

Multilingual interaction and minority languages: Proficiency and language practices in education and society Durk Gorter University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU – IKERBASQUE  
d.gorter@ikerbasque.org In this plenary speech I examine multilingual interaction in a number of European regions in which minority languages are being revitalized. Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, on 28 Oct 2019 at 07:42:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of DURK GORTER: MULTILINGUAL INTERACTION AND MINORITY LANGUAGES 85 2.1 Focus on multilingualism The ideas of Williams, Baker, Garcia, Canagarajah, Li Wei and others were an inspiration for the studies of multilingualism I have undertaken with my colleague Jasone Cenoz. Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, on 28 Oct 2019 at 07:42:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of DURK GORTER: MULTILINGUAL INTERACTION AND MINORITY LANGUAGES 87 interconnected world, in which the local and the global merge to become the GLOCAL in a networked society (Castells 2000; Wellman 2002) in which people are increasingly 'always on' (Baron 2008). The paper is based on my experience of over 30 years of research into the Frisian language in the Netherlands (Gorter 1987, 2001, 2008a), in addition to several years of comparative work on minority languages across the European Union (Sikma & Gorter 1990; Revised version of a plenary address given at the International Conference on Bilingual and Multilingual Interaction, Bangor, Wales, 30 March–1 April 2012 use, available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms>. It is interesting to note that speakers of European minority languages, such as Basque, Frisian, Welsh, Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Breton and Catalan, share certain characteristics that distinguish them from speakers of majority languages, especially the fact that they all become fluent bilingual speakers. This way of conceptualizing the idea of repertoire fits with our focus on multilingualism because we also want to take into consideration all the languages in the speaker's repertoire, ranging from the language maximally known, to the languages in which a speaker develops partial or minimal competence or can only recognize a language, even if we are aware that 'languages' are constructed entities (Makoni & Pennycook 2007). Theories and models about revitalization or about loss and maintenance of minority languages are often based on a vision of a society in which only two languages play a role, one being the minority language, such as Basque, Breton, Catalan, Frisian, Irish, Scottish Gaelic or Welsh, and the other the dominant language, such as Spanish, French, Dutch or English. The definition in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe (1992) is frequently quoted in the literature (e.g. Dunbar 2001: 91; Extra & Gorter 2001: 19; Hult 2004: 192; Darquennes 2011: 549; Nic Craith 2012: 377). Education is seen as a crucial variable for the revitalization of minority languages: Fishman (1991, 2001), in his influential multi-stage model of the GIDS (Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale), emphasizes the importance of language acquisition, learning and education. The associated language institutes, such as the Alliance Française for French or the Goethe Institut for German, actively promote their languages and cultures to learners in numerous countries across the world, and in part explain their spread. The project is carried out in collaboration between the Faculty of Education of the University of the Basque Country in Donostia–San Sebastian, the Basque Autonomous Community in 'Spain and the Mercator Research Centre of the Fryske Akademy in the province of Friesland in the Netherlands. For my discussion I will draw on the results of the long-running project on the 'Added value of multilingualism and diversity in educational contexts', in

