

Gerhard Stickel

EFNIL - 20 Years of European Language Cooperation

Spoštovani kolegi in prijatelji, dear colleagues and friends:

EFNIL has apparently grown up. Its 20th anniversary here in Ljubljana is an opportunity to look back to the beginning of our organisation and how it has taken shape over the past two decades. A condensed history of EFNIL's first 15 years has already been presented by our friend Johan Van Hoorde. It is part of the proceedings of our 2018 conference in Amsterdam¹. I would just like to take a second look and add some thoughts on EFNIL's first 20 years and its prehistory. This will no doubt overlap with parts of Johan's essay. For our president Sabine and other long-serving colleagues, it will simply be a recall of some familiar facts and memories.

The prehistory

It was at our first conference on 13–14 October 2003 in Stockholm that EFNIL was formally founded. Preparations for this event had begun three years earlier in 2000 at a conference at the Institute for the German Language in Mannheim. Concepts and ideas that finally led to the founding of EFNIL had been presented previously at events in various places, in particular at a conference organized by the Dutch Language Union in 1999 in Brussels. Its topic "Status and Use of National Languages in Europe" precluded an important theme that was dealt with in Mannheim. Other events that had already provided inspiration for the Mannheim conference were international meetings held in Munich and Bad Homburg in 1998 that resulted in a declaration², parts of which were later adopted in the Mannheim-Florence Recommendations.

At Mannheim, a circle of representatives of language institutes from nine European states came together. We discussed in depth the problems of preserving and further developing the individual national languages within a multilingual Europe. A draft resolution on the national languages of the European countries was discussed but not concluded. This happened one year later at a conference at the Accademia della Crusca in Florence organized by Francesco Sabatini, the then president of the Academy. At this meeting, we adopted the "Mannheim-Florence recommendations for the European

1 Van Hoorde, Johan: Collaboration makes all languages stronger. In: Schoonheim, Tanneke/Van Hoorde, Johan (eds.): Language Variation – A factor of increasing complexity and a challenge for language policy within Europe. Published by the Research Institute for Linguistics, Budapest 2019. PP 13-23.

2 „Homburger Empfehlungen zur Förderung der europäischen Hochsprachen“ (Homburg Recommendations for the Support of the European Standard Languages) in: Ehlich, Konrad/Ossner, Jakob/Stammerjohann, Harro (Hgg.): Hochsprachen in Europa – Entstehung, Geltung, Zukunft. Freiburg i. Br. : Fillibach, 2001.

standard languages"³. It was an appeal to national and European politics and a kind of first outline for language policies. It ended with the proposal that "A permanent council should be formed by the central language institutions of the European states."

Unlike other Eurolinguistic meetings, the Mannheim conference and the following ones were not planned and organized as encounters between individual experts, but as meetings of representatives of relevant institutions, that is, language academies and central linguistic institutes of European countries. We believed that an organisation of institutions would be more stable and effective than a group of individual experts. In fact, as experience showed, individual experts often just meet for a single conference or two resulting, at most, in an anthology of learned papers, while an organisation of institutions could stay on and act independently of the persons representing them. Of course, the institutions would have to be represented by competent delegates.

Thanks to the initiative of our colleagues of the Nederlandse Taalunie / the Dutch Language Union, we could meet for a third preparatory conference in Brussels in 2002. There, we soon agreed to have our institutions cooperate in a joint organisation. Based on detailed working papers prepared by our hosts, we outlined its structure and gave it the somewhat clumsy name "European Federation of National Institutions for Language" - and this in all 11 official languages of the EU states at the time. A steering committee was formed that met several times to prepare the actual founding. We drafted a constitution and sent out questionnaires to the institutions to be involved in the new organisation.

The 20 years

The founding process was then completed at the Stockholm 2003 conference. It was attended by delegates from language institutes of all but one member state of the EU, by observers from several other European countries, and officials of the European Commission. Our first general assembly accepted the constitution and elected members of the Executive Committee. This first board consisted of Pietro Beltrami from Italy, Abraham Benjo from France, Ole Josephson from Sweden, Johan Van Hoorde from the Netherlands and Belgium, John Simpson from the United Kingdom, and myself from Germany. (Abraham Benjo was succeeded by Jean-François Baldi.) Johan agreed to be our General Secretary, I was elected president and Pietro deputy president. I mention our names here because we were involved in the preparatory actions, stimulated

3 (In 9 language versions) In: Stickel, Gerhard (Hg.): Europäische Hochsprachen und mehrsprachiges Europa. Mannheim : Institut für Deutsche Sprache 2002, 225-256. Also on EFNIL website: <http://efnil.org/documents/recommendations-of-mannheim-florence>

the founding process, planned and organized various projects and were, as such, responsible for what happened to EFNIL during its first years.

