



The Language Puzzle in the European Integration Process

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STATE OF THE ART REPORT

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1. Introduction: Languages in Europe and the EU In-the-Making

This paper focuses on the issues concerning language education within Europe *in-the-making*. Elsewhere in the world, bi- or multilingual skills are far from being the exception, as can be seen in Asia or Africa where most people speak several languages. The analysis of data concerning knowledge of foreign languages, broken down by country or by generation, cannot be carried out successfully without an understanding of the socio-historical context of the process. This involves considering the twofold question of bilingualism and language learning in Europe.

First, this issue implies a comprehensive study of the European cultural heritage. Umberto Eco (1994) has coined the concept of *confusion linguarum* – i.e. linguistic (and then cultural) diversity – which represents the only hint of *Europeanness* and the sole existing common feature of European experience and history. This shared experience of linguistic diversity has resulted in similar attitudes to bilingualism in Europe (part 1). This *confusion linguarum* – or *The Curse of the Tower of Babel* for Eco – has emerged as the driving force behind social and political organisation in Europe. *La ricerca della lingue perfetta nella cultura europea*¹ – the pursuit of a perfect or universal language in Europe – was, for centuries, seen as the key for resolving the continent's tragic religious, political, and economic divisions. Concern for linguistic diversity has shaped Europe as a continent, so that with the birth of nations, a fate similar to the Tower of Babel was avoided. This stage was followed by *the Age of Nationalism* and linguistic differentiation formed the basis for stability based on national identities. The *confusion linguarum* was thus the historical condition necessary for creating stability based on specific values peculiar to each state (part 2).

Although the vision of a perfect language has never been unique to European culture, it has constituted an essential element for European political development. This evokes the other side of the problem as the choice of which common language among Europeans raises further questions. What is Europe? When did Europe come into existence? Which geographical areas or cultures are to be considered as belonging to it?

However, this issue cannot be treated from a purely linguistic point of view as it raises extremely problematic points on the socio-political level. Georges Kersaudy (2001) has addressed this linguistic dimension of Europe. He assumes that, since all our languages (Indo-European languages) are derived from contact with peoples from North-India, Iran and the Caucasus, who came to Europe 4000 years ago, either one has to define as *European* only those languages that predate these, i.e. the Basque language and elements from Caucasus, or one has to acknowledge a

¹ This is the original title of Umberto Eco's book.

much wider group of languages that have resulted from intermingling. He takes a firm stance for calling 'Europe' the territory and populations that spread from Iceland to Baku, via Kazakhstan and New Zemble. In this area, whose centre is Vilnius, more than 40 languages are spoken by at least 1 million people. At a time when the construction of Europe has taken a political turn, and its elites are discussing the common heritage as well as its political or organisational implementation, the linguistic issue takes on vital importance.

For more than 40 years, the European construction process has been based on a functionalist model whereby citizens are integrated through daily practices, designed and implemented from the top down. These practices would first be adopted by the *Euro-elites* and then spill over to all citizens². This has a major relevance for our study as the diversity of languages has so far been viewed by EU actors as hindering mobility. Mobility is supposed to create a shared sense of European identity through the experience of a common space. The command and knowledge of foreign languages is thus a tool by which Europe hopes to mobilise its citizens in the process of identity/community building.

EU technical developments have probably postponed the need to question Europe's cultural and linguistic heritage, with the highly-developed system for translating each EU document into the eleven official languages being an obvious example. Nonetheless, there can be no question that tremendous political activity has been undertaken, in order to launch programmes, and co-operation procedures or exchanges to bolster citizens' commitment to Europe. Given that we agree with Noam Chomsky's statement that all men have the very same genetic predisposition to acquire language (and culture), we will focus on the conditions and modes of transmission of those constituent elements of the social being. Hence, the issue of language in Europe implies a need to stress the process of socialisation, the political organisation of the schooling system and the question of collective social identities. This analysis can be carried out by studying what is disseminated and what is at stake in the learning process that leads to the acquisition of targeted linguistic skills (part 3).

Which data or socio-political indicators are available? In the absence of comparative data on education and linguistic skills, two sources have been used as mainstays for this paper. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that these are reports by the *Eurydice*³ European Unit and the report of the Special Eurobarometer 54⁴, both carried out with the financial support of the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education and Culture), and so both part of the on-going EU polity-building action (part 2.2).

