

## FROM LANGUAGE POLICY TO LANGUAGE GOVERNANCE: THE ROLE OF CITIES IN MANAGING TODAY'S COMPLEX DIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** This article offers some preliminary reflections on the need to recognize cities as relevant stakeholders in language policy beyond the implementation of governmental language policies, which are more ideological in nature. The paper begins by providing a succinct overview of how contemporary states are imposing language measures to migrants, it continues with an overview on how regions with minority languages are “caught in the middle” trying to implement policy measures to revitalize their language while their increasingly complex diversity derived from mobility and migration and, finally, it proposes the need to include the local level in a “multilevel approach” to language policy. The article ultimately claims that the existing approaches to the study of language policy should be expanded and include reflections from the field of “language governance” as this approach captures the multiplicity of actors and levels in language policy making. It calls, in sum, for incorporation of “language governance” reflections to the study of language policy.

**Key-words:** Language policy. Minority languages. Language revitalization. Language governance

**Resumo:** Este artigo oferece algumas reflexões preliminares sobre a necessidade de reconhecer as cidades como intervenientes relevantes na política linguística para além da implementação de políticas linguísticas governamentais, que são de natureza mais ideológica. O artigo começa por fornecer uma visão sucinta de como os Estados contemporâneos estão a impor medidas linguísticas aos migrantes, continua com uma visão geral de como as regiões com línguas minoritárias são “apanhadas no meio”, tentando implementar medidas políticas para revitalizar a sua língua enquanto a sua diversidade cada vez mais complexa deriva da mobilidade e migração e, finalmente, propõe a necessidade de incluir o nível local numa “abordagem a vários níveis” da política linguística. Em última análise, o artigo afirma que as abordagens existentes ao estudo da política linguística devem ser alargadas e incluir reflexões do campo da “governança linguística”, uma vez que esta abordagem capta a multiplicidade de actores e níveis na elaboração de políticas linguísticas. Em suma, apela à incorporação de reflexões de “governança das línguas” no estudo da política linguística.

**Palavras-chave:** Política linguística. Línguas minorizadas. Rebitalização linguística. Governança linguística.

### Introduction: From simple to complex diversity

One of the defining characteristics of today's Western societies is the increasing migration flows taking place at an unprecedented pace. There are few issues that have aroused the concern of electorates more than the prospect of rapid social change resulting from migration (HEPBURN; ZAPATA BARRERO, 2014). Against this backdrop, one of the most

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pressing issues has been the integration of immigrants into host societies, broadly defined as “the process of becoming an accepted part of society”. Migration has put a considerable pressure on many European nation states with regard to concepts such as social cohesion, integration, citizenship, identity, culture and language. This interacts with a change in perception regarding immigration and integration.

To capture the thrust of these social changes, we may speak of a transition from ‘simple’ to ‘complex’ diversity (KRAUS, 2012). In the age of *simple* diversity, societies were based on clear differentiating lines between the layers of diversity they had incorporated, ranked according to a hierarchical logic that distinguished between dominant majorities (mainly state majorities), old (autochthonous) minorities, and ‘new’ (immigrant) minorities. *Complex* diversity, in contrast, characterizes settings where historical forms of multilingualism and more recent patterns of linguistic heterogeneity interact in new ways. At the same time, complex diversity not only implies that new layers have to be added; the layers themselves become more fluid (KRAUS, 2012).

Despite this rapid social, and sociolinguistic changes, contemporary nation states have placed an increasing emphasis in prioritizing national languages in a migration scenario. The underlying assumption is that knowledge of language will enable immigrants to function independently within the society which will result in easier acceptance by the host society. Linguistic proficiency has now emerged as one of the key conditions to measure integration and willingness to belong to the host society. Different surveys conducted over a period of time show that a proliferation of integration tests and courses is spreading across Europe

