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ABSTRACT

Discussion of the current language situation in Europe looks first at the compelling political changes affecting language policies, then examines progress toward implementation of the modern languages component of the National Curriculum for England and Wales. It is noted that Europe differs from other eastern hemisphere regions in that in most countries, the native language of the majority of the population is the largest language spoken. Another trend in Eastern Europe is the emergence of smaller, independent countries, reducing the number of states with large linguistic minorities and creating a closer relationship between linguistic community and nation-state. These developments have in common an increase in the status and functions of minority/former minority languages and consequent increase in language-related policy formation. With regard to implementation of languages component of the National Curriculum of England and Wales, it is concluded that notable advances have been made in some areas, particularly better funding and improved academic standards, increased use of the target language in the classroom, interest in language learning processes, integration of languages within the general curriculum, and better language teaching in special education. Inservice teacher education and teacher assessment persist as areas of concern. (MSE)

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CENTRE FOR LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON
OCCASIONAL PAPERS, 17

EVOLVING LINGUISTIC PATTERNS IN EUROPE
LANGUAGE CENTRE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY LECTURE
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON, 4 NOVEMBER 1993

MARTIN HARRIS

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

On November 4th 1993, to celebrate its 25th Anniversary and to open its new resource centre, the Language Centre of the University of Southampton invited Professor Martin Harris, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Manchester and one of Britain's most eminent modern linguists, to deliver a lecture.

We are most grateful to Professor Harris for permission to circulate his text.

The Language Centre, University of Southampton, provides language for specific purposes and study skills classes in German, Spanish, French, English and a variety of other languages to members of the university.

EVOLVING LINGUISTIC PATTERNS IN EUROPE

I was both delighted and flattered when I was invited by Alison Piper to come to Southampton today on the occasion of the official reopening of this splendidly refurbished language centre and its associated facilities. I need hardly say just how impressed I have been with what I have already seen, and with the enthusiasm of the many colleagues and friends with whom I have had an opportunity to talk. Modern Languages in the broadest sense of that term have been enjoying a significant renaissance in all sectors of our education system over the last decade or so, after a period in which morale had reached a very low point indeed in many schools, colleges and universities, and it is clear that Southampton is very much at the forefront of that ongoing recovery of ideals and confidence.

I wonder, by the way, if there is anyone in this room today who knows that in the spring of 1967 as a PhD student at SOAS, I failed to be appointed to a lectureship in French with Phonetics and Linguistics in this University, with the result that my first post was in Leicester rather than here. From this, you can deduce the year when my academic career started, a year which surveys have shown was the year of the greatest mismatch between demand for, and (qualified) supply of, University teachers, such that absolutely anyone could gain entry to our profession! I invite listeners here today to make of that what they will!

There is one other thing I would like to say by way of preamble. There are many ways in which Southampton has been fortunate to have had Gordon Higginson as its Vice-Chancellor through the recent years of stress and turbulence. I will mention today only his unfailing support for the humanities in general and for languages in particular. During a period when, at times, our discipline and its cognates have seemed under siege, Gordon's voice has always been there in support, and this has been greatly appreciated. And I might add that interest in, and sympathy for, languages and their associated cultures is, as I know very well personally, something very much shared by Howard Newby, whom this University has so shrewdly chosen, Gordon, to be your successor. I see every reason for confidence that the aspirations of those here today will continue to be in very safe hands.

I would like, if I may, to address two themes today which may be loosely subsumed under the title 'the changing linguistic curriculum in Europe'. I intend to open with a brief tour d'horizon of developments across Europe, where political changes are provoking so many linguistic consequences which are already having, or will in due course have, profound effects on the language policies and curricula of the people affected. I will then turn my attention to current perceptions of progress towards the implementation of the Modern Languages component of the National Curriculum for England and Wales, seeking to synthesise the various reports and feed back which have reached me since the then Secretary of State very largely accepted the advice of the

group which I chaired some three years ago. I must apologise at this stage to those who were at the BAAL conference in Salford in September, who will already on that occasion have heard much, though not I hope all, of what I have to say.

