



Report Ownership & Leadership module

A comparison between four minority languages – West Frisian, Latgalian, Mirandese and South Saami – in their use and integration in educational systems, based on the OWL+ module.



Ownership and Leadership: Pathway for (Endangered) Languages' Use in School

1. Introduction

Ownership and Leadership: Pathway for (Endangered) Languages' Use in School (OWL+) is a 3-year Erasmus+ Key Action 2 Partnerships for Cooperation project that aims to raise educators' awareness of under-resourced languages, provide them with adequate information about minority languages, and encourage their integration into different learning contexts. One of the tools created within this project, is the OWL+ module that features four units on different languages and one unit on ownership and leadership. The units aim present interesting facts about the languages, including the different ways of integrating them in education.

This report compares the four minority languages from the OWL+ module based on the units' contents about Latgalian, Mirandese, South Saami and West Frisian. The evaluation focuses on the status and the use of these languages in educational settings, following the units' chapter structure. The aim of this report is to help us understand each of the four minority languages better by looking at their unique qualities and the difficulties they face. Ownership and leadership initiatives are important for the support of these (endangered) languages. By studying the minority languages closely, we hope to provide useful insights that can guide policies and actions – especially in the domain of education – to support them.

2. Language Profiles

The language profiles of the four minority languages give us an outline of the usage, recognition and the status of each language. Once we have a better grasp of these characteristics, we can compare the minority languages in the way they have been implemented and integrated in education.

The four languages differ substantially in terms of the number of speakers. West Frisian, spoken in Fryslân, the northern province of the Netherlands, is the largest minority language among these four, with approximately 450,000 speakers.

Latgalian is spoken by 165,000 people throughout Latvia, which accounts for about 8% of the total population. In Latgale, the eastern region of Latvia, 98,000 people, approximately 32% of the local population, speak Latgalian.

Mirandese is spoken in the region Terra de Miranda, in northeastern Portugal, near the Portuguese-Spanish border. It is actively spoken by about 3,500 people. In addition to these active Mirandese speakers, there are 1,500 individuals who could speak the language but choose not to. Due to the lack of confidence among many potential speakers, Mirandese can be considered an endangered language. South Saami is spoken by about 500 to 600 people in Norway and a similar number in Sweden, making it an endangered language. However, the South Saami-speaking population is currently growing.

The extent to which people use their minority language in the community largely defines the position of that language. Whether the language is only spoken at home with family or also in a broader community context, such as in stores, provides insights into the confidence users have in speaking the minority language. Whether or not the minority language can be used with community authorities indicates the recognition and status of that language in relation to the majority language. Moreover, the official status of a minority language can highly influence the attitudes towards that language.

Frisian is spoken in both private and public spheres. The language can be used in communication with authorities in Fryslân. The status of the Frisian language has evolved over time. While it was seen as a peasant language in the early 19th century, it gained more recognition, followed by more rights for the Frisian language through the centuries. In 1956, Frisian was recognised as an official language and its status has continued to develop ever since.

Latgalian is used in most aspects of daily life. According to the Law on the Latvian Historical Lands, the state is responsible for ensuring the maintenance and development of the acquisition of Latgalian as a variety of the Latvian language. This includes educational institutions, public events and everyday work. Furthermore, streets and place names are being renewed in the Latgalian language.

Mirandese is mostly spoken within domestic settings. This is because many users of the language have a lack of confidence in speaking Mirandese. Mirandese was officially recognised in 1999, making it the only recognised regional language in Portugal. However, the inferior status that Mirandese had until the late 1990s continues to affect it today. Overcoming this stigma is challenging, but progress is being made step by step.

South Saami used to be a language primarily spoken within families, workplaces and during festivals. Nowadays, South Saami can be seen in the streets, on signs, boards and posters. South Saami is recognised and has been given an official status in Norway, along with North Saami and Lule Saami. Communication with the state, regional or municipal authorities can be conducted in South Saami if the citizen chooses to do so.

