

Good practice, the economy, language and the workplace

Background paper for two workshops organised by Centre for Welsh Politics and Society, Aberystwyth University and Wavehill in cooperation with ARFOR II, September 2024

Elin Royles

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The aim of the ARFOR Program is develop plans to promote economic development across local authorities in West Wales and in doing so boost the prospects of the Welsh language. The emphasis on promoting opportunities to use the Welsh in clear the summary of the programme:

‘Support the communities which are the heartlands of the Welsh language to prosper through economic interventions which will also contribute to increasing opportunities to see and use Welsh every day.’¹

It is also apparent in strategic objective 4:

‘Strengthen the identity of communities with a high density of Welsh speakers – by supporting the use and visibility of the Welsh language, encouraging a sense of place and local loyalty, together with increasing awareness of what is common across the region.’

1.2 The Centre for Welsh Politics and Society, Aberystwyth University and Wavehill as part of their work programme associated with the ARFOR II programme seeks to examine how workplaces can have a positive effect on the Welsh language and particularly on the use of Welsh.

2.0 Consideration of languages in workplaces

2.1 There are different ways of understanding the term 'language management', and it is utilised in field of business studies. There the context is increased recognition of the importance of languages within the business strategy of large-scale multinational corporations operating across different countries. They encounter multilingual contexts and need to decide on and develop policies which manage the languages used within their companies (Sanden, 2014).

2.2 From the business studies perspective, corporate language management purposefully regulates languages within a company through top-down planning and actions based on an evaluation of the company’s linguistic needs (Sanden, 2014: 525). On this basis, a strategy or language policy is developed to manage the linguistic regime within the company.

2.3 It is argued that decisions regarding languages can have positive or negative effects on the effectiveness of companies, on their productivity and their performance. Equally, decisions about languages can be affected by cost, expenditure and profit implications. Often, companies decide on English as the common corporate language, but others encourage investment, developing tailored arrangements for a company and a language strategy that recognises language diversity in the workplace (Sanden, 2016).

¹ See <https://www.rhaglenarfor.cymru/index.html>

2.4 Sanden (2016) outlines a four-stage model of corporate language management:

1. Linguistic needs analysis: developing an overview of the current linguistic situation within a company, for example by assessing current linguistic skills and assessing if current linguistic competences sufficient for the future.
2. Developing a language policy or strategy: a plan which is a statement on language use within a company and deliberately seeks to manage linguistic matters.
3. Language management tools: as a language policy is often not sufficient to realise objectives, measures and activities are needed to respond to linguistic needs or goals. Some may require investment in terms of time or human resources.

Examples:

- Language training: Language courses or training for employees
- Translation: Use of internal or external translators
- Technical or mechanical translation solutions
- Selective recruitment: recruiting language-skilled employees
- Linguistic intermediaries: strategic use of the bilingual or multilingual skills of some employees who can act as language nodes and overcome language barriers

2.5 The context of the business studies literature differs to the circumstances encountered by the ARFOR programme, particularly due to its emphasis on international businesses, on majority languages, and often on employees learning additional foreign languages in order to be able to promote business abroad. However, the literature is useful for the following reasons:

- It highlights the significance of language policy in workplaces and processes of language planning within workplaces. Some in the field claim that corporate language management can be more important and have a greater impact than governmental policies (Sanden, 2024).
- It recognises the effect of workplaces on the linguistic practices of employees and the broader effect of company policies on the language within society (Sanden, 2024).
- The four-stage corporate language management provides a clear structure for processes of language planning that are becoming more common in private sector workplaces.

2.6 Given the different context in workplaces where there is combination of a majority language/languages and minority languages as in the ARFOR context, are the approaches outlined above sufficient to promote minority language use in a workplace? What other factors or interventions need to be considered in the more challenging situation of seeking to promote minority language use, often in a context of a wider language shift? Is sufficient attention given to issues such as sociological and behavioural factors and to language prestige? In this context, considering the Basque case is extremely useful.

3.0 The Basque case

3.1 As regards the situation in the main region where Basque is spoken, the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC), economically it is one of the main industrial areas in Spain, where industry is important, including technologically advanced light metal

industries, aeronautics and energy (van der Worp, Cenoz and Gorter, 2017). Average income levels are higher than the Spanish average. As part the high degree of devolved autonomy, the Basque Country's distinct fiscal system provides regional government with wide-ranging fiscal and taxation powers.

