



Photography: The project team

## Valuing all languages in Europe

This leaflet presents key findings from the VALUR project (2004-2007), which took as its focus the 'additional' languages of Europe. These are defined as all languages in use in contexts where they are not 'national', 'official', or 'dominant' languages. They include 'migrant' languages, 'regional/minority' languages, sign languages and 'non-territorial' languages of diasporas such as Yiddish and Romani.

The project team brought together a range of expertise in sociolinguistics and language pedagogy, planning and research from Finland, Netherlands, Poland, Spain and the UK. We took as our starting point Council of Europe policies on plurilingualism and the desirability of promoting linguistic diversity both for individual citizenship in Europe and for social cohesion.

Our aim was to map provision for additional languages in Europe, in a more systematic and inclusive way than ever before. We looked at provision at school level for different languages in different contexts in order to identify good practices to be shared. In order to achieve our objectives we drew on the good will and enthusiasm of workshop participants, who provided a wealth of information and insights from 21 of the Council of Europe countries. We are also indebted to the work of our research fellow, Susanna Yeghoyan who was attached to ECML for 3 months. Our work is not definitive: its purpose is awareness-raising and to stimulate further activity to support the learning of all Europe's languages.

The full report of the VALUR project is published at [www.ecml.at/ntp2/valur](http://www.ecml.at/ntp2/valur) and may be ordered in hard copy from ECML.

The VALUR project team:

**Joanna McPake** University of Stirling and **Teresa Tinsley** CILT, the National Centre for Languages (project co-ordinators)

**Peter Broeder** University of Tübingen

**Laura Mijares** Autonomous University of Madrid

**Sirkku Latomaa** University of Tampere

**Waldemar Martyniuk** Jagiellonian University

ECML, 2007



**Languages for social cohesion**  
Language education in a multilingual and multicultural Europe

**Les langues pour la cohésion sociale**  
L'éducation aux langues dans une Europe multilingue et multiculturelle

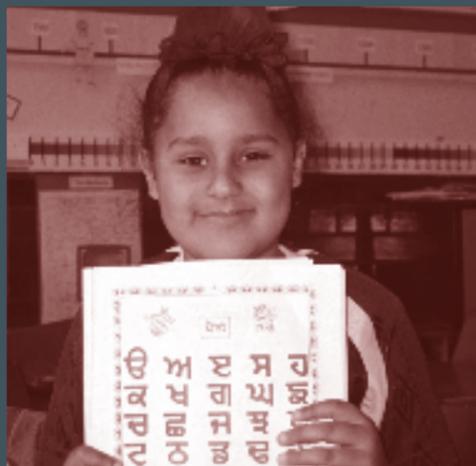


# Valuing all languages in Europe



European Centre for Modern Languages  
Centre européen pour les langues vivantes





*Plurilingual education promotes... a respect for the plurilingualism of others and the value of languages and varieties irrespective of their perceived status in society*

Council of Europe Language Policy Division

## It's a multilingual world, naturally



The fundamental challenge that those of us who support and work for plurilingualism face is a strange one. It is, essentially, to naturalise a state of affairs which is in fact natural. By 'natural' I mean commonplace, everyday, routine and taken for granted.

Throughout human history, in all parts of the world, linguistic diversity has been the norm, and usually accompanied by plurilingualism. This combination of diversity at the societal level, with plurilingualism at the individual level, allows the expression of local difference alongside the capacity for extra-local communication: identity and localisation combined with transcending the local and the particular. Communicating in ways

that allow us multiple kinds of identity, that permit us to be unique and yet to find common ground. This might not be 'natural' if by this term we mean connected to nature, but it is certainly common, ancient and persisting. Today, this balance needs to be made natural in another sense, it needs to be made commonplace, routine, expected or taken for granted.

The best kinds of societies that we can aim to construct are those that recognise diversity but facilitate communication; that acknowledge difference while they sustain connection and solidarity. Languages are an essential marker of identity, but unlike other markers of human difference languages are less exclusive. It is far easier to be a bilingual than to have two religions, races, or genders. We can multiply and add languages. We can be, and most people in the world are, plurilingual.

This unique quality of languages isn't however, naturalised. We need to consciously work to value languages equally, to encourage language learning in all its modes, the learning and retention of regional/minority languages, of immigrant languages, of indigenous languages, and of sign languages,

alongside the languages of wider communication, official and international languages. By addressing these kinds of issues the VALEUR project is far more important in its historical significance and implications than many people realise. Many national states were formed by and through and sometimes for, distinctive languages. Today, whether it is through economic globalisation, or the population mobility that characterises our time, or the ubiquity of instantaneous global electronic communications, or whether it is simply curiosity, ours is the age of language learning. Language learning is the prelude to communication and to forging institutional structures that encourage collaboration and dialogue at a time in history when nothing is more important.

