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## **LINGUA RECEPTIVA IN EUROPE: THE MAP AND THE TERRITORY<sup>1</sup>**

KEY WORDS: receptive multilingualism, mutual intelligibility, *lingua receptiva*, language constellation, European language families

ABSTRACT: As a result of complex and closely-related social, political, economic and technological processes, significant changes are now occurring in the European language situation. While these processes foster participation in the transnational communication community, they also reinforce the linguistic identity, based on their distinction. In view of these contradictory but non-exclusive trends, one should consider the multilingual systems that would better reflect the dynamics of real changes. For this purpose, the concept of *lingua receptiva* will be presented. Geographical and cultural perspectives are taken into account in this paper. Emphasis is on the space of discursive interculturalism, in which contacts in more or less fixed language constellations constantly take place. Its allocation on the political map of the European continent is not performative, but based on the literature. However, it does illustrate the challenges for the future of European receptive multilingualism.

### **1. Introduction**

The situation of languages on the European continent is being largely influenced by such processes as globalism, migrations and the increased mobility of inhabitants from various regions of the world that favour participation in the community of transnational communications. In this context, universal access to modern technologies that reduce spatial barriers in communication between people is significant. The linguistic landscape of Europe continues to change not only due to general economic and social trends; it is also significantly impacted by the political integration practices within the framework of the European Union. This is particularly visible among the new Member States from Central and Eastern Europe where the presence of western economic, aesthetic, ethical, etc. culture is intensified and reflected within the hierarchy of languages in the public realm.

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<sup>1</sup> The article has been prepared within the framework of a research project “*Lingua receptiva* or *lingua franca*? The linguistic practices in the borderland area between Poland and the Czech Republic in the face of English language domination (ecolinguistic approach)” financed by National Science Centre, Poland (agreement no. 2017/26/E/HS2/00039).

On the other hand, both the EU language policy that respects linguistic human rights and promotes the multilingualism of Europe and an increasing number of separatist aspirations among individual countries and regions today indicate the transition toward an increasing concern regarding native language resources and maintaining linguistic identity in the presence of the ubiquitous global language of today's mediated communication environment.

In the face of these contradictory trends that simultaneously affect the situation of languages in Europe, one should consider the bilingual and multilingual systems that would better reflect the dynamics of real changes. For this purpose, the concept of *lingua receptiva* will be elaborated, i.e. receptive multilingual communication based on the (related) languages of its participants, both in terms of presentability (in relation to the real multilingual practices) and configuration (in relation to other categories within the set of concepts as a part of the research discipline). This observation takes into account the geographical and cultural perspective. Europe is treated as a multidimensional cultural construct gaining its importance on the basis of the contrast with 'others', structurally fragmented centre of modernity, development and progress. Its borders change not only together with the expansion of the European Union, but also depending on the position, from which they are defined. This 'fractal' geography of the continent – as S. Gal (2006, 25) puts it – constantly projects linguistic inclusions and exclusions depending on the point of view and placement in the context of social interaction within all states of the continent. In view of the current objective of the paper, the author intends to emphasize (or – similarly to the metaphor of 'fractals' – 'calibrate') the space of 'discursive interculture' (Beerens 2010, 34), i.e. the common communication space based on established multilingual practices elaborated through years of experience.

Although *lingua receptiva* (abbreviated LaRa) as communication mode is not a European specialty (similar asymmetric inter-language practices can be observed throughout the world), the choice of the territory seems obvious as studies carried out in the perspective that elaborates especially on the receptive component are most advanced for the language families of the European continent; primarily for Scandinavian and Romance, and recently also Slavic languages. The reconstruction of these constellations on the map of Europe is based on the literature and is not performative; as a part of cultural analytics it is a way of organizing or visualizing data in the form of a map interface.