The use and status of minority languages vary for each language. While Frisian and Latgalian seem to be integrated into daily life, there are challenges in the daily use of Mirandese and South Saami has only recently become more visible in public spaces. While all minority languages are recognised as an official language nowadays, the attitudes towards the minority language are not always positive. The Mirandese language still suffers from the stigma it carried up until a few decades ago. However, all minority languages are growing in the use in daily life, making them more appreciated, but also creating more positive attitudes towards the linguistic diversity in a community.

3. Integration in the education system

The role of a minority language in education is crucial for passing it on to a new generation. Factors such as the historical context of language in education, whether or not the language is mandatory in schools, the availability of teaching materials and the pathway to becoming a teacher in a minority language all contribute to the integration of a minority language in the education system.

West Frisian

There are approximately 265 Dutch-Frisian bilingual childcare and preschool education centres in Fryslân. The aim is not only to raise children with the Frisian language, but also to stimulate children's language development, promote the benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism and to encourage bilingualism in all children by consistently using both languages.

In primary school, either Frisian lessons or Frisian as a language of instruction are mandatory. Some primary schools in Fryslân are trilingual, offering instruction in Dutch, Frisian, and English.

Learning materials are available for all levels of education.

The training required to become an educator for the Frisian language depends on the level of education one is teaching in. For pre-school educators, there is no specific focus on Frisian, although it is possible to sign up for workshops or classes specifically targeting Frisian language education, offered by external organisations.

The programme for primary school teachers in Fryslân includes a course titled "Frisian as a subject". For non-Frisian speaking students, a special course is offered on language acquisition.

For teaching Frisian on a secondary school, there is a programme similar to other school language subjects, such as Dutch, English, German and French. This programme involves improvement of the student's own language proficiency up to CEFR-level C2, grammar and syntax, (youth) literature, history of Fryslân and learning and training of didactic skills.

Latgalian

In the region of current Latvia, the language of instruction in all schools had to be Russian since 1824. However, in 1907, the local Latvian language was introduced as a school subject, and some schools even adopted Latvian as the main language, despite the prohibition. From 1920 onwards, primary schools in Latgale began offering Latgalian as language of instruction in the first two years. Starting from the third year, Latgalian was taught as a subject and the 'Baltic dialect' (today's Latvian Standard language) was the language of instruction. Additionally, there were also schools with Russian or Polish as languages of instruction, as well as Jewish schools.

During the occupation by Nazi Germany (1942-1944), Latgalian became the primary language of education. However, during the Soviet occupation, Standard Latvian was the only language used in schools. In 1991, Latvian independence was re-established and since then, Latgalian is no longer a language of instruction or a subject in any school.

Today, Latgalian may occasionally be offered as a facultative subject or taught in voluntary afternoon classes. Consequently, there is only a small number of teaching materials available that are officially recognised by the Ministry of Education and Science.

There is no official qualification for teachers of Latgalian language, literature or regional studies. Individuals who aspire to become a teacher of Latgalian can follow specific modules or courses, which are part of programmes in Latvian philology or in Latvian language and literature teacher training. However, these modules and courses generally offer no more than basic knowledge about Latgalian language and literature.

Mirandese

For a long time, the Mirandese language only had an oral tradition. In 1884, the first book in Mirandese was published by José Leite de Vasconcellos. The author of this poetry book later published the "Studies of Mirandese Philology I and II", which are still of great importance for the knowledge about the Mirandese language. Following the principles of this philology, an experimental Mirandese course for children aged 10 to 12 began in 1986 at the Preparatory School. The course turned out to be a success, with an increasing number of students enrolling each year.

Nowadays, Mirandese courses are available at all schools in Miranda but are still optional. Due to this facultative nature of the courses, there is a lack of an official teaching programme, instructional manuals and established guidelines for becoming a Mirandese language teacher.

South Saami

Boarding schools play a crucial role in the education of the South Saami language, as does online education, whether utilized independently or in combination with language camps. However, a significant challenge in South Saami education remains the lack of teaching materials. Saami programmes are offered in 53 kindergartens in Norway. In accordance with the Norwegian Kindergarten Act, kindergartens are responsible for protecting Saami culture and tradition. Saami is the main language in these kindergartens, in order to enhance the Saami identity of the children. At the primary school level, pupils can either follow education in Saami as a first language, or in Saami as a second language. On the lower secondary education level, this distinction still holds. In the upper secondary level however, all students follow the same amount of teaching hours in their Saami language.

To become a primary school teacher, one must follow a 5-year master's programme, focused on the South Saami language as well as on pedagogical and didactic aspects. Furthermore, the National Center for Art and Culture offers various teaching programmes and theme packages related to Saami.

While Frisian and South Saami are actively taught and used as the language of instruction in Fryslân and the Saami region in Norway, Mirandese and Latgalian are still facultative subjects in school. The minority languages that are not compulsory subjects, have significantly fewer official teaching materials available compared to the mandatory ones.

The requirements to become a teacher in the minority language vary widely for each language. For teaching South Saami in primary education, there is a 5-year master's programme, and there are various courses related to Saami available as well. In Fryslân there are courses for teaching Frisian in primary education and there is a separate programme for teaching Frisian in secondary education. For teaching Latgalian, basic courses are available within the Latvian teacher programme. However, for becoming a teacher in the Mirandese language, there is currently no programme at all.

The challenges faced by Mirandese and Latgalian, with limited educational integration, emphasize the need for tailored programmes and initiatives. For instance, the absence of a dedicated teacher programme for Mirandese marks the urgency of developing such resources to ensure the continuity of language education. Likewise, for Latgalian, there is a need for more educational materials supporting its teaching. Once there is a plan on how to fulfil the community needs, teachers can implement these plans in the educational context.

4. Outside the classroom

The minority languages play an important role in preserving and celebrating unique cultural identities. From literature to modern media and from sports to theatre, the linguistic diversity is visible and often crucial for the region's culture. At the same time, various cultural initiatives can boost the minority language, giving it attention and making it accessible to a broad audience.

West Frisian

Frisian can be found in the linguistic landscape of Fryslân, although it is less visible than might be expected from a region in which the minority language is strongly supported by governmental authorities.

Frisian Literature has developed similarly to other Western European literatures. The earliest Old Frisian texts found date back to the Middle Ages. The Mid Frisian era (1550-1800) delivered only a limited amount of Frisian literature. From 1800 onwards, Frisian literature slowly started to expand to what it is today, with many different movements, magazines, groups of writers and genres.

The regional broadcaster in Fryslân is completely bilingual with both Frisian and Dutch speakers. But the Frisian language is also promoted by the organisation of events such as It Grut Frysk Diktee (The Big Frisian Dictation). Moreover, social media give a boost to the Frisian language, for instance through the use of Frisian GIFs.

There are several initiatives and organisations for Frisian theatre in Fryslân, partly subsidised by the province. Furthermore, there is a declamation contest for youth to recite poems in Frisian. Frisian music encompasses a wide variety of genres and several Frisian songs have gained popularity throughout the Netherlands. An event promoting Frisian music is SJONG: a Frisian song festival for young people aged 12 to 18, where a Frisian song text is created for an existing song. There are also various other music festivals in Fryslân.

Latgalian

After the publication of the first book in Latgalian in 1753, Latgalian literature developed over the following centuries with wide historical, religious and linguistic diversity. Nevertheless, there were times when Latgalian literature faced oppression. It endured three printing bans, and following the last printing ban in Soviet Latvia, from 1960 to 1988, the aim was to nurture Latgalian literature alongside the Standard Latvian tradition, since many writers had decided to write in Standard Latvian rather than in Latgalian during Soviet times. Nowadays, every year about five books are published in Latgalian and many more books are bilingual. Furthermore, numerous books about the Latgalian history are published in Standard Latvian.

Music in Latgalian began with pop and schlager music in the 1990s. Since then, Latgalian songs have emerged in many other genres, creating a great diversity. Particularly, younger generations sing and write music in Latgalian.

The Latgalian language is gradually becoming more visible in public space, with signs, texts and product names written in Latgalian.

There are Latgalian programmes on television and radio, however there are no media channels that broadcast exclusively Latgalian content all day, every day.

Latgalian language, literature and cultural history have faced challenges and have relied on the efforts of NGOs and other entities, rather than being primarily supported by government institutions. Even though the Latvian state has some responsibility for Latgalian, as defined by the State Language Law.

Mirandese

Mirandese has a rich tradition of oral literature, including poetry, tales, songs and prayers. After the first books in Mirandese were published in the 20th century, a new stream of publications followed in the 21st century, with a growing number of authors writing and translating in Mirandese. Many different genres of books are now available in Mirandese, making the written language accessible to all speakers. The Mirandese language is spoken on local radio and television. Furthermore, the local government promotes the language by publishing in Mirandese and organizing cultural events.

A characteristic cultural aspect for the Mirandese language is the Mirandese popular theatre, which is performed in the streets of the villages. Local actors recite their texts, rather than acting out the script, making the scripts very important. The most important character is the Fool, who isn't part of the plot but makes everyone laugh throughout the performance. While both Portuguese and Spanish are spoken in the plays, the Fool exclusively speaks Mirandese.

The Mirandese language is represented in folk and popular music songs, which are well-known, even outside of Miranda. Dance is also a very important aspect of the Mirandese culture. The musical pieces, called "Ihaços" are not always lyrical, but when they are, the lyrics can be either in Portuguese, Spanish or Mirandese.

South Saami

South Saami has a broad collection of oral literature, but a relatively small number of works in written literature. To expand the South Saami literature, new works are written in South Saami and original material from other languages is translated.

The language and culture of the South Saami are shared through dramatic art by a South Saami theatre group.

The Saami Sports Federation pursues and strengthens the Saami traditions using three branches of sports: skiing, track racing and lasso throwing; reindeer racing; and football. These sports carry the Saami cultural tradition, including the language.

South Saami newspapers have been published in both the South Saami language and the majority language. Likewise, the South Saami language is also represented on television and radio. Recently, South Saami programmes for children and youth have been broadcasted for the entire Norwegian audience.

The traditional Saami music is the joik (or vuelie in South Saami). It is more than a song; rather, it is a form of expression and of representing the world.

The literature of a minority language is of great value for understanding the language because it represents both cultural and linguistic development. While the literary tradition of Frisian and Latgalian dates back centuries, written literature in Mirandese and South Saami emerged at later stages. The use of the minority language in media differs greatly. For instance, the Frisian broadcaster adopts a bilingual approach with Frisian as the main language, just as the South Saami language is represented alongside the majority language in Norwegian and Swedish media. In contrast, in Latvia, there are only a few programmes in Latgalian.

In many minority languages, theatre serves as a means to share language and culture within a community. Music has the same goal, but often extends to a far broader public outside the minority language's region.

In the Frisian and South Saami context, the minority language is of great importance for the local culture. In media, sports and theatre both the culture and the language are shared with everyone in the community. Mirandese and Latgalian remain considerably less integrated in daily life. Both languages lack visibility in the public spheres. The difference in integration highlights a critical need to elevate the status and presence of Latgalian and Mirandese in community life.

5. Broader context

A minority language is traditionally used within a specific territory, but speakers are not restricted to one specific area or region, consequently a language can extend to a much broader context. Likewise, the regions of a minority language, are often rich in linguistic diversity. Various languages coexist within a community, creating space for cultural diversity as well.

West Frisian

The Frisian language has – next to Dutch – an official status in the Netherlands. Several organisations in Fryslân facilitate contact and joint activities between Frisian and other minority languages in Europe. Moreover, there are funding opportunities, provided by government and non- government organisations, for various projects and activities related to Frisian.

Latgalian

Latgalian is predominantly spoken in Latgale, though it has extended to various regions across Latvia. Additionally, there are many more languages spoken, both in Latgale and in Latvia, as there are many different ethnic groups living in Latvia.

Mirandese

The Mirandese language has spread worldwide as many Mirandese families have migrated, searching for a better live. Since most of them were illiterate and their only language was Mirandese, they maintained it as the main language within their families and in interactions with other Mirandese migrants.

In the region of Miranda, Mirandese is not the only language. All speakers of Mirandese speak Portuguese as well and most of them also speak Spanish. In the northern part of the region, the Leonese language is often spoken too.

Recently, the Mirandese population has been progressively decreasing and aging, since young people leave their hometowns to study or work abroad and rarely come back. However, a few young people, even without cultural ties to the region, come to Miranda out of interest in the language and culture, providing a source of revival for Mirandese.

