

## PLURILINGUALISM IN CROATIAN FOREIGN LANGUAGE POLICY

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The focus of this paper is the stance of Croatian language policy (LP) toward foreign languages (FLs) in the education system, which we call Croatian foreign language policy (FLP). By analysing current curricula, which define the place of FLs in primary and secondary school explicitly or implicitly, we gain insight into Croatian FLP in primary and secondary education. Furthermore, we place it in the context of European LP of promoting plurilingualism. With this in mind, we analyse data from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics from the last ten years to establish the proportion (and popularity) of FLs in Croatian schools. We compare the inclusion of FLs in the Croatian education system with the inclusion of FLs in the curricula of other European countries. Based on the analyses, we find that the Croatian education system has moved away from the promotion of plurilingualism as one of the main goals of European LP. In the conclusion, we offer guidelines for developing Croatian FLP in view of embracing plurilingualism.

*Keywords: Croatian foreign language policy, plurilingualism, foreign language in primary and secondary school*

### 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this paper is to explore plurilingualism in Croatian foreign language policy (FLP), with special attention given to the teaching and learning of foreign languages (FLs). In line with that, after defining plurilingualism and FLP as key notions, we examine plurilingualism in

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European FLP by analysing selected documents (represented in Figure 1 and Figure 2), as well as in Croatian FLP by analysing education development strategies and curricula. Please note that in Figure 1 the acronyms CEFR and ELP refer to the Common European Framework of References for Languages and European Language Portfolio, respectively.

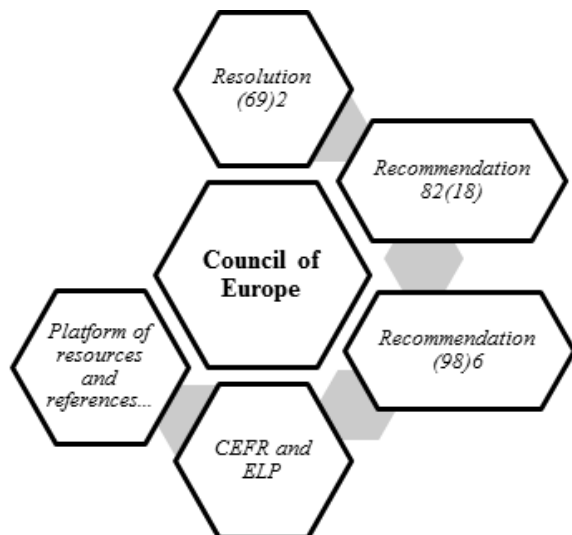


Figure 1. Plurilingualism in selected documents of the Council of Europe



Figure 2. Plurilingualism in selected documents of the European Union

Following the synthesis of the core features of European and Croatian FLP, we examine the inclusion of FLs in the Croatian education system, and then

compare the presence of FLs in Croatia and other European countries in order to propose guidelines for developing Croatian FLP.

## **2. DEFINING PLURILINGUALISM**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the notion of multilingualism has become intertwined with plurilingualism, with the latter gaining increasing attention (Zajednički europski referentni okvir za jezike [ZEROJ], 2005). In this paper, we opt for plurilingualism as the dominant notion that includes the elements of multilingualism as defined in the abovementioned documents of the EU.

Plurilingualism is primarily seen through the prism of bilingualism (e.g. Jelaska, 2003). In fact, it is only by acquiring, or learning, a third language that plurilingualism comes about (Bausch, 2007) and that the difference between bilingualism and plurilingualism needs to be highlighted (Gass & Selinker, 2008). In this context, plurilingualism gains special attention in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Croatian: ZEROJ). This document advocates the knowledge of more languages at different levels, with those languages interacting together (ZEROJ, 2005). In such a notion of plurilingualism, we recognise a shift from the previous notion of bilingualism, or plurilingualism, which expects the same level of native-like language proficiency in all of one's languages, toward the notion of bilingualism, or plurilingualism, which recognises the coexistence of two or more languages (Medved Krajnović, 2010). Therefore, in this paper plurilingualism means the coexistence of skills in different languages and at different levels, without excluding interaction among those languages, especially in regard to the native language. Furthermore, in this paper, plurilingualism, as the coexistence of different languages at different levels of language proficiency, is viewed exclusively within the context of teaching FLs.