which the teaching of languages in the Basque Autonomous Community in Spain is compared to that in the province of Friesland in the Netherlands (Arocena et al. 2010). Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, on 28 Oct 2019 at 07:42:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of 8 4 PLENARY SPEECHES definition contains the word 'state' no less than four times, which demonstrates the power of the state authorities to give official recognition to a minority language on its territory (or to deny such recognition). Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, on 28 Oct 2019 at 07:42:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of DURK GORTER: MULTILINGUAL INTERACTION AND MINORITY LANGUAGES 89 and other languages (such as immigrant languages). A multi-method approach was used, including questionnaires, classroom observations, student essays, language diaries and photographs, to collect quantitative and qualitative data on such matters as language proficiency, language use and attitudes, in a sample of secondary school students aged from 14 to 16, as well as among their teachers. A number of research reports were produced for the Basque government and are available online (Arocena et al. 2010; Douwes, Hanenburg & Lotti 2010; Bangma, Van der Meer & Riemersma 2011; De Vries & Arocena 2011). Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, on 28 Oct 2019 at 07:42:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of 9 0 PLENARY SPEECHES However, the regional government generously supports and facilitates the teaching of Basque, and parents are free to choose the model they want for their child. Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, on 28 Oct 2019 at 07:42:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of DURK GORTER: MULTILINGUAL INTERACTION AND MINORITY LANGUAGES 91 Arocena 2011). I draw on the results of a long-running project on the 'Added value of multilingualism and diversity in educational contexts' among secondary school students, and show that there are interesting differences and similarities between the minority language (Basque or Frisian), the majority language (Spanish or Dutch) and English. Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, on 28 Oct 2019 at 07:42:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of DURK GORTER: MULTILINGUAL INTERACTION AND MINORITY LANGUAGES 83 Extra & Gorter 2001, 2008). Although this definition is widely used, it is not undisputed, because Article 1a of the Charter explicitly excludes 'dialects of the official language(s) of the State or the languages of migrants', and such varieties would be described by some as minority languages. Our approach also implies that 'the goal in multilingual education should be to behave as a competent multilingual speaker' (Cenoz & Gorter 2011: 367) and the school should adopt a 'flexible bilingual pedagogy' (Creese & Blackledge 2010: 112). A comparative research project For the discussion I will draw on the results of the project entitled 'Added value of multilingualism and diversity in educational contexts', which has run for several years, and in which the teaching of languages in the Basque Autonomous Community in Spain is compared to what happens in schools in the Province of Friesland in the Netherlands. The basic aim of the project is to compare the position of the languages in education in both regions, with a focus on the minority languages Basque and Frisian, but in both regions also looking at the majority languages Spanish and Dutch, as well as English use, available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms>. After the end of the Franco dictatorship in 1975, during the period of transition to democracy, the educational authorities of the Basque Autonomous Community developed three linguistic models: Model A, in which all teaching is through Spanish, and Basque is taught for about three hours per week; Model B, in which all subjects are taught

through both languages for more or less equal amounts of time; and Model D, in which all lessons are in Basque, except when Spanish and English are being taught as subjects. Outside the Basque Autonomous Community itself, that is, in the other parts of the Basque Country – the historical province of Navarre in Spain and the area known as Iparralde in the south of France – advances in teaching the minority language have been much weaker (see also Zalbide & Cenoz 2008; Cenoz 2009). Language practices comprise the routine selections that speakers make from their linguistic repertoire (Spolsky 2004: 5), which includes all types of linguistic behaviour by individuals in a multilingual context. It is often believed that multilingual communities were once monolingual, a misconception also applied to countries as a whole, but in reality regions such as the Basque Country, Friesland or Wales have been bilingual or multilingual at least to some degree for several hundred years. Garcia (2009: 45), in her book on bilingual education in the twenty-first century, broadens the scope of translanguaging to all 'multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds'. For Li Wei (2011) the concept of translanguaging has a different source because it builds on the notion of 'linguaging' in psycholinguistics, and the term also links to Becker's (1988) attempt to move away from language as a noun to language as a verb. From our comparative studies of autochthonous minority languages in the European Union (Sikma & Gorter 1990; Gorter 2008a) we concluded that the position in education of most minority languages covered by the Charter can at best be characterized as weak or very weak. In a comparative perspective on European minority languages, the Basque language group comes out as relatively strong and the Frisian language group occupies an intermediate position (Nelde, Strubell & Williams 1996: 65).

### 3.1 Multilingual education in the Basque Country

One of the most significant developments affecting a European minority language has taken place in the Basque Autonomous Community in the north of Spain, where the main language of instruction in the education system has changed from Spanish (and only Spanish) to predominantly Basque. Revitalization processes no longer take place in a bilingual context with one minority and one dominant language, but increasingly in a multilingual context in which international and immigrant languages are also present. The language usage patterns of teachers and students can be examined under this heading, but it is also important to investigate language use in wider society, asking questions about the development of languages in a specific community of speakers, how speakers use the languages in their repertoire, how languages interact with each other and how different groups of speakers use languages. In the Welsh context and for Garcia in the US, translanguaging applies to two languages, but Canagarajah (2011) uses the term for 'the general communicative competence of multilinguals'. Li Wei (2011: 1223) applies translanguaging to multilinguals in its widest sense, since it includes 'any going between different linguistic structures, including different modalities'. In contrast, we believe that 'if multilinguals have some special characteristics when learning and using languages, monolingual native speakers of each of the languages they speak cannot be the appropriate reference' (Cenoz & Gorter 2011: 367). Speakers of Arabic, Turkish, Chinese, as well as those from European Union countries such as Poland, Bulgaria, Romania and many others have migrated to countries all over Europe. London, where Baker & Eversley (2000) estimated that school children speak over 300 different home languages, has been used to demonstrate the extensive linguistic diversity of modern urban settings (Salverda 2002). In many cases a

monolingual mindset (Clyne 2005) lies behind ideas that go against bilingualism; a similar way of thinking occurs among authors on minority languages when they think in terms of two languages only – the majority and the minority language – ignoring other languages. Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, on 28 Oct 2019 at 07:42:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of 8 8 PLENARY SPEECHES a 'bilingual mindset'. For example, many studies and governmental reports mention the importance of teaching the minority language at school (Oakes 2001; Coluzzi 2007; Kaplan & Baldauf 2007; Council of Europe 2010; Henn–Reinke 2012). An example is the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, mentioned earlier, which states in its Explanatory Report (Council of Europe 2010: 43) that 'A crucial factor in the maintenance and preservation of regional or minority languages is the place they are given in the education system'. The discussion demonstrates the complexity of everyday multilingual practices and the outcomes have implications for the gap between education and society and for further research into the linkages between language proficiency and actual language practices. In this plenary paper I want to examine the interaction between three or more languages in a number of European regions in which minority languages are already experiencing revitalization. Additional considerations include the aims of language teaching and more complex questions such as how languages are taught, what teaching strategies are used, how the school tries to improve the level of proficiency in each of the languages and the desired outcomes in terms of proficiency. We distinguish three dimensions in the focus on multilingualism: (1) the whole linguistic repertoire, (2) the multilingual speakers and (3) the wider social context.

### 2.2.3 The wider social context

Today, regions where minority languages are spoken, such as Wales, the Basque Country or Friesland, can no longer be thought of as closed, traditional societies. The most recent full report available relates to 2006 (Gobierno Vasco 2008), although some provisional figures for 2011 have been released (Viceconsejería de Política Lingüística 2012), which show a gradual increase in the number of speakers. The areas of lower density are mainly in the southern half of the autonomous community and in the urban areas of Bilbao, Vitoria and San Sebastian. Baker (2007: 2–3) examines the potential advantages of using translanguaging in the classroom to enable the student to develop into a balanced and confident bilingual person. Baker suggests that bilingualism offers communication, cultural, curriculum, cognitive, character and cash advantages. She further asserts that 'despite curricular arrangements that separate languages, the most prevalent bilingual practice in the bilingual education classrooms is that of translanguaging' (Garcia 2009: 304). In the traditional approach, based on a 'monolingual mindset' (Clyne 2005: xi), the competence of a multilingual person in one language is compared to that of a native speaker. The second category is 'partial' competence which concerns specialized language, registers and genres and also touches on the whole range of language skills, with some limitations. Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, on 28 Oct 2019 at 07:42:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of 8 6 PLENARY SPEECHES no minimum language knowledge. They can be characterized as 'speakers who use their resources when communicating with monolingual and multilingual interlocutors' (Cenoz & Gorter 2011: 367). He uses an analogy from athletics, in which the high hurdler blends the competences of a high jumper and a sprinter, but it is unfair to compare one type of athlete to the other. Another factor in increased linguistic diversity is, of course, the spread of numerous 'migrant' (or community or heritage) languages. Barni

