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LANGUAGE IMMERSION IN THE MULTI-SYSTEM EDUCATION IN ANDORRA

Abstract: The aim of the article is to present the multi-system education in Andorra and the related language immersion. The observations made during the author's participation in an academic seminar in Andorra and acquiring literature on the subject enabled her to explore the originality of the country's educational system, consisting in the freedom of choice among three different systems: the Andorran, French or Spanish school, and, as a consequence, in language immersion. Choosing a school, parents and students are guided by such criteria as the distance between the school and the place of residence, the language of instruction, the possibility of continuing education abroad. The variety of educational systems results from the history of the Principality of Andorra. The first schools were founded by the French and the Spanish, who competed for influence in a given area. The innovative Andorran school was created only in 1983, and since that time it has been thriving and has the highest number of students. The author poses a question about the relationship between the educational system and the Andorrans' national identity, as well as about the possibility of cooperation between the systems.

Keywords: multi-system education, language immersion, Andorran school

The current article concerning the issue presented in the title was written on the basis of the author's observations and the literature which was made available to her during her participation in an academic seminar in Andorra.

The Principality of Andorra is a young country, situated in the Eastern Pyrenees, bordered by France in the north and by Spain in the south. This small country, with an area of only 468 km² and with a population of about 85,000 inhabitants,¹ was founded in 1278. Andorra is a constitutional monarchy in which the function

¹ The data from the Statistics Department of the Government of Andorra from 2012 indicates that in that period the country had 76,246 inhabitants (<http://www.estadistica.ad>). Over the years, their number increased to about 85,000.

of the head of the state is performed jointly by two entities (Co-Princes of Andorra) (*Princepsa*):² the President of France and the Catholic Bishop of the Catalan town of La Seu d'Urgell. The Principality is divided into seven parishes: Canillo, Encamp, Ordino, La Massana, Andora, Sant Julia de Loria and Escaldes-Engordany, which are the equivalents of Polish *gminy*. The capital is a city with the same name as the country. It has about 20,000 inhabitants and is referred to by the locals as Andorra la Vella, which means "The Old Andorra" (*Culture. Andorra*, 2014). It is situated high in the mountains (over 1,000 m a.s.l.), near the estuary of the Valila del Norte river. The Andorran landscape is composed entirely of mountains (the highest peak is Pic Alt de la Coma Pedrosa – 2,946 m a.s.l., situated on the border with Spain) and small valleys. Thanks to its mountainous location, the country was left unaffected by many wars, and, as a result, it boasts a number of fantastically preserved Roman sacral monuments, churches, chapels and monasteries, scattered over the Andorran valleys.

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

In Andorra, there is a number of different educational systems: the Andorran School, the French National Education and the Spanish system, including religious and private schools. Altogether, there are 39 primary and secondary schools in seven parishes. Andorra's Qualified Act on Education [Llei qualificada d'Educació] has been in force since 1993. According to the Act, it is the family that chooses the educational system for their children. This choice is often made according to various criteria. During a debate which took place on the XX Conference "The History of Education. Social Cohesion and Education: Ideas, Politics and Experiences", which took place in Andorra la Vella in October 2012, a need was noted to conduct research on the motivation behind the choice of a given educational system the parents make for their child. It turned out that the choice can be justified by the distance between the school and the place of residence, the parents' origins or the language of communication used in a given educational system. The basis of education in the Andorran system and religious schools is the Catalan language; French is used in

² The word "prince" present in Western European languages stems from the Latin *princeps*, *prince*, *princepe*, *prin*z. Andorran *coprinceps* are known in English as "co-princes." As a consequence, Andorra is referred to as a "principality," and, therefore, is generally seen as a monarchy, or even a constitutional monarchy. See e.g.: E.J. Osmańczyk, *Encyklopedia ONZ i stosunków międzynarodowych*, Warszawa 1986, p. 36; W. Jakubowski, T. Słomka, J. Wojnicki, *Systemy polityczne państw Europy nie będących członkami Unii Europejskiej*, [in:] K.A. Wojtaszczyk, W. Jakubowski (red.), *Spółczesność i polityka. Podstawy nauk politycznych*, Warszawa 2007, p. 571.

the French system, while Spanish – in the state and private Spanish system. Some parents admit that the Spanish educational system is perceived as the most attractive by the country's inhabitants who come from Spain and it is the main reason for enrolling children in one of the three religious schools: Sagrada Familia, Mare Janer or Saint Ermengol. For a period of twenty years, French schools have been the most prestigious; currently the situation has changed. A number of parents, looking from the perspective of their children's university education, stress the significance of the languages taught at school, e.g., instead of two languages, Catalan and French, they opt for immersion in three languages: Catalan, French and Spanish.

LANGUAGE IMMERSION

The economic transformation of the last 70 years has significantly changed Andorra. In 1955, the country had 6,000 inhabitants; now, there are about 85,000 of them. The most numerous groups of immigrants who contributed to social and economic growth of the country are the Spanish (Catalans, Andalusians and Galicians) and the Portuguese. The Constitution from 1993 states that Catalan is the only official language (of the administration, press and television)³ in the Principality of Andorra. The indigenous inhabitants of Andorra, who are a minority in their own country, feel more connected to the political and cultural reality of Catalonia and Spain than to French culture.⁴ The most recent sociolinguistic research conducted by the Andorran Ministry of Culture and the sociologist Estel Margarit Vinas shows that Catalan remains the most up-to-date language among students from all educational systems (Almarcha 2013, p. 123). However, the latest analyses prove that Catalan is not used in the majority of areas of social life.⁵ The Institute of the Andorran Studies [*Institut d'Estudis Andorrans*] attributes this phenomenon to the steady influx of immigrants who do not have Catalan origins. The biggest communities of immigrants work in the sectors of economy in which Catalan is non-existent or virtually never used, even when their children have mastered it.

The Andorran School is based on a multilingual educational model with an innovative pedagogy and Catalan as a language of reference. The presence of two teachers

³ Article 2: "The official language of the state is Catalan".

⁴ The country is inhabited by: 34,417 indigenous Andorrans, 20,320 Spaniards, 11,229 Portuguese, 3,794 French and 6,486 people of other nationalities. Data from the Statistics Department of the Government of Andorra from 2012.

⁵ "As a result of the combination of three areas which affect the most frequent use of the language (at home, with friends and at work), the language which is used most often is Spanish, which is stable, similarly to Catalan".

in class allows for immersion, or being equally “submerged in two languages” – Catalan and French from an early age, starting in the second year of nursery school. In the first year, only Catalan is used. Learning through dual immersion finishes after the first educational stage, or at the age of 12, after graduating from primary school. At the age of 8, children begin to learn English and two years later – Spanish. In secondary school, Catalan becomes the language of communication independently of subjects taught in French (Art) or Spanish (Natural Sciences). Moreover, at the second stage of education, students can choose Portuguese classes as elective courses.

The model of teaching foreign languages presented above is an innovative idea of Andorra’s educational authorities, constituting a response to the sociolinguistic reality of the country and the European trend of linguistic education at school. It is worth stressing that after finishing the first stage of education, students are bilingual, proficient in French and Catalan (linguistic skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing), or even trilingual, as Spanish has become the language of communication in the street or in family homes. When teachers working at the first stage of education were asked if the level of language competence and the ability to express oneself in French has reached the desired level, they answered in the affirmative. French is taught from the second year of nursery school and continued at the second stage of education, or in secondary school, thanks to reducing the number of hours of the subjects taught in French. The French language is also of key significance at the undergraduate level of higher education (*batxillerat*).

THE HISTORICAL GROUNDS FOR VARIETY

The system of varied education in Andorra has its roots in the history of the Co-Principality. The country was held under the protection of two co-princes; today, they are the President of the French Republic and the Bishop of La Seu d’Urgell.⁶ Founding schools in Andorra was a response to the political situation. The first French schools were opened in 1900; thirty years later, first secular Spanish institutions were created. However, it was religious schools called *congregacionals* that were the first to offer education in Andorra as early as in 1882.⁷ Competition between schools was open and it manifested itself in the activities they undertook. As soon as the French started secondary school-level courses, the Spanish organised their own educational institutions of the same type. In 1930, Spanish schools were opened in La Massana and Ordino parishes. In a response

⁶ A town located in Spain, 10 kilometres from the border with Andorra.

⁷ On the basis of information acquired from teachers of Andorran schools in a survey conducted by the author (during her stay in Andorra, October 2016).

to the steps taken by the Spanish, a French parish priest, a representative of the Co-Prince, came forward with an offer of French schools. These were organised mainly in parishes, where only religious education was taking place (Roser 1987, p. 204). In 1882, the Foreign Minister of Andorra, in a letter to Jules Ferra, the Interior Minister, formulated the words referring to the French educational system in Andorra: “among numerous factors which can effectively contribute to uniting the interests of the inhabitants, there is a need for creating an institution of public education which would combine teaching the French language and educating by our schools (...)” (Roser 1987, p. 205).

From the point of view of the legal framework, the situation in Andorra is most favourable for Catalan, if only on the ground that it is the only official language. Therefore, it seems natural that it should constitute a significant element of education of every student, regardless of the type of school they attend. Taking into consideration the above-mentioned situation, the Parliament of Andorra [*Consell General*] expressed its willingness to include “Andorran” subjects in the educational curricula of the French and Spanish systems, which were the only ones in force as long as until the 1980s. It became possible thanks to approving The Report on the Process of Assimilating the Language and Culture of Andorra by Individuals and Social Groups Previously Functioning Within Other Cultures [*Nota-Informe sobre l’Andorranització*] in 1972. As part of the process, students attended a few hours a week of Catalan classes as well as lessons in the history and geography of Andorra, using didactic materials in the form of file cards, which, after some time, were replaced with textbooks (Almarcha 2013, p. 123). The programme of the process of assimilating the language and culture of Andorra was a challenge and still remains a key need.

It was only in 1982 that the Andorran school was created and, as an independent institution, began to function in parallel to other educational systems existing since 1900. This initiative – as it has already been mentioned – was aimed at equipping students with the knowledge of Andorra’s culture, history and geography, including the Catalan language. As the years passed (34), the school – which at the beginning was of an experimental character – progressively consolidated its position. There were 30 graduates from the first school year 1983/1984, but in 2012 there were as many as 4,234. It places the Andorran school ahead of the French and Spanish systems, which educated 3,146 and 3,350 graduates, respectively.⁸ As the Ministry of Education and Youth reports, the Andorran system is the best developed, the French system remains stable, while the Spanish one experiences a systematic decline in interest (Almarcha 2013). The durability of

⁸ Data obtained from the Statistics Department of the Government of Andorra from 2012.

these systems, which function independently of one another, has a stronger effect on good international relations with France and Spain than it would result from a purely scientific point of view. Andorra is an example of a country which shows initiative for creating an innovative system tailored to the needs of a varied and multilingual society. However, the question about the Andorran identity remains unanswered, as two thirds of all educational institutions are based on the systems of the neighbouring countries.

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IMMERSJA JĘZYKOWA W EDUKACJI WIELOSYSTEMOWEJ W ANDORZE

Abstrakt: Celem artykułu jest ukazanie wielosystemowości szkolnictwa w Andorze oraz związanej z nim immersji językowej. Poczynione obserwacje podczas uczestnictwa w semi-

narium naukowym w Andorze oraz pozyskanie odpowiedniej literatury umożliwiło zgłębienie oryginalności tamtejszego systemu oświaty, polegającego na wolności wyboru jednego z trzech systemów szkolnictwa: szkoły andorskiej, francuskiej lub hiszpańskiej, a co za tym idzie immersji językowej. Decydując się na wybór szkoły, rodzice i uczniowie kierują się takimi kryteriami jak, odległość szkoły od miejsca zamieszkania, język wykładowy, możliwość kontynuowania nauki za granicą. Różnorodność systemów edukacji wynika z historii księstwa Andory. Pierwsze szkoły założyli Francuzi i Hiszpanie, aby rywalizować o wpływy na danym terenie. Nowatorska szkoła andorska powstała dopiero w 1983 roku, od tego czasu rozwija się najprężniej i ma największą liczbę uczniów. Autorka zadaje pytanie o związek między systemem szkolnictwa i tożsamość narodową Andorczyków oraz możliwość współpracy tych systemów.

Słowa kluczowe: wielosystemowość szkolnictwa, immersja językowa, szkoła andorska

