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COMPLEXITIES OF EU LANGUAGE WORK

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Abstract

The article discusses some of the numerous parameters that must be taken into account in studies of language work at European Union institutions, let alone the European Union. Initially listing the central EU institutions, which in their totality constitute the international organisation with the largest language staff, the article proceeds to discuss diachronic and synchronic views of the language scene. Then it deals with the translation procedures employed, including simultaneous conference interpreting. It attempts to set up a distinction between two extremes, viz. simple and complex translational situations and concludes that even such a distinction is often inadequate. The use of core languages in much EU work, notably in daily work at the EU institutions is discussed in terms of their usefulness as repositories and records of a collective negotiation process as well as the fear that they may imply political domination, a view analysed from synchronic and diachronic angles. The article concludes with a general caution against generalising too much from individual studies.

This article will focus on European Union language work. The main emphasis is on making some salient features clear to outsiders. To insiders, the present article will offer an angle with a bite.

I believe that it is important for Europeans to discuss the EU constructively. The EU is – also in linguistic terms – a unique entity. This is in itself one reason why it is doubtful that anti-Europeans can conduct worthwhile discussions on EU language work: without a major perspective, the discussion gets bogged down in uninteresting detail.

My comments are based primarily on studies of the European Commission in Brussels. In 1975, the University of Copenhagen was asked to help with some linguistic problems so I spent three one-month stints in Brussels. I had access to whatever and whoever I wanted - and everybody cooperated.[1] Since then, I kept in touch. In 1991, I taped the interpreting proceedings at expert meetings for one solid week.[2] In 2000, I interviewed key persons in the Interpreting and Translation Services at the Commission and paid a brief visit to the Parliament.[3]

The diffuse discussions

Discussions of language work at the EU institutions are often diffuse. Among the reasons are (a) that scholars are often unaware of the limitations of their perspective, (b) that they sometimes draw too many general conclusions from the insights they gain, (c) that the EU is a much more dynamic entity than is commonly realised. … // 272 …In other words, it exhibits more adaptability and flexibility than many people give it credit for, (d) that some things are not spelled out by the EU institutions mostly for 'political' reasons, among these a legitimate wish to keep criticism at a minimum. And, I would add (e) that the general public has a very fuzzy idea of the institutions it comprises – a feature not eased by name changes and near synonymous names, by excessive use of acronyms, capitalisation according to complex rules and limiting the sense of many words in the public domain to specific (and often unclear) meanings. **Concerned with describing EU language work in a way understandable to outsiders, this article does not follow EU terminology on these points**.

One can approach language work in the European Union from a large number of angles. They overlap in complex ways, so what is offered here is (and must be) simplified.

Flags outside the European Paliament (in Strassbourg)

Institutions

EU language work can be studied at various institutions. In terms of language staff, which must be one of the main criteria in a translation context, the seven largest EU institutions are:

Illustration 1
Language staff at EU institutions (Budget 2000)

INSTITUTION	Translation staff ('written'/printed)	Interpreters (Oral renditions)	Total
Commission	1,332		1,903*

Council	641	(SCIC) 529	641
Economic and Social Committee	140		140
Committee of the Regions	58		58
Parliament	583	258	841
Court of Justice	265	40	305
Court of Auditors	63	0	63
Total	3,082	827	3,951

*The interpreters are considered Commission staff but also serve at the Council and the two Committees listed (SCIC). The figure for translators at the Commission includes 42 lawyer-linguists.

Overall, this shows that, even when we exclude freelancers who take on as much as 20% of the work, the European Union institutions constitute by far the largest single organisation for translation work in the world. (Source: http://europa.eu.int/comm/ translation/en/eyl/en) …// 273 …

I believe that, to people interested in language work from a generalist point of view, the most interesting institutions are

The Commission which draws up initiatives and oversees their implementation,

The Council of Ministers, which is a session of national ministers of the EU member states within a given field (e.g. agriculture, finances), and

The European Parliament, the 626 members of which are elected directly by the citizens of the EU and who – within the Parliament - form political groups independent of their nationality. It is also the only EU body that conducts public debates.

Roughly speaking, the **Commission** is primarily a policy-making, executive, and monitoring body in the European context, the **Parliament** is the legislative and political body, and the **Council of Ministers** a policy-making and politically specialised body. These and other EU institutions have their own staff of language workers. Most institutions, such as the Commission do not publicly emphasise translational aspects of their internal work. But it is at the three institutions that the linguistic element is most clearly part of the negotiation, the game of creation, the “translation-cum-creation”.

Material

Within the framework of the EU institutions, the texts translated span from speeches and press releases via delegates’ speeches in standing or expert committees over debates in the European Parliament, to legislative texts. In so far as these are meant for EU law, they are divided into regulations and directives (see Wagner, 2001).

The language scene: a diachronic perspective

Today, the European Union has eleven official languages, spoken in one or more of the member states. It is possible to study language work focusing on any one language at any of the major EU institutions.

However, the languages do not, as it were, have the same status on the international scene: most of the languages spoken in the EU countries are small languages – which is the term used in this article. Globally, Spanish, English and French are considered major languages. …// 274 … In European history, German, French and English have enjoyed the status of major languages.

