3
Greek	3	0	3
Portuguese	3	0	3
Danish	1	1	2
Finnish	1	0	1
Russian	0	1	1
Other	1	4	5

Some communities have links across national frontiers, such as the Basque and Catalan speaking communities of Spain and France; others have traditional cultural and historical ties, such as the Celtic language group in France, Ireland and the United Kingdom. While these links are undoubtedly important and continue to be promoted at the inter-regional level, nearly all regional and minority language communities share a range of deeper interests concerning the survival and continued development of their languages and cultures and the realisation of their potential within the European Union.

Changes in the population structure in the expanded EU, however, not only create the basic problems of language contact, but these are bound to add a new dimension to such problems. Secondary levels of contact emerge, especially, but not exclusively, in the urban areas. The changes in population structure threatens the position of several of the minority or regional languages in their traditional geographical areas, while at the same time, they encourage the dispersal of large numbers of speakers of these smaller languages. A recent Eurobarometer report, as given in the above table, shows that more EU citizens prefer to learn either English or French as a second or third language than any other European language. This is true even for German, notwithstanding the dominant position of German as a mother tongue. This may not have any legal bearing on the situation but it probably does give us some clues as to the direction EU policy on language usage might take.

The nature and extent of the secondary contacts, such as the size of the nationalities/groups involved, their history of previous contacts with the same or other linguistic groups, and their geographical and cultural contiguity, also affects the overall language situation in the EU.

⁶ *Eurobarometer Report*, No. 50, March 1999, as mentioned in Ó Riagáin, Dónall, "The European Union and Lesser Used Languages", *MOST Journal on Multicultural Societies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2001 (as on <http://www.unesco.org/most/vl3n1ria.htm>)

The Problem of Language Attitudes

Language is not only an instrument for the communication of messages. This becomes especially clear in multilingual communities where various groups have their own language. With its language a group distinguishes itself. Therefore it is a common assumption in sociolinguistics that languages carry social meanings or social connotations. The fact that languages are linked up with the identities of social or ethnic groups has consequences for the social evaluation of, and the attitudes towards languages. In a multilingual/multiethnic environment, as in the EU, there is a strong relation between language and identity. This relation finds its expression in the attitudes of individuals towards these languages and their users.

Theoretically, the degree to which individuals self-categorize themselves as members of ethnic groups is critical to understanding their language attitudes.⁷ In multiethnic environments, however, self-categorization alone cannot adequately explain language attitudes. Rather it is necessary to take into account the difference self-categorization as a member of the larger culture and self-categorization as a member of a specific ethnolinguistic group. In addition, subordinate group members' convergence toward dominant group language subtracts from their ethnolinguistic identity.⁸ The underlying assumption is that in a society different social or ethnic groups have certain attitudes towards each other. These attitudes affect attitudes towards cultural institutions or patterns characterizing these groups such as language.

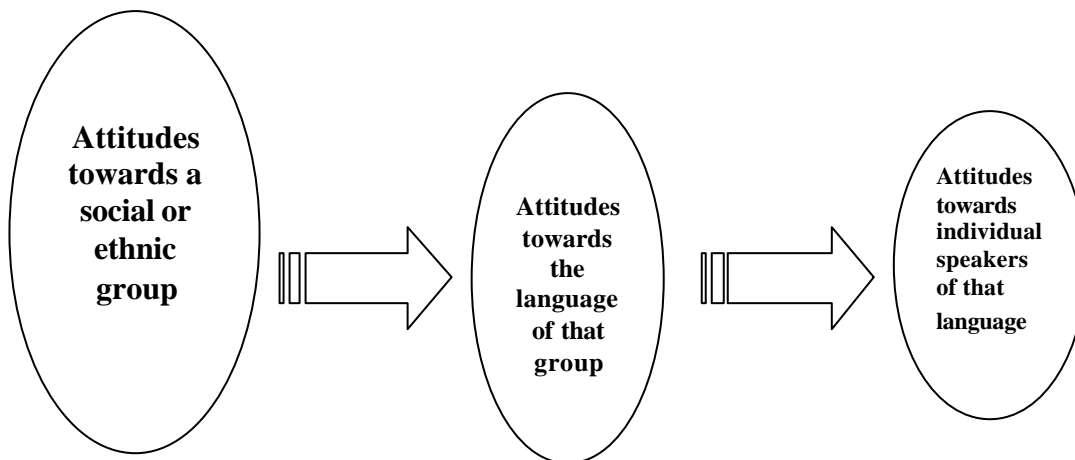
This attitudinal problem has by and large been caused by the differences in social positions of various linguistic groups. The realization that certain languages, i.e. non-prestige languages or minority languages, do not have a function in gaining upward social mobility plays a great part in defining attitudes towards them.

