

This article was first printed as ‘English in the European Union’ in Hartmann, Reinhard (ed.) *English language in Europe, Special edition of European Studies Series*. Exeter: Intellect. 1996. 24-36. The article is, as far as I know, the only attempt to trace the introduction of English as the dominant language in terms of social and historical changes.

English and ‘English’ in the European Union

Cay Dollerup

Users and uses of English

An assessment of the status of English for official and unofficial work at the European Union, with special reference to the future, calls for some introductory remarks. One must bear in mind that, although the European Union (EU) organisations are political, their work, and the status of English in this framework, is intimately connected with the recent history of Europe, as well as developments in the various national societies. Languages, national as well as international, do not exist independently of their users, and users do not exist independently of language communities.

Worldwide, English spread in the wake of British conquests. It was diffused as the language of the peoples of North America. And in African and Asian colonies it often came into use as the language of communication with the original population, and, later on even after independence, often as the common vehicle for communication. Yet it is a veritable newcomer on the European Continent.

There are additional points: the present-day situation where, irrespective of class and occupation, nearly all Europeans have some familiarity with foreign languages, is a relatively modern phenomenon. Despite the existence of Latin church services all over Europe until the reformation (and until quite recently in Roman Catholic countries), few people were previously aware of foreign languages as something relevant to their own everyday life. For most of the time, even in epochs held forth as periods of foreign language influence such as the eighteenth century when French became the language of the cultured elite, it was only a fraction of the population of any European country which would ever hear a foreign language spoken.



aristocratic couple

Large-scale and systematic foreign-language teaching made its appearance slowly in the course of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth. It coincided with the rise of the middle classes and their opportunities for foreign contacts, which were, in turn, the outcome of improved national

infrastructures and consequent international mobility. Until the middle of the present century, the first foreign language taught would, roughly speaking, be the language spoken by the nearest major nation: in Britain, students learnt French (and still do); in Germany French; in Spain French. This also applied to the small nations, only that students were told to learn the languages of several of their bigger neighbours. Thus in the Danish senior grades more than thirty years ago, my classmates and I were expected to learn three or four foreign languages (English, German, French, Latin) on the (unquestioned) assumption that it was more polite to address foreigners (implicitly nationals from large states) in their own language than in our melodious and expressive mother tongue. ...// 25 ...

Many factors thus intertwine in an assessment of the use of the English language in Europe. Braj Kachru (1992) has set up three categories of users of English: (a) the 'inner circle' of native speakers (e.g. the British, Americans, Canadians, Australians) for whom the language is the mother tongue, and, to most of these users, also the only language they know; (b) the 'outer circle' comprising second-language speakers who use English as the 'other' tongue in much everyday communication (e.g. people in administration, education and the like in former British colonies), and (c) the 'expanding circle' of people who use English as 'another' tongue, i.e. a foreign language. Kachru's idea could be illustrated as in Figure 1 (which is not identical with Kachru's own version). In the Continental European context, English is 'another tongue' in the 'expanding circle', but in the course of very few years it has become by far the dominant one. A discussion of English in the context of the European Union thus focuses on the 'inner' and the 'expanding' circles, whereas the 'outer circle' is largely irrelevant.

argely irrelevant.