We have attempted, although using these biased data, to highlight how Europe is dealing with this key dialectic: the urgent need for a *lingua franca*, surpassing

2 On this relation between the functionalist European way and the shaping of a common citizens community, see Wiener (1998).

³ All material is available in English at www.eurydice.org. The reports at the core of this paper are *Foreign Language Teaching in Schools in Europe*, 2001; *Key data on education in the European Union — 2002*.

⁴ 16,078 persons surveyed during December 2000, Report issued on February 2001.

linguistic divisions, while guaranteeing the historical heritage of linguistic diversity as the expression of individual cultural dynamics.

2. Learning Foreign Languages and Linguistic Skills in Italy, France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom: Common Trends and Particularities

2.1. Common Trends in Europe

When Europeans are asked about their foreign language skills, 53% of them say that they can speak at least one European language in addition to their mother tongue. 26% say that they can speak two foreign languages.

Besides their mother tongue, 41% of Europeans know English as a foreign language, 19% know French, 10% German, 7% Spanish and 3% Italian. Overall, the most-spoken first foreign language in Europe is English (33%) followed by French (10%). From these figures we can note that the 5 most-spoken foreign languages are those of the five PIONEUR focus countries. It is also of interest to observe the order in which these languages are ranked.

In all European countries, except Ireland, all pupils have to learn at least one foreign language while at school. The central education authorities require all pupils to learn a foreign language from primary level onwards, except in the United Kingdom (bar Scotland) and in a few European countries (the Flemish Community of Belgium, Bulgaria and Slovakia).

In almost half of the European countries/regions, pupils have to study a prescribed language when studying a foreign language for the first time. In the great majority of countries, this language is English. French is most frequently a prescribed language when pupils are obliged to study a second foreign language. In a few countries, two prescribed languages have to be learnt (three in Luxembourg). This points to the lack of unity among the national schooling systems. Certain languages are prescribed in some countries for historical (Swedish in the bilingual Finnish system) or political reasons.

The other common feature is the will to create an awareness of other languages and cultures in childhood. In all member states, there is a shift towards language learning at an early stage. This growing awareness of the importance of language learning has some effect on generation variations.

46% of Europeans have followed language courses. The second most common way of learning languages, for 17% of Europeans, is informal discussions with someone whose mother tongue is the language being learnt. Then come the extended or regular stays in countries where the language is spoken (15%) and finally self-learning with the help of a language book accounts for 12%. Hence, only a minority of Europeans mix mobility and acculturation (learning while living abroad).

As far as age or generation variations are concerned, there can be no question that knowledge of other languages decreases with a rise in age. This generation gap is

represented in the Eurobarometer, and is illustrated through the command of English: 66% of the '15 to 24' age group declare speaking English, this falls to 53% of the '25 to 39' age group, 38% of the '40 to 54' age group and decreases to 18% of those over 55 years old. The trend characteristic for competence in English as a foreign language can be applied to all other languages. If the age/generation effect is definitely significant, we will later (part 3) consider the impact of the level of education as an important variable in language skills.

Nonetheless, in addition to the command or knowledge of a foreign language, there is a strong generation effect on the presumed usefulness of mastering one. Indeed, 87% of young people aged between 15 and 24 consider the knowledge of foreign languages useful while only 57% of people over 55 tend to do so. The average opinion on the question for the whole EU is 72%.

