

Mac Giolla Chríost, Diarmait/Bonotti, Matteo: Brexit, Language Policy and Linguistic Diversity. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. ISBN 978-3-319-78725-1 (hardcover). IX, 84 pp. € 53.49; ISBN 978-3-319-78726-8 (eBook). € 42.79

Among the many important implications of Brexit, its impacts on the language policy of the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU) have hardly been discussed. Mac Giolla Chríost/Bonotti fill this gap with a compact book consisting of three well-structured chapters. In the first chapter, the authors give an overview of the status of the languages of the UK and the EU. It serves as the empirical basis for the following two chapters addressing normative questions with regard to the language policy of the UK (chapter 2) and to that of the EU (chapter 3).

Chapter 1 begins with an overview of the status of English and the other autochthonous and allochthonous languages of the UK. The authors show that English is not only the de facto official language in the UK, but that its official status is de jure also recognised in several acts. They further expound that some of the other autochthonous languages are granted official status by legislation: British Sign Language and Scottish Gaelic in Scotland, Welsh in Wales, the Irish language and Ulster Scots in Northern Ireland. Apart from British Sign Language, all of them as well as Scots, the largest autochthonous language in Scotland, and Cornish, spoken by several hundred people in Cornwall in England, are recognised by the UK Government as languages under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The speakers of allochthonous languages have certain rights in court proceedings and in the sphere of public services, such as the right to have an interpreter, and they enjoy protection against linguistic discrimination.

The authors then sketch the language policy of the EU pointing out the tension between multilingualism and the use of restricted language regimes: there are 24 national languages (each member state can designate one, with the same languages spoken in some states), being used equally as Treaty languages (Art. 55 [1] Treaty on European Union [TEU] and Art. 358 Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union [TFEU]), official languages and working languages (Art. 1 Regulation 1/1958). However, on the basis of an authorisation in Art. 6 Regulation 1/1958 some languages have a privileged status as working languages in the institutions of the EU, namely English, French, and German. Another aim of the EU language policy is the promotion of linguistic diversity: the authors list initiatives to foster language learning (e.g. the ‘mother tongue plus 2’ formula) and to protect minority languages (e.g. European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages, Mercator Network). Concerning the role of English in the EU, the authors correctly expound that it is de jure one of the 24 official EU languages, but that it is –

as the lingua franca in Europe – de facto the dominant working language: English is predominant in all institutions, except the European Court of Justice where French is the working language; most of the legislative proposals are drafted in English, and English is also the main language used by EU institutions for external communication.¹ The assessment of the authors that English will not lose its status as an official EU language (and that of the dominant working language) after Brexit is more than plausible: the rules governing the language regime of the EU are decided unanimously by the Council of the European Union. A unanimous amendment to Regulation 1/1958, according to which the most widely spoken language in the EU would be removed from the list of the official languages, is hard to imagine.

In the second chapter, the authors suggest two changes in the UK's language policy in the wake of the debate about a reform of the UK's Constitution. In this debate, which had already been led before the Brexit referendum and has been intensified after the Brexit decision, the codification of the UK's Constitution or at least an authoritative constitutional text is demanded. With regard to language policy, Mac Giolla Chríost/Bonotti first propose that the English language should be recognised as the official language of the UK in a codified Constitution. Secondly, the authors argue that autochthonous minority language rights and freedoms should be embedded in a transformed UK Constitution, because Brexit disconnects the linguistic actors engaged with sub-State nationalisms in Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland 'from a European "social imaginary" that is defined by ethno-linguistic diversity' (p. 28). Linguistic actors promoting autochthonous languages of the UK have been ideologically rooted in 'the idea of Europe as multilingual polity' (p. 36). Now 'Brexit means the loss of the European linguistic patrimony' (p. 40 f.). After Brexit, Art. 22 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, according to which the EU 'shall respect [...] linguistic diversity', is no longer applicable in the UK. The same is true for the case law of the European Court of Justice according to which linguistic facilities granted to a country's own nationals must be granted to all EU citizens (cf. ECJ, *Grauel Rüffer*, judgment of 27 March 2014, C-322/13, ECLI:EU:C:2014:189). Therefore, the authors' demand is appropriate and, in relation to the inclusion of English in the Constitution, the more urgent issue. At least in part, however, the European roots are still present. Mac Giolla Chríost/Bonotti took into consideration that the UK might also leave the Council of Europe, which had been an open question at the time of the publication of the book in 2018. As this did not happen, important European Conventions granting linguistic rights remain applicable in the UK: the

¹ Stefaan van der Jeught, *EU Language Law*, 2015, 126 ff.

