English-Only Europe?
Challenging Language Policy

ROBERT PHILLIPSON

Also available as a printed book
see title verso for ISBN details
English-Only Europe?

‘Globalization and EU enlargement mean that languages from the whole of Europe are coming into even closer contact. This perceptive book makes a sweeping Grand Tour of the political, cultural and economic issues that we all consequently face, and I hope that those who frame language policy will be influenced by it.’

Neil Kinnock, Vice-President of the European Commission

‘An important and timely book, containing a rich and wide-ranging set of ideas about the “on the ground” reality of language policy in Europe. The book is very engaging, and will appeal to a wide range of readers.’

Joseph Lo Bianco, Director, Language Australia, The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia

‘Absolutely essential reading if we are to prevent a linguistic catastrophe in a rapidly anglicizing Europe.’

Dafydd ap Fergus, Secretary General of the European Esperanto Union

Languages are central to the development of an integrated Europe. The way in which the European Union deals with multilingualism has serious implications for both individual member countries and international relations.

In this timely and provocative book, Robert Phillipson considers whether the current expansion of English represents a serious threat to other European languages. The book explores the role of languages in the process of European integration. After looking at the implications of current policies, Phillipson argues the case for more active language policies to safeguard a multilingual Europe. Drawing on examples of countries with explicit language policies, such as Canada and South Africa, the book sets out Phillipson’s vision of an inclusive language policy for Europe, and describes how it can be attained.

*English-Only Europe?* is essential reading for anyone with an interest in the future of the European Union.

English-Only Europe?

Challenging Language Policy

Robert Phillipson
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustrations</th>
<th>vii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The risks of *laissez faire* language policies | 1 |
2. European languages: families, nations, empires, states | 24 |
3. Global trends impacting on European language policy | 61 |
4. Languages in EU institutions | 105 |
5. Towards equitable communication | 139 |
6. Recommendations for action on language policies | 175 |

### Appendices

1. European Council conclusions: *Linguistic diversity and multilingualism in the EU, 1995* | 193 |
2. Resolution of the Council of the European Union: *The promotion of linguistic diversity and language learning in the framework of the implementation of the objectives of the European Year of Languages 2001* | 195 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Declaration of Oegstgeest (The Netherlands):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Moving away from a monolingual habitus</em>, 2000</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Vienna Manifesto on European Language Policies:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The cost of monolingualism</em>, 2001</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Index</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Illustrations

Boxes

1.1 Speakers of the eleven EU languages 8
2.1 Our daily bread 27
2.2 Languages of Europe 31
2.3 Continuities of Us and Them 36
2.4 End of a federation and its language 43
2.5 The French view of the national language 45
2.6 The rule of law, and its multiple meanings 57
3.1 EU support for foreign language learning 97
4.1 Facts and figures about EU translation and interpretation 112
4.2 Interpretation types 116
4.3 The European Union’s language charter 119
5.1 Triumphant English 149
5.2 Inequitable international communication 167

Tables

1 Factors contributing to the increased use of English in Europe 64
2 Social goals and language correlates 102
3 The Diffusion of English and Ecology of Languages paradigms 161
My very sincere thanks are due to numerous people who have helped significantly in the genesis of the book:

- those who generously made many suggestions for improving the manuscript: David Ferguson, Jennifer Jenkins, Joe Lo Bianco, Barbara Seidlhofer, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Ruth Wodak;
- those who were very welcoming and informative when I visited EU institutions, particularly Emma Wagner, Brian McCluskey, Robert Rowe and Preben Saugstrup;
- those many colleagues who make the English Department of Copenhagen Business School a congenial professional base, particularly the Head, Lise-Lotte Hjulmand;
- special thanks to David Ferguson, Secretary General of the European Esperanto Association, who is a cumulative archive of information about developments throughout Europe;
- loving thanks to Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, who is not only a constant support as a professional colleague, but who follows Voltaire’s advice about cultivating one’s garden literally, metaphorically and intellectually, and who cared for me lovingly in a protracted hour of medical need in the spring of 2002.
The Federal Trust for Education and Research, London has granted permission to reproduce the tables on pages 283 and 285 of *The Treaty of Nice explained*, edited by Martyn Bond and Kim Feus, 2001, which appear as Appendix 3.

Except in the case of published translations, the texts in translation are my own renderings.

*Robert Phillipson*
*Trønninge, Denmark, June 2002*
Chapter 1

The risks of *laissez faire* language policies

The most serious problem for the European Union is that it has so many languages, this preventing real integration and development of the Union.

*The ambassador of the USA to Denmark, Mr Elton, 1997*

No-one pays attention to what you say unless you speak English, because English is the language of power.