The first thing to note about Europe is that, as a continent, it is atypical within the Eastern Hemisphere in that in the majority of European countries, at least as defined since the end of the First World War, a very high percentage of the population (excluding recent immigrants to whom I shall return later) have the 'largest' or 'main' language of that country as their mother tongue; in this, Europe differs from most of Asia and Africa (the main exception being the Arab World) and resembles rather most of the countries of the Americas. To elaborate: in almost three-quarters of present European countries the largest language is the mother tongue of 80% or more of the population. For the remainder, with just two exceptions (Belgium and Latvia), the proportion of the population speaking the 'main' language of that country is 60% or higher.

If we exclude the now-ended incorporation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union (1941-1991) and the recent reunification of Germany, there has also been as a constant trend throughout the last century or so for the number of independent countries in Europe to increase, from less than 20 at the end of the last century to about 30 in 1973 and about 40 in 1993. The general effect of this increase has been to continue to reduce the number of states possessing large linguistic minorities. A 'mirror-

image' point is the fact that 28 of the 32 European languages with the largest number of native speakers now 'have' their own country, although the relation is not entirely biunique, in that certain languages (for example, German) are the principal language of more than one country.

It is interesting to view the linguistic consequences of recent political, and at times, sadly, military, events in Eastern Europe against this broad background. It is clear, for example, that the break-up of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia has converted a number of important linguistic minorities into majorities. More specifically, from the European part of the former Soviet Union have emerged Byelorussia/Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldavia/Moldova, Russia and the Ukraine; from Czechoslovakia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic; and from Yugoslavia, Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia-Montenegro. (If Cyprus is deemed part of Europe, the de facto division of the island into Greek and Turkish parts can be included here). In Eastern Europe, then, ethnic (usually ethnolinguistic) differences have done away not only with the Soviet Union but also with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, with a consequential further move in the direction of a close relationship between linguistic community and nation state.

In Western Europe, of course, there have been no such radical political changes. Switzerland, which might be compared in terms of its ethnolinguistic make-up to the former Yugoslavia, continues on its solid course; Belgium, on the other hand, which

in its ethnolinguistic structure invites comparison with the former Czechoslovakia, is perhaps closest to showing Eastern-style fissiparous tendencies (with Flanders and Wallonia demanding and obtaining more and more autonomy). Although it currently remains one country, many observers predict a divorce, which would, of course, unless merger with France ensued, convert the very large French-speaking minority into a majority within a new small nation-state, in accordance with the general pattern noted earlier.

Notwithstanding the East-West differences just mentioned, it might perhaps be argued that the striking political changes in Eastern Europe that have led to the empowerment of former ethnolinguistic minorities by converting them into majorities can to some extent be compared with developments in Western Europe whereby varying degrees of local autonomy have been accorded to certain regions in which 'minority' languages are prominent; examples include Galicia, the Basque Country and Catalonia within Spain, and the Faroe Islands within Denmark. At a lower level of support we find, for example, the increase in legal status accorded to Welsh in Wales and to Frisian in the province of Friesland within the Netherlands.

Summing up so far, it can be seen that all the developments mentioned above have in common an increase in the status and range of functions of minority or former minority languages, often within a new nation-state. In short, there is now official recognition of more minority or former minority languages in

Europe than ever before. There are, of course, exceptions to all this, the most notable of these being France, a country where, apart from the very limited Loi Deixonne of 1951, official support for almost all the minority languages is minimal. The concept of France, 'une et indivisible', remains deeply engrained in the national psyche!

All of these changes have inevitably led to political responses in areas where the situation is sufficiently settled for this to be feasible. All the countries that were formerly Union Republics of the Soviet Union have passed legislation declaring that the locally demographically dominant language (e.g. Lithuanian in Lithuania, Byelorussian in Belarus) is the official national language. In point of fact the majority have gone further and endeavoured to spell out in great detail the linguistic functions and situations in which the new national language is to be used. This is by no means an unmixed blessing. Not only do there need to be rapid and ill-considered changes to the curriculum, but the emergence of new countries will often convert a language from a useful lingua franca into a disfavoured foreign language (e.g. Russian in Lithuania), thereby considerably altering its position in the curriculum. A further point is that the increased prominence in the classroom of (former) minority languages frequently results in there being less time available for other languages, a development which is obviously in conflict with the continually increasing use and hence attraction of certain major lingua francas, most noticeably English.

