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MIME

Mobility and Inclusion in Multilingual Europe

# Third Publishable Summary

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## 1. Summary description of project context and objectives

The MIME research project (2014-2018) investigates the challenges of multilingualism for Europe and its citizens. In contrast with most earlier research on linguistic diversity supported by the European Commission, this project is not strictly rooted in the language sciences. Rather, it views multilingualism as a transversal feature of contemporary Europe, whose study requires combining inputs and perspectives from different disciplines. Therefore, the 25 project teams include researchers from 11 specialties across the whole span of the social sciences and humanities. This helps approaching multilingualism from various angles.

This strongly interdisciplinary orientation converges with another principle animating the MIME project: since the range of phenomena that linguistic diversity encompasses is extremely broad, any proper account of "diversity-in-society" must simultaneously consider processes unfolding at the micro, meso and macro levels:

* to varying degrees, multilingualism characterises the environment in which micro-level actors such as individuals and households live. They encounter, learn and use different languages in the family, in the community, at school, or at work.
* Multilingualism is also an issue for meso-level organisations such as private sector companies or universities, who need to make choices regarding the languages of internal and external communication.
* Finally, at the macro level, multilingualism contributes to shaping the social, political, and geopolitical features of countries and supra-national entities, including the EU itself.

Multilingualism, then, is a transversal phenomenon exposing persons, organisations and societies to various challenges. The latter, however, turn up in very specific forms in given contexts. Therefore, there is no such thing as one-size-fits-all solutions, let alone universal "best practice" responses. Instead of attempting to come up with sets of rules about what to do regarding, say, "the multilingual classroom", or "the use of translation in international organisations", the MIME project approaches multilingualism in terms of *tools* that users can appropriate and adapt to their specific conditions. These can serve to select and design language policies in areas as varied as the constitutional aspects of minority language protection, linguistic integration in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, the combination of formal and non-formal approaches to language teaching, the complementarity between machine and human translation for efficient multilingual communication, the ethical implications of competing criteria of linguistic justice, the modelling of demolinguistic dynamics , etc.

Nevertheless, overall consistency in the approach to diversity is needed, and it is provided by an integrative and innovative framework. The latter approaches language policy as a form of public policy, not unlike public policy in the other spheres such as the environment, culture, or transportation. Policy analysis provides essential concepts and criteria for the application of language policy instruments to language questions in specific, unique contexts.

This way of linking up fundamental research with practical needs as they manifest themselves on the ground has been supported by the establishment and maintenance, throughout the duration of the project (2014-2018) of regular contact with some 220 individual professionals or associations active in translation, interpreting, language teaching, migrant integration, practical language policy design, etc., who have liaised with the MIME project through its **Stakeholder Forum**.

## 2. Description of work performed and main results

The project has unfolded in three phases.

In the first phase, the emphasis was placed on re-interpreting manifestations of the "multilingual challenge" in terms of the project's radically novel analytical framework. This framework rests on the idea that if multilingualism is commonly seen as a *challenge*, it is not because multilingualism is just experienced as a *problem*. Multilingualism, rather, is a dimension of contemporary societies that carries *both* advantages and drawbacks. The question, then, becomes that of how European society can use language policy in order to strike the best possible balance between these advantages and drawbacks.

This obviously raises very complex questions, particularly when due account is taken of its simultaneously micro, meso and macro dimensions, and of the *interactions* between these different levels. It is not possible to do justice to this complexity by focusing only on its linguistic aspects, hence the need for an interdisciplinary perspective combining them with political, sociological, economic, psychological, legal, educational, etc. considerations.

In order to conceptually manage this complexity, the "advantages-and-drawbacks" approach is transposed in terms of two interrelated dimensions, namely "mobility" and "inclusion". Both are relevant components of the European venture. Mobility is the possibility for the citizens of EU member states to move freely and easily across boundaries; "inclusion" refers to the fact that mobile citizens ought to be well integrated in the society where they settle – a condition which typically requires them to learn the local/national language(s). Respecting and nurturing local expressions of linguistic and cultural diversity is a core value of European integration, recognised by the Treaties. However, the two objectives of mobility and inclusion do not automatically converge: making mobility (across the EU) easier may end up undermining inclusion (into local communities); conversely, an exclusive emphasis on inclusion can hamper mobility. A balance must be struck between the two, and the overall cohesion of European society can be said to *proceed* from the *balanced combination of mobility and inclusion*.

The project's second phase was devoted to applications of the foregoing approach through a wide range of theoretical and empirical case studies (whether theoretical or empirical, involving desk research or fieldwork, focused on one context or comparative, qualitative information or quantitative).