*Ombudsperson for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Gret Haller, 1999*

The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.

*Article 22, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 2000*

I asked Voltaire whether he still spoke English. He replied, ‘No. To speak English one must place the tongue between the teeth, and I have lost my teeth’ . . . When he talked our language he was animated with the soul of a Briton. He had bold flights. He had humour. He had extravagance . . . He swore bloodily, as was the fashion when he was in England.

*James Boswell, 1764*

**Language policy challenges for Europe**

Many profoundly important language policy questions need addressing:

- How does English as the key language of globalization impact on national economic, cultural, and educational policies in continental Europe, on job qualifications, mobility, and personal freedoms?
- Do the procedures followed in conducting European Union (EU)
affairs give native speakers of the ‘top’ languages, particularly English and French, unfair privileges, and if so, what can be done to remedy the problem?

- If speakers of Catalan, Welsh, and other minority languages have no right to use their languages in EU institutions, does this mean that only certain languages are being used to create ‘Europe’? If so, does ‘Strength in diversity’ (an EU mantra) apply only to the privileged languages? Can Europeanness and European citizenship be expressed in any European language? Is European linguistic identity multilingual?

- Practical solutions are needed to the multiple communication needs of cross-European communication in the political, business, cultural, and many other fields, but are pragmatic solutions compatible with principles of equity, language rights, and human rights?

- Can English, and other influential foreign languages, be learned and used in ways that do not threaten other languages?

- Are the language policy issues of European integration being seriously addressed at the national and EU levels? Is there constructive dialogue between key constituencies, politicians and bureaucrats, the corporate world, academics in relevant fields, particularly education, political science, international law, economics, language, and minority rights, and grassroots public opinion?

- What can be done to bring about more informed and more inspired language policies?

This book is a general introduction that situates language policy, language use, language learning, and language rights within broader European political, economic, and social changes. The opening chapter introduces some of the major language policy challenges, clarifies what language policy is, and provides examples of when it becomes newsworthy. The historical background is covered in Chapter 2, the contemporary impact of globalization on European languages in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 is devoted to the institutions of the European Union. Chapter 5 goes through many of the factors that impinge on language policy and the ecology of language, and considers whether some form of English as a lingua franca can replace the traditional view of English as a British or North American language. This is one aspect of the search for an international language which is a genuinely egalitarian means of communication among speakers of different languages. Specific recommendations, within a vision of how language policy could be revitalized, are made in Chapter 6.
The book describes how the influence of English is much profounder than that of Latin and French in earlier periods. It assesses whether the contemporary expansion of English represents a serious threat to all the other languages of Europe. Languages are central to the processes leading to a more deeply integrated Europe, in commerce and the media, and in the activities of the institutions of the EU. With electronic communication and service industries playing an increasingly significant role, the role of languages is even more important than in earlier historical periods. But in the copious literature on European integration and globalization, the language dimension tends to be absent, except in specialist works on the sociology of language and nationalism. Through analysis of how languages are expanding and contracting in processes of European integration, the book will suggest ways in which a more active language policy, nationally and internationally, can ensure that all languages can flourish. The way the EU deals with multilingualism has significant implications, both for international relations and for what happens in each member country. It is important to clarify what sort of Europe current policies are leading towards, and the criteria that could guide policies that permit speakers of different languages to communicate on a basis of equality. The book argues a case for more active language policies that can serve to ensure the continued vitality of all the languages of Europe.

It would have been tempting to call the book ‘From Babel to Eurobabble’. However, to do so would have reinforced the notion that a multiplicity of languages is a curse, both in history and at the present. Babel is historical myth rather than fact (see Chapter 2 on the Bible also endorsing ‘speaking in tongues’). Multilingualism, in the sense of an individual or an institution operating effectively in more than one language, is an everyday reality for the majority of the world’s inhabitants. It is a source of richness and joy for us, facilitating access to a range of cultures and cosmologies. If Babel and Eurobabble are understood as meaning that people who come from different language backgrounds cannot communicate, then the EU institutions, with their elaborate translation and interpretation services, are living proof of the opposite. The British Minister for Europe, Peter Hain, used ‘Eurobabble’ as a way of rubbishing official EU texts written in impenetrable language, as part of a campaign in 2001 to make the EU more comprehensible to British people. However, neither the EU nor the English language has a monopoly of such texts, and the Eurobabble smear has more to do with the British government distancing itself from what the EU is perceived as representing. Much is at stake in
communication at the EU, and the use of English is increasing in Europe. We need to explore whose interests are being served by this trend, and how it impacts on other languages.