The speakers of minority languages are reported to exhibit a negative attitude towards their own language in many respects. But, this may be far from concluding that they do not attach any importance to it. One's attitude towards a language of another group is by and large precipitated by factors such as cultural differences, social inequality, economic viability, political domination, and historical prejudice.

⁷ Hogg, M. A., N. Joyce and D. Abrams, "Diglossia in Switzerland? A Social Identity Analysis of Speaker Evaluations", *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, Vol. 3, 1985, pp. 185-186, as in Gudykunst, William B. and Karen L. Schmidt, "Language and Ethnic Identity: An Overview and Prologue", in Gudykunst, William B. (ed.), 1988, *Language and Ethnic Identity*, Clevedon & Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, p. 10.

⁸ Gudykunst, William B. and Karen L. Schmidt, *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Figure 5.1
Schema Representing the Formation of Attitudes⁹



Experiencing violations of rights because of ethnic/linguistic affiliation is not unknown. Merely this may not indicate the true picture of attitudinal discrimination, given the fact that attitudes is more of an internal and mental state, which may give rise to forms of behaviour. Furthermore, identities and languages are not monolithic wholes but are clearly differentiated, heterogeneous and variable. This makes their relation in specific situations even more intricate.¹⁰ Language attitudes play a bigger role in all spheres of sociolinguistics, and the problems related. Attitudinal bias is more often than not likely to take a back seat with improving social equilibrium among different linguistic groups in the EU. Attitudes nevertheless are as important in acceptance of the language laws.

Problems in Acceptance of Language Laws

Language policy can be defined as a system of measures regulating the influence of the state on the language functioning on its territory. There is a need to distinguish clearly between state language, official language, national language and regional or minority languages and define their specific social roles to remove the legal ambiguity. "It is necessary to distinguish between language policy as decision-making from language planning as implementation."¹¹

In connection with accepting language laws in the EU member States there arise different problems:

- (I) The mode of functioning of languages and cultures of nationalities, which are separated;
- (II) The problem of the functional development of minority languages and their reasonable combination with the major languages;
- (III) Alongside with the formation of the general economic space, the problems of formation of a general language space by introducing the minority languages into different spheres of organized communication;
- (IV) The choice of realization of language laws without conflicts, for obtaining this goal it is necessary not only to count with language rights of the communities but also with the language rights of the individuals;

These problems impede the realization of the language laws in the EU. The factor of linguistic multiplicity in the EU makes a wider acceptance of language laws a tough proposition. For

⁹ Appel, Rene and Pieter Muysken, 1987, *Language Contact and Bilingualism*, London, Baltimore, Melbourne & Auckland: Edward Arnold, p. 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹¹ Mar-Molinero, Clare, 2000, *The Politics of Language in the Spanish-Speaking World: From Colonization to Globalization*, London: Routledge, p. 74.

instance, about five years ago, the French Presidency of the Union proposed five working languages for the Union– French, German, English, Italian and Spanish. This proposal gave rise to a storm of protest, especially from the Netherlands, and was quickly and quietly dropped.¹²

In spite of the extraordinary care and drive of the member states in pursuing language planning process by whatever strategies and techniques, what most strikes, in the end, is the resilience of the large number of ‘minority or regional languages’, several of them quite small, and the tenacity with which they are maintained. This resilience of languages in the EU minimizes the scope of acceptance of a language law, which is still based on the ‘national - territorial’ status of the languages.

It has not been easy to have an appropriate legal act adopted, one, which would establish a multi-annual action programme to support lesser-used languages. Much preparatory work was done before the legal advisers of the Commission ruled that Article 149 (Education) would not be sufficient as a legal base for the proposed legal act. Article 151 (Culture) would also have to be invoked. There lay the political impasse. Actions under Article 151 require unanimity – something impossible to achieve in the present political climate as it is almost certain that Greece, and even possibly some other states, would seek to veto any programme aimed at supporting regional or minority languages.¹³

A possible solution to this problem may lie in the forecast oriented studies of the language situation and in the implementation of an adequate language policy.¹⁴ The possibility to forecast the advent of the language conflicts and the intentions to prevent aggravations of the national and language conflicts can perhaps improve the acceptance of language laws in the member states of the EU. But there are no fruitful efforts in this direction in most parts. The official policy in the parts is generally connoted with the development of bilingualism. But, some members of intelligentsia declare that bilingualism is only an intermediate stage on the way to national monolingualism. With these utopian ideas, it is difficult to eradicate the problem of acceptance of language laws. It would rather accentuate such problems.

