
PLURILINGUALISM, MULTILINGUALISM IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND MULTILINGUAL DIDACTICS

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Abstract: The core of business communications is the language as a means of exchange of information. In today's globalized world, most people are plurilingual, i.e. they understand and use several languages. This is due both to the development of the international trade and business and the increasing frequency of private international contacts. Plurilingualism affects people's social environment, career development and culture. According to the modern concept, a plurilingual person must have certain competence in at least two other languages in the same or in a different field of communication. In this respect, plurilingualism is fully consistent with the language policy of the European Union. The main goal of the study was to examine the current state of plurilingualism in the field of business communications and outline some theoretical aspects of plurilingual didactics.

Keywords: plurilingualism, multilingualism, business communications.

JEL: A20, Z19, M29

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Introduction

The core of business communications is the language as a means of exchange of information. People's daily private and professional contacts are mainly language-based, i.e. using verbal or written communication. The knowledge of the literary language and its conventions (spelling, pronunciation, linguistic etiquette) is a prerequisite for successful communication. In today's globalized world, most people are plurilingual, i.e. they understand and use several languages. This is due both to the development of the international trade and business and the increasing frequency of private international contacts.

This article aims to examine the plurilingualism within the European Union. The main goal of our research was to define the current state of plurilingualism, to determine the effects of using more than one language on people's professional development and to outline some theoretical aspects of plurilingual didactics. More specifically, we have focused our attention on:

- The nature and dimensions of plurilingualism;
- Multilingualism and business communications;
- The influence of English on the other languages within the EU;
- The main principles of plurilingual didactics.

The conclusions are based on official data published by Eurobarometer and on some theoretical studies in the field of foreign language teaching methodology published by some German and other leading scientists.

1. The nature and dimensions of plurilingualism

Multilingualism is undoubtedly the most prominent feature of the modern world and affects people's social environment, career development and cultural life. Language and culture are of paramount importance in our lives and affect both our personal lives and the business environment. In intercultural communication, representatives of different cultures engage in exchanges of information regarding their daily routines. The language we communicate in defines our identity to a large extent. People engage in language-based communication to interact with other people and institutions, to identify themselves as community members and to share spiritual values. Article 22 "Cultural, religious and linguistic diversity" of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union¹ states that "the Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity." With respect to languages, the EU has put an emphasis on the concept for development of plurilingualism in order to avoid the dominance of a single language in business and administration. According to Eurobarometer,² the most popular languages among EU citizens are English, French and German.

For many decades, linguists used the term "mother tongue" - the language used for communication. It was used synonymously to the term "native language" - the language we grew up with and in which we were taught at

¹ **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union** 2010/C 83/02, <https://www.cdpd.bg/?p=element&aid=437>, retrieved on 30 July 2015

² **Eurobarometer 386** "Die Europäischen Bürger und ihre Sprachen", June 2012, retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_de.pdf on 30 July 2015.

school. The two terms are applicable to communities where most people speak the same language (i.e. are monolingual.) Logically, the mother/native language was opposed to the term "foreign language" – a language we did not learn as part of our environment. Today, due to the process of globalization, the boundaries between communities are blurring and there is a growing number of multilingual families and professional communities of people who speak different languages. In such cases, we cannot distinguish a universal native/mother language and therefore the terms "first language" (L1), "second language" (L2), etc., are more relevant. Plurilingualism exists both in Europe and worldwide.³ There are numerous examples of people speaking different languages in their daily communication the language spoken by their parents, the people they live, work or study with, etc.

Receptive and productive foreign language skills are the core of communication. In the process of foreign language acquisition, these are developed by means of various teaching methods: concepts, topics, roles and places of communication, verbal and non-verbal aids. Some of them are universal while others are language-specific. The European languages are very similar in terms of their underlying material cultures, which means that their denotations and connotations are very similar as well. However, in other fields related to verbal etiquette and rules of social conduct (e.g. the ways to express courtesy, to establish contacts, to avoid uncertainty, etc.) they are quite different. For example, the conditional mood in German is used to express politeness or caution, while in Bulgarian it expresses uncertainty. In order to communicate effectively in the foreign language we have to "switch" to the register of the foreign language and ignore the specifics of our native/first language.

For the purposes of this study, we have to distinguish between the terms "multilingualism", "bilingualism" and "plurilingualism". Every person is potentially plurilingual due to the existing languages. Multilingualism (*German* Vielsprachigkeit) refers to the situation in a given country, region, community or school. Plurilingualism (*German* Mehrsprachigkeit) refers to the language situation of an individual.⁴ Statistics show that the majority of the world's population is bilingual or plurilingual and lives in a multilingual environment.⁵ This is due to the fact that people from different ethnic and linguistic

³ Стойчева, Д. Многоезичието в обучението по съвременни езици. София, Анубис, 2012, р. 6.