The eleven EU languages have not been ‘official languages’ of the European Union institutions for the same number of years.

The first six founding nations (1958) comprised four languages: French, German, Italian and Dutch, with French and German as the main languages. The first enlargement (1973) added English and Danish. The second (1981) Greek, the third (1986) Portuguese and Spanish, and the last one (1995) Swedish and Finnish.

Any approach to EU language work from one language is likely to be affected by language-specific concerns – as were for instance my own first reports. Add to this that, from the perspective of a small language, there is less material whereas the wealth of material may be quite overwhelming with a major EU language.

In this context, it is also pertinent that the official EU languages do not belong to the same language families: Finnish is a Finno-Ugric, not Indo-European language. The other languages belong to different subgroups of Indo-European: German, English, Dutch, Danish, and Swedish are Germanic (and divide into West Germanic and Nordic). French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish are Romance languages, and Greek is Hellenic. The enlargements under way will add e.g. Slavonic. Given the differences in vocabulary, syntax and extra-linguistic features embedded in every one of these languages over the centuries, generalisations made from translation between any binary language pair cannot always be applied to all languages.

Source and target languages

The eleven languages are not represented in equal measure on all occasions, although this may well be what some people believe when they hear about language equality.[4]

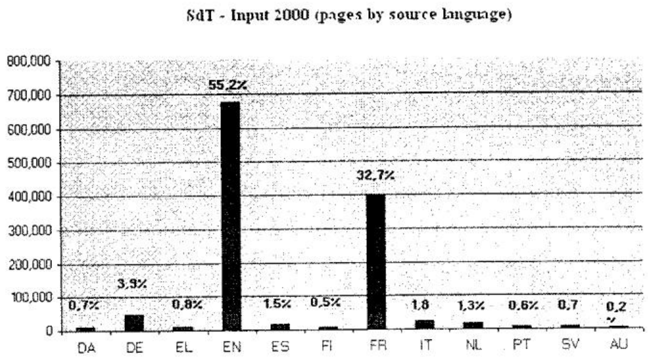
Firstly, there are wide variations in the use of the different languages at the various institutions. The members of the European Parliament will often resort to their national language. This is perfectly understandable: the politicians have not been elected for their ability to speak foreign languages, but in order to represent national voters; and in order to demonstrate to these very voters that they are doing their job, they must convey this information by speaking the national languages during debates – at least as long as the television cameras are on. …// 275 …

Secondly, figures are not always available or comparable. Written translation can cite the number of pages (of 1,500 typographical signs) whereas interpreting can only quote the number of meetings at which there have been specific language booths. The transnational political groups in the European Parliament are expected to employ freelancers who are paid from the funds the group receives for translation. Thus official statistics do not list all translation work. Statistics serve only to give an indication of what is going on.

Nevertheless, when we look at the source languages, the European Parliament received source texts as follows in the period October 2000 to October 2001: Danish 1.65%, German 10.7%, Greek 2.54%, English 37.05%, Spanish 6.49%, Finnish 1.63%, French 26.51%, Italian 4.81%, Dutch 3.77%, Portuguese 2.50%, and Swedish 2.34%, and a few in other languages. In principle, these texts are translated into all official languages.

The figures for the number of pages translated from the languages in the European Commission in 2000 look as follows:

Illustration 2



Source: http://europa.eu.int/comm/translation/en/eyl/en

… // 276 …

It seen right away, that in the Commission, direct translation between small languages (excluding German) constitutes less than 2.5% of total translation work. At the same time, it is noted that the 'amount' of source languages at the political body, the Parliament, corresponds much more to the size of the population of each language group.[5]

Core languages

The figures from the Commission vividly illustrate that most internal language work at the EU institutions, notably the Commission, is conducted in English and French. Following Wagner, such predominant languages will henceforth be termed 'core languages' in this article.

A diachronic view puts the present English and French predominance in perspective: the enlargements and changes in foreign-language teaching at national level in the EU countries have brought about shifts in the identity of the languages used for daily routine work in the EU institutions. Until Britain joined the EU, the 'core languages' would be German and French. After Britain joined, they were, at first, French, German and English, then French, English and German.[6] Subsequently English and French became the core languages and as of the mid-1990s English has been the dominant language.

The identity of the ‘core languages’ is thus subject to fluctuation and their mutual status changes.

Translational procedures

As in many other international organisations, translators at the EU institutions normally work *only into* their mother tongue. In this respect they are privileged: It is only in the Anglophone world that most non-literary translators working outside international organisations can make a living translating into their mother tongue.

Translational procedure in the European Commission is discussed in the article by Emma Wagner. In the present context, we can therefore simplify this into stating that, at the EU institutions we find e.g.:

Traditional translation (including electronic dictionaries and terminology banks and so on),

The use of *Translation Memory*, recycling previous translation (now also usually part of professional translation procedure), … // 277 …

SYSTRAN, and

Interpreting.

Interpreting

It is often overlooked by linguists that the meetings of the delegates from the member states are the backbone of EU cooperation. Every day there are about sixty meetings at the institutions that are taken care of by the SCIC alone (see Illustration 1). In addition there are meetings at other institutions as well as sessions in Parliament. In principle, all member states send delegates to these meetings (Luxembourg is often represented by Belgium.)

