

Policy and practice in foreign language education

Case studies in three European settings

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Abstract

This paper arises from the work of the LINEE research network (<http://www.linee.org> [Q1 ?accessed]) on language education policy and practice in three European countries (England, Hungary and Italy). The paper first examines different educational ideologies which underpin the development of European language education policies, noting the increased reflection of competence and outcomes-based ideologies in the discourse of documents such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and tensions between these and other more traditional humanistic educational discourses. The recent evolution of language education policy in each national context is examined in detail. Secondly, observational case studies of foreign language classroom practice documented in the three settings are examined, to clarify to what extent they reflect current competence-oriented discourses, or other more progressivist and classical humanist education traditions. Conclusions are drawn about the interactions between European level and national level declarations about language education, and their influence on local student experience.

Keywords: Language education policy, German as a foreign language, classroom observation, outcomes-based education, language competences

Curriculum theorists have identified three broad trends underlying school curriculum design: 'classical humanism', committed to the transmission to new generations of highly valued cultural traditions and knowledge; 'progressivism', committed to the development of individual learners in response to their personal interests and needs; and 'reconstructionism', committed to the production of useful citizens with an equal chance of succeeding in the world of work and public life (Clark 1987). Of course, actual curricula are some kind of blend of all three; however, since the Second World War, the transformation of education from an elite activity to a universal experience has been driven largely by versions of reconstructionism, with literacy and other knowledge benefits from schooling being seen as key to participation in modern globalis-

ing economies. In recent decades, discourses of ‘competences’ and ‘standards’ have reflected increasing concerns with the delivery of measurable educational outcomes, initially in the anglophone world but also more recently in areas such as South-East Asia and Europe. For example, since 2000, the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has conducted regular surveys in industrialised countries of the attainment of 15 year olds in literacy, mathematics and science; the programme “assesses how far students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills essential for full participation in society” (<http://www.pisa.oecd.org> ([Q1] ?accessed)). Increasing numbers of countries have participated voluntarily in these competence-focused assessments (63 in 2009), and their places in resulting rankings have a significant impact on national education policies.

Turning more specifically to languages, traditional foreign language education within formal school systems of the nineteenth and early twentieth century had an elite, classical humanist character, commonly focusing on grammar and literature. Following the Second World War, with greatly increased access to schooling beyond the level of basic literacy and numeracy, languages had to find a new place in the curriculum (Hawkins 1981). Worldwide, the rise of English as an international language was the pre-eminent driver for this (Graddol 2006). In Europe, the development of the European Union led to greatly increased interest in language learning at all levels from primary to adult education, and the EU has taken various measures to encourage the learning of languages of fellow member states, and to support regional and minority languages (for overview, see CoEC [Q2] 2007 ?a or b?).

In response to this changing context, both the ‘audiolingual’ and ‘communicative’ language teaching movements of the post-war period can be seen as a shift towards a reconstructionist approach, away from classical humanist traditions in language education (Clark 1987). (Some versions of the communicative approach, however, consistently reflected more learner-centred and ‘progressivist’ strands of thought, e.g. Breen 2001). From the 1970s, the Council of Europe promoted a new model of language knowledge as ‘functions’ and ‘notions’, which lent itself helpfully to a more can-do, competence-based conceptualisation of language achievement, initially for adult learners (Trim 1973; Wilkins 1976). After a long period of development of defined syllabuses for a range of languages (the [Q3] so-called Threshold Level syllabuses), this work culminated in the production of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR: Council of Europe, 2001). This very elaborate document, partly grounded in empirical research, partly conceptual, operationalises

language proficiency in terms of six defined levels from A1 'Breakthrough' to C2 'Mastery'. The CEFR has offered a convenient model for ways of spelling out behavioural targets for language learning, and has been widely adopted, at least rhetorically, as an instrument to drive outcomes-based reforms in language education at school level.

Language education is thus in course of change and evolution within Europe, in response to broad trends in educational policy at international and national levels, as well as to specific language-related policy initiatives, at EU and national levels. Within the framework of the EU-funded LINEE research network (<http://www.linee.org>) we had an opportunity to conduct small-scale research into the current classroom experience of foreign language education in three national settings: England, Hungary and Italy (Trentino Alto Adige). For this project, national and local documentation relating to foreign language education was scrutinised, and the views of participants (teachers and students) were surveyed. However, the core of the project was classroom observation, recording and transcription in a small number of schools in each country, with German as the common target second/foreign language. In this paper we review recent developments in second/foreign language education policy within each national setting, and review and interpret the classroom observational data against this backdrop. We ask to what extent, under the influence of EU initiatives and international trends towards an emphasis on competences and learning outcomes, language education is becoming more similar in these three contexts, and to what extent it is retaining a distinct local and/or institutional character.

Following sections of the paper briefly sketch the educational and language policy background for the three countries in which research was conducted. In a later section we describe the pattern of classroom interaction documented in each setting, with illustrative excerpts. In a concluding section we discuss the findings from each setting, and evaluate the impact of EU policy and international curriculum trends on the learning experience available to students.

Foreign language education policy: Hungary

Recent structural reorientation

Until 1989 the Hungarian education system was highly centralised, with a very prescriptive national curriculum and a strong national school inspectorate. Russian was taught as the compulsory first foreign language to all students for

eight to ten years, with second foreign languages available only in certain types of secondary school (Enyedi and Medgyes 1998). After the political changes associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its political control in East Europe, Hungary moved very rapidly to a highly decentralised school system, under a general impulse to create a more humanistic and locally responsive system (Halasz et al. 2002). Ownership and responsibility for schools was passed to many small municipalities, and churches and other private bodies also acquired the right to run schools with state funding. A new National Core Curriculum was introduced in 1995; this prescribed what should be taught only in the broadest outline, and schools were expected to develop their own institutional curricula, to be approved by their local municipality. The national inspectorate was abolished and municipalities were expected to commission their own monitoring and evaluation. At the same time, the educational market was opened up to private forces in many respects, so that, for example, international publishers became important in the textbook market (Enyedi and Medgyes 1998). Parental choice of school was increased, with the practical effect that the school system became more socially segregated (Sinka and Kopataki 2008).

Subsequently, an element of greater prescription was reintroduced (e.g. statements of minimum numbers of class hours to be devoted to particular subjects), and more detailed 'framework curricula' have been developed (Halasz et al. 2002; Medgyes 2005). In the 2000s the old-style school leaving examination and university entrance examinations have been merged into a single matriculation examination (*érettségi vizsga*), with somewhat greater standardisation and external control than in the past (Eckes et al. 2005; Fekete et al. 1999). Small municipalities have been encouraged to collaborate as local 'associations' and government statements declare a greater concern with learning outcomes and competences (Eurydice 2008; Ministry of Education and Culture 2007; Sinka and Kopataki, 2008). Standardised testing of literacy and numeracy skills has been introduced in certain school grades and schools are expected to use the results for self-evaluation purposes; an EU-funded pilot project has investigated the feasibility of competence-based instruction in a range of subjects including foreign languages (Eurydice 2008; Kuti and Morvai 2007).

