



Although all official languages of the EU member states are the official languages of the Union itself, the use of lesser-used official languages in the EU institutions is limited. Our research of the compatibility between the declared language policies and the actual possibilities to use lesser-used languages focused on Slovene language as an official language of a relatively monolingual state. The ongoing sociolinguistic changes influenced by the new supranational context after the 2004 EU accession were investigated at both EU-institutional level and the level of national politics.

I. EU institutions

From the Slovene standpoint (analysed through interviews with Slovene representatives and a written survey conducted among them) there is a mismatch within multilingualism in the EU institutions. Linguistic diversity and the use of Slovene language have a formal, symbolic value, guaranteeing democratic accountability, legal certainty and equality of member states: all EU legislation is published and equally authentic in all official languages, interpretation to/from Slovene is always available at plenary sittings of the European Parliament or the ministerial-level meetings of the Council of the EU and Slovene can be the language of the case at the Court of Justice of the EU. But on the other hand each institution implements a different regime which limits multilingualism and reduces costs, such as the controlled full multilingualism at the Parliament or on-request interpretation at the Council. The backstage, everyday linguistic habitus at the institutions is thus highly marked by the predominance of English/French (and to a lesser extent German). English is mostly used at all lower-level Parliament and Council meetings while the internal working language at the

Court is French.

Corresponding to this dichotomy, multilingualism is not perceived as strictly positive or negative by Slovene representatives. The equality of all official EU languages is considered culturally and symbolically important, particularly by the higher-ranking respondents, since it preserves, promotes and strengthens the national language and its prestige in a supranational milieu. As lesser-used language speakers fluent in at least one foreign language, they find multilingual repertoires a functional asset: the possibility of choosing the language enables them to be more politically successful when addressing others in their LI or to exclude others from the conversation during negotiations when switching to Slovene. However, there are also drawbacks to multilingualism, such as interpretation/translation errors, the advantage of the native speakers of working languages, the unpreparedness of wider-used language speakers to switch to another language, the representatives' speaking in English although interpretation is available, or rivalry between the three working languages. French as a lingua franca, less taught in Slovenia, impedes efficient communication of Slovenes in the Parliament or Council who would not oppose the dominance of English. Judging by these results, there appears to be no need for radical changes of language-related political agenda of EU institutions. Full multilingualism, albeit enabling the representatives to use their mother tongues, would be financially and organisationally unfeasible and is perceived as pointless by our respondents, since they are mostly proficient in at least one foreign language and claim that for lesser-used language speakers, language switching is not a problem. The only possible improvement from Slovene perspective would be the reduction of the number of working languages in the Parliament and Council from three to one, namely English, but this would probably not be welcomed by speakers of French and German.

2. Slovene political institutions

Since the EU accession in 2004, EU language policies have also affected political bodies in the Republic of Slovenia. Our research centred upon the analysis of political party programs, debates in the Slovene parliament and legislation in the 2000-2008 period. Although multilingualism and foreign language learning were discussed more after 2004, they were mostly perceived as an argument and motivation for the internationalisation and promotion of Slovene language outside the national milieu, particularly by the conservative/oppositional parties which defended monolingualism through protection of Slovene language and prescription of its form, while liberal/governmental parties were oriented towards multilingualism with overt support

for foreign and minority languages. The importance of the position of power was apparent in attitude shifts; the Slovene Democratic Party (SDS) shifted from protectionism to multilingualism when it was in the government and had to defend the EU guidelines.

Both political poles used the EU as an argument in their favour: perceiving Slovene as endangered among other European languages while on the other hand proving its value with its equal status in the Union. Other arguments were introduced to Slovene politics through European unification, such as the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages or the economic advantages of foreign language proficiency.

Slovene language protectionism was also obvious in Slovene legislation which mostly addressed the rights of official languages in Slovenia. Nevertheless, the majority of changes introduced to existing acts were measures to meet the EU guidelines regarding minority or foreign languages (such as the second foreign language as a compulsory subject in elementary schools). The most discussed was the Consumer Protection Act, in which the reference to product labelling in “Slovene language” had to be replaced with “easily understandable language”. Promotion of multilingualism and diversity, placed in the centre of language policies designed by the EU, is thus not consonant with Slovene national language policies where Slovene language protectionism is still prevalent. The new supranational context is mostly perceived as an opportunity to strengthen the dominant national language while the multilingual guidelines are implemented only when directly demanded by the EU.

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