In the project's third and last phase, the findings of the second phase were revisited and processed in order to generate policy *orientations* (as distinct from *recommendations*). A selection of 72 topics spanning the entire project is available in the recently published **MIME Vademecum**, which is destined for a readership of non-specialists (including legislators and civil servants) who have to take a stand on language policy matters.[1] Each topic, whose treatment embodies our research findings, is approached through practical questions and answers, showcasing tools that users can appropriate and adapt to the language challenges they encounter in their specific and changing realities.

1 Some 200 copies have already been given free of charge to selected MEPs and EC civil servants. A pdf version of the report can be ordered free of charge from the MIME website.

A group picture taken at the MIME Final Conference official dinner, on top of the German Bundestag, 27 August 2018. Portrayed on the picture are most of the MIME consortium members, plus several external participants to the event.

For lack of space, it would not be possible here to present this vast range of findings, but what matters no less is the project's *meta-level results*. Three main conclusions stand out:

1. Multilingualism cannot be left to itself, and *laissez-faire* is not an option. The EU should design a more proactive language policy paying explicit attention to the exigencies of *both* mobility and *inclusion*, not only for the sake of each, but because social cohesion requires combining them.
2. A proper language policy for the EU should be *integrated*, which requires (i) the joint consideration of various classes of processes (linguistic, social, economic, legal, etc.), because language policies are transversal, and (ii) the explicit identification of the reciprocal influences between the micro, meso and macro levels.
3. In order to enjoy broad support, diversity management policies should foster inclusion beyond the sense in which this notion is frequently understood. "Inclusion", by definition, must be for everybody – majorities as well as minorities, autochthonous as well as migrant communities.

## 3. Expected final results and potential impacts

Beyond the project itself, the teams are now working on an edited volume presenting theoretical and empirical analyses in greater detail, in connection with suggested policy orientations for meeting the challenges of multilingualism.

The EU has generally tended to avoid language policy questions or handle them in narrowly restricted areas – often because of the lack of an adequate legal basis for extensive policy development. However, the absence of such a legal basis, apart from reflecting what may be seen as a certain lack of political will among member states, arguably also proceeds from the fact that the issues at hand are objectively complex. Language policies bearing the seal of the EU, thus, tend to be fragmented and often inconsistent, sometimes even self-contradictory.

MIME offers innovative tools for the formulation of more proactive, more integrated, and more coherent policies. Our results warrant making the following suggestions, which can make a significant impact on social cohesion in Europe:

1. increase the use of the territoriality principle in order to better safeguard the long-term prospects of autochthonous minority languages;
2. increase EU support for the implementation of international instruments such as the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;
3. develop context-sensitive language policies to favour the development of more individualised expressions of multilingualism;
4. integrate formal, non-formal and informal modes of language learning;
5. deepen multilingualism in education in order to improve educational inclusion, rather than narrowly focus on the mother-tongue / lingua franca diptych;
6. keep encouraging the learning of the local/ national languages, since in processes of inclusion, nothing replaces the acquisition of these languages by newcomers;
7. rethink teacher education to better prepare teachers to deal with language contact phenomena;
8. adopt truly multilingual language policies in higher education instead of extending the role of English only;
9. make space for multiple lingua francas, since English is not the only one that can be used for this purpose;
10. encourage multilingualism in order to foster individual creativity, since a positive and statistically significant correlation between the two has now been established;
11. combine communication strategies (human translation, machine translation, intercomprehension, lingua franca use, additional foreign language skills), since there is considerable evidence of complementarity between them, but match them with context (e.g., low-risk v. high-risk situations, short-term v. long-term needs, etc.);
12. assess language policy choices with the help of new (classical or simulation-based) models of language dynamics, which are now available for making much finer conditional predictions regarding the impact of language policy choices;
13. give adequate consideration to issues of linguistic justice when weighing language policy plans, paying particular attention to "equal dignity" in the normative assessment of language policy scenarios, because it is a condition for the exercise of other liberties;
14. establish a system of indicators of societal resilience in order to monitor the security implications of language policy and language-related conflict;
15. adapt language rules for consumer protection in the market for goods and in the regulation of selling arrangements. In order to promote multilingualism through EU consumer legislation;
16. move towards a stronger application by EU institutions of Articles 21 and 22 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights;
17. consider amendments to certain provisions of EU Treaties, in particular Article 3, paragraph 3 of the Treaty on European Union. To make reference to valuing and enhancing the multilingual competence of all EU citizens.

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