An organisation such as EFNIL cannot live and act without a Secretariat. Headed by Johan, the EFNIL Secretariat was based at the Dutch Language Union in The Hague from 2003 until 2010. It was then moved to the Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics in Budapest, where Tamás Váradi has since been our General Secretary.

The Stockholm event was followed by 19 more annual conferences. They took place in cities all over Europe and each conference was, like this one, organized by EFNIL members of the hosting country. The various cities where we met gave us colourful impressions of the cultural diversity and wealth of Europe. We covered a wide range of topics such as language education, linguistic stereotypes, language use in the academic world and other relevant themes. At the conferences in Brussels, Riga, Lisbon, Budapest and Florence, we passed resolutions and declarations on important linguistic and political issues, including our demands and proposals concerning national and European language policies. I refrain from presenting an exhaustive list of all the conferences and resolutions here. An overview of the annual conferences with the texts of the resolutions can be easily found on our website (www.efnil.org).

EFNIL grew over the years. The number of members increased following the enlargement of the European Union. As the linguistic landscape of Europe is not confined to the states of the EU, we decided back in 2004 to also accept language institutions from other European countries as associated members, provided they shared the ideas and aims of EFNIL. The first ones were institutes from Norway and Iceland, later on from Switzerland and in recent years, as you know, from Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine. The UK is now, unfortunately, following Brexit, only represented by an associated member. We hope that Spain and Portugal, who have suspended their membership, will rejoin in the future.

At present, central language institutions of 31 European countries are members of EFNIL: from 24 member states of the EU and seven other European countries. As some countries are represented by two institutes, EFNIL now comprises a total of 41 language institutions.

One important event in EFNIL's external history needs to be mentioned - its legal stabilization. For the first 13 years of its existence, EFNIL was not illegal - it was based on a constitution that its members had agreed on. However, under the legal systems of the EU and its member states, EFNIL had no solid status. Since the Union itself offers no legal model for a multinational organisation such as EFNIL, we had to get under the umbrella of a national legal system. We chose Luxembourg because its civil code was less complicated than that of

other countries and we had the help of our Luxembourgish colleague Guy Berg. As a result, since 2016, EFNIL has been an *Association sans but lucrative* - a non-profit organisation - under the law of Luxembourg.

This legal act and the numerical data mentioned are but part of EFNIL's external history. They are, of course, intertwined with its inner development, that is, the ideas and concepts that were important to us and the projects we moved forward or tried to advance over the past 20 years.

The inner development

Like my co-founders, I was frequently asked: What was your reason for founding EFNIL? Well, we had become aware that the economic globalisation and the establishment of the European Union did not only influence the living conditions in the various countries, but had also an impact on the current development of the various languages in Europe. We knew there had been contacts and transfer relations between the European languages for centuries, but they were limited to rather small groups of people. In modern times, however, language contacts involve increasingly larger subpopulations of the European countries. With the development of modern ways and means of traffic and communication and with the opening of national borders, contacts between people with different languages are no longer limited to a handful of diplomates, businessmen, messengers and travelling scholars. Transnational business and tourism are booming. Student and worker exchange programs have increased. More and more people are confronted with the question of where and when to speak to whom about what in which language.

When EFNIL was founded, there were already organisations for the protection of minority languages in Europe. Since 1982, there had been a *European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (EBLUL)*, a non-governmental organisation that devoted its activities mainly to minority languages. Unfortunately, it was dissolved in 2010 due to a lack of financial support. In 1992, the Council of Europe (not to be confused with the Council of the EU) passed a *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*. Beside the efforts to improve the recognition of minority languages, there was, however, no convincing political concept at EU level for the maintenance and advancement of the national standard languages, even though their development and interrelations within Europe were by no means set in stone. There have been discussions and suggestions on the use of the languages of the member nations throughout the long development from the European Economic Community to the present European Union. However, there has not been a permanent political institution or general legal agreement concerning the official languages within the EU. There is still only the ruling that all official languages of the member states should also be the official languages of the EU bodies.

From the perspective of our national languages, we realized that practical demands within the EU and beyond are met increasingly - as we all know - by a modern Lingua Franca, an internationalized variety of English. The economic interests and communicative needs within Europe and beyond have led to an expansion of English to domains that were previously confined to continental European languages.