The EU institutions nearly always use simultaneous conference interpreting. The role and procedures of interpreting are hard to understand for outsiders, and it is therefore appropriate to provide a simplified overview. This will be done by describing a meeting at which delegates from all 15 member states use interpreting from and into their mother tongues. Albeit rare in practice, it serves well for illustration.

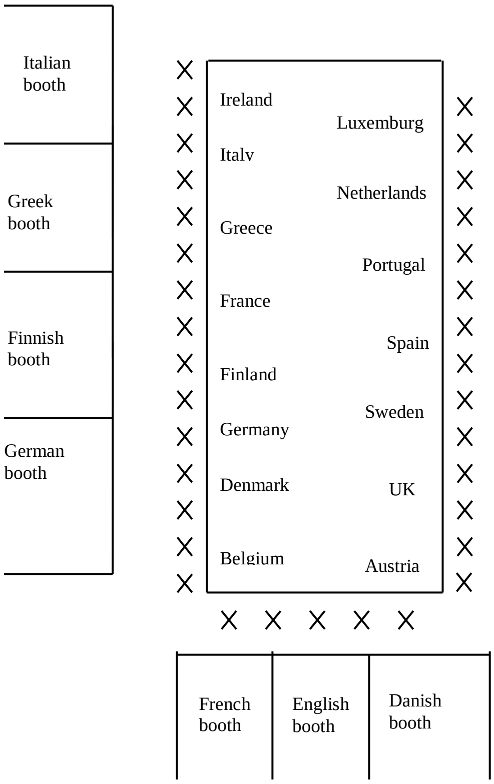


Illustration 3

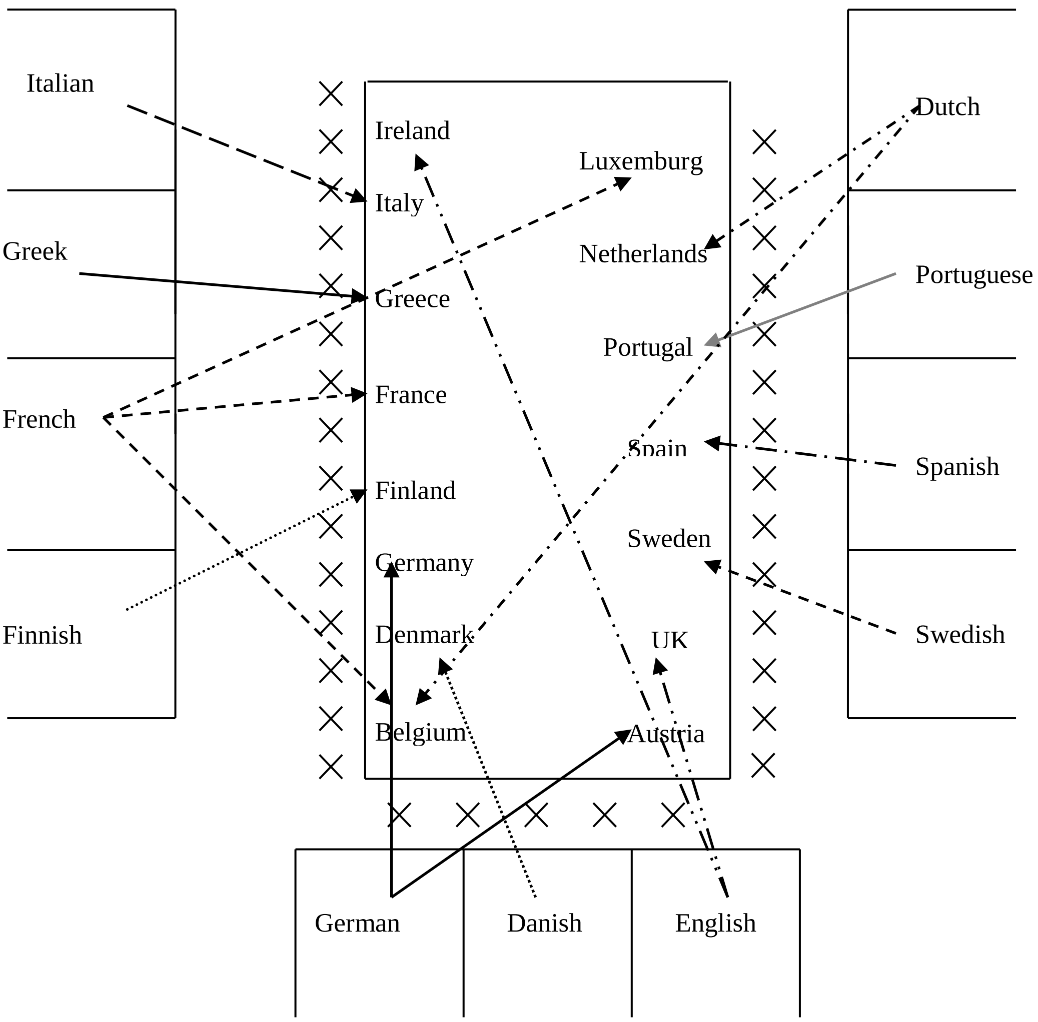
… // 278 …

The delegates (marked with crosses) sit in alphabetical order at the table (according to their country's name in the national language).