European Convention on Human Rights granting the right to have the free assistance of an interpreter for those who do not speak or understand the language used in court (Art. 6 para. 3 e); the European Charter for Minority or Regional Languages; the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. This means that there is still an important connection between the UK with the European tradition of respecting linguistic diversity so that there is no full detachment from the European linguistic patrimony.

In chapter 1, the authors hold that English is the *de facto* lingua franca of the EU (empirical level) and that it will stay an official language after Brexit (legal level). In chapter 3, they argue that Brexit should strengthen English as a lingua franca in the EU, e.g. with regard to its role as the main working language in the EU institutions or to EU programmes fostering the learning of English (normative level). They develop their argument by discussing Philippe van Parijs' theory of linguistic justice. In his book 'Linguistic Justice for Europe and the World', van Parijs promotes English as a European and global lingua franca, which is important to establish a common forum where citizens with different native languages can communicate with each other.² However, he also considers the injustices connected with it. According to Mac Giolla Chríost/Bonotti, Brexit reduces them with regard to three problems:

One injustice is that there is an unfair distribution of costs and benefits between native and non-native speakers. After Brexit, the number of native English speakers in Malta and Ireland is quite small (around 2 % of the EU population). Only with regard to them, the problem of free riding continues. Mac Giolla Chríost/Bonotti do not consider it as morally problematic for an interesting, but not persuasive reason: it is a compensation for the efforts of the Irish and Maltese to keep their national languages alive, which have been weakened by the historical fact that the British Empire had unjustly imposed English upon them.

A second problem, according to van Parijs, is the proficiency gap: native speakers of English enjoy greater professional opportunities than non-native speakers. Mac Giolla Chríost/Bonotti argue that after Brexit this gap is reduced by the fact that nearly all EU citizens use English as non-native speakers. They hold that the different national varieties (= specific forms) of English in Europe should not be regarded as inferior to the British variety, but should be accepted without hierarchies (e.g. in schools and in the media). This idea that English should be 'Europeanised' deserves support because it reduces language barriers and promotes the European integration at the communicative level.

² Philippe van Parijs, *Linguistic Justice for Europe and the World*, 2011.

A third problem is that the status of a language affects the self-esteem of its speakers. The role of English as a lingua franca made it superior to the other official languages of the EU. After Brexit, 'English would somehow be "Esperantized", that is, it would acquire the status of a neutral language, the official recognition of which as the EU's sole lingua franca would no longer send the message that in the EU there are speakers of first-class and second-class languages' (p. 68). This important aspect should facilitate the acceptance of English in the EU. Together with the other two aspects, there is a strong case for strengthening the role of English in the EU after Brexit vis-à-vis the other two working languages, German and French.

The authors argue at a high level, although their conclusions are not always convincing. As representatives of language policy, they overestimate their own field in the overall context of Brexit: as far as can be seen, the language issue did not play any role in the Brexit negotiations. The authors' assessment that 'the place of English in a post-Brexit EU is likely to become one of the most controversial issues in the ongoing negotiations between the EU and the UK' (p. 75) appears to be a misjudgement in retrospect. The place of English in a post-Brexit EU is just one matter within the EU. There was no reason to make it an issue in the Brexit negotiations. However, the authors deserve credit for introducing the implications of Brexit for language policy into the discussion and making an important contribution to it, both for the language policy in the UK and in the EU. As far as the EU is concerned, Brexit would generally be a good occasion to finally discuss the EU language law openly and reorganise it. Until now, it has been regulated only fragmentarily and is often the subject of informal and pragmatic ad hoc decisions, which is especially true of the role of English. English is only *de facto*, but not *de jure*, lingua franca in the EU. Now that it is an almost neutral language, consideration should be given to making it the sole working language *de jure* as well.

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