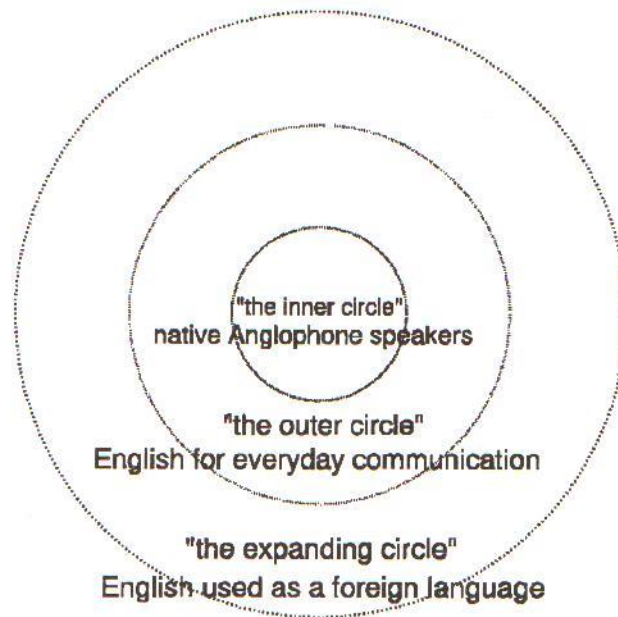


Figure 1: *Different users of English*

This state of affairs is due to a variety of factors which are not easily disentangled. They do not always belong to the same dimension, and they even vary from country to country depending on local conditions

ranging from financial constraints to political decisions at the highest national level. ... // 26 ... The latter is best exemplified by the deliberate French promotion of the French language, both within France, e.g. in the official discouragement of the use of loan-words, and abroad by means of *l'Institut français*. The reverse situation in minor speech communities where people's living rooms are invaded by a veritable flood of foreign languages is due to a simple question of finance - namely that imported television programs cost much less than domestic productions and that, in turn, subtitling costs only a fraction of the dubbing practised in large countries.

The emergence of English as the first foreign language in Europe

To the best of my knowledge there are no systematic studies and no statistics that have been put together to prove the following points. Nevertheless, most of the factors will be within recent memory of most readers.

The present hegemony of English in Europe is primarily due to the entertainment industry, and only secondarily to war, technological lead, science and political domination. It also varies from profession to profession, country to country, and district to district.

Chronologically speaking, the beginning of the establishment of English as the first foreign language began, I suggest, with the introduction of the talkies (1927-1928). Minor language communities would subtitle films as a matter of course because the small-audience market would not justify the expenses involved in dubbing. In itself this did not lead to an improved command of English, only to a heightened awareness of its existence.

The Second World War, however, caused more radical changes. The first physical factor of importance to the improved knowledge of English was the placement of American and British troops in Germany, though it is hard to assess the linguistic effect. The role of German, however, changed overnight. From being a powerful nation whose language was important in industry and the natural sciences, Germany was reduced to rubble not only literally, but also in terms of political influence and importance in scientific affairs. In schools all over northern Europe, English became the unchallenged second language within a decade or two. In southern Europe, French continued to dominate until the 1970s.

Whereas the First World War had still been fought by national armies largely under the command of their own generals, the Second World War was fought, especially in the Western hemisphere, by the Allied Forces, with English as the main language of command because the supreme command and most troops were Anglophone (Americans, British, Canadians, Australians etc.). The importance of the goodwill among most Europeans towards the liberation should not be underestimated as preparing the ground for the rise of English, and thus providing the all-important motivation for learning English and using it in international communication between Continental



US soldiers in France 1944

nationalities.

American advances in technology, industry and advertising do not really seem to have promoted the cause of English substantially before the Second World War. ...// 27 ... But I suggest that after the Second World War, the determined American drive to establish institutions of basic research (most spectacularly demonstrated in the massive effort leading to the explosion of the atom bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki) quickly led to the fact that major advances and discoveries in the natural sciences and medicine were published almost exclusively in English. This meant that scientists all over the world were obliged to accept English as their lingua franca. This acceptance, however, was not independent of what happened in other areas in the national communities.

In the 1950s, the advent of a new mass medium, television, brought about another upheaval. Once again the minor speech communities (the Netherlands, Belgium, and the Nordic countries, to mention only a few) used subtitling, while the bigger nations (France, Spain, Italy, Germany) stuck to synchronisation of the imported entertainment programs (especially films). An intuitive estimate is that by now more than 80% of the films and television serials in most European countries are imported from Anglophone countries (especially the US). As opposed to subtitling, the use of dubbing in large language communities implies that the main impact of television is primarily visual and hence less obvious - or at least confined to cultural and life-style spheres rather than to language influence.

