

#02

ECCA report

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The ECCA project: kick-off meeting and tools

Abstract: In this report, I explore some of the tools that the European Charter Classroom Activities (ECCA) project has developed or intends to develop during the 2019-2020 academic year in order to contribute to the dissemination of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) and to raise awareness among young European citizens about the value of linguistic diversity through education. This includes developing activities and teaching units and competitions, creating a website and ECRML-related content for social networks, preparing modules for universities, organizing meetings, conferences and a school exchange.

Key words: European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, language diversity, regional languages, minority languages, education, language policy, ECCA project, youth, school activities.

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The aim of the ECCA (European Charter Classroom Activities) project is to raise awareness about European linguistic diversity and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by implementing the educational guide in secondary schools. In the words of Sabrina Rasom, the ECCA project-leader:

Language is not just a means of communication, it is part of who you are. The European Charter gives rights to young people in language regions, something they often don't even know about. This ECCA project would like to raise awareness about the European Charter and make it better known.

A number of tools needed to be developed in order to achieve this goal; in this report, I will explore some of these tools, as well as the organization of the project.

The ECCA project, which is being undertaken during the 2019-2020 academic year, consists of different phases: the translation of the educational guide into the project languages and the creation of a website in these languages, the search for and selection of schools willing to participate in the pilot programme,





the kick-off meeting in Brussels, the preparation of teaching units by the schools and their practical implementation, the participation in a video competition and a school exchange for the winning pupils. To begin with, the schools that participate in the pilot programme must build on the activities that are briefly proposed in the educational guide to develop teaching units adapted to each specific context (this topic will be focused on in future reports) or they can generate their own activities. After this first didactic stage, teachers implement their teaching units in the classroom with their students.

However, the ECCA project does not simply consist of the practical implementation of the guide, but rather aims to bring students from different linguistic regions together in order to promote intercultural dialogue and learning and to raise awareness about language diversity. In fact, looking at the way languages are handled in other countries and getting to know speakers of other languages allows you to find out more about (and even to reconsider) yourself, your language and what you feel and think about that language. Therefore, the project is understood as a network that allows the exchange of knowledge and good practices between linguistic communities. That is why one of the components of the project is a school exchange which a school from each region can win through a competition. For this contest, the students had to make a short video about the following topic “What does your language mean to you, now and in the future?”. The 49 videos that have been made for this purpose as of now are available on the ECCA project’s YouTube channel (@thisismylanguage) and they deal with many issues: intergenerational transmission and the experiences of the elderly, music and the regional or minority language, the importance of language for the future, the relationship between the sense of belonging and one's own language, the modernity of their language, the link between regional and linguistic identities and the European identity, important people for the language, the connection between emotions and the mother tongue and so on.

In addition to the YouTube channel, the ECCA project also has its own [website](http://thisismylanguage.eu) (thisismylanguage.eu), in English, Catalan, Frisian,





Friulian, Hungarian and Ladin (undoubtedly the only webpage with this language combination), and it is found on the Twitter account @myeulanguage. Moreover, every project partner can, of course, also create further digital tools. Afûk, for example, has created a Moodle virtual learning environment to pool and work on their teaching units; access to this environment will be given to other partners upon request. The University of Udine is developing, within the ECCA project, learning modules on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (from a theoretical, historical and specific language framework) for higher education, in order to promote knowledge about it in university studies, especially in the fields of teaching, law and languages, that is, among future teachers, legal practitioners and linguists¹.

¹ *These modules will be elaborated on in greater detail in a specific report.*

As already mentioned, the school exchange and the implementation are two key elements, especially for a European project like this one, with seven partners and five languages





(plus English, as a working language) and more than twice as many schools. To this end, the initial meeting that took place on 15th November 2019 in Brussels was crucial, since it allowed everyone to get to know the participants of the project, to share their doubts and to find similarities in our sociolinguistic situations and concerns. Although recurring language prejudices might want to make us believe that our languages have no worth outside our language region and community (and according to some, not even there), all languages are part of humanity's shared cultural heritage and are to be treasured; therefore, as the project's motto states, it is important to "shift your language border with the ECCA project" and to make our languages known throughout Europe.

The initial kick-off meeting was attended by representatives of all the linguistic regions involved and included the following activities²: opening words, by Sabrina Rasom and Sietske Poepjes (the latter via video message)³; a presentation of the project, by Sabrina Rasom and Ypie Boersma; a short introduction by all the participants; a keynote speech on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, by Vesna Crnić-Grotić; a keynote speech on the educational guide, by Vicent Climent-Ferrando; a brainstorming session with working groups and a final discussion on different aspects of the project, and the closing remarks. I would like to highlight two ideas expressed by the teachers who will be putting the project into practice:

² A detailed programme of this meeting can be found on: <https://thisismylanguage.eu/>

³ The video message can be watched on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWnHI02to6k>





“minority languages are a good starting point in the pursuit of who we are” (Silvia Murer) and constitute “a new way of feeling European” (Stefano Riz). Another observation highlights the importance of “changing the mental frameworks implicitly, not explicitly, [...] and of linking regional or minority languages to the future, to the young, to the cities and to progress” (Vicent Climent-Ferrando); to this end, it is also important to underline the project’s intention of developing competitions and challenges and, in general, of relating linguistic diversity to fun, music, games, memes, etc.

In addition, it may be interesting for the partner regions to hold their own coordination meetings, at which not only some teachers but also students from different schools involved in the project can meet up. Therefore, the Xarxa Vives d’Universitats organized a conference on linguistic diversity in the classroom, which took place on 4th December 2019 at the campus of the Universitat Jaume I, in Castelló de la Plana, coinciding with the celebration of the Day of Linguistic Rights in the Valencian Country. On this day, teachers and students from the Valencian schools involved in the project came together and it featured the following activities⁴: opening words, by Pilar Safont and Sergi Linares; a presentation of the project, by Elija Lutze; a keynote speech on linguistic rights and linguistic equality, by Rafael Castelló; a workshop/speech on language uses and social social identities of Valencian adolescents, by Avel·lí Flors-Mas; a

⁴ A detailed programme of this conference can be found on: <https://www.vives.org/events/jornada-forum-vives-sobre-la-carta-europea-de-les-llengues-regionals-o-minoritari-ies-celrom/>

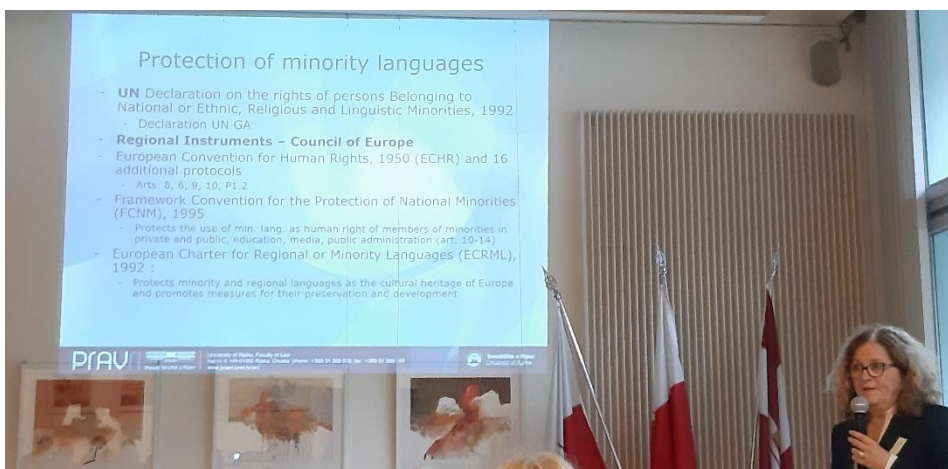


Catalan language contest for students, by the Voluntariat Lingüístic de la Universitat Jaume I, and a coordination meeting for teachers, by the Xarxa Vives d'Universitats. From this conference, I would emphasize that education can help “build an identity and a conscious position in the linguistic ecosystem” (Avel·lí Flors-Mas) and that the only way to achieve “veritable linguistic security” in a society is when rights “are linked to obligations” (Rafael Castelló).

I hope that all these tools will be useful in disseminating knowledge about the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages among the stakeholders involved in secondary education, in order to dispel linguistic prejudices and to raise awareness about the value of linguistic diversity among European citizens, and thus contribute to a fairer, more egalitarian and democratic Europe. Moreover, I trust that the interaction and dialogue, ultimately, the network that will be established among all the stakeholders involved in the project will generate further proposals and initiatives for activities, competitions and projects.

Finally, I cannot leave out the evaluation of the project and the implementation of the educational guide in the classroom. Will the attitudes of the students towards regional or minority languages have changed for the better? What are the teachers' thoughts on the activities they have carried out? Has the project helped to deconstruct some linguistic prejudices? In short, have

we promoted linguistic diversity in the classroom? To answer these questions, the universities involved in the project (the University of Udine, the Partium Christian University and the Xarxa Vives d'Universitats) will work on questionnaires and surveys for both



teachers and students and will be monitoring the project. At the end of this pilot programme, it will then be decided whether to extend the project to other linguistic regions of the NPLD.



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About ECCA Reports:

The series of publications under the title ECCA Reports aims to disseminate the contents of the ECCA project in particular, but also to raise awareness on the fundamental importance of the Europe Charter for Regional and Minority Languages in general, to influence public opinion and to support the activity of the Council of Europe on this subject. ECCA targets European youngsters through a network of schools which have agreed to develop and apply specific classroom activities and an exchange of experiences among pupils from different regions.

Three universities are involved in the production of the ECCA reports: Partium Christian University, Vives Universities Network and Udine University- CIRF. These institutions are fundamental in order to accompany and study the development of the activities from an academic point of view, combining the practical and the scientific aspect, thereby contributing to the dissemination of the results at different levels.

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More information on ECCA: thisismylanguage.eu/