If we naturalise an expectation of plurilingual individuals many changes can occur. The immigrant child who is retaining a mother tongue as they learn their host society's new language can be seen as a skilled person. They are defined through their growing competence in more than one language, rather than being defined in relation to their lack of knowledge of the official language. Dominant sections of the society will be encouraged to learn other languages and to recognise that minority plurilingualism is not threatening, but strengthening. There will be more communication about language and learning, both of which make all the interlocutors equal and interesting, because both are quite natural.

**Professor Joseph Lo Bianco**  
University of Melbourne

Adviser to the VALEUR project

**Europe is rich in languages, and European policies stress the benefits of this diversity and the need to achieve unity and greater mutual understanding through learning each others' languages and respecting those spoken by our fellow citizens. The VALEUR project highlights the true extent of our linguistic diversity: new languages are arriving from outside Europe and old languages are spreading to new corners of our continent.**

**Children brought up in communities where more than one language is in use quickly learn the languages they need and can become bi- or trilingual with ease. This represents a resource for the individual and for the wider society.**

**'If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.'**

*Nelson Mandela*

## Linguistic benefits

Someone who has two or more languages can communicate with a wider range of people than someone who speaks only one. In developing our citizens' linguistic capacity, we can build on the languages already spoken, as well as teaching new ones. Everyone has the capacity to be plurilingual from an early age<sup>1</sup>. Every language conveys information, relationships, ideas and emotions in a unique way.<sup>2</sup> Someone who has more than one language is well-placed to understand this and to mediate between people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

**'Les langues sont bien davantage que des espèces vivantes. Elles sont situées au plus profond de l'humanité. Une langue est aussi une certaine façon de ressentir, d'imaginer et de penser.'**

*Claude Hagège*

## Cognitive benefits

Children who grow up with two or more languages gain cognitive benefits connected with enhanced metalinguistic awareness. For example, plurilingual children are able to distinguish at a younger age than monolingual children the difference between linguistic form and meaning, or to judge the grammatical correctness of sentences.<sup>3</sup> It has also been established that lifelong plurilingualism reduces the rate of the natural slowing in cognitive function that comes with age.<sup>4</sup>

**'In the thinking quarters of the brain, one language feeds the other.'**

*Professor Colin Baker, University of Wales Bangor*

## Educational benefits

Research shows plurilingual children do better than monolingual children on a range of tasks linked to educational performance, such as those involving creative thinking and certain verbal and non-verbal skills – providing they are highly fluent in both languages.<sup>5</sup> In order to benefit from their plurilingual potential, children therefore need to have opportunities to develop all their languages to the highest level possible.

Children who learn to read and write in more than one language simultaneously have been shown to gain in terms of their literacy.<sup>6</sup> And people who already speak two languages find it easier to learn additional languages at a later stage in life.<sup>7</sup>

**'Bilingual children develop two native languages so in general reach higher levels of attainment than adult learners.'**

*Professor Antonella Sorace, University of Edinburgh*

## Social benefits

Family relations are better if children can communicate with older relatives and those living in other parts of the world. Young people from ethnic groups which maintain all their languages are more likely to have more positive self-images and to avoid disaffection.<sup>8</sup> The additional languages acquired in family or community contexts are also of wider benefit to society, for social inclusion, cultural enrichment, diplomacy and economic development.

**'... l'Europe dans son ensemble dispose d'un patrimoine linguistique qui, s'il était valorisé, lui permettrait à la fois d'accroître son rayonnement et de souder les peuples à l'intérieur de ses limites.'**

*Professor Claude Truchot, University of Strasbourg*

## Economic benefits

The ELAN<sup>9</sup> survey of businesses in 29 European countries showed how language skills bring tangible benefits to exporting businesses, and identified future needs for a very wide range of languages to support economic growth. Language skills are strongly associated with employability,

and multinational businesses increasingly regard language skills and international experience as a prerequisite<sup>10</sup> both for job applicants and promotion within the company. A wide range of other employers also recognise the benefits of languages to their business, in tourism, the sports and leisure industries, freight, financial and legal services, retail and customer services in general. Regions or cities which can offer a rich range of language skills are in a better position to attract inward investment from multinational companies.<sup>11</sup>

In the public services, there is a need for people who can work as translators and interpreters, and as plurilingual professionals in order to ensure that all European citizens have access to the services to which they are entitled, and to promote social inclusion.<sup>12</sup>

