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# Dilemmas of Public and State Administration: Bilingualism Bonus or Multilingualism without Bonus

The role of education systems is crucial in creating bilingualism and multilingualism. Based on domestic and foreign literature and structured interviews with public officials in North Macedonia and Italy, the article analyses the solutions and incentives for institutional bilingualism, which have proven insufficient thus far. It also offers a model of multilingualism as a concept of an ideal environment where speakers can communicate using multiple languages. The impact of new information and communication technologies on language learning and use in bilingual areas and their contribution to the creation of an ideal environment conducive to multilingualism will also be examined. The data obtained shows, among other things, that artificial intelligence is also revolutionising language use and learning. Nonetheless, despite rapid progress, human communication in different languages cannot be replaced by artificial algorithms.

**Keywords:** institutional bilingualism, bilingualism bonus, public employees, public sector, state administration, public administration, minorities, immigrants.

## Dileme javne in državne uprave: dodatek za dvojezičnost ali večjezičnost brez dodatka

*Vloga izobraževalnih sistemov je ključna pri ustvarjanju dvojezičnosti in večjezičnosti. V članku na podlagi domače in tuje literature ter strukturiranega intervjuja z javnimi uslužbenci v Severni Makedoniji in Italiji analiziramo dosedanje rešitve in spodbude za institucionalno dvojezičnost, ki so se pokazale kot nezadostne, pri čemer se nam ponuja model večjezičnosti kot koncept idealnega okolja, kjer bodo govorniki komunicirali večjezično. Preverjal se bo tudi učinek nove informacijsko-komunikacijske tehnologije na učenje in rabo jezikov na dvojezičnih območjih in na kreiranje idealnega okolja za spodbujanje večjezičnosti. Pridobljeni podatki so med drugim pokazali, da prinaša umetna inteligenca tudi na polju rabe in učenja jezikov pravo revolucijo, vendar kljub bliskovitemu napredku človeške komunikacije v različnih jezikih ni mogoče nadomestiti z umetnimi algoritmi.*

**Ključne besede:** družbeni razred, identiteta, neenakost, integracija, Severna Irska, mir, revščina.

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# 1. Introduction

Democratic countries actively promote the use of minority languages, with nations housing minority populations implementing a range of measures to encourage the use of minority languages within state institutions. However, even where institutional bilingualism seems firmly established, practitioners find that certain solutions have proven ineffective. In specific countries like Slovenia, Italy, Belgium, and Canada, the use of minority languages is supported through financial incentives, such as a bilingualism bonus provided to public employees. Nevertheless, as indicated by the presentation of the project titled *Institutional Bilingualism in the Ethnically Mixed Areas in Slovenia: Evaluation of the Bilingualism Bonus Programme* (INV, n. d.), conducted by the Institute for Ethnic Studies, during the years 2018–2022, a significant number of public employees who receive this bonus do not speak or use the minority language in their interactions with the parties. These monetary incentives for public employees to use minority languages in bilingual areas have emerged alongside the introduction of the New Public Management doctrine, which aimed to depart from the conventional Weberian model of public management characterised by rigid hierarchical structures within public institutions. However, while the New Public Management doctrine employs new approaches to enhance public sector efficiency, often borrowing from private sector solutions, not all these strategies have proven effective. One such case is the bilingualism bonus. A comprehensive examination of countries addressing these issues is presented in the section titled *Institutional Bilingualism and Monetary Incentives – an Overview of Selected Countries*, while an in-depth discussion on the effectiveness of the public management doctrine is provided in the subsequent discussion section.

However, there are legislative solutions in some cases that are currently in effect and may not have been fully considered, presenting countries with unique dilemmas and challenges distinct from those described above. In this context, we turn our attention to North Macedonia. In the chapter titled *Introducing Institutional Bilingualism in North Macedonia*, we will explore the repercussions that have arisen following the introduction of institutional bilingualism across the entire country. Naturally, considering North Macedonia's reputation for its ethnic diversity, questions arise regarding the situation of speakers from other linguistic communities, especially in the absence of comprehensive legislation.

Nonetheless, in Europe, there are national policies that not only reject the bilingualism requirement but also discourage any form of monetary incentives within their borders. Furthermore, these policies actively promote the exclusion of minority languages from educational institutions and public life. A prominent example is Latvia, which, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has constructed its identity around its language and culture, while maintaining a notably negative stance towards its substantial Russian-speaking community.