(2006: 11) found traces of 24 varieties in the linguistic landscape of one neighbourhood in Rome, a predominantly monolingual Italian city. Theories of language revitalization point to education as a crucial variable, and international legal instruments recognize the right to teach minority languages at school. The Charter refers to 'languages that are traditionally used within a given territory of a state by nationals of that state who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the state's population and [are] different from the official language(s) of that state'. Multilingual speakers learn and use their languages while participating in language practices that are shaped by the social context. I prefer the view put forward by Blommaert & Backus (2011), for whom repertoire is based in someone's biography and comprises the individual's current language resources, their actual skills and competences. The competence of multilingual speakers is fluid, not fixed: difficult to measure, but real (Cenoz, Arocena & Gorter in press). Young minority language speakers may not be aware of concepts such as 'minority language', 'dominant language' or 'international language', but as speakers they soon become aware of the social inequalities of the languages they speak; they pay attention to the significance of language choice and to the role of languages in social relationships. English is followed at some distance by a limited number of widely used languages such as French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, Korean, Arabic and Chinese. To complement this plenary, I will use the outcomes of this sub-project to illustrate the next generation's awareness of the importance of multilingualism. We held interviews with a number of teachers and carried out classroom observation in different schools (see also De Vries & use, available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms>. Introduction Activities to protect and promote minority languages are common throughout Europe and beyond. However, early efforts to secure the survival of minority languages showed that revitalization cannot be achieved by schools alone; society at large is at least as significant. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000481> Downloaded from <https://www.cambridge.org/core>. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000481> Downloaded from <https://www.cambridge.org/core>. Thus it is not the speakers of a minority language, or activists or language experts, but the state that has the power to determine the status of a minority language, including whether it officially exists at all. My emphasis is on European minority languages, in particular Basque and Frisian. One of the most creative concepts of recent years is probably TRANSLANGUAGING ('trawsieithu' in Welsh): a skill that aids the development of bilingualism. Baker (2001) attributes its origins to Cen Williams, for whom it means (2002: 2) '(i) receiving information in one language and (ii) using or applying it in the other language'. It is a skill that bilingual Welsh-English children already use in everyday life, but one that should also be developed systematically at school, because it reinforces not only the two languages, but the relationship between them. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000481> Downloaded from <https://www.cambridge.org/core>. In this plenary speech I want to apply our ideas to a comparison of Basque and Frisian and other European minority languages.

## 2. 1.1 The whole linguistic repertoire

Our focus on multilingualism makes us look again at the concept of REPERTOIRE: 'the totality of linguistic resources available to members of particular communities' (Gumperz 1986: 21–22). The third category is 'minimal' competence, which depends on the kind of encounters a speaker experiences, and may be merely temporary knowledge, such as learning the odd word when visiting a country. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000481>

Downloaded from <https://www.cambridge.org/core>. Cook (1992, 2003) and Grosjean (1985, 2008) proposed some time ago that multilingual speakers have different characteristics from monolingual speakers because they have more than one language in their repertoire. Similarly, Grosjean (2010: 75) states that the 'bilingual is not the sum of two (or more) complete or incomplete monolinguals'. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000481> Downloaded from <https://www.cambridge.org/core>. The origins of this vision are based on concepts like DIGLOSSIA (Ferguson 1959; Fishman 1967) which take account of only two languages. This limited set of languages also appears in many less expected places, such as an option for the operating language of an electronic device in the home, its instruction booklet and guarantee document. This way of thinking is common and, following Clyne, I want to label it use, available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms>. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000481> Downloaded from <https://www.cambridge.org/core>. Policies to promote minority languages are in operation throughout Europe and elsewhere. But he also warned that a 'narrow education framework within which language maintenance retrieval and revival activities have been grounded is doomed to failure' (Fishman 2001: 417). Only a few minority language groups control their own fully-fledged school system, or have relatively strong provisions at different levels of education. Nelde, Strubell & Williams (1996: 6) noted that education as social agency may contribute more to endangerment than to revival. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000481> Downloaded from <https://www.cambridge.org/core>. We also collected data about the advantages and disadvantages of multilingualism, as seen by different groups of university students in both regions. The disadvantages mentioned include 'knowing a word only in one language and borrowing it, polluting the language with that word'; 'you might reject your native language (Basque in my case) if you learn another one that is more useful' and even 'I cannot think of any disadvantages'. In the early 1980s Model B and Model D together were offered to less than 25% of all students, the remainder being educated under the Spanish Model A. use, available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms>. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000481> Downloaded from <https://www.cambridge.org/core>. In the language surveys four different sociolinguistic zones are distinguished in terms of the proportion speaking Basque: (1) less than 20%, (2) 20–50%, (3) 50–80% and (4) over 80%. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000481> Downloaded from <https://www.cambridge.org/core>. Education is a crucial variable, but the wider society is equally significant. The context of revitalization is no longer bilingual but increasingly multilingual. Of course, language learning continues outside the classroom, mainly through language use, so how the different languages are used has great significance. In this plenary paper I will be looking from a multilingual perspective at these two axes: language practices and proficiency on the one hand and education and society on the other. Theoretical approach Work on bilingualism and multilingualism has been inspired in many ways by research in Wales. Translanguaging, in its original formulation, is a teaching method in which, for example, the listening, singing or reading taking place during a lesson is in one language (Welsh), and further work, such as discussion or writing a summary, is in the other (English). They make use of all their linguistic resources and navigate between their languages in interaction (see also

Kramsch 2006). This perspective can be applied to research into the acquisition of languages as well as to the classroom in multilingual education. Just as there is no absolute maximum, there is use, available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms>. The repertoire of a multilingual speaker comprises his knowledge of all languages taken together. Multilingual speakers are not different monolingual people when they use each of their two, three or four languages at different times or on different occasions. A multilingual speaker uses different languages for different purposes, sometimes using one language at a time, and at others mixing languages. Monolingual majority language speakers, in contrast, find only one language in their surroundings and grow up using that language, their 'mother tongue'. At the time of these early contributions it was useful to apply a schematic representation of two languages to such societies. However, over the last decades societies have changed, becoming ever more linguistically diverse, so there are several reasons why we can no longer simply talk of 'bilingual societies'. Words from these languages might also be used for the name of an exotic restaurant, a type of food, on a label inside a piece of clothing, or the name of a distant location, habit or product, which reaches us through the daily flow of news from every corner of the world. Instead, we need improved models to represent complex multilingual societies in which major and minor languages are present. Several international legal agreements contain provisions for teaching minority languages. It is clear that in areas where a minority language is spoken, the majority language often dominates the educational system. The advantages they mentioned include 'to understand cultures around the world'; 'to communicate with other people'; 'possibilities for travel'; 'more job opportunities'; 'access to more information'; 'making it easier to learn other languages'. In the school timetables the languages are allocated to different slots and are taught separately. Teachers of other subjects also contribute to this goal, even if they do not focus on teaching the language per se in the course of, for example, mathematics, history or music lessons. The use, available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms>. Minority language speakers are multilingual by nature, or by necessity, from a young age. use, available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms>. Cenoz and I want instead to focus on the whole repertoire of languages and take into consideration the relationships between them. They distinguish four broad categories of competence (2011: 16), which can be read as a sliding scale of language knowledge. 'Maximum' competence is comprehensive and refers usually to the mother tongue and to school learning and covers the whole range of language skills. It is clear, however, that there is no absolute maximum because the perfect knowledge of the ideal hearer-speaker does not exist in reality. This is the ability to identify a word or text as belonging to another language, such as recognizing a different script such as Chinese or Greek.

### 2.2.2 Multilingual speakers

The second dimension of our focus on multilingualism is that of 'multilingual speakers'. Cook (1992) suggested the concept of 'multicompetence' to denote a unique form of language competence that cannot be compared to that of monolinguals. They are part of an use, available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms>. These examples summarize the arguments in favour of and against multilingualism. How do we characterize them?

### 1.2.3.