The real turning point for the pervasive and permanent English influence is, in my view, the establishment of a specific youth culture and the propagation of popular music. The existence of a self-contained and independent youth culture started with the Californian beatnik-movement which had a ripple effect in Europe among the intellectuals and was then overshadowed in the socially much more influential rock-and-roll music. It was the latter which heralded the epoch where Anglophone productions came to dominate the international music market in the 1950s and 1960s with Elvis Presley (international breakthrough: 1956, Heartbreak hotel and Love me tender), Bob Dylan (international breakthrough: 1963, Blowin' in the wind), the Beatles (international breakthrough: 1964, I want to hold your hand), the Doors (international breakthrough: 1967, The Doors), and others. Such lyrics appealed directly to target audiences with the original words irrespective of television translation policies.



I suggest that the pervasive use of English in songs had a lasting effect in terms of motivation for learning English, not only in Europe, but, indeed, all over the world where it gained a foothold. In turn, this motivation was immeasurably increased for the average European by the realisation that ‘English’ in the broad sense can be used as a *lingua franca* on trips, for business or pleasure. In so far as there was a choice, English became the language preferred. Witness its popularity in European schools: it is a recognised but often overlooked fact that Continental teachers of English have no problems motivating students to learn.

Educational authorities have probably not been swayed by the popularity of television and pop songs. Once again the switch to an emphasis on English as the first foreign language is due to a variety of reasons in each nation, but some of the major factors must have been the dominance in politics, industry and science of the Anglophone societies. At all events, the overall outcome is that English teaching has gained ground. ... // 28 ...

In terms of international politics, English has had a dominant role at least since the establishment of the League of Nations (1919) where it was one of the working languages, and even more so since the establishment of the UN (1945), its multitudinous subsidiary agencies (the UNESCO, the WHO), and other international bodies. In this diplomatic world, English is today the only working language always represented and has thus replaced the role of French.

The first Anglophone political commitment in a European context came with the establishment of NATO (1949) which is dominated by Anglophone societies (UK and US) and where English is therefore the main language, even at its headquarters in Brussels. The next major political step was the British entry in the European Union (1973) where English became a working language, technically on a par with languages like Danish, Italian, and Dutch. This was thanks to the fact that it was already established as an international *lingua franca* in other contexts, and in wider usage, especially at an informal level.



The NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium

The institutions and languages in the European Union

The EU was originally founded back in 1952 (as the Coal and Steel Community). Today [1996] it comprises several institutions, but in most contexts, including this one, it is sufficient to focus on the following three: (a) The European Parliament, which has 636 elected politicians from the 12 member states, Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. (b) The non-partisan Commission, which can take initiatives and see them through the process of decision and later supervises the execution of these decisions in the member states. (c) The Council of Ministers, which consists of any meeting of ministers in specific fields (e.g. ministers of science, foreign ministers, ministers of agriculture).

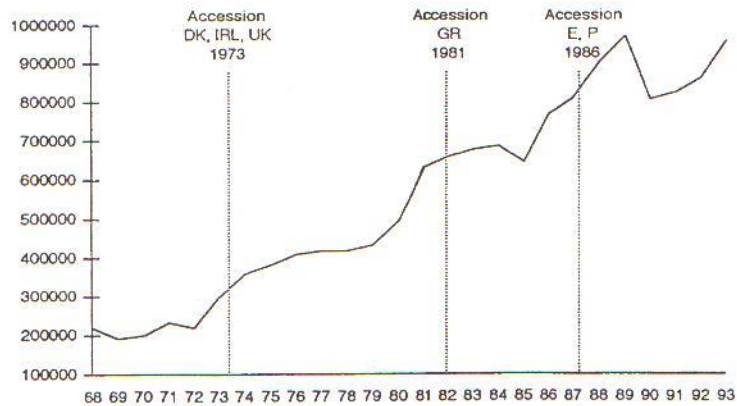
Each of these bodies has its own administration and its own translation service. The official languages used at the EU are the national languages of the member states. So, when founded by the original six nations, the EU had four official languages: Dutch, French, German, and Italian. Two of these, French and German, were the recognised working languages - a subtle distinction to outsiders, but of great importance to the administration (and translation work).



Map of the first six member states: Italy, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany

The first expansion in 1973 brought in Danish and English, the latter language tacitly but naturally taking over the role of German as the second working language. In 1981 Greek was added. In 1986 Spanish and Portuguese were brought in. And in 1995 the entry of Austria, Sweden and Finland added more official languages, Swedish and Finnish, thus swelling the number of official languages to eleven (and the official working languages to three: English, German and French). Translational activity has followed these developments. Figure 2 shows the growth in the number of pages translated annually at the EU Commission. ...// 29

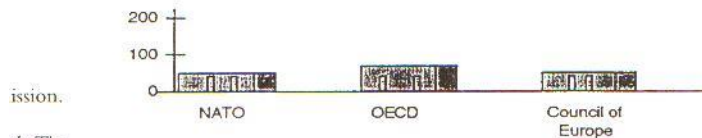
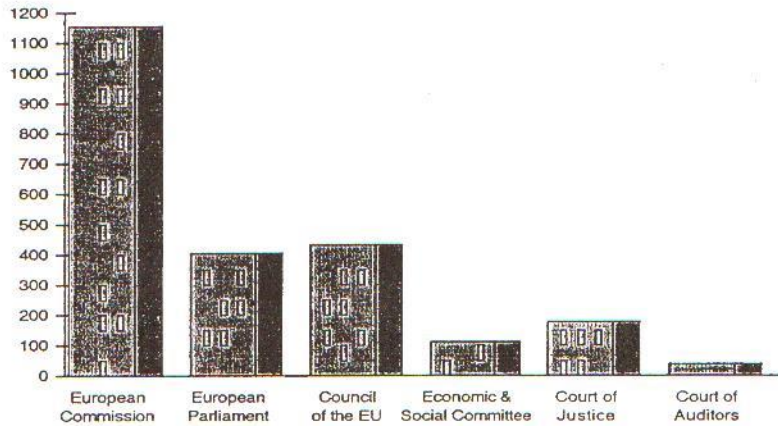
...



The Translation Service's daily input (into all languages) in 1993 was between 4000 and 5000 pages.

Figure 2: Number of pages translated per year in the EU.⁵

Translation (and interpreting) staff in the institutions of the EU are by far the largest group of language professionals in the world, and far outnumber those of any other international body as is amply demonstrated in Figure 3:

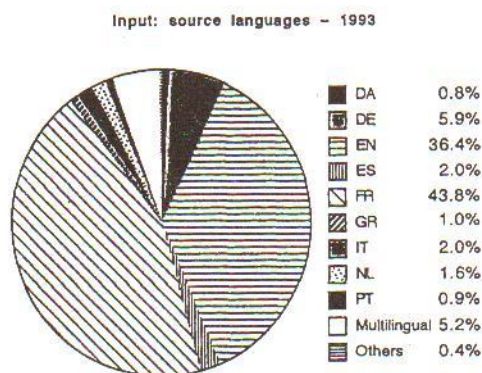


ission.
rk. The
sion's
. June

Figure 3: Number of staff translators employed by the EU institutions and by various international organisations.⁶

In order to explain the language work at the EU properly, it is useful briefly to present the ideal procedure for creating a regulation, e.g. about the use of additives in food. The draft is (a) in French. It is (b) translated into all the languages. The draft is (c) discussed, and changes are suggested, in the member states. There are (d) meetings in Brussels using interpreting where the written documents are discussed. The meetings are followed by (e) new translations and (f) new national hearings. The directive is (g) finalised at the Commission and then (h) passed for decision by the Council of Ministers. It is finally (i) used in national legislation.

In principle, all languages should be involved to the same extent at all stages in this process. This, however, is not the case: at the Parliament more than 40% of all documents are originally prepared in French which is the working language among the permanent EU staff in Brussels, Luxembourg, and Strasbourg. But the statistics show that English is steadily gaining ground, and is now close on the heels of French.⁷ The situation at the Commission is shown in Figure 4 which also provides evidence of translations from non-member states.



The work of the Commission's Translation Service is not confined to the Community languages. It may have to produce translations from any language, ranging from Hungarian to Japanese!

