

The new member states of the European Union: linguistic demography and language policies

by Albert Branchadell

Abstract

On May 1st 2004, ten European states joined the European Union (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia). The aim of this article is to provide an overview of the linguistic complexity of these states and a general description of their current language situation, using a standard typology for language situations as a rubric for classification. We shall be looking particularly at the constitutions of these states in this respect, leaving analysis of their practice for other articles in this dossier, and for subsequent publications. To complete this characterisation, we comment on the position taken by each state with respect to the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

Summary

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1. Linguistic demography of the new member states

According to Fishman (1968), a polity is linguistically homogeneous when a single language is "natively spoken" by 85 percent or more of the population, and linguistically heterogeneous either when there is one "significant" language spoken among the remaining 15 percent, or alternatively when there is no language spoken natively by 85 percent or more of the population. Other authors have suggested lower thresholds. Lijphart (1984), for example, considers a country to be homogenous when 80 percent or more of the population "speak the same language".

According to these criteria, the new member states of the European Union can be classified as appears in table 1, which is based on data obtained from the respective statistical institutes, listed at the end of the article.¹

Table 1. Classification of the states according to Fishman's criteria and Lijphart's criteria

Linguistically homogeneous		Linguistically heterogeneous	
Fishman ($\geq 85\%$)	Lijphart ($\geq 80\%$)	Fishman ($< 85\%$)	Lijphart ($< 80\%$)
Cyprus (GCA) Czech Republic Hungary Lithuania Malta Poland Slovenia	Cyprus (GCA) Czech Republic Hungary Lithuania Malta Poland Slovenia Slovakia	Estonia Latvia Slovakia	Estonia Latvia

Using Fishman's criteria, we have seven homogenous states (including GCA Cyprus) and 3 heterogeneous states. According to Lijphart, we have 8 homogenous and 2 heterogeneous

¹ In the case of Cyprus, it should be made clear that we refer exclusively to the zone controlled by the Republic of Cyprus (what the republic in question calls the "Government controlled area"), which is the area that joined the Union on the first of May following the failure of the United Nations plan for the reunification of the island (<http://www.cyprus-un-plan.org/>). The "Government controlled area" (GCA), where Greek speakers make up more than 90 percent of the population, is homogeneous both on Lijphart's and on Fishman's terms. Were we to look at the whole of the island, we should have to speak of a heterogeneous state by the same criteria.

states. There is one state (Slovakia) where the proportion of speakers oscillates between 80 and 85 percent, a range which Fishman considers heterogeneous and Lijphart considers homogeneous, such that its classification is oscillating or borderline. We can summarise the situation as in in table 2.

Table 2. Classification of the states according to degree of homogeneity-heterogeneity

States clearly homogeneous	States neither clearly homogeneous nor clearly heterogeneous	States clearly heterogeneous
Cyprus (GCA) Czech Republic Hungary Lithuania Malta Poland Slovenia	Slovakia	Estonia Latvia

In any case, it is a fact that in none of the ten states does 100 per cent of the population speak the same language. Thus, all ten present some degree of internal linguistic diversity. Precisely the purpose of the following tables is to illustrate this internal linguistic diversity based on the latest available census data. Before proceeding to look at these data certain aspects concerning Slovenia, Malta and Poland need to be made clear.

With regard to the question on mother tongue spoken, the Slovenia census considers the responses Croatian, Serbo-Croat, Serbian and Bosnian to refer to different languages. The four-way distinction illustrates the situation current in the states that have emerged from the old Yugoslavia, where Serbo-Croat continues to be identified by some speakers as their own language, at the same time as the denominations "Croatian", "Serbian" and "Bosnian" have emerged to refer to what were formerly considered to be regional variants of the Serbo-Croat language.

In the case of Malta, the census apparently does not contain linguistic information. Given this situation, we have had recourse to the survey of cultural participation carried out by the Malta's National Statistics Office in 2000, where there was a question on the language respondents prefer to speak. In point of fact, the percentage of Maltese who have the Maltese language as their mother tongue is greater than the 86.23 percent who state that Maltese is the language they prefer to speak.

In the case of Poland, we observe that the percentage of people who in 2002 claimed they normally used only Polish at home was as high as 96.5 percent. If we consider those who use Polish and one or two languages other than Polish, the figure would be 97.8 percent. Overall, the number of speakers who state they use one or two languages other than Polish with their family amounts to 1.47 percent of the population (563,500 speakers). The majority of these latter (510,000) use these languages together with Polish (1.34 percent of the total population).

The group stating that at home they speak these languages to the exclusion of Polish comprise some 52,500 speakers (0.14 percent of the population). The language other than Polish most mentioned (either spoken alone or in combination with Polish) is German (204,600).

Table 3. Composition of the clearly homogenous states

	Date of last census and population	Question	Percentage of principal language	Percentage of other languages
Slovenia	(31.3.2002) 1,964,036	Mother tongue	Slovenian 87.7	Croatian 2.8 Serbo-Croat 1.8 Serbian 1.6 Bosnian 1.6 <i>Speakers of Hungarian, Albanian, Macedonian, Romany and Italian represent less than 1 percent of the population</i>
Hungary	(1.2.2001) 10,197,119	Mother tongue	Hungarian 98.7	<i>Speakers of Romany, German, Croatian, Slovak and Romanian represent less than 1 percent of the population.</i>
Lithuania ²	(5.4.2001) 3,483,972	Mother tongue	Lithuanian 90.9	
Malta	End of 2002 385,941	Language respondents prefer to speak (2000)	Maltese 86.23	English 11.76 Italian 1.84
Poland	(20.5.2002) 38,230,080	Language normally used at home	Polish 96.5	<i>German speakers constitute less than 1 percent of the population</i>
Czech Republic	(1.3.2001) 10,230,060	Mother tongue	Czech 94.9	Slovak 2.0 percent. Polish, <i>Romany and German speakers constitute less than 1 percent of the population</i>
Cyprus (GCA)	(1.10.2001) 689,565	Language spoken fluently	Greek 91.7	English 2.3 Russian 1.96

Table 4. Composition of states neither clearly homogeneous nor clearly heterogeneous

	Date of last census and population	Question	Percentage speaking the majority language	Percentages speaking other languages
Slovakia	(26.5.2001) 5.379.455	Mother tongue	Slovak 83.9	Hungarian 10.7 Romany 1.8 Ruthenian 1.0 <i>Speakers of Czech, Ukrainian, German, and Polish represent less than 1 percent of the population</i>

² In the case of Lithuania we have not been able to obtain information directly on mother tongue usage. Basing ourselves on nationality, however, does provide us with an indication of the population that has Lithuanian as mother tongue. In Lithuania 83.45 of the population are Lithuanians, 6.74 are Polish, 6.31 are Russians and the remaining 3.5 are other nationalities. Some 96.7 percent of Lithuanians have Lithuanian as their mother tongue and there are, furthermore, another 356,000 people of other nationalities who have it as mother tongue. On this basis we calculate that 90.9 percent of the population in Lithuania (nearly 3.2 million people) are mother tongue speakers of Lithuanian.

Table 5. Composition of clearly heterogeneous states

	Date of last census and population	Question	Percentage speaking the majority language	Percentage speaking other languages
Estonia	(31.3.2000) 1,370,052	Mother tongue	Estonian 67.3	Russian 29.7 <i>Speakers of Ukrainian, White Russian, Finnish and Latvian represent less than one '1 per cent of the population</i>
Latvia	(31.3.2000) 2,377.383	Mother tongue	Latvian 59.0	Russian 37.4. <i>Speakers of White Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian and Polish represent less than 1 percent of the population</i>

As can be seen from the above tables, in the case of the 10 new member states of the Union, especially those that are not clearly homogeneous, there is no case comparable to Catalonia and the Catalan language. In the latter states, the main linguistic is in every case the majority language of a neighbouring state. This is the case of Russian in Estonia and Latvia and also of Hungarian in Slovakia. Leaving aside the special case of Romany, spoken by millions of Rom (Gypsies), the closest comparison with Catalan is arguably Ruthenian – the language of Ruthenia - which in any case is a language whose affiliation is a matter of controversy, since it is often considered to be a dialect of Ukrainian.