Such a policy can yield severe and far-reaching consequences, even potentially escalating into armed conflicts. Hence, it is imperative to devote particular attention to the challenges faced by the Russian-speaking population in Latvia.

Countries are also facing other challenges that are increasingly putting pressure on their established national policies regarding traditional bilingualism within their borders. Migration is on the rise, with people moving to other countries in pursuit of a better life. In certain regions, refugees or migrants are already advocating for equal language rights, giving rise to new dilemmas concerning the criteria for institutionalising the use of these languages or determining the critical mass of speakers necessary for such institutionalisation. Herein lies a fundamental challenge, even for the wealthiest nations, as they struggle to ensure the use of a multitude of languages within their government offices and the broader public sector. This challenge persists because they often lack a sufficient pool of staff proficient in these languages, despite the available monetary incentives.

When contemplating solutions to the myriad of challenges encountered in the realm of language policies, the vision of an inclusive multilingual society emerges. In such a society, individuals from diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds communicate in their respective mother tongues. The premise is that early exposure to multilingualism in kindergartens and schools will foster a more open, tolerant, and competitive society, and that the necessity for special monetary incentives for public employees in bilingual areas would diminish, as in this ideal environment, individuals would naturally engage in multilingual communication.

A brief glance at history shows that the Ottoman Empire, spanning South-Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, was already a multiethnic and multilingual entity. This observation requires some critical reflection, but it does offer encouragement showing that diverse linguistic and ethnic communities coexisted in the past. While the Ottoman Empire did not precisely embody the contemporary model of multilingualism, its fundamental elements can be identified in the empire's policy towards non-Muslim populations (Upton-Ward 2002, 245). As aptly pointed out by Upton-Ward, people of that era either coexisted or resided in separate areas, yet they engaged in common activities, traded with one another, and generally cultivated social relationships (Upton-Ward 2002, 246). The author of this insightful study further contends that the prevalence of multilingualism and multiculturalism was made feasible through a unique state organisation, facilitated by the concept of *Millets*, referring to distinct nations or ethnicities. This organisational structure prevented the assimilation of various cultures into the dominant majority. The Ottoman Empire's organisation through the *Millets* permitted communities to practise their religions and maintain their languages (Upton-Ward 2002, 247).

Numerous travellers across the Ottoman Empire documented the Empire's remarkable multilingualism. For instance, Evlya Celebi, in his 17<sup>th</sup>-century report-

age (cited in Sooyong & Bashkin 2021, 130), vividly portrays the extraordinary coexistence of different languages and dialects throughout the Ottoman Empire. In his writings, Celebi highlights the regions where he encountered bilingual or multilingual speakers. In Ohrid, he notes that the inhabitants primarily conversed in Greek or Bulgarian but seamlessly shifted to elegant Turkish when necessary. Moreover, linguistic diversity was not always confined to spoken language; in the ensuing centuries, bilingual and even multilingual newspapers began to circulate (Sooyong & Bashkin 2021, 140). Woodhead (2012, 146–147) describes the Ottoman Empire as polyglot, with Turkish being one of the languages in use alongside others like Armenian, Greek, Hebrew, and Church Slavonic. Leupold (2019, 2) paints a picture of a “polyglot homo ottomanicus” who prays in Fuzha Arabic in the Mosque, recites poetry in Farsi, writes complaint letters in Ottoman Turkish, trades with Westerners in French, and speaks Albanian with his family. Meanwhile, Dursteler (2012, 67–68) speaks of a Mediterranean linguistic ecosystem, characterised by diverse *lingua francas* that facilitate communication between various linguistic communities.

After reviewing the methodology, our analysis will delve into the state of bilingualism or multilingualism, primarily focusing on the aforementioned countries (Slovenia, Italy, Belgium, Canada, North Macedonia, and Latvia), with historical insights from the Ottoman Empire. The core discussion within this article revolves around charting a course towards multilingualism. Within the section titled Pathways to Multilingualism: Discussion and Proposals, we explore the benefits and incentives for embracing multilingualism.

Special consideration will also be devoted to the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and digitisation within the realms of language learning and use. These developments are likely to revolutionise not only language learning but also language use. We will explore the question of whether artificial intelligence can serve as an asset or an obstacle to the creation of a multilingual society.

In the final chapter, we will test our hypotheses and provide guidance for the future.

