



MIME

Mobility and Inclusion
in Multilingual Europe

The Multilingual Challenge: Toward Policy Responses

February 2017

Introduction: understanding complex multilingualism

The MIME project (2014-2018) addresses the Multilingual challenge for the European citizen and examines the following questions: how can Europeans balance the requirements of mobility in a modern, integrated, technologically advanced with the need to maintain and take advantage of Europe's linguistic and cultural diversity? What does this challenge imply in terms of communication practices, language use and language rights, language teaching and learning? How does this translate into policies regarding national languages, minority languages, and immigrant or heritage languages? These questions go well beyond what received approaches to language policy normally deal with. The MIME project, therefore, is designed to foster innovation in the field of language policy at three main levels.

First, its approach is anchored in **public policy analysis**. This distinguishes it from other research on language and multilingualism, which often focuses on the observation of actors' linguistic practices in particular settings. Instead, the MIME project offers an integrating framework where a wide range of insights, from recent sociolinguistic work on micro-level processes to macro-level considerations on linguistic justice originating in political theory, can be combined in a policy-oriented perspective.

Second, the MIME project is **deeply interdisciplinary**. The project partners represent more than ten different disciplines (political science, philosophy, sociolinguistics, translation studies, sociology, education sciences, history, economics, geography, law, and psychology), but the team leaders all have previous experience in the application of their particular discipline to language issues. Crucially, these disciplinary orientations are evenly distributed in the project, allowing a balanced and comprehensive approach to the management of linguistic diversity.

Third, the MIME project is designed to consider jointly a wide range of language issues that are usually addressed separately, allowing for a **comprehensive**

approach to the management of linguistic diversity. It considers simultaneously issues such as:

- * the protection and promotion of **regional and minority languages** in Europe;
- * the presence and visibility, in an EU member state, of the **official languages of other member states** (as a result of intra-European mobility);
- * the challenges of effective second and **foreign language learning in education systems**, which raises, in particular, the issue of the special role major languages, including one or more lingua franca(s);
- * the language issues surrounding the presence of other (historically extra-European) **languages accompanying migration flows**;
- * the problem of efficient and fair **communication in multilingual organisations** – not least the European institutions themselves;
- * a number of specific questions connected to the management of multilingualism, such as the linguistic dimensions of consumer protection or the specific language needs of retirees settling in another EU member state.

Typically, these various challenges had been approached in relative isolation from each other, and the attention devoted to one risks relegating others to the background, even if they are no less relevant than before. However, this piecemeal approach is increasingly less satisfactory as a result of two major trends. The first of these trends is **globalization**, which increases the frequency of interlinguistic contact. Linguistic diversity has become an inescapable feature of modern societies, at the workplace, in the classroom or during one's free time, and it pervades economic life (production, consumption, and exchange). The second major trend is **technological development**, particularly in information and communication, both of which are intimately connected with language skills and language use.

Taken together, these trends underscore the fact that societies are experiencing **fundamental and rapid change**. This change affects



language and multilingualism in a number of ways, often blurring the boundaries between types of language challenges. While parsing remains useful for a systematic analysis of contemporary language issues, this analysis must consider them jointly.

Another challenge thrown up by these combined trends is the **growing interconnection of levels in language issues**, where the **micro level** (individuals and households), the **meso level** (organisations, whether non-profit or for-profit, public or private, like universities or companies) and the **macro level** (society as whole, whether locally, nationally, or globally) influence each other. This trend is not unique to language, but it raises, in the case of language, questions of particular complexity. Gone are the days when the protection of a minority language could be envisaged strictly within the confines of a particular region: the destiny of the language also depends on its visibility on the Internet and on its availability elsewhere – e.g., in the cities where young members of the community go to university. Likewise, the linguistic integration of migrants may be a more complex and multilingual process than used to be the case. In the past, “integration” often amounted to the acquisition of the local language. However, as a result of technological and cultural change, this learning process is more likely, nowadays, to be associated with various forms of language maintenance. For example, the decline in the cost of international travel and telecommunications makes the language of the country of origin (sometimes called the “heritage” language) readily available in people’s daily life. Geopolitical trends affect activities in the home, just as personal opinions may be given worldwide resonance through social networks. The strength and modalities of these cross-level interactions may vary from one case to the next, confronting decision-makers tasked with orienting policy choices with **very diverse local conditions**.

Summing up, the re-thinking of the linguistic challenge requires us to come to grips with a considerable level of complexity and to handle it in a systemic perspective. Received approaches to language policy are not always adequately equipped to deal with this task.