However, when we prepared what later became EFNIL, we soon agreed that we should not form a sort of fighting unit against the English language. In many situations involving people of different native tongues, who want to communicate with each other, English is a practical auxiliary language - an Esperanto - that does not have to be invented. We, therefore, called for personal multilingualism (we call it plurilingualism) among Europeans, that is, the use of the other European languages complemented where necessary by English. In order to also gain British support for European multilingualism, we promptly invited the chief editor of the Oxford English Dictionary to the preparatory conference in Florence and later on the British Council to join EFNIL. Both have been most active members.

An important development occurred during the years following the foundation of EFNIL. It is not as tangible as a book or as visible as a website presentation. It is rather a mental attitude that we acquired over the course of our cooperation. We started off as representatives of linguistic institutions that were not primarily interested in multilingualism. The task of each of our members was and still is to care for the national language(s) of an individual country. Our regular work in research, documentation and language planning serves a kind of national linguistic egotism. For the maintenance of the linguistic diversity in Europe, we were – at first sight – the wrong people. But only at first sight. In our many meetings and discussions, we became more and more “European”, so to speak. We realized that our linguistic interests should not stop at the boundaries of our own linguistic territories. We learned that our individual languages are substantial components of the European linguistic mosaic that is essential for the cultural wealth and social diversity of our continent. We learned to regard the other languages as the relevant cultural and linguistic environment of our own languages. In front of the venerable *Accademia della Crusca* in Florence - one of the founding members of EFNIL - there is a semicircular square. In 2007, our old friend Francesco Sabatini had this square officially named: *Piazza delle Lingue d'Europa* ('Square of Europe's languages'). With this, the Academy that has nurtured the Italian language since the 16th century presents an impressive symbol of how an individual language should be seen within the context of other languages.

There was increasing agreement among the delegates of the member institutes with our conviction that it is in the interest of the individual languages, that we not only respect the corresponding work of our partners in the other countries but also learn from them and carrying out joint activities. An important part of this collaboration is also to propagate the idea that citizens in our native countries should not be content merely with speaking their national language or languages, but should opt for multilingualism, which transcends national borders – if not for themselves, then for their children and grandchildren. We propagated the idea and should continue to do so: Whoever wants to foster the development of their own language should also learn other languages. Our English friend John Simpson coined the slogan: “Your language is our heritage.” Consequently, resolutions and other texts expressed EFNIL’s explicit support of what is known as the 1-plus-2 Barcelona objective of language learning, that is, the aim that all children in Europe should learn at least two other European languages beside their own. The European Council passed this at its meeting 2002 in Barcelona, however, it was only a recommendation. Unfortunately, discussion and propagation of the Barcelona objective seems to have fallen by the wayside in recent years. I think EFNIL needs to look into this anew.

Projects

Our activities were not limited to holding conferences, publishing proceedings and now and then a resolution. Several joint projects have developed and have meanwhile yielded substantial results. A documentation on language legislation in the various European countries was initiated by our French friends. EFNIL took over this project and took care of updating it. The results are now available on our website under the acronym LLE, that is, Language Legislation Europe.

Based on the conviction that realistic language policies at national and European levels should be based on reliable empirical data, we began collecting information on the linguistic situation within our various countries soon after the foundation of EFNIL. We called this project the European Language Monitor (ELM). It started with a limited pilot survey in 2003/04. Data collection using improved questionnaires followed in 2008/09 and were succeeded by further comprehensive surveys conducted at four-years intervals. The results up to ELM survey no. 3 are available on the EFNIL website. As a core of questions has been retained in the various surveys, ELM allows a kind of European diachronic linguistics. There remains one condition for the further success of this important undertaking: the readiness of all members to take part in future surveys and fill in the necessary questionnaires.

Another project called EFNILEX is also worth mentioning. Its objective is the development of modern, cost-effective methods for the production of bi- and

multilingual dictionaries, making use of modern technologies. Prototype versions of the EFNILEX dictionaries for two language pairs (Lithuanian-Hungarian and French-Dutch) are now available on the Internet (at: <http://efnilex.efnil.org/>).

A further successful project is named *European Languages and their Intelligibility in the Public Sphere*, abbreviated as ELIPS. It studies the use of languages as communication tools for legislation and public administration. As with ELM, its data are collected among the members of EFNIL by means of a detailed questionnaire. Results are available on the EFNIL website. They enable comparisons on how the public administrations of the participating countries organize and carry out communication with their citizens.