⁴ Стойчева, Д. Многоезичието в обучението по съвременни езици. София, Анубис, 2012, р. 44.

⁵ Linguistic Society of America. <http://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/multilingualism>, retrieved on 30 July 2015.

communities can nowadays easily migrate and live in other countries around the world, where they actively communicate with the indigenous residents. There are many definitions of plurilingualism: Kierepka and Krüger believe that it refers to the usage of at least two other languages in addition to the mother tongue⁶ while Christ⁷ relates plurilingualism to the mastery of several languages from different language families.

Thus the question that arises is at what level a person must use the foreign language to be considered plurilingual, i.e. whether learners should achieve a relatively high level (fluent use of language) or acquire only the knowledge and skills that would be sufficient for certain linguistic situations. The predominant opinion is that, to be considered plurilingual, one must have certain knowledge of at least two other languages in the same or in different areas of communication.⁸ Thus, plurilingualism complies with the language policy of the European Union and refers to people with sufficient working knowledge in different languages that enables them to engage in professional and personal communication without being equal to the level of their native language.

Plurilingualism is above all a personal trait – it means that in addition to our native/first language we can communicate in other languages depending on our specific preferences, needs, commitments and plans by using the knowledge we have acquired in educational institutions and on our own. We use our native/first language skills to study other languages and thus increase our overall language competence. The aggregated linguistic experience enhances our knowledge of the structure of these languages and our comprehension. Plurilingualism is included in the educational policies of the EU member-states and is to create an appropriate environment for intercultural communication while preserving their national identities. The equality of the languages of the member states within the European Union is necessary for the existence and preservation of their national languages. Within the concept of plurilingual education, the study of a second, third and subsequent foreign language eliminates the native-foreign language paradigm. It practically es-

⁶ **Kierepka, A., Krüger, R.** Mehrsprachigkeit in der Grundschule – Vision oder Realität. In: Kierepka, A./Klein, E./Krüger, R. (Hrsg.): Auf dem Weg zur Mehrsprachigkeit. Tübingen, Narr, 2007, S. 113.

⁷ **Christ, H.** Die Konzepte Ausgangs- und Zielsprache im Rahmen der Theorie des Lehrens und Lernens fremder Sprachen. In: Abendbroth-Timmer/Bach, G. (Hrsg.): Mehrsprachiges Europa. Tübingen, Narr, 2001, S. 27-37.

⁸ **Стойчева, Д.** Многоезичието в обучението по съвременни езици. София, Анубис, 2012, p. 45.

establishes a common linguistic competence that is developed further with the study of each additional foreign language and culture.

Depending on the possible psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic points of view, individual bilingualism and plurilingualism can take several forms. Bausch⁹ classifies the types of bilinguals and plurilinguals into two main groups:

- Group One includes the types who differentiate bilingualism and plurilingualism on the grounds of their overall language competence (the specific language acquisition level): *minimal forms of plurilingualism, maximal forms of bi- and plurilingualism, balanced or symmetric forms of bi- and plurilingualism, dominant or asymmetric forms of bi- and plurilingualism, semi-lingual form of bi- and plurilingualism, additive forms of bi- and plurilingualism.*
- Group Two includes the types distinguished in terms of the socio-cultural context with regards to both guided and the natural foreign language acquisition: learning conditions, communicative intentions and goals, interlocutors, foreign language acquisition sequence, etc.

2. Multilingualism and business communications

According to a research conducted by SIL International, as of 2009 there were 6909 languages worldwide.¹⁰ Today the plurilingualism in North America is due to the French in Canada and the Spanish in Mexico and the southern states of the USA, but historically we can trace more than 300 different languages that were spoken by the indigenous tribes prior to the colonization of the continent. Nowadays there are great differences in terms of the popularity of the thousands of languages spoken around the world - some of them are spoken worldwide while others are used only in certain countries or geographical regions. A "world language" is a language that is significant as a means of communication and is spoken outside of its original territory. Such languages are most often spoken by people with different nationalities as a first or a second foreign language (L2 or L3) in the fields of international

