

## VALEUR: Valuing All Languages in Europe

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### VALEUR: aims and objectives

The VALEUR project (2004-2007) was funded by the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz, Austria, as part of its second medium term programme of work, on the theme of *Languages for Social Cohesion*. Led by a team of six researchers and language educators, the project involved experts in the field of *additional* languages from 21 Council of Europe states.

The goal of the project was to draw attention to the extent of *plurilingualism* across Europe, among people who use both the dominant language(s) of the country in which they live and *additional* languages: 'regional/ minority' languages such as Basque, Sorbian or Saami; 'migrant' languages, such as Arabic, Chinese or Bengali; 'non-territorial' languages such as Romani or Yiddish; and sign languages. The project aimed to raise awareness of plurilingualism as a resource for individuals who use additional languages, for the societies in which they live and for Europe as a whole. It also set out to establish what provision there is to support children learning additional languages, to share good practice in this field, and to identify challenges and opportunities for the field.

### Context

Europe is and has always been a continent where many different languages are in use. The rise of the nation-state established certain languages, such as English, French or Polish, as the dominant languages of national territories; but every modern European state is home to many people who speak other languages in addition to the 'official', 'national' or 'dominant' language(s). These may be languages long associated with a particular region, such as Breton, Kashubian or Frisian; they may be languages which arrived as a result of migrations from other parts of Europe or beyond, whether in the distant past or in very recent times; or the various sign languages used by Deaf communities across Europe. The range of languages in use in Europe is likely to have increased significantly over the last decade as we enter the age of 'superdiversity' (Vertovec, 2007), as a result of growing mobility within Europe, immigration to Europe from other parts of the world, and a rise in both *repeat* migration (where people move several times in the course of their lives from one country to another) and *reverse* migration (when emigrants return to the country of origin, after some years, or even several generations, elsewhere). However, before the VALEUR project, there had been few attempts to quantify the range of languages in use in Europe: the most ambitious estimate indicated that there were around 60 'indigenous and non-indigenous' languages, in addition to the official languages (Eurobarometer, 2006).

Both the Council of Europe and the European Commission have stated their commitment to supporting and promoting *plurilingualism* across Europe, recognising that the ability to speak more than one language benefits both the *plurilingual* individual and the *multilingual* society in which s/he lives (Beacco & Byram, 2007; European Commission, 2008). Research has shown that plurilingualism brings a range of cognitive, career and even health benefits to those who can speak more than one language (Bialystok, 2001; Baker, 2006); while societies, which promote the learning and use of a range of languages benefit in terms of commerce, social inclusion, cultural richness, international relations, tolerance and security (Clyne 2005; Zarate et al., 2008). But before the VALEUR project, little attention

had been paid to kinds of provision available to support the learning of additional languages across Europe. The project therefore set out to document the range of opportunities available to children of school age, in the 21 participating states, and to identify the challenges and the opportunities facing those engaged in this work.

## **Methods**

*Mapping* languages and the provision available to support their acquisition presents a number of challenges. It means engaging with the long-running debate about ‘languages’ and ‘dialects’; and with the politically sensitive issue of asking people to say which the languages they use. Because it was not feasible for the project to conduct a comprehensive survey of all the inhabitants of the 21 countries participating in the project, VALEUR is based on the collation of existing data on languages in use and provision to support the learning of these languages, by experts from each country. The expert group received training from the project team in how to conduct this exercise and also met together on two occasions to discuss and refine first the data collection instruments and secondly the findings. We recognise that there are major differences in the kinds of data sets, and the philosophies underlying data collection in each country. Thus our findings must be understood as an approximation rather than a definitive picture of the number of languages in use, and the range of types of educational provision available. Nevertheless, we believe that they represent a more accurate account than previously existed.

## **Europe’s additional languages**

The VALEUR project found that *at least* 440 spoken languages and *at least* 18 sign languages were in use in the 21 participating countries. Geographically, they range from languages of the far north of the northern hemisphere, such as Inuktitut, originating in Greenland but also spoken in Spain; to languages of the southernmost inhabited parts of the southern hemisphere, such as Maori, originating in New Zealand and now also spoken in Spain and the UK.

Of the languages listed, nine were major ‘world’ languages, spoken by over 100 million people worldwide as their first or main language: Arabic, Bengali, English, Hindi, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish; while 26 were spoken by fewer than 1000 people around the world: these include some of Europe’s most endangered languages, such as Cornish (UK), and endangered languages from other parts of the world, including Ingrian (originating in Russia but also spoken in Latvia).

The languages most widely spoken across the 21 participating states were Polish and German (reported in 17 states); French, Arabic and Russian (16); Spanish and Turkish (15); Romani (14); English and Mandarin (13). In contrast, around 270 languages were spoken in only one country in each case.

The three states reporting the highest number of additional languages in use were the UK (288), Spain (198) and Ireland (158). These are all countries with high rates of immigration. But even countries at the lower end of the immigration scale revealed a wider range of languages in use than might have been expected: Latvia reported 26 languages; Slovenia, 24 languages; and Estonia, 18 languages.

## **Making provision: challenges and opportunities**

The project identified formal provision to support children’s learning of 109 additional languages, representing 24% of the number of languages in use. Provision for regional/minority languages was more developed than provision for migrant, non-territorial or sign languages. The types of provision reported ranged from monolingual and bilingual schools where additional languages are used as media of instruction, to after school classes organised by the communities in which the additional languages are spoken, often with volunteer teachers and *ad hoc* resources.

Regardless of the type of provision, we found considerable consistency in features of good practice to support the learning of additional languages. Committed teachers, linguists, policy-makers and other activists play a critical role in ensuring that additional languages are taught effectively, that teachers are trained to high standards and that materials meet the needs and aspirations of learners. Attention to progression and attainment are key factors in enabling learners to develop fully their language skills, and important work has already been initiated in this context, for example in devising versions of the Council of Europe's *European Languages Portfolio* which stress the inclusive nature of this project.

Despite the good practice we encountered, the fact that there was identified provision to support the learning of only a quarter of these languages indicates that much remains to be done: there was no provision at all for three quarters of the additional languages in use in Europe. Even in the case of those languages for which provision existed, this was not accessible to all potential learners. The quality of provision varied considerably and did not always meet learners' needs. We could not, therefore, conclude that Europe is currently in a strong position to realise the benefits of its linguistic resources.

European policy to underpin better provision for additional languages is already in place. Key instruments to support the implementation of this policy, such as the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework* and the *European Language Portfolio*, are already available and others are in development. Provision for additional languages can be greatly enhanced by the application of these instruments, just as has been the case with the major 'foreign' languages taught across Europe. A key recommendation from the VALEUR project is therefore to raise awareness of their potential in this context and to support their use.

Download the full report of the VALEUR project from:  
[www.ecml.at/mtp2/publications/Valeur-report-E.pdf](http://www.ecml.at/mtp2/publications/Valeur-report-E.pdf)

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