## **3. DEFINING FLP**

The term 'language policy' (LP) is used by various authors, such as Vrhovac (2004), Velički (2007), and Gehrmann and Knežević (2011); in addition, conference proceedings from the 2009 Croatian Applied Linguistics Society are titled *Language Policy and Language Reality*. Be that as it may, we find that it is necessary to point out that FLP is a set of activities taken by institutions in

order to provide a framework for the learning of FLs in a given country. The notion needs to be recognised as different from the notion of LP that refers to the “activities taken by institutions in order to monitor and change language practice or ideology” (struna.ihjj.hr, our translation), which also includes the learning and teaching of the native language, which is not in the focus of this paper.

#### **4. REVIEW OF DOCUMENTS ON PLURILINGUALISM IN EUROPEAN FLP**

##### **4.1. *Plurilingualism in selected documents of the Council of Europe***

Based on the results of the *Project in Modern Languages* ([http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/historique\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/historique_en.asp)), *Resolution (69)2* (1969) highlighted the importance of permanent education in modern languages, which we recognize as the beginning of plurilingualism. Following that, *Recommendation (82)18* (1982) emphasised the importance of learning languages and acquiring language skills that can facilitate communication within the member states of the Council of Europe, which meant that plurilingualism was beginning to gain importance. This development led to the publication of *Recommendation (98)6* (1998), which brought forth a number of specific guidelines for promoting plurilingualism.

The years of involvement of the Council of Europe in FL teaching resulted in the publication of CEFR and the ELP. The focus of these documents is plurilingualism; ZEROJ (2005) defines a clear stance toward the concept, and ELP is used to ensure its implementation. The Council of Europe continues to insist on the development of plurilingualism, which can be seen in the subsequent development of a new instrument, *Platform of Resources and References for Plurilingual and Intercultural Education*. The *Platform* is a part of the website of the Council of Europe ([http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/langeduc/le\\_platformintro\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/langeduc/le_platformintro_EN.asp)) that aims at ensuring a plurilingual and intercultural Europe.

##### **4.2. *Plurilingualism in selected documents of the European Commission***

The concept of European plurilingualism, which is understood as the learning of two FLs alongside the native language (Gehrmann & Knežević, 2011), is also in the focus of the European Commission. In the White Paper from 1995,

among five general objectives, one refers to proficiency in three community languages. The principle of “mother tongue plus two languages” found its place in the publication *Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004–2006* from 2003 that promotes language diversity, plurilingualism, interculturalism, and language learning as an important contribution to the development of competitive EU economy. The continuity in supporting plurilingualism is reflected in *A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism* (2005) that aims to create a foundation on which the learning and teaching of a variety of FLs can flourish.

However, it seems that despite everything that has been done thus far, there is plenty of room for improvement. For that reason, in the document *Multilingualism: an Asset for Europe and a Shared Commitment* (2008), emphasis is placed on additional effort that needs to be made to achieve the set objective of developing trilingual EU citizens.

## **5. REVIEW OF DOCUMENTS ON PLURILINGUALISM IN CROATIAN FLP**

### **5.1. *Plurilingualism in Croatian education development strategies***

With the aim of promoting the concept of plurilingualism in Croatia, *Zagreb Resolution on Plurilingualism (Zagrebačka rezolucija o višjejezičnosti, 2002)* was signed in 2002. Soon after that, from the 2003/2004 school year, it became mandatory for pupils to choose a FL in year 1 (Buljan Culej, 2012), which becomes their first FL that they must continue to learn until the end of primary education in year 8. They can, but are not required to, choose a second FL in year 4 of primary school.

Although the implementation of plurilingualism in the teaching of FLs should be based on documents of the Croatian education policy that would delineate plurilingualism in the teaching of FLs, that is not the case. The *2005–2010 Education Development Plan (Plan razvoja odgoja i obrazovanja 2005.–2010., 2005)* only implicitly points to the need for developing plurilingualism by stating proficiency in FLs as one of the common objectives for the system of compulsory education. The *2006–2013 Strategy Framework of Development (Strateški okvir za razvoj 2006.–2013., 2006)* and the *2012–2014 Strategy Plan (Strateški plan 2012.–2014., 2012)* in a similar way refer implicitly to the development of plurilingualism in pupils. However, the *Strategy of Education,*

*Science, and Technology (Strategija obrazovanja, znanosti i tehnologije, 2015)* includes, among key competencies that pupils need to develop, communication in FLs, and explicitly states that pupils should be prepared to communicate in a multicultural and plurilingual community.

## **5.2. Plurilingualism in Croatian curricula**

In the description of the language and communication area within the National Framework Curriculum (*Nacionalni okvirni kurikulum, 2011*), emphasis is placed on the importance of developing plurilingual competence. In line with that, in the *National Curriculum for Early and Pre-School Education (Nacionalni kurikulum za rani i predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje, 2014)*, emphasis is placed on the development of children's abilities to communicate in a multicultural and plurilingual international community.

However, the *National Curriculum for Primary Education (Nastavni plan i program za osnovnu školu, 2006)* comprises curricula for English, German, French, and Italian. Similarly, the *National Curriculum for General Secondary Education (Nastavni program za gimnazije, 1994)* comprises the curricula for English, German, French, and Russian, whereas the *National Curriculum for Vocational Secondary Education (Okvirni nastavni programi općobrazovnih predmeta u srednjim školama, 1997)* refers only to English and German in the part on FLs. We see that the fundamental documents that regulate primary and secondary education in Croatia are primarily concerned with English and German, and then French, Italian, and Russian (the latter is today rarely taught), which can be interpreted as official Croatian FLP.

## **6. REVIEW OF DATA ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN CROATIA AND OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**

After the analysis of selected European and Croatian documents, we examine which languages were included in Croatian primary and secondary schools in the period following the implementation of a mandatory FL in year 1 of primary school, from 2004/2005 to 2014/2015. Following this, we look at the percentage of pupils learning FLs in primary and secondary schools. Finally, we compare the data with the situation in other European countries.

### 6.1. Foreign languages in the Croatian education system

In the following part, we present data from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics and we look at the situation in other European countries. Although a mandatory FL from year 1 was introduced in Croatia in the 2003/2004 school year, there is no statistical data on foreign language learning for that year; for this reason, we examine the period from 2004/2005 to 2014/2015.

If we look at Figure 3, we can see how many pupils and what FLs they were learning in the defined period (all primary school years combined). Here we should note that the Croatian Bureau of Statistics does not differentiate between the first and second FL. Nonetheless, what is obvious from Figure 3 is the predominance of the English language. The second most popular language is German, with around 23% of learners. It is followed by Italian (around 5%) and French (around 0.8%). Other languages are Hungarian, Czech, Slovakian and Spanish. The number of learners of these languages is counted in the hundreds.

