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English as medium of instruction in university education

Emrije Agai-Lochi ^{a*}

^aSouth East European University, Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication, Ilindenska n.335, 1200 Tetovo, Macedonia

Abstract

The main aim of this paper is to examine the use of the language policy in higher education in a multi-ethnic and a multilingual country such as Republic of Macedonia. The change in use of official languages has turned a new page not only for Albanians, but also for all other ethnic minorities in the country. The new law for using a minority language in higher education has gained importance in social and political aspects. Language planning policy covers two main periods that is before and after the Ohrid Framework. This research study gives a special emphasis on the use of English as a third language among multi ethnicities at South East European University as the first established university open to all ethnicities of the country in which Albanian, Macedonian and English are the medium of instruction. Therefore, the study uses the methodology of comparing language objectives and learning outcomes between English Department and Language Center. The findings of the research study done on the use of English in higher education provide some crucial differences based on English language proficiency. It can be concluded that the paper gives some insight into the theory of language planning in education and provides the reader with significant information on the different language objectives between the English Department (ED) and the Language Center (LC).

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +389-70-326-128; fax: +38944-356-001.
E-mail address: e.agai@seeu.edu.mk

1. Introduction

1.1. Language planning policy in Macedonia

In the last ten years, Macedonia has made a number of changes regarding ethnic minorities' rights as representative members of the 'nation state'. Wright discusses that it is essential for status planning to create a central language which would be recognizably distinct from the languages of other ethnic groups (2004:43). Furthermore, according to Wright (2004:45), "[M]aking the case that a language was separate and coherent was a powerful strategy in the bid for independence and sovereignty". This view is unlikely to be true. The main argument against this assertion is that in the case of Macedonia, it is not merely a separate language but a separate population that seeks to be defined as a part of the country. As a result of this struggle, ethnic minorities in Macedonia were demanding change.

The framework of these changes involved a reformation of the constitution, more Albanian representatives in the service sector, the decentralization of cities and most importantly a change in the education system. As many scholars argue (Daskalovski, 2002, Pjaziti, 2005, Bliznakovski 2013) this was the only alternative which would allow a new page in the history of the country to be written. Language identification was the first problem to be solved. Phan Le Ha (2008: 28) suggests that a community's stability depends both on language and culture. As a consequence, language and culture shape and unite the nationalities in a country. This view however does not always hold, since Macedonia is a multilingual country with different ethnicities.

The problem regarding the use of languages in multilingual societies is defined as a 'set of language policy choices that have particular consequences and that are subject to particular normative criteria' (Pool, 1991: 497 cited in Bliznakovski 2013: 22). Therefore, the notion one language, one territory, one people (Wright, 2012: 66) may result in conflict between the ethnic majorities and minorities in a multilingual country. According to Pjaziti (2005: 103), "[M]acedonians and Albanians did not find common 'transitology' language during the first transition". Pjaziti is certainly correct in saying that ethnic minorities were seen as separate nations in their homeland.

1.2. Language policy pre-post- The Ohrid framework agreement

With the incorporation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), the reviewed language regime resulted in the official use of ethnic minority languages at the national and educational level. Based on the Constitution 1991, Macedonia was defined as a 'national state of the Macedonian people' and the ethnic minority recognition defined as 'full equality as citizens and permanent co-existence with the Macedonian people is provided for Albanian, Turks, Serbs, Vlachs, Romanies, and other nationalities living in the Republic of Macedonia' (Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, 1991). Although the nation-state of Macedonia recognized officially the existence of ethnic minorities, this was so far only symbolic.

As a consequence, the Macedonian Constitution had disobeyed the fact of liberal equality of ethnic minorities. The resistance of Albanians against the Macedonian Constitution was seen as 'evidence of discrimination' which resulted in the conflict of 2001 and gave way to changes in ethnic minority rights (Daskalovski, 2002:17). Since this paper seeks to give some insight into language policy, the changes made in this area are highly important. According to Article 7 of the Macedonian Constitution, the official language was Macedonian and a minority language can gain acceptance only if it is spoken by a majority of citizens in a certain area. These conditions were made in accordance with the Law on Local-self government. This law allowed for use of minority languages, though their official use was required to be next to Macedonian language. The use of a minority language in local status was a positive step, but it still was not sufficient for Albanians with regards to the educational system.

1.3. Language use in schools and higher education

There is no doubt that schools play an important role in the educational system. Even more important though is being educated in one's mother tongue. As Skutnabb-Kangas (1981:305) points out, 'values', 'norms' and 'ideology' established by the school is a law that is accepted by all including linguistic minorities. In the same way, Wright (2012: 70-71) discusses the importance of schools in the creation of a community and that 'the school system

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