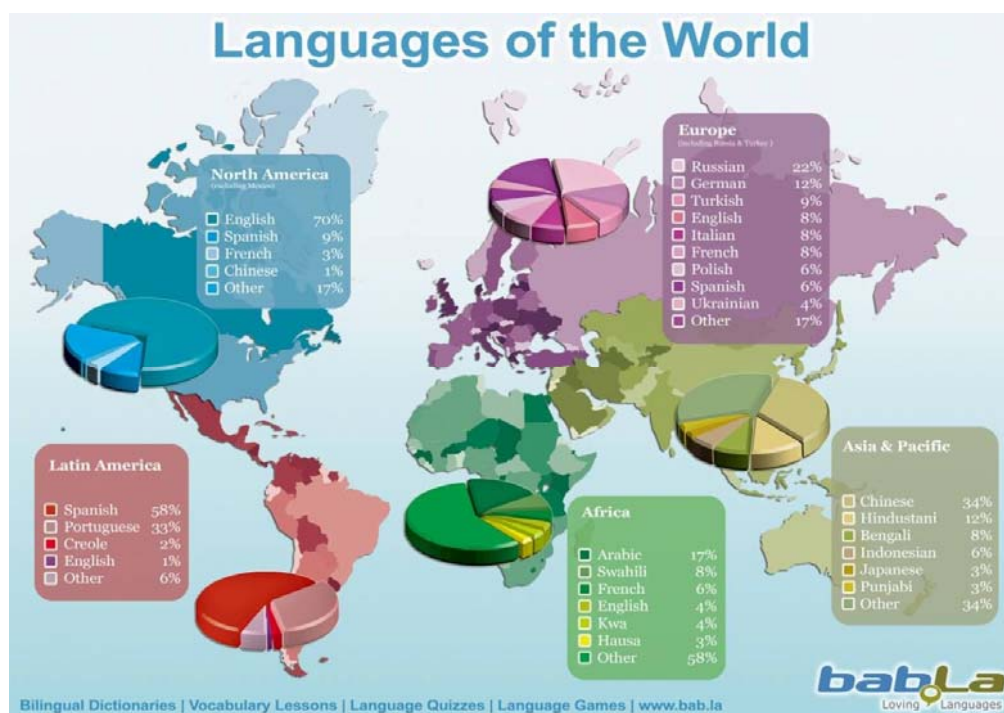
⁹ **Bausch, K.** Zwei- und Mehrsprachigkeit. In: Bausch, K.-R./Christ, H./Krumm, H.-J. (Hrsg.): Handbuch Fremdsprachenunterricht. 4. vollständig neu bearbeitete Auflage. Tübingen/Basel, Francke, 2003, S. 443.

¹⁰ **Anderson, S.R.** How Many Languages Are There in the World? Linguistic Society of America. <http://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/how-many-languages-are-there-world>, retrieved on 30 July 2015.

trade, diplomacy, education, in multinational corporations and interpersonal communications.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the main languages by continent.¹¹ North America is dominated by English (70%) followed by Spanish (9%) and French (3%). Latin America is dominated by Spanish (58%) and the Brazilian variety of Portuguese (33%). Europe is markedly more fragmented with dominant languages (Italian, French, Polish, Spanish, Ukrainian, etc.) spoken by 8 to 4 per cent of the people.

Figure 1. Distribution of languages by continent



The existence of many languages spoken by relatively few people in the European Union puts their future at stake. Those people tend to study and use one of the more popular European languages in order to have better chances for professional development. 44% of the respondents claim that they understand TV and radio broadcasts of the news in the foreign language fairly well. The Europeans that can actively communicate using the foreign lan-

¹¹ Source: <http://en.bab.la/news/world-languages.html> retrieved on 30 July 2015, source image retrieved from <http://en.bab.la/doc/file/world-language-map-english-small.jpg>

guage are fewer (39%)¹². Table 1 shows the first and second foreign language situation in the European Union.

Table 1. Most popular languages in the EU (%)

	As a native language	As a foreign language	Total
English	13 %	38 %	51 %
German	16 %	14 %	30 %
French	12 %	14 %	26 %
Italian	13 %	3 %	16 %
Spanish	9 %	6 %	15 %
Polish	9 %	1 %	10 %
Russian	1 %	6 %	7 %

Source: Eurobarometer 386, June 2012, p. 6

The results show that there is a certain discrepancy between the receptive and the productive language skills: listening is mostly related to the passive use of the language while communication includes both reception of information and production of oral and written utterances intended to convey information to interlocutors.

Interpersonal communication has a complex nature. It includes a communicative aspect (exchange of information), an interactive aspect (interaction) and a perceptual aspect (interlocutors are expected to understand each other.) The use of the same code by both the sender and the receiver is essential for the success of communication. This may be the language in which the message is composed and transmitted, specific scientific or professional terminology, idioms, etc. Communication is often hindered by various factors that impede the proper understanding of the conveyed message. The most important of these factors is the different level of interlocutors' fluency in the foreign language. The survey conducted by Eurobarometer shows that many Europeans are passive users of foreign language/s and cannot communicate effectively in it. 69% of the people who speak at least one foreign language use it only occasionally. A lot of people use a foreign language only to watch movies or TV (37%), to surf the Internet (36%) or to communicate with friends (35%). 27% of the respondents claim that they regularly use a foreign

¹² Eurobarometer 386 "Die Europäischen Bürger und ihre Sprachen", June 2012, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_de.pdf retrieved on 30 July 2015, p. 7.

languages at work and 50% use a foreign language during their holidays abroad.¹³

In terms of the so-called semantic barriers, communication problems arise due to the following reasons:

- Understanding presumption – interlocutors presume that both sides of the communication process use the same linguistic and terminological code. In practice, this is often not the case due to differences in their linguistic, professional and social competence.
- Associative discordance – The senders of messages compose them based on certain connotations and associations from their own language and culture. However, these connotations and associations may not be the same in the receiver's culture. On a linguistic level, the most common example is the rejection of a certain brand by a domestic market due to negative connotations or taboos.
- Interlocutor's representation – people tend to expect that their business partners will speak, dress and communicate in the same way as they do. A difference in their linguistic culture or dress code may result in doubts regarding their personal or professional qualities.

Business communication consists mainly of written messages and oral presentations, negotiations, discussions, etc. Plurilingualism in business communication is defined as the use of the native and two or more foreign languages by the interlocutor. Written communication implies the use of standardized documents (letters, offers, invoices, contracts), which comply with the social etiquette of the language they are written in. Plurilingualism affects it in two ways:

1. It provides more possibilities for communication with more business partners when more than one language is used – although the interlocutors may use a common language (usually English), their fluency may be at different levels.

2. Interference from the native language (L1) and the first foreign language (L2) – the languages in which the interlocutor is most fluent. Certain aspects of these languages may be transferred into the other languages (L3, L4, etc.) under the presumption that if a certain rule (X) is valid in the first foreign language, it most probably is applicable to the subsequent foreign languages as well.

¹³ Eurobarometer 386 "Die Europäischen Bürger und ihre Sprachen", June 2012, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_de.pdf retrieved on 30 July 2015, p. 8.

The dominance of English over the other languages has resulted in a large-scale borrowing of English words. Borrowing of words from another language is normal and common in Bulgarian as well as in all other languages. It is one of the most common ways to expand the vocabulary of the receiving language. In the past words were borrowed mainly from Latin (the language of culture, education and medicine) and French (the language of diplomacy, good manners and good cuisine.) The massive penetration of English words into the German language has resulted in the so-called "Neudeutsch" or "Denglish".¹⁴ Most of the new words are borrowed from the Internet and usually denote new phenomena (e.g. skypen, chatten, downloaden) while others substitute existing German words (e.g. "statement" instead of "Aussage", "meeting" instead of "Besprechung".) The communication with German-speaking business partners today requires a certain knowledge of English because of the excessive use of Denglish by such people. The most important advantage of learning a foreign language for 61% of EU citizens is the possibility of being employed abroad.¹⁵ The practice of international business deals shows that language competence is very important for the success of the business operations.

3. Didactics of plurilingualism

Didactics is the science and art of teaching that follows a consistent scientific approach or educational style in order to engage the student's mind and raise the student's interest in the subject that is taught. It includes theoretical models and concepts as well as practical methods of teaching used at the different stages of education. Plurilingualism is a fundamental principle of the European Union - every citizen can address the institutions and receive a reply in their own language or in a language they use competently. The differences in the number of people who speak certain languages in the EU resulted in some relative advantages for the most common languages (English, French, German, Polish and Spanish.) This has made the learning of foreign languages an opportunity for being better informed and communicating more efficiently with business partners and institutions.

¹⁴ **Sprachbar: Echt deutsches Englisch!** <http://www.dw.de/echt-deutsches-englisch/a-18237754>, retrieved on 30 July 2015.

¹⁵ **Eurobarometer 386** "Die Europäischen Bürger und ihre Sprachen", June 2012, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_de.pdf retrieved on 30 July 2015, p. 8.

Foreign language teaching is based on some fundamental didactic principles. A principle is a guiding law or a commonly accepted rule of conduct.¹⁶ The main principles are:

- Principle of development – education is intended to induce and further people's development both at a certain age and throughout their whole life;
- Principle of explanation – certain phenomena are explained by means of scientific research;
- Principle of exemplification – various combinations of visual and audible examples are used purposefully in the process of education;
- Principle of conscientiousness – conscientiousness is related to understanding the meaning of the learning content and processes;
- Principle of activity – students participate actively in various activities within the process of education,
- Systemic principle – knowledge and skills should be acquired in a logical sequence - all new knowledge should be integrated in the system of knowledge already acquired by the students.