The core mission of the MIME project is to provide an analytical approach to deal with this complexity. The project’s overall objective, then, is not to provide a detailed linguistic analysis of communicational processes (as has been done in earlier research projects), but to develop an approach generating consistent policy responses to the challenges of linguistic diversity, and illustrating these responses with applications to specific situations. The MIME project, ultimately, aims at proposing:

a set of interrelated, mutually compatible analyses of language issues that help to navigate a vast range of questions (political, social, educational, communicational, etc.), while also moving in a consistent way between the micro, meso and macro levels at which linguistic processes unfold;

a set of policy-oriented tools that analysts, decision-makers and citizens at large can adapt and apply to specific contexts, also taking in stride the rapid changes affecting these contexts.

The trade-off model and its implications

The MIME project’s core analytical is the trade-off model, which provides a unifying framework. It starts out from the idea that the language issues confronting European citizens and their authorities can be approached through the prism of a common problem, namely, the **tension between two equally justified objectives, namely, mobility and inclusion**.

The trade-off model is a classic policy analysis instrument. It may be applied to any problem where a human society has to make decisions and, in particular, needs to balance commendable, but not converging goals. Multilingualism is a “challenge” precisely because it points towards goals that aren’t easily reconciled:

On the one hand, Europe intends to become a strongly integrated union whose citizens can freely move between member states for work, study, leisure



or retirement. This is what we call **mobility**, a notion which denotes a broader range of processes than physical migration and reflects the growing multiplicity of motivations and modalities associated with the geographical, or sometimes virtual movement of people. Mobility requires easy communication among people with different linguistic backgrounds. This can be achieved by appropriately combining multiple communication strategies involving various ways of using languages, but which challenge the association traditionally made between a particular language and a particular geographical area.

On the other hand, the “multilingual challenge” raises issues of **inclusion**, in which languages play a fundamental role. The range of languages spoken in Europe is crucial to the definition of its diversity, which is recognised as a core value of the Union. This diversity is manifested in the linguistic specificity of different parts of the EU, whose member states have different official languages (sometimes more than one, with various internal arrangements, at national and/or sub-national level, to deal with this diversity). Inclusion, then, refers to the fact that a sense of belonging to and connection with one’s place of residence – whether one was born there, or moved and chosen to settle there. This sense of belonging may in particular be reflected in participation in the social, political, economic, and cultural life of the country, region and local area of residence, implying familiarity with the local language. Thus, the conditions required for the maintenance and/or emergence of a sense of belonging and connection requires that the many languages and cultures that make up European diversity are recognised and nurtured. This enables long-time residents to feel secure in their capacity to extend inclusion to newcomers. This matters, given the importance that people usually attach to language and culture in identity-building processes. While inclusion implies the integration of newcomers into local conditions, it does not require the latter to relinquish the linguistic and cultural features that they bring with them, and can allow for the emergence of multi-layered identities.

The MIME project builds on the idea that a **trade-off problem arises** between “mobility” and “inclusion”. On the one hand, if society were to opt for an exclusive emphasis on the necessities of inclusion in a specific place in the EU, this could lead to material or symbolic impediments to citizens’ mobility. Putting it differently, an exclusive emphasis on “inclusion” makes mobility more costly for people, whether in material or symbolic terms. More inclusion will generally entail less mobility. Conversely, an exclusive focus on mobility can have a detrimental effect on inclusion, because it may, through the potentially uniformising forces it abets, erode the sense of place, specificity and rootedness associated with different locales within the EU. At worst, if this focus on mobility is perceived as undermining local languages and cultures, it can cause a negative backlash among some citizens who may feel dispossessed of their sense of place. More mobility can be disruptive for inclusion processes.

Therefore, we have the typical makings of a trade-off, in which two goals, both worth pursuing, may be at odds with each other. In order to resolve the trade-off, the MIME project pursues the two following aims:

1. to identify, given an existing constraint (which restricts the extent of mobility achievable while preserving a certain level of inclusion, and vice-versa), the best balance between the two;
2. to identify policy orientations that can help to relax this constraint – in particular, to formulate measures (or novel combinations of measures) that can increase mobility without impeding inclusion, and improve inclusion without restricting mobility. The guiding principle is that of increasing compatibility between mobility and inclusion.

Much of the attention of MIME researchers is devoted to the study and reinterpretation of classical language issues in terms of this trade-off model, in order to bring to light adaptations to existing arrangements that can increase



the compatibility between mobility and inclusion in various domains (constitutional arrangements, daily life in diverse neighbourhoods, educational systems, etc.). At the same time, and in order not to unduly constrain the range of analyses and policy solutions that the project's framework can generate, the list of concepts common to the 25 participating teams is deliberately kept to a minimum. This maximises research teams' autonomy in using their specific disciplinary expertise and methods in the quest for solutions. Nevertheless, one key concept that has emerged from research work is that of **cohesion**.

For the purposes of the MIME project, cohesion is defined, at the European level, as a product of the **balanced combination of mobility and inclusion**. This balance, of course, is something dynamic that changes over time, but the general perspective on mobility in the long term can be summarised as follows. Europe will be cohesive:

- * if its citizens can easily move between member states and not be confined to one state where they happen to have been born or to have studied. This requires support for arrangements and institutions that facilitate mobility. Such support can concern the legal provision of language rights, the design of school syllabuses, the regulation of multilingualism in the packaging of consumer goods, the conditions under which access to public services is guaranteed, etc.;
- * and if, while taking full advantage of the educational, professional and other opportunities offered by mobility, citizens are included in the local community in which they settle, for a short or for an extended period. This requires support for the vitality of diverse communities, big or small, which differ from each other and manifest their uniqueness, in particular, through their specific linguistic features. Cohesion, therefore, also implies paying attention to the concerns of those who chose not to move or have no particular reason to do so, but who may find themselves in the role of a host society. Their sense of place must not be threat-

ened, but enriched by the arrival of mobile, and linguistically and culturally different European fellow citizens.

Applications

The trade-off model is being applied to **four main classes of problems**.

1/ Political organisation and discourse (addressed in Work package 1) raise issues of language rights and constitutional arrangements. Such arrangements are primarily designed to manage the respective position of different ethnolinguistic groups (typically, a majority whose members usually speak language Y and one or more "traditional" minorities speaking language(s) X1, X2, etc.). While legal and constitutional arrangements, reflecting the usual principles of international law, are typically restricted to autochthonous minorities (thus excluding the languages Z1, Z2, etc. spoken by more or less recent immigrant communities, whether from other EU member states or from other continents), maintaining a sharp distinction between the language rights of different linguistic communities is increasingly problematic. Using a comparative approach applied, in the main, to legal texts and policy documents, as well as to commentary on these sources, the MIME project teams have reviewed political and constitutional arrangements in two selected European countries (France, the Netherlands) in four overseas cases (Canada, China, India and the United States) and in pan-European legal instruments (the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages).

2/ Social practices (addressed in Work package 2) are centered on questions of inter-community relations and identity-building, whether individual or collective. MIME examines them with a particular emphasis on European cities that exemplify various forms of experience with linguistic diversity (Amsterdam, Barcelona, Brussels, London and Riga). Processes of transnationalism and Europeanisation combine in giving



rise to complex processes in which different layers of (self)-identification are combined. This affects for example our ways of experiencing and relating to space, particularly the visual features of our linguistic environment (sometimes called “linguistic landscape”). Of course, changes in the linguistic landscape are an inescapable by-product of increased mobility; but this challenges residents’ sense of place, which is a crucial dimension of the conditions under which processes of inclusion are expected to operate. MIME project teams investigate these issues through qualitative research on informants’ linguistic practices and representations of linguistic diversity in their daily life.

3/ Educational processes (addressed in Work package 3) are of course crucial to our ability to deal with the multilingual challenge. In the face of increasing mobility, multilingualism and overall diversity in student populations, we need to identify ways of helping educational institutions, school administrators, teachers, teacher trainers and other school staff to discharge their duties in such a deeply changed environment. Further, we need to understand how education systems can, in turn, help to increase the compatibility between mobility and inclusion. For this purpose, MIME research teams have been investigating not so much the didactic dimensions of language teaching and learning as some of its broader, organisational aspects, in particular the explicit integration of various forms of multilingualism (which many pupils bring into the classroom) in the education process and the complementarity between formal and non-formal language teaching and learning, with the former occurring mainly in classroom context, with the latter can involve the participation of the community at large. Our comparative investigation of the ways in which these questions are managed in different EU member states such as Germany, the UK, Italy, France, Spain, and Finland, branches out into a vast array of specific aspects of the functioning of educational systems, from teacher training to certification. These turn up in the case of majority languages, minority languages, immigrant languages and languages of wider communication. Given the social, political, and economic importance of tertiary education, a particular line of

investigation in the MIME project is set aside for the study of the mobility-inclusion trade-off as it crystallizes in academic teaching and research.