Successive Hungarian governments since 1989 have been very concerned about poor foreign language skills among their citizens, especially from the perspective of accession to the European Union (achieved in 2004). Today, "communication in foreign languages" remains one of the nine "key competences" of the National Curriculum, second only to "communication in the mother tongue" (Ministry of Education and Culture 2007). The first foreign language is obligatory from Grade 4 in the 8-grade primary school (*általános*

iskola, i.e. from age 9), with an allowance of three teaching periods per week. (However, many primary schools now offer languages from younger ages, see Kuti and Morvai 2007.) In general secondary schools (*gimnázium*), two foreign languages are studied with a similar minimum allowance of time, though some schools increase the number of foreign language lessons considerably above this. In vocational secondary schools (*szakközépiskola*) and vocational training schools (*szakiskola*), one foreign language is compulsory. (This is a recent development in the vocational training schools, which do not prepare students for the *érettségi vizsga*.) General secondary schools and vocational secondary schools can also choose to make Grade 9 an intensive foreign language learning year, with 40 per cent of compulsory lessons being spent on languages; in 2008, around 15 per cent of all Grade 9 students were participating in such programmes (Eurydice 2008).

After 1989, interest in learning Russian collapsed almost completely, and despite teacher shortages it was rapidly replaced in the 1990s by either German or English as first foreign language (Enyedi and Medgyes 1998; Foldes 2001). In the 2000s a clear preference for English has emerged, with a majority of secondary school students now choosing it as first language (Eurydice 2008). German remains much the strongest alternative foreign language, with other European languages (Italian, Spanish, etc.) attracting small numbers.

Curriculum orientation for languages

The current version of the National Core Curriculum begins by asserting a set of liberal and humane core values for education:

[D]emocracy, humanism, respect for the individual, the freedom of conscience, the development of personality, progress towards cooperation between fundamental communities (family, nation, community of European nations, mankind), equality between peoples, nations, national minority and ethnic groups and genders, solidarity and tolerance [. . .]. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2007: 3)

The nine key competences required for future Hungarian citizens include communication in foreign languages, defined as

the ability to understand, express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions both orally and in writing (listening and reading comprehension, text writing) in an appropriate range of societal and cultural contexts – education and training, work, home life and leisure, in line with one's individual needs. Communication in a foreign language demands other skills, such as mediation and intercultural understanding. The level of proficiency is not necessarily the same for all four dimensions (listening comprehension, speaking skills, reading comprehension and writing skills), and there can be differences between

languages or based on the individual's sociocultural background, environment and needs/interests [. . .]. (5)

This competence is expected to be accompanied by a positive attitude, including “respect for cultural diversity and interest in and curiosity in languages and intercultural communication” (6). This attitudinal orientation is reinforced, with particular reference to Europe, in the description of another of the key competences, “social and civic competences”, which includes the following:

Being aware of the multi-cultural and socio-economic dimensions of European societies and understanding the interaction between national cultural identity and European identity are also desirable components of this competence. (8)

[This competence] extends to being familiar with the idea of European integration and the EU's structures, main objectives and values as well as an awareness of European diversity and cultural identity [. . .]. This further implies a sense of belonging to the locality, the country, the EU and Europe in general. (9)

The 2007 National Core Curriculum thus stresses a general communicative orientation for foreign language learning, accompanied by an interest in cultural diversity and intercultural understanding, and an evident priority for orientation towards EU countries in particular. As I explained in the previous section, the Hungarian Ministry of Education is also very interested in shifting curriculum and assessment in the overall education system towards a more competence-based orientation, though the highly decentralised school system means it lacks strong levers to effect change. A number of pilot projects were therefore co-financed with the EU to develop competence frameworks and related curriculum materials in key subject areas including foreign languages. The languages project dealt with English, German and French; the underlying framework is outlined by Kuti and Morvai (2007).

Kuti and Morvai begin by criticising past foreign language pedagogic practice as focusing primarily on linguistic system: “the most frequently used classroom activities are still grammar exercises, reading aloud, translation and oral question and answer drills” (6). They set out the goals of the competence project in terms of a shift towards a classic communicative approach:

To develop foreign language communicative competence, it aims to develop a foreign language programme which is organized around topics, language functions and situations, and it takes into consideration the students' age, interests and knowledge. This will make it possible for the students to acquire the foreign language through meaningful activities and communicative tasks. (7)

They present the CEFR as the key text underpinning this approach, describing it as “the document setting standards for language teaching” (7). They provide

a table in which the expected foreign language learning outcomes for various stages of Hungarian school education are expressed in terms of CEFR levels. (The National Core Curriculum itself uses this terminology, expecting all Hungarian students to achieve a minimum of level A2 ‘Waystage’ in at least one foreign language, but that many will achieve level B2 ‘Vantage’ in at least one, and A2 or B1 in a second.)

However, the main focus of this competence project is concerned with classroom processes and teaching/learning activities, rather than with learning outcomes. A bank of materials has been developed to support experiential learning roughly calibrated to the CEFR levels, from voluntary oral-based language learning with the youngest children until the end of secondary school (at age 18). With older learners these are intended to complement, not replace, more formal textbook-based activity. For the younger children the focus is on storytelling and topic-based activities (Farago et al., 2008; Kuti 2008); activities for older children are conceptualised in task-based terms, and include (oral) ‘creative communication’, classroom projects and internet-based activities (Boócz Barna et al. 2008). The materials are supported by a set of DVDs, which illustrate their use in the classroom and are intended to be used for staff development (see <http://www.sulinovaadatbank.hu/> ([Q1] ?accessed).

Despite promoting the CEFR levels as a means of conceptualising learning goals, the pilot competence project pays relatively limited attention to learning outcomes. The short section on assessment in the project document for 12–19 year old learners gives all its attention to formative assessment, dismissing summative assessment processes on the grounds that “these are what all teachers [already] know and use” (Boócz Barna et al. 2008: 36). The document concentrates on holistic and subjective approaches to the assessment of communicative ability:

It is of prime importance that assessment should consider the competences in focus and not the language systems (vocabulary and grammar). It is important that assessment should be given during communicative language use, which presupposes the communicative situation, the communicative purpose and some kind of information – attitude – or opinion gap which needs to be bridged by the participants in the communication. The most important criterion should be whether during communication the communicative purpose is fulfilled [. . .]. (36)

The writers recommend portfolio assessment, self and peer assessment among other tools supportive of student motivation and communicative pedagogy. Teachers are briefly encouraged to identify relevant assessment criteria in domains such as accuracy and fluency from the CEFR, but are given no detailed guidance on how to do this.

Another attempted reform project for languages was centred much more on assessment, specifically the school-leaving examination, *érettségi vizsga*. Traditionally, this examination was effectively managed by the institution alone, with non-standardised procedures and high pass rates (Fekete et al. 1999; Pizorn and Nagy 2009). A general reform initiated in 1995 and actually implemented in 2005 introduced a two-level examination, the ‘standard level’, again managed largely by the individual school, though with increased standardisation of tasks, and the ‘advanced level’, managed by a national body with employment of external markers. In languages, much more comprehensive reform had been envisaged and extensive development work was done for a revised English language examination, through a joint Ministry of Education/British Council project (Alderson et al. 2000). This project proposed a system of test definition, item development and assessor training, in order to enhance the technical reliability and validity of the examinations and demonstrate empirically their connection with the intended CEFR levels (A2/B1 for the lower level, B2 for the advanced level). However, the project proved unmanageable in actual local conditions, and the new examinations introduced in 2005 in parallel versions for all foreign languages were written by Ministry experts with much more limited underpinning research (Eckes et al. 2005). An unforeseen outcome has been the unpopularity of the advanced level examination, which has been taken by very small numbers of students (the standard level examination is accepted in most cases for university entry); the Ministry is therefore contemplating further reform (Eurydice 2008: 114).

Foreign language education policy: England

Recent structural orientation

Against a backdrop of the worldwide spread of English and its increasing adoption as the international lingua franca for trade, science and leisure (Graddol 2006, and see also Cogo and Jenkins in this volume), foreign-language education in England has had to struggle against public indifference for much of the twentieth century and the picture remains the same in the twenty-first (Coleman et al. 2007). Structural and curriculum reform in English schools has been driven by other, more pressing concerns, and the story for languages is that of fitting in (or failing to fit in) with plans and structures created largely for other purposes.

In the 1980s, there was concern at the perceived failure of a highly decentralised English educational system to deliver consistent educational achievement,

despite the post-war creation of a largely unified, comprehensive secondary school system. This resulted in strong moves towards centralisation, and the introduction in the 1990s of a National Curriculum for England and Wales (Lawton 1992). This curriculum was conceptualised for all subjects according to the same model: a ladder of ten behaviourally defined 'levels', initially intended to cover the full period of compulsory education (from age 5 to age 16: later reduced to an eight-level model, covering ages 5–14). This framework was also made the basis for a system of national tests, to be taken by all students at ages 7, 11 and 14, in selected subjects (literacy, numeracy, science) (Daugherty 1995). Results of these tests were published annually school by school and have proved an extremely powerful accountability mechanism, strongly influencing, for example, parental choice of school. While details of the scheme have constantly changed (so that in 2010, for example, only the literacy and numeracy tests for 11 year olds survive in full form and their educational value is questioned by significant numbers), an ethos of target-setting and the conceptualisation of attainment in terms of measurable behaviours has permeated public education for two decades. In particular, National Curriculum levels are used as the common currency for schools to measure and report student achievement in all curriculum subjects, not only in those subjects where the levels are measured through external national tests.

Against this backdrop, what was the fate of languages? With comprehensive in the 1960s, the proportion of children learning at least one foreign language in secondary school increased (Hawkins 1996), and the teaching profession adapted to working with a wider range of learners through the [Q3] so-called 'graded objectives' movement (Page 1996). In 1988 a new-style unified national examination (the General Certificate of Secondary Education) was introduced for learners of school-leaving age (16+); the GCSE examinations in Modern Foreign Languages stressed oral and situational proficiency (Whitehead 1996). On the basis of these developments, a foreign language was prescribed as one of the subjects which must normally be studied within the new National Curriculum from 1990 onwards, from ages 11–16. This led to a great expansion in the proportion of children within this age group studying a language, so that by 2001 around 80 per cent did so for a full five-year period up to age 16. However, by the early 2000s, when the core requirements of the National Curriculum were relaxed, language numbers at GCSE started to fall. In 2004, the compulsory study of a language was reduced to three years (ages 11–14: King and Dearing 2006); from 2005, less than half the state-maintained secondary schools in England were teaching a language to a majority of their students aged 15 and 16 (CILT 2009). This decline was compensated for to some degree

by the introduction of an entitlement to foreign language learning in the upper primary school, i.e. between the ages of 8 and 11 (Department for Education and Science 2002); by 2008, over 90 per cent of primary schools claimed to be offering some form of provision (Wade and Marshall 2009). However, up to the time of writing this primary provision has not been made mandatory, and compulsory language learning experience remains limited to the 11–14 age group.

Curriculum orientation for languages

The *National Curriculum for Modern Foreign Languages* has been through a number of editions since the early 1990s (for example, Department of Education and Science/Welsh Office 1991; Department for Education/Welsh Office Education Department 1995; QCA 2007). However, each version has been written to fit into a wider curriculum model devised for the overall school curriculum. Thus, for example, the first edition conceptualised language learning in terms of ten ‘levels’ for each of four separate skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing); these had to encompass the language proficiency likely to be attained over five years of secondary school study (unlike, for example, English or Mathematics, which used the ten-level model to reflect progression over seven years of primary education as well as the five lower secondary school years). The levels were drafted on the basis of professional experience by a committee of experts; time and resources were not available to conduct any empirical research to validate the proposed levels.

Obviously the National Curriculum levels developed in England considerably predated the CEFR, and have never been empirically calibrated to it. However, in the 2000s, the education ministry for England produced its own variant on the CEFR, the so-called ‘languages ladder’ (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) 2007), as the basis for a set of optional proficiency tests in the four skills (the Asset Languages tests: available at: <http://www.assetlanguages.org.uk> ([Q1] ?accessed)). These provide an alternative to the GCSE in particular, where lesser proficiency needs to be accredited.

The most recent version of the [Q4] *National Curriculum for Modern Foreign Languages* describes the value of language learning in the following terms:

Languages are part of the cultural richness of our society and the world in which we live and work. Learning languages contributes to mutual understanding, a sense of global citizenship and personal fulfilment. Pupils learn to appreciate different countries, cultures, communities and people. By making comparisons, they gain insight into their own culture and society. The ability to understand and communicate in another language is a lifelong

skill for education, employment and leisure in this country and throughout the world.

Learning languages gives pupils opportunities to develop their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and to express themselves with increasing confidence, independence and creativity. They explore the similarities and differences between other languages and English and learn how language can be manipulated and applied in different ways. The development of communication skills, together with understanding of the structure of language, lay the foundations for future study of other languages and support the development of literacy skills in a pupil's own language. (QCA 2007: [Q4] ??)

Unsurprisingly in an anglophone setting, this statement emphasises broader benefits from language learning (intercultural understanding, language awareness, personal development). Indeed, the document goes on to identify four key concepts: 'linguistic competence', 'knowledge about language', 'creativity' and 'intercultural awareness', as "underpinning the study of languages" ([Q4] QCA 2007: 166). However, the eight levels which conceptualise developing attainment are spelled out in terms of the traditional four skills, i.e. they relate to linguistic competence alone.

As in the case of the Hungarian Core Curriculum, the broad descriptors of the English National Curriculum proved insufficiently detailed to provide concrete guidance for teachers or reliably to promote officially sanctioned good practice in terms of classroom pedagogy. Consequently, from the late 1990s the [Q3] so-called National Strategies were introduced, detailing much more specific curriculum content and approved pedagogic practices in increasing numbers of subjects (Daugherty 1995: Chapter 1). The first and most influential of these were the National Literacy Strategy and National Numeracy Strategy developed for primary education (Stannard and Huxford 2007); these conceptualised achievement in sharply behavioural form and were closely aligned to the national tests administered at ages 7 and 11. By the early 2000s, a similar approach was adopted for the lower secondary school curriculum, and a *Framework for Teaching Modern Foreign Languages: Years 7, 8 and 9* was accordingly produced (Department for Education and Skills 2003).

This framework was conceptualised very differently from the four skills model underpinning the National Curriculum levels. Influenced by the National Literacy Strategy in force for L1 English, the 2003 MFLs Framework proposed the following five 'strands':

Words

Sentences

Texts: reading and writing

Listening and speaking

Cultural knowledge and contact (Department for Education and Skills 2003: 7)

For each strand, a list of behavioural objectives was proposed for each of the three school years concerned (7, 8 and 9, or 'Key Stage 3' in current British terminology). These objectives downgraded the position of oracy and made it clear, within the first three named strands, that a strong return to direct and explicit grammar instruction was expected, in place of the broadly situational and phrasebook-style learning which had come to characterise lower secondary school languages pedagogy, and which had attracted criticism for learners' apparent inability to generate new language in a creative fashion. At the same time, the behavioural emphasis is clear, with a central focus on the ability to generate target language phrases and sentences of increasing complexity. Figure 1 presents the Year 8 learning objectives of the 2003 MFLs Framework.

The 2003 version of the MFLs Framework was drafted in the expectation that it would create a firm linguistic foundation, during the first three years of secondary school language learning, which could then be exploited more imaginatively in a further two years of compulsory study. However, while the Framework document was in preparation, the decision was taken to reduce compulsory study to three years only, thus leaving the framework as a launch pad to nowhere for many students. Another problem was lack of fit with the much more communicatively oriented *Key Stage 2 Framework for Languages* (Department for Education and Science 2005), which was produced subsequently to guide language learning in the upper primary school. For these reasons, the 2003 Framework was replaced in 2009 with a new version aligned more closely with the primary school one (DCSF 2009). However, this change did not result from professional dissatisfaction with the 2003 version. Recent research has shown that teachers favoured the 2003 Framework:

Support for the Framework was based mainly on its conformity with teachers' prior beliefs and approaches to language teaching [. . .]. This was expressed as approval of a return to explicit teaching and learning, in the sense of explicit learning objectives and an explicit focus on grammar. (Evans and Fisher 2009: 3)

Thus, the English system has in recent decades travelled in a very different direction from Hungary. It has become highly centralised, with a curriculum philosophy strongly focused on learning outcomes as conceptualised through National Curriculum levels and the more detailed behavioural objectives of strategy documents. In languages, the CEFR has had unusually little influence on curriculum thinking in England; instead, policy has vacillated between the traditional four skills, situational/functional conceptualisations and explicit grammar sequences, = as curriculum building blocks. Oddly for an anglophone

Word level objectives	<p>8W1 How to extend their vocabulary and include some abstract items</p> <p>8W2 Connectives to support sentence building and linking and how to use them</p> <p>8W3 To understand and use words found in comments or advice about their work</p> <p>8W4 Some regular patterns of word change linked to gender and plural forms</p> <p>8W5 To use verb patterns and forms to understand and refer to present, past and close future events</p> <p>8W6 Some common exceptions to the usual patterns of sounds and spellings</p> <p>8W7 How to use detail and exemplification in dictionaries and other reference materials</p> <p>8W8 That words do not always carry their literal meaning</p>
Sentence level objectives	<p>8S1 How the main elements of simple and complex sentences are usually sequenced</p> <p>8S2 How compound and complex sentences are built up using connectives, phrases and clauses</p> <p>8S3 The basic nature of modal verbs and how to use them in simple sentences</p> <p>8S4 To understand and use a variety of question types, including some reflecting an attitude or expectation</p> <p>8S5 To understand and use a variety of negative forms and words</p> <p>8S6 How to develop a sentence by adding or replacing elements, making necessary changes</p> <p>8S7 To understand simple sentences using high-frequency verbs referring to present, past and future events</p> <p>8S8 How to use knowledge of high-frequency words and punctuation to understand sentences</p>
Text level objectives (reading and writing)	<p>8T1 That words and phrases can have different meanings in different contexts</p> <p>8T2 To recognise simple features which add authenticity, expression or emphasis to a written text</p> <p>8T3 To begin to associate aspects of language with different text types</p> <p>8T4 To make regular use of glossaries and dictionaries, finding the appropriate section readily</p> <p>8T5 How to extend, link and develop sentences to form continuous text</p> <p>8T6 How to use a given text as a source of information, language and a stimulus for their own writing</p> <p>8T7 To check routinely on points of word ending and word order</p>
Listening and speaking	<p>8L1 To begin to listen for subtleties of speech and imitate them</p> <p>8L2 Skills they need to use when listening to media</p> <p>8L3 How to relay both the gist and relevant detail in a spoken message or item</p> <p>8L4 How to add interest to what they say by using extended sentences</p> <p>8L5 How to take part in short unscripted dialogues and exchanges</p> <p>8L6 How to recognise and add expression in speech</p>
Cultural knowledge and contact	<p>8C1 Learn some basic historical facts about the country</p> <p>8C2 Learn about some famous people in popular culture and history</p> <p>8C3 Use direct contact or media to find out about daily life and young people's interests and attitudes</p> <p>8C4 Read, hear and share simple poems, jokes, stories and songs in the target language</p> <p>8C5 Understand and use some simple colloquialisms in context</p>

Figure 1. Sample Behavioural Objectives from Framework for Teaching Modern Foreign Languages (Year 8 only: Department for Education and Skills 2003).

country, where instrumental reasons for language learning are much weaker than in the other contexts we have studied, the curriculum continues to centre on linguistic achievement and neither language awareness nor intercultural understanding has received consistent and sustained attention (Figure 1 illustrates the very limited conceptualisation of intercultural understanding in the 2003 Framework document, for example).