In Western Europe, too, linguistic legislation has not been wanting. In Spain, for instance, the Autonomy Statutes of, for example, Catalonia and the Basque Country refer to the traditional local language as well as to Castilian. Since the adoption of the Statutes, Catalonia, in particular, has been the source of much official language planning in the pursuit of its goal of the 'Normalization' of the status and functions of Catalan. In Britain, Parliament has recently been occupied with a new Welsh Language Bill. At a supranational level minority language questions have occupied the attention of the European Parliament with the most important document being the so-called Kuijpers Resolution or, in full, the 'Resolution on the languages and cultures of regional and ethnic minorities in the European Community'. Despite this attention, the second half of the present century has seen a marked decrease in the number of speakers of minority languages, resulting in the further strengthening of the position of the majority language within the countries in question.

The picture painted above of, in general, increasing linguistic homogeneity within given political boundaries, whether of countries or of regions, requires a major qualification: immigrants have introduced many 'new' languages into most Western European countries (e.g. Turkish in Germany, Albanian in Italy, Portuguese in France, Urdu and Punjabi in Britain). In general, the official recognition of these languages and the granting to their speakers of language rights and status is either at an initial stage or non-existent, an issue which did of course need

to be addressed here in Britain by the National Curriculum Modern Languages Group. Furthermore, recent political changes in Eastern Europe have led to considerable migration both within that area and also from Eastern into Western Europe, leading to further linguistic diversity, particularly in Germany. The most important migration, however, in terms of the scale of ethnic and ethnolinguistic problems created, is surely that which, during the period of existence of the Soviet Union, resulted in large numbers of Russians taking up residence in the originally ethnically non-Russian Union Republics of the U.S.S.R. Because of this movement of Russians (and to a lesser extent other Slavonic peoples) all the newly independent countries that were formerly in the European part of the Soviet Union find themselves with large or, in the case of Estonia and Latvia, very large Russian-speaking minorities; most of these Russian speakers have little knowledge of the national languages of the new countries they find themselves in, a situation with obvious implications both for the educational linguistic policies mentioned earlier and indeed for the long-term social and political stability of the entities in question.

Within this broad and indeed fascinating situation, the linguistic situation within the United Kingdom is of course relatively stable. There are estimated to be some 80,000 speakers of Scots Gaelic in Scotland and some 6,000 speakers of Irish (few of them native speakers) in Northern Ireland. In neither country does the language have any official status. Welsh, with some half million speakers, has a much higher degree of protection,

which was of course enshrined in the National Curriculum, though I have to say not without the strong opposition of many Anglophone parents in various parts of that country, as I can attest from my postbag at the time. One might note as an aside that when there is for whatever reason a consensus between all relevant political parties, the voice of the ordinary citizen counts for very little!

We spoke earlier too about the influx of speakers of other languages, mostly those from the Indian sub-continent, into Britain, and the almost absolute lack of recognition which these languages have outside the relevant native-speaker communities. Here too, the National Curriculum is as permissive as possible, although I am not aware of any statistics yet which indicate how many schools are taking advantage of the opportunity permitted to offer such languages to their pupils. For a comprehensive and up-to-date survey of the linguistic position in the British Isles, describing a situation and addressing issues which go far beyond what I have briefly mentioned here, can I warmly recommend the two volume study Multilingualism in the British Isles edited by Safder Alladina and Viv Edwards and published by Longman in 1991?

