

LANGUAGE, POWER AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE CASE OF ENGLISH IN THE EU

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Abstract

Though generally overlooked, the language question is at the core of International Relations studies: it is associated with power in general and with the concept of “soft power”¹ in particular. Indeed, language cannot be considered as just an instrument of communication. In the context of the Nation State as well as in the context of the EU and International Relations in general, it has a strong symbolic value. At the level of the EU and its institutions, the linguistic governance is a very technical and political debate. On the one hand, the European institutions have been promoting multilingualism as crucial for social and political inclusion, but, on the other, English has imposed itself as the main lingua franca. Despite the affirmation of the official character of all national official languages, the EU has never clearly addressed the challenge we are facing. The main focus of this presentation is on whether in the context of regionalization and globalization, English can be stopped from being used as the main lingua franca. First the EU language reality and doctrines will be addressed. Then we shall consider the unbalance of power and the role of English in the EU and worldwide on the basis of several theoretical debates, and finally we shall conclude addressing future challenges.

Keywords: *Globalization, regionalization, international relations, soft power, lingua franca, language policies.*

Introduction

That languages are instruments of power is widely accepted. On the one hand, throughout history Nation States have often imposed, directly or indirectly, their own national language. There have been, and still are, language conflicts in many different places all over the world: in Nation States like Belgium, Spain, Canada, India, in the ex-Soviet countries, in many African countries, etc. On the other hand, there is a clear correlation between the power of the linguistic groups and the spread and prestige of their languages: Latin with the Roman Empire, Spanish with Spanish colonization, French with the French Revolution and the Napoleonic conquests, English with English colonization, etc. In the post-Westphalian order of international society, with the increasing power of international and regional organizations as well as with the process of globalization in all fields, the communication problem, and therefore the linguistic issue, has become more and more challenging. For political projects of integration like the EU, where diversity itself plays an important role, how the linguistic issue is addressed is even more problematic, particularly as the number of languages spoken within the EU has increased with successive enlargements.

Democratic citizenship in the EU is, among other aspects, dependent on the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity on the one hand, and the achievement of a common communicative sphere, on the other. In other words, the EU has the challenge of how to make the greatest possible number of EU citizens competent in three or more languages (mother tongue(s) + two) not only to allow democratic participation in multilingual (bilateral and multilateral) environments within the EU but also to facilitate participation as European citizens in wider global processes. However, in reality, and according to the 2012 Eurobarometer statistics, English as the only *lingua franca* is gaining

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¹ Several authors relate languages, directly or indirectly, to the notion of “soft power”. P. Bourdieu (2001) deals with the symbolic value of language, an idea which is particularly meaningful in the context of this paper. Joseph Nye (2004) with his notion of “soft power” refers to the ability of a State to influence directly or indirectly the behaviour or the interests of their actors through cultural or ideological means. Stephen Berro (2009) states that language is the most concrete and measurable way to observe the diffusion of soft power.

ground within the EU. The question is whether in the context of increasing regionalization and globalization there is an alternative to the use of English *lingua franca* and whether in the short term it is even possible to make the majority of Europeans not only competent in English *lingua franca* but also in another EU language apart from the mother tongue.

The language reality in the EU and the language doctrines

The EU language regime was regulated by Council Regulation n° 1 called “Determining the languages to be used by the European Economic Community”² in April 1958 following Article 217 of the Treaty of Rome (1957)³ which reads that “the rules governing the languages of the institutions of the Community shall, without prejudice to the provisions contained in the Rules of Procedures of the Court of Justice, be determined by the Council acting unanimously”. The Council directive contains the following eight articles which define the linguistic status of the political project of European integration:

Article 1. The official languages and the working languages of the institutions of the Community shall be Dutch, French, German and Italian.

Article 2. Documents which a Member State or a person subject to the jurisdiction of a Member state sends to the institutions of the Community may be drafted in any one of the official languages selected by the sender. The reply shall be drafted in the same language.

