

## The Place of English in an Expanding Europe



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The boundaries of Europe are generally regarded as being the Atlantic Ocean in the west, the Arctic Ocean to the north, the Ural Mountains and Ural River in the east, the Caspian Sea, Caucasus mountains and Black Sea in the southeast, and the Mediterranean Sea to the south.

Despite these fixed boundaries, Europe can be said to be expanding in a number of senses, particularly, since 'Europe' is increasingly taken to refer to the European Union. In 2004, the EU grew to 25 Member States, and additional states within the geographical boundaries of Europe have made formal applications to join. These include Turkey, the majority of which is deemed geographically to be in Asia. And those

European states in the Balkans and the former Soviet Union which have not yet applied for membership, including Armenia, are receiving European funding through cross-border projects.

Outside the geographical boundaries, economic co-operation is increasing across the Mediterranean with the countries of the Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia), with which 25 years of cooperation and five years of partnership were celebrated in 2000, while the long-standing arrangements with former colonies under the General System of Preferences and ACP agreements (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) have continued and been enhanced. There is growing media speculation that even countries in the Middle East, such as Syria or Lebanon - even Iraq - might one day become, Member States.

At the same time, the internal political cohesion of the EU is increasing, notably in the area of security, criminal law, human rights and environmental concerns, and through the long process of drafting a Constitution bringing together the principles underlying the thousands of treaties, conventions, directives, regulations and ad hoc agreements that have been adopted over nearly fifty years by the EU and its predecessors, the various European Communities.

### *Languages in Europe*

The linguistic implications of these developments are immense. The number of official languages of the EU is now 22 - Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Luxemburgisch, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Slovak, Slovene, Spanish and Swedish, although two of these, Irish and Luxemburgisch, are used only for certain formal documents.

The problem of finding people competent to translate and interpret between this Babel of tongues, particularly from those that are less well known, has worsened. With the accession of new countries from Central Europe and the Mediterranean in 2004, the theoretical number of language combinations has risen from 110 to 380. This has already caused delays in the implementation of some EU legislation.

Looking at the problem in a different way, the Directorate General of Translation estimates an increase from 1.3 million pages of text per year translated for central Commission departments in 2003 to 2.4 million pages in 2006 (figures from Kinnock 2003).

However, all EU citizens have the inalienable right to hear from, and communicate with, an institution which influences their lives in a language in which they are fluent. The EU, therefore, bravely insists that it will cope with the current, and in prospect, with yet further potential increases in the demand for language services. In 2004, the Joint Interpreting and Conference Service (SCIC, or Service Commun Interpretation - Conference) recruited 40 interpreters per new language, half of whom were freelance - a total of around 360, and the Directorate General of Translation anticipated recruiting 37 additional translators. And in the field of 'back office' translation, the Commission anticipates needing around 110 translators and support staff per language by 2007 (Kinnock 2003). In passing, it should be noted that these services are not immensely expensive. In 2003, the linguistic services of the EU institutions only cost EUR 2 per citizen per year for the translation of those 1.3 million pages of text, using freelance translators to complement 1200 Commission translation staff (Kinnock 2003). Another way in which the European Commission has been tackling the language issue is by pressing for expansion of the teaching of foreign languages, both to adults and in school. Numerous EU documents make statements such as: 'Proficiency in several Community languages has become a prerequisite if citizens of the European Union are to benefit from the professional and personal opportunities open to them in the single market' (European Commission 2000: 20). In 1995 the Commission set out the target in its White Paper 'Teaching and Learning: towards the learning society' that all EU citizens should be proficient in at least three languages - which only leaves another 17 or so. Through programmes such as Lingua and Europa Multilinguis (MLIS), it has sought to promote language learning, and through Socrates, Erasmus and Leonardo it has encouraged contacts between educational institutions and mobility of students more generally. The picture of languages in Europe is more complex still, however. The list of European languages given above comprises only official national languages. It does not include the most widely spoken regional language, Catalan, or other significant living languages such as Welsh, Scottish Gaelic, Gallego, Mallorquin, Mirandese, Ladin, Sicilian, Creole, Breton, Occitan, Corsican, Lappish or Serbian, or the languages of neighbouring countries spoken in the new Member States of Central Europe: Serbian, Ukrainian, White Russian, and so on. The status and official use of these languages varies considerably, but they are covered by the provisions of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, a Council of Europe convention adopted in 1992, which aims to protect and promote the traditional languages of minority groups through administrative, educational and cultural measures. Note that this Charter is currently

concerned with the 'traditional' languages of Europe, not the languages of recent immigrants, so that it excludes Arabic, Turkish or the languages of Africa and the Indian sub-continent, which are increasingly adding to the complexity of the language situation. The Charter is also the only binding European document to date dealing with the phenomenon of the non-territoriality of certain minorities, which has particular implications for Romani and Yiddish.