Despite the immense complexity and diversity revealed in that survey, the broad background against which a Modern Languages Curriculum for this country needed to be devised was fairly clear, except, as I indicated earlier, in respect of Welsh within Wales for at least some Anglophones. I thought therefore that

I might now move from the general to the specific, and address in the second part of my presentation a theme which I know directly interests a number of you here, and with which I was myself personally concerned for some time, namely the implementation of the National Curriculum in respect of Modern Languages. One of the oddities of chairing something like the Modern Languages Working Group is that, once the work is finished, unless one is oneself a practitioner in that immediate field, there is no easy way of being aware of the extent to which the group's recommendations have been successful or otherwise; it reminds me somewhat of the old 'paternalist' days of the former University Grants Committee, now enveloped in the rosy glow of nostalgia, when the Committee, on which Gordon and I both served, breezed into a university, gave well-intentioned, firm but liberal advice, and then left again, never to see whether that advice was followed and, if so, to what effect! In the case of Modern Languages in the National Curriculum, however, by a quirk of fate, political events and the advent of the Dearing enquiry have led to a kind of 'recall', in that Sir Ron recently invited me, and, I understand, the chairs of other former Working Groups, to talk to him, in my case of course about Modern Languages and in particular about the possible slimming down of the statutory content of what is to be taught - not, I stress, with a view to changing the content of the Curriculum itself (there have surely been enough changes to last many teachers a lifetime) but to look at the division between what is statutorily prescribed and what should be left to the discretion of teachers. I shall report back on our discussion briefly later. At all

events, the revisiting of this topic which I had undertaken to do in order to reflect on it first with those who attended the BAAL meeting in Salford and now with you today came to serve a second purpose, and enabled me, with feedback from practising secondary teachers, to respond on as informed a basis as possible to Sir Ron's enquiry. I do not doubt that, elsewhere and by others, methods of assessment are also being looked at again, something that was always outside the remit of my Group.

What I want to do today, then, is report on a variety of impressions as to how successfully the curriculum has been implemented in our field, what issues are currently being grappled with and what are perceived as the major problems being encountered. I am most grateful to colleagues for sharing their impressions with me, and in particular for much personal help from Peter Boaks of CILT, an organisation whose governors I am delighted to chair and which has done so much to assist in the implementation of the Modern Languages Curriculum. My colleagues and I like to believe that the Curriculum which we proposed was relatively well received in schools because the Working Group took as a major starting point current good practice in the classroom, with the result that when teachers set about implementation - in other words, as they devise schemes of work - they often found that they were actually 'doing' much of it already, albeit in a different format. This was obviously a considerable relief in many cases.

In general, we may say that impressions on the implementation of

Year 7 are positive, with notable advances in some respects and growing awareness of others, though there remain issues that have scarcely been addressed. As usual, teachers' own perceptions of what they and their pupils are doing in classrooms do not always match the perceptions of dispassionate observers. However, Key Stage 3 now appears less daunting to most practitioners. There is strong support in principle for languages for all, a topic to which I shall return later, and the 'plateau' issue has not surfaced as strongly as was expected. Headteachers are in general very positive. According to them, Modern Languages departments are now better funded, and indeed departmental capitation does seem to have risen by a modest amount. There are some signs that schools are recognising the 'practical' aspects and hence the equipment needs of modern language teachers, with the gradual corresponding adjustment of funding levels. It is particularly reassuring that there does not seem to have been a further reduction in the number of foreign language assistants since the advent of devolved budgeting, although one is only too aware of earlier losses which have often not been made good.

Many teachers have been pleased to note improved standards in Year 7 with expected targets being reached and exceeded. Some of this enthusiasm has carried over into Year 8 and 9 but there is of course little impact yet on Key Stage 4. In sum, we may speak of a better than expected start, but this is still a honeymoon period. Some slowing of momentum might be expected fairly soon. Nevertheless, in the eyes of most observers, nothing less than the National Curriculum could have brought

about even this much change so quickly.

Let us now turn to a number of more specific questions. Firstly, the use of the target language for teaching purposes. It seems generally agreed that this has been the area of greatest impact. There has been a substantial increase in teacher use of the target language for instruction, for classroom management and so on. The real question is, will it hold? The widespread use of the target language in Year 7 should provide a solid basis for its fuller deployment in later years and in particular in Key Stage 4, as it gradually becomes the norm. Of course there isn't yet much evidence of significantly increased pupil use of the target language, but this was not really to be expected in Year 7. This will be an ongoing process, reinforced by target language teaching, in which one is looking for slow but sure progress. The same is probably true of the enhanced range of teaching and learning styles which the Group envisaged, where change is as yet limited and patchy. Some teachers claim evidence of better listening skills as a result of increased experience of target language in class, and this seems inherently plausible, and in line with the Group's intentions. In short, teachers' initial worries seem to have been eased, although major anxieties remain about possible forms of testing. It is worth adding, however, that the use of non-specialist teachers will be a much bigger issue as we reach Key Stage 4 - but there too there is a silver lining for higher education colleagues, as major opportunities for appropriate INSET provision present themselves!