2. Language policy in the new member states³

How do these states organise their internal linguistic diversity? Here we shall draw upon a standard typology of linguistic regimes developed by Siguan (1995), Badia (2002) and Vernet et al. (2003) and adapted by the present writer.

We first have to divide the states in question into those that have one official language and those that have more than one. Of the ten states considered here, only two, Malta and Cyprus, have two official languages, all the rest are officially monolingual, with the majority language as the only official language of the State.

Where a state has more than one official language, these may be official throughout the state, or not. The latter situation applies in Belgium and Switzerland. In Switzerland, for example, German, French and Italian are the official languages of the Confederation but none of the three is official throughout the length and breadth of the state. The two new member states of the Union which have more than one official language represent the former option. That is, the two official languages of Malta (Maltese and English) are official throughout both islands that make up Maltese territory, and similarly the official languages of Cyprus (Greek and Turkish) are official throughout the territory of Cyprus.

In the case of Cyprus, we should emphasise what was said at the outset on constitutional designs. Even though the 1960 Constitution plainly establishes that Greek and Turkish are the official languages (article 3.1: "The official languages of the Republic are Greek and Turkish"), the Republic of Cyprus functions de facto as a monolingual state with Greek as the only official language. In the case of Malta (article 5.2: "Maltese and English [...] shall be the official languages of Malta") we have a special case, since one of her two official languages (English) does not have a significant group of mother tongue speakers.

³ In this section, we cite the unofficial Catalan version of the constitutions of the states which can be consulted at <http://www.ciemem.org/mercator/>.

The question is, how do the remaining eight, officially monolingual, states treat their language diversity.

According to our typology, a state that has one official language can either protect or not its minority languages; if it protects them, it may do so by considering them official in one part of the territory, or it may not. Nominally, the eight new member states of the Union which are officially monolingual all protect their linguistic minorities. Of the eight, we note that only one, Slovenia, explicitly recognises in the constitution the official status of (some of) the minority languages in their respective areas.

Thus, according to article 11 of the Slovenian constitution, "the official language of Slovenia is Slovenian. In the areas where the ethnic Italian and Hungarian reside, Italian and Hungarian shall also be official languages " (italics are ours). It is interesting to note that Slovenia does not recognise the official status of Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian/SerboCroat, which is (are) greater demographically speaking than Italian and Hungarian.

It can be observed that in three of the remaining states (Slovakia, Estonia and Hungary), while there is no explicit recognition by the constitution of official status, there is recognition ex constitution of the possibility of official use of languages other than the state language. The others are rather more vague on this issue (Latvia, Lithuania and Poland) or simply don't mention (Czech Republic). Tables 6 and 7 summarise the situation.

Table 6. States in which the constitution explicitly refers to the possibility of official use of languages other than the official state language

State	Constitution
Slovakia	<p>Article 6 2. The use of languages in relations with the authorities will be regulated by law.</p> <p>Article 34 2. In addition to the right of the state language to prevail, the citizens that belong to national minorities or ethnic groups shall, subject to conditions laid down by the law, have the following rights guaranteed: a) the right to be educated in their own language, b) the right to use their language in relations with the authorities, c) the right to participate in the resolution of questions relating to national minorities and ethnic groups.</p>
Estonia	<p>Article 51 1. All persons have the right to communicate with central government and local government authorities and their officials in Estonian, and to receive replies in Estonian. 2. In localities where at least one half of permanent residents belong to an ethnic minority, every one has the right to receive replies from the state government and local government authorities and their officials in the language of the said ethnic minority.</p> <p>Article 52 1. The official language of central government and local government authorities shall be Estonian. 2. In areas where the language of the majority of the population is not Estonian, the local government authorities may use the language of the majority of permanent residents of this locality, both internally and extensively, according to the procedures established by legislation 3. The use of foreign languages, including the language of ethnic minorities, by the authorities and in the courts and procedures leading up to court hearings, shall be determined by legislation.</p>
Hungary	<p>Article 68 2. The Hungarian Republic shall extend protection to national and ethnic minorities and shall guarantee collective participation in public affairs, the promotion of their cultures, the use of their own languages, education in their own languages and the use of names in their own languages.</p>