## **2. *Lingua receptiva* on the map of Europe**

As indicated by H. Riionheimo, A. Kaivapalu and H.-I. Härmävaara (2017, 117-121), the research on receptive multilingualism (abbreviated: RM) as a separate domain, developed in the first decade of the 21st century, but a number of acclaimed

predecessors from the preceding century had contributed to their emergence. In the second decade, the scope of research expanded and now under the umbrella of receptive multilingualism several different issues are included: intercomprehension or mutual intelligibility of related languages, inter- or trans-linguistic similarities, pragmatics of receptive interactions in different language constellations, areas and communication situations, linguistic stereotypes and attitudes of users and language policy in relation to the practice of receptive multilingualism. Its scope goes far beyond the passive knowledge of the language or methods of foreign language teaching since it refers to multilingual communication strategies that usually are not paid attention to in language pedagogy. As a communication phenomenon that occurs especially in borderlands of different states of more or less similar national languages, it is usually based on the historical tradition, geographical proximity and long-term neighbourly relations, in the course of which receptive competence is developed – that is considered obvious and thus often elusive even for the participants of multilingual communication themselves.

The term often used interchangeably with receptive multilingualism is *lingua receptiva*, formed in analogy to the widespread concept of *lingua franca* and defined as “the ensemble of those linguistic, mental, interactional as well as intercultural competences which are creatively activated when listeners are receiving linguistic actions in their ‘passive’ language or variety” (Rehbein/ten Thije/Verschik 2011, 249). LaRa works on the same level of relations as the contemporary *lingua franca* (English as *lingua franca*, abbreviated: ELF). Both involve similar communication goals – achieving understanding in the multicultural setting, the participants of which use the linguistic resources and communication strategies allowing mutual understanding in the situation; when their ethnolinguistic resources differ. The assumptions, however, are different in both cases: whereas ELF assumes general knowledge of common linguistic resources as a starting point leading to the differences in understanding and using different linguistic forms, LaRa assumes a diversified set of linguistic resources and a resulting effort is aimed at recognizing common forms and meanings in order to achieve understanding (Hülmbauer 2014, 274).

The research on receptive multilingualism conducted on the European continent is multi-layered and quite dispersed. The measurements of mutual intelligibility of closely-related languages are most structured and regionally extensive. Both, methodology based on the American inter-comprehension tests (Taylor 1953), and the manner of developing the acquired material and the range of verifiable relationships were clarified in the last decade in the process undertaken at several intervals of research on multilingual receptive communication among the inhabitants of Scandinavia (Gooskens 2006; Kürschner/Gooskens/van Bezooijen 2008; Gooskens et al. 2010; Schüppert 2011; Gooskens/van Bezooijen/van Heuven 2015). At present the MICReLa project includes 16 languages (Gooskens et al. 2017); uniform methods

of testing the level of intelligibility of spoken texts were developed within related languages using an Internet application, and studies are carried out on a large scale. In 2017, the results of cloze tests were published for selected pairs out of three largest language families in Europe: Germanic (Danish, Dutch, English, German, Swedish), Romance (French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish) and Slavic (Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Polish, Slovak and Slovenian). In the following table (Table 1.) they were presented in a simplified manner, i.e. without distinction on the basis of so-called acquired and inherited intelligibility (better results were taken into account – with few exceptions, it pertained to acquired intelligibility).

Since asymmetry is a permanent property of LaRa, the sequence in the investigated language pairs was determined by the degree of intelligibility, i.e. in each line, first, this language appears, whose users better understand the language that follows and remains the same in the configuration. In subsequent lines within individual groups, language pairs were recorded in which the degree of intelligibility is increasingly lower only reaching 10% in recent configurations. The range of asymmetry was calculated by subtracting the percentage value of the intelligibility in a given pair. It provides information on the degree of reciprocity with regard to intelligibility in accordance with emerging relationships: the higher the range of the asymmetry, the greater the dominance of the second language in a pair, the lower the range of asymmetry, the higher the reciprocity of intelligibility of languages in receptive communication.

It is worth noting that the asymmetry in intelligibility of languages in individual groups is very diverse: from very high among Germanic languages (especially in configurations with English – above 80%) to a very low level among Slavic languages. In the West Slavic group (Slovak – Czech – Polish) asymmetries for individual pairs refer to a few percent and mutual intelligibility is high (Slovak – Czech) or average (Slovak – Polish and Czech – Polish). Languages in this configuration do not subside in terms of semi-communicative potential of the Scandinavian languages.

Taking into account the percentage results presented in the table, it is possible to create an interface in the form of a map of mutual intelligibility of European languages. It covered the configurations where intelligibility is not lower than 35% (the approximate limit of LaRa effectiveness); the degree of reciprocity was marked by placing arrows in two directions, in the case of high dominance by one of the languages (above 35% asymmetry span) only one arrow in the direction corresponding to the specificity of configuration was placed.

This map (Fig. 1.), enabling an insight into receptive multilingualism ‘from the aerial view’ is certainly not complete; it covers only the configurations that have been examined so far. However, the MICReLa project has a potential for growth and one can reasonably hope that in the coming years, the map will be supplemented with subsequent pairs of related languages. The most general picture that emerges is a clear predominance of non-symmetric communication

Table 1. Degree of mutual intelligibility of closely-related languages according to Ch. Gooskens et al. (2017)

Language pair	The degree of intelligibility	The range of asymmetry
Germanic group		
Dutch – English	93% – 10%	83%
Danish – English	92% – 8%	84%
Swedish – English	90% – 9%	81%
German – English	86% – 28%	58%
Dutch – German	75% – 13%	62%
Swedish – Danish	62% – 57%	5%
Danish – German	48% – 17%	31%
Swedish – German	37% – 10%	27%
Danish – Dutch	12% – 10%	2%
Swedish – Dutch	12% – 10%	2%
Romance group		
Portuguese– Spanish	68% – 38%	30%
Italian – Spanish	65% – 47%	18%
Romanian – Italian	58% – 10%	48%
Romanian – Spanish	54% – 13%	41%
Portuguese – Italian	49% – 33%	26%
Romanian – French	38% – 11%	27%
Italian – French	46% – 24%	22%
Portuguese – French	33% – 23%	10%
French – Spanish	31% – 29%	2%
Romanian – Portuguese	22% – 14%	8%
Slavic group		
Slovak – Czech	94% – 92%	2%
Slovenian – Croatian	79% – 43%	36%
Slovak – Polish	50% – 41%	9%
Czech – Polish	35% – 27%	8%
Bulgarian – Croatian	29% – 19%	10%
Slovak – Croatian	26% – 22%	4%
Bulgarian – Slovenian	20% – 18%	2%
Czech – Croatian	19% – 18%	1%
Slovenian – Slovak	18% – 15%	3%
Slovenian – Czech	18% – 16%	2%
Bulgarian – Slovak	15% – 10%	5%
Polish – Croatian	14% – 9%	5%
Polish – Bulgarian	13% – 6%	7%
Czech – Bulgarian	12% – 10%	2%



area. They have different objectives: apart from the analyses regarding purely the course of receptive communication, also interesting methodological proposals and theoretical solutions can be observed.

It should be noted that in the field research, a different approach applies than in the analyses relating to mutual intelligibility of languages. The pragmatics of receptive multilingualism is viewed not so much as ‘languages in use’, i.e. update of different abstract systems, but more as language practices implemented by multilingual interlocutors in frequent conversations, based both on their own experience and socially developed conventions or standards of communications that prefigure specific verbal behaviour and develop scenarios of communication events. This reveals the diverse conditions of LaRa:

- civilizational and historical ones that determine the preferences changing in time in more or less stable language constellations and increasing participation of *lingua franca* in multilingual communication (Braunmüller 2013; 2007; Rindler-Schjerve 2007);

- social conditions, including in particular the sources of asymmetry in stable constellations, linguistic attitudes and stereotypes, the economic or cultural distance, and the impact of the current geopolitical situation on the openness in undertaking multilingual receptive practices (Schüppert/Hilton/Gooskens 2015; Beerkens 2010; Hlavac 2014);