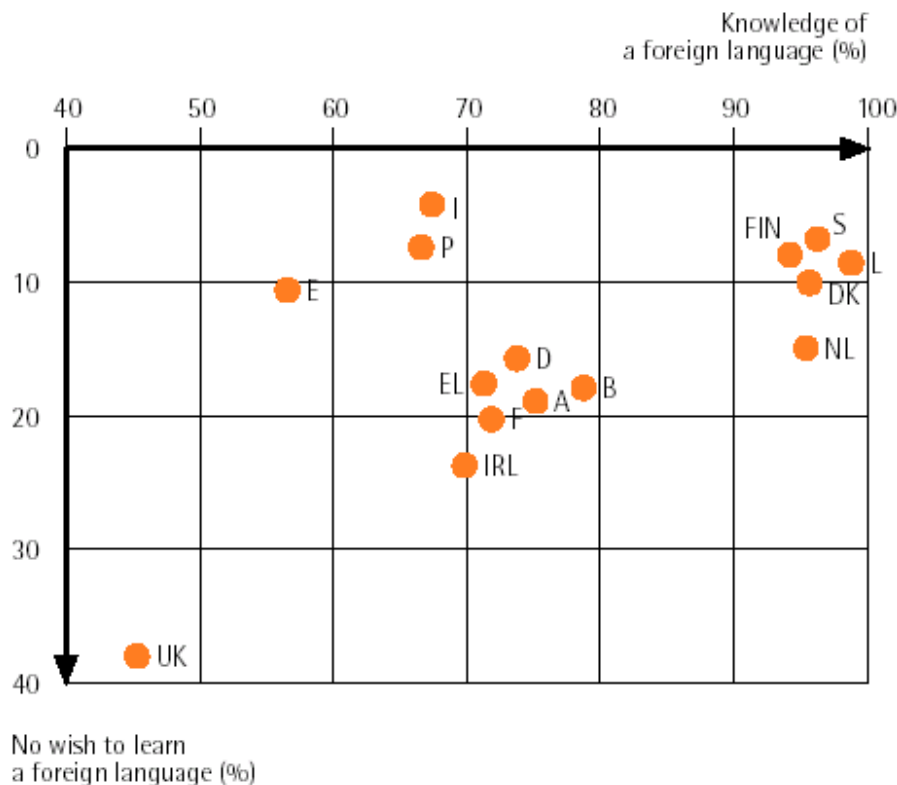
Then, there is an overall broadened range of languages offered. This goes beyond the national languages and concerns more than 40 native languages and their active use. Apart from the national languages, minority/regional language teaching has been developed further and encouraged by various European institutions. Despite the fact that only a handful of regions impose the minority language as a medium of instruction for all pupils (in the form of either partial or total immersion), the EU can claim its education systems are clear evidence of this desire to protect Europe's linguistic heritage (in accordance with the Charter for Fundamental Rights).

Although there can be no doubt that the promotion of language skills within Member States has been recognised everywhere as a necessity for pupils as well as an important aspect of Europe's success, there is still a long way to go before the standardisation of language learning, and generally, a uniform model of education in Europe. Not only does this come up against technical barriers, but also strong political interests.

2.2. The Status of Languages and Particularities of Learning Systems in Italy, the UK, Spain, Germany and France

There are clear discrepancies between EU countries in the knowledge of foreign languages, as the Special Eurobarometer 54 revealed. A very high level of command of a foreign language can be seen to exist in the Nordic countries and the Benelux (in Luxembourg, only 2% of the population do not speak any other language than their mother tongue). For the main body of the EU population, the language skills differ less from one country to another (except for Spain and Britain) than the will to learn foreign languages (subjective). Lastly, in the UK, about 66% of the people interviewed speak only their mother tongue.

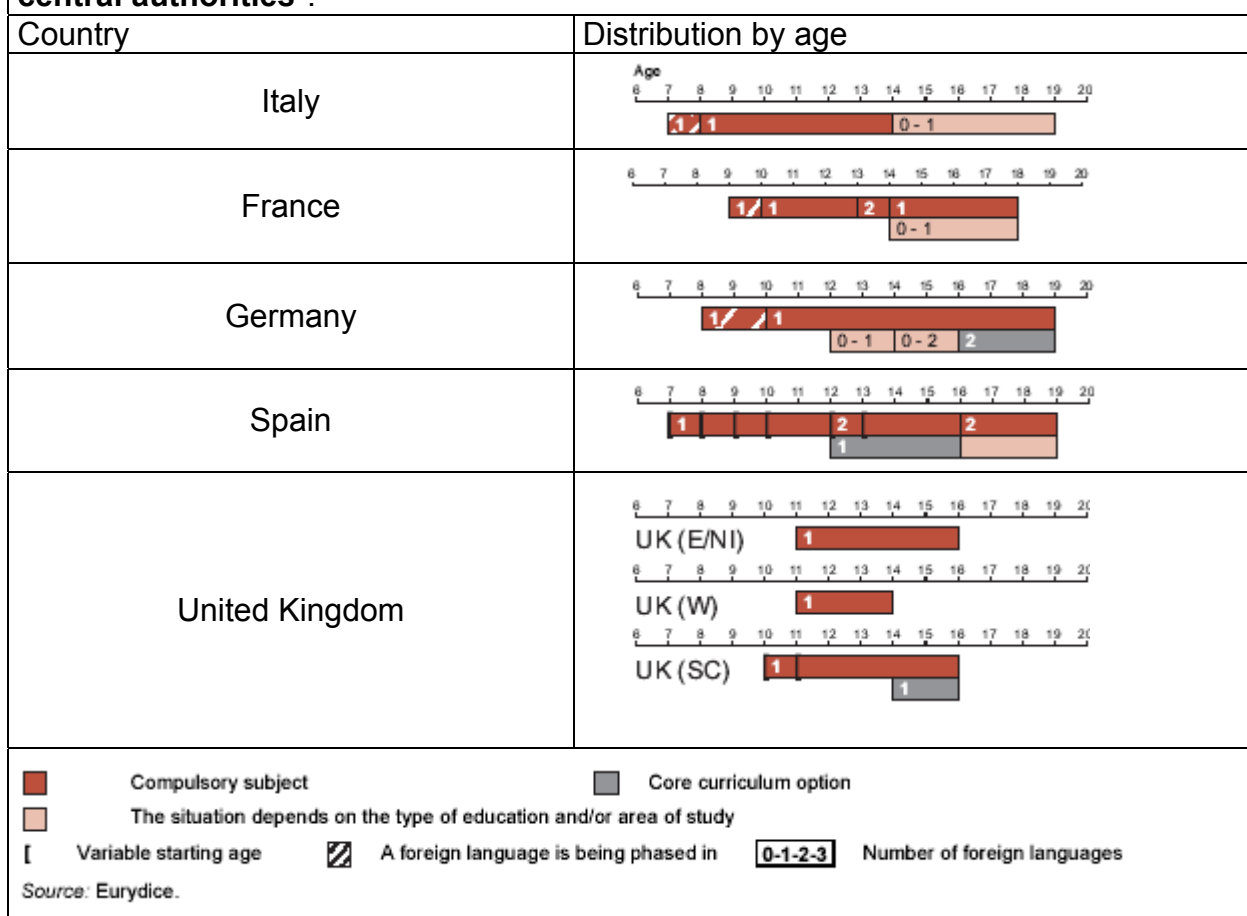
Figure 1 – Subjective and objective attitude towards foreign language knowledge



Source: Eurobarometer (1997)

Only in France and Spain do pupils have to learn two foreign languages at school but the situation is above all peculiar in Italy and in the United Kingdom (except Scotland)⁵. The central authorities do not require all schools to offer a second foreign language as a core curriculum option (the first foreign language being compulsory). In the great majority of cases, this second foreign language may be learnt from lower secondary education onwards (education authorities require that schools include at least one foreign language among their core curriculum options) though there is no insistence on learning two compulsory foreign languages. In only four countries (Luxembourg, Sweden, Iceland and Estonia) do pupils start learning a second compulsory foreign language from primary level onwards.

⁵ As well as in Malta.

CHART 1: Foreign languages as a compulsory subject or core curriculum option in pre-primary, primary or general secondary education, as determined by the central authorities⁶:

In Spain, the time devoted to compulsory foreign language is usually three hours per week in most Autonomous Communities. At the age of 10, the minimum annual load is 85 hours (the same as for Mathematics but fewer than for Mother tongue). At the ages of 13 and 16, pupils study one compulsory foreign language for at least 105 hours. Nonetheless these figures are always increased as they correspond to only 65% or 55% of the minimum core curriculum for the whole State and which the different Autonomous Communities complete and develop. To compare the Spanish situation with the one in the United Kingdom is hazardous since, in the latter country, the time spent on each subject is for schools to decide (at least in England and Wales). However, typically, the time allocation for one language for pupils aged 11 to 14 is around 2 to 3 hours a week. After the age of 16, the time typically allocated to each GCE A level subject is between 4 and 5 hours a week. In France, at the age of 11, a pupil studies one foreign language for 4 hours a week. At the age of 13, two foreign languages are compulsory, the load for the first one is between 3 and 4 hours, and 3 hours for the second one.