4/ Multilingual mediation (addressed in Work package 4) may be approached as a set of strategies for communication in multilingual contexts. These strategies can be adopted and combined in various settings where people with different languages interact. Four main strategies are investigated in the MIME project: (i) making increased use of new translation technologies; (ii) developing a systematic approach to the use of human translation and interpreting, viewed as a public policy in itself, particularly for the delivery of public services; (iii) resorting not just to one, but to a few different lingua francas chosen according to context; (iv) exploiting the potential of intercomprehension, that is, of the ease with which receptive skills in languages close to one’s L1 can be developed, particularly in written communication. These four modes of mediation are compared in a series of case studies involving diverse forms of mobility and degrees of inclusion, namely: the (expat) Russian-speaking community in the south of Catalonia; asylum-seekers in Ljubljana and Leipzig; foreign academic staff in Ljubljana; official communication in twin-town partnerships and Euroregions; use of Esperanto as a lingua franca; intercomprehensive language use by MA graduates in Reims.

Alongside these four main areas of research, MIME is visiting and in some cases addressing hitherto unexplored aspects of the **fundamentals of language policy analysis**. This is done in Work package 5, which is devoted to “policy” (in the sense of public policy, as opposed to the politics of language). The relevance of this examination exceeds the European context, even if the analytical framing of the questions at hand refers to the European situation. MIME teams have developed a synthetic model of language dynamics (why do some languages gain ground while others retreat?), identifying the decisive factors (including some that can be influenced through public policy) that nudge these dynamics towards uniformity, or, on the contrary,



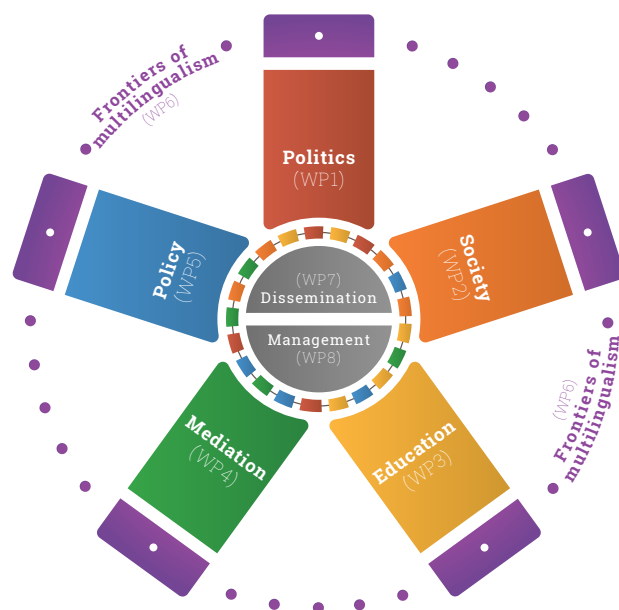
allow for the maintenance of sustainable linguistic diversity. Other teams are investigating the distributive effects of language policy choices, shedding light on two distinct aspects of the issue of fairness: first, how are different language communities impacted by these choices? And what is the actual nature of the assets (material or not) that are being redistributed as a result of the implementation of language policies? MIME is also developing an integrative typology of language policy questions, providing a general mapping of language policy into which a large number of language problems can be slotted, thus clarifying which tools can be used to formulate well-targeted policy responses. Finally, a legal team is looking at the formal requirements, for EU Treaties, of the adoption of the policy measures required to design an integrated language policy meeting the “multilingual challenge”.

In addition to the foregoing research, MIME includes a small set of pilot studies addressing little-known dimensions of multilingualism. These short pilot studies bear upon the links between multilingualism and geopolitical issues of security; the linguistic dimensions of consumer protection on an integrated, multilingual market; the identification of facets of cultural experience in the history of Roma communities as a possible repository of novel ideas for coming to terms with the multilingual challenge; the specific language needs of mobile retirees; and the connections between multilingualism and creativity, with an exploration of the implications of this link in the area of finance.

Outcomes

In addition to regular research reports submitted to the European Commission, the MIME project will produce a *Vademecum* (2018) with practical policy orientations on the management of multilingualism in Europe, as well as an academic volume (2019) presenting its main scientific results.

Information on the MIME project activities is available on www.mime-project.org.



In the figure above, the project’s identity, analytical framework and organisational design are summarised in the MIME Cartwheel.

Further reading

François GRIN, László MARÁCZ, Nike K. POKORN and Peter A. KRAUS, 2014: **Mobility and Inclusion in Multilingual Europe: A Position Paper on the MIME Project.** <http://www.mime-project.org/resources/MIME-POSITION-PAPER-V4.pdf>



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