Various other projects have been proposed at conferences and other occasions that could not be taken up so far, because the necessary cooperation between several or even all member institutions could not be organized or simply because the necessary funds could not be found. I still hope that my favourite project idea will be taken up one day: the creation of a comprehensive European language history that is not just an anthology of national language histories but shows the developments of common linguistic traits across national borders. However, this has not been part of EFNIL's history so far.

In addition to our successful projects, I have to at least briefly mention an ambitious project that failed. In 2007, we combined a series of smaller projects run by several member institutes into a complex project called EFNILNET and applied to the EU Commission for support under its Lifelong Learning Program. Our application failed. My impression is still that the main reason we did not succeed was that too many of the applicants asked for support for too many subprojects.

Political Contacts

EFNIL is not a political organisation. However, from the very beginning, we looked for and established contacts with the political bodies of the European Union. Being a kind of linguistic lobby, several of our activities were directed towards institutions of the Union. Our recommendations and resolutions or parts of them were addressed to the EU authorities to support language policies in the interest of the linguistic diversity of Europe. We had also hoped for a permanent subsidy from the Union. As it turned out, however, the EU supports only limited projects. In 2009, the European Commission created a European Civil Society Platform to Promote Multilingualism. EFNIL quickly

became an active member. However, the Commission stopped its support for this promising platform after just two years.⁴

Our Riga resolution of 2007⁵ calls on the governments of the Member States and the bodies of the European Union to establish a permanent coordination office and an advisory board on language planning and language research. Unfortunately, neither a permanent coordination office nor an advisory language board have been established. EFNIL should keep reminding the EU bodies of this.

We invited members of the EU Commission to all our conferences. We also visited the relevant commissioners or their staff. For several years now, we have had particularly good relations with the Commission's interpreting and translation service. They twice helped us save interpreting costs for our annual conferences in Vilnius in 2013 and Florence in 2014.⁶

Not all of our contacts with the EU were successful. I will mention only one initiative that failed – for fundamental reasons.

When the EU's Lisbon Reform Treaty was prepared in 2007, we tried to get an important article changed.⁷ Article 2(3) of the treaty reads:

"It (= the European Union) shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity".

Unfortunately, this article only prescribes **respect** for cultural and linguistic diversity, but does not call for it to be promoted or supported. Our proposal was to change the wording to [The Union] "shall respect **and promote** its cultural and linguistic diversity". We sent letters and e-mails to the EU Commission, to foreign ministries of several states and even contacted high-ranking officials by telephone, yet we did not succeed in getting the two words "*and promote*" into the article. Apparently, the national governments who signed the Lisbon Treaty avoided a wording that would grant European institutions an influence on the linguistic situation in their countries. According to the principle of subsidiarity, language policy was, obviously, not considered a

4 It was relaunched in 2012 as a separate organization without support by the Commission.

5 *The Riga Resolution of EFNIL on National and European Language Policy, approved by the EFNIL General Assembly on 13 November 2007 in the 23 official languages of the states of the European Union and Luxemburgish.* On the EFNIL website: <http://efnil.org/documents/resolutions>

6 As official events of the Commission were taking place close to the dates and places of our conferences, they generously lent us their interpreters. We only had to provide the 'hardware'.

7The complete article reads: "It (= the European Union) shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced."

We had already, in November 2003, appealed to the Convention on the Future of Europe, that existed at that time, to change Art II-22 of the draft of a European constitution, that the Convention had prepared. It read: "The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity". We asked the Convention to complete this article by the verb "support", that is, "... shall respect and support cultural, religious and linguistic diversity". This could not happen, because the ambitious project of a European constitution was given up.

central task of the Union but primarily a matter of the individual states. Despite our failure, however, we at EFNIL upheld and, I believe, should continue to uphold the conviction that the legitimate national linguistic egotisms must be complemented by a comprehensive European language policy.

Conclusion

Here I end my contemplation of EFNIL's first 20 years and its prehistory. A detailed EFNIL-history or EFNIL-story has yet to be written, if possible, in time for EFNIL's 25th anniversary. It would be an attractive task for an ambitious historian or an advanced student of sociolinguistics. It will need explorative action to get at detailed facts and processes. Developments and events that were not recorded in digital or paper format will have to be retrieved from the memories of those of us who were involved from the outset. The historian who prepares a comprehensive history of EFNIL should, therefore, take the opportunity to interview some of the founding generation. I am sure that old EFNIL-hands would be more than willing to cooperate with any serious historian.

Thank you for your attention.

Vielen Dank.

Najlepša hvala.