Article 3. Document which an institution of the Community sends to a member State or to a person subject to the jurisdiction of a Member State shall be drafted in the language of such State.

Article 4. Regulations and other documents of general application shall be drafted in the four official languages.

Article 5. The official Journal of the Community shall be published in the four official languages.

Article 6. The institutions of the Community may stipulate in their rules of procedure which of the languages are to be used in specific cases.

Article 7. The language to be used in the procedure of the Court of Justice shall be laid down in its rules of procedure.

Article 8. If a Member State has more than one official language, the language to be used shall, at the request of such State, be governed by the general rules of its law.

At the time, when the Treaty of Rome was signed, only four languages were involved: Dutch, French, German and Italian. Today, after successive enlargements, 23 languages⁴ (24 with the accession of Croatia as of 1 July 2013) have to be considered, increasing the level of complexity of the language issue. The existence of a multilingual reality is indeed one of the defining features of the European Union. However, and the rich tapestry of language goes beyond the 23 official state languages spoken today in the 27 countries of the European Union. Indeed the European linguistic diversity is fed mainly by the more than 60 non-official languages, the so-called regional or minority languages, spoken by more than 40 million citizens as their mother tongue, living or co-existing with the state languages in their respective communities. These non-official languages are characterized by a great diversity of situations both regarding their use and their internal legal status.

² See <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=DD:I:1952-1958:31958R0001:EN:PDF>.

³ See <http://www.eurotreaties.com/rometreaty.pdf>.

⁴ The European Union 23 official languages are Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovakian, Slovene, Spanish and Swedish.

This linguistic diversity has been seen as one of the key elements for building the European project since the late 1970s and early 1980s. Obviously, taken together, the minority groups have a considerable demographic and political weight, besides representing a potential source of social conflicts. From a theoretical perspective, relegating the language of the minority groups to the condition of marginalization would mean contradicting the very foundation of the European project that emerged from the destruction left by the conflicts of the 19th and part of the 20th century. Besides being a union of states, Europe must unite all peoples, groups and citizens. The European institutions have claimed on various occasions that the construction of Europe is based on cultural wealth and diversity and that in order to be European nobody must stop feeling what they are primarily, Basque, Catalan, English, Flemish, French, Galician, Occitan, Romanian, Welsh, etc., or fail to maintain an awareness of identity as received from history.

So, understandably, the European institutions are absolutely unanimous in considering language diversity or multilingualism a European value, a sign of identity that must be promoted and protected, a principle which stands radically against ranking one language above all others. Moreover, the loss of any of these languages would automatically mean a weakening of the tradition and wealth of multicultural and multilingual Europe. Consequently the two supra-national bodies, the European Union and the Council of Europe, engaged in language-policy making, have actively been promoting language diversity and plurilingualism, principles that, at least in theory, have been endorsed by all member states. Linguistic diversity refers to the fact the Europe is multilingual and all its languages are equally valuable modes of communication and expressions of identity, whereas plurilingualism refers to the capacity of individuals to develop a degree of communicative ability in a number of languages over their lifetime in accordance with their needs.

In Europe, multilingualism and plurilingualism have become political concepts closely related to the process of constructing the polity. The EU's White Paper of 1995 already referred to languages as instrumental in helping to build up the feeling of being European with all its cultural wealth and diversity and therefore in building up the needed European identity/citizenship (European Commission 1995: 67). The fundamental role of language in the creation of this polity led the EU Heads of State and Government in 2002 to set the long-term objective for all EU citizens to speak at least two languages in addition to their mother tongue(s).⁵

The European institutions seem to postulate some kind of causal relationship between language learning and European identity/citizenship. Therefore European institutions encourage the learning of languages not only as an essential condition for intercultural communication and acceptance of cultural differences, but also for participation in democratic and social processes in multilingual Europe and social cohesion (European Commission 2002, Council of Europe, 2004). Plurilingualism provides the necessary conditions for mobility within Europe, but is above all crucial for social and political inclusion of all Europeans. With respect to the long-term objectives, the Council of Europe has provided instruments of various kinds to support language acquisition such as the *Common European Framework* (2001), the *European Language Portfolio*, or the *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe* (2003), as well as to support planning for regional and minority languages: *The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (1992) and the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (1994). The EU⁶ has also promoted a number of programmes in order to advance towards plurilingualism: the *Lingua Programme* in 1989, the *Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci Programmes* in 1995 and more recently *Comenius* in 2000, etc. The project of the European Higher Education Area, the so-called Bologna

⁵ Conclusions of the Barcelona European Council in March 2002:
http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/71025.pdf.

⁶ The European Commission has invested millions of Euros to finance a number of important language projects. Worth mentioning is the 2004-2006 Action Plan (8,200 million euros) to promote language learning and linguistic diversity, including regional or minority languages through an integrated approach.

Process (after the Bologna Declaration, June 1999) also depends for its success on language learning, among other aspects, as was recognized by the European Parliament in 2001 with the "Resolution on universities and higher education in the European Area of knowledge" which called on member states and universities to recognize the importance of learning foreign languages and to organize language courses for those students who did not pursue studies in the humanities or linguistics, as only the knowledge of several languages will facilitate mobility and help achieve greater European integration. Facilitating the acquisition of other languages and the command of basic communication skills has, therefore, become the responsibility of governments and education institutions alike.

The question is whether the many policies adopted by the European institutions are ambitious enough for such an ambitious political project. The European Community founders addressed the multilingual reality by granting all the official languages (Dutch, French, German and Italian) of the Member States the same official status at a time when other International Treaties limited the official and working languages.⁷ Since then, with successive enlargements, all the official languages of the Member States have automatically become official languages of the regional block. It seemed a bold decision then with only four languages but now, with 23 and soon 24 languages, the language issue has become increasingly complex and even unmanageable. How does the principle work in practice?

An important political function has been assigned to language in the construction of Europe, and therefore in the creation of a common European identity, but the language question is seldom included among all the deep and theoretical debates on European Integration, such as culture and religions. Apart from the recognition of the official status of all the official languages of the Member States and the much proclaimed need to promote plurilingualism in European citizens, the Common policy in the language issue is extremely limited. There are no precise rules as to how the Union must address its citizens, how to constitute a common linguistic space or a communicative sphere, or as to the language or languages to be used in international forums. What is more, this lack of clarity also affects the internal functioning of the Union institutions, as will be explained later. In reality, there is *laissez faire* everywhere and, consequently, there is no such equality in the language issue. Plurilingualism is more a wish than a reality and, despite the reluctance of the EU, English as the dominant *lingua franca* has imposed itself in all key domains, including the institutional level.

Unbalance of power in favour of English

Current circumstances of increasing wider processes of globalization have favoured the adoption of English as a corporate language in many larger business based in Europe and as the language of instruction in higher education institutions, putting the non-competent speaker of English at a considerable disadvantage. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to see how the dominance of English could be curbed. The 2004-2006 Action Plan of the European Commission, designed for this purpose, did not do much to stop the influence of English, though certainly drew attention to the fact that English alone is not enough.

Foreign language education policies in Europe, though embedded in national education systems and their distinct traditions, are influenced by these wider processes of globalisation and the way languages are perceived to operate in global interaction in Europe and worldwide and therefore in general tend to favour English as the first foreign language in schools. This is confirmed not only by the 2012 Eurydice report⁸ which shows that in many countries English is the only language taught in primary schools and that the main motivation for language learning is the language prestige, the value of the language for social mobility. English has become such a priority with parents that in a

⁷ The United Nations, for example, limited the number to six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish, with English and French being the working languages, whereas the the Organization for Economic Cooperation in Europe, the OECE, later called OECD, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and EFTA (European Free Trade Agreement) decided to have only two languages, English and French.

⁸ http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/key_data_en.php#path.

number of states this has led to concomitant language-tutoring in the private sector, starting at an even younger age than in the public sector. The 2012 Eurobarometer⁹ report shows that English is perceived by Europeans to be by far the most useful language to know (67%) compared to 68% in 2006), followed by German (17% compared to 22%) and by French (16% compared to 25%). Spanish ranks fourth with a 14% share (compared to 16% in 2006). The 2012 Eurobarometer also confirms two worrying trends: first that there is a notable decrease in most European countries of the proportion of Europeans who speak two languages and, second, that Europeans are hardly motivated to learn a new language; only a minority (14%) have continued learning a language in the last two years; less than one in ten (7%) have started learning a new language in the last two years. Thus, the promotion of language policies does not seem to be having a considerable impact in terms of the proportion of Europeans who become plurilingual.

The common linguistic policy concerning the internal functioning of Institutions is limited too, in its nature and scope; and the principle of equality is hardly applied. Only five institutions, the Court of Justice, the European Council, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Court of Auditors, are legally bound by the obligation to have all twenty three languages as official and working ones, a principle established only in 2003, following the complaint of a Dutch citizen¹⁰ who could not read the webpage of the Office of the Harmonization of the Internal Market in her own language.¹¹ According to the principle of equality of languages, the official Community websites should be in the 23 official languages: some are but many are not. The EU portal and the European Parliament portal are available in the 23 official languages. However, for example, the Regional Policy-Inforegio website¹² is only available in eleven languages: Bulgarian, Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Romanian, Slovakian and Spanish. Surprisingly, the Research and Innovation website¹³ can be read only in English, whereas the CORDIS¹⁴ (Community Research and Development Information Service) website exists in six languages, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Polish. Other websites exist only in three languages: it is the case Education and Training of the European Commission¹⁵. Whenever the website is in English and some other languages, the choice of the latter seems to depend exclusively on demographic grounds.

The linguistic unbalance also applies to Community programmes, including Community funded linguistic programmes such as Lingua - Socrates Action 4 - Language Learning and Teaching, which, oddly enough, provides information only in English.¹⁶ This unbalance affects mostly the so called "Lesser Used languages". In some cases the expression refers to the smaller official languages of the institutions, namely Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Estonian, Finnish, Greek, Hungarian, Portuguese, Slovakian, Slovenian and Swedish; whereas in other cases the expression refers to minority languages, such as Basque, Catalan or Gaelic, within the Member States.

The European language policy is hardly applied in institutional proceedings, either. The EU Court of Justice uses only French whereas the European Central Bank has turned English into its only official language, as can be seen from the language policy stated on its website.¹⁷ This

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/languages/languages-of-europe/eurobarometer-survey_en.htm.

¹⁰ See <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:62001CJ0361:EN:HTML> for Case C-361/01 P, Christina Kik. «(Regulation (EC) No 40/94 – Article 115 – Rules in force governing languages at the Office for Harmonisation in the Internal Market (Trade Marks and Designs) (OHIM) – Plea of illegality – Principle of non-discrimination)».

¹¹ It was only available in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish.

¹² See http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/newsroom/detail.cfm?id=638&LAN=EN.

¹³ See <http://ec.europa.eu/research/index.cfm>.

¹⁴ See http://cordis.europa.eu/home_en.html.

¹⁵ See http://ec.europa.eu/education/index_en.htm.

¹⁶ See http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/en/overview/lingua_overview.htm.

¹⁷ See <http://www.ecb.int/home/html/index.en.html>.

discrepancy between the declared official policy and the reality is an outstanding feature in the daily work of the institutions. At the European Commission, all the preparatory meetings and documents are made in only three languages, English, French and German, though even here there is a huge unbalance between the use of English and French, while the use of German is almost symbolic. Contrary to what can be read in the 1958 Directive regulating that the four official languages were also working languages, with the increasing number of languages added to the EU, the European Commission has thus established a distinction between official and working languages. In its website we can read that the 23 are official and working languages but “due to time and budgetary constraints, relatively few working documents are translated into all languages. The European Commission employs English, French and German in general as procedural languages, whereas the European Parliament provides translation into different languages according to the needs of its Members.”¹⁸ This obviously represents a problem for the language doctrines of the EU. And much has been written on this dilemma. The challenge for communicative integration in the EU is how to accommodate unity and diversity, since Europe needs a good degree of both. With 506 possible linguistic combinations (soon 552 with Croatia’s accession), it is impossible for the Parliament and the other institutions to deal with the daily communication needs of multilingual Europe, and therefore, for practical purposes, the *lingua franca* imposes itself.¹⁹

Is there an alternative to English *lingua franca*

At this moment it is difficult to see how the use of English as *lingua franca* could be resisted or at least how its hegemony curbed. The challenge for the EU, as already pointed out, is not only how to make the greatest possible number of EU citizens competent in three languages (mother tongue + two) in order to make democratic participation in multilingual (bilateral and multilateral) environments within the EU possible but also how to facilitate participation in wider global processes. Despite the fact that most of the political groupings, including the European Union or the United Nations, have adopted linguistic policies, English has become the language of globalization. The correlation between English and globalization has been much debated.²⁰ The hegemony of the US in world affairs has made it a powerful instrument of communication. English is the language of communication used key areas such as high diplomacy, financial markets, international trade, electronic communication, international mass media and film industries. In consequence, a good knowledge of English is a requirement for jobs in the diplomatic services and in almost all big companies in the world. It has become the language needed for advanced research and the language of instruction in higher educations in many countries worldwide, not only in the English-speaking ones. English is also the most important language used in the internet. For all practical purposes, English is already the communication language in almost all world international organizations such as APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations²¹), the BSEC (Black Sea Economic Cooperation²²) or the European Central Bank. In terms of official the British Council list 80 countries in the world where English is recognized as an official

¹⁸ See http://ec.europa.eu/languages/languages-of-europe/eu-languages_en.htm.

¹⁹ In “Europe’s Linguistic Challenge” (2007), P. Van Parijs uses the expression “*maximin* rule” in connection with the use of *lingua franca*. When confronted with the choice of a language in front of an audience, a speaker will use the language which is best known by the member of the audience who knows the least languages. This *maximin* criterion will tend to maximize the minimum competence. Thus, in the case of the EU and other international institutions this spontaneously leads in most cases to the use of English.

²⁰ See Joshua A. Fishman (1999) and David Crystal (2000, 2007).

²¹ ASEAN member countries are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

²² Whose members are Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.

language.²³ English is an official language widely spoken in many parts of the world. English expansion is of course a result of the English colonization. And the United Kingdom was the most successful country in the world as far as colonization is concerned.

English is associated with prestige and power, But then, it is not the first time in history that a language is chosen as the only communication language in international relations, associated with prestige and power. In the Western world, Latin, the language of two important international actors, the Roman Empire and then the Church, was used from the 8th until well into the 15th Centuries as a *lingua franca* between elite, as the language of science, administration, diplomacy and higher education, i.e. in a way similar to English nowadays. Latin, however, was progressively replaced by other languages as other actors progressively grew in importance. Italian became important from the 15th until the 17th century as a language for culture and diplomacy, and finally French from the 18th Century onwards. Then French imposed itself in Western and Eastern Europe as the only European communication language when France became the economic, demographic and military giant of Europe. It maintained the status of the language of Diplomacy and culture, even when France and an international actor lost importance in favour of other countries like Germany or Russia. English began to grow as an international language, at the height of the British Empire, and when the United States began taking ground as a world power.