## 2. Research Methods and Hypotheses

Based on a review of domestic and foreign literature, as well as an analysis of comparable practices (comparative method), the article aims to assess several hypotheses. Firstly, it will investigate whether the current solutions and incentives for institutional bilingualism are inadequate, thus calling for alternative, non-monetary solutions, and above all strategies that promote multilingualism among speakers and foster a multilingual environment. Secondly, the article will test the hypothesis that early introduction of multilingualism in kindergartens and schools is of paramount importance, given the prevailing global bias

towards elite languages and the inadequate attention given to the benefits of children's learning. Early introduction of multilingualism in kindergartens and schools fosters a more open, tolerant, and competitive society. This will render the need for special monetary incentives or bonuses obsolete, as within such an ideal environment, individuals naturally engage in multilingual communication. Lastly, the article will explore the hypothesis that new information technologies have the potential to facilitate two-way communication, allowing foreign speakers to communicate in their mother tongue while public employees receive the message in their language via simultaneous translation by artificial intelligence. This innovation is likely to expand language use.

The hypotheses were further tested through qualitative analysis, conducted in the form of structured interviews. This empirical study, involving three public employees from Italy and four from North Macedonia, took place from 15 January to 15 February 2023. The respondents came from countries with distinct traditions in promoting bilingualism, held university degrees, and were employed in public administration. The Italian respondents comprised the Head of the Slovene Schools Office at the Regional Education Office, an employee of Slovene nationality at the Central Office for the Slovene Language in Friuli Venezia Giulia, and an employee of Italian nationality from Friuli Venezia Giulia. In North Macedonia, the interviewees included two employees of Albanian nationality – one employed at Invest North Macedonia and the other as the Government PR Adviser. Additionally, there were two interviewees of Macedonian nationality, one employed at Invest North Macedonia and the other serving as a Macedonian Language Adviser in one of the public administration departments. The personal details of the interviewees have been kept confidential to maintain objectivity and minimise the need for idealisation or embellishment of the research context. The interview questions were thoughtfully structured and revolved around several key themes: the effectiveness of institutional bilingualism, the adequacy of both monetary and non-monetary incentives for public employees using multiple languages in their interactions with users of public sector services, the prevalence of language use among public employees, and the provision of simultaneous teaching of both languages in schools. The respondents were also asked about their attitudes towards early learning of the language of the majority (if they belonged to a minority group) and of other ethnic communities in their country. Furthermore, they shared their perspectives on the early introduction of multilingualism in schools and its potential impact on fostering a more open, tolerant, and competitive society. Lastly, the interviews encompassed questions about artificial intelligence (AI), namely whether public employees use AI in their multilingual communications and whether new communication technologies would facilitate or enhance bilingual or even multilingual communication.

### 3. Institutional Bilingualism and Monetary Incentives – an Overview of Selected Countries

#### 3.1 Belgium

A law governing the use of languages in administrative procedures has been in place in Belgium for decades. The country's cultural and linguistic diversity is reflected in its three traditional communities: French, Flemish, and German. French and German-speaking communities predominantly reside in Wallonia, while Flanders is primarily Flemish-speaking. In Brussels, both Flemish and Walloon communities coexist. However, these communities are officially designated as monolingual, which means that some positions in public administration are language-specific. Thus, for example, only Flemish-speaking candidates can apply for jobs in Flanders. The only exception to this rule is bilingual Brussels, where public employees who use a second language alongside their mother tongue are eligible for a bilingualism bonus. This means that only employees who work in the bilingual region of Brussels or for the federal government and are proficient in both French and Flemish qualify for the bilingualism bonus. The amount of the bonus depends on the job's complexity. In monolingual regions, multilingualism does not yield any specific financial rewards (cf. Van Herck & Vermandere 2016).

#### 3.2 Italy

Italian Law 482/1999 establishes a comprehensive legislative framework for safeguarding linguistic minorities. Under this law, various minority languages are officially recognised, entailing special protection in regions where these minority populations reside. The languages afforded this special status encompass Croatian, Albanian, Franco-Provençal, Friulian, French, Greek, German, Occitan, Ladin, Sardinian, and Slovene. The law acknowledges the spoken and written use of these minority languages within the respective minority-populated areas, but this is only possible if the administrative services employ public employees who are able to communicate in the given minority language. Notably, the law does not explicitly prescribe incentives for institutional bilingualism, as such provisions had already been adopted by autonomous regions and provinces prior to its enactment. The Slovene minority in the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia also benefits from this protection, enjoying the right to employ the Slovene language in state and local administrations. Public employees proficient in both languages are entitled to monetary incentives, although their language proficiency is not evaluated during their service (Norme a tutela della minoranza linguistica slovena della Regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia 2001).