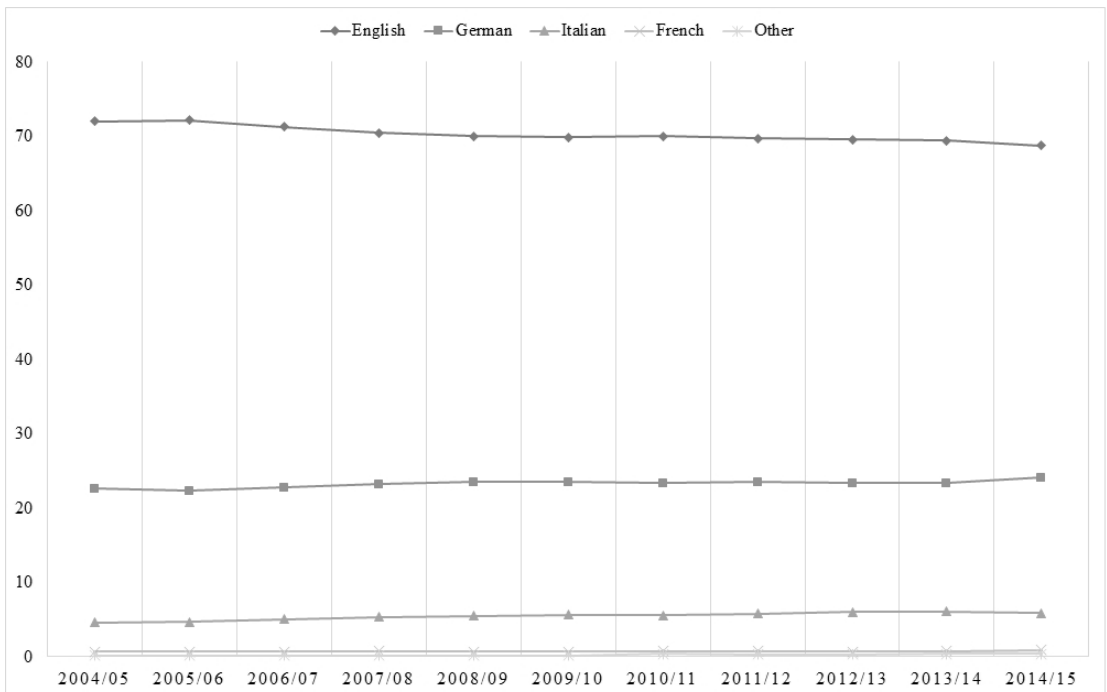


Figure 3. Proportion of pupils according to FLs they were learning in Croatian primary schools from SY 2004/2005 to 2014/2015

Since, as we mentioned, the Bureau does not distinguish learning a FL as a first or second, it might be useful to look at the data in the defined period for FLs in the first year of primary school. It is then that pupils choose their first, mandatory FL. As we can see in Figure 4, from around 87% to 89% of pupils choose English and from around 9% to 12% choose German, depending on the school year. The percentage of learners choosing English as their first FL is slightly increasing, whereas the percentage of those choosing German is slightly decreasing. Very few pupils choose Italian or French as their first language (from around 0.2% to 0.5%).

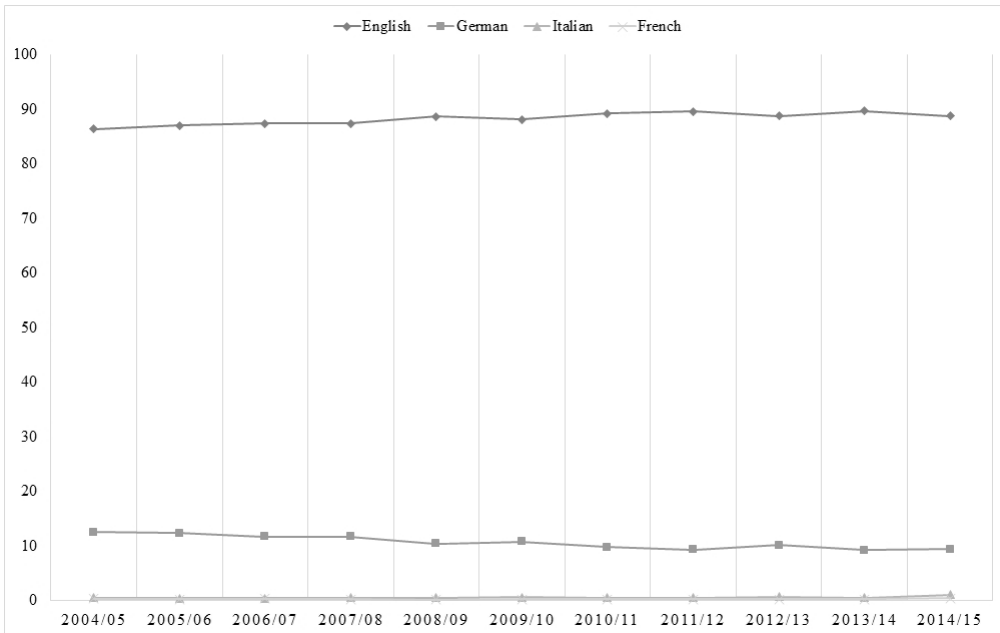


Figure 4. Proportion of pupils according to the FL they chose in year 1 of primary school (first FL) from SY 2004/2005 to 2014/2015

We shall now turn to Figure 5 and look at the data regarding FLs in secondary education. Similar to the previous figure, we notice a slight rise in the percentage of pupils learning English, and a slight decrease in the percentage of pupils learning German. However, the percentage of secondary school learners of German is higher (from around 35% to 42%) than the percentage of primary school learners of German (from around 22% to 24%, see Figure 3).