**English to unite or divide Europe?**

For the American ambassador to Denmark who claims that a multiplicity of languages is thwarting the unification of Europe, the solution would be for the EU to eliminate all languages other than English. It is unthinkable that any political leader in Europe would endorse such a scenario. To do so would run counter to the endorsement of diversity that is enshrined in many key EU texts. Thus the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU that was approved by the European Parliament and the European Council and Commission in December 2000 commits the EU to respect linguistic diversity (in Article 22). Article 21 also seeks to prevent discrimination on grounds of language, nationality, or membership of a national minority:

> Any discrimination based on sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited. . . .

> Any discrimination on grounds of nationality shall be prohibited.

Nevertheless, the forces of globalization and americanization may be moving language policy in the direction of monolingualism. English may be seen as a kind of linguistic cuckoo, taking over where other breeds of language have historically nested and acquired territorial rights, and obliging non-native speakers of English to acquire the behavioural habits and linguistic forms of English. The EU Charter of Rights is a political declaration that does not have the force of law. According to the EU Ombudsman, ‘this seems to imply that European citizens should understand that even the most solemn promises made by politicians are not intended to be taken seriously’.6

Things are moving fast in the world of commerce. The cover of the European edition of *Business Week* of 13 August 2001 asked in a banner headline: ‘Should everyone speak English?’ The inside story was flagged as ‘The Great English divide. In Europe, speaking the lingua franca separates the haves from the have-nots’. The cover drawing portrays twin business executives: one communicates successfully, the English speaker; the other is mouthless, speechless. Competence in
English is here projected as being imperative throughout Europe in the commercial world. By implication, proficiency in other languages gets you nowhere. The article describes how more and more continental European companies are switching over to English as the in-house corporate language. It also describes how English for business is big business for English language schools.

*Business Week*'s uncritical celebration of the way English is impacting on continental Europe fails to note that many businesses in Europe are becoming aware that proficiency in English will in future be so widespread that proficiency in other languages will be essential for commercial success. It is arguable that it is monolingual English-speakers who will lose out in the future, and that the high fliers will be multilingual, as is often the case today.7

The contemporary power of English makes itself felt in many fields. In international gatherings, there is a pecking order of languages. English has the sharpest beak, one that inflicts wounds on speakers of other languages. Discrimination against speakers of other languages is widespread, often without the users of English being aware that there is a problem. At a Council of Europe conference in 1999 on *Linguistic Diversity for Democratic Citizenship in Europe*, the Ombudsperson for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Gret Haller, who comes from Switzerland, noted that she had ‘frequently come across situations where you are not taken seriously unless you speak English. This has been in Bosnia, not in my own country. No-one pays attention to what you say unless you speak English, because English is the language of power.’8 She warned that going along with this state of affairs could be dangerous for Europe, and pleaded for language policy not to be left to *laissez faire* market forces.

Languages have expanded and contracted throughout history, and there are many languages that are currently expanding at the expense of other languages, but the way English is impacting globally is unique. Its advance has major implications for speakers of all other languages, for education systems and professional qualifications, for the economy, and for the vitality of cultures big and small. Languages are the medium through which communication takes place in politics, commerce, defence, academia, the media, technology, the internet, and most aspects of life. Languages are therefore central to our increasingly international world, to globalization and the accelerating processes of European unification.

In different historical periods, voices have protested against an excessive reliance on English. In the struggle for Indian independence,
Mahatma Gandhi warned that English represented cultural alienation. Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India (educated at Cambridge University and imprisoned by the British before independence), was ‘convinced that real progress in India can only be made through our own languages and not through a foreign language. I am anxious to prevent a new caste system being perpetuated in India – an English knowing caste separated from the mass of our public.’ In fact, an English-using caste has emerged, because the management of multilingualism in India has largely been left to market forces. These strengthen the position of users of English, here as elsewhere. Roughly 30 million Indians are fluent users of English, but they account for under 5 per cent of the population.

The French have long been concerned about their language being corrupted by an invasion from English, by franglais and anglomania. Successive French governments have invested substantially in the promotion of their language internationally, and in the establishment of a counterpart to the British Commonwealth, a global ‘Francophonie’ organization. They have also legislated to ensure that French is given priority in France in commerce, education, public life, and the media. The Body Shop, and an American university operating in France, have been prosecuted for failing to use French in their information to customers. However, such sanctions and protective measures may well not prove very successful, because they represent limited treatment of a disease that has multiple causes and symptoms.

To regard the stand taken by the French as a waste of time, as is often done, is misguided. Governments are responsible for language policy in their countries. Many act vigorously to promote a single national language. Several are concerned about the impact of English on their own languages. The Polish and Hungarian governments have legislated to restrict the spread of English. A Swedish parliamentary committee has recommended legislation aimed at ensuring that Swedish remains a ‘complete language’ serving all purposes in Swedish society. It stresses the need for more proactive language policy work so as to maintain the position of Swedish in EU institutions, to build on the diversity of languages in use in present-day Sweden, and to ensure that Swedes in higher education and research can use Swedish and English equally well.