Figure 4: Breakdown of languages in which documents are originally

The Language Services are the backbone of the EU, which is, after all, a voluntary federation of free and independent states united in peaceful cooperation. Most international bodies have two to four official languages, the UN has a staggering six (English, French, Russian, Chinese, Arabic, Spanish), the EU has nine (11 from 1995). Each of these has its own staff and its own administration, all in all more than 2000 highly qualified professionals.

This language situation has become increasingly complex with progressive enlargements. In the original Community, diligent staff members could, by an incredible and unsung heroic effort, hope to attain some degree of mastery of all the languages and thus to become plurilingual, but now they usually give up, faced with the multilingualism of the institution as it is today.

Given the fact that all countries, and, consequently, their national languages, are equal at the EU, there are executive bodies where all languages must be treated on an equal footing. The same goes for meetings in the European Parliament and for politically important meetings in the Council of Ministers, where

national ministers use their national languages and interpreting is provided from and into all languages, as illustrated in Figure 5. The illustration shows the set-up for a meeting with interpreting from and into nine languages at meetings (that is, before 1995) at the European Commission. Commission staff head the table, and the national delegates are seated in alphabetical order. Behind the participants are the booths for the interpreters, who render the proceedings into their mother tongues.

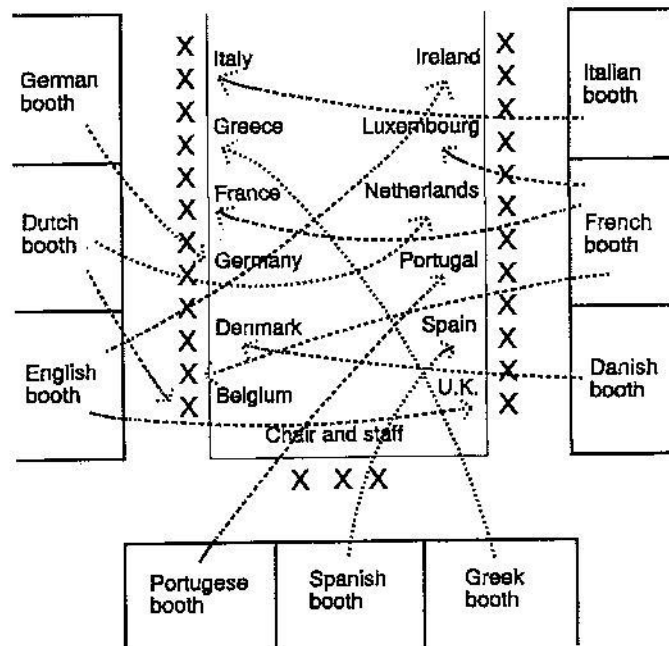


Figure 5: Interpretation set-up for meetings at the European Commission.



Enlargement

Given this complexity and the high number of official languages, many people have voiced their concern about the Language Services at the EU, especially as the Union is about to admit new members. The entry of Sweden and Finland, both of which have, without any raising of an eyebrow, had their national languages acknowledged as official languages on a par with the previous nine, brought the number of languages up to eleven - and added nearly 500 people to the Language Services.⁹

The official EU policy statement runs as follows:

Enlargement will bring additional languages to the [European Union], thus enriching its cultural diversity. But more languages will also complicate its work. In the [Union] of 12 members there are 9 official languages in normal use: In a [Union] of 20 members there could be as many as 15 languages; with 30 members there could be as many as 25 languages.// 32 For reasons of principle, legal acts and important documents should continue to be translated into the official languages of all member states. To ensure effective communication in meetings, pragmatic solutions will have to be found by each of the institutions. (EU Commission 24 June 1992).

Scared by the burdensome administration, appalled by the cost (which is high), and daunted by physical obstacles, some people have argued that 'a decision must be reached', or, as Christian Heynold has put it, 'the moment of truth will come'. (1995)

The EU has been much criticised, especially in northern Europe, and this makes it hard for many North Europeans to appreciate that they are indeed part of a world power - and a peaceful one at that - in embryo. In the early years the member states went in for harmonisation at levels which were open to ridicule (and sometimes, but not always, rightly so, as when time was spent on discussing the shape of cucumbers). But for all its set-backs and internal bickering, the progress made is impressive: common legislation facilitates movement of individuals and goods, a common parliament with supranational power is slowly emerging, and a common currency is within reach.

