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Is there any *unity in diversity* in language policies national and supranational?

English as an EU lingua franca or lingua frankensteinia?

This is a summary of what I said in my talk at the EFNIL conference, where my task was to tie together some of the threads of the papers presented during the first day of the conference, and to relate them to the challenges that language policy in Europe currently confronts. It is not therefore a scientific article with footnotes, copious references et al. For more detailed analysis of the issues, the reader is referred to my book *English-only Europe? Challenging language policy* (London: Routledge, 2003), and to more recent survey articles, "Language policy and education in the European Union", in *Language policy and political issues in education*, volume 1 of *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*, 2nd edition, ed. Stephen May and Nancy H. Hornberger. New York: Springer, 255-265, 2008; and "English in Europe: threat or promise?" in *Language, power and identity politics*, ed. Máiréad Nic Craith. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 65-82, 2007; as well as to related articles that can be downloaded from my Web site, www.cbs.dk/staff/phillipson.

The management of languages in the EU system is problematical. There is "No more emotional topic in the EU than the language issue" ("Es gibt in der EU kein emotionaleres Thema als Sprachen") according to Wilhelm Schönfelder, Head of Mission for Germany at the EU (cited in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 1 April 2005). The topic is explosive ("Un sujet qui peut être qualifié d'explosif en Europe"), according to Pierre Lequiller, Président, réunion ouverte à l'ensemble des membres français du Parlement Européen, 11 June 2003. The Francophonic MEPs were meeting to discuss the *Rapport sur la diversité linguistique au sein de l'Union européenne*, prepared by Michel Herbillon on behalf of the Délégation pour l'Union Européenne.

One wonders whether those responsible for decisions on whether interpretation and translation are needed or not are victims of a linguistic Frankenstein, in the sense of Europe being united by 'bad' English and other languages being killed off. One of my Danish colleagues, a freelance interpreter (Danish/German/English) with 30 years of experience, has stopped work because she cannot understand the English spoken by non-natives. She relates that this even applies to the 'English' of Dutch and Scandinavians, who are probably the most competent users of English as a foreign language. My colleague is convinced that when representatives of some countries in Brussels decide not to use (and pay for) interpretation, in the belief that they can defend national interests just as well in English as in Danish/Swedish/…., this is, alas, simply not true. This is, it seems to me, a problem not of bad English but of bad policy.

(NB: The fictional Frankenstein was the person, not the monster. Can we identify the monsters who are not treating EU languages equally, and privileging English above other languages?)

When there was a major diplomatic conflict between Finland and Germany in 1999 about the right to use German at informal inter-ministerial meetings during the Finnish presidency, the issue was resolved by brute force, by Germans as users of a 'big' language insisting on German being used. The conflict was not tackled as a matter of principle, of language rights (see *Deutschland: Finnland 6:0 Saksa-Suomi 6-0,* Andreas F. Kelletat, Tampere University 2001). Why are there not more analyses of what language rights there are in the EU system, when even governments are ignorant of them? Why do some of the scholars who express concern about linguistic inequality produce analyses that assume that speakers of 'big' languages should have more rights than speakers of 'small' languages? Why are costs considered more important than equity and efficiency?

One contributory reason is that there are conflicting discourses, with a principle of the rule of law at one end of a continuum, and brute political force at the other. On the one hand, there is the constitutional formulation "The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity", *Article 22, The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.* On other we have the surprisingly frank revelation by a top French civil servant that "in the field of linguistic rights, like in other fields of human rights, there is no right but only … politics", Yves Marek, counsellor to Jacques Toubon, Minister of Culture and Francophonie, and later of Justice, France, 1996 (see Phillipson 2003: 45-47).

There is a need for conceptual clarification in this area. For instance, English is often referred to as a *lingua franca*, as though the language serves all equally well. I would suggest that in whatever specific context we meet the term *lingua franca*, we ask whether it might not be more appropriately labelled as a:

– *lingua economica* (the globalisation imperative);
– *lingua cultura* (the specific values and norms of a society, country, group or class, needing exploration in foreign language teaching);
– *lingua academica* (an instrument for international collaboration in higher education);
– *lingua emotiva* (the pull of Hollywood, the global advertising and PR giants, pop culture);
– *lingua tyrannosaura* (the language that gobbles up others, linguistic cannibalism);
– *lingua bellica* (the language of military conquest).

Lingua franca is a *pernicious* term if the language in question is a first language for some people but for others a foreign language. It is a *misleading* term if the language is supposed to be neutral and disconnected from culture. It is a *false* term for a language that is taught as a subject in general education. There is also an ironical historical continuity in the evolution of a term initially used for the hybrid language of the Crusaders, the Franks (which Arabic speakers understood that all western Europeans were) now being used to refer to English in the crusade of global corporatisation, marketed as freedom, democracy – and no longer for human rights, since these are not compatible with the disastrous attempt to impose democracy by force, whether in Iraq, Afghanistan or elsewhere.

We need to find answers to a set of heuristic questions so as to clarify whether English functions as a *lingua franca* (in its positive equitable sense) or a *lingua frankensteinia* in any given context:

– Is the expansion and/or learning of English additive or subtractive?
– Is linguistic capital dispossession of national languages taking place?
– Is there a strengthening or a weakening of a balanced local language ecology?
– Where are our political and corporate leaders taking us in language policy?
– Is English serving local needs or merely subordinating its users to the American empire project?

These are significant macro-sociolinguistic questions that need empirical investigation. This could be at the level of an enterprise, a university, state administration, or what in Scandinavia is referred to as 'domains'. Thorough analysis would provide a surer foundation for language policy decisions.

Unfortunately in the European context there is a good deal of conceptual confusion simply because basic concepts like *language, dialect*, and *nation* have evolved differently in each country, and therefore mean different things in each language and state. So do terms like *multiculturalism, integration,* and the *rule of law.* Is it conceivable that Eurolaw 'means' the same in 23 languages and 27 states? Anyone concerned with translation is aware of the complexity of language equivalence.

Similarly, discussion of *EU language policy* is often muddled because it is unclear whether people are referring to different institutions, to speech or writing, to a document with or without legal force, to interaction between an EU institution and member states or citizens, etc. The term *working language* is used in several different senses. And when an EFNIL document states: "Linguistic diversity is an essential characteristic of European identity", this is a very bold generalisation to make about the citizens or legal systems of countries that have generally defined themselves monolingually for the past two centuries. Identity at the national level? The personal level? How can linguistic diversity be 'essential' to the average Greek or Swede? The statement happens to have slightly more validity for minority language speakers, immigrant (Kurdish or Algerian) and traditional (Basque or Welsh). But I am afraid I think that the statement is a good example of Euro-woffle, of the sort of platitudes that the Commission produces in large quantities, and that do not become any truer through repetition. EFNIL, as a body concerned with languages, their uses and identities, ought to be able to produce more informed statements.

A further complication in analysing or managing European multilingualism is that there are competing language policy agendas and discourses: this applies to the 27 member states and their languages in use in many EU institutions and in a diversity of language functions. It applies to the 300+ minority languages now identifiable in the continent. And can the mantra of mother tongue plus two apply to Chinese, or to an immigrant mother tongue, or to trading languages that a state might wish to promote?

In addition to EU language issues and initiatives, it is also important to recall that the Council of Europe conducts a considerable amount of language policy activity of several kinds. It is responsible for the implementation of the Framework Convention on National Minorities, and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. It has a language policy division that organizes national surveys, and has produced a series of pioneer language pedagogy documents such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Other significant players in this field are NGOs, some of which are given EU funding support, such as the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages and three key minority language centres in Catalonia, Friesland and Wales, and the Federal Union of European Nationalities (which has a permanent Contact Forum with the European Parliament).

What is perhaps of even greater impact on an evolving language policy scene is the globalisation of commerce, the media, advertising, research, military activities, etc., none of which respects national borders. All such activity strengthens the position and use of English. The 'internationalisation' of higher education and research through the 'Bologna process' favours English, even if the principal driving force behind this monolingual thrust is the Commission, which is supposed to strengthen multilingualism, rather than universities. If 'internationalisation' means 'English-medium higher education', at least at the MA level and above, is this compatible with 'respecting linguistic diversity' (see my article "English, a cuckoo in the European higher education nest of languages?", in: *European Journal of English Studies*, 10/1, 2006: 13-32).

Many governments promote a national language internationally but are generally powerless vis-a-vis US-UK linguistic imperialism – dominance in many domains, hegemonic practices, native speaker insensitivity, corporate universities, testing businesses, journal 'peer' reviewing' etc. etc. English learning is very big business for the UK, as a glance at the *British Council Corporate Plan 2006-2008* shows. Higher education is also a British money-spinner, which the 'Blair initiative' to attract more foreign students sought to consolidate, and which Gordon Brown is pursuing aggressively in China and India.

There is a great deal of fluidity in language policy in Europe: there are unresolved tensions between linguistic nationalism (monolingualism), EU institutional multilingualism, and English becoming dominant in the EU. There is increasing grassroots and elite bi- and multilingualism, except in England and among the older generation in demographically large EU countries. There is a largely uncritical adoption of englishisation, English as the *lingua economica/Americana*. There is a rhetoric of language rights, some national and supranational implementation, advocacy of linguistic diversity, but much is left to market forces. States differ constitutionally (unitary, federal), in their cultures and educational philosophy (Bildung, skills, …) and in the extent to which they support minority languages.

Unfortunately there are many *obstacles to supranational, Europe-wide language policy formation*. They can be enumerated in outline. The length of the list makes it abundantly clear that the tension between English as threat and promise is not straightforward. What is unclear is what the outcomes of present trends will be:

– European history has led to different cosmologies in national linguistic cultures, making cross-cultural dialogue treacherous;
– there are collisions of terminology (e.g. *lingua franca*, multilingualism, working language) in discourse (politics, media, business etc.), and in distinct academic disciplines, as well as in different countries;
– overall responsibility for language policy in the EU is fragmented (Council of Ministers, Directorates for Education & Culture, Multilingualism, Translation, …), and is ultimately an inter-governmental responsibility;
– there is a poor infrastructure nationally in Ministries (except in Finland and Catalonia, perhaps in Sweden) and supranationally for addressing language policy issues;
– the research community is small and scattered;
– language policy is politically untouchable at inter-governmental level, and has a low priority, remaining untouched by the Convention on the Future of Europe and in the draft Constitutional Treaty and the Reform Treaty, despite pleas from a number of NGOs from several countries;
– EU institutions are inconsistent in living up to ideals of multilingual equality (website, communications with member states) and in effect practise linguistic apartheid;
– the EU translation and interpretation services are impressive in many respects, but are detached from international research, and subject to an economic rationale, seeing themselves as a service function rather than policy-making (Phillipson 2003: chapter 4);
– the language of EU written texts is increasingly under attack, even if the translation industry and translation technology are of increasing importance;
– the rhetoric of EU multilingualism and linguistic equality is seen as a charade by many;
– linguistic human rights are a recent development in international law, and do not constrain 'international' languages;
– criteria for guiding equitable supranational language policy are under-explored;
– journalistic coverage of language issues tends to be ill-informed;
– alternatives to market forces (the comparative advantage of English in the European linguistic market) and linguistic nationalism (e.g. Esperanto) are unexplored;

and perhaps of most central interest to EFNIL

– international coordination among national language bodies is in its infancy, and the processes for dialogue between scholars, interest groups, and policy-makers are fragile.

Ultimately language policy is deeply imbued with power politics, linguistic nationalism, and economics, which means that the question of how a more enlightened and informed political will can be generated is of central importance.

Related to this is the issue of who is setting the agenda for European integration. Is it the French and Germans who occupy the political high ground, as is generally believed? Geopolitics is in fact rather more complex. "The process of European integra-

tion might never have come about had it not been imposed on Europe by the Americans", according to a top EU insider, a Danish economist who was an adviser to the Danish Prime Minister at the time of Danish accession, Erik Holm, *The European anarchy. Europe's hard road into high politics* (Copenhagen Business School Press 2001). The depth of US involvement with the key architects of what became the EU, especially Jean Monnet, is explored in Pascaline Winand's book, *Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the United States of Europe* (New York: St Martin's Press 1993). This collaboration was largely covert in the early decades (which is what diplomacy and 'being diplomatic' is all about), but now there is an annual EU-US summit. The 2007 meeting endorsed the Transatlantic Economic Integration Plan as well as agreement on the coordination of foreign policy globally. Granted the strength of the US corporate world, and the fact that European joint foreign and security policy is a goal rather than a reality, it is difficult to interpret this transatlantic 'cooperation' as anything other than EU subordination to US global ambitions. Commercially these are agreed on in the European Round Table of Industrialists, the Transatlantic Business Dialogue, the Transatlantic Economic Partnership, etc. One wonders how many European citizens are aware that their leaders have agreed on the creation of a transatlantic common market, and that there is a strong movement towards the United States of Europe, the federalism that Monnet and Churchill envisaged rather than the 'Europe des patries' of de Gaulle?

As an example of the way English has progressively over a thirty-year period taken over the role that French played earlier as the key language of the internal affairs of the Union can be seen in the figures for the language of initial drafting of EU texts. The figures reveal a dramatic decline in the use of German and French, and a progressive and accelerating increase in the use of English as the default in-house language. This clearly strengthens the interests of the English-speaking member states, and of the countries in northern Europe where proficiency in English tends to be high.

	French	**German**	**Other**	**English**
1970	60%	40%	0%	0%
1996	38%	5%	12%	46%
2004	26%	3%	9%	62%
2006	14%	3%	11%	72%

It is, however, doubtful whether German or Finnish interests are served optimally when representatives of these countries use English in high-level negotiations. What this development means for French is recognized in the 'Bilan d'activité 06 Francophonie et multilinguisme', the annual report of the *Délégation nationale à la langue française et aux langues de France*: "[…] le français tend à devenir une langue de traduction et non plus de conception". In effect, languages other than English become derivative. Anglocentric ways of thinking become the norm that others must follow, at the expense of alternative cosmologies.

How are such developments being decided and by whom? This is not a straightforward matter. Probably those who work for the interpretation and translation services are deeply disturbed by the way some languages, both the demographically small

'old' EU languages and the languages of new member states are being treated as second-class languages. This does not appear to worry career diplomats assigned to the EU, whose attitudes are doubtless coloured by many subjective factors. Fundamentally there is a gulf between EU bureaucracy and ordinary citizens, a linguistic deficit accompanying a democratic deficit. There is also deep-seated continent-wide ambivalence about the whole EU project, where integration is heading, and whose interests it serves.

The inability of the EU to show leadership in the language policy field can be seen from a number of examples. For instance, a majority in the European Parliament (in plenary session) refused to endorse the principle of states adopting more energetic language policies, despite strong recommendations from the EP's Culture and Education Committee (23.10.2006), which wished to strengthen the 2005 *Framework Strategy for Multilingualism,* and which also endorsed the *Ebner Report* on minority languages. One of the rare occasions when the EU did commission a serious study of some language policy issues was the feasibility study concerning the possible creation of a European Agency for Linguistic Diversity and Language Learning. This had been requested by European Parliament. The task was given to Yellow Window Associates, a consultancy with wide experience of servicing EU institutions. Their mandate excluded attention to the internal workings of EU institutions and migrant languages. Their report, of 18 May 2005, was made available on the DG for Education and Culture's website. The detailed (118 pages) study, on the basis of extensive consultation with a wide range of people concerned with many aspects of language policy, articulates an analysis of needs, conditions, and modalities. The report confirms that a wealth of professional expertise exists that decision-makers ought to draw on. It makes a strong case for either a Linguistic Agency, like other high-prestige EU agencies (dealing with the environment in Copenhagen, and human rights in Vienna), or alternatively a network of Language Diversity Centres to strengthen policy formation and implementation, particularly for regional minority languages. The feasibility study reveals a widespread perception that there is a serious need for policy advice and information for national and EU decision-makers. This was overwhelmingly the case in new member states, whereas the established ones consider such functions 'not useful'. The same pattern holds for research into language policy issues. There was also near unanimity in responses in rejecting English as a sole lingua franca. The study concludes that "A no-action scenario would seriously undermine the credibility of the EU in this field".

The Linguistic Agency proposal was rejected unilaterally and undemocratically by the Commission. What it has done is to decide to support the Network on Promoting Linguistic Diversity within the framework of the programme 'Integrated Lifelong Learning (2007-2013). But funding for 'regional and minority languages' has been significantly reduced, from 1.2 million euros annually to 149,000 euros annually (*Mercator News* 33, September 2007). This represents a massive downgrading of funding for languages. Whatever credibility the EU might have gained by creating a portfolio for multilingualism in its own right from 2007 is being seriously undermined by no-action on an Academy and reduced action on minority languages. Most of Commissioner Leo-

nard Orban's speeches consist of platitudinous generalities about support for diversity and language learning, and languages for business, and it is probably in the nature of his role that they have to be.

The final report of a High-Level Group on Multilingualism was published on 26 September 2007 (IP/07/1396: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/doc/multireport_en.pdf), analysing many aspects of language policy and making suggestions for activities to strengthen language learning. It was published in 22 languages (all official languages except Irish), reflecting the importance of the project. The Group's many proposals relate to raising awareness and enhancing motivation for language learning; the potential of the media in evoking, enhancing and sustaining motivation for language learning; languages for business; interpretation and translation, new trends and needs; regional or minority languages; and research into multilingualism. The key issue is whether EU or government funds will be forthcoming for implementing such ideas.

The up-beat nature of these ideas contrasts with many symptoms of crisis in language policy in Europe, such as foreign languages other than English being learned less, and the way market forces are strengthening English in many fields and in the internal management of multilingualism in EU institutions. There is a conflict between the rhetoric of supporting all languages and the realities of linguistic hierarchies and marginalisation.

The Slovak government has made a plea for more active language policy analysis, based on the conclusions of a conference in Bratislava. Dušan Čaplovič, Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, wrote to all Ministers for Foreign Affairs and European Affairs of EU Member and Candidate States, and EU Commissioners, on March 26, 2007. His approach refers to many ongoing EU initiatives, to the Grin report for French educational planners, and reports on the EU system not serving speakers of all languages equally well. It explains why the Višegrad countries (Slovakia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland) see the need for inter-governmental, Europe-wide discussion of EU language policy, initially at expert level.

His letter has led to responses from the Ministers of Foreign Affairs (or a deputy, or the Minister for European affairs) of Austria, Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Croatia. He has had no response from 19 countries or from the Commission. Among the issues raised by those endorsing the initiative are matters of equality, which need to be considered along with pragmatism and cost; the principle that language policy is a national responsibility; and a complaint that the Language Competence Indicator is only being developed for the five ‘big’ languages.

Whether the Slovak initiative will lead anywhere is a question of political will, national and supranational. The Commission is legally charged with a monopoly of policy initiation, in interaction with member states. Thus changes of official/working language policy in the EU system are the result of Member State policies and pressure, of the kind that Ireland and Spain have generated. Decisions on which languages are to be used in interpretation in each part of the EU system are made by COREPER (Heads of mission). Linguistic hierarchy has always been an EU reality. Equality has only applied to all EU languages for certain restricted written or spoken purposes.

Can one then, in conclusion, identify a number of tasks that EFNIL is qualified to undertake?

– Make proposals to the Commission.
– Influence member state governments.
– Put pressure on EU Heads of Mission.
– Clarify which written and spoken language functions are discriminatory.
– Verify if interpretation and translation are being reduced, and if so, why, and what the implications are.
– Insist on equality for all official languages.
– Look for inspiration in the final chapter of *English-only Europe*? *Challenging language policy*, which lists 45 recommendations for action.

As I am hopeful that EFNIL can and will be able to contribute constructively to the elaboration and implementation of policies that serve to maintain the vitality of all the languages of Europe, I feel it is important to point out that some of the documents produced by EFNIL seem to be self-contradictory. I have found statements to the effect that the main objective of EFNIL is "the promotion of multi- and plurilingualism" and at other points "strengthening the position and usability of their own national languages". These are different tasks. Specialists in each of the two areas have different expertise. A rapid scrutiny of the mandates of EFNIL member organizations leads me to identify that the organization draws on many types of expertise, which may be a strength but may also mean that collaboration is bound to be tricky. There seem to be representatives of at least the following types of activity:

– An obligation to promote the welfare of a single national language OR the welfare of all, or of several, of the languages within a state;
– In language planning terms, EITHER corpus planning OR acquisition planning, POSSIBLY COMBINED WITH status planning, agenda-setting, and technology planning;
– EITHER recording a corpus OR policy-making;
– EITHER a governmental body, and politically accountable OR independent;
– EITHER promoting a language internationally OR with no such responsibility;
– EITHER with close links to EU (eurocrats, translators, EP) OR without;
– EITHER concerned with language pedagogy and learning materials OR not;
– EITHER mono- OR multidisciplinary.

With all this variety represented among the members of EFNIL, getting its act together is a huge challenge, both in terms of taking things forward and unity of purpose. There are impressive EFNIL achievements, but the tasks are gargantuan and messy (like a lot of social science work and policy activism). There is a strong case for much more sharing of information, for the circulation of relevant studies, for analyses to be made and distributed in advance of any annual meeting, a dynamic

website, which presupposes a stronger organizational structure and data collection effort, which would require vastly more time, more expertise in key areas (e.g. bilingual education, the everyday practices of each EU institution, the sociolinguistics of multilingualism, etc.), a continuous effort in a wide range of topics. At some point it is possible that 'national institutes' of language can become the experts on multilingualism and 'international' language learning and policy? This would be a real achievement of European integration.