The Problem of Language and Education

The problem of language and education is an important sociological problem in a community, like the EU. Language is a “symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), which allows us to see education as powerful means of providing access to valued symbolic resources”¹⁵. Education moulds an individual not only as a personality but contributes to the development of his language competence. Hence, the linguistic role of education is very significant in a multilingual environment. Micro interaction between educators, students, and communities “either reinforce coercive relations of power or promote collaborative relations of power”¹⁶. “Students’ identities are affirmed and academic achievement promoted when teachers express respect for the language and cultural knowledge that students bring to the classroom and when the instruction is focussed on helping students generate new knowledge, create literature and art and act on social realities that affect their lives”.¹⁷

The problem of language and education is, primarily, two folds: languages as subject of study, and languages as media of instruction. The second problem is of wider consequence, in the present context. The problem, associated with languages as media of instruction, includes

¹² Ó Riagáin, Dónall, *op. cit.*

¹³ Ó Riagáin, Dónall, *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Isayev, M. I., “Conflict-Related Parameters of National Language Policy”, *International Conference Abstracts*, 22 - 25 October 1996, Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 1996, pp. 185-188.

¹⁵ de Mejia, Anne-Marie, 2002, *Power, Prestige, and Bilingualism: International Perspectives on Elite Bilingual Education*, Clevedon & Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, p. 37.

¹⁶ Cummins, Jim, 2000, *Language, Power, and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*, Clevedon & Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, p. 44.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

issues of language choice, which is based on the relative status of the language and its demand in the job market.

Thus, a great inequality exists between pupils who have one of the major languages as their native language and those who do not. However, measures for the expansion of the educational functions of the languages of minorities are taken in many regions of the EU. But, mere increase in the numbers of national schools cannot bring the attitudinal change.

The only scientific solution to this problem of language and education is to create a parity of opportunities for all the languages, in question, in the European Union. Given the socio-economic discrepancy in various regions of the expanded EU, and the emerging linguistic scenario, this solution is difficult to adhere to.

Problem of Revival and Development of (Minority) Languages

According to the "Euromosaic" study published in 1996 by the European Commission, of the 48 minority languages in the EU territory, 23 have only "limited" or "no" capability of survival. Twelve other minority languages are considered as "endangered". Unfortunately, the EU has hardly drawn any consequences from this study. Of its total budget of 90 trillion Euros, only 2.5 million Euros are available to the organizations of linguistic minorities. This is not enough by far to allow efficient work. Particularly little support is given to those languages, which, in their respective countries, are not recognized as official languages.¹⁸

Of all the minority language speakers in the EU, 50% live in Spain and 23% in France, leaving only 47% of all minority language speakers scattered over the remaining 12 member states. These figures suggest how precarious is the situation of minority languages in the European Union, in general. Question of survival of these languages therefore appears greater than their maintenance.

Some languages are made up of several distinct and sometimes extreme, dialects. Groups for whom the tradition of education and literacy is relatively short and incidence shallow speak them, and there are cleavages between urban and rural communities speaking the same language. Some of these languages lack a well-defined writing system and an exclusive lexicon.

Extraordinary internationalization has led to the erosion of cultures and languages. Though, off late, efforts are devoted to the revival and development of these languages, the greatest impediment that obstructs these efforts is the multiplicity of variants. It is a tough task to select any one dialect of these languages for development, as the dialects of the same language are, at times, unintelligible for even that language-group using another dialect. Many languages of this type, often, lack a literary tradition, which is another problem in their revival and development.

Besides these languages, there are several other languages, having a uniform script and spoken by a larger group, which still requires an enhancement in their social status and function. The efforts in this direction are commendable. Measures for expansion of functions of these languages are undertaken in many areas. Minority language schools are opened, the publications in languages of minorities is actively supported; the official correspondence in several of these languages is revived. Most recently, for example, on 22 January 2004, a bill entitled "Act for the promotion of Frisian in the public domain" was presented and well received in Schleswig-Holstein's Land Parliament, which became the first legal text ever written in Frisian in the history of Germany.¹⁹

¹⁸ Written statement submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status, Commission on Human Rights, Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Fifty-first session, Item 8 of the provisional agenda, E/CN.4/Sub.2/1999/NGO/18, 28 June 1999.

¹⁹ *Eurolang* (as on <http://www.ciemen.org/mercator>).

Moreover, politics, economics, business and culture have accelerated the process of language change due to heavy borrowing. This process covers semantic shifts and formation of new words. This adds new spheres of paradigm shift in communication so far as minority languages are concerned.