Around them are the interpreting booths. Since we operate with more than five languages in this example, there are three interpreters in each of the eleven booths, one for each official language.

When the proceedings start, the delegates speak and are interpreted. The arrows indicate how the booths serve 'their' languages:

Illustration 4

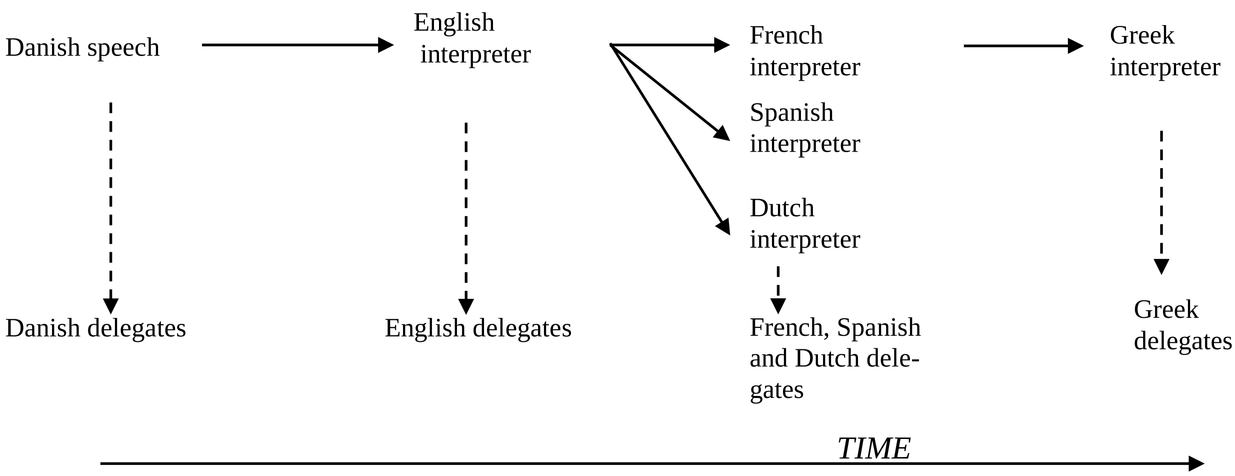


… //279 …

It is noted that the Belgian delegation listens to the Dutch and French booths since it often comprises both Flemish and French speakers.

The immediate problem with this set-up is that even when interpreters know several languages (they must master at least two in addition to their mother tongue), there will be occasions when a delegate from one of the small languages (which are logically understood by fewer interpreters than the core languages) has the floor. The delegate's statement may be understood by only one or two of the interpreters. The interpreters in the other booths then have to switch off the channel which transmits the source text (and which follows the speakers). Instead, they listen to interpreted renditions by colleagues who understand the source language. This is called ‘relay’ and is illustrated by means of a Danish speech which is understood only by an English interpreter. This is what happens:

Illustration 5



In my experience ‘relay’ does not lead to the number of errors in the interpreting at the EU that many would believe. The reason is that EU interpreters are top professionals.[7] Errors do occur in interpreting, but the vast majority are due to delegates who throw in slang, names, come up with complicated figures, speak dialects, hit microphones, etc. On the other hand, relay is a major management problem. The axis below the drawing illustrates how ‘relay’ slows communication even though this is a matter of seconds only. …// 280 … The drawing also implies how the use of many languages is costly in terms of interpreting staff.

Depending on the institution in question, the meeting will be chaired by a staff member or by a representative of a member state. The agenda of the meeting is used for steering the points of the debate. In turn, these refer to documents. These may have been forwarded before of the meeting (e-mail, etc) or be available at the beginning of the meeting. During meetings, the chair, the staff and the delegates refer to these documents so that everybody knows what is being discussed. There are, undoubtedly, a number of ways of referring to documents.

Among those which I have seen are general reference to a document as well as reference by means of title, date, file number, page number, paragraph and line number (in which latter case the line number has dictated the presentation of the text). But there does not seem to be any fixed set of rules.

Procedures in 'translation-cum-creation'

In order to get an impression of the stages at which language work occurs, we may, skipping a number of intermediary steps, present a rough and simplified table of policymaking in the European Union.