Evidence of the pivotal importance of language in the current immigrant integration policies is the growing number of compulsory language requirements being increasingly implemented across Europe. Immigrant integration and the acquisition of competence in the language(s) of the host country are a focus for political debate and policy initiatives in a growing number of states. Put in other terms, while the rhetoric around the policy measures portrays language as a necessary element to become “an accepted part of society”, the political intentions would be immigration control, language being instrumentalized as a gate-keeping mechanism for this purpose. As pointed out by Jopkke “The novelty of integration policy is its obligatory character, which has notably increased over time, and this notiona ‘integration’ policy has even transmuted into a tool of migration control, helping states to restrict immigration (2007, p. 5). This idea is shared by an increasing number of shclars (HOGAN-BRUN *et al*, 2009, KOSTAKOPOLOU, 2010) have pointed out at the instrumentalization of language as a gate-

keeping mechanism, transformed into a regulatory technique for the state. Against this backdrop, scholars have pointed out at “the need to develop a fuller conceptual and theoretical basis than is currently available for the widespread public discussion on the linguistic and cultural requirements being proposed as elements in the gate-keeping process in many EU member states” (HOGAN BRUN; MAR-MOLINERO; STEVENSON, 2009, p. 1)

### **Regional and minority languages: caught in the middle**

These reflections, however, are frequently conducted at a state level, with little attention paid at sub-state level. Immigration has rarely been examined from a multilevel perspective, including the sub-state view. The vast majority of works on immigration focus on the state level, and more recently on the European level (HEPBURN; ZAPATA, 2014, p. 5). While it is true that immigration generally falls under the rubric of central-state control, certain aspects of migration policy – most notable immigrant integration – have been devolved to the sub-state level. Sub-state territories how hold substantial power over the rights of citizenship – social, cultural, economic and political – and control over institutions that provide access to participation and belonging (HEPBURN; ZAPATA, 2014). Consequently, it is the regional institutional settings and the prevailing public discourses at this level that can importantly shape the pace, intensity and level of immigrant integration.

This sub-state approach to immigrant integration becomes even more important when there is a **regional language** other than the state, majority language. This distinctive characteristic of some regions means that immigrants are often presented with a challenge when moving to a particular sub-state territory: integrating through the minority language of the territory might be key for their participation in social, political and economic life, that is, “to become fully accepted part of society” but immigrants might often adopt the majority language as the best route for social mobility, which subsequently reduces the sub-state population speaking a minority language (HEPBURN; ZAPATA, 2014). One of the greatest fears of sub-state territories with a language of their own is therefore that immigration erodes their linguistic identity. Against this backdrop, sub-state territories have attempted to gain sufficient competencies on immigrant integration to shape policies and discourses aimed at making the minority language attractive enough. If sub-state territories do not have sufficient competences,

the tendency of immigrants is to integrate into the dominant language and culture, the minority nation may become a minority within its own territory (ZAPATA-BARRERO, 2007, p. 12)

This might become a potentially contentious issue as sub-state territories seek to pursue greater autonomy to shape their language policies to support the minority language to demarcate who belongs to the sub-state community in a migration scenario. Often, these sub-states approaches to linguistic integration conflict directly with central-state models, resulting in ideological tensions over policy competencies and the framing of integration policies (HEPBURN; ZAPATA, 2014). The existence of multiple, often competing political identities presents a complex challenge where integration is concerned, especially if the central government and the sub-state territory promote different conceptions of citizenship and different nation-building through different languages (BANTING; SOROKA, 2012)

### **Any place for the local level? Local language policies in an era of complex diversity**

Cities around the world are becoming ever more multilingual due to their established ethnic minorities and their increasing migration rates. This is leading to a rise in metropolitan multilingualism with more and more people in urban localities using languages other than local/regional or national language. As pointed out by Favell, cities are the arena where the newest and sharpest developments are first observed, and where there is a degree of cross-national convergence on both policy problems and policy solutions, that belies many of the differences reflected in national ideological debate (2001).

Manifestations of complex diversity are most salient in cities where historical forms of multilingualism and new elements of linguistic heterogeneity intertwine. Given the particular challenges stemming from this sociolinguistic scenery, cities appear today even more than before as the key sites for formulating institutional responses to managing linguistic diversity.

Rather than being constrained by national policy agendas which are motivated by a predominantly monolingual mindset and legislate in highly symbolic terms, cities are attempting not only to adapt but to manage this emerging multilingualism beyond national language ideologies. As the first point of contact between government and citizens, cities – or the local level in general – is the place where linguistic problems have to be dealt with on a day-to-day basis.

It can be claimed that the rigidity of the state or regional legislative framework, which aims at prioritizing the national or regional language, becomes more flexible when it comes to managing the *de-facto* multilingualism present in cities. Cities are closer to the citizens than regions/states and are, therefore, closer to cater for their day-to-day realities and needs.

A number of institutional responses including languages other than state or regional languages are seen in an increasing number of cities. Examples include the teaching of mother tongues in some of the neighbourhoods in Barcelona<sup>1</sup> or the action taken by the Manchester City Council to foster the social and economic benefits of having multilingual citizens in the city<sup>2</sup>. Institutional responses of this sort can be observed in a considerable number of cities and in concrete policy services where languages – other than the national/official languages – are included – are incorporated languages, in some local services (social services, awareness-raising campaigns, citizenship initiatives or tourist sites). However, we can also observe that there is no systematic approach to managing real multilingualism. Whereas the ethnic composition of cities are discussed at length in the various city networks and policies, the linguistic composition of cities is rarely mentioned (CLIMENT-FERRANDO, 2018). When mentioned, it is done rather cursorily either as something to be celebrated or a complex problem. These are only some of the numerous examples found. However, from a policy perspective, multilingualism has tended to be downplayed at city level.

The reality from a policy perspective stands in sharp contrast with research on urban multilingualism, which has exponentially increased over the past few years. Figure 1 below shows graphically the increasing attention of urban multilingualism from a research point of view.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information visit the Barcelona Neighbourhoods Plan (Pla de Barris de Barcelona), available at <https://pladebarris.barcelona/ca/plans-de-barri/la-trinitat-vella/concrecio-del-pla/llengues-maternes-aprenentatge-de-l-urdu-i-l-arab>

<sup>2</sup> Report available here

<https://democracy.manchester.gov.uk/documents/s9767/Manchesters%20Language%20Diversity.pdf>

**Figure 4:** Research on Urban Multilingualism



**Source:** EUROMECC research project. Jean Monnet Network on European Identity, Culture, Exchanges and Multilingualism. Report: *Multilingual identities. A study of attitudes towards multilingualism in three European cities.*

As highlighted in above, a peak of research interest can be observed around the year 2005, following an upward trend and reaching the highest peak around the years 2014-2015. This upward trend, acknowledged also by academia seems to contradict the policy approaches to urban multilingualism, which seems absent from policy debates.

The analysis of the current research trends on urban multilingualism shows the existence of a wide range of different subjects areas, related mainly to sociolinguistics, translation and to education. The main lines of research identified also bring to surface the scarcity of academic debates from other disciplines that are also key to language management in urban contexts such as urban politics, urban planning by sociologists, geographers or political scientists (KING; CARSON, 2016, p. 4).

The analysis conducted has led us to identify a number of research networks focused on urban multilingualism:

1. LUCIDE. Languages in Urban Communities (2011-2014)
2. EUROMECC (2014-2017)
3. Language Rich Europe (2009-2012)
4. The challenges of medium-sized language communities in multilingual cities (2015)
5. Multilingual Cities Project. On the Status of Immigrant Minority Languages at Home and at School
6. MIME. Mobility and Inclusion in a Multilingual Europe (2014-2018)

In 2019, a number of scholars from the University of Manchester launched the Multilingual Cities Movement, a new research network that calls for the need to engage in “productive collaborations between universities and local governments, communities and organisations, committed to understanding linguistic diversity and developing multilingualism as an enhancement for society. The movement seeks to extend these collaborations, both in- and outside cities, in a broad alliance between projects and organisations which aim to build stronger and better social relationships through openness to the opportunities and challenges that linguistic diversity involves”<sup>3</sup>.