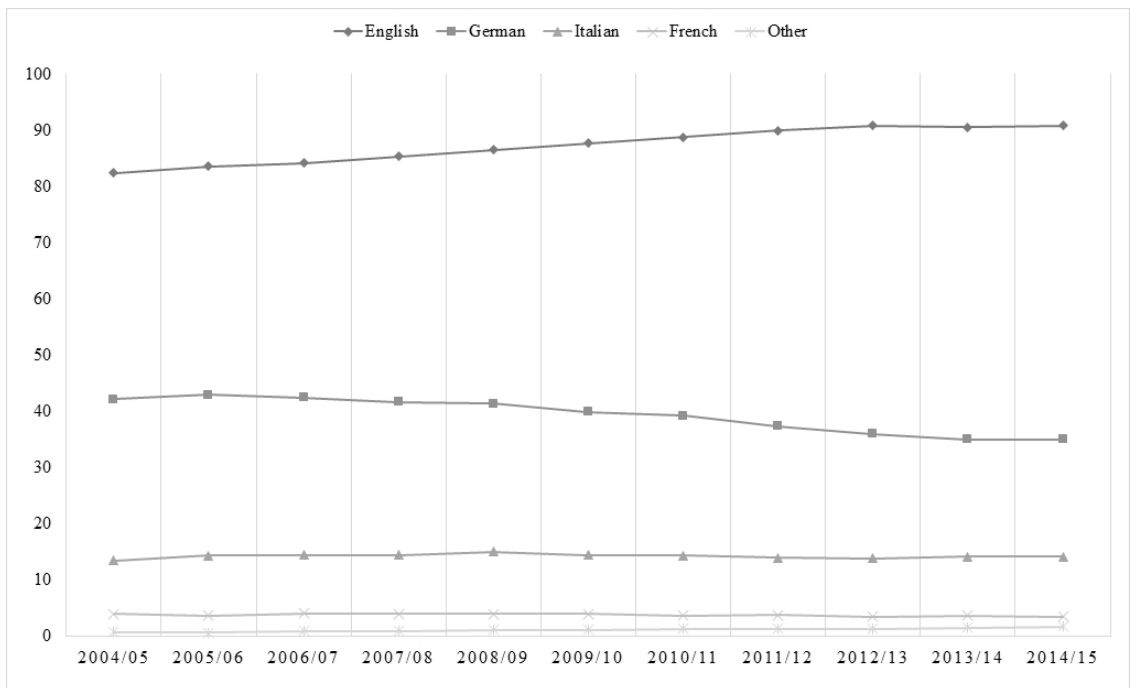


Figure 5. Proportion of pupils according to FLs they were learning in Croatian secondary schools from SY 2004/2005 to 2014/2015

It is obvious that English has firmly established itself as the dominant language in Croatian public education from the first year of primary school to the last year of secondary school. It is interesting to note the stability of FLs throughout the ten analysed years; there are slight rises and falls, but overall tendency is quite clear.

### 6.2. Foreign languages in the education systems of other European countries

Having analysed data at the national level, we can now compare FL learning in Croatia to other countries in Europe. Based on Eurostat's data from 2014 (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained>), Croatia is in the top quarter regarding the proportion of primary school pupils learning English, and among top three countries when it comes to German.

We mentioned that in Croatia pupils start learning a foreign language in year 1, whereas before the 2003/2004 school year they would start learning it in year 4. The lowering of age at which a mandatory foreign language is introduced is a process that has been going on in the last two decades, in Croatia as well as most European countries. Today, for the greatest part, pupils in Europe start learning their first foreign language between six and eight years of age (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). There are

exceptions such as the German-speaking community in Belgium where pupils learn a foreign language from the age of three, or Wales and Northern Ireland where pupils start learning a foreign language at the age of 11. Only two countries, Ireland and Scotland, do not have a first foreign language as a mandatory subject (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

When it comes to learning a second FL, Croatia is one of the countries in which learning a second FL is not compulsory, along with Germany, Ireland, Spain, Sweden, etc. However, it should be noted that Croatia and several other countries offer the opportunity of learning a second FL to all of their pupils in compulsory education. In most countries, it is compulsory for pupils to learn two FLs at least one year during their schooling. The age at which pupils start learning a second FL ranges from 10 to 15.

