

Multilingual realities and language policy

Education, identity and space

Manuel Célio Conceição

University of Algarve, Portugal
mconcei@ualg.pt

The growing complexity of linguistic environments in the twenty-first century reflects global processes such as urbanisation, migration, political transformation and educational reform. In an increasingly interconnected and linguistically diverse world, language functions not merely as a tool for communication but as a complex and contested site of identity, governance and global participation; language has become both a mirror and a driver of change.

This volume brings together a collection of interdisciplinary studies, and one policy and strategic document of a topical group within FOREU4ALL, that explore the evolving roles of language in contemporary society, from the classroom to the city street, from legal frameworks to personal identity. These contributions examine multilingualism, language policy, education and linguistic landscapes as they intersect in different cultural, geopolitical and institutional settings. Ranging from educational reform and legal frameworks to sociolinguistic identity and urban semiotics, they synthesise and collectively interrogate how language policies and practices reflect deeper struggles over power, inclusion and cultural continuity. Though diverse in scope and geography, the research points to recurring tensions between top-down language planning and bottom-up linguistic realities, between symbolic national unity and everyday multilingual diversity, and between globalising pressures and local identity preservation.

The contributions span a wide geographic and conceptual range, from the Healthy Linguistic Diet model developed in Europe to empirical investigations in Kazakhstan, Latvia, Morocco, Italy and Ukraine. Each paper offers a distinct perspective, yet collectively they build a coherent picture of how language policies and practices reflect broader tensions between global pressures and local identities, top-down regulation and bottom-up realities, unity and diversity.

The volume opens the Healthy Linguistic Diet (HLD) model, from Bak and Mehmedbegovic-Smith, a metaphor that treats multilingualism as essential nourishment for cognitive, emotional and social health. This model provides a conceptual foundation that resonates throughout the issue, encouraging readers to view linguistic diversity not as a challenge to be managed but as a critical asset for individuals and societies alike.

Druvite offers a Latvian perspective on the sociolinguistic phenomenon of superdiversity, challenging traditional notions of language norms and identities. Her work sets the stage for a broader reconsideration of linguistic categories and assumptions, particularly in multilingual and multicultural societies.

Language as a tool of state-building is critically examined in the paper by Sarkytbay et al. Their comparative legal analysis explores how national language policies, particularly those aiming to institutionalise the state language, navigate the delicate balance between unifying a population and preserving linguistic diversity.

These themes of identity and policy are echoed in the work of Hermas, who critiques Morocco's fragmented language planning and proposes a trilingual policy grounded in the principles of linguistic citizenship.

Turning to the sphere of higher education, Torubara and Shevchenko's contribution investigates the role of English-language proficiency in Ukrainian academia. Their findings reveal a striking gap between policy and practice, offering important implications for how nations prepare scholars for global research engagement while safeguarding linguistic and disciplinary needs.

The contribution of Kaibuldayeva and Madiyeva expands the discussion into the visual and symbolic realm of urban linguistics. The analysis of ergonyms in Kazakhstani cities and global metropolises demonstrates how naming practices in public space reflect shifting ideologies, cultural reclamation and the influence of global commerce. The linguistic landscape, in this view, becomes both a site of memory and a medium of transformation.

The voices of younger generations are foregrounded in the chapter of Khamit et al. on language attitudes among Kazakh youth. This sociolinguistic study reveals the uneven reception of Kazakhstan's trilingual language policy across different regions, emphasising the need for locally sensitive, culturally inclusive approaches to language planning.

Köhncke's examination (an ongoing project part of a doctoral research) of foreign language education in Northern Italy highlights how educational systems respond to both internal diversity and international pressures. The use of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and the inclusion

of minority languages in the curriculum reflect efforts to reconcile regional identities with broader European and global competencies.

The Terms of Reference for the Topical Group on Multilingualism and Multiculturalism (TG M&M) define its role within the FOREU4ALL network of European University Alliances. The group fosters collaboration on linguistic and cultural diversity in higher education through shared practices, research and policy alignment. Expanding on previous efforts, TG M&M also addresses multiculturalism, intercultural communication and global competence. It responds to challenges posed by English dominance and the need for inclusive, multilingual environments. Guided by open-ended goals, the group promotes institutional cooperation and shared learning.

The studies collectively emphasise the central role of language in shaping identity, education, urban life and public policy. A shared theme across diverse contexts is the necessity of inclusive, adaptable and context-sensitive approaches to managing linguistic diversity. Efforts such as revitalising endangered languages and reshaping urban spaces underscore the urgency and complexity of sustaining multilingualism in a changing world. Language is shown to be deeply political and historical, never neutral. Whether in Morocco or Kazakhstan, societies face the challenge of balancing unity and diversity in their linguistic landscapes. These studies argue for embracing multilingualism as a resource rather than a problem. Language is intimately tied to belonging, knowledge, power and equity. It serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a medium for negotiating identity and societal goals.

The volume presents language and language policy as central to how communities define who they are and who they aspire to be. It offers valuable insights for researchers, educators and policymakers engaged in the realities of contemporary multilingualism.