It is perhaps worth noting that the advent of the National Curriculum aroused renewed interest in the 'principles' whereby children learn a foreign language in the classroom, and - a related point - in the role of 'grammar' in the teaching and learning of a foreign language, two issues close to the hearts of many of those here today. One point in this connection which emerged very clearly at the BAAL meeting was the opportunity - indeed, many would say the need - to combine language awareness programmes and terminology for modern linguists with those incorporated within the English curriculum, once a generally acceptable version of this emerges. Can I warmly endorse this suggestion? And I cannot refrain from adding that modern language teachers' cannot be, and should not be, immune to debates relating to the teaching of L₁ in our schools, nor to issues surrounding the non-homogeneity of all languages with significant numbers of speakers.

There is another development which has particularly pleased me personally, namely the increasing signs in a number of schools of the greater embedding of modern languages within the curriculum as a whole, and thus within the cultural context in which the language is situated. This, it seems to me, can only be beneficial to pupils and must serve to increase their motivation. It also opens up a whole range of opportunities for inter-department or collaboration within schools and, I may say, within universities too - to the potential advantage of all concerned.

As far as the second foreign language is concerned, fears have continued to remain high, at least until very recently. It may be, however, that recent signs of a loosening up of the overall structure of the Curriculum will now lead to some easing in this respect. In any event, there is no statistical evidence of a squeeze on second languages within Key Stage 4 yet, whether from Technology or any other source. Indeed, there is anecdotal evidence that the presentational advantages of offering a second foreign language may have helped to secure its position, at least in some schools. And it seems to be the case too that the diversification of the first Foreign Language in schools is growing as we hoped, at least in Year 7, so we can say that, at the very least, languages other than French are holding their own rather better than some feared. A final verdict on diversification, however, cannot be reached at this time; for this we shall need to see the statistics for examination entries in three or four years time.

One area where enthusiasm is particularly noticeable is in special schools, where the involvement of teachers and their pupils has been widely welcomed. For pupils with special needs in mainstream schools, there is, perhaps inevitably, more anxiety, particularly when looking at the whole five years of the curriculum, and the motivational need to accredit very small steps will be of the greatest importance. This is one area where, if you'll forgive a brief advertising slot, CILT, its publications and its courses have been especially valued. There has also been a reawakening of interest in the possibilities of

foreign language teaching within primary schools, although the familiar obstacles to successful implementation remain hard to resolve, as I explained to a sympathetic Sir Ron.

One recurrent theme is that of INSET needs, a matter which is clearly a very important factor in the effective implementation of the National Curriculum. As one observer put it, heads of departments and returners are being well-served, part-timers (as ever) neglected. More generally, we're all very conscious that the introduction of the National Curriculum has been a novelty. As that wears off, teachers will need to continue to reflect on the wealth of advice and suggestions which have been offered. It is vital to avoid the temptation to take an over-simplistic approach to issues, characterised rather brutally by one adviser as 'seen that, done that' - and of course, for their part, INSET providers do not always resist what we might label a 'tricks for teachers' approach. It is essential that classroom language teaching should be based on some principled understanding of the language learning process, an area where the interests of all those here today must overlap. And we must all be alert to the risks if proposed changes to Initial Teacher Education were to lead to reduced opportunities for beginning teachers to reflect on their own practice, a development which would clearly not be helpful. In summary, most teachers are now seeking to implement the spirit of the National Curriculum, but all of us must remain aware of the need to continue to reconsider and reassess the relevant issues as that implementation proceeds.

The next phase of that process will require ongoing evaluation by teachers of what they want to achieve and what is actually happening in their classroom. Key Stage 4 will add its own special challenges. The impetus given by the introduction of the National Curriculum will continue to assist up to a point. However, it cannot be expected to carry teachers through to the more difficult targets without further support and possibly even a fresh impetus. INSET, in short, will remain indefinitely a key factor in the successful delivery of the curriculum.