South Saami

Swedish and Norwegian belong to a completely different language family than Saami does, namely the North Germanic or Nordic languages, whereas Saami languages belong to the Uralic language family. Despite both languages being quite distinct from Saami, they share significant similarities with each other.

Norway has two official versions of written Norwegian of equal status: Bokmål and Nynorsk. As a consequence, there is quite some tolerance for dialects compared to many other nations. However, there is far less space for the minority languages than there is for the Standard Norwegian languages. In the public space of Sweden, there is less acceptance for the use of dialects.

In addition to the three Saami languages, there are three other recognised minority languages in Norway: Kven, Romani and Romanes.

Although there are many difficulties, such as cultural, geographical and political borders within the region of Saepmie, there is a notable level of transnational cooperation within the Saami community, which is of great importance.

None of the four minority languages is exclusively spoken in the region where most speakers live. Families move from those areas to other parts of the country or even to different parts of the world, and they maintain their minority language as the main language within the family. Consequently, these languages spread across countries and the world. Moreover, in the regions where these minority languages are spoken, there is typically a linguistic diversity that goes beyond the minority language itself. This includes the majority language but also languages from other immigrant groups in the area.

6. Ownership and leadership

Agency and the sense of responsibility of community members active in the broad field of education can be powerful tools to enhance the vitality of an (endangered) minority language.

The OWL+ project group views ownership (sense of responsibility) and leadership (agency in the revitalisation process) as interlinked concepts, and one cannot be defined without the other. They can be fluid depending on factors such as the language community, the location and persons present in a situation (for example urban vs. rural areas, new speakers vs. traditional speakers). Therefore within OWL+ not one clear-cut definition is assigned, but ownership and leadership is interpreted as:

In the concepts of ownership and leadership, a language community (or individuals within it) apply theoretical or academic knowledge to their context, guided by their own experience and set their own standards of success. Ownership refers to a sense of responsibility towards one's own language and the personal relationships among the community. Different agents can take ownership and leadership, such as educators, families, or cultural initiatives.

Individuals or groups that take agency in language preservation and promotion have recognised and understood the needs and wishes of the language community and are leading by example. Their efforts are recognised by the community members, and their agency also empowers the community to grow, to develop a sense of awareness, and to take action on their own. Such leadership also empowers speakers with different levels of competencies to take ownership and pride in their skills.

To truly take ownership, stakeholders need to comprehend the needs of the speaker community and address their challenges proactively. Community leaders play an essential role in identifying and mapping these needs, laying the foundation for strategies to tackle the problems.

The next essential step in the revitalisation process is leadership. Community leaders and educators should make the minority language accessible for everyone in the community.

The final step involves empowering the community to take action. Once the community members are conscious of their language usage and the linguistic diversity in their community, they can proactively engage in activities that promote the active use of their language. Through this, they can see the benefits of a diverse linguistic environment. The promotion of a language can lead to positive attitudes towards that language, resulting in people adopting the language in their daily lives.

The ownership and leadership unit presents examples from all four language contexts where a person or group initiated a project that showed a sense of responsibility towards the language, an under-

standing of the speaker community's needs, agency in the revitalisation process, and the potential to empower the community to take action. These examples show efforts to proactively engage in activities that promote the active use of the languages in their daily lives.

The examples from the Frisian, Latgalian, Mirandese, and South Saami communities show the different kinds of actors that can take ownership and leadership, and some are more directly connected to formal education than others.

The goal can be to spread the joy of reading and popularise Frisian children books (Berneboeke-ambassadeur), motivate pupils choosing Mirandese as an optional subject through an award scheme (Agabones Amadeu Ferreira), building a Latgalian community centre (centre in Upīte), or open a dialogue between Saami and non-Saami youngsters in Sweden and Norway to inform about Saami culture, language, and society (Saami pathfinders).

Although there are clear contrasts between the languages – such as Latgalian and Mirandese being considerably less integrated into both educational frameworks and daily life than South Saami and Frisian – all context show community efforts to elevate the status and presence of their language and tackle communities' specific needs.