Foreign language education policy: Italy

Structural considerations

Compulsory schooling in Italy comprises five years of primary education, starting from age 6; three years of middle school education (*scuola secondaria di primo grado*), and the first two years of upper secondary school or vocational training (to age 16), though students have a 'right' to education up to age 18 (Eurydice 2009; Scalmato and Angotti, 2010). However, full secondary schooling lasts for five years up to age 19 in different types of institution: various types of *liceo* run by the national government, preparing students for higher education, and vocational education and training run by regional governments. The *liceo classico* and *liceo scientifico* attended by around 30 per cent of the total number of secondary school students are the most academic/prestigious school types (the former teaching Latin and Greek in addition to other languages). The main lines of the curriculum are prescribed nationally (subjects to be taught, minimum numbers of hours allocated to these); however, the schools have considerable autonomy in producing their individual curriculum plans or *Piano dell'Offerta Formativa*, and upper secondary schools in particular offer a great variety of programmes.

Formal examinations leading to certification are taken at the end of lower secondary school and upper secondary school; these comprise a mix of national tests and school-devised assessments (Eurydice 2009: 111; 114), though the external element has recently been strengthened (Scalmato and Angotti 2010). The *Diploma di Esame di Stato* taken at the end of upper secondary school is a necessary qualification for university entry.

Schools have considerable autonomy and the process of change required to modernise the system was described in a recent Ministry report as "somewhat tortuous" (Ministry of Education and Research 2008: 2). Other outside observers have described the sharply differentiated upper secondary school system in particular as "antiquated and rigid", and noted Italy's poor overall performance,

for example in international PISA comparisons (Polesel 2010). The 2000s have been characterised by highly politicised proposals for structural reform which have swung in different directions and to some degree cancelled each other out (Polesel, 2006).

The Ministry has introduced more limited reforms intended to introduce common curriculum standards (“minimum learning outcomes”, Ministry of Education and Research 2008: 2), reduce the variability in curricula from school to school and promote competence-based instruction (8) and, above all, reduce school dropout, which continues at a high level in southern Italy. In 1999 a National Evaluation Service (*Istituto nazionale per la valutazione del sistema di istruzione* (INVALSI)) was established, which sets some parts of the state examinations, monitors standards by running tests of Italian and mathematics at the end of primary school (and soon at other grades: Eurydice 2009: 200) and by analysing performance in the national school-leaving examinations:

The implementation of a national evaluation system which focuses on the evaluation and assessment of acquired competences and skills should ensure less disparity in the learning outcomes achieved by students all over the country, thus reducing the performance gap between northern-central Italy and the southern regions. Moreover, this system should foster the rise of competence-oriented teaching models. (Ministry of Education and Research 2008: 8)

This initiative shows clear interest on the part of policymakers in shifting curriculum policy in an outcomes-based direction; however, this has been hampered by the difficulty of reforming school structures.

Curriculum orientation: languages

Foreign languages have received increasing attention in Italian schools in recent years. From 1978 to 1994 the subject received exceptional support in terms of in-service programmes for teachers (Lopriore 2002). Lopriore also describes the [Q3] so-called Progetto Lingue 2000 (PL2000), introduced by the Ministry in 1999, as a means to promote the learning of a second foreign language outside the normal school timetable and curriculum (see also Hawkey 2006). This was a state-funded project, which delivered competence-based language learning in English, French and German to volunteer students through short self-contained modules:

Modules are an attempt to provide a different way of organising knowledge and competencies around self-contained segments of learning where topics, language functions and language structures interact. At the beginning of each module students are told what they will learn, both in terms of language and of competencies; at the end they will be asked to

check whether they did learn or not, and this is a way of measuring their progress. (Lopriore 2002: 209)

A significant factor was the desire of the Italian Ministry of Education to promote general awareness of the CEFR among language teachers, and to promote a more 'communicative' pedagogic approach. In-service training was provided on a large scale to participating teachers and, very significantly, instead of developing its own performance tests calibrated to the CEFR, the Ministry instead funded student candidacy in a number of international proficiency testing schemes. For English, the Cambridge ESOL suite of examinations was adopted; for example, primary school students were prepared for the *Young Learners English Tests* representing CEFR Level A1, middle school participants were prepared for the *Key English Test* (CEFR Level A2), and so on (Hawkey 2006). In 1999/2000, nearly half a million children were taking part in this project; for Cambridge ESOL, the project provided a significant boost to numbers taking its lower level English language tests internationally. In 2002, PL2000 entries accounted for over 80 per cent of entries for the Key English Test (Hawkey 2006: 156).

Following earlier smaller scale initiatives, from 2003, one foreign language was to be taught within the regular primary school curriculum and a second language introduced in lower secondary school (Eurydice 2009: 217); the number of hours allocated to languages was also increased from 2005 (105). The CEFR was consistently promoted through *Progetto Lingue 2000* and other forms of training and helped familiarise teachers with behavioural targets in languages (Lopriore 2002); achievement was conceptualised in CEFR terms, with primary school leavers supposedly achieving level A1, lower secondary school leavers achieving A2, and upper secondary school students achieving level B1 (in vocational training) or B2 (in academic *licei*). However, no clear means have been created for calibrating performances in regular national examinations reliably to these levels.

Foreign language education policy: concluding comments

These three countries provide interesting contrasts in terms of recent approaches to curriculum reform and modernisation. Hungary has moved from a highly centralised system to a highly decentralised one, where change is to a considerable degree market driven, and where the state controls relatively few levers to direct curriculum change. For languages, the post-1990 curriculum was articulated in relatively humanistic and progressivist terms, while paradoxical-

ally the schools themselves became more sharply selective. There is a will on the part of the state to move language education in a more outcomes-based direction, with the CEFR as a guide, but this process has been either diluted (as in the school leaving exam reform), or else remained so far at the level of pilot projects. Italy has also had difficulties in reforming a school system with many layers of responsibility and great regional disparities. In *Progetto Lingue 2000* we have seen that Ministry modernisers, keen to promote outcomes-based 'communicative' instruction targeting CEFR levels, stepped outside mainstream curriculum reform to fund 'special' language classes and access to international examinations. In England, system-wide curriculum reform has followed on a great centralisation of the education system, including introduction of the first ever National Curriculum; for languages, this has meant a focus on outcomes and targets, though these have been defined using home-grown models and systems (as in the Key Stage 3 Framework and Languages Ladder), in an ideological context very resistant to acknowledgement of European models such as the CEFR.

Impact of language education policy on classroom practice

Under the auspices of the LINEE research network, observations of a number of German lessons were conducted in three secondary comprehensive schools in England, in one vocational secondary school in Hungary, and in one upper secondary school (*liceo classico*) in Italy. (For details of the observations, see Table 1.) Most lessons were recorded in audio or video and in a few cases field notes only were made; lessons were then transcribed for analysis. In the account given below, a number of short episodes are cited from the resulting protocols to illustrate key points in the analysis.

Table 1. Classroom observations conducted (adapted from Mitchell et al. 2008)

Country	Number of observations	Type of School	Classes observed	Method
England	7 lessons	3 comprehensive state secondary schools	1 Year 7 class (12 year olds) 2 Year 9 classes (15 year olds)	Video and audio recording, field notes
Hungary	2 lessons	1 vocational secondary school	2 Year 10 classes (15 year olds)	Video and audio recordings
Italy	3 lessons	1 <i>liceo</i>	1 3rd year class (15 year olds) 2 5th year classes (18 year olds)	Video and audio recordings

German was selected as the focus for research as it was regularly taught in all three national contexts. However, instructional conditions differed, in line with the curriculum policies outlined above. In England, the students who were observed had been learning German as their first foreign language only since Year 7/age 12; in Hungary and in Italy, they had been learning German since primary school. In Italy, special circumstances prevailed regarding the teaching of German, as the research was conducted in Trentino Alto Adige, an autonomous region where the German and Ladin linguistic minorities have a right to education through the medium of their own language (Businaro 2007; Mitchell et al. 2008). It is also expected that Italian and German will be taught in a sustained manner as a second language to speakers of the alternative mother tongue. Thus, for example, the hours of German taught in Italian-medium schools in the region are shown in Table 2.

According to local legislation, the second language curriculum aims at:

- acquisition of linguistic and communicative competence through direct contact with German;
- knowledge of German culture and comparison to one's own;
- participation in the local “daily culture” of the German linguistic group.

(However, [Q5] DalNegro 2007 notes that German instruction in Italian schools concentrates on the teaching of standard written German and largely ignores the local dialect actually spoken in the immediate environment.)

Given these different conditions and starting points, it was to be expected that German language proficiency in the three settings would be variable, and this certainly proved to be the case. Thus, Table 3, showing the topics and principal resources used in the observed lessons, has to be interpreted partly in light of the students' language level. However, in our cross-setting comparisons we were looking for the broad impact of distinctive language education policies, expecting these to be visible independently of the students' language level.

Even taking the level of students into account, Table 3 brings out some striking differences. The English secondary school classrooms focused in terms of topic almost exclusively on the ordinary daily life of the students themselves; just one

Table 2. Hours of German taught in Italian schools in Trentino Alto Adige (source: Businaro 2007)

	First year	Second year	Third year	Fourth year	Fifth year
Primary school	6	6	6	6	6
Lower secondary school	6	6	6	n.a.	n.a.
Upper secondary school	6	5	5	4	4

Table 3. Topics and situations in each lesson (adapted from Mitchell et al. 2008)

Class / Lesson	Main topic / Situation	Materials Used
1A_12_UK	Sports	Photographs on whiteboard worksheet on whiteboard written worksheet for group work
2A_12_UK	Interests and hobbies	Images on whiteboard activities on whiteboard Powerpoint presentations by students
3A_12_UK	A town and its parts	Images on whiteboard activities on whiteboard
1B_14_UK	Daily life topics: birthdays, pets	Pictures on whiteboard mini whiteboards for group work electronic beeper
2B_14_UK	Likes and dislikes: favourite lessons, activities	Pictures on whiteboard mini whiteboards for group work electronic beeper
1C_14_UK	Sports and types of clothes	Written text from textbook and board
2C_14_UK	Types of clothes and occasions we wear them	Written text and board
1_14_HU	Homes: what people need to live, different house types	Images of houses, worksheet on electronic whiteboard, written texts
2_14_HU	Homes: families' actual and desired homes	Different kinds of written text
1_17_IT	Newspaper articles selected by the students with contemporary social themes	Authentic newspaper articles brought by the students
2_17_IT	Relationship between body and soul: situations of body pain	Newspaper article
3_14_IT	Philosophical issues and daily issues to promote students' argumentation abilities	Written texts produced by the students

Year 7 lesson included a touristic slide show about a German city, presented in English, as a way to relax at the end of the lesson. The Hungarian vocational secondary school lessons addressed culture in a much more sustained way, for example systematically comparing different styles of home in Germany and Hungary; they also encouraged students to use their imaginations, with a task centring on 'dream homes'. The Italian upper secondary school lessons were characterised by a commitment to open discussion and critical thinking; in one observed lesson, for example, students made oral presentations arising from current German newspaper articles which they had read independently. The English lessons also focused almost exclusively on the spoken word, whereas texts of different kinds were prominent in the Hungarian and Italian lessons, as

support for oral activities (including sustained discussions and presentations, in the case of the advanced *liceo* students).

Curriculum principles in practice

As we have seen in earlier sections, there has been a broad trend in terms of curriculum conceptualisation towards a focus on competences and learning outcomes, which has influenced the three countries under scrutiny in this paper to different degrees. When it came to the observation of classroom practice, striking differences emerged relating to this issue.

The lessons distinctively preoccupied with outcomes and ‘performance’ were those observed in England. The teachers observed mostly used German as the language of classroom communication, and to this extent they provided ‘communicative’ input for their students. However, for much of the time these teachers were preoccupied with eliciting student oral production in German, with a strong focus on accuracy. Student engagement and motivation was sustained through use of games, visuals, jokes and variation of activities, rather than through intrinsically creative and meaning-focused language use. Thus, for example, one Year 7 class spent around two-thirds of the lesson creating leisure-related questions orally in German, through a variety of games. In Extract 1 they are guessing the subject of picture cards held by the teacher, and producing a related question. Most guesses are incorrect:¹

Extract 1 (England Year 7, lines 130–143)* [Q6]

- S: Gehst du gern # tanzen? *Do you like going dancing?*
 T: Gehst du gern tanzen? # ist nicht richtig. *Do you like going dancing? # is not correct.*
 S: **Ooohhhh.**
 T: Okay, das ist nicht richtig. *This is not correct.*
 S: ((xx))
 T: Gehst du gern segeln? # ist nicht richtig. *Do you like going sailing, is not correct.*
 S: **Ohh noo.**
 T: (S17)
 S17: Gehst du gern schlittschuhlaufen? *Do you like going ice skating?*

1. Italics represent translations into English of German utterances; bold represents utterances in mother tongue, in this case English; # represents pausing.

T: Gehst du gern schlittschuhlaufen ist auch nicht richtig. *Do you like going ice skating is also not correct.* Okay. ((xx))

S: Gehst du gerne reiten? *Do you like going riding?*

Many questions were produced, but none were answered. In a later activity the students asked and answered similar questions in pairs, and reported the results to the teacher; she responded throughout to students' utterances in terms of grammatical accuracy. As can be seen in Extract 2, the students themselves wanted to make real meanings; this was tolerated, but not central for the teacher:

Extract 2 (England Year 7, lines 591–597)

T: Ich gehe nie surfen ist richtig, ich gehe nie surfen. *I never go surfing is right, I never go surfing.*

S: **How do you say you've never been?**

T: I # ich # ja ich gehe nie surfen *yes I never go surfing means I ne- I never go surfing.* Man kann auch sagen eh ich weiss nicht ich bin # ich habe nie gesurft. Oder ich bin nie surfen gegangen, kannst du sagen. *You also can say eh I don't know I was # I have never surfed. Or I have never been surfing, you can say.* **A little bit difficult cos we've not done the past tense yet okay.**

In Extract 3, taken from a Year 9 class at a different school, we see a very similar focus on accuracy of production. This time the issue is case and gender agreement within the German noun phrase. To add variety the teacher is using an electronic beeper to manage turn-taking:

Extract 3 (England Year 9, lines 558–582)

T: Die nächste Frage? – <beep>Thomas.

ST: Hast du Geschwister? *Do you have siblings?*

T: Perfekt und was ist die Antwort was könnte man sagen? *Perfect, and what is the answer? Aya.*

SA: Ich habe eine Schwester. *I have a sister.*

T: Sehr gut. Und wie kann man einen Adjektiv nutzen? *Very good, and how can you use an adjective?*

S: **Dingeling** (reminding the teacher to use the beeper)

T: <beep>Liam.

SL: Ich habe eine lustige Schwester. *I have a funny sister.*

T: Eine ((lustige)) Schwester, okay sehr gut, was könnte man auch sagen?

A funny sister, very good, what else can you say? [Q6] Dilan –

SD: Ich habe eine – ich habe eine – langweilig – langweilig Schwester. *I have a – I have a – boring – boring sister.*

T: Oh Dilan. Ist das richtig? *Is that right?*

SD: ((what))

T: Ich habe einE – *I have a –*

SD: Ein *a*

T: Langweilig Schwester? *Boring sister?*

SD: LangweiligE – eh Schwester. *Boring – eh sister.*

Again there is some suggestion that students are trying to make meaningful sentences, but the teacher's attention is on matters of form. A few lines later she states her reasoning in English:

Extract 4 (England Year 9, lines 637–640)

T: **Who can remember what grade you can get in GCSE if you use the adjectives properly? Corin.**

SC: **A five.**

T: **A five yes, it is a National Curriculum Level five, and it is also a level C in your GCSE, ok.**

This reference to 'levels' reflected a consistent part of this teacher's motivational strategy, which was highly concerned with target-setting and direct output-focused instruction towards these. While the other observed teachers did not refer so explicitly to learning outcomes and targets, their pedagogy was similarly focused.

In contrast, the lessons seen in both Hungary and Italy were much more meaning-focused. In the Hungarian vocational secondary school, German was used to impart cultural information, which was seen as integral to the German lesson (in contrast to its much more incidental role in the English lessons). In Extract 5, the Hungarian teacher is showing slides of a selection of buildings:

Extract 5 (Hungary, Grade 9)

T: Also der neue Tipp ist richtig. Es ist kein Wohnhaus, es ist ein Schloss. In Bayern, also in Deutschland, kennst du das Schloss? Es heißt Neuschwanstein. So. Also ein Schloss. Jetzt ist es kein Wohnhaus mehr. Lieber ein Museum. Ja, aber früher, ja, in der Geschichte war es auch ein

Wohnhaus, so zu sagen. *Okay, [picture] I, the new suggestion is right. That is not a house that is a castle. In Bavaria, so in Germany, do you know that castle? It is called Neu-schwan-stein. So. Okay, a castle. It is not a dwelling any more. Rather a museum. But before, in history, it was a dwelling as well, so to say.*

Concerning student production, classroom interaction in Hungary sometimes had a focus on form, as in the following example checking vocabulary knowledge:

Extract 6 (Hungary year 9)

- T: Was heißt „Villa“ zum Beispiel? What does ‘villa’ mean for example?
 S: **Villa. Villa.**
 T: Lasst mal einen Satz sagen! Was ist „Villa“ auf Ungarisch? Say a full sentence! What is ‘villa’ in Hungarian?
 S: „Villa“ ist **villa** auf Ungarisch. ‘Villa’ is ‘villa’ in Hungarian
 T: Ja, ja. Was ist „Holzhaus“? Yes, yes, what is a ‘wooden house’?
 S: „Holzhaus“ ist **faház** auf Ungarisch. A wooden house is ‘faház’ in Hungarian.
 T: Danke schön! Reihenhaus? Dia, hast du einen Tipp? Thank you! A terraced house? Dia, do you have any suggestions?
 S3: **Sorház?**

However, in other phases of the lesson the focus shifted to meaning, and errors were let pass. In Extract 7, we see students reporting back on their reading, and comparing answers to some set questions about a ‘dream house’:

Extract 7 (Hungary Year 9)

- S1: Im Traumhaus das Küche ist sehr klein und in Wohnung das Küche ist groß und hier steht ein Esstisch und Stühle. *In the dream house the kitchen is very small and in [Q6] the flat the kitchen is big and there are a dining table and chairs.*
 T: Hm. Ja, bei dir auch? Hm. *Yes, you have that as well?*
 S2: Ja. *Yes.*
 T: Du bist auch damit einverstanden. Was ich aufgeschrieben habe, ja, die Küche ist klein im Traumhaus. *You agree with that as well. What I wrote was, the kitchen is small in the dream house.*

An error of grammatical gender is made ('das Küche'), but while the teacher recasts this to the correct form in her own utterance, she does not disrupt the comparison of answers to correct it explicitly.

In the Italian *liceo*, in the bilingual setting of Trentino Alto Adige, the students' German was, of course, much more advanced than in the lower schools observed in England and Hungary. Through the German lesson they were expected to inform themselves about contemporary Germany through studying authentic material such as newspaper articles. Extract 8 comes from a lesson in which students made short presentations on topics such as German hostages in Afghanistan and social segregation in Berlin.