One should also consider the official priorities in language learning: are these productive objectives (speaking and writing) or comprehensive ones (reading and

⁶ From Eurydice, *Key Data on Education in Europe, 2002* (Chapter H), European commission / EURYDICE/ Eurostat.

listening)? Other differences may reside in the national systems as some of the countries still base foreign language teaching on curricula formulated in the 1980s or even in the 1970s. This is the case in Italy, where the curricula for the primary and lower secondary levels were published in 1985 and 1979 respectively. Or, also, what is the room for clear objectives concerning the acquisition of cultural knowledge in the curricula? As regards the development of attitudes of respect and understanding, the section devoted to language in the curricula of a few countries does not explicitly mention objectives of this type. This is the case for secondary education in France even if in the overall teaching objectives pupils are first encouraged to become aware of the relationship between language and culture.

Many more organisational points are nationally specific and put into question the global trend of language learning homogenisation. In each national systems lay peculiar developments. In Italy, for instance, pupils at a *liceo artistico* do not learn a foreign language as a compulsory subject unless they enrol in an experimental class, for which the school may make the teaching of a foreign language compulsory. In France, according to new primary education curricula, a foreign language should be taught in the third year (children aged 8) and, from 2007 onwards⁷, in the first year (children aged 6). In Germany, the regulations differ from one *Land* to the next. Generally, pupils can choose English or French when they first have to learn a foreign language, but they are obliged to study English at some stage during compulsory education. In Spain, no list of specific foreign languages is provided. Theoretically, schools may offer any language. In England and Wales, the *National Curriculum* requires schools at secondary level to offer at least one of the official working languages of the European Union. Other languages can be offered if the school chooses to do so. Pupils may study any modern foreign language that the school offers.

The following chart shows the national diversity in the organisation of language teaching. This illustrates the limits to comparative analysis. If the common trends we focused on characterise, on the whole, each of our study countries, there is a broad range of particularities that remain relevant. It is for instance noticeable that there is no relation between cultural closeness of languages and mutual knowledge of languages. Thus, despite the fact that French and Spanish are linguistically close, the level of French knowledge in Spain is very low. This might be related to historically different educational policies, as well as to the burden of the past – in Franco's Spain France and its language were regarded as the 'enemy at the border' (part 2).

⁷ *Plan de développement de l'enseignement des langues*, designed in 2000.

Chart 2: Language skills and learning systems in Italy, France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom

Country	Knowledge of English as first foreign language	Foreign languages prescribed (P) or on offer in 2001	Percentage of pupil in primary education learning English ⁸	Percentage of pupils learning one foreign language in general upper education ⁹	Percentage of pupils learning two or three foreign languages in general upper education
Italy	30%	Spanish, German, French and English	51%	89%	10%
France	36%	Spanish, German, English, Italian, Dutch, Portuguese, Polish, Russian ¹⁰	36%	15%	84%
Germany	45%	Spanish, Danish, English (P), French, Italian, Dutch, Swedish, Czech, Polish, Russian	17%	No data	No data
Spain	30%	Spanish, German, English (P) and French	78%	6%	92%
United Kingdom	5%	Spanish, German, French and Italian ¹¹		No data	No data

⁸ EU average is 41.7%⁹ EU average is 51% for one foreign language learned, 40% for two and 7% for three.¹⁰ Also offered in France: The Alsace regional languages, Arabic, Basque, Breton, Catalan, Chinese, Corsican, Creole, Gallo, modern Hebrew, Japanese, the Melanesian languages, the languages of the Moselle region, Occitan, Tahitian and Turkish.¹¹ For England and Wales, also Danish, Greek, Dutch, Portuguese, Finnish, Swedish. For Scotland, also Latin, Ancient Greek, Urdu, Gaelic.