This Council of Europe legal framework is reinforced and enriched by the initiatives and instruments of other institutions, such as the European Union's European Year of Foreign Languages in 2001 and the UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity, also dating from 2001.

However, all this being said, and perhaps because of it, the reality is that the use of English is spreading. Given the implicit admission in the recognition of minority languages that the official language of a country is itself a second language for a proportion of its citizens, the need for those living on the many borders within Europe to have some proficiency in their neighbours' tongue, and the slowly growing mobility of labour in the EU, driven partly by mutual recognition of vocational qualifications, this is perhaps not surprising.

At the same time, the desire to learn foreign languages varies widely. In 1997, a survey carried out for the European Commission's Education, Training and Youth Directorate General (DG XXII) asked a sample of young people, intended to be representative of those aged between 15 and 24 in every European country, two questions about the then 11 official languages of the European Union: which they already knew well enough to take part in a conversation, and which they would like to learn.

The results were as might have been expected (European Commission 2000:20). Italy, Portugal and Spain demonstrated a high desire to learn, but not yet great proficiency, while the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries scored high on both proficiency and desire to learn, young people claiming already to be able to hold a conversation in at least one foreign language and recognising the need to learn. Countries whose languages were more widely spoken - notably France and Germany - had had lower scores. And right at the bottom, on both counts, came the United Kingdom, whose language, English, was then spoken as a mother tongue by an estimated 16% of the population of the EU and as a second language by an additional 31% (European Commission 2000: 21). Ireland, it should be noted, displayed a greater desire to learn foreign languages than the United Kingdom. It can reasonably be speculated that those who see an obvious social and economic need to learn a second or foreign language will be more highly motivated to do so. Many of the British see no such need, being spoilt by the ready availability of speakers of English abroad, both native speakers in the Commonwealth and the United States, and non-native speakers across the globe. The teaching of foreign languages in UK schools is declining, and they are being squeezed out of the core national curriculum by a focus on information and communication technology skill. It is not just the English language as a whole which is spreading. English words are appearing increasingly often in European languages.

In Italian, according to Ray (2004), such English words as *business*, *hostess*, *consumer*, *database*, *competence profile* and even *open space* are being used where there are perfectly acceptable Italian alternatives. A recent survey in Germany reported by Mechan-Schmidt (2004) enquired into whether Germans understood the English used in advertising slogans such as 'Drive alive' (Mitsubishi), 'Stimulate your senses' (Loewe Electronic Group) or 'Come in and find out' (Siemens Mobile). According to the results, many people thought these meant 'Stay alive while you drive', 'Enjoy sexual satisfaction' and 'Come in, but then find your own way out'. In other words, the understanding of English is not as complete as the advertisers might like. School-leavers with basic English can hardly be expected to appreciate subtleties.

Despite the efforts of the Académie française and the existence of "approved" French equivalents, English terms are even creeping into French, as an article by Christopher Rollason (in Tosi 2003) makes clear, especially in relation to information technology: *le spam*, for example, *le scanner* and *le faxer*.

In other words, English is now chic in Europe, although its fashionableness is something of a mystery if so few people genuinely understand it. It may, in the German context, have something to do with the long post-war presence of British and American forces who came to be seen as a protection against the threat of Soviet expansion, and both in Germany and elsewhere not a little to do with snobbery.