This problem of interethnic linguistic interaction can be sorted out by formulation of basic outlines of functional and communicative differentiation of lexical and grammatical stock of various languages in question. A liberal consideration to the ethnolinguistic reality and to peculiarities of lingual situation has to be given, in order to examine the prospects of lesser languages. An attempt to make a scientific forecast may lead to the idea that this process is certain to become deeper as it entirely depends on the integration of contacts and expansion of all spheres of communication.

Problems Associated with Bilingualism/Multilingualism

The interaction of people and their languages leads to the formation of bilingualism, which develops either through the control by legislation or by spontaneous linguistic factors. Bilingualism in the EU is quite necessary for the functioning of economics, culture, education and science. It is connected with the actual problem of the communication culture between the representatives of different language groups.

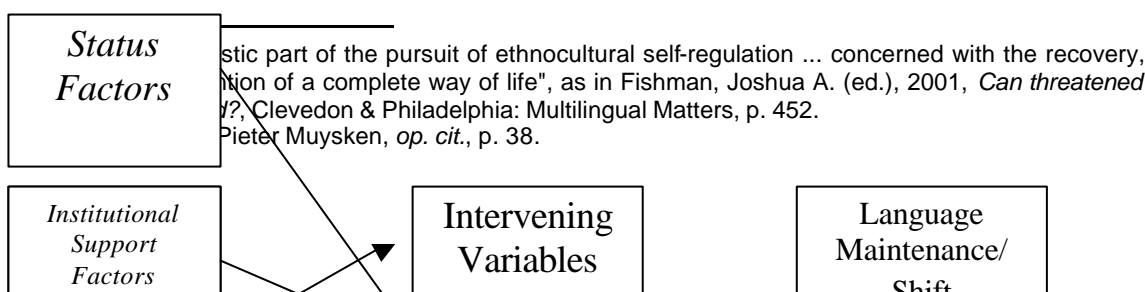
The basic problem of bilingualism is created by a 'paradigm-shift' in the language policy on bilingualism. But, to provide all conditions of the successful formation of bilingualism all kinds of interlingual interference must be exposed.

Language Maintenance, Shift and Loss

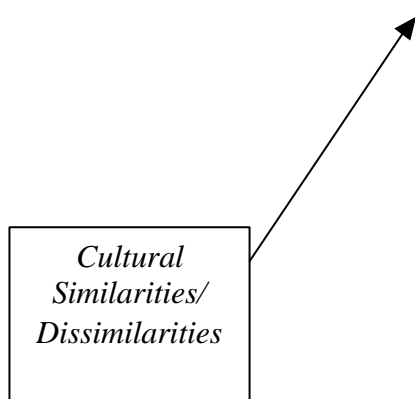
Adoption of majority languages as a regular vehicle of communication in the EU is growing, often mainly because of better chances of upward social mobility and economic success. Language shift in general can hence be equated with shift towards the majority or prestigious language.

There is a combination of three main factors, namely status, demographic, and institutional support, which affect language maintenance and shift. Economic status is the most prominent factor. Where groups of minority language speakers have a relatively low economic status, there is a strong tendency to shift towards the majority language. Social standing of any language is closely aligned to economic status, and thus affects language maintenance and shift. Spanish hegemony was thus most vigorously challenged by the Catalans, above all through the economical power of Catalonia. But, the current passiveness of the Catalan community, on the contrary, may contribute to renewed language shift to Spanish as societal bilingualism necessarily leads to language shift while only boundary maintenance and compartmentalization guarantees language maintenance as exemplified by the relative success of *Reversing Language Shift* (RLS)²⁰ in the case of Ultra-Orthodox Yiddish. The geographical distribution of minority group members therefore affects language maintenance and shift quite considerably. As long as they live concentrated in a certain area, minority groups have better chances of maintaining their language. Sociohistorical as well as language status are also quite important variables guiding language shift/maintenance.

Figure 5.2
Factors Affecting Language Maintenance²¹



When a community stops speaking a language, of course this language will not always be extinguished. But, what happens is the shift towards the majority language. Language shift linked up with gradual loss will finally result in language death, as have happened with many of the endangered languages. After all, "language death does not happen in privileged communities. It happens to the dispossessed and the disempowered, peoples who most need their cultural resources to survive".²² The EU policy makers must therefore make special provisions for saving languages from extinction. There is a score of languages in the EU, which are on the brink of extinction. "More [languages] can be saved than has been the case in the past, but only by following careful strategies that focus on priorities and on strong linkages to them, and only if the true complexity of local human identity, linguistic competence and global



interdependence are fully recognized."²³ Language shift and loss could be stopped by measures, which could constitute both an addition and an alternative to globalization. The need is to draw a strategy for multilingual and multicultural coexistence, and not for the total rejection of the language and culture in power.