During the first decades of the European Integration, French used to be this *lingua franca* but since the seventies, English has been more and more used. In the nineties, the Scandinavians, Austrians and Finns disrupted the balance between English and French due to their scarce knowledge of French. The last Eurobarometers (2006 and 2012) prove that English is by far the main second language in Europe. The question is whether its hegemony is at risk and whether another international language will rise and occupy its place. As noted by J. Fishman, “historically languages have risen and fallen with the military, economic, cultural and religious powers that supported them”(1999:10). The role of English as a world language may suffer as complex international, economic, technological and cultural changes are underway. There are many factors that may affect power of English in the future.

Firstly, even considering the number of countries where English is an official language, it is still only spoken by a small minority of people in the world. Even in the EU it is a misconception to think that English has already become a universal *lingua franca*. Both the 2006 and 2012 Eurobarometer reports shows that Even though English is the languages that is most learnt, only 38 per cent of Europeans are able to communicate in English, which means that almost two out of three Europeans are not able to do so. When results are analyzed at national level, then the differences between countries are daunting. English is widely spoken in countries like Sweden (89%), Malta (88%) and the Netherlands (87%), but far less widely in countries like Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal or Spain where English is much less firmly entrenched, even if most children and adolescents are now exposed to English in schools.

Secondly, both the economic crisis which is slowing down the pace of globalization and the emergence of new economic powers such as China, India and Latin American countries, are accelerating the use of regional languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, and Spanish, which are growing at a faster pace than English. Russian has been and still partly is a *lingua franca* in Central Asia, the Caucasus and Eastern Europe. Notwithstanding the undeniable power of English, a shift is taking place in favour of new world languages. Similarly, the Arabic use is still growing in North Africa and Asia and Chinese in East Asia.

Thirdly, in a number of countries like Denmark or the Netherlands, where English is firmly entrenched, there has been, since the 1990s, a bigger stress to use and protect the national official language as a growing reaction to the widely spread use of English in key domains like Higher Education. Similar reactions have happened in other areas of the world such as Canada, with the

²³ See http://www.britishcouncil.org/map_of_countries_where_english_is_an_official_language.pdf.

result of well-planned language policies. Globalization is accompanied by regionalization and the globalization of English by a tendency to defend the local language status and use. The emphasis on identity, and therefore the need to preserve one's culture and language, is becoming more and more important as a side effect of globalization. The detailed study of David Graddol (2006) for the British Council is not optimistic about the future of English as the main language for international relations.

Fourthly, in terms of native speakers, English is falling in the world's rankings in favour of Mandarin, Spanish, Hindi-Urdu and Arabic which are rising in number. All these languages play a very important role in their own regions. They are developing besides English as global languages.

The importance of maintaining multilingualism

Three factors should be taken into consideration when approaching the relevance of language learning in the context of European integration. First, as has been repeatedly expressed by European institutions, language learning is crucial for the construction of Europe as a polity and therefore requires adequate planning. Second, the importance of the language issue is evident from the evolution of transnational civil society at both a European and world level, and this requires planning, too. Indeed, the evolution of transnational civil society is closely related to trends toward global governance and, therefore to notions of discourse and debate in a public sphere. The development of European transnational society cannot be separated from the development of global civil society which, for economic, cultural and technological reasons, among others, has adopted English *lingua franca* as the language of communication in key domains. And this is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored by the European institutions. The challenge for communicative integration in the EU is how to accommodate unity and diversity, since Europe needs a good degree of both.