### 3.3 Canada

Canada has been encouraging institutional bilingualism for decades. Initially, bilingualism was enforced in the federal parliament and the courts. Nearly a century later, in the 1970s, this policy was extended to administrative services. The federal government prioritised proficiency in both English and French during the recruitment process to increase the representation of French-speaking employees in the public sector. The required level of language proficiency corresponds to the complexity and responsibilities of each position, and a monthly allowance is granted. However, some researchers (Maltais 2018; Lecomte 2018; Borbey et al. 2017) have raised concerns about the efficacy of this language policy, particularly regarding the allocation of the bilingualism bonus. For example, Maltais (2018) highlights instances where employees in bilingual positions receive the bonus despite lacking sufficient language skills. Once they demonstrate at least satisfactory language proficiency in a language test, they receive the bonus on a permanent basis, and their language competences are no longer evaluated. Moreover, Borbey et al. (2017) argue that these language proficiency tests are cursory and do not adequately reflect the actual language knowledge needed for the job.

### 3.4 Slovenia

The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (1991) provides in Article 64 for the special rights of the autochthonous Italian and Hungarian national communities in Slovenia. The special status of the two national communities is thus recognised by the highest legal act in the country. Among other things, these national communities and their members have the right to education in their languages. In Slovenia, the bilingualism bonus is regulated by the Public Sector Salary System Act (2009). Proficiency in the language of the national community is required for employment in public institutions in the area where the Hungarian or Italian national community resides (Public Employees Act 2007, Art. 17). Nonetheless, ethnographic research has revealed that public employees from the majority population often lack practical proficiency in the language of the minority, despite this being a requirement for their positions for which the bilingualism bonus is paid (Novak Lukanović 2020; Novak-Lukanović & Mulec 2014; Burra 2022).

## 4. Institutional Bilingualism in North Macedonia

North Macedonia is an ethnically diverse country where a multitude of languages are spoken. The primary languages are Macedonian and Albanian, yet Turkish, Serbian, and Romanian also enjoy significant usage. Additionally, English is

increasingly spoken among the younger generation (Halimi 2014, 2). According to Friedman (2011, 282), “Turkish is still valued as sophisticated by old urban families, and Albanian is considered rural, albeit politically more powerful and now a pragmatic necessity.”

Institutional bilingualism was introduced across the entire country by the North Macedonia Law on the Use of Languages (Council of Europe 2019).

The official language of North Macedonia is Macedonian. However, the new Act envisaged mandatory official use of the language of any linguistic national community representing at least 20 % of the country’s total population. Members of such linguistic communities thus have the right to use their language in parliament, government institutions, the judiciary, public administration, and the broader public sector. Considering the country’s current demographic composition, such right is afforded to the Albanian national community. Members of the Albanian-speaking community can communicate in their language not only in contacts with government institutions and the state administration, but also with other public institutions, in hospitals and, last but not least, in educational institutions.

Before this regulation came into effect, institutional bilingualism had been obligatory solely in localities where over 20 % of the population belonged to a specific linguistic community. Nevertheless, researchers like Petrovski et al. (2010) pointed out an unconventional interpretation of bilingualism under the prior regulation. In the prevailing understanding, this bilingualism implied monolingual communication by members of the majority nation: those who communicated in Macedonian could be monolingual, while members of other linguistic groups were required to be proficient in both Macedonian and their mother tongue (Petrovski et al. 2010, 4). In practice, this meant that for Macedonians, knowledge of Albanian was not compulsory, while the Albanian-speaking community had to speak both languages.

However, according to Halimi (2014), another phenomenon has emerged. The political instability of recent years has led to tensions between the two ethnic communities. Younger generations of students, as observed in interviews conducted at the State University of Tetovo, perceive Macedonian as an imposed foreign language. They achieve better results when learning English and favour German over Macedonian as third language. Foreign languages have thus begun to overshadow the majority language, Macedonian (Halimi 2014, 13). This may potentially lead to asymmetric bilingualism, where one language system gradually supplants the previous one, ultimately resulting in a shift towards monolingualism, disproportionately favouring minority language over majority language.