**'Spanish, Mandarin and Arabic are all languages of the future. Ethnic minority groups may well prove to be a major asset.'**

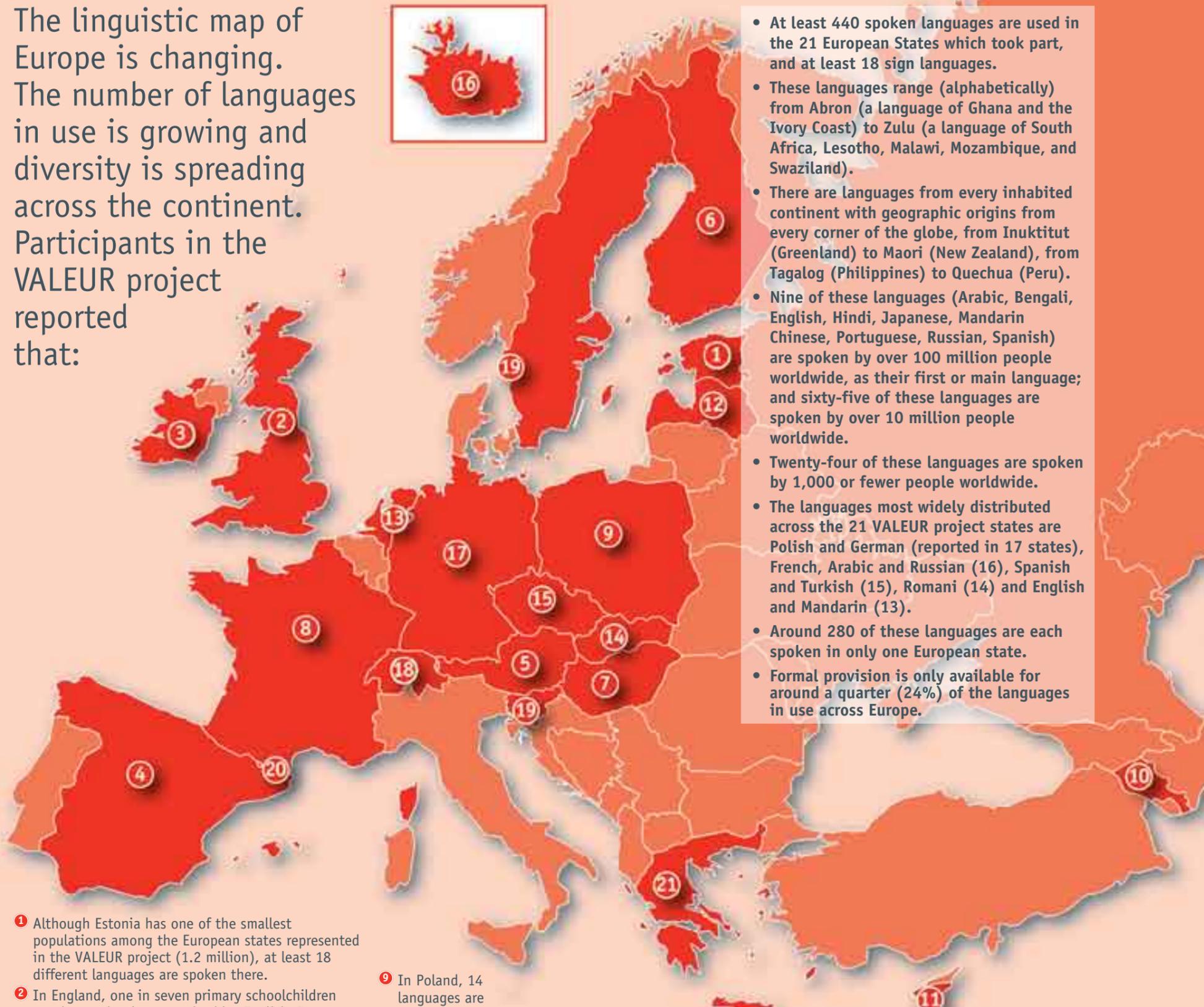
*David Graddol*

**'There is a Vietnamese and a Finnish side in me, and also something global.'**

*Additional language speaker*



The linguistic map of Europe is changing. The number of languages in use is growing and diversity is spreading across the continent. Participants in the VALEUR project reported that:



