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Editorial

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Language education is an area of increasing anxiety and tension in the European Union and also in other parts of the world. Recent surveys reported in this journal have shown disappointing levels of language competence among European citizens, with the result that current arrangements for language learning are being subjected to critical scrutiny in terms of their aims and their effectiveness. Undercurrents of opinion in the European institutions also suggest that attention is moving away from the implementation of well-established policies and towards the search for alternative approaches.

A different perspective is presented by Jean-François Graziani, who examines the French Law of 4 August 1994 on the use of the French language, better known as the ‘Toubon Law’. This was intended to protect consumers, workers and cultural creation in French against the growing dominance of English language and American culture in Europe, and it also extends to education, higher education and research. He discusses the university reforms of 2013, which sparked a heated controversy when presented by the Minister for Higher Education and Research, Geneviève Fioraso, since they allowed French academic institutions to implement courses taught in a foreign language, which would usually be English. This threatened to undermine the principle of the Toubon Law, which had proved difficult to enforce. He concludes that the new legal arrangements reflect the new issues facing universities in a context of hyper-competition on a global scale.

The question of educational language policy is taken up by a team from the University of Aveiro, Susana Ambrósio, Maria Helena Araújo e Sá, Susana Pinto and Ana Raquel Simões. They report on a study at the university that aimed to identify perspectives on educational language policies in the academic context, taking account of the voices of institutions and students. They describe convergent and divergent perspectives within those voices and reflect on the implications for the development and implementation of educational language policies in higher education institutions. They conclude that institutional actors and students share the same pragmatic perspective regarding the integration of languages in the curricula, perceiving it in terms of employability, mobility and professional needs, and revealing a representation of languages as instrumental

objects. However, students showed a stronger commitment to the value of language learning as part of their studies, suggesting a need to raise institutional awareness of the importance of implementing educational language policies, and the need for an appropriate locus of discussion.

In the fourth article, Nicola Carty examines language revitalisation in Scotland, focusing on adult learners in Gaelic language education policy. She suggests that Gaelic language acquisition is being impeded by the lack of recognition of the specific linguistic and pedagogic issues surrounding it. She proposes a model for the development of a framework for Gaelic for adult learners, including teaching, learning and testing. She suggests that it should be modelled on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, but should also take into account the formal and sociolinguistic context of Gaelic. She concludes that research in second language acquisition can play an important role in language planning and policy.

The issues discussed in these analytical articles are echoed in our 'Interventions' section, which reproduces documents that are already in the public domain. These include the texts of legislation, reports, official statements and contributions to the debates that are shaping language policies. The first document is a policy decision from UNESCO, in April 2014, which encourages Member States to do more in support of multilingualism. Among other points, this echoes the EU's Barcelona declaration in encouraging states to make greater efforts "to promote the teaching of at least two languages in addition to the main language of instruction within their respective educational system" (clause 10).

The second document is the text of a Council of Europe decision, also of April 2014, on the importance of competences in the language(s) of schooling for equity and quality in education and for educational success. It concludes with an endorsement of the European Centre for Modern Languages at Graz. This is followed by a commentary of May 2014 from the Observatoire Européen du Plurilinguisme on language practices in the recent European political campaigns and in communications within the EU. It is sharply critical of the predominant use of English and the neglect of long-established practices respecting linguistic diversity.

The remaining documents reflect concerns about language policy at the level of individual countries. They outline actions that are being taken, or should be taken, to support greater competence in languages in the country concerned. The first of these is a substantial presentation of the work of the Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France during 2013. This is

of particular interest since the agency works both to strengthen the French language and to promote language diversity in France and further afield.

The next two documents express concerns in the UK to counter tendencies for complacency on the importance of languages other than English. A report published by the British Academy points to the growing requirement for language skills in pursuit of diplomacy and national security across a growing number of government departments. And a manifesto published in July 2014 by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Languages calls for a Framework for National Recovery in Language Learning.

Finally, we include the Final Report of a significant initiative in the United States to address the lack of language capability. It outlines a plan of action which would provide access to language learning in at least one language other than the mother tongue, for all pupils in national education up to the end of secondary school.

Taken together, these Interventions demonstrate how much the issues of language learning continue to be of fundamental concern in Europe and elsewhere in the world.