Plurilingualism didactics (*Ger.* Mehrsprachigkeitsdidaktik) is being developed very actively in Germany because of the plurilingual society of the country. This branch of didactics deals with opportunities for cross-language learning. Students have a certain propensity to study a certain language and a certain level of indifference to study other languages. Therefore, we should find the means to develop a plurilingual language competence, to enhance their skills for conscious use of students' knowledge and technology skills in the process of language learning, to promote their tolerance to the cultures and the cultural identity of the other people.

Plurilingualism didactics and methods are affected by various factors such as personal motivation, public opinion, the rating of the educational institutions, etc. These factors are included in the communicative approach model of Noiner and Hunfeld and are explained in detail by Stoycheva.¹⁷

At a public level, the development of plurilingualism didactics and methodology is affected by:

- the importance of the language in the field of international relations;
- the number of people who speak the language worldwide;

¹⁶ For more details see **Стефанова, П.** Чуждоезиковото обучение учене, преподаване, оценяване. София, Сиела, 2007, pp. 27-31.

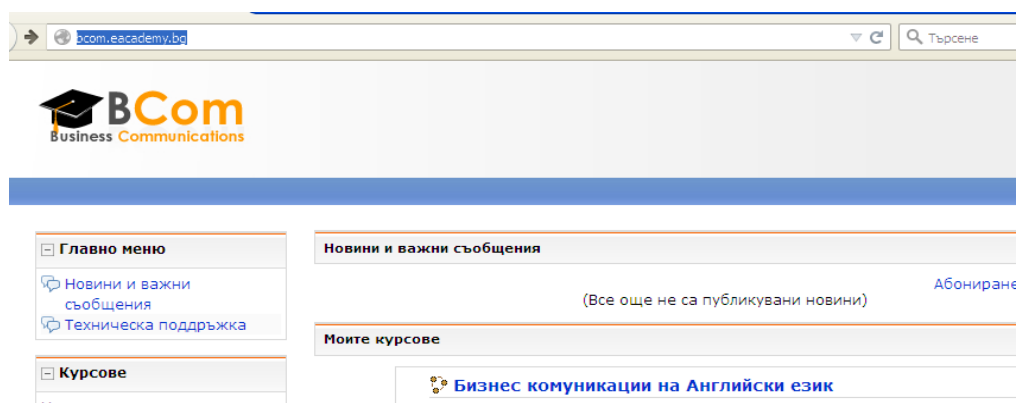
¹⁷ **Стойчева, Д.** Многоезичието в обучението по съвременни езици. София, Анубис, 2012, pp.66-70.

- the importance of the language in the field of international communications;

- the migration of different languages and cultures, etc.

At a personal level, plurilingualism is reflected in the linguistic biography of each individual. The native (first) language is defined by the family environment, the first foreign language is defined by the public preferences, while the second and all subsequent foreign languages are defined by the personal need for communication with people who speak them. An interesting and unique model of institutional learning of foreign languages for specific purposes is the system implemented at the D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics.¹⁸

Figure 2. The online course in Business Communications in English



Foreign language learning has a modular structure and includes courses in business communications in English, German, Russian and French at B1 and A2 level. The target groups consist of students of economics and specialist in the field of international trade. A specific feature of these courses is that they are delivered entirely online and include interactive exercises, educational resources and channels of communication between the teachers and the students (forums, private messaging, chat rooms.)

The analysis of the results achieved by the course participants shows that a significant number of the students in economics have the required linguistic competence and a lot of them are interested in taking courses at higher levels (C1, C2). The surveys of students' opinion show that the choice of a language and of course level is affected both by the foreign languages studied previously (the linguistic biography of the individual) and by the practical needs related to employment and career development.

¹⁸ <http://bcom.academy.bg/>, retrieved on 30 July 2015.

Conclusion

Plurilingualism is a fundamental principle of the European Union. The harmonious co-existence of 24 official languages symbolizes the equality of the member states. The linguistic diversity affects the social environment, the career development and the cultural life of their citizens, who rely on plurilingualism for their personal and professional communication. Language and culture are central to people's lives and this is why we have to take into account their effects on today's globalized economy.

To be plurilingual, a person must know at least two foreign languages in the same or in different fields of communication. This definition of plurilingualism complies with the language policy of the European Union and meets the practical needs of the people who can communicate in different languages in their professional and personal environment.

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