These examples show that the advance of English, while serving the cause of international communication relatively well, and often bringing success to its users, can represent a threat to other languages and cultures. English is influential and popular worldwide because this
brand of language connotes pleasure, employment, influence, and prestige. English opens doors, it facilitates mobility. English is often referred to as a ‘global’ language, but even if many decisions affecting the entire world’s population are taken in English, the vast majority of the world’s population have no proficiency in the language. In many African states that are often loosely referred to as ‘English-speaking countries’, such as Nigeria or Kenya, under 10 per cent of the population speak the language well. The same is also broadly true in former colonies in Asia. The hierarchy of languages of colonial times has been maintained, with English as the key medium for prestigious purposes, and proficiency in English correlating with socio-economic privilege. This has serious adverse effects on civil society and democratic participation in the political process. English is the language of the powerful. For the majority, lack of proficiency in English closes doors. Acquiring proficiency in English is therefore seen as desirable by and for marginalized populations, whose prospects often suffer from absence of a coherent national policy for ensuring a balance between competence in, and education in, English and in local languages.

Could a similar hierarchy of languages be evolving in Europe? Language policy in each EU member state largely continues along well-established lines, at the national and sub-national levels. In some countries, the constitution and legislation are explicit about language policy, but many aspects tend to remain implicit and deeply entrenched in traditions and values. It is likely that such national policies are inappropriate in a rapidly changing, internationalizing world in which technology and communication do not respect national borders. It is certainly questionable whether the language policies in place at the national and international levels will ensure that cultural and linguistic diversity are maintained and will flourish. The pressures of globalization and europeanization may be strengthening English at the expense of all the other languages of Europe. It is unclear to what extent this will occur, but many of the factors that will influence the outcome can be identified. These are what an informed language policy must be based on.

The EU and languages: does a common market need a common language?

In theory the eleven official languages of the fifteen EU member states have equal status and equal rights in EU institutions. These languages are Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Italian,
Portuguese, Spanish, and Swedish. Such EU institutions as the Commission in Brussels, the European Council (not to be confused with the Council of Europe), the European Parliament, and the European Court of Justice are serviced by the largest and most complex translation and interpretation services in the world, so as to facilitate communication between speakers of the different official languages. The language services are a vital link in the many communication chains that connect the shared concerns of the member states. There are regulations on which languages can be used in documents going to and from EU institutions, but the management of multilingualism in the many internal procedures of EU institutions is rather less clear, and the principle of complete equality is affected by constraints of time and funding. The operation of these services will be explored in Chapter 4.

### Box 1.1 Speakers of the eleven EU languages

EU Eurobarometer data on percentages of the population of the EU speaking the official languages of the EU as a mother tongue or as a second or foreign language:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother tongue (%)</th>
<th>Foreign or second language (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. This information has been compiled on the basis of a Eurobarometer report (54, 15 February 2001) in which people (15,900 across the member states) reported on...
their use of languages, using very broad categories of proficiency. They are therefore crude measures. Exact, reliable data on numbers of speakers of languages is notoriously elusive.

2 For the total population of member and applicant states, see Appendix 3.

3 The survey presumably ignores the widespread bilingualism of those who speak at home a regional minority language (one-sixth of the 378 million citizens of the EU), or an official but demographically small language (300,000 speakers of Swedish as a mother tongue in Finland), or an immigrant language (for instance, there are 400,000 Finnish-speaking immigrants in Sweden).

4 On the basis of the information in this study, the EU website proudly announces that ‘Half of Europe is already multilingual’, the evidence being
• ‘45% of European citizens can take part in a conversation in a language other than their mother tongue
• there are large variations between the Member States
• in Luxembourg, nearly everyone speaks another language well enough to hold a conversation
• this is also true for more than 8 people in 10 living in the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden
• people in the UK, Ireland and Portugal are least likely to speak another language, with less than a third of these populations saying they can do this’.16

In principle, what happens to languages in each member state is exclusively their own concern. This follows the subsidiarity principle that decisions should be taken locally rather than centrally, that is, in member states rather than in EU institutions.17 The Danes have adopted a more user-friendly term for subsidiarity, ‘nærhedsprincippet’, the nearness or proximity principle. However, it would be naive to assume that each EU state is a linguistic island, and that EU policies do not impact on all European languages. The EU has become an immensely complex and influential forum for policy throughout Europe. A common EU policy means that national policies and interests are coordinated, negotiated, and agreed on at the supranational EU level. The label supranational is more restricted than international, and