### *English worldwide*

The use of English is growing worldwide, not just in Europe, and attempts to replace it by the vernacular have sometimes been economically disadvantageous. 'We have to accept English whether we like it or not,' Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia, said at the opening of that country's first Chinese-run university in August 2002 (Kent 2003). He even made reference to the situation in Europe: 'I am quite sure that the French don't like it, but [now] they have to learn English.' According to Kent (2003: 54), the irony of this is that 'it was Dr Mahathir who spearheaded the switch to Malay 30 years ago, first as Education Minister, later as Prime Minister. The legacy of that policy has been a generation of Malay graduates who are viewed as virtually unemployable by Malaysian business and who, instead, glumly people government offices and state companies.'

In the European context, the case of Malta has some potential similarities, since the civil service works mostly in the English language and English is the medium of instruction in schools and higher education (Eynaud 2004). There is therefore considerable debate over whether it is worth translating thousands of EU documents into Maltese, which is now an official language of the Union.

### *Future uses of English*

It would seem undeniable that English will be used increasingly in Europe as a *lingua franca*, despite the official EU and Council of Europe policy of multilingualism in official, minority and regional languages.

For practical purposes, the way ahead may be that of the Council of Europe which,

while encouraging multilingualism, itself works only in English and French, rather than that of the European Union, with its cumbersome multilingual structure. Already, much translation and interpreting within EU institutions is a two-stage affair, using English, French or another more widely known language as an intermediary between, say, Estonian and Greek, thereby doubling the potential for error. According to Newmark (2004: 158), citing a report in the British *Guardian* newspaper, 'Most [EU] documents will now be limited to 15 pages and will be produced only in English, French and German, with only short summaries in the remaining 17 languages. However, texts such as draft directives, state aid and merger decisions will be published in full in all the languages.'

This trend has been evident for some time. In 1994, for example, a compromise was reached by the then 12 Member States of the EU on the languages to be used by the Office for Harmonization in the Internal Market, which deals with the registration of trade marks. This Office works only in English, French, Italian, German and Spanish although 'business owners and other economic operators who deposit a trademark [are] able to present their application in any of the Union languages, and translations will be ensured by the ... Translation Centre of the Bodies of the Union' (EUR-OP News 1994: 8).

Furthermore, a glance at the publications list of the Office for Official Publications of the European Commission shows that numerous surveys, reports and other non-statutory documents are available in only a restricted range of languages. This sounds like good news for native speakers of English and other more widely used languages who want to work as translators and interpreters. Maybe so, within the confines of the European Union and its agencies.

But in the wider economic context, Orietta Odoardi (2004:91) argues that 'an increasing volume of translations into English could be outsourced to British and American-educated professionals living, for example, in India, South Africa or Kenya. As globalisation is breaking many barriers and frontiers, it will not be long before the existing differences between British, US, Indian or South African English will disappear and merge into the creation of a "globalised" English language.'

### *The changing English language*

It is obvious that this 'globalised' English will not necessarily be the English spoken by this author. Already it is a vehicular language used in trade, politics, academic research and many other contexts by non-native speakers, and it will develop in directions that cannot be foreseen.

Consider the following examples of non-native English drawn from European academic research papers, from Sweden, Germany and Portugal:

- *Illiteracy used to be looked upon as the disability to read and write.*
- *It hardly surprises that illiteracy is known since a long time and is seriously pedagogically dealt with.*
- *The educational programme is aimed at the integration of the learner in his/her own education, and connected with this we are developing a programme anticipating his/her participation and integration into society.*

All of these read oddly, but are comprehensible to the sympathetic native or non-native speaker, and they serve their limited purpose.

And who would have thought fifty years ago that we would now speak in the EU context of 'the Community acquis' rather than the 'Community body of law', of 'transnational actions' rather than 'international action' or of 'Directorates' rather than 'Departments'?

Or that we should see the EU produce documents with opaque titles such as 'Strategy options to strengthen the European programme industry in the context of the audiovisual policy of the EU', 'Television without frontiers' or 'Conclusions on furthering an open European space for cooperation within higher education'? The quotation above on the Office for Harmonization (the use of 'for' in titles itself being a recent innovation influenced very probably by German) contains some very strange expressions: 'economic operators', and 'translations will be ensured' - the latter doubtless a direct and imperfect translation of the French *'assurees'*. The history of the European translation service of the European Communities, now the European Union, is reviewed in a recent book entitled *Crossing Barriers and Bridging Cultures*. The article by John Trim comments on such language, seeing a danger to English in the 'bureaucratisation' resulting from its use in international administration, where Greek and Latin-based words are favoured over the 'immediacy and plasticity' of Anglo-Saxon English.

In other words, the Anglo-Saxons, and, more specifically, the British and Irish, given the dominance of US English in the electronic media and international affairs, are losing control of their language at international level. While domestic literature may be flourishing (over 100 000 titles are currently published each year by UK publishers\*), it is only a local branch of the worldwide phenomenon of English. Amid the plethora of English texts used daily in international business, politics and research, particularly in Africa, Asia and the Pacific (more or less everywhere except Latin America and the Francophone *Communauté*), it can be argued that Euro-English is another branch, its own subject, with a range of expressions such as those mentioned above - directorates, acquis, harmonization and so on - that are particular to the European administrative context.

There are precedents for this trend towards English in specific international contexts. Within the EU framework, 'Truck Speak' is an initiative supported by the EU to help truck drivers on the international routes of Western Europe. The outcome of the two-year initiative has been the publication of a number of illustrated bilingual guides, each of 12 hard-wearing wipe-clean pages in A5 landscape format. They deal with such issues as customs/documentation, immigration/police, delays, loading/unloading, accidents/doctors, directions, breakdowns, accommodation, etc. There are also complementary audio recordings. Details are available from Canterbury Christchurch College in Kent ([p.j.tipping@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:p.j.tipping@canterbury.ac.uk)).

Truck Speak follows on from 'Seaspeak', now widely established as 'essential English for international maritime use'. A Reference Manual and a Training Manual are available to purchase (see various 'seaspeak' entries on the Internet). And it is well known that airline pilots are trained in aviation English for international flights.

\* Information from Brewin Publishers, March 2004

Curiously, however, this trend is occurring at the same time as what might be considered a counter-trend, that of 'localisation'. This is the word used to demonstrate that translation means more than rendering the content of one text into another, and it was first used specifically in the context of translating websites (MacDermott 2004). According to Kingscott (2003), 'the term is these days much more widely used.... The Localisation Industry Standards Association (LISA)...defines localisation as follows: "Localisation involves taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale (country/region and language) where it will be used and sold."

The main implication of localisation is the huge need for the relevant expertise. Linguists should clearly be involved at the stage of drafting text, rather than simply translating a text drawn up in the original language without regard to its transfer to other cultural contexts.

However, to put it simply, there are not enough native speakers to go round. There is a limit to the number able and willing to work as linguists checking all the English texts put out in the electronic and print media. While major companies may produce well-adjusted, 'localised' text that acknowledges, for example, the Anglo-Saxon dislike of intellectual concepts and preference for simple practical statements, it is certain that both translations and original English-language text prepared by non-native speakers will go on expanding and may well overwhelm attempts by native speakers to preserve traditional syntax and lexis, and to resist neologisms such as those cited above from the European Union.

In other words, English is used in all manner of specific contexts by huge numbers of people for whom it is a second, vehicular language. The language is now yours. Use it well.

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### Անգլերենը և ընդլայնվող եվրոպան

Ֆիշյալ հոդվածում հեղինակը ներկայացնում է անգլերենի ներկայիս վիճակը և կանխատեսում նրա ապագան՝ ընդլայնվող եվրոպայի համատեքստում:

Անգլերենի զարգացման առաջ տեմպերը, ըստ հեղինակի, պայմանավորված են եվրամիության գործունեությամբ, որը լինելով բազմազգ, բազմամշակույթ և բազմալեզու կառույց, այնուամենայնիվ, նախապատվությունը տալիս է մի քանի լեզուների՝ հատկապես անգլերենին:

Հոդվածում մանրամասն ներկայացվում են եվրամիության համապատասխան գործողություններն ու նախաձեռնությունները՝ հնարավորինս թեթևացնելու քաղաքացիների հաղորդակցման դժվարությունները և օգնելու վերջիններիս ճիշտ գործածել լեզուն: Հոդվածում զգալի տեղ են զբաղեցնում եվրամիության անդամ առանձին երկրներում անգլերենի զարգացման տեմպերի նկարագրությունները, որոնք ի վերջո հիմք են տալիս հեղինակին կանխատեսել ապագայում «զլորալիզացված» անգլերենի տարածումը ողջ աշխարհում: