Evaluating language policies
Which objectives, criteria, indicators?

X Days of Linguistic Rights - DLR 2016

International conference

Teramo-Giulianova 14-16 December 2016 *

Presentation

The conference aims to explore the purposes and methods of language policies evaluation in Italy, Europe and beyond. The topic is of great relevance and urgency, and arises a wide range of interpretations and articulations.

One first focus is predominantly economic and political. Explicitly in this period of fiscal austerity and economic hardship it becomes essential to evaluate each public investment policy, including evidently the language policies. So far, this assessment will give account of the public resources investment, and above all, it will ascertain if the policy has led to the planned and expected results or if perhaps its sudden interruption before the arrival of mid-term results would cause its failure implying therefore a waste of public money. Without this verification, it is likely to lose citizens and the taxpayer's endorsement to the language policy itself. In different European regions where minority languages are spoken, the need for regular evaluation emerges more and more clearly, on the language policy authorities' account. And this also shows the need to evaluate the effectiveness of educational policies of the languages in public education systems. This applies to the teaching of foreign languages, knowledge of which is generally associated with economic benefits for the individual and society, and also to the national languages which are a very important tool to promote social integration in the working world of growing immigrant masses (and their relatives).

A second focus holds a more cultural and social nature. Approaching and working on the evaluation of language policies is to declare taking them seriously, fully integrating them into the category of public policy. In fact, in today's world, the culture of the assessment covers and concerns many human activities, sometimes even excessively and so pervasive, it was not so - not that much - for linguistic sphere.

The failure or spurious, unsatisfactory assessment of language policy has produced and produces several negative consequences (and perhaps some positive), which are summed up in the partial darkness of the relationship between economy, subject, language and Government of the community.

That relationship should therefore be explored, notably by distinguishing between:

- Policies relating to major world languages and official languages. The stakes are very high, because the evaluation of these policies could clarify the scope (positive and/or negative) of specific choices, such as the adoption of English as the language of science and education also in non-
English speaking countries and, more broadly, as « international lingua franca [sic] ». Also the promotion of the Italian language abroad, which has been the subject of renewed interest from 2014 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is comprised into this category;

- **Policies relating to lesser used languages** - regional, local or historical minority - increasingly delegitimized because, precisely because of their failure or interruption assessment, these policies are widely perceived as a burden on the community. The disappearance or survival of such «linguistic heritage» is nevertheless a equally high threat;

- **Policies relating to the «new minority languages»**, which seems to be considered strategic to promote integration of newly arrived migrant community that is more geared to dialogue and intercultural promotion than assimilation. Also in this case the stakes, in terms of conflict or social pacification, are remarkable.

It is therefore necessary to clarify the field knowing that, on the one hand, these three language policy levels can interact (the enhancement of the historic local languages, which are often a real hinge between different States and that in any case are functional to a communication of proximity, can for example be usefully directed to a more rapid and effective integration of some new immigrant communities). On the other hand, one needs to ask oneself, even creatively, about the methods, criteria and indicators to be taken in order to properly evaluate language policies, precisely because of the eminently anthropological and social nature of natural languages. The indicators to be investigated should not be only economic, of course, but also related to health, to relational goods, the quality of life, social and inter-generational cohesion, cultural disalienation, environmental sustainability and so on.

These reflections are decisive. Although the importance of the evaluation (in the sense of policy analysis) was already clear to the language policy experts in the 70s, especially in North America, it is only since the 90s, and increasingly in the last decade, general evaluation tools in the field of language planning have been developed. It should therefore be made a point about the state of the art and the development of research lines and teaching for the future through an interdisciplinary view, because, in addition to the relative scarcity of field practices, worth mentioning the lack of appropriate training courses that can meet the need to prepare professionals in language planning and evaluation of language policies. The research, teaching of language and education policies must find their rightful place in schools and universities.

The complexity of the conference topic deserves a thorough and interdisciplinary discussion, which points to restore value, legitimacy and effectiveness to language policies of today and tomorrow.

**Research themes (non-exhaustive list)**

Methodology of evaluation of public policies and management of linguistic diversity

Linguistic rights and language policy: from principles to the field

The evaluation of language policies: case studies

Evaluate language policies: the widespread languages

Evaluate language policies: heritage languages - regional, local or minority

Evaluate language policies: languages of new immigrants

Criteria and indicators for the evaluation of language policies

Practices bottom-up and top-down practices: similarities, differences and interactions

Language policies: good and bad practices

Language policies and local development: border experiences

The communication of language policies
Calendar
June 15 - August 24: Launch of the First Circular and opening reception of paper proposals
August 31: Scientific Committee response and sending of editorial guidelines
14 to 16 December: Conference
March 31, 2017: Sending texts for publication in the Proceedings
Autumn 2017: Publication of the Proceedings

Proposals for papers
Proposals for papers should be transmitted to both of the following addresses:

info@associazionelemitalia.org and gagresti@unite.it

under summary form about min. 300 max. 500 words, accompanied by some keywords and personal contacts (name, surname, institution affiliation, email, phone). These proposals should be drafted in one of the following languages: Catalan, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish.

Inscriptions
Conference inscriptions are open from the response of the Scientific Committee until 30 September. For teachers, the registration fee is 80 Euros. For doctoral students and research doctors fee is reduced by 40 Euros.

Language regime of DLR 2016
Working languages
The following languages are eligible for the work of the conference and for the debates:
Catalan, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish

Publication languages
For the publication of the various contributions in the Proceedings of the Conference it will be possible to propose texts in other European linguistic varieties, even minority, provided they are accompanied by three abstracts in as many working languages (v. supra).

Conference places
The Conference develops between the University of Teramo and Hotel Europa in Giulianova.

Info
gagresti@unite.it; info@associazionelemitalia.org
Scientific Committee (provisional list)

Giovanni Agresti, Università di Teramo
Francesco Avolio, Università di L'Aquila
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Christian Tremblay, Observatoire Européen du Plurilinguisme (OEP)
Federico Vicario, Università di Udine
Maurizio Viezzi, Università di Trieste e European Language Council (ELC/CEL)

Partnerships

GSPL, SLI, Società Filologica Friulana, AIDL, OEP, MAAYA, La Renaissance française, Association TRANSIT-Lingua, DORIF-Università, Conseil européen pour les langues, CELE, MIBACT, FRI, ELC/CEL