Table 7. States in which the constitution makes no reference to the possibility of official use of languages other than the stage

State	Constitution
Latvia	Article 114 Those belonging to ethnic minorities have the right to conserve and to promote their language and their ethnic and cultural identity.
Lithuania	Article 37 Citizens who belong to ethnic communities shall have the right to conserve their language, culture and customs.
Poland	Article 27 Polish shall be the official language of the Republic of Poland. These measure shall not infringe the rights of national minorities arising from internationally ratified agreements.
Czech Republic	<i>no mention</i>

As we stated at the outset, we shall here be limiting ourselves to discussion of the respective constitutional provisions; in actual fact, the most interesting approach would be to look at the lower-level legislation, and above all its practical application. On the one hand, that would allow us to see that there are states like Lithuania and the Czech Republic, which recognise in their legislation the possibility (not explicitly recognised in the constitution) of official use of languages other than the official language of the state. On the other, it is evident we could also draw finer distinctions between states which constitutionally speaking fall into the same category. Simply as an illustration we could compare two states like Slovakia and Hungary, which belong to the group of states whose constitution alludes to the possibility of making official use of languages other than the state language.

In Hungary, Law LXXVII of 1993 on the rights of ethnic and national minorities provides for ample use of minority languages in official contexts. For example, article 52 of the Act states that the members of the Hungarian parliament who belong to minorities may use their mother tongue. A very noteworthy fact is that, in principle, no demographic threshold is established above which minorities can enjoy the rights recognised in the Act. Article 54, for instance, which states that vacancies in the public services should be filled by those who know the mother tongue of the local minority or minorities, refers simply to "settlements where there are people who belong to minorities".

In Slovakia, on the other hand, Law 184 of 1999 on the use of the languages of national minorities limits the possibility of using a minority language with the authorities to municipal areas where the minority in question constitutes at least 20 percent of the population (article 2.1: "Citizens of the Slovak Republic who are members of national minorities and, according to the results of the latest census, represent at least 20 % of the total population in the community may use the minority language in such a community in official contacts").

3. The new member states and the European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages

To complete this panoramic overview of the language policies of new member states of the Union, it would be worthwhile looking at their position vis-à-vis the European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages (<http://conventions.coe.int/> [versions in English and French]).

Of the ten states in question, four have ratified the Charter (Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia and Cyprus) and three have simply signed it (Malta, Poland and the Czech Republic). The three remaining states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) didn't sign it. It is perhaps significant that among the states who have not signed or ratified the Charter are the two clearly heterogeneous states (Estonia and Latvia).

Table 8 shows the situation in each state, as at 1st May 2004, with respect to the signing of the Charter, its ratification and coming into effect. As a point of reference here, it is worth noting that the Kingdom of Spain signed the Charter on the 5th November 1992 and proceeded to ratify it on the 9th April 2001, such that the Charter came into force in this state on the 1st of 2001.

Table 8. Situation in the states with respect to the European Charter on regional and minority languages

	Signed	Ratified	Came into force
Slovakia	20/2/2001	5/9/2001	1/1/2002
Slovenia	3/7/1997	4/10/2000	1/1/2001
Estonia			
Hungary	5/11/1992	26/4/1995	1/3/1998
Latvia			
Lithuania			
Malta	5/11/1992		
Poland	12/5/2003		
Czech Republic	9/11/2000		
Cyprus	12/11/1992	26/8/2002	1/12/2002

To gauge the application of the Charter in the four states that have ratified it, there are periodic reports issued by the states that may be consulted, as well as reports by the Committee of experts and the recommendation of the Committee of Ministers.

The periodic reports issued by the states can be consulted at the following address: http://www.coe.int/T/E/Legal_Affairs/Local_and_regional_Democracy/Regional_or_Minority_languages/Documentation/1_Periodical_reports/default.asp#TopOfPage. The first such periodic reports were published at this site on the 1st May 2004, from Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary, as well as the second by Hungary.

The reports issued by the various Committees of experts may similarly be consulted at: http://www.coe.int/T/E/Legal_Affairs/Local_and_regional_Democracy/Regional_or_Minority_languages/Documentation/2_Committee_of_Experts_reports/default.asp#TopOfPage. Here, on the 1st May there appeared the report from the Committee of Experts on the first periodic report from Hungary.

Lastly, the Ministerial recommendations may be consulted at the following address: http://www.coe.int/T/E/Legal_Affairs/Local_and_regional_Democracy/Regional_or_Minority_languages/Documentation/3_Committee_of_Ministers/default.asp#TopOfPage. Here on the 1st May there appeared the recommendations from the Committee of ministers on arising out of the first Hungarian periodic report.

Which languages do the four states that have ratified the Charter commit themselves to protecting? Table 9 summarises the situation as reflected in the respective documents of ratification, which are available for general consultation at the following address: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/ListeDeclarations.asp?NT=148&CM=8&DF=24/03/04&CL=ENG&VL=1>.

Table 9. Languages with protection by the states that have ratified the Charter

State	Protected languages
Hungary	German, Croatian, Slovak, Slovenian, Romanian and Serbian
Slovenia	Italian and Hungarian
Slovakia	German, Bulgarian, Croatian, Hungarian, Polish, Romany, Ruthenian, Czech and Ukrainian
Cyprus	Armenian

An interesting question is the relationship between regional and minority languages recognised in the ratification of the Charter, and the languages protected by internal jurisdiction. In the case of Hungary, for instance, article 42 of Law LXXVII of 1993 on the rights of ethnic and national minorities (<http://archiv.meh.hu/nekh/Angol/93LXXVIIkistv.htm>) recognises more languages than the six mentioned in the Hungarian document officially ratifying the European Charter. Naturally, beyond the question of the number of languages is the really interesting question of whether the protection afforded by internal legislation is greater or lesser than would follow from endorsement or ratification of the Charter. Unfortunately, there is no space to enter into such questions in an article like this which sets out to give a panoramic overview.

4. Conclusions

Overall, the ten new member states of the European Union present moderate linguistic complexity. Seven of the ten states are homogeneous in both Fishman's and Lijphart's terms and only two are clearly heterogeneous. The two heterogeneous states are Estonia and Latvia, where the internal linguistic complexity is in large part the result of population movements which occurred under Soviet domination during the 20th century. In the event that Cyprus reunifies, that island will be the third heterogeneous state, with the proviso that internally it will still consist of two clearly homogeneous territories and most probably the resulting state will be organised politically as a confederation of these two territories. In terms of language policy, all states except Malta and Cyprus have one official state language. Malta's case is exceptional, as we have said, because the second official language (English) is not the mother tongue of any significant group of speakers on the island. And in the case of Cyprus, even though the Republic has two official languages, in the current political situation on the island, as we have said, the Republic functions as an officially monolingual state. In general, there is no situation in any of the ten states that is even broadly comparable to the one in which the Catalan language finds itself. In any case, the most interesting developments from the Catalan point of view could be the way in which Latvia and Estonia treat their substantial Russian-speaking minorities, the result in the main of immigration during the Soviet era, and the uptake, in Cyprus, of linguistic (con) federalism in the event that the island is reunified.

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Links

Ceský statistický úrad
Czech Statistical Office
<<http://www.czso.cz/>>

Statistická služba Republiky Iperesía
Statistical Service of the Republic of Cyprus
<http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/index_gr/index_gr?OpenDocument>

Központi Statisztikai Hivatal
Hungarian Central Statistical Office
<<http://www.ksh.hu/pls/ksh/docs/>>

LR Centrala statistikas parvalde
Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia
<<http://www.csb.lv/vidus.cfm>>

National Statistics Office
<<http://www.nso.gov.mt/>>

Polska Statystyka Publiczna
Polish Official Statistics
<<http://www.stat.gov.pl/>>

Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky
Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic
<<http://www.statistics.sk/>>

Statistični urad Republike Slovenije
Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia
<<http://www.stat.si/>>

Statistikaamet
Statistical Office of Estonia
<<http://www.stat.ee/>>

Statistikos departamentas prie Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybes
Department of Statistics to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania (Statistics Lithuania)
<<http://www.std.lt/web/main.php>>

Albert Branchadell
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona <<http://www.uab.es/>>
Departament de Filologia Catalana
Albert.Branchadell@uab.es