Source: Eurobarometer (1997); Eurydice (2001, 2002)

3. Language, Social Identity and Community/Polity

3.1. Social Identity, Identity Policies and Nationalism

The consensual paradigm, at least among psycho-sociologists in the tradition of G.H. Mead or E.H. Erikson, holds that self-consciousness (identity) is not a purely individualistic outcome, but rather arises from the experience of social interaction. This implies both psychological and social factors¹². This feeling of belonging is formed throughout the process of socialisation, starting in childhood, with the acquisition of language which brings the child to nominate himself as *I*, part of a group. There is a core dimension of the social ideal within self-identity. Freud pointed to the potency of the ideal of the family, class or nation on the self-conscious. The consubstantiality of individual/collective identity is also the theme of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*, with sustainable schemes of cognition, perception and action. These are formed from past experiences within a social framework in which institutions and individuals interact and shape each other, which results in the two ways of history objectivation.

Besides this social-generating link between individuals and the collectives in their experience, another aspect of the act of feeling of belonging to a group arises: the categories of *in* and *out* groups. Identity is no more the grounds for group unity, but rather a process of identification through distinction from other groups. The relevance of cultural identities – held as a universal principle – is undoubtedly a product of political modernity, an element of the *Age of Nationalism*.

Whether from a primordialist or modernist position for understanding what a *Nation* is, language remains a key element. From the former point of view, language is a constituent element of a nation, along with the named population using it, its historic territory, a common mass culture, myths and history, and collective solidarity. Those constituent elements would have existed for ages, long before the coming of the *Age of Nationalism*, and nationalism would be the political expression of a need to secure these inviolate nations or at least some of their pillars (Smith 1986). On the contrary, the modernist approach to nationalism – as a (modern) phenomenon – is best expressed in Ernest Gellner's arguments. He summed up the debate¹³ between the two approaches in a single but meaningful question: *Do nations have navels ?* (Gellner 1996).

To take up this debate is not our aim here, although this could elucidate the question as to whether nationalism, being an ideology, has shaped nations as a recent political phenomenon (Gellner 1983 and 1996; Anderson 1991) or whether nationalism has paved the way for the advent of lasting units (theory of nation-building, see Smith 1991). We will stick to the central role of language, which happens to be one of the few prevalent standpoints of the two sides.

¹² For a clear and concise introduction to the issue of group identity building, see Lipiansky (1998).

¹³ This debate around the study of nationalism is clearly illustrated through the presentation of the two sides' positions, Gellner (the teacher's) and Smith (the student's), gathered by the latter at the death of the former in the review *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 2, Part 3, 11/1996.

‘A nation in the modern sense cannot exist without a shared sense of identity, and for some people to share an identity a certain minimum level of communication between them must be guaranteed’ (Barbour and Carmichael 2000, 4).

Language is therefore either the expression of the cultural coherence of a group – working both as a distinctive marker from other groups and as a common means of communication – or it serves as the political/cultural vehicle to bolster a common shared identity, for what Benedict Anderson has named an *imagined community* (Anderson 1991). Ernest Gellner explains this role of language in community building, with his anthropological approach to daily nationalism, or nationalism as a way of being in the world. The standardisation of languages appears to be a functional requirement, turning the mastery of a particular language into the *condition sine qua non* for citizens’ integration. The characteristics of modern society – anonymity, mobility, and atomisation – are completed by the semantic nature of work, which differs from agrarian societies. Daily interaction implies the manipulation of messages and contacts with a large number of anonymous partners. Thus, everybody needs to possess this skill of speaking the established *lingua franca* which requires prolonged schooling. Modern societies are the first ever in history in which literacy is near universal, and high culture has become the pervasive culture of the entire society.

‘That is all. It is this which explains nationalism: the principle – so strange and eccentric in the age of agrarian cultural diversity and of the ‘ethnic’ division of labour – that homogeneity of culture is the political bond, that mastery of (and, one should add, acceptability in) a given high culture (the one used by the surrounding bureaucracies) is the precondition of political, economic and social citizenship. If you satisfy this condition, you can enjoy your droit de cité’ (Gellner 1996, 29) .

The Eurobarometer survey makes it obvious that, in each country, the language most often designated as the respondents’ mother tongue is the (or one of the) national language(s). In countries where there is a single national language, it is the mother tongue of 94–97% of the population.

Citizenship has been nationalised, along with the *marriage of state and culture*. To avoid tendentious generalisations, which would present this union as universal, Gellner studies differences of context according to areas. Over the past two centuries, ‘the ideal of a nation closely identified with a particular language’ (Barbour and Carmichael 2000, 14), has been chiefly European. In the strong dynastic states centred around Lisbon, Madrid, Paris and London the customary marriage had existed for ages thus making the union between state and culture barely noticeable in these cultural–linguistic zones. Those cultures had their *roof–state* given to them through history before they ever needed to claim it. There were smaller cultures inside these territories which needed to struggle but the main ones did not. ‘The political and cultural centralisation inherent in modernity meant the peasants or the working class needed to be educated, to be taught to ‘talk proper’; but their membership of a state–culture was seldom seriously in doubt, nor was the identity of the state’. For the former Holy Roman Empire, ‘the situation was odd in a different kind of way: the bride had been ready, all tartered up at the altar, for a long, long time, but, but...no groom!’ (Gellner 1996, 52). A high culture had long been available among both Germans and Italians (since Dante and Luther or even before). Italian and German nationalism had to centre on unification so as to overcome political

fragmentation. The suitable grooms found were Piedmont and Prussia. These nations wanted their own state in addition to their poets, operas, and languages.

Language is, probably to an even higher level in the five countries we are interested in, a highly political issue – since it carries emotional and sentimental elements of identity as well as the communication tools needed for citizens to function in a standardised polity. Not only is it an indicator of belonging to a group (leading to the ethnic conception of language: the Tower of Babel, Herderian Romantic idea, etc.) and then a resource for identification, but it also stands as the means of integration into daily life within the social community. ‘We can hence see that the growth of nations and the demarcation of languages are actually related processes’ (Barbour and Carmichael 2000, 13)

This, then, helps in understanding the Eurobarometer figures. 71% of Europeans agree on the fact that every citizen of the EU should be able to speak one EU language in addition to his/her mother tongue. Nonetheless, this desire to facilitate communication and encounters between Europeans is counter-balanced by the threat that the advance of the EU will ruin national (and then social) integration channels. Thus, 63% of Europeans think that EU enlargement implies the absolute necessity of better protecting his/her own language and 47% did not believe that enlargement would initiate universal command of a common language (against 38% who did so).

3.2. The European Union, Language Policy and Community–Building

Following this discussion of language in the process of socialisation and social identity transmission, it would seem relevant to consider concrete EU policy as far as education, and above all language learning is concerned.

The origins of modern foreign language teaching can be traced back to the 18th century, and it became part of general secondary education a century later, during the industrial revolution (the surge in international trade). There was another massive boost in foreign language learning in the period following the Second World War, and again since the 1980s. In this vein, the EU has issued documents on education and learning languages which offer a guide to history. ‘In western Europe, the scene was set by the creation of the European Union and its rising demand for multilingual citizens able to benefit from the free movement of people, goods and services within its boundaries’ (Eurydice 2001). However, the EU is a key actor in long term social trends. It is also a major arena for the formulation of future developments: providing diversity to language teaching systems in Central and Eastern Europe which were dominated by Russian for decades, assessing the role of non-EU immigrant mother tongues and, of course, ensuring the place of minority/regional languages.

This EU interference in a field that for decades was the basis for incentives on national identities is the outcome of a highly political process, launched three decades ago. EU linguistic policy is manifold, but the official aim has been to promote a growing emphasis on language skills and then on teaching systems. This has found its expression in five trends that are, in general, still in place in Europe.

Educational matters remain the inviolate prerogative of Member State central authorities. The EU's actions were thus less directive oriented. The EU has always been conscious of the need to encourage the Member States to increase their awareness of the importance of multilingualism in the construction of Europe, and to take action in the area of foreign language teaching. This has had a great impact on national schooling systems. First, this resulted in the creating of more Europe-oriented *hussars*. Actually, this took place in teacher training programmes meant to match the need for language teaching skills and the increasing demand at primary level. As those teachers are now requested not only to be proficient in the target language but also knowledgeable about the associated cultural aspects, there is now room for new cultural references.

All of this was integrated into initiatives during the 1990's that sought to promote foreign language teaching, resulting in an entire generation of new programmes: Lingua¹⁴, Socrates¹⁵ and Leonardo da Vinci. Eurydