The role of English as an administrative 'lingua franca' in the EU institutions

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1. Introduction

The EU has:

- Round 502 million citizens (*Eurostat 2011*) and countless languages
- Committed itself to ensure & promote its linguistic & cultural diversity
- Currently 27 MS and 23 official languages
- Given English a predominant position as the prevailing ‘administrative’ language of the EU institutions

Tension between the national & supranational, monolingualism & multilingualism, personal & institutional
2. The presentation will briefly:

- Explore the current language situation in the EU
- Emphasise the role & use of English as the EU's administrative 'lingua franca'
- Tackle the concern: English as a threat to multilingualism?
3. THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

3.1 The EU

- A complex hybrid of a state and a federation (Phillipson 2003: 18)
- A combination of supranational & national systems, shared sovereign power
- Roughly 60 to 80 % of national legislation is about acting out EU policies (Phillipson 2003: 18)
3.2 EU INSTITUTIONS

- „the instruments of the EU“
- creation and adoption of EU policies
- decision-making process between the EC, EP and the Council (Court of Justice, Court of Auditors, etc.)
- The importance of language as the medium of discussion & implementation
- „One says what one is able to say, not what one wants to say (Berchem, 2003: 26)
4. Regulation of the Council of the EU, determining rules on language use in the EU:

- All 23 OL are also ‘working languages’ of the EU
- The OJ of the EU is published in the 23 OL
- Regulations, directives (legislation) are produced in all 23 OL
- Communications, decisions, etc. addressed to particular individuals/entities, are translated only into the languages needed
- The EU citizens have the right to communicate with the EU institutions in their native language and receive a reply drafted in the same language (1997, the Treaty of Amsterdam)
Overall aim:

- A more transparent, open & efficient EU
- Respect for and tolerance towards linguistic diversity
- To strengthen multilingualism
5. **Multilingualism**

- everyday reality for EU’s employees
- institutional interactive multilingualism enables EU communication
- efficient EU communications determines how well the EU “operates”
- management of multilingualism “in-house” rather less clear
- Legislation (translated in all 23 languages) accounts for minority of EU’s work
- EU institutions are allowed to choose their own linguistic arrangement for internal purposes
- 3 procedural languages of the EU institutions: English, French, German
6. PREDOMINANCE OF ENGLISH IN THE EU INSTITUTIONS

- Shift from French to English as the primary working language of the EC
- Integration 2004 additionally strengthened the role of English
- Linguistic hierarchy as a rather normal and natural language development!
- Linguistic hierarchy in the EU: pragmatic constraints such as time, money, efficiency
- Linguistic hierarchy in the EU: English, French, German
- English as an administrative lingua franca of the EU and its institutions
7. English in the European Commission

- The prevailing working & procedural languages
- 33 DG’s and 11 other services
- French: symbol for courtesy & respect
- German: very little role or no at all
- Internal meetings conducted in English, English is the main drafting language of the EC

- FACTS: drafting and translating in the EC (including documents of other institutions)
### 7.1 Drafting & translating in the EC (source language)

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of translated pages</td>
<td>1,125,709</td>
<td>1,270,586</td>
<td>1,661,685</td>
<td>1,860,347</td>
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<tr>
<td>EN originals</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>77%</td>
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<tr>
<td>FR originals</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE originals</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- the change in the annual volume of pages translated
- the trends in the languages in which texts sent to DGT for translation are written (source languages)

*Source: DGT 2011*
English dominates, followed by French as the principal drafting languages inside the EC

7.2 Translating in the EC: into the target language (2008)

- 210 000 into EN
- 175 000 into FR
- 140 000 into German
- 50 000 – 100 000 all other languages

- proportion is more equal due to the fact that a big part of legislation must be translated in all official languages
- it is clear from the number that even here EN dominates, followed by French and German as the main target languages
8. Why English?

- a global language
- the dominant language of key domains (science, commerce, culture, education, media, etc.)
- Educational system in continental Europe strongly geared towards learning English (obligatory school subject)
- English as a requirement for higher & further education
- English a key requirement for many types of employment
- English opens doors & facilitates mobility
9. ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA FOR THE EU?

- functional flexibility
- spread across the world
- already de-nativised
- 4:1 = non-native : native users
- As such the foreign language most commonly shared by the EU citizens
- English as a “contact language”
10. Euro-English on the rise?

- Main “in-house” language
- 2009 EC survey: 95% of Commission drafters write mainly in English, only 13% were native speakers
- Quality of English: bad English or Euro-English?
- Heading towards EU English as a new variety of English?
- EU is being modified daily:
• Already existing English words with a more or less different meaning:
  - mission: (BE) particular work that you feel it is your duty to (my mission is to help poor people), an important official job (trade mission to China); (EU) business travel
  - bottlenecks: (BE) a narrow or busy section of road where the traffic often gets slower and stops, anything that delays development or progress; (EU) problems MS have that prevent implementation & development
• Completely new words with the root in another language: Member State, Eurocrat, Euro, additionality, etc.
(Extent to which a new action is added to the existing actions (instead of replacing any of them)}
11. A 'SINGLE LANGUAGE FOR THE EU? 

- EU language situation a sensitive issue
- EU languages as purely technical, pragmatic tools rather than identity markers
- One working language for the EU:
  - Smaller speech communities: feel disregarded or even fear for the future of their native tongue, being even more marginalized
  - Larger speech communities: competition as the best suitable language
- Threat to multilingualism?
Advantage:
- Common market, common currency, common language?
- Less effort, less time and less money spent on translating

Disadvantage:
- Against language rights and equality
- Weakening multilingualism
12. Conclusion

- English is the prevailing working language of the EU institutions
- English is the main drafting language of the EU institutions
- Native speakers & proficient users of English currently hold all the good cards
Respect for multilingualism is essential for the EU

couragement in a number of widely used ‘lingua francas’ rather than just one might be the most acceptable solution

The EU must continue to respect its obligation to promote linguistic and cultural diversity of all its 27 MS
English as a 'language for communication’ within the EU rather than a 'language for identification'

it seems rather unlikely that one single language would, at least in the short run, officially be given preferential status, and thus officially be recognised as the EU's ‘lingua franca’

expected that English will continue strengthening its position as the prevailing 'in-house language' of the EU institutions, especially as new countries will join the EU

Euro-English: for the time being EU jargon
13. REFERENCES


• A. Pereira and P. Marchetto, “Languages and translation, Clear writing,” Directorate-General for Translation, pp. 1—27, September 2010
Thank you!