1. There is an initiative (at the Commission), for instance, concerning a directive on methods of transport for toxic fluids.
2. This leads to preparatory studies in the Commission (experts, Commission)
3. which conclude with a green or a white paper used for discussions etc. with the member states (translation).
4. There are follow-up discussions in the member states (in ministries, government bodies, etc.).
5. Subsequently, national delegates attend expert meetings, usually at the Commission (interpreting).
6. Documents for decision by the Council of Ministers and the Parliament (translation into all languages).
7. This concludes with debates (interpreting) and
8. the publication of the directive (translation into all languages). Finally there are
9. reports on its implementation (translation).
10. New initiatives incorporating this directive.
    (Simplified and modified from europa.eu.int/comm/translation /en/eyl/en)

Stage 1 is the first place to involve language work. Initiatives do not appear out of the blue while staff members are musing in their offices, but require numerous references to existing documents including legislation, possibly more or less detailed study of documents in various languages, usually meetings at which decisions are made and the initial documents are drawn up in one or two of the core languages. …// 281 … Given the amount of diverse language material and the fact that virtually any group of staff, however small, will comprise non-native speakers of the core language, a text at this stage is hardly 'pure', in the sense that it is unaffected by other languages (also Koskinen 2001).[8]

In stage 3 the core language document is drawn up in other languages, thus involving a kind of first draft of a translated version. In this process, reference is made to all prior documentation that is relevant. Previous translations of identical sentences, passages, etc. are without exception followed verbatim in legal texts.

Stage 4 is characterised by the fact that virtually all discussion goes on in the national languages of the member states. Such discussion may be based on or refer to core language documents in the small member states. It will be oral and frequently also written (e.g. in minutes from meetings in national ministries and organisations). In turn, this material is used for instructing and providing national delegates with information and points of views which they are to present at the joint EU meetings.

There are usually more meetings than indicated in the rough outline above, and they take place at several stages during the creation of important documents, such as directives and regulations. As described above, interpreting takes place from and into as many languages as are agreed upon between the chair of the meeting, the delegates (or their representatives) and the interpreting service. At the Commission it is often only English and French. In the Parliament more languages, sometimes all eleven, are represented. And at meetings within the transnational political groups there may be yet other combinations.

In our context, the meetings are relevant in as much as they represent the multiplicity of languages. Whenever delegates speak and listen to interpreters in their native language, they will, within the specialist language norms governing the meeting, be within their mother tongues. The moment they are listening to interpreting from a language which is not their mother tongue, there will be linguistic interference to some degree or other. When they have to speak other languages than their mother tongue, they must master the foreign language to perfection in order to avoid interference. Otherwise the statements will be slightly off target. … //282 …

Most importantly, the meetings have an impact on the documents. In so far as a meeting involves actual discussion of the phrasing of a document this will be noted in some form or other and become part of the process (by the chair, the secretary, the interpreters, or the national delegates (possibly in writing)) and, in due course, translators are informed.

The proceedings are oral and although they involve languages they are primarily negotiations, spanning from the individual to the collective. The goings-on are quite complex and involve numerous factors, which is illustrated by the following description of extra-linguistic features from one of the meetings I taped:[9]

The session had 45 participants (excluding interpreters), comprising delegates from the member states, the Commission, and lobbyists. There was simultaneous interpreting from and into Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. The French and German booths took in all languages directly. The English and Italian booths used relay for Danish and Dutch (both via French or German). The Danish booth resorted to relay from Italian and Spanish. The Spanish booth needed relay for German, Italian, Dutch and Danish. The interpreters had not been briefed and there were piles of documents.

This happened to be the first meeting in a working group, so the participants introduced themselves, and the next day a list of participants was distributed (Not all interpreters were the same as on the first day so in the interpreting booths there were slight changes in the chain of communication concerning relay).

In the course of the first two hours, the British delegate produced a prepared written speech which was hastily distributed to the interpreters. Quite a few delegates did not speak in their mother tongue: an Austrian, a Dane and a German spoke English and the German-speaking chair (from the Commission) was switching between German and French. There were frequent references to the documents available in English, French and, occasionally, German. Other features noted were that delegates overestimated their own mastery of languages and – after having first waived interpreting – preferred to use whatever was available. There were also complex shifts in ‘power’ defined as “getting one’s will” in an interplay between having – or not having - the floor, making a point, presenting national points in a fashion which was appropriate in an interpreted session, etc (cursorily discussed in Dollerup 2002b (Publication # 189 on this home page)). … // 283 …

The point is that on the way to finalisation, documents, be they technical or legal, will have been realised in all eleven languages in some form or other, and in situations which are far more complex than people who focus merely on, say, ‘negotiation’ usually take into account.

Although the main documents are in the core languages, these documents cannot really be said to have been ‘made’ or ‘drafted’ in the core languages. They exist as repositories recording pertinent stages and components in a process which I would term ‘translation-cum-creation’, which is, furthermore, restricted by prior decisions made within the EU framework.

With the above remarks we may skip some subsequent stages, since the discussions at these stages are essentially based on similar movements from a centre (the EU institutions) to the member states and interested parties, all of which subject documents to discussion and propose changes. Such proposals are then presented, rejected, accepted or modified. There is eventual agreement in EU fora by means of both physical representation (delegates) as well as written support documentation (Illustration 2 suggests that such documents are often translated locally in the small member states of the EU).

However, the last stages call for attention:

Stage 8 in the above table indicated that there are final debates. After such debate, the versions in the non-core languages are aligned with the ‘core language versions’. In principle, this process is happening exclusively within the EU institutions (see Wagner 2001). The publication of the documents is simultaneous in the official languages of the EU.[10]

Stage 10 then opens for other initiatives that must go through the same stages. Only now, the result of what was discussed is part of the background material for the new initiative.

At this point it would be pertinent to stress that whenever translation is involved, the people working with the text are language professionals who, within the linguistic constraints of the previous translations, have done their best to integrate the various versions of the texts, which are intended to be understood in the same fashion in all member states, and make them conform to the vocabulary and syntax of their own language. They may have to bow to common EU terminology, but the over-the-board claim that they work to establish texts with a “common low” denominator is out of touch with reality. // … 284

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The headquarters of the European Commission, Brussels, Belgium

Simple vs complex procedures

Unless you are superhumanly gifted, it is difficult to understand all the nooks, crannies and complexities of EU work. This also applies to language work.

In order to illustrate this, we can, at one extreme, set up 'simple' translation in the vein that is known in traditional translation theory. Here there is a sender, a message and a translator who produces a target text destined for an audience.

This is surprisingly rare at the EU institutions. The sentence from the European year of languages quoted above would seem to belong to this category since one source text would be enough for ten translators working into their mother tongue. The most frequent examples might well be the machine translations which staff can request for internal work, but here then, the 'translator' is a machine, and therefore many would not accept it as translation at all although the quality between say, French and English is higher than one would expect.

Provided we disregard the fact that many statements are drawn up by groups including non-native speakers, we can argue that press releases and speeches would be simple in that they are translated from one or two core languages into other official languages. But the synchrony of the publication sets many of these apart from the traditional translation model.

Even the speciously most simple operation, namely the address that any EU citizen can make to any EU institution and which is answered in the citizen's native language, involves several stages:

Dutch citizen addressing the Council

1. Decision about who is to answer the letter (say, staff working in French).
2. Translation into French by native French translator
3. The staff answers the letter in French
4. Translation of letter into Dutch by native Dutch translator

Answer to the Dutch citizen from the Council

The above procedure is often more complicated (see numerous examples in Lenaerts 2001; also Snell-Hornby 2001: 256-257 (who does not belabour the point of nationality)). …// 285 … On the other hand, these procedures may often work better than one would suspect, because many non-language staff know several official languages.

Similarly, at first glance, the procedure in oral exchanges at an interpreted session may seem simple, but, again, the complexity increases significantly with the number of active participants and languages involved.

The Parliament building in Brussels, Belgium

Complex cases would then be those procedures in which documents are translated, interpreted, discussed at national levels, include reports, national points of view and have involved all relevant prior language work.

The point is that the combinations of administration, logistics and languages are many and simply cannot fit in with the kind of thinking in Translation Studies which is based on 'one sender -> one message -> one translator -> one audience.'

Quality

EU translations are sometimes accused of being poor. I believe that such views are vented most often when outsiders come across texts outside the domains for which the texts were meant. In such cases, the texts are assessed by criteria which do not really apply. It should also be acknowledged that over the years the general quality has improved – which again implies that criticism of 'old translations' may not be relevant today. It is telling that in her discussion of an unofficial translation into German of an EU report, Mary Snell-Hornby admits that “Such howlers are not found in the official German translation (Bericht).” (Snell-Hornby 2001: 260. My translation).

However, it is problematic that the EU institutions claim to work for overall ‘quality’ in translation because this implies that quality is one-dimensional (see e.g. the home page of the Commission as late as December 2001).

Furthermore, this is contradicted by the actual practice at the EU institutions: A raw machine translation by SYSTRAN, which must be used only for internal use, may be fine for allowing a staff member to get a general idea of a document, but would be a disaster if presented as a masterpiece of French rhetoric. Preliminary forms of neologisms may work among terminologists in their search for acceptable forms. An adequate rendition of a common regulation needs to meet quality in terms of conformity with e.g. the agreed common European Union terminology for legal texts in that specialist area (see Stolze 2001) as well as the vocabulary and syntax of the eleven different languages of the fifteen member states. …// 286 … The target group which will assess the ‘quality’ of a regulation will be made up of national specialists familiar with the LSP of the domain in question rather than ordinary citizens.

Adequate renditions of messages for generalist consumption in the official languages call for adherence to the norms of the languages in which they are published. Still, I believe that the number of such documents is not very high. At all events, as mentioned above, I find it downright wrong to argue that these texts cluster linguistically around some “low common” denominator. Of course they may occasionally be infelicitously phrased, but so are many ‘originals’, ‘drafts’ and translations outside the EU system.

The criterion of ‘quality’ is thus not a blanket term which is useful in scholarship and least of all in discussions of EU texts. Studies of these call for a sophisticated approach according to which the assessment of ‘quality’ also requires that the identity and composition of the actual audience and other factors are taken into account. In other words, quality is not based on a bipolar semantic differential distinguishing merely between ‘poor’ and ‘perfect’. It is a multidimensional entity depending, in each case, on how adequately the translation product is in the eyes of the user(s).

Language work and core languages revisited

Some criticism of language work at the EU institutions ties up with the conviction that because of the multilingual 'equality' decreed by Regulation No. 1, more or less the same material and service should be available to all the official languages (e.g. Lenaerts 2001). Let me add that I vaguely shared this belief until I first visited the EU institutions.

Within the framework of the EU institutions, the main problem is that it is legitimate, indeed vital, for politicians, to promote this principle. It is therefore most visible in political work. Again, it means that scholars should keep in mind which institution they are dealing with and avoid drawing general conclusions.