### **From language policy to language governance?**

The description above on how the different levels of government manage linguistic diversity derived from mobility and migration leads us to incorporate reflections and concepts developed in political sciences that could also be useful to recognize and give more visibility and prominence to the local level. The concept of governance and, in consequence, language governance. Language governance studies borrow the term ‘governance’ from political studies of public management and decentralisation processes. It focuses primarily on the involvement of sub-state administrative levels but also other key stakeholders at local level as important elements in solving language problems.

The volume edited by Loughlin and Williams (2007) entitled *Language and Governance*, outline some of the key philosophies of the approach:

The main thrust of the argument of governance theorists is that, as society becomes more complex and differentiated, the traditional method of governing from above – government – becomes more difficult. This leads to governance, understood as steering rather than directing, which it is claimed supplements or at times even replaces government. Governance is allegedly more bottom/up than top-down and involves a partnership between government and nongovernmental elements of civil society (2007, p. 59–60).

Governance includes a wider variety of stakeholders beyond official bodies such as civil society, social capital, political empowerment and participatory democracy. It calls for a switch

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<sup>3</sup> For a full account of the Multilingual Cities Movement, see <http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/call-for-a-multilingual-cities-movement/> [last accessed 5 May 2020]



from vertical to horizontal forms of government. Governance also involves a shift in concern for the manner in which different groups of citizens interact with government (Williams 2007, p. 13)

Whereas states and regions concentrate on the promotion/protection of their national/regional language, the city level cater for the most immediate needs add another layer, closer to the citizen. This local level, the lowest sub-national level, is the place where linguistic problems have to be dealt with on a day-to-day basis. Language issues are much more than managing linguistic diversity. They are also about social cohesion, civil rights, democratization, equality, and opportunities in society.

Adopting a language governance approach facilitates greater understanding of the complexity of the concept of language policy in modern society as it allows us to analyze a multiplicity of voices and stakeholders involved in language provision at a level closer to the most immediate needs of citizens. In short, we need an expanded concept of language policy to include language governance, as it is a wider, more dynamic conceptual framework which allows us to analyze the relationship between language practices, language beliefs and language management. It is not proposed to elevate language governance to the same level as language policy but rather to broaden the scope of language policy to include governance.

Just as language policy will be enhanced by paying greater attention to questions of governance, specifically the interaction of actors and institutions, it is argued that language governance in turn will benefit from closer integration with language policy. This is particularly so in the case of language beliefs, as these are powerful influences on the institutional actors participating in governance, although they have not featured strongly in the governance debate to date. The Irish case illustrates how language beliefs contained in the statutory policy documents of public bodies can apparently contradict the overt language policy aims

Williams (2007) and Loughlin and Williams (2007) have argued that the state of languages is influenced by the interaction of local, regional, national and international actors, each seeking to achieve its own form of governance. In this paper, perspectives from language governance are combined with elements of the existing language policy approach.



## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Cities show an increasing dynamism as relevant stakeholders in policy making, including language, establishing making synergies through the creation of networks. We are witnessing growing numbers of formal and institutionalized governance structures built from below (cities themselves) aimed putting city-networks at the core of the political debates.

Cities are increasingly becoming an international priority and are taking a more important role in global politics. Cities are now related directly to international global instruments, have their own voice in many aspects and often bypass states in a number of policy issues. There is a growing relevance of international cooperation mechanisms for local governments. Cities show an increasing dynamism as non-state actors and are sharing and transferring technical know-how and expertise, making synergies through the creation of networks. In other words, we are witnessing growing numbers of formal and institutionalized governance structures built from below (cities themselves) aimed putting city-networks at the core of the political debates.

From a policy perspective, cities are adopting a number of institutional responses including languages other than state or regional languages as mechanisms to communicate or give linguistic support or recognition to the languages of citizens. IN this respect, cities have also become relevant actors in language issues beyond the replication (and application) of national/regional policies. For this reason, the concept of language governance is proposed to give a broader, more accurate vision of the multiplicity of actors and levels in language policy making.

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