3.2 Regarding the situation of the Basque language, while the Spanish Constitution (1978) establishes Castilian as only official language of Spain, Basque and Spanish were recognised as official languages in the Basque Autonomous Community in the 1979 statute that also committed regional government and institutions to promoting Basque. The government has sought to promote Basque use through a range of public policies, especially in the field of education, the media and public administration, and also in the private sector.

3.3 Over the last quarter of a century, a range of attempts have sought to promote Basque in the workplace, particularly in response to success in producing speakers through the education system followed by a lack of opportunities to use the language in workplaces. One study claims that generally the emphasis on promoting Basque in companies has resulted in a general acceptance regarding the use of Basque for internal language use, but language use in formal work situations has not been normalised (van der Worp, Cenoz and Gorter, 2017).

3.4 Basque Government (BAC) policies

An emphasis is placed on companies developing language plans and the quality of a company's Basque language management is recognised through the Bikain certificate of excellence. It is awarded by Euskalit, the foundation supported by the Basque Government that promotes advanced level management and Basque language management.

3.5 Another element of promoting Basque in companies is financial assistance. For example, since 1997 the *Lanhitz* (language at work) programme promotes use of Basque within companies as part of the Plan General Promote the Usage of Basque.

3.6 The EME Framework

As part of this, the EME framework supports bodies and companies to develop the presence of Basque and language use. It emphasises establishing objectives and identifying priorities in terms of use of Basque and its presence in the workplace in a systematic, clear and simple way. Emphasis is placed on the importance of internal and management arrangements in enabling use.

3.7 The intention is that a company takes action along two main axis (language of service and language of working) and in 6 main fields ²:

1. The language of services

1. The image of an organisation: signage, marketing materials and public events, digital materials.

² See :

https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/eme_koadroa_2016/eu_def/adjuntos/Sailbururaren%20Agindua%20EME%20EU.pdf

2. Relationships with customers: written and oral, e.g. face in face and online.

2. Language of working

3. Internal language of communication and working methods: signage, documents and all forms of written communication, oral communication in meetings, informal conversations, technology and resources e.g. computer programmes.

4. People management: induction processes and materials, staff training and management, including any communication with staff.

5. External relations: language used with other bodies e.g. oral and written communication with governmental organisations.

6. Management System: including a systematic process for developing a language strategy, sufficient resources to implement what has been decided, identifying the needs of customers and citizens, creating structures including a Basque language committee and monitoring structures, and projects to promote leadership.

3.8 Beyond Government

Several projects promote the Basque language in workplaces, including promotion of good practice, encouraging networking and exchange information between companies. A central role is played by a range of companies who operate as professional consultancy services on language planning in the workplace. They are often also experts in other services such as governance, diversity and mainstreaming equality. They support public sector bodies, private companies and cooperatives in devising, implementing and over time developing their Basque language promotion plans. As a result, they have extensive expertise in language planning in the business sphere. The most prominent examples are Emun, Elhuyar, Ahize and Artez.

3.9 The Basque Country is also known for its tradition of cooperatives and they operate on different scales from a network of large cooperative companies such as Mondragon, other groups of cooperative companies to smaller cooperative initiatives. As a result, the emphasis on the use of Basque in the workplace is coupled with recognising that supporting Basque in society forms a greater part of the part of the social responsibility of companies than is perhaps seen in other cases.

We look forward to learning more about these initiatives this in the workshop.

Bibliography

Sanden G. R. (2024) 'Corporate Language Management: Insights from Scandinavian Business, presented at Languages Lanean Kongruesa, 18-19.1.24.

Sanden, G. R. (2014) 'Language Management x 3: A Theory, a Sub-Concept, and a Business Strategy Tool' *Applied Linguistics*, 37.4, 520-535.

Sanden, G.R. (2016) 'Language: the sharpest tool in the business strategy toolbox' *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 21, 3, 274-288.

van der Worp , K., Cenoz , J., Gorter , D. (2017) 'From bilingualism to multilingualism in the workplace: the case of the Basque Autonomous Community' *Language Policy*, 16, 407-432.