Another criticism is based on the opposite belief that all work at all levels takes place in all languages – which leads to demand that one language (English) would do the job more efficiently (e.g. House 2001). This suggestion disregards the fact that there are quite a few staff and ordinary EU citizens who do not speak English. …// 287 … In that context, it should not be forgotten that there are nearly 40 million speakers of genuine minority languages (e.g. Basque, Welsh, Catalán) who are not provided with EU language services (Walsh 2001).

However, scholars frequently overlook and the EU institutions fail to emphasise that the use of a core language is not tantamount to political 'domination'. A core language version serves as a repository of views, as a practical means of ensuring and keeping track of a democratic process in which all languages contribute – as best they can and wish – to a common goal, which is finally realised in the eleven languages. A 'core language version' cannot be said to be 'in one language' as it has been buffeted, rephrased, changed and hammered into form before reaching the final shape through this collective process.

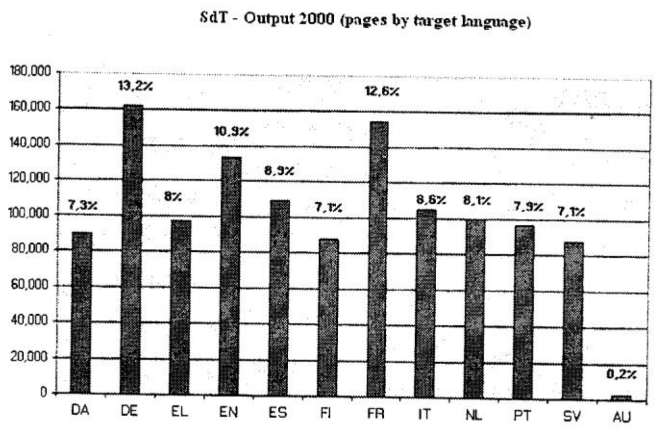
German serves as a fine example of the fact that influence, national size and linguistic expression are different entities. Although German is the 'largest language' in terms of native speakers in the EU, it has never been the main core language.

It is also worthy of note that at least to most users, the kind of English that serves as the core language at the EU institutions is one out of many Continental varieties and has features setting it aside from any English spoken in Ireland and the United Kingdom: the definition of 'English' in the EU context is subtly different from what we learnt at school as received standard. Thus Mary Snell-Hornby's criticism of the English version of the report mentioned above is justified coming from her as a native speaker of English and consequently as an English-speaking citizen of the European Union. But the criticism does not carry the same weight when she is criticising the idiomatic correctness of the English text as the source version for the German version.

With people who think in terms of British imperialism of the past, the present position of English raises the spectre of political domination, in which language use is an instrument of power. Much discussion clearly has this as part of a (hidden) agenda. At present, there is little to substantiate it. But, once again, a diachronic perspective of the work of the EU does give some substance to this view: Great Britain was refused entry into the EU in 1963 and 1968 – in both cases with France as the prime opponent. There were plenty of political reasons for the French vetoes, amongst them British foot-dragging in embracing the European idea. But it was also a decade in which English became the most popular foreign language in basic schools in southern Europe, a fact which has hardly gone completely unnoticed in the appropriate places, as well as the decade in which Anglo-phone (American) television programmes began to encroach on Europe. … // 288 … So there is some murky precedent for the idea of a dominant language connected with political clout.

Nevertheless, these views underline that it is necessary to stick to common sense when assessing EU language work. *In a democratic framework, what really matters is whether the member states receive the amount of information they need in the national languages*. They do, as is shown in illustration **x** which shows the translation work in terms of the target languages in the Commission:

Illustration 6:
Target languages for translation work as percentages of number of pages:



Source: http://europa.eu.int/comm/ translation/en/eyl/en. See also Phillipson (2001).

The source texts

As mentioned above, a core-language version serves as a repository. Its precise status differs according to the parameters of the specific text and situation. In other words, when we discuss an answer to a query from a citizen in an official language, the answer is 'the original' and what is forwarded is 'a translation'. …// 289 …

In cases involving the simultaneous release of documents such as some press releases, public statements, regulations, and so on, the core language versions may technically serve as the source texts (see Wagner 2002). But, as stressed repeatedly above, they are not 'pure source-language texts', and, secondly, these specious 'originals' *do not have validity independent of the other official language versions. It is thus the very fact that there are eleven co-existing texts which grants each of them authority*. In order to have this authority, none of them can have supremacy.

This is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that whereas the 'originals' in other translation contexts can give rise to alternative translations and new translations, a piece of EU legislation can exist in only one linguistic cast in each of the eleven official languages.

Concluding remarks

In sum, there are many approaches to studies of EU language work. Virtually all are legitimate scholarly approaches, but they are restricted in terms of findings and consequently there are limits to the general conclusions that can be drawn from them.

Furthermore, I have here been concerned nearly exclusively with language work which is directly connected with activities at the EU institutions. The EU institutions generate much other translation work indirectly, for instance, with directives requiring that there must be information for consumers in their national languages (see Askehave and Zethsen 2002).