- At least 440 spoken languages are used in the 21 European States which took part, and at least 18 sign languages.
- These languages range (alphabetically) from Abbron (a language of Ghana and the Ivory Coast) to Zulu (a language of South Africa, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, and Swaziland).
- There are languages from every inhabited continent with geographic origins from every corner of the globe, from Inuktitut (Greenland) to Maori (New Zealand), from Tagalog (Philippines) to Quechua (Peru).
- Nine of these languages (Arabic, Bengali, English, Hindi, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish) are spoken by over 100 million people worldwide, as their first or main language; and sixty-five of these languages are spoken by over 10 million people worldwide.
- Twenty-four of these languages are spoken by 1,000 or fewer people worldwide.
- The languages most widely distributed across the 21 VALEUR project states are Polish and German (reported in 17 states), French, Arabic and Russian (16), Spanish and Turkish (15), Romani (14) and English and Mandarin (13).
- Around 280 of these languages are each spoken in only one European state.
- Formal provision is only available for around a quarter (24%) of the languages in use across Europe.

- 1 Although Estonia has one of the smallest populations among the European states represented in the VALEUR project (1.2 million), at least 18 different languages are spoken there.
- 2 In England, one in seven primary schoolchildren speaks another language besides English. In Scotland, there are speakers of more than 100 languages.
- 3 Ireland has become rapidly multilingual. At least 167 languages were identified in the VALEUR project and this number is still growing.
- 4 Like Ireland, Spain has become a country of immigration. The VALEUR project found 200 languages including at least 7 different varieties of Arabic and 10 sign languages.
- 5 In Austria, Romani is one of six official minority languages and also the language of many migrants.
- 6 In Finland, 3% of the population use another language in addition to Finnish and Swedish.
- 7 There are 13 recognised minorities in Hungary. Having lived in Hungary for centuries, they are mostly bilingual, and may use archaic varieties of their languages as well.
- 8 In France, there are at least 120 languages, including some not so far recorded anywhere else in Europe.

- 9 In Poland, 14 languages are officially recognised as languages of national or ethnic minorities, and Kashubian has been given official status as a regional language.
- 10 In Armenia, minority language groups include the Yezedis, whose language was officially recognised in 2001, Germans, who settled there in the 18th century, Russians and Kurds.
- 11 In addition to users of three official languages in Cyprus, there are 3000 Armenian speakers and about 2500 speakers of Maronite Arabic.
- 12 In Latvia, Livonian is an indigenous minority language spoken alongside the languages of other groups such as Russian, Polish, Belarusian, Lithuanian and Estonian.
- 13 In the Netherlands, surveys of schoolchildren found the most widely spoken languages besides Dutch are Turkish, Arabic, Berber and English.
- 14 In the Slovak Republic, 14% of citizens regard themselves as belonging to a minority language group, the biggest of which is Hungarians (nearly 10%).
- 15 Vietnamese is the largest additional language group in the Czech Republic.

- 16 Iceland is second home to Singhala, Tagalog and Visayan (a language from the Philippines spoken by more than 20 million people) as well as most of the main European languages.
- 17 In Hamburg the most widely spoken non-European languages are Dari and Pushtu.
- 18 There are three Swiss sign languages, based on Swiss German, French and Italian respectively.
- 19 There are three official languages in Slovenia: Slovenian, Italian and Hungarian. At least 12 additional languages are also spoken.
- 20 Most native Andorrans are plurilingual and the non-native population has a varied range of linguistic competences including Arabic, Catalan, Spanish, French, English and Portuguese.
- 21 Additional languages in Greece include Filipino, German and Urdu.

**Children who grow up using more than one language tend to use different languages in different contexts, and with different people – their skills in each language may therefore differ. Giving them the opportunity to study all their languages formally, during their school years, is important in enabling them to develop their full repertoire in each language. The VALEUR project has identified a wealth of good practice across different countries of Europe in helping children develop their languages.**

Some countries, such as Finland, make provision for every pupil to receive formal instruction in the language spoken at home, no matter what the status of the language is, as long as there are at least 4 pupils in the teaching group. In other countries, provision depends on whether the language is spoken by a recognised minority. Hungary for example has 13 recognised minorities. Provision may be offered during school time, or outside the normal curriculum. In Estonia, there is a recently established and highly successful programme to teach Ukrainian language and culture for children. This enables the children to gain a sense of Ukrainian identity, something which was not promoted earlier. In Latvia, there are Saturday schools for 8 languages.

**Bilingual education** or CLIL is an excellent way of developing children's plurilingualism and the VALEUR project found this type of provision being offered in a variety of different circumstances. In some cases it is the government of the country of emigration which supports the teaching of their language alongside the official language of the host country. For example, the Spanish government supports provision of this type in London, Lisbon and Rome. Other bilingual schools exist in border regions: for example in Slovenia, a nine-year bilingual education programme is offered in Hungarian and Slovenian in the region of Premurkje, near the Hungarian border, and since 1996, there has been an Estonian-Finnish bilingual stream within a regular Finnish primary school. This has been developed through the good will and commitment of the teachers; no additional funding has been needed.

In Ireland, Irish Sign Language is gradually gaining ground in the education system. There are now some deaf teachers in the schools for the deaf who teach through Irish Sign Language. In addition, home tuition in ISL for pre-schoolers is being funded.



**The purposes and rationale** for provision include more general social and educational objectives as well as purely linguistic ones. For example, Gandhi School in Pécs, Hungary, represents the first school in Europe that focuses on preparing young Roma for a higher education. In a primary school in London, all pupils learn some simple phrases of a 'Language of the Month' chosen from one of the 44 languages spoken by pupils. In this way, the school shows respect for the pupils' linguistic background and as a consequence, the parents become more actively involved in school activities.

In Austria, there is a long-standing programme to revive Burgenland Romani. A 'RomBus' tours the region with books, CDs, and DVDs, helping older speakers to maintain the linguistic culture and enthusing and empowering younger learners.

Similarly, there need to be systems in place to **record achievement** and recognise skills. In all countries, the number of languages for which accreditation exists is only a small fraction of those spoken. In France, Germany, Ireland and the United Kingdom, there are exams available within mainstream education for a number of additional languages. In the UK a scheme known as the Language Ladder has been developed which can be used to recognise achievement in all languages, and has official assessment in 21 languages.

In the Netherlands, the *European Language Portfolio* has been validated for multilingual classrooms. The portfolio allows plurilingual pupils to obtain recognition for language competences not acquired formally.



**Training and support for teachers** is a crucial feature of good practice. Recognised qualifications for teachers as well as teacher education have been developed for teachers of, for example, Occitan in France and of Hungarian in the Slovak Republic. Teachers of lesser-taught languages may feel very isolated and benefit from network of support. An example of this on a European scale is a Europe-wide teacher network which has been established for teachers of Arabic.

**Materials** are also a crucial factor. Materials for teaching Assyrian, designed and printed in Sweden and Iraq, have led to some materials being produced by Armenian Assyrians, thus raising motivation for learning the language that was unsupported for a long time. In Sweden, useful web pages have been developed that bring together material for teaching additional languages. In Finland, a unique online web dictionary of Finnish Sign Language has been published which is also accessible via mobile phone and other hand held devices.

In Poland, there has been a dramatic revival of the Kashubian language, involving teacher training, materials development and the widespread provision of language classes and bilingual education.



The development of innovative approaches to plurilingual teaching and learning is a priority for the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) of the Council of Europe and further information can be found at [www.ecml.at](http://www.ecml.at). VALEUR was one of 22 projects supported by the ECML as part of its second medium term programme (2004–07) to support the Council of Europe's language education policy, specifically on the theme of *Languages for Social Cohesion*.

- 1 Sorace, A. (2006) *The more, the merrier: facts and beliefs about the bilingual mind*. in Della Sala, S. (ed.) 2006. *Tall Tales about the Mind and Brain: Separating Fact from Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2 Hagège, C. (2006). *Combat pour le français: Au nom de la diversité des langues et des cultures*. Paris: Editions Odile Jacob.
- 3 Bialystok, E. (2001). *Bilingualism in Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 4 Bialystok, E., Craik, F.I.M., & Ryan, J. (2006). *Executive control in a modified antisaccade task: Effects of aging and bilingualism*. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning Memory and Cognition*, 32, 1341–1354.
- 5 Ricciardelli, L. A. (1992). *Two components of metalinguistic awareness*. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 4, 349–367.
- 6 Kenner, C. (2004). *Living in Simultaneous Worlds: Difference and Integration in Bilingual Script-learning*. *Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 7 (1), 43–61.
- 7 Cenoz, J. and Valencia, J. (1994). *Additive Trilingualism: Evidence from the Basque Country*. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 15 (2), 195–207.
- 8 Portes, A. and Rumbaut, R. (2001). *Legacies: the story of the immigrant second generation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 9 CILT/InterAct International (2007). *Effects on the European Union economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise (ELAN)*.
- 10 Feely and Winslow (2005). *Talking sense, a research study of language skills management in major companies*. CILT.
- 11 ELAN survey, op. cit.
- 12 Corsellis, A. (2001). *Turning good intentions into good practice. Enabling the public services to fulfil their responsibilities*. In Roberts, R. et al. (eds): *The Critical Link 2: Interpreters in the community*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: Benjamins (2001).

# Ours is the age of language learning

Professor Joseph Lo Bianco

