

# Language policy as provision of public goods. The case of Berlin and Leipzig

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# What is language policy?

- A language policy is a policy mechanism that impacts the structure, function, use, or acquisition of languages (Johnson 2013).
  - Corpus planning
  - Status planning
  - Acquisition planning

In practice, status planning consists in allocating functions to languages in different public domains, e.g.

1. Law and order
2. Justice
3. Public administration/public services
4. Mass media
5. Names of places/ road signs
6. Education
7. Health care



# Types of goods

	<b>Rival (R)</b>	<b>Non-rival</b>
<b>Excludable (E)</b>	Private goods	Club goods
<b>Non-excludable</b>	Common-pool resources	Public goods

- Property  $R$  describes to what extent a good can be consumed by several individuals at the same time
- Dimension  $E$  describes the extent to which it is technically feasible or not too expensive to exclude someone from the consumption of a given good, once it has been produced
- Any intermediate types are possible
- The state can provide public and intermediate goods both for efficiency and equity reasons.



# Language-related goods

1. Private goods
  - Individual language courses
  - Books
  - DVDs
  - Language holidays
  
2. Public goods (Status planning)
  - Official documents (e-version) – written and oral (e.g. multilingual Parliament's sessions)
  - Bilingual road signs
  - Use of languages on banknotes
  - Broadcasting (TV-Radio-Internet streaming), unless a decoder is used
  
3. Intermediate types (Status / Acquisition planning)
  - Bilingual schools
  - Bilingual Courts/Tribunals
  - Language training for adult migrants
  - Bilingual social services (e.g. hospitals)



# Implications for language policy

1. The choice of the State as to which language should be used for official purposes is problematic because it influences the extent to which publicly provided goods and services are accessible to people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
2. The official language policy can create different forms of linguistic disadvantage, defined on the basis of “what people are able to be and do in a given language” (Shorten 2016, Caray 2017) → capability approach
3. As publicly provided goods and services can be more or less multilingual, alternative language policies can entail different effects on the socio-economic situation of individuals living in a country or region.
4. The State is *directly* responsible for linguistic disadvantage in the domains in which it exerts its *exclusive* or *predominant* competence (i.e. law & order, administrative authorities, essential public services).
5. “Reducing *linguistic unease* is a duty of the public institutions. In fact, they should raise the attention of the civil society towards the sociolinguistic needs of the mobile people, so that the latter will be more and more keen to be integrated ... <sup>5</sup> into the hosting society as much as possible” (Iannàccaro-Gobbo-Dell’Aquila, 2018).



# The case of Berlin and Leipzig

- Exploratory analysis of six cases in a comparative perspective in Berlin (large city) and Leipzig (middle-size city) in three areas:
  - Immigration office (Ausländerbehörde) in Berlin and Leipzig
  - Public higher education (HU and ULEI)
  - Hospitals in Leipzig (and Berlin – Vivantes)
- Structured interviews about multilingualism management in these contexts.



# Results: Immigration offices

- **Berlin (largest immigration office in Germany)**

- No formal language policy. German official language, but in recent years plan towards bilingualism German-English for oral communication and some important written documents (websites, forms, etc.). Any language for Asylum-seekers.
- Only 30%-50% of staff have some knowledge of English. No requirement for employment. 10% of staff per year attends courses of English.
- Use of “Improvised interpreters”: 20% of staff is of foreign origin (language spoken, Turkish, Kurdish, Serbo-Croatian, Arab, Spanish, Chinese, some African languages) *or* users bring someone who can speak German or English.

- **Leipzig**

- No formal language policy. German official language. In practice written documents in German only, with some exceptions. Oral communication Russian and English are used by employees who learnt them in school. Few employees have foreign origins.
- Use of linguistic mediators for Arabic and Dari two days a week.
- Users bring someone who knows German if they cannot speak it.



# Results: Universities

## 1. HU zu Berlin (service for the “internationalization of administration”)

- No formal language policy.
- German official language. Special funds to improve the level of English of the administration, especially staff who has contact with students, and for translations into English.
- Providing language training courses on a voluntary basis and gradual introduction of bilingual signage.

## 2. Universität Leipzig

- A formal language policy is in preparation. The “internationalization” of the administration is mentioned. The idea is to avoid the equation “internationalization”=“English-isation”
- Bilingual services and support for foreign students and researchers. Integration language courses (German). 95% of foreign students already know German, 20-30% of international researchers.



# Results: Hospitals

1. **Berlin (Vivantes Humboldt-Klinikum ) – next Friday.**

2. **Leipzig (Universitätsklinikum)**

- No formal language policy.
- Multilingual communication relies on existing language skills of doctors and nurses. Doctors know English, nurses sometimes. Russian, Turkish, Arabic, Polish and Spanish are part of the linguistic repertoire of staff.
- Such skills are reported in a list. “Improvised interpreters”
- Patient may bring personal interpreters (friends or relatives)
- For asylum-seekers special provisions apply
- Different explanatory sheets are available in different languages (Turkish and Arabic are often demanded).
- Some use of automatic translation and icons.
- Sorbian is not an issue.



# Conclusions

1. No institution is strictly monolingual, but no explicit language policy and no evaluation of effects
2. English is generally viewed *a priori* as a viable solution to different language problems (following the idea that “everyone speaks English”)
3. No real “need assessment”, but nevertheless there is a certain awareness of the importance of other languages
  - Multilingual forms and sometimes signage
  - Use of staff’s language repertoire (“improvised interpreters”) / language mediators
  - Use of interpreters, especially for asylum-seekers
4. Little attention to the “exolingual” use of German in communication with foreigners.



# Thank you for your attention

## References

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