The concept of institutional bilingualism has not been fully implemented, even in areas where the Albanian ethnic community constitutes over 20 % of the population. However, institutional bilingualism is now mandated for the entire



country, rather than being limited to specific regions with a higher percentage of a linguistic community, which brings new challenges and dilemmas. In his study, Stankovski (2019, 24) identifies numerous issues yet to arise in the implementation of this new regulation. As reported by Fernández Ibáñez (2021), such bilingualism poses daily challenges, as all legal acts, documents, and even technical forms must be available in both languages. This solution has faced resistance from a portion of the majority population, the Macedonians, who fear that Albanians will cease to communicate in the Macedonian language. The introduction of bilingualism across the public sector nationwide has also been viewed as inappropriate (International Crisis Group 2001, 1).

The historical context cannot be overlooked, either. Following the breakup of Yugoslavia, new countries found themselves with members of various nations and linguistic communities who had coexisted not only in previous decades but also for centuries under Ottoman Empire rule. However, the formation of these new states brought about tensions among different groups, leading to demands for recognition of the identities and languages of various ethnic communities. Such multiethnic entities seek to distinguish themselves also through language, as highlighted by previous research (e.g., Petrovski et al. 2010; Sujecka 2021; Friedman 2011; Halimi 2014).

## 5. Dilemmas of Russian-speaking Citizens in Latvia

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, an estimated 25 million ethnic Russians found themselves residing outside the borders of the newly formed Russian Federation. Putin described this as the worst geopolitical disaster of the twentieth century (Coolican 2021, 1). During the existence of the Soviet Union, Russians in Latvia predominantly communicated in Russian. While learning the majority language, Latvian, was not compulsory for the Russian-speaking community, the same cannot be said for Latvians who had to learn Russian alongside their mother tongue. Attitudes towards languages shifted after Latvia gained independence. Many members of the Russian minority lost Latvian citizenship due to their lack of proficiency in the majority language (Dilans 2009, 1). Consequently, Latvian became the sole official language in the country, despite a substantial Russian-speaking community of approximately 800,000 individuals, most of whom arrived after World War II, at the time of the Soviet Union (Dilans 2009, 1).

In this transformed landscape of the newly established state, Russian began to be treated as a foreign language. This shift discouraged younger generations from learning Russian. The young nation heavily relied on language for its national symbols and identity, viewing language as the primary tool of differentiation from others, according to Hoffman (1991, 238). Cheskin (2012, 326) further argues that “the military and cultural ‘threat’ from Russia has been

a common theme for Latvian nationalistic parties”. Despite a sizable Russian-speaking community, language policy, according to research, no longer places emphasis on learning Russian but rather focuses on asymmetrical bilingualism with a priority on mastering Latvian. Zepa (2003) believes that this policy aims to foster greater loyalty to the newly formed state and to distance it from the previous socio-political order.

Within educational institutions, Russian is only offered as a third foreign language and has been losing its position to English (Dilans 2009, 5). Moreover, the learning of Russian is primarily concentrated in areas with a significant minority population. The introduction of Latvian as the language of instruction (comprising 60 % of the curriculum) in Russian upper secondary schools has encountered resistance from both teachers and students (Cheskin 2012, 332). Under such circumstances, it is challenging to envision institutional bilingualism, with monolingualism emerging as the more likely outcome. In the present political climate, such a stance could potentially provide grounds for the Russian Federation to interfere in Latvia’s internal affairs, under the pretext of safeguarding its minority population. In fact, as stated by Coolican (2021, 2), Putin’s *Russkii mir* (Eng. Russian World) has become an intrinsic part of Russia’s diasporic policies.

This ideological concept, as articulated by Putin, is comprised of three pillars: Russian language, historical Soviet memory, and the Russian Orthodox Church (Coolican 2021, 2). Nevertheless, there are noticeable shifts in the perspectives of younger generations. Pisarenko’s study (2006) indicates that Russian-speaking students endorse policies that prioritise bilingualism as part of integration while rejecting both assimilation, where communication occurs exclusively in the majority nation’s language, and exclusion policies, which advocate for the exclusive use of the Russian language. Notably, Zabrodskaia (2019, 133) observes a significantly different outlook among younger members of the Russian-speaking community concerning Russia’s policy toward its diaspora. Among them, a dismissive attitude towards the current Russian policy under Vladimir Putin emerges, with the younger generation talking about “how strange Russia is” (Zabrodskaia 2019, 133).

## 6. Pathways to Multilingualism: Discussion and Proposals

### 6.1 Monetary Incentives for Multilingualism in the Public Sector

The illustration above demonstrates the diverse approaches employed worldwide when it comes to learning and using different languages within public institutions. In regions with lower socio-political stability, authorities often hesitate to endorse bilingualism or multilingualism. There may even be policies that could, in the long term, lead to tensions among various linguistic communities

or result in asymmetric bilingualism, where one language supplants another. On the other hand, societies with a well-established tradition of institutional bilingualism encounter other challenges. Foremost among these is the necessity for a distinct approach to human resource management within the public sector. Whereas the New Public Management model, which advocated the transfer of certain practices from the private sector to the public sector, was favoured until recently, it has now come under criticism. This shift in perspective is particularly noticeable in the realm of institutional bilingualism, as highlighted by the aforementioned studies, which reveal inadequacies in monetary incentives for the increased use of minority languages within state institutions.

Our survey also perceived a certain degree of scepticism among the respondents about additional rewards. Thus, for instance, the employee of Slovene nationality working at the Central Office for the Slovene Language in Friuli Venezia Giulia is not keen on the idea of providing extra monetary incentives:

Instead of providing incentives through bonuses, a more appropriate approach would be to encourage public institutions to conduct recruitment competitions with a priority requirement for a high level of proficiency in the Slovene language (Interview 1).

Also the employee of Italian nationality employed in the Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia disagrees with such bonuses, as they can cause tensions among colleagues (Interview 2).

The Head of the Slovene Schools Office at the Regional Education Office agrees, in principle, with the bonus, but points to complications in its implementation, as bonuses are not integrated into a standardised system:

The unequal treatment of employees performing the same work in the public sector would face opposition from trade unions. Without their agreement, such a change cannot be implemented. Any salary adjustment requires modifications to collective agreements, and given the multitude of these agreements, it could result in Slovenes receiving a bonus in one administrative body and not in another (Interview 3).

The following solution was suggested:

The approach adopted for the Germans and Ladins in South Tyrol is a more suitable solution. The differentiation begins with the *maturità* exam at the end of grammar school; the language proficiency certificate obtained on such occasion is accompanied by a special certificate affirming that passing the *maturità* exam equates to possessing the language skills required for employment within the public administration of the autonomous region. In this way, everyone has an interest in learning and using the minority language (Interview 3).

Public employees in North Macedonia do not see the point in special bonuses. The problem lies elsewhere. As explained by the Adviser at Invest North Mace-

donia (Macedonian), the deficiency in language use is not linked to monetary incentives but rather to the shortcomings of the school system:

This has nothing to do with material incentives, but with politics. Albanian children do not start learning Macedonian from the very beginning, in the first grade. Their parents complain about their children being overloaded with other subjects and consider learning Macedonian akin to learning a foreign language. For their children, it represents an extra effort and source of stress (Interview 4).

Other respondents also did not place significant emphasis on the bonus, either, with the employee of Albanian nationality emphasising that the critical issue lies in the implementation of the specific law (Interview 5).

As pointed out by various authors in their studies (e.g., Frey et al. 2013; Piney et al. 2015; Shamsul Haque 2007), the pursuit of substantial profits is not the primary motivation in the public sector, as it is in the private sector. Hence, the rewards to motivate public employees are not necessarily financial. There are multiple factors that drive public employees to perform their duties in the public interest. Sometimes, a simple compliment from superiors and parties can suffice, while any doubts regarding the fairness of additional monetary rewards may demotivate them. As the Head of the Slovene Schools Office pointed out, this often involves double work (translating official acts without monetary rewards) driven by personal conviction or a profound sense of national belonging (Interview 3).

## 6.2 Benefits of a Multilingual Society

The selected countries serve as examples that highlight the diverse challenges they encounter in the realm of language policy. When contemplating solutions that could be universally applicable, a model of a multilingual society emerges. García and Lin (2017) define multilingualism as the simultaneous learning of more than two languages.

The overarching aim of multilingualism is to facilitate improved and more effective communication among individuals and nations. In this context, García and Lin (2017, 2) add that one of its aims is also to accommodate students who do not speak the language of instruction.

Contemporary research increasingly favours multilingual societies over not only monolingual but also bilingual ones. The monolingual model is a vestige of the past, rooted in nationalism and outdated ideologies, while multilingualism champions the desired ideal of cosmopolitan European speakers (Weichselbraun 2014, 422). Such an ideal society naturally fosters openness and tolerance, a sentiment corroborated by both literature and research participants. Nevertheless, some reservations regarding the deployment of multilingualism have been expressed by public employees of Macedonian nationality in North Macedonia.

They emphasise the need to make Macedonian as the sole official language in the potential deployment of multilingualism (Interview 6). The Adviser at Invest North Macedonia holds a contrary perspective on the introduction of a multilingualism model, explaining that it is a matter of personal choice. If you wish to learn languages, go ahead and learn them; if you do not wish to learn them, then it is perfectly fine not to [...] (Interview 4).

Joshua A. Fishman (1976, in García & Lin 2017, 4) explains that teaching in a monolingual mode, i.e. either in the language of the majority or the language of the minority, is harmful to children and deprives them of opportunities offered by the globalised world. Other researchers, such as Dewaele (2015, 3), concord that the old view has shifted: multilingualism is the norm, and monolingualism is the exception (Dewaele 2015, 3). He adds that children possess an incredible ability to learn multiple languages simultaneously from birth. Concerns expressed by parents and educators regarding the cognitive and developmental implications of early multilingual teaching are entirely unfounded. In fact, research suggests that multilingual children tend to be more successful, communicative, and even display greater understanding and empathy (Dewaele 2015, 5). A solution proposed by scholars is therefore to introduce multilingual teaching at an early stage, ideally within kindergartens and primary schools. Such an education system should enable children to effectively learn various languages from a very young age, depending on their individual preferences. A child's language preferences often align with their familial or cultural backgrounds. Immigrant children, for instance, may feel a stronger affinity for the languages spoken by their parents or even their grandparents.

Multilingual education should become a mainstream model, accessible to all learners, rather than being reserved exclusively for the children of the elite who can afford expensive language courses and thus secure better education and improved job prospects for their children (elitism). Also, children living close to bilingual areas will be more likely to learn the languages of their neighbours.

This transformation poses new challenges for national education systems. Countries will need to adapt their language policies to incorporate more effective teaching methods and ensure an adequate number of qualified teaching staff. An excellent example of successful cross-curricular integration can be found at the Nova Gorica School Centre in Slovenia, where the subject teacher and the teacher of Italian are both present in class, making the learning process more engaging. In this way, students simultaneously develop professional competences in both languages. Enhanced language skills will make students attractive to a range of employers, including the public sector in the bilingual area.

However, the process of adapting education systems to produce multilingual speakers is long and complex. As Dewaele (2015, 4) points out, governments often encourage the learning of foreign languages but may not give enough attention to languages spoken by children in their home environments. This is

particularly evident among children of immigrants, where educational institutions often prioritise communication in the majority language rather than in a language the child understands, arguing it will aid the child's integration into society.

Weichselbraun (2014, 423) also references studies that highlight the dominance of national standards promoting multilingualism while neglecting immigrant language learning. Such negative trends are observed in Latvia, where current policy leans towards assimilating the Russian minority. Additionally, it is concerning that as many as 40 % of the world's students, according to UNESCO (2022), lack access to education in their mother tongue. This issue is also present in Slovenia, where very few Roma children complete primary school due, in part, to poor linguistic competences (Bešter et al. 2016). Furthermore, North Macedonia exhibits some worrying trends, with respondents indicating a negative or even hostile attitude towards learning the minority language (Albanian) or the majority language (Macedonian) in kindergartens and schools. In contrast, in the Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italian is taught from the first year of primary school in schools with a Slovene curriculum, and also Italian families enrol their children in such schools. However, among adults, there is limited interest. They tend to prefer widely-used European languages such as German, Spanish, and English (Interview 3).

These trends may also be influenced by the EU language policy which, despite emphasising the importance of multilingualism in society (Busse 2017), tends to favour certain languages for learning while marginalising minority languages. As Weichselbraun (2014, 425) points out, a minority language can be a "kitchen" language in which speakers express their emotions in the home environment, but not a language used in the economy and public institutions. English is undoubtedly the *lingua franca* in European institutions and systems, relegating other languages to secondary roles (Busse 2017, 566).

### 6.3 Artificial Intelligence – an Asset, a Solution, or an Obstacle?

In the quest for innovative solutions, it is imperative to acknowledge the rapid advancements of artificial intelligence (AI) and digitisation within the realms of language acquisition and use. Godwin Jones (2017) focuses his research on mobile devices and SMART technology, which serve as valuable tools for both formal and informal language learning. Today, AI, "resembling human intelligence and not being human per se" (Kirov & Malamin 2022, 3), "a machine-based technique with algorithmic power for making predictions, diagnoses, recommendations, and decisions" (Chen et al. 2022, 28), has progressed to a stage where it can support language learning and use. With the assistance of machine intelligence, we can now effortlessly book lunch at a restaurant, and AI-driven voices exhibit an astonishing human-like quality. A multitude of tools

are readily accessible to provide technical translations across various languages. The integration of language learning with AI is on the rise, and the digital realm offers a vast array of animations to aid language learners. Nevertheless, despite this rapid progress, human communication in different languages cannot be supplanted by artificial algorithms. Godwin Jones (2019, 6) points to the social and emotional facets of human interactions, attributes that cannot be replaced with algorithms. Consequently, the objectives of language policies should extend far beyond mere technical multilingual communication, often confined to completing official forms.

The outcomes of qualitative research echo similar reservations. The employee of Slovene nationality working at the Central Office for the Slovene Language in Friuli Venezia Giulia also uses online apps to enhance her proficiency in Slovene (Interview 1). The employee of Italian nationality working in the Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia shares a similar perspective, saying that he does not use AI in multilingual communication. He believes, however, that communication technology will be able to improve communication in both or multiple languages. On the other hand, the Macedonian Language Adviser points to poor technical, at times chaotic translations (Interview 7).

Nonetheless, as mentioned above, AI cannot discern human emotions. Consequently, the Head of the Slovene Schools Office at the Regional Education Office is convinced that AI will have little impact on communication and interpersonal relationships. Artificial intelligence is a tool within the human-machine (computer) relation and does not contribute to the deepening of interpersonal ties and understanding (Interview 3).

In North Macedonia, not even AI can solve the current challenges. Both the Adviser at Invest North Macedonia (Macedonian) (Interview 4) and the PR officer of the Macedonian government (Albanian) (Interview 6) assert they do not use AI in the public administration. The Adviser at Invest North Macedonia further adds that at the moment, Albanians within the public administration can also speak Macedonian but the future does not appear promising. She is concerned that, owing to divisive politics, future generations of Albanians will no longer be able or willing to speak Macedonian (Interview 4).

## 7. Conclusions

The examples of various national approaches and our analysis of empirical data have confirmed the hypothesis that the existing solutions and incentives for institutional bilingualism are inadequate and that we must seek alternative non-monetary solutions, particularly those that promote multilingualism among speakers and a multilingual environment in general. Challenges vary among countries, and multilingualism does not necessarily entail elevating all widely spoken languages and those learned by children to official status. Nor can

the unique official status of minorities be equated with that of other linguistic communities within the country. However, a language policy that encourages the learning of languages spoken by various linguistic groups within the country and its neighbours, even preceding widely accepted *lingua francas*, might solve many of the problems we face today. As a result, such multilingual speakers will be able to easily switch between languages when providing public services, potentially rendering additional monetary incentives for minority language use unnecessary.

Drawing from domestic and foreign literature as well as our empirical research, it is possible to support the hypotheses that multilingualism needs to start in early childhood, that the existing policies worldwide favour elite languages, and that less consideration is given to the tangible benefits of children's language acquisition. Additionally, there is support for the idea that introducing early multilingualism in kindergartens and schools can foster a more open, tolerant, and competitive society.

However, the hypothesis that new information technologies will facilitate two-way communication, with foreign speakers using their own language while employees receive messages in their preferred language through simultaneous AI translation – thus enabling expanded language use – cannot be fully supported. While AI is certainly revolutionising language use and learning, human communication in various languages, despite rapid technological progress, cannot be replaced with artificial algorithms.

In Slovenia, a new Strategy for Language Education 2030 is being drafted by a group of experts who agree that early multilingualism is the only way forward. Several factors are instrumental in achieving these goals, including the broader environment, society, and suitable pedagogical methods. Multilingualism must be perceived as an asset rather than an obstacle. In language policy planning, the child's best interests must be considered, and priority should be given to languages proximate to the child, those prevalent in their immediate surroundings, and, naturally, the languages of neighbouring countries.

## Interviews

Interview 1 – Public employee of Slovene nationality at the Central Office for the Slovene Language in Friuli Venezia Giulia, 2023.

Interview 2 – Public employee of Italian nationality, Friuli Venezia Giulia, 2023.

Interview 3 – Head of the Slovene Schools Office at the Regional Education Office, Friuli Venezia Giulia, 2023.

Interview 4 – Adviser at Invest North Macedonia (Macedonian), 2023.

Interview 5 – Adviser at Invest North Macedonia (Albanian), 2023.

Interview 6 – PR Officer for the Government of Macedonia (Albanian), 2023.

Interview 7 – Macedonian Language Adviser, 2023.



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