In the present context, I have left out the questions of the effect EU language work will have on the languages of the member states (Dollerup 1996: 307-308, 312), the development of EU-ese used and developed by staff and delegates (Dollerup 1996: 307), and also the long-term problem of keeping up with language development in the individual member states (Dollerup 2002a and b).

I shall finish by pointing out that, in terms of language work, the most fascinating feature about the European Union system is that many products of language work are valid only when finished in eleven languages. Then they are on a par. You cannot point to one of them and proclaim it to be 'the original'. // … 290 //

In the first place, this would be tantamount to saying that there is British or French superiority. Since English is now gaining the upper hand, the argument would be that the UK and the Irish are exhibiting imperialist tendencies, but they are not.

Secondly, the belief in a pure and untouched 'original' is naive by disregarding the tortuous multilingual processes in which translators, interpreters, experts, national committees and politicians all over Europe have contributed to the product in their different tongues and negotiated, not only among themselves but also within their respective cultures. Students of translation should not be misled into believing that translation and interpreting are the only forces that go into the process of the creation of EU linguistic products. As language specialists, translation scholars have a unique insight into parts of the process, namely the fragments in which translational activity is part of the creation. But it is not translation alone that makes the product, and that is part of the reason why there are no unambiguously identifiable source texts.[12]

Notes

1. The first month of my stay was devoted to an exploration of the problems and means of solving them. This meant interviews with c. 40 persons from stagiaires to heads of divisions. The second month covered supervision of Danish trainee interpreters and interviews with heads of Danish translation staffs at the Parliament, Council, Commission and Economic and Social Committee. The third month covered supervision and recording teaching sessions for Danish trainee interpreters and interviews with Danish delegations. The findings of the interviews resulted in six non-confidential reports.
2. The recording was undertaken with the permission of the Directorate of the Interpreting Service (SCIC) and was thus cleared of copyright. All meetings were non-controversial expert meetings. The chairs and the chefs d'équipe were informed of the recording. The recording tracked the source speaker and the Danish, English and French booths. Unfortunately, the project ran out of money and only the Danish rendition has been transcribed so far. In addition to the recordings, we also hold all the documents used, handed out in the sessions, and finally, I was present to note any features which were not recorded but might affect the interpreting or proceedings and might make it impossible for us to understand what was recorded. The corpus is, of course, open to interested parties. There are actually interpreted renditions of proceedings in the European Parliament, but like all so-called 'verbatim' transcriptions found in national 'Hansards', these transcriptions are not really 'verbatim' but have been checked and edited.
3. The reports from this visit have been published in *Language International: The business resource for a multilingual age* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins). 2001. Vol. 13 # 4. 36-42, and # 6. 30-40. And 2002 vol. 14 # 1. 36-41. // … 290//
4. As the title of the article reveals it, this is the thinking behind Lenaerts 2001. But it is definitely also due to the phrasing of the European Union's Charter (Council Regulation No. 1), article 1, which states that "The *official* and the *working* languages of the institutions of the Community shall be [all eleven languages]."(My italics). This infelicitous phrasing is, to put it mildly, not conducive to an understanding of language work.
5. The figures illustrate that although even many insiders believe this to be true, the scenario (with future enlargements) of more than 200 active language combinations will hardly apply to Commission work in practice. It should also be kept in mind that no single document will be translated into more than all the target languages ('at worst' making for 25 translations). True, in Parliament, there will be logistic difficulties, and probably more reliance on core language renditions.
6. Lenaerts cites examples from the Council archives, in which it is made clear to British delegations that they could not demand special treatment (meaning interpreting and translation services). The examples are found both before and after Britain joined the EU (2001: e.g. 236-237).
7. I discuss the problems in relay interpreting in some detail in Dollerup 1996. There are several factors at work, but the most important is the professionalism of the interpreters at international organisations. The presence of both sender and recipients as well as body language, and, finally, the minutes from meetings all contribute to a minimum of errors at meetings. There is thus nothing contradictory in that Susan Šarčević (below, p.

xx) points out that translators working with written material and who do not have access to similar correctives, should be wary of relay.
8. The term ‘hybrid’ is sometimes used about such texts, but it is in need of clarification. There are essential differences depending on whether we are talking about texts that serve as sources for translation or target texts since elements from different sources will fuse in different ways. In addition, there are elements of translationese, interference, LSP, segmentation in language usage and language change which must be considered separately. I do not find that it is justified to speak of a common ‘low’ denominator in an EU context.
9. As mentioned, I was present during the sessions precisely in order to take note of all the features which we would not be able to record – and consequently understand – if we had to rely on what we could hear on the tapes only.
10. Leaks are, of course, inevitable, but difficult to prove. Snell-Hornby’s article discusses the translations of the official publication of the investigation into Austrian interior affairs (which should have been released simultaneously in all eleven languages). The fact that in this case there had been a leak of an English (?) report to a Spanish newspaper before the official publication, illustrates how complex the system of synchronous publication is. It also shows the enormous difference in quality between an official EU translation and a translation made by either a cheerful amateur or a sloppy professional.
11. I wish to express my thanks to the numerous people with whom I have had constructive discussions about language work at the EU over more than 25 years.
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