Although there are fine visions underlying the EU which are slowly being realised, the day-to-day routine is based on pragmatic solutions. I am disinclined to believe that there will ever be a showdown - a 'moment of truth' - on the language issue. The pragmatic attitude will see to it that this is avoided, for the main conflict of interest is essentially between French and English, and for this there will be no obvious solution as long as the main institutions of the Union are placed in Francophone regions. There are no signs that this will change in the foreseeable future. So instead of a major political confrontation we will see a set of pragmatic solutions at the practical level. These solutions will be adapted to the mode of communication (translation, interpreting, discussion), to the institution involved (Parliament, Commission, Council of Ministers), to the type of work done, and they will take into account the realities of what can be done (e.g. the time available for translation work, or the number of booths which can realistically be used simultaneously). There is, clearly a slow change in the air: in 1993, the reunited Germany insisted on its status (as it originally was) as a working language in full use, which in itself has shifted some emphasis back to German. Yet English is indeed gaining ground.

Translation

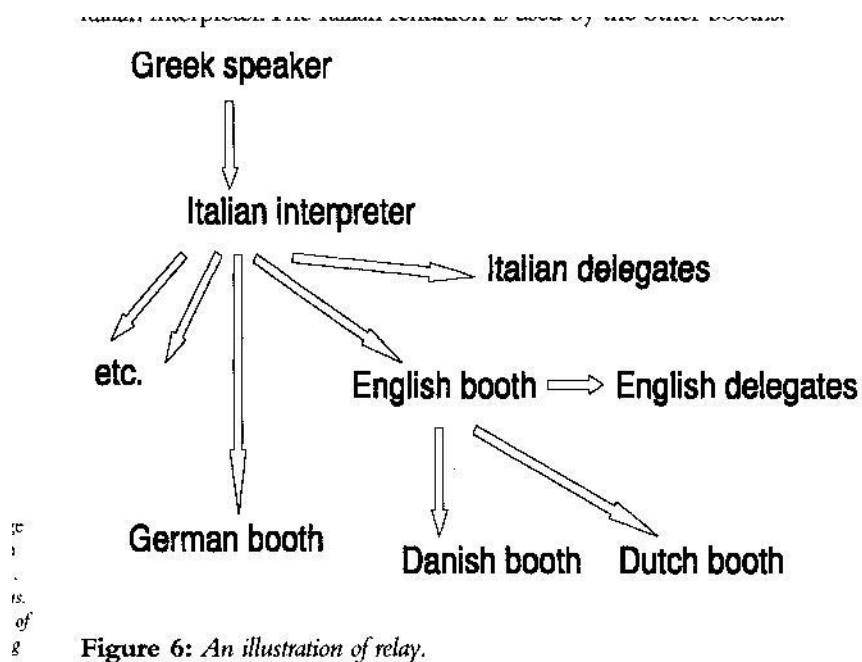
In terms of translation, the road ahead is fairly obvious: work at the EU will be streamlined in a number of ways: staff and delegates will be reminded that brevity is the soul of wit and asked to cut down the texts to be translated as much as possible. In addition, the Union will pursue its goal of harmonisation not by direct regulations (which become national law in their respective translated forms), but by a stronger emphasis on directives, which are the common guidelines used for implementing national legislation, where the actual wording and phrasing is the responsibility of each member state. ...//33 ... The EU's use of machine translation, which is at present used sparingly, will increase, especially with texts that are repetitive (either in their actual contents, or because they incorporate previously translated material).

More translation work will be done on a freelance basis and new member states will themselves be responsible for preparing most of the essential translations, e.g. of the treaties. I believe that they may also, in the long run, have to do most translations at the local and national level rather than within the EU institutions.

Interpreting

The two main problems in keeping up with further enlargements as far as interpreting is concerned are (a) the practical and architectural problem of having the appropriate number of booths: it seems as if twelve is the absolute top limit (and this may be too optimistic) and (b) the training, maintenance and administration of staff of adequate size.

Many people familiar with interpreting also consider the use of relay a major obstacle. Relay is used when interpreters do not understand the language spoken by the delegate, and therefore switch onto a colleague's rendition. For instance, when an English delegate speaks there is ordinarily no relay: all interpreters understand directly and interpret into their various languages. However, when a Greek delegate speaks, this may be understood only by e.g. the Italian interpreter whose rendition then serves the needs of, say, the French, English, Portuguese, and German booths, while the Danes and the Dutch manage through two relays (perhaps Italian and English). This is shown in Figure 6: the Greek delegate speaks. He is understood by the Italian interpreter. The Italian rendition is used by the other booths.



It is often claimed that relay makes for distortion, but although this an understandable view, it is not correct. Errors in interpreting are nearly always due to the first interpreter's non-comprehension (for instance because the delegate does not speak into the microphone or uses dialect, slang, and the like), but not to misunderstandings between the professional interpreters who are trained in making smooth and easily understood oral presentations. Relays however, produce time lags, so that, for instance, the point of jokes is made at different times (several seconds apart) with speakers of different languages, or new speakers start before all renditions are finished. This is primarily a problem of management which can to some extent be solved by careful chairmanship.

The Danish foreign minister has publicly stated that Denmark may dispense with interpreting at specific

meetings (*Weekendavisen* 14 May 1993), thus pointing the way for other minor speech communities. Despite this opening, I do not think any member state is going to accept publicly that its language becomes second-class by giving up all claims to interpreting services. Such an action can only be considered a slighting of the national language, unless there are (at least symbolic) concessions from the French, who would have to accept that even French is not indispensable, and this I find unlikely.

The political forums, especially the European Parliament, are even less likely to accept a reduction in the access to interpreting for the simple reason that the politicians are not elected by voters according to their mastery of foreign languages, but because of their political views. There is no doubt that speakers of minor languages will occasionally have to make do without interpreting, perhaps even without translation, and it will do no good to demonstrate anger by walking out of meetings as has sometimes been practised, since this results only in loss of influence. In other cases, and these will probably happen before the turn of the century unless some miracle architect dreams up a solution, we may see meetings where some politicians (for instance from states applying for membership) have to rely on their own interpreters, with or without equipment, in ways which are eminently clear to the public, for instance by using whispered interpreting.

Continental English(es)

I have already made the point that the EU is a pragmatic organisation. So most working groups made up of permanent staff use French and occasionally English. Other working groups cut down the number of languages used to two or three, and then only call for interpreting in cases where they face an important delegation which could participate without interpreting.

The main problem is, of course, that in terms of democratic equality, the native speakers may have an unfair advantage. This point has, at least in one case, led to the adoption of a working language (Italian) which was not the native language of any member of that particular group (Karkar p. 12). But by and large the expert groups (which consist mostly of delegates flown in from the member states) tend to use English and French, and possibly German, although English seems to be gaining ground here as well.

...// 35

Delegates working with languages other than their mother tongue sometimes perform well, and at other times not. Some are aware of the handicap ('We say what we can and not what we wish to say'), others are not. Any lack of interpreting is, to some extent at least, made up by the fact that in most cases committees function for long periods and members get to know one another, so that they get a feeling of the intention. But of course misunderstandings and snarl-ups can still occur at meetings. I have witnessed a meeting without Danish interpreting where the mistaken use of *want* for *wish* by a Danish delegate led to an unnecessary one-hour debate. But snarl-ups may also happen with interpreting, as when the Italian booth had major problems with explaining to the Italian delegates the concept of *goodwill* as part of the value of firms in industry.

Let me add that I have here focused on the formal aspects only. Roughly speaking, in informal talks, French is primarily used by the permanent staff and English by the delegates who attend meetings from the national countries. In this case, we must return to the question of motivation. English is the truly global language of international communication, and from their national schools, English is already the foreign language most delegates have learnt best.

All told English is slowly but surely gaining ground as the major working language at meetings, formally as well as informally. The expansion in 1995 will strengthen the position of English further. I also suggest that any future expansion of the EU will, in fact, also tend to boost the position of English for work. This, however, is not due to central political decisions, but to the changed status of English in other contexts: in science, in business, in travel, in foreign-language teaching and in the entertainment industry. All contribute substantially to make sure that English is the means of communication, and consequently the language people want to learn, to practise, and to use in international communication. The delegates will, willy-nilly, exert peer-pressure on one another to talk English and, in so doing, they, too, will contribute to the diffusion of English, and its traces (in terms of loan words) all over Europe.

In other works, I have discussed the fact that Danes connected with the EU have developed an 'EU-sociolect'. In itself, this is on a par with the type of language which is developed by any group of professionals working with English who are not native speakers.

I am in no doubt that, in the long run, delegates of all languages who use English (and to some extent the permanent staff) will develop a kind (or several kinds) of EU-English. The most marked feature about these sociolects will be their vocabulary, and one can make a strong case for calling them 'languages for special purposes'. As far as their syntax is concerned, I would guess that they will have longer sentences than ordinary British English (because of legalese, German, and French influence), but we wait for future linguists to come up with detailed descriptions of these sociolects as they develop and grow.

Perhaps we are going to see several such domain-oriented Englishes on the European continent—one example is that of the common man whose English is affected by the language of entertainment. Other Englishes are those of the scientists in their separate fields. ...// 36 ... Yet others are those of the Eurocrats in Brussels and Strasbourg. The emergence of such EU-Englishes which are distinct from the separate national second-language Englishes is somewhat ironical in an organisation committed so thoroughly to democracy and equality.

Conclusion

It will have been noticed that I have at no stage considered English the only working (let alone official) language of the EU. I consider this possibility unrealistic - it would go against the ideology of cooperation, and at the same time reality dictates that the Union cannot continue to expand with the same Language Services that mediate between the core languages at present. I believe that the recent reassertion in 1992 of German as an official working language may have some effect, especially since German has a fairly strong standing in some of the nations which may enter the EU within the next twenty years. However, I doubt that German will remain a strong force in the EU in fifty years' time. For geographical reasons, French will remain strong within the foreseeable future and consequently there will be a stand-off, possibly leading to a compromise where French and English do in fact become the main working languages and the others are hitched on to the extent that is necessary. In terms of sheer bulk, time is on the side of English, because more and more contacts are established with nations where English is or has recently become the first foreign language taught. These nations will themselves have to provide the language work which is today offered centrally at the EU, and they may have problems if their foreign-language teaching is not up to the

task.

The importance of foreign-language teaching has, as far as I can see, not really dawned on Greek and Portuguese politicians. But some of the states who will be applying for membership in the future seem to be more aware of it. The battles for influence in Europe will be fought in the primary grades of the respective national educational systems.

Let me finally stress that the usage discussed here has been of English in what Kachru (cited at the beginning of the chapter) termed the 'expanding circle'. The EU is not only part of that circle, but will also add to its enlargement. In this context, English is not used as a mother tongue, and it will take a long time, in my view more than a generation, before it ever becomes a second or 'other language' used in everyday life within any member state. At present it is not even used for the promotion of English but for securing adequate, if not perfect, communication between democratic states. And in that process it may well, right now, be on the way to becoming the common European working language - outside the institutionalised European Union.

References:

Heynold, Christian. 1994. Interpreting at the European Commission. In: Dollerup, Cay & Annette Lindegaard. *Teaching Translation and Interpreting. 2: Insights, Aims, Visions*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 11-18.

Kachru, B. 1992. *The Other Tongue. English across cultures*. 2nd ed. Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (pp. 356-357)

Figure 4 is based on Karker, A. Dansk I EF – en situationsrapport om sproget. Copenhagen & Oslo: Gad. P. 37.

Other sources quoted are from official publications of the European Union Institutions.

