



Language Policy Instruments and the Promotion of Multilingualism in the Federal Public Administration of Canada and Switzerland

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Abstract

While the study of policy instruments is an important component of public policy studies, it has received little attention so far in research in language policy and planning (LPP). This paper contributes to bridging this gap. First, I discuss the relevance of the concept of policy instrument for LPP. Second, I propose a general taxonomy of language policy instruments based on Hood's NATO taxonomy (nodality-authority-treasury-organisation). Finally, I apply the taxonomy to examine and compare the language policy aimed at promoting multilingualism within the federal public administration of Canada and Switzerland. The legislation in both countries requires that the official languages (respectively, English and French in Canada; French, German and Italian in Switzerland) should be treated on an equal footing in the federal public administration. Empirical research and official reports, nevertheless, have shown that the relationship between the official languages (and therefore their speakers) in many respects is characterised by substantial inequality. The results of my comparative analysis show that in both countries we observe a prevalence of information- and organisation-based instruments. These instruments are generally considered less contentious but also weaker than treasury-based and authority-based instruments. This shows that both governments tend to follow a soft and indirect approach to the implementation of the language policy in the federal public administration. Yet, there are some important differences between the two countries. While Canada has chosen an instrument based on financial incentives (with little impact), Switzerland did not. Further, in Switzerland, the language skills required to work in the federal administration depend only on the hierarchical level of staff, whereas in Canada such requirements depend also on the territory where civil servants work. This difference influences the distribution of language skills between civil servants and therefore the potential effectiveness of multilingual communication in the federal administration.

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