Finally, let me say a word about assessment, a topic which concerned our Group greatly, even though, as I said, it was strictly outside our remit, and which clearly continues to exercise many practising teachers greatly. Probably a majority of modern language teachers are in favour of continuous assessment - providing recording and reporting systems are simple. However, if the status of teacher assessment is boosted in some way, for example, by the abandonment of national testing at Key Stage 3, then it seems clear that this an area in which teachers can benefit from much more specific assistance and guidance than SEAC has succeeded in providing, since there is much duplication of effort in the preparation of marking schemes, grids and checklists. Assessed dossiers of pupils' work will clearly help, as do the shared experience groups to which a growing number of modern language teachers belong, but there remains a long way to go if excessive effort is to be avoided and maximum effectiveness achieved. And how exactly Key Stage 3 is to be tested has been a kind of shadow hanging over many teachers, not only because of

its own inherent importance but because of a belief that there would inevitably be 'backwash' effects on teaching. Ironically, regular testing is much more familiar to linguists than to many of their colleagues - but that has not diminished the anxieties and uncertainties which many have felt, largely about the possibility that test-types might be imposed by an outside body which did not fully grasp the pedagogical consequences of its proposals.

Inevitably in so short a time, I have only been able to touch on a few of the issues which arise from the implementation of the National Curriculum in Modern Languages, and I reiterate that these impressions have been culled, directly and indirectly, from other, in particular from teachers, advisers, and colleagues in CILT. What I can say is that, as we foresaw in the foreword to our Report, the full inclusion of Modern Languages within the National Curriculum was a great opportunity for our discipline, which our colleagues in secondary schools of all kinds would seize with enthusiasm. Whatever difficulties remain - and they are real - I believe that the confidence is already being vindicated. In my discussions with Sir Ron, I was able to report to him directly many of the impressions which I have shared with you today, and I was delighted to learn that Modern Languages has almost entirely escaped the kind of media attention, and the kind of postbag, which have surrounded certain other subjects, above all one which I shall of course not name but about which I was musing to my newly retired colleague Brian Cox just last week! I stressed to Sir Ron the continued enthusiasm of teachers for

the retention of a modern language throughout Key Stage 4, as part of the 'core' of the National Curriculum. Interestingly, recent as yet unpublished figures show that the number of school pupils studying a language to age 16 has gone from approximately 40% to approximately 80% over the last ten years, a process accelerated by the impetus provided by government's original intention. There is an area, however, in which, as linguists, we must remain vigilant. I also indicated that, whatever may or may not be the case in other disciplines, colleagues in modern languages were not pressing for a reduction in the number of levels of assessment, not because they are insensitive to some of the difficulties involved but because of the over-riding need, as many see it, to be able to recognise and accredited relatively small improvements in the performance of individual pupils.

You will recall that the ostensible purpose of my visit to SEAC was to discuss whether there was a perceived need to shift the boundary between statutory and non-statutory guidance in the field of Modern Languages. Here, the feedback I have received - and which I passed on - is unambiguous. Because in our discipline the relationship between a curricular core and 'options' is one of applying a developing competence to various areas of interest or activity, and not therefore comparable to the core-satellite model pertinent to many other subjects, there is no pressure for change in this field either. In other words, alongside the general reluctance to contemplate further changes at this time, there are quite specific reasons in this case why teachers already feel they have the freedom which they need. I

cannot imagine that Sir Ron was unhappy to receive such advice.

In sum, we have a momentum going here which certainly antedated the National Curriculum but which was strengthened and encouraged by it. Things are going well and we need to focus on how to maintain this impetus rather than on further structural and bureaucratic changes. I'm very hopeful that this message is well understood.

And now, Chairman, I will close. I hope this brief survey of developments initially in the wider Europe and later here in England and Wales has served to set the scene for the enthusiastic and successful work which is being done here in Southampton. [It now gives me the greatest of pleasure formally to declare this splendidly refurbished language centre open] [It gives me very great pleasure to be associated with the opening of this splendidly refurbished Language Centre]

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