Croatia, like many other European countries, influences the choice of languages available to pupils in primary and secondary education by including specific languages in the curricula. Most countries require schools to provide specific languages, apart from Croatia, Ireland, Poland, Romania, England, Wales, Scotland, Bosnia and Herzegovina where there are no central recommendations or regulations for school to include specific foreign languages in the curriculum (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). In 18 countries or regions within countries, English is prescribed as a mandatory foreign language, such as in Denmark, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, etc. It is not surprising then that the most common foreign language in primary education in the European Union is English, with 77.1% pupils at primary level studying it in 2013 (*Eurostat News Release*, 2015). The second most common foreign language in the EU at ISCED 1 level is German with 3.2% of pupils. When it comes to the lower secondary level, 95.6% of pupils in the EU were learning English in 2013, followed by 27.4% learning French and 16.3% learning German. In 2009/2010, less than 5% of pupils in Europe were learning languages other than English, French, Spanish, German, or Russian in most countries, and in a significant number of countries the percentage was below 1% (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2012). On the other hand, the number of pupils learning English in Europe has been rising steadily in the past two decades, especially at primary level (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

Here we would like to highlight data that we find puts European plurilingualism in question. According to the report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2012), there are only a few countries in Europe in which the average number of foreign languages learnt by pupils reaches 2 at the secondary level (ISCED level 2). The average for Croatia is 1.5, which

matches the average for the European Union. The average is higher for general secondary education at ISCED 3 – in Croatia it is 1.9, and in the EU it is 1.6. However, it is lower for vocational secondary education at that level – 1.3 in Croatia and 1.2 in the EU. If we look at the percentages (data for 2010), nearly 50% of pupils in Croatia were learning two or more languages at ISCED level 2, whereas the average for the EU was slightly over 60%. Croatia is in better standing when it comes to ISCED level 3 in general education with almost 90% of pupils learning 2 or more languages and the average of the EU being 60%. However, in vocational programmes this percentage is below the average of the EU – around 25% in Croatia compared to the European 40%.

## 7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Based on the analyses above, we can conclude that the participation of pupils in the learning of FLs in Croatia fits into the general picture of learning FLs in Europe: a) English is the most popular FL, followed by German (mostly in central and eastern European countries), b) less than 1% of pupils learn a language other than the four or five major European languages, and c) around half of the pupils at ISCED level 2 learn a second FL and even less at ISCED level 3 in vocational schools.

When we talk about pupils (or their parents for that matter) choosing a FL, we must bear in mind that this hardly is a choice. The offer of a FL depends not on national or school policy, but on the FL teachers employed at a given school. Although it makes sense that a school can offer only those FLs for which it has someone to teach them, this can hardly be called a national FLP. This issue and others were clearly articulated ten years ago (see Velički, 2007: 99–100), but nothing has changed. Furthermore, there are no guidelines on the number of FL teachers we need or should have, and for what languages – this is left to the autonomy of the universities. Since English is the most popular choice among universities students, to the detriment of other FLs, it is clear that even if we wanted different FLs taught, we would face the problem of the lack of teachers who would teach those languages.

Based on everything that has been said thus far, there is no doubt that the English language is the dominant FL in Europe. Today, English is the most commonly learnt FL in Croatia, and the easiest means of communication with speakers of other languages (Vilke, 2007). For this reason, it is very likely that the trend of learning English will continue in the future. However, we must raise the question of how the predominance of English fits into the notion of plurilingualism as one of the educational objectives toward which we strive (*Strategija obrazovanja, znanosti i tehnologije*, 2015). Gačić and Cergol Kovačević

(2014) acknowledge the challenge and call for measures to be taken that would result in popularizing the learning of both other world languages and smaller European and non-European languages.