²² Crawford, James, 2000, *At War with Diversity: US Language Policy in an Age of Anxiety*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, p. 63.

²³ Fishman, Joshua A. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 481.

The Problem of Maintaining Diversity: One too many?

The Union has eleven official and working languages, which is quite exceptional for an international organisation. The Council of Europe and NATO have only two working languages – French and English. The UN, despite its size, has only six. The practical difficulties, which arise from having such a large number of working languages, should not be underestimated. The Commission has to translate more than a million pages and to interpret for more than 100,000 interpreter days per annum. Geometric progression comes into play with each language added to the list, as translation and interpretation from and into this language must be possible from each and every other official and working language.²⁴ The EU, for instance, had to spend about Euro 690 million on translation and interpretation in the year 2001 alone.²⁵

A study carried out in 1994 by the Gerhard-Mercator Universität of Duisburg showed that there were two dominant languages in use in EU institutions – French and English. The following table gives a résumé of the study:

Languages Used by Staff in EU Institutions²⁶

Language	Within EU Institutions		With EU citizens		With Non-EU citizens	
	(In %)		(In %)		(In %)	
	Oral	Written	Oral	Written	Oral	Written
French	69	75	54	56	30	28
English	30	25	42	41	69	71
German	1	<0.5	3	2	1	1
Others	<0.5	<0.5	1	1	<0.5	<0.5

The list of anomalies is endless. For example, when the LINGUA Programme – now part of *Socrates* – was launched, to promote “foreign language” ability among European citizens, Irish and Lëtzebuergesch were included for the purposes of the programme. Later on, the three non-EU members of the EEA – Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein – agreed to participate in and financially support the EU’s educational and cultural programme. This led to the inclusion of Norwegian and Icelandic in the list of LINGUA languages. Of course, the lesser used languages, spoken by some 40 million EU citizens did not figure in these provisions.

Besides the above-mentioned linguistic problems and policy anomalies, there is a host of other language-related problems, which are, at times, extra-linguistic in nature. The relationship of language to culture and social change in the EU creates one such problem. But, this needs to be pursued along the extent to which society itself is exposed to structural strains because of language contacts of a new sort, and particularly because of the penetration of a *lingua franca* such as English. There are a few aspects of society where restructuring may occur because of changes in the relationship between languages. On the one hand, the very introduction of a new language, especially if it is prestigious, cuts across the existing divisions in society; on the other, it is likely to help set up new status groups. The existence of these status groups is the problem of the relationship of language with traditional social classes. This relationship between language and society is, though, bound to change with time, is also likely to complicate further.

²⁴ Ó Riagáin, Dónall, *op. cit.*

²⁵ According to *InfoBase Europe: Fact Sheet*, February 2003, as on <http://www.ibeuropa.com/>

²⁶ *The New Language Planning Newsletter*, Vol. 9 No.4, June 1995, as mentioned in Ó Riagáin, Dónall, *op. cit.*

The emerging language situation and related problems of language maintenance are also guided by the socio-economic factors. Due to economic viability, the situation of 'minority languages' is likely to deteriorate. Their demand in the job-market is none to negligible. Thus, the socio-economic variable adds a new dimension to the already existing problem of language maintenance as far as the case of 'minority languages' is concerned. The minority languages must be investigated in connection with the way of thinking of a person, and not as an abstract system. The subject and responsibility of Sociolinguistics is the investigation of the language as well as of the social and personal factors, resolution of the contradictions and determination of the ways of the development of the dialogue of cultures.²⁷

The notion of unity in diversity is hard to import into a society overnight, which has so far comparably been a monolithic sociolinguistic entity. Each and every country of the Union, by and large, represented a monolingual society, with perhaps the only a few exceptions. Formation of the European Union has therefore created new conditions of multilingualism, which is likely to expand further with the proposed expansion of the EU by 2004. This coming together of larger linguistic groups will add a new threat to the existing regional and minority languages, which are already in decline. This is like putting some bigger fishes, in addition to the one already existing, in a pond of small ones.

What we have seemingly achieved with modern civilisation is perhaps what guards against any possible bias against any language or group at least in principle. Respect of plurality is what we have achieved on paper but this is something, which is yet to be translated into reality.

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²⁷ Olshansky, D. A., "Social Functions of Language: the Problem of Philosophical Sociolinguistics", *Proceedings: International Scientific Conference "Language and Culture"*, 14 – 17 September 2001, Moscow, organized by Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages, and Journal of Philology, Moscow, 2001, p. 216.