

PAPER • OPEN ACCESS

Minority languages of Brittany in regional economy and regional enterprises

To cite this article: A S Bukhonkina *et al* 2019 *IOP Conf. Ser.: Mater. Sci. Eng.* **483** 012042

View the [article online](#) for updates and enhancements.

Minority languages of Brittany in regional economy and regional enterprises

A S Bukhonkina, V P Sviridonova, U S Dzubenko

Volgograd state University, 100 Universitetskiy Ave., Volgograd, 400062, Russia

E-mail: bukanna@volsu.ru, v.p.tim@volsu.ru, dz_julie@volsu.ru

Abstract. The article deals with the analysis of the situation of Brittany minority languages in the economy of the region and its enterprises. Minority languages of the region include the Breton language and the Gallo language. Until the mid-20th century, these languages were on the periphery, their functional relevance was limited. By the mid-20th century language's policy vector has gradually changed. Over the past few decades the Breton language and the Gallo language received renewed attention of the society and the authorities of different levels. Over the past decade, the Breton language and the Gallo language had strengthened its position in the education, media and economic spheres. A number of enterprises in the region started using the Breton language for creating websites, the number of jobs related to minority languages significantly increased.

1. Introduction

French Brittany region stands out among other French regions, standing out on the background of the high level of local identity. The region is not characterized by only cultural, but also linguistic identity, since three languages with varying degrees of vitality and functional integrity here coexist. It's the dominant French, the Breton language spoken in the western part of the Peninsula, and the Gallo language spoken in Eastern (or Romanic) zone of the region.

The policy of linguistic and cultural homogenization of regions, which peaked at the end of XIX-beginning of XX centuries, reversed any manifestation of otherness and deviations from the French ideological maxims "one nation, one language". As a result of the policy of cultural and linguistic unification, that was undertaken sometimes by the very rigid ways, the number of Breton and Gallo native speakers has fallen strongly. The functional relevance of minority languages was limited because of the cliff of their generational transmission.

By the middle of the XX century the French language became the dominant means of communication in all areas, including the production and the labour market. In the first half of the 20th century a number of non-linguistic factors determined the change of functional status and relevance of the Breton language. In the beginning of XX century 75 per cent of the population in Lower Brittany spoke the Breton language. Most of these people were monolinguals and didn't know the French language but in the next decades the situation changed. The improvement of the means of communication, the introduction of school education in French and the participation of Bretons in two world wars affected the minority languages. The socio-economic and psychological factors adjusted communicative rating Breton language and contributed to its weakening.

By the mid-20th century vector language policy has gradually changed. With regard to the new linguistic policy, laws had been passed and institutions established to guarantee the proper functioning of minority languages in Brittany. The law Dekson in 1951 and the amendment to the Constitution in 2008 allow regional languages to teach and recognize them as part of the cultural-historical heritage of France. Thanks to all these efforts the attitudes towards minority languages changed at the level of both national authorities and at the regional level.

In Brittany, since the 90s, a vast education campaign has been undertaken to promote the Breton language. Bilingual schools have been opened (like "Divan"), mass media began to actively use the



Breton language, the bilingual French-Breton signage and signposting had become standard. Finally, the Breton language went back into production. Launched in 2001 the company "Ya d'ar brezhoneg" ("Yes" to the Breton language), has brought tangible results in many spheres of life. However, in Brittany, in addition to the Breton language there is another minority language, the Gallo language. This language little is known, not only outside of France, but even in Brittany.

The Breton language being the basis of the Breton identity has always been considered the only true language of historical Brittany and outmatched Gallo with this region being positioned as a successor of Celtic culture tradition. Breton has always had the status of the language even if it was supplanted from the local communicative environment. According to H. Walter, "the Breton language, apparently being different from French, seems more Breton as Romance forms of speech in Upper Brittany poorly contribute to image creating of Breton, the non-romance region. In this regard, residents of Upper Brittany are not considered to be Bretons, unlike residents of Lower Brittany" [1].

Gallo, that distribution area is the upper Brittany, largely shared the fate of the Breton language. Being close to the French language, he has long perceived as his "wrong" option. For a long time the status of the Gallo language was contentious. They did not recognize it as a language, even its native speakers (mainly inhabitants of rural settlements) called it a dialect or "patois". Only in 2004, the Regional Council of Brittany acknowledged the Gallo language and the Breton language as "historical languages of Brittany along with the French language". Although the Breton language and the Gallo language are officially recognized as minority languages of the region, their functional status is not equivalent. The Breton language is spoken everywhere in different social spheres. It fills an important symbolic function and it is perceived not only by residents of the region, but his guests as more obvious symbol of Brittany.

According to some researchers [2, 3], Breton and Gallo did not have identical status in the eyes of the inhabitants of Brittany. As noted by R. Le Squère "Breton and Gallo do not occupy the same position related to the functions to be performed. Languages of Brittany is much more than just a means of communication. They are both vectors of identity and cultural symbols, therefore in the collective consciousness of the two languages do not have the same value and do not appear to be one and the same" [4]. Moreover for the majority of people, Gallo is still considered to be 'patois'. It is indeed difficult for a foreigner to hear people spontaneously speaking Gallo as this form of speech is used within families [5].

Contacts between Gallo and Breton speakers has not always proved to be harmonious and would appear to confirm Nelde's statement that "there is—in the field of European languages—no contact situation which cannot be described as a linguistic conflict at the same time" [6]. Brittany's cultural specificity is frequently located in its Celtic past, as expressed by Humphreys: "Brittany's present distinctiveness can be attributed to British immigration originally organized as a defensive measure in a threatened Roman empire"[7]. Gallo, as a result of its close linguistic relationship with French, is contested in popular opinion and frequently referred to as a patois or dialect of French. This contestation is further aggravated when Gallo is contrasted with Breton, which in popular consciousness is a more firmly established regional language [8]. In addition, as a result of its linguistic proximity to French, spoken vernacular French and Gallo share the same sociolinguistic landscape. According to Blanchet (9), many Bretons in Upper Brittany use a mixed linguistic system, oscillating between two polarities that can be called gallo francisé ("Frenchified Gallo") and français gallésé ("Gallicized French"), which is also called regional French when this interference is relatively stabilized.

The advantage of the Breton language over Gallo in the first place becomes evident when analyzing the economic sphere of the region, in particular the labor market. The fact is that over the past decade, one of the main components of regional policy has been the widespread improvement of the image of Brittany, its positioning as one of the most distinctive French regions in order to improve investment attractiveness. Sociolinguistic features of Brittany - its Celtic roots, the presence of two minority languages at once, belonging to different linguistic groups - came in handy. The use of the Breton language and the Breton culture to improve the cultural and economic climate has coincided

with a growing public demand for a regional (Breton) identity, for a surge of interest in everything Breton, primarily in the language.

2. The Breton economy: a brief overview of the main sectors

Agriculture and fishing are still important in the Breton economy. At the same time, strong industrial activity has developed in some key sectors of activity (agrifood, telecoms, automobile and shipbuilding) and the services industry has experienced significant growth. In Brittany, one of the few French regions to have continued to create jobs over the past decade, the unemployment rate is still lower than the national average by one or two percentage points. The total labour force consists of 1.24 million people: agriculture and fishing still accounted for 6% of these workers (despite a sharp decline), industry for 25% and the tertiary sector (trade and services) for 70%. While Brittany is home to major French and foreign groups, the regional economy is characterised by a dense network of small and medium-sized enterprises. Brittany is one of the only regions in France where industrial employment has continued to increase since 1980. It is centred around four main sectors of activity.

The main sector (with 43% of the companies and a third of the industrial jobs), the agrifood industry has experienced significant growth in Brittany over the past twenty-five years: processing of animal protein (meat, fish, milk), vegetable production, animal feed. The automobile industry centred around PSA. The establishment of Citroën in Rennes in the 1960s led to the development of the Brittany's automobile industry around a major network of parts manufacturers and subcontractors. Brittany's vehicle industry (Véhicules Bretagne) is distinguished by its experience and expertise in the field of specific and dedicated vehicles; it is developing expertise and skills in the small series and/or low production rate domains across the entire supply chain: design, industrialisation, tools, manufacturing, logistics, marketing and commercialisation, etc.

The shipbuilding tradition is the fourth leading industrial sector in Brittany, brings together building sites and military ship repair (despite the recent restructuring in Brest and Lorient), as well as those with jobs in fishing, sailing, oceanography, passenger transport, etc. Brittany is the second leading national centre for telecommunications and the fifth leading French region when it comes to electronics, and the Breton industry has built a global reputation in this field. The establishment of research centres, French and foreign industrial groups and many SMEs has encouraged its construction around three hubs: Rennes, Lannion and Brest.

3. The regional economy: the Breton vs. the Gallo

Unlike the Breton language, the Gallo language is poorly represented in regional economic life: there are no professions that would require knowledge of the Gallo language, i.e. owning them is not an advantage during the job interview. There is no demand for knowledge of the Gallo language neither in the trade sphere, nor in the sphere of social services. The Breton language, on the contrary, is in demand in different areas: in education (schools, preschool institutions, language centers, libraries), in medical and social institutions (nursing homes), in trade. Some Breton enterprises and commercial associations still make timid attempts to support the gallo and visualize it in the names of their products or on their websites. For example, "Clic ta béroutte" (association of local producers from the region of Ploëmel), or "Le dret en Goulet" (producer of cakes from Lambal). The following manufacturers also use words and phrases from Gallo like «Drao» (cafes in Meles) or "Lait Berbis du Broutay" (cheese maker), "Miron Mirette", etc. According to the National Institute of Intellectual Property, nine brands of manufacturers and businesses use the term "gallo" ou "gallèse" in their names. Among these names there are an amusement park "La mézon du câroujmaison des jeux gallo-bretons", a hotel "Le clos gallo", an enterprise for the production of sausage products "Charcuterie artisanale du pays gallo", a transport company "Gallo'bus", a dairy enterprise "Les prés natur'les produits laitiers du pays gallo", an yogurt and dairy desserts enterprise "Le p'tit gallo", etc. If the Gallo language is poorly represented in the industrial sector of the region, then its position in the field of education and culture is much stronger. In general, there are more than 60 associations directly related to the Gallo language and gallo culture. However, there are very few jobs requiring knowledge of

gallo. All of these associations use the Gallo language either in the name or in the communication, but they do not create additional places in employment. This may be due to the fact that for a long time, the majority of people considered using Gallo, especially at school, to be a speech mistake and that is confirmed by the expression "se remettre à parler gallo" (resume speaking gallo), which has a meaning "to make a mistake". The attitude to Gallo is ambivalent. On the one hand, people are ashamed of it and perceive it a speech flaw. On the other hand, people are very attached to it as to a traditional way of communicating within a family. For the most part, Gallo remains to be the language used in rural areas. Moreover, representatives of different age categories who live both in cities and in rural areas point out that Gallo is a language for "relatives", exclusively for a narrow circle of family members.

As for the Breton language, its position in the regional economy is represented more actively. Of course, we are not talking about the fact that Breton can replace the French language in the industrial or commercial areas at the local level. However, many companies in Brittany are trying to use the Breton language as a marker of loyalty to the favorable linguistic policy pursued by the regional authorities in relation to the Breton language. Various production companies, farmer enterprises try to use Breton words, phrases or even Breton interjections as a marketing ploy capturing the public demand for authenticity and Breton identity.

Any indication that a product or service belongs directly to a region, to Celtic roots serves as a kind of consumer lure. It may be Breton words or easily recognizable symbols of Brittany. According to a number of polls regional consumers have a positive perception of using of their native language in regional economy because many of them identify themselves as Bretons. Now in Brittany you will not be surprised by the bright packaging of many products or the memorable slogan in the Breton language. However, some companies they have gone further to made the site in the Breton language. For example, Askorn Medical, a company specializing in the production of medical prostheses, also offers a Breton version of its website, in addition to French and English versions. According to its director, D. Pishon, "this not only does not repel customers, but, on the contrary, allows them to attract more attention. For the realization of our products and the successful work of the entire production, using of the Breton language is not necessary. However, this is our choice and effective market tool. Our goal is to make our company different from other competitors, and Brittany and the Breton language attract a great interest and sympathy, especially on the regional market".

The reaction of people to the using of the Breton language is always positive, for many it looks unusual, but it evokes respect and interest in Brittany and its language. According to D. Pichon, "even people living in Brittany and not speaking Breton, perceive positively its using in the producing sphere". As for the personnel of the enterprise, at first its attitude towards the choice of language was neutral. Then, the company attracted attention of many associations to promote the Breton language, it was cited as an example when it came to real steps to support the region's languages at work. After that the attitude of staff has changed and the employees began to take it in a positive way. Moreover, in 2012 the company was awarded the "Prix régional de l'avenir du Breton" (Regional prize for the future of the Breton language) in the category "Breton language in the economic sphere". Its founder – the Public Council for the support of the Breton language (Office public de la langue bretonne) - with the support of the regional authorities annually presents this award to private persons, associations, companies and public organizations to promote the Breton language.

8 people work at D. Pishon's enterprise, two of them speak Breton and the two other understand this language, the company's accountant is able to draw up checks in the Breton language. "Employees have a choice, no one imposes the using of the Breton language on them. - emphasizes the director. - When hiring an employee, first of all I pay attention to his qualifications and professional skills. But with equal competencies, I prefer the one who speaks Breton". In addition to the production of orthopedic prostheses, one of the main goals of the enterprise, stated on the website, is "strengthening respect for the cultural environment in which production is localized".

In addition to the using of the Breton language on the site and directly in production, the company carry out a number of activities aimed at supporting a minority language. In particular, it accepts

interns who speak the Breton language, thereby making knowledge of the Breton language an additional advantage when applying for a job, and encouraging its study among young people. Along with other Breton enterprises, the company participates in the program “Ya d’ar brezhoneg” (“Yes to the Breton language”), aimed at promoting the Breton language in the social and socio-economic life of the region.

Apart from that, Askorn Medical participates in various forums of the Diwan private school network, which is taught in the Breton language. Furthermore, Askorn Medical supports the Breton language learning centers (Skol an Emsav, Stumdi), and also participates in exhibitions of products and goods under the auspices of associations of regional producers “Produit en Bretagne”, “Bretagne Commerce International”, “CCCOB” (Communauté de commune de Center Ouest de Bretagne). Employees of the company take part in the annual Redadeg Marathon, the route of which passes through most of the communes in which they speak Breton. The publishing is another area of economic activity in which the Breton language is used. In Brittany, there are more than 300 publishing houses, of which dozens publish books and magazines in the Breton language, and 6 publishing houses publish products exclusively in the Breton language. With the introduction of new technologies, new professions have emerged that require knowledge of the Breton language as well. This includes mockup artists, software developers in Breton, creators of the Breton version of websites, etc. In addition, we should not forget about the traditional professions for this field related to the Breton language.

As an example of the involvement of the region’s minority languages in the publishing business, it’s enough to recall the “Ti-Embann ar Skolioù” publishing house that develops learning resources for schools and language centers where the Breton language is taught. Since 1994, this structure has been publishing and delivering printed and digital products to private and public schools that teach in Breton. Publishing products are focused on a variety of age and language levels, from primary school age to the senior class. The regional authorities (Le Conseil régional de Bretagne) provide comprehensive, including financial, support to the publishing house, allocating subsidies to educational organizations for the purchase of its products. In addition, the Ministry of National Education of France pays for the work of the publishing house’s employees.

All employees speak Breton and the company’s working language is Breton. Not all employees of the publishing house are Breton-speaking from birth, among them are those who have mastered it as a foreign language. For example, one of the mockup artist Anna, is a native of Haute Savoie. She began to study the Breton language on her own and, by her own admission, it was precisely because of this that she was hired by a publishing house. For another employee, infographics artist M. Le Maine, Breton was the language of interfamily communication, he spoke it from his childhood. He also got a job at a publishing house thanks to his knowledge of the Breton language.

Breton is also in demand in the field of support staff in social centers working with older people. In this regard, many vocational schools in Brittany made it necessary to study the Breton language for those specialties that are focused on working with older people, such as social workers or carers. “For older people who are lost in some everyday situations, it is pleasant to hear the Breton speech. This calms them down and inspires confidence”, - explains Jan-Pierre Dérödel, a teacher of the Breton language at a vocational school.

4. The studies about the involvement of the Breton language in the regional economy

In 2006 and 2012 thanks to the efforts of the State Agency for the Support of the Breton Language (Office Publique de la Langue Bretonne), an analysis was made of the involvement of the Breton language in the regional economy, primarily the presence of workers in the Breton language. Thanks to a full-scale survey of 500 regional structures (associations, manufacturing enterprises, public organizations, educational institutions), three important socio-economic indicators were analysed.

Firstly, the current number of jobs occupied by people speaking the Breton language, for whom Breton is necessary to perform their professional tasks. Secondly, the potential jobs that could be occupied by brythonophones, and thirdly, the prospects for the development of the labour market for

the Breton language. According to the survey, in the region there are 1,300 jobs, which requires knowledge of the Breton language, and which are occupied by people who speak it. Most of these jobs, more than 1000 associated with the field of education.

78% of them are teachers of elementary and secondary schools, 14% of them are assistant teachers in pre-primary education and facilitators of extracurricular activities in high school, 4.5% of them are teachers of Breton adult audience in the language centers and less than 1% of them are teachers and researchers of higher education. In addition to the educational sphere, Breton is in demand in the management area, especially in non-governmental organizations. These are the leaders of various associations, employees of the secretariat, accounting, etc. The media space over the past decade has also been replenished with new jobs that require knowledge of the Breton language.

In addition, according to the same survey, the number of workplaces with the Breton language at work, in trade, in health care, and among artisans has increased. At the same time, there is an annual increase in jobs with the Breton language by 5-8%, and not only in familiar areas, but also in new ones.

It is important to note that most of these workers belong to the category of permanent (*contrat à durée indéterminée*). In addition to jobs employed directly by native speakers of the Breton language, the survey confirmed the presence of additional places in the labor market for which knowledge of Breton would be desirable.

5. Conclusion

Thus, the using of minority languages in the regional economy means an attempt to label them as part of the cultural heritage. However the Breton language in comparison with the Gallo language has a great identification potential due to a number of factors (greater number of speakers, the well-established written tradition, the status of the language entrenched in the collective consciousness). This becomes especially obvious when it comes to the development of the labor market of the region. A weaker position of Gallo in sociolinguistic Breton hierarchy shows itself in high attention to the Breton language on the part of regional authorities and the bigger number of education programs in Breton, the amount of TV and radio broadcasts, printed publication and literature, unequal representation of Breton and Gallo on the Internet, etc.

The Breton language performs the function of one of the symbols of the region such as the sea, Celtic roots, flora and fauna of the region, festivals, etc. Unlike the Breton language, the Gallo language is poorly represented in regional economic life: there are no professions that would require knowledge of Gallo i.e. the Gallo speaking skills is not an advantage during the job interview. There is no demand for knowledge of the Gallo language neither in the trade sphere, nor in the sphere of social services. The Breton language on the contrary is in demand in different areas: in education (schools, preschool institutions, language centers, libraries), in medical and social institutions (nursing homes), in commerce and industry. Some Breton enterprises and commercial associations still make timid attempts to support the gallo and visualize it in the names of their products or on their websites.

In other words Breton acts as a kind of "trick", a well-recognized brand, which can contribute to the promotion of the region, Breton communes or city individual landmarks. As noted by Le Squère "Breton promotes what could be called "tourism values" (*tourisme des valeurs*)" [10]. Representation of minority languages in the regional economy is associated with their perception of the collective consciousness as cultural symbols of Brittany, performing an identification function. A more favorable attitude towards the use of the Breton language is explained by the fact that it is associated with a return to the traditions and cultural sources of the region. In this regard, the using of minority languages in the regional economy in the context of the modern sociolinguistic situation of Brittany is a way to legitimize them.

References

- [1] Walter H 2012 *Adventures and misfortunes of the languages of France* (Paris: Champion classics) p 177

- [2] Bulot T 2006 *French Language Studies* **16** 305-33
- [3] Chevalier G 2007 *Sociolinguistics Books* **12** 75-09
- [4] Le Squère R, Ar Rouz D 2005 *Linguistic Margins* **10-7**
- [5] Blanchet Ph, Le Coq A 2007 *Sociolinguistics Books* **12** 11-9
- [6] Nelde P 2007 *Maintaining Minority Languages in Transnational Contexts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan) pp 59-77
- [7] Humphreys L 1993 *The Celtic Languages* (London: Routledge) pp 606-643
- [8] Nolan J 2011 *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity* **2** 310-23
- [9] Blanchet Ph 2005 *Linguistic Margins* **10** 23-9
- [10] Le Squère R 2007 An analysis sociolinguistique marking of the territory in Brittany: toponymy, bilingual display, cultural identities and development regional (Rennes:Linguistics. Rennes University) p 123