Third, there is the already mentioned correlation between language and power which needs to be considered in the context of the political integration of the EU. For the founding fathers, the symbolic use of the language was considered more important than its practical value as a communication tool. Many International Relations theories, particularly the social constructivist ideas which developed as reactions to the empirical and rationalist currents, support the necessity to deal with the symbolic function of the language when determining a linguistic policy or behavior in International Relations. In this connection, political philosophers such as P. Bourdieu, among others, relate languages to hegemony and the diffusion of dominant ideas. The Soviet language policy in the ex-Soviet Union, particularly in Central Asia, illustrates this relation clearly. Russian was imposed as an interethnic language in order to diffuse the Soviet ideology and ensure the merging of the Soviet nations. As a consequence the symbolic value of the national languages was diminished in favour of that of Russian. Because big proportions of populations were not fluent in that language, this resulted in an imbalance between symbolic and communicative functions of languages in Central Asia. The case of Central Asia also provides an excellent example of the relation between language policies and international relations. When the Soviet Union collapsed, language policies became one of the most important aspects of the nation-building processes for the newly independent countries, and each different language policy option was related to a foreign policy alternative.

Nevertheless, even the realist and neo-realist theories can be applied to the importance of the symbolic power of languages in the context of the EU, as they lay the emphasis on the search for power as the main engine of international relations. Promoting one's language and culture is a good way of promoting one's interests and influence on other actors in the international scene, which brings us back to the notion of "soft power" (Nye 2004) This concept can function as framework to explain the reluctance many in Europe have expressed toward "American cultural imperialism" which is may gradually have been imposed through the English language.

These theoretical frameworks are very useful to understand the importance of the language issue in the process of European integration. They help understand how, as Sephen Berro suggests

“an accurate language policy could promote political integration, or on the contrary, how the hegemony of one language in a regional block could be counterproductive, sending negative signals about the final objective of the integration project.”(2009: 21).

Conclusion

The language issue is a highly political and technical debate. Both linguistic unity and linguistic diversity must be considered as vital elements in the process of European integration. The three levels of participation (subnational, national and supranational) meet at the European institutional level where day-to-day debates and negotiations on the future of Europe can evolve. In the context of multilingual Europe (23 official languages and more than 60 regional or minority languages), for practical purposes, debates can only be carried out in English *lingua franca*, according to the “maximin” principle. For this reason, a number of scholars see the European institutions themselves as contradicting Article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, which states that “the Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity”, because in day-to-day affairs, English as *lingua franca* is increasingly the dominant language in which documents are drafted and discussed. Other scholars like Breidbach (2003) are in favour of a common communicative sphere in which the interests of all Europeans can be defended in one of the multiple linguistic identities Europeans can take without having to rely on translation. For this group of scholars, what must be guaranteed is that there is equality between the EU official languages in promulgating legislation in parallel in all languages, that interpretation is provided between all languages at the most important meetings and that citizens are able to communicate with the administration in their own language.

As Breidbach (22) points out “European citizens’ acceptance of policies for European integration probably depends to a large extent on their ability and willingness to participate in a European public debate.” In order to become full actors in this debate Europeans need an interlingual mediator and English *lingua franca* has imposed itself in this role, as an instrument of communication. However, this is problematic for the promotion of linguistic diversity through foreign language teaching. Should English *lingua franca* become the instrument of communicative integration. The European institutions do not want to explicitly grant English such a role: “policies for language education should therefore promote the learning of several languages for all individuals in the course of their lives, so that Europeans actually become plurilingual and intercultural citizens, able to interact with other Europeans in all aspects of their lives.” (Council of Europe 2003: 7). At a European and global level, under circumstances of implicit power structures, the fact of not speaking English puts the individual at a considerable disadvantage and, therefore, it is difficult to see how the influence of English could be curbed. But, then, one also needs to consider that even in Europe, those who can communicate in English still belong to a privileged minority, particularly in Eastern and Southern Europe.

The other important challenge is how to achieve the long-term objective for all EU citizens to speak at least two languages in addition to their mother tongue(s) set by the EU Heads of State and Government in 2002 at the Barcelona European Council. While, in the light of the conclusions of the 2012 Eurobarometer, the competence in English is still a challenge for the majority of Europeans, transnational discourses in Europe cannot rely on a single shared language. The symbolic aspects involved in language use also need to be considered as discussed above. Language integration, then, should work toward the achievement of adequate balance between language unity and language diversity.

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