

## ***SVETIMŲJŲ KALBŲ STUDIJS/ STUDIES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES***

### **Regional Language Network: a Language Planning Model?**

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**Abstract.** Language planning has been a major field of state and regional intervention of New Public Management in the United Kingdom, with a move towards taking subsidies off university language teaching to allocate it onto training at regional level. The Regional Languages Network (RLN) was created in England after 2002 to provide for responses to concrete corporate language needs. This paper aims at describing the working of RLN as a network and as series of autonomous members of the network, elaborating on Spolsky's language management theory (2009). It is argued that RLN is a language planning consultancy which not only solves stakeholders' language issues, as language agencies and services do, but also allows businesses to meet challenges. RLN also deals with projects by bringing solutions to problems or elaborating on hypotheses. It also has a number of additional functions, among which language planning, managing projects and brokering, which consists in visiting companies to explain what financial support is available and through what schemes language services can be funded. Overall, RLN appears to implement an original language planning model, occupying a niche in language planning.

**Keywords:** *language planning, multilingualism, language training, local language management, offshore English, European language projects.*

#### **Introduction**

With the global "stampede towards English" (de Swaan, 2001, p.171) and the increasing number of migrants in the United Kingdom, one may expect languages not to be a societal issue in the Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Actually, according to Grin (1999), the UK has a competitive advantage over most other European countries in which financial provisions are required for ESL teaching and training. Regarding languages other than English, there has been a de facto multilingualism over the centuries in the UK (Edwards, 1995). Yet, a number of reports were published in the past decade on the theme of the decline of multilingualism. Among them, the Nuffield report (2000) led to the creation in 2001 of a Languages national steering group. The report was the result of an inquiry committee which was set up in 1998. With its members coming in equal numbers from language education and the business world, it was aimed at reviewing the UK's capacity in languages. It established a link between competitiveness and language capability and estimated that the UK was ill-equipped to face international competition. CILT, the National Centre for languages, published two reports on the subject. The first, entitled *Talking World Class* and which came out in 2005, warned that the country was the worst-equipped in Europe to deal with business conducted in foreign languages. The second report, *ELAN: Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise*, came out in 2006. In 2008, a British academy report estimated that UK-born and educated scientists lacked the essential foreign language skills to keep up with research engaged in languages other than English.

In the context of New Public Management, language planning has been a field of state intervention in the UK, nationally and locally. In Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, public linguistic space became multilingual, languages became optional post 14 years of age and modern languages university departments were closed. Deem and al. (2007) noted that universities went from regulated autonomy to institutionalized distrust. Overall, there was a move towards taking state subsidy off language education to allocate it to training. As a language planning organization operating at local level, the Regional Languages Network was part of this move. It was created at the beginning of the 2000s, depending on the regions, to respond to businesses' targeted language needs, thus channeling funding towards where it is most needed. This paper aims at analysing how management theory can be applied to help answer the question as to what happens when funding for languages is taken off language teaching to be targeted onto businesses' needs. This issue is crucial for most European countries in a context of a scarcity of public resources and of accountability of higher education institutions towards the citizens and the state. Is it more efficient to have a variety of languages taught in the framework of secondary or higher education, or to use it to help finance training or translation where needed?

Our research questions are threefold: what is the Regional Languages Network? What are the characteristics of the language policy model it implements? How has it evolved?

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## Method and Theoretical Background

The chosen method builds upon Spolsky's theoretical model of language management (2009). The method was chosen because "Language Management theory makes visible ... [the] participation of the economy in the realization of linguistic processes" (Nekvapil, 2010, p.156).

Spolsky's model distinguishes among the many language management institutional actors: family, church, the workplace, the educational system, local and national governments, language activist groups, the army, various international organisations and various agencies. These actors exert pressure on each other and on individuals, which influences them in return. Spolsky suggests that the working of such an ecosystem might be unpredictable because chaotic. Yet, such a model would be greatly needed to help anticipate the effects of a given policy taking into account local societal structures. Nekvapil (2006) justly points out that Spolsky uses the term Language Management to refer to language planning, which is the work carried out by experts with a range of techniques at their disposal. Actually, the term language management refers to a vast number of practices, among which Nekvapil (2006) and Nekvapil & Nekula (2006) distinguish between organized management, which is performed by more or less complex networks, and simple management, performed at individual or discourse-level.

Another relevant distinction can be made between micro and macro language planning (Nekvapil & Nekula, 2006). The relationships between micro and macro language planning will be examined here. Micro planning is a direct result of macro planning and in return, should inform macro planning. What is studied here is how macro planning is translated at local level and how it is taken into account at macro level. As the interests of stakeholders in language planning situations are different, so is their power.

A further distinction lies between language agencies and language services (Spolsky, 2009). Both operate within different time frames, agencies being concerned with training, recruiting and change in language variety, while services deal with translation and interpreting, which provides for short-term answers. Both aim at solving a communication issue. Our hypothesis is that the Regional Languages Network, while in charge of both the long run and the short-term, carry out the missions commonly devolved to agencies and services, while having also a wider scope, being also a language broker and a language projects manager. I will use discourse analysis to characterise the type of issues RLN is faced with and the type of answers it brings. Language competencies will be described using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Language Policy Division, 2000).

## Results

### 1) *The Regional Language Network*

As a network, RLN was created after 2001 as part of the National Languages strategy with the aim of encouraging English citizen to learn foreign languages. The National

Languages strategy was devised by the Department of Education and Skills following the recommendations of the Nuffield commission. The creation of RLN was presented as part of a national priority which does not concern Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, probably because of the presence of local language varieties in these areas. There is no RLN in these regions. Actually, RLN is both a network and individual members of the network.

Together with CILT, the National Centre for Languages, RLN work towards implementing the National Languages strategy at regional level, as described in their reports (such as Regional Language Network North West, 2009). RLN is funded by UKTI, the ministry of trade and industry, and regional development agencies. The National Languages Strategy insists on developing young people's motivation to learn foreign languages. The strategy itself is described in its institutional brochure as a radical language policy move. Its aim is to

*achieve a step change in language competence in this country (...) [and] create an appetite for learning and broaden and enrich the opportunities for language learning at school and beyond. (Regional Language Network North West, 2009, p.5).*

This is in order to "... transform [the] country's capability in languages" (Regional Language Network North West, 2009, p.4) for cultural, political and economic reasons, particularly by increasing motivation, right from primary school. The issue here, six years before ELAN came out, is reducing the shortage of language skills in UK companies and the inadequacy of the UK workforce, considered "unable to meet the demands of a globalised economy." ((Regional Language Network North West, 2009, p.10). In order to overturn what is seen as a national culture of linguistic underachievement, the National Languages Strategy (Department for Education and Skills, 2002) particularly advocates a recognition of bilingualism and of community languages. The proposed measures mostly deal with diversifying entry points into language learning and raising motivation. Language learning, which was obligatory until the age of 16, stays so until 14 years of age and is replaced with optional language learning after 14 years of age. Teachers and schools are given the new role of engaging in promoting language learning at school. The NLS sets to give local authorities funding to organise language teaching at primary school level. It also marks the entering of the private sector into the teaching of primary-school children (with the example of Peugeot running a language club for primary school children) in the absence of other provisions. RLNs helps local schools and teachers foster motivation through several measures. Much of the activity of Regional Language Network endeavours to match corporate demand in language skills with the regional offer, supported by part-time staff. RLNs are funded by local authorities and central government. They carry out audits of language needs and, individually, devise language planning strategies at micro and macro levels.

### 2) *The characteristics of the language management model RLN implements*

Part of RLN's work addresses businesses. Some RLNs are also engaged into projects.

#### a) *In relation to businesses*

An analysis of some case studies available on the website of RLN East shows that there is no single language policy model, allowing to build a typology of language management models. Three main models can be identified: the problem solving model, the mixed model and the challenge.

##### 1. The problem solving model

This is when businesses typically encounter difficulties dealing with foreign clients. In some cases, the difficulty to communicate is manifest because the client has little competence in English. For instance, FSC global, a supplier of cable and wire, found fewer English-speakers than expected in Kazakhstan but was eager to establish business links with a promising partner. Another company, Huco, discovered that it was difficult to initiate contact at corporate fairs with visitors whose English skills were insufficient. The same company also found that it could not be reactive enough when dealing with Spanish clients, as it required emailing back and forth another service to find a Spanish speaker. However, businesses are sometimes unaware of any language difficulty at micro-level. In the case of Huco for instance, a company which manufactures precision engineering components, communication with German clients was carried out in English. When Huco highlighted ambiguities and errors in business correspondence, they received no reply; however, when ambiguities were pin-pointed in German, Huco received an immediate response. Generally, the difficulty for RLN is making companies aware that miscommunication with foreign clients can be due to a language problem and that code switching may be required.

##### 2. The challenge

This is when managers get in contact with RLN because they seek to improve their communication with an existing or prospective partners, or are willing to show their commitment towards a partner, or to find new partners. For instance, the manager of ResearchSEA, an Asian research news portal, contacted RLN because she wanted to develop the company's activities to new markets and to consolidate existing activities by promoting her clients. She had a specific Asian market in view. The challenge may also consist in developing a business's added value. For instance, Britten Sinfonia was seeking to show its Polish counter-parts respect and commitment through learning their language. The partnership had obvious financial implications for Britten Sinfonia, but when it set to learning Polish, the main aim was improving the quality of communication with its partner rather than increasing profit.

##### 3. The mixed model

This model derives from the problem solving model and the challenge model. This is when companies seek to further their international communication strategy as a whole by improving their language capability so as to be able to deal with one or several countries, in

one or several regions of the world. Foreign Language requirements may vary with the targeted region, from acquiring technical vocabulary and business negotiation skills to having websites translated.

#### 4. Solutions

Solutions recommended by RLN are short term, middle term and long term, depending on the issue. RLN East, for instance, does not provide with ready-made responses. Short term answers include recommending translation of catalogues, websites and promotional material. RLN does not deliver these services themselves but act as an international consultancy. Solutions are also middle term. RLN sets up awareness raising workshops on translation and interpreting, pinpointing requirements and checks when using a translating service for a website, suggesting what corporate material to translate depending on the targeted culture and language situation and indicating reliable providers of translation and interpreting. Examples of successful solutions are presented on the website of RLN East, such as using dual-sided business cards with Asian customers, or displaying Powerpoint presentations in the client's language. Participants to these awareness raising workshops are advised to specify that the text will go on the web, to check that proofreading is included in the price and also to verify layout on the webpage. RLN's website also indicates schemes, such as Train to Gain, and various regional, professional or national organizations, such as the Learning Skills Council and UKTI, which may offer funding for language training. RLN also offers long-term solutions. For instance, in certain circumstances, it recommends using the client's language, for oral interaction at corporate fairs or to make phonecalls and in writing when dealing with correspondence. It also organizes training within or outside the client's premises. Advice is as sector-specific as possible and lays much emphasis on business culture and business etiquette so as to be able to understand non-verbal language. Local RLN branches may also recommend infrastructures created by other RLN members (for instance, online service finder facilities).

Another long-term solution is advocating businesses to adjust their home language to as to make themselves understood by foreign clients, using "offshore English". Offshore English is presented positively, as a code, rather than negatively, as an English containing mistakes. In return, RLN East invites companies to adjust oral interaction according to their client's language and culture. This implies, for instance, avoiding acronyms, idioms, long complicated sentences, using graphics, maintaining eye contact, speaking more slowly and face-to-face, interpreting non-verbal signs correctly, building a vocabulary to use with offshore clients, guessing words and possibly seeking confirmation of meaning. Offshore English differs from international English, of which it is a localized version, depending on the interlocutor. RLN East presents offshore English as a fused lect (Auer, 1999)

in its own right so as to convince businesses not to pass value judgments on their overseas clients' mastery of English.

#### *b) In relation to projects*

Two main language planning models can be distinguished: the problem solving model and the hypothesis model.

##### 1 The problem solving model

Some projects in which RLN is engaged aim at solving a particular issue of national or of local priority in a given sector, for instance in Education or in the prisons. Business Language Champions+, for example, is a nation-wide project locally implemented by all members of the RLN to counteract the significant drop in language classes attendance after language ceased to be a compulsory subject beyond 14 years of age. The Prisons Scoping project, on the other hand, was set up after a 2007 meeting at which a number of justice organisations, including the police service, the Drugs Intervention Programme, the probation service and the prison service, asked for support in language and culture skills and resource. It was felt that the prison workforce could not communicate with overseas national prisoners because of language and cultural issues (for speakers of Vietnamese, Chinese, Portuguese, Russian, Polish & Lithuanian) and cultural issues (for inmates from Nigeria and Jamaica). ESOL classes for inmates were oversubscribed. Some inmates were pre-ESOL and did not have sufficient English to access rehabilitation programmes. The Prisons Scoping project, although it operated locally, was dealing with a nationwide issue.

##### 2 The hypothesis model

The starting point of projects based on the hypothesis model is the assumption that language competence increases the competitiveness of businesses. SMEs benefit from some knowledge of their customers' language and culture, even at a basic level. It helps them understand customers' behaviour, allows to adapt their marketing material and thus show commitment. Projects generally consist in creating awareness-raising material to cater for the language and culture needs of SMEs, targeting either the region as a whole or a particular sector or trade. They also consist in organizing language and culture workshops, developing language and culture resources, including testing whenever possible, and setting up training schemes. Projects based on the hypothesis model may be EU-funded with match funding from the project partners. Types of EU funding include Interreg (to foster regional cooperation), Leonardo (for vocational education and training) or Grundtvig (for the training of adults). Projects such as the Export Communications Review may receive exclusive funding from the national government. In that case, it is UKTI, the ministry of trade and industry, which manages the project on a nationwide basis with RLN operating locally on its behalf. As Cook-Davies (2002) points out, projects benefits are twofold: there are product or service

delivery and operating benefits, which concern management. Actually, it is not just outputs that the financial support of project sponsors, it is also the embedding of languages into business management.

##### 3) Other functions

RLN also carries out missions as regards brokering and language planning at macro level. It also manages its own projects.

###### *a) Brokering*

RLN liaises with SMEs, sometimes organised in clusters (for example Silicon Fen, now Food East, is a cluster of SMEs in the food sector), brokers, business support advisers, training providers and funders. Among the funders, there are the Learning and Skills council, UKTI, CILT, EEDA (the funding agency in the East of England region) and project consortia such as "Routes into Languages". RLN visits companies to explain what financial support is available and through what schemes language services such as translation, training and business consultancy can be funded. A number of national and regional programmes aimed at companies may be presented, such as Passport to Export, Gateway to Global Growth, Train to Gain. There are also European programmes, among which European Social Funds. RLN particularly helps companies in sectors that have been identified as of regional priority.

###### *b) Language planning at macro level*

This policy-making role is one of the core missions of some members of the Regional Languages Network. RLN East, for instance, was officially designated to write the regional policy by the East of England Europe and International Affairs Panel, as shown in the LILAMA application form (2008). The 2005-2012 East of England language framework defines a strategy for identifying and funding local companies based on their language requirements so as to help them export and find locally the workforce their need. The focus is on economic performance, improved linkage between education and employment, better use of the migrant workforce (Branagan, 2009) and more efficient use of public funding.

However, not all members of the RLN network have so much influence on local policy-making. RLN East is part and parcel of the regional language policy-making process because it is seen as an extension of the local development agency. This has been made possible thanks to the personal qualities of the local RLN director. RLN East's office is located in EEDA's Cambridge building.

###### *c) Project management*

RLN East manages the Leonardo Harvest (UK/06/B/F/LA-162\_538) and BioCulture (UK/07/LLP-LdV/ TOI-002) projects within EEDA. Language management and project management, which involves the running of or participating in either national or European projects, may be interrelated. This is the case for the LILAMA network project. LILAMA seeks to identify best practices of language policy aiming at increasing employability

among European citizens and to make recommendations of language policy at regional level. Language policies at micro-level set up as part of the consultancy or run by RLN on behalf of the national government (for instance BLC+) inform the research work carried out in the frame-work of other European projects (for instance LILAMA) and sometimes help “dissemination”, which is the reporting of projects results to various publics.

The border between project management and brokering tends to be blurred. RLN has helped training providers obtain European Social Funds, Higher Education Funding Council of England and Leonardo funding to cover part of language training expenses. RLN manages projects in which it is directly involved as a partner and acts as a project management consultancy on behalf of project partners, as it is the case for the Language and Culture for Business programme (LCB), a series of projects dealing with language training for SMEs. LCB was managed by the University of Bedfordshire.

## Discussion

RLN’s mission is to find the most effective way of allocating the right language resources to match corporate needs at micro and macro levels. However, assessing individual language capabilities outside companies has proved extremely difficult. For instance, RLN recognizes the considerable economic potential that lies in migrants’ language skills but has found it challenging to identify, assess and use them (RLN North West, 2009). RLN’s hypothesis is that migrants, with the language and the specialist skills that employers require are often restricted to low-level jobs below their level of qualification (Owen, 2009). It also suggests that the current ESOL approach into the job market, delivering English training to migrants instead of using them for their area of expertise in their language and for language training, is not cost-effective. However, matching demand with micro technical competencies, taking into account language proficiency in English and native language as well as cultural expertise has proved extremely complex. EU-produced standards and tools to allow to compare competencies and qualifications, such as Europass and the European Language Portfolio, if implemented, would probably give recruiters indications as to the partial language competencies that would be useful on the workplace. A register of migrants’ competencies which would make the most of their language resources could take into account the country and culture of origin, the language variety, the level in each partial competence, the level in English and of course the level of qualification based on the European Qualification Framework. However, a clear political decision of promoting these tools would be needed in order to rationally offer migrants posts in which their language competencies are used to their utmost. In addition, managing migrants’ language skills alongside their professional skills implies management costs the recouping of which is problematic.

Actually, if RLN was set up to manage languages at regional level, its impact on the local economy remains difficult to assess. RLN addresses SMEs and local authorities already convinced that increased language capabilities would benefit them. It relies on word of mouth and

employers’ testimonials in the form of success stories presented on its website. RLN also allows for the dissemination of results of European projects and clearly benefits social inclusion. However, it does not systematically carry out a cost-benefit analysis of the development of language capabilities and of its interventions. In a context of dwindling financial support for language services, with the closing, in 2007, of BLIS, a CILT-run directory of language professionals. The fact that RLNs have not proved financially sustainable may go towards explaining why two RLNs out of ten have closed. The phenomenon seems to be in line with a trend noted by Dunleavy et al. (2006), in the United Kingdom off New Public Management, a form of management that valued disaggregation, competition and incentivization, towards Digital Management, with the reintegration within the government’s remit of certain functions formerly carried out by agencies, considered “obsessed with intermediate organizational objectives rather than service delivery or effectiveness” (Dunleavy et al., 2006, p.472).

## Conclusion

This contribution was aiming at completing Spolsky’s theoretical model of language management. Spolsky (2009) distinguishes between language agencies, which are “active participants in language management, working essentially to solve long-term communication problems by changing participants or modifying the language”, and language services, which “provide what computer programmers call a ‘work around’, a way to deal with an unsolved communication problem by providing a translator or interpreter” (2009, p.248).

In this theoretical model, both agencies and services aim at solving communication issues. What distinguishes them is how these issues are solved.

Like agencies and services, RLN addresses businesses’ needs for solutions to their language problems. However, it also helps them meet goals and solve communication difficulties that may arise when dealing with a challenge. RLN also intervenes on a project basis. In certain cases, RLN is also expected to solve problems, again like agencies and services. Eventually, it carries out other missions such as brokering, language planning and managing projects. RLN thus exemplifies another type of language management actor, which could be defined as language management consultancies. It certainly occupies a niche in a complex language planning landscape but also competes with other brokers and agencies for dwindling public resources.

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#### **Regioninis kalbų tinklas – kalbų politikos planavimo modelis?**

Santrauka

Kalbų politikos planavimas buvo ir yra svarbi valstybinės ir regioninės Naujosios viešosios vadybos (*angl.* New Public Management) sritis Jungtinėje Karalystėje, kurios tikslas mažinti subsidijas kalbų dėstymui universitetuose ir skirti jas mokymui regioniniame lygmenyje. Regioninis kalbų tinklas (RKT; *angl.* Regional Language Network) buvo sukurtas Anglijoje 2002 metais, skatinant kalbų mokymą pagal darbo rinkos poreikius. Šio straipsnio tikslas yra apibūdinti RKT tinklo ir jo narių veiklą remiantis Spolsky kalbos vadybos teorija (2009). Straipsnyje teigiama, kad RKT yra kalbų mokymo planavimo konsultacinė tarnyba, kuri ne tik sprendžia suinteresuotų šalių kalbų mokymosi problemas, kaip tai daro kalbų mokymo agentūros ar kitos tokias paslaugas teikiančios įmonės, bet ir padeda verslo įmonėms įveikti iššūkius. RKT taip pat nagrinėja projektus teikdamas pasiūlymus problemoms spręsti ar smulkiai išdėstydama hipotezes. Jis taip pat vykdo daug kitų papildomų funkcijų, tarp kurių – planavimas, vadybos projektai ir tarpininkavimas. Lankomos kompanijos, aiškinama, kokia yra galima finansinė parama ir kokiomis programomis remiantis galima finansuoti kalbų mokymo paslaugas. Taigi, RKT įgyvendindama originalų kalbos planavimo modelį, užima savo nišą planuojant kalbų mokymosi politiką.

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