Extract 8 (Grade X, Italy)

- S: Mein Artikel erzählt von den „Chemienobelpreis für Deutsche“ und sagt, dass der deutsche Forscher Gerhard Ertl # eh # am seinem einsiebtzigsten Geburtstag des Nobelpreis gewonnen hat # eh # für seine Forschung an komplexen Oberflächen *my article speaks about 'the German Nobel Prize for chemistry' and says that the German researcher, Gerhard Ertl # eh # won the Nobel Prize on his seventy-first birthday # eh # for his research on complex surfaces.*
- T: Mhm # interessant. *mhm # interesting.*

Much of the interaction in these lessons was fluency-oriented, as in the above example (where the teacher responds to the content not the language). However, discourse types varied, including extended informal discussion about the self, with a focus on meaning, as in Extract 9, and also systematic analysis of language, with high expectations regarding students' grammatical knowledge, as in Extract 10:

Extract 9 (Grade X, Italy)

- T: Frage jetzt an euch, was macht ihr jetzt wenn ihr Rückenschmerzen habt? Was macht ihr denn dagegen? eh.. *i ask you now, what do you do when you have backache? What do you do against it?*
- S: Ins Bett. *To bed.*
- T: Ins Bett gehen, mhm. *Go to bed.*
- S: xxx.
- T: Was macht ihr noch? *What else do you do?*
- S: Am besten Stretching. *Stretching is best.*

- T: Stretching, ja. *Stretching yes.*
 S: Tabletten manchmal. *Pills sometimes.*
 T: Tabletten nehmen # eha mhm. *Take pills # eha mhm.*
 S: Nichts. *Nothing.*
 T: Du machst nichts. *you do nothing.*
 Ss: (general laughter)
 T: Die vergehen von alleine wieder. *They [pains] go away by themselves.*

Extract 10 (Grade X, Italy)

- T: Ja also vom Inhalt her stimmt es, von der Form her gibt's noch was zu korrigieren. *Yes, well, as regards the content it is ok, concerning the form there is still something to correct.*

(Some students speak together, so T selects one of them to correct the mistake)

- T: Wer hat das? *Claudia? Who has it? Claudia?*
 SC: Der # ersten. *The # first.*
 T: Warum warum? *Why why?*
 SC: Weil es Dativ ist. *Because it's in the Dative*
 SN: Ah!
 T: Ah ah, wir haben also eine Präposition, auf, warum es ist hier Dativ? *So, we have a preposition <auf>, why is it Dative here? (. . .)*
 SM: Weil es eine Präposition ist. *Because it is a preposition. (. . .)*
 T: Genau, Dativ singular oder plural? *Exactly, Dative singular or plural?*
 SN: Singular.
 T: Singular, ja (. . .) mit bestimmten Artikel, exzellent. *Yes, with definite article, excellent.*

While the lessons in Hungary and Italy are at very different linguistic levels, and in very different types of institution, it is striking how substantially they focus on meaning and communicative processes. In the Hungarian setting, there is a strong emphasis on using German communicatively to develop students' familiarity with German culture (if a somewhat idealised version), reflecting the overall commitment of the Hungarian National Curriculum to promoting awareness and positive attitudes towards the EU itself. Students are not pressed to speak extensively, independently of text, nor to be very analytical; however, the meaning of their messages is attended to, and L2 German is promoted as a means of communication with some attention to form. In the Italian *liceo*

setting, we see a strong reflection of the culture of an elite institution, where high achieving students are expected to take an interest in European current affairs and to engage in critical debate, as well as mastering advanced analytical capability, applied in this instance to languages. These settings both contrast strongly with the English classrooms, where despite the broader professions of the National Curriculum the teachers' energies focus largely on the attainment of narrow linguistically defined targets; accuracy is stressed at the expense of communication; and topical content remains largely that of the everyday familiar environment. Motivation is sustained by making activities 'fun' and game-like, and by rapid variation, rather than through more intrinsic qualities of topics and more open-ended discussion.

Conclusion

In this article we have set out to examine the relationship between evolving national language policies and practice at the level of the individual second/foreign language classroom. The scale of empirical research conducted means that any conclusions must be heavily qualified: the schools visited and lessons seen were in no sense 'representative' of entire national pedagogical cultures. Nonetheless, it is clear that these lessons had non-accidental, distinctive qualities associated with their settings. The promotion of an outcomes-led culture in England has had direct effects on teachers' instructional priorities and consequently on their classroom practice; the insistent focus on oral production of accurate sentences and phrases, the neglect of meaning and of intercultural understanding, and the explicit links made to learning targets, have at least been encouraged by this wider culture. The Hungarian and Italian teachers observed have not been subject to such strong pressures to meet 'targets'; however, both the strongly pro-European orientation of the Hungarian National Curriculum, and the classical humanist tradition of the Italian *liceo*, with its aspiration to produce critical thinkers, can be traced in observed classroom priorities and practices.

In England, there has very recently been some reaction against a narrowly targets-focused educational culture, with consequences also for the languages curriculum; research by Cable et al (2010) has shown a rather different, more meaning-focused orientation of primary school foreign language teaching, for example. However, broad international trends continue to promote competence-based educational models, and the main current language project of the European Union is to measure the actual language skills of citizens in various countries, itself likely to boost an outcomes-focused perspective on language

education (CoEC 2007b). How far these initiatives will in due course mould and influence classroom practice remains unclear, but the evidence presented in this paper shows the complexity of efforts at changing practice, and the multiple factors affecting this. These factors include the extent of institutional centralisation/decentralisation and traditional pedagogic cultures, distinctive institutional cultures among them, as well the changing priorities and beliefs of individual language educators.

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Résumé

Cet article a pour origine le travail du réseau de recherche LINEE (<http://www.linee.org>) sur la politique linguistique éducative et sur sa mise en œuvre dans trois pays européens (Angleterre, Hongrie et Italie). En premier lieu, cet article examine les différentes approches éducatives qui sous tendent le développement des politiques linguistiques éducatives en Europe. On remarquera notamment l'impact croissant des approches basées sur la performance et les compétences acquises dans les documents officiels tel que le « Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues » (CECRL : Conseil de l'Europe, 2001) et les tensions entre le discours tenu dans ces documents et les discours plus traditionnels et humanistes sur l'éducation. Les évolutions récentes de la politique linguistique éducative dans chacun de ces contextes nationaux (Angleterre, Hongrie et Italie) sont étudiées en détail. Deuxièmement, les observations d'études de cas des pratiques de classe de langue étrangère dans les trois environnements sont étudiées pour clarifier jusqu'à quel point elles reflètent les discours actuels axés sur les compétences, ou d'autres traditions éducatives plus progressistes et humanistes. Les conclusions de cet article portent principalement sur les interactions entre les déclarations sur la linguistique éducative au niveau européen et au niveau national et sur leur influence sur l'expérience de l'étudiant au niveau local.

Mots clés: Politique linguistique éducative, allemand langue étrangère, observation de classe, éducation basée sur la performance ; compétences linguistiques