- situational conditions, e.g. in families (Herkenrath 2012), at workplace (Lüdi 2013; Ribbert /ten Thije 2007), in the media (Sloboda/Nábělková 2013), in institutional communication (Berthele/Wittlin 2013) and in brief contacts, e.g. when shopping or using services (especially in border areas – Beerkens 2010), and also in school education (Lambelet/Mauron 2017) and as part of international student exchange (Blees/Mak/ten Thije 2014);

- discursive conditions, covering varied competence of the participants of interactions and the manner of their use in LaRa on several levels of communication, for example when objectives of the conversation, cognitive orientation in time and space, a manner of linguistic expression are defined (Bahtina-Jantsikene 2013b). Their core, however, is in the observation of interactive strategies of the interlocutors aiming at achieving understanding: the changes in transmitting/receiving roles, the level of engagement in the interaction, the verbal and non-verbal character of action and reaction, etc. as well as realization of conversational-discursive mechanisms characteristic of LaRa, such as repetitions and echo effects, reformulations and paraphrases, cognitive prophylactic reformulation – avoiding words and phrases that could be unclear for the interlocutor (idiomatic expressions) or misleading (false friends), flagged-term strategy – intended use of keywords (not in a statistical but a pragmatic sense) in speaking, and, possibly tag-switching and code-switching.

As the definition of LaRa evolves toward greater openness, eliminating the condition of genetic relationship of languages in receptive communication,

the researchers focus more and more on language configurations with ambiguous potential of mutual intelligibility – sometimes rather unusual, e.g. Turkish – German (Herkenrath 2012) or Greek – German (Androutopoulos 2015), Finnish – Russian (Verschik 2012) or Estonian – Russian (Bahtina-Jantsikene/Backus 2016). It can be observed that the new language constellations are appearing on the map of LaRa practices in Europe and due to integration and migration processes, more language contacts are being established in the framework of receptive multilingualism especially between the North and the South of the continent. Additionally, the research within the LaRa field is not so structured as in the case of mutual intelligibility analyses of related languages; various problems of multilingualism are addressed in them as well.

It is worth noting that interest in receptive multilingualism in Europe has increased especially after the European Commission presented a report which takes into account a new insight into the European multilingualism (European Commission 2008), going on to recommend research in the area of interlingual communication, identification of communication strategies and receptive competence that enable inter-comprehension, when interlocutors speak different languages without mutually knowing them. It has led to the dissemination of the concept of LaRa. The territorial map of communication with its usage is therefore, similarly to the former one, incomplete; those places in Europe where receptive multilingualism is not only practised, but became subject to linguistic study were marked (Fig. 2).

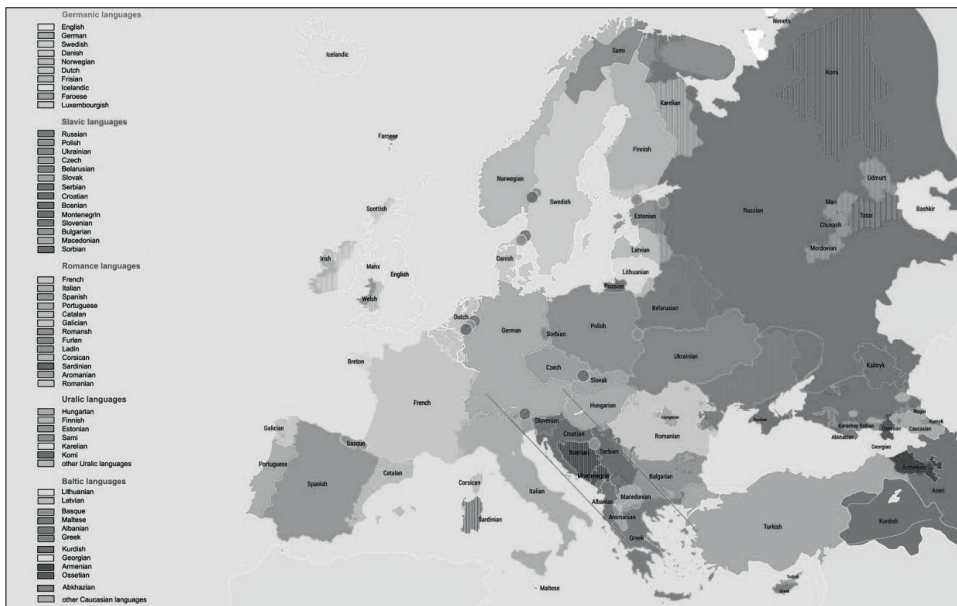


Fig. 2. Map of LaRa practices and research in Europe



### 3. Conclusions and further implications

LaRa lies in the centre of the idea of receptive multilingualism. The core of its addressor-addressee form is based on the fact that the participants of communication exchange roles in the course of the receptive multilingual discourse, speaking alternately in one language (addressor's role) and understanding in a different one (addressee's role). The reception of speech acts in this discourse is a process based on several stages of understanding during which the recipient 'soaks' the language of the addressor (Rehbein/ten Thije/Verschik 2011, 250). An overview of the achievements in the field of research on receptive multilingualism in Europe from two, i.e. aerial view and bottom-up perspectives suggests that depending on the adopted perspective, the map of *lingua receptiva* may look quite different. However, the dissemination of the idea on the European continent is confirmed.

Additionally, researchers point out, that as a communication mode LaRa has many advantages: it supports efforts to understand other cultures by extending their common platform of communication and improving social cohesion. It breaks down the barriers between nations, thus ensuring the choice of languages on the basis of equality and tolerance, without oppression or linguistic imperialism. Also, it corresponds to many official declarations of language policy and guidelines regarding foreign language teaching.

On the other hand, LaRa seems to be an 'endangered' communication mode on the European continent. Although still practised in the border areas of different countries (where languages are similar and mutual prejudices and national antagonisms are eliminated), in informal settings and in a minor degree at institutional level in such specific domains as healthcare, [LaRa] is not widely accepted nor actively supported. To maintain the image of an educated person, the use of standard languages is required and not those referred to ad hoc during spontaneous interlingual interactions (Braunmüller 2013, 218-219). Therefore, LaRa works more effectively in unofficial situations; in areas such as science, politics and business there is a tendency to seek a high standard in the 'English only' mode.

The main language ideologies rooted deeply in the European history, i.e. monolingualism and standardization, are still influential today, although one can notice that even if the ideological linkage between speakers' identity and the first language remains strong, the deterritorialization of language practices weakens their connections to the state and nation. To capture this ongoing dominance of monolingualism as well as the incipient moves to overcome it the term 'postmonolingual condition' is introduced by Y. Yildiz, with the additional explanation that the prefix 'post' has an evidently temporal dimension: "[I]t signifies the period since the emergence of monolingualism as dominant paradigm, which first occurred in late eighteenth-century Europe. Such historized understanding underscores the radical difference between multilingualism before and after the

monolingual paradigm” (Yildiz 2012, 4). However, the research shows that such ideological factors, i.e. conscious or not conscious metalinguistic assumptions, different cultural presuppositions, stereotypical beliefs etc. should not be ignored as determinants which can enhance or weaken or even block mutual understanding in language constellations that are burdened by negative attitudes (Bahtina-Jantsikene 2013a, 21). From the linguistic point of view, receptive multilingualism is therefore possible, but only if it is practised without prejudices.

Some limitation of the development occurs to be also the lack of awareness of its existence (as a mode of interlinguistic communication) and experience in receptive multilingual practices. Outside Scandinavia, where it functions as the subject of not only academic, but also public debate, it is not really high on the agenda. This is clearly pictured in comparison with the lively discussion on the role of English as a *lingua franca* (Beerens 2010, 5). On the other hand, treating of linguistic diversity on the continent as the civilisational wealth of Europe and the growing resistance to use ELF as the only means of communication at the supranational level or more tangibly – the challenges related to the expansion of new cultures and migration of people with extremely varied ethnolinguistic background – lead to seeking more open forms of multilingual communication.

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