The first year of the implementation of a FL as a mandatory subject in year 1 of primary school was the best opportunity to introduce plurilingualism into the Croatian education system. However, the Ministry of Education and Sports in a certain way imposed the learning of English (Vrhovac, 2006). Almost fifteen years later, we are on the one hand faced with the need of implementing the policy of plurilingualism in the Croatian education system, and on the other with the leading role of English in the world.

A possible solution is to give more prominence to elective FL subjects during primary and secondary education. Another, even more important, is to consider the role of plurilingualism within early FL learning, in the first four years of primary education. However, in order to achieve these objectives, it is necessary to ensure financial resources for elective subjects as well as to ensure quality in the teaching of FLs at lower primary levels. Related to the latter, a question arises to whether teachers are sufficiently trained in teaching FLs in the first four years of primary school, considering the neglect of early language learning and teaching in teacher education at university level.

According to the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, one of the ways to increase the proportion of pupils learning another foreign language is to make the language mandatory (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2012: 74), which worked well in some European countries. In line with that, the idea is to introduce two mandatory foreign languages in compulsory education, that is, to change the status of the second foreign language from elective to mandatory (Gehrmann and Petravić, 2010: 1719). Furthermore, the status of English should be reconsidered as well. As a language of the utmost importance in global communication, it should perhaps lose the status of a foreign language and simply be considered a core subject such as mathematics, physical education, etc., which are never a matter of choice. Of course, English, like other core subjects, should be taught from year 1 until the end of compulsory education, which is a proposal we also find in Vilke (2007). This would open up an opportunity for two additional foreign languages to enter primary education: one as a mandatory subject from year 1, and another as an elective from year 4. Unlike English, which as we said would be a core subject, the other two foreign languages would be a matter of choice (taking into consideration what languages a school can offer). However, we should be aware that there are arguments against introducing English as a first foreign language, or as a core subject for that matter. Lujčić (2016), for

example, mentions two reasons: 1) upon learning English, pupils are no longer motivated to learn another foreign language, and 2) our pupils are sufficiently exposed to English in their surroundings to be able to learn it easily at a later point.

The first step in the implementation of the idea suggested above is certainly training FL teachers for working with young learners. Accordingly, teaching languages to young learners should become a greater part of teacher education at the faculties of humanities and social sciences that provide education for the majority of FL teachers. The developers of these study programmes could find inspiration in the curriculum for primary teachers of English or German offered at the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb. The second step relates to ensuring financial resources and technical conditions for the implementation of the suggested guidelines.

Taking into consideration the complexity of the issue of systematic implementation of the notion of plurilingualism in the Croatian education system, we conclude that there are numerous challenges. At the same time, we are nonetheless hopeful that the institutions will recognize the importance of stimulating and developing plurilingualism and thus take appropriate and specific steps in line with the suggested guidelines because “plurilingual education is an educational necessity of every democratic society” (Vrhovac & Berlengi, 2010:251).

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## VIŠEJEZIČNOST U HRVATSKOJ INOJEZIČNOJ POLITICI

U ovome se radu istražuje odnos hrvatske jezične politike prema stranim jezicima u obrazovnome sustavu, odnosno hrvatska inojezična politika. Analizom kurikula i postojećih nastavnih planova i programa, koji eksplicitno ili implicitno definiraju mjesto stranih jezika u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi, stvaramo konkretnu sliku hrvatske jezične politike prema stranim jezicima u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi. Hrvatska inojezična politika smješta se u kontekst europske jezične politike njegovanja višejezičnosti. S tog aspekta analiziramo i podatke Državnoga zavoda za statistiku Republike Hrvatske u posljednjih deset godina kako bismo utvrdili zastupljenost (i popularnost) stranih jezika u hrvatskom osnovnoškolskome i srednjoškolskome obrazovanju. Uključenost stranih jezika u hrvatski obrazovni sustav također uspoređujemo s prisutnošću stranih jezika u kurikulumima drugih europskih zemalja. Na temelju provedenih analiza utvrđujemo da se hrvatski obrazovni sustav udaljio od promicanja višejezičnosti kao jedne od ključnih odrednica europske jezične politike. U zaključku se rada donose smjernice za daljnje oblikovanje hrvatske inojezične politike u vidu poticanja višejezičnosti.

*Ključne riječi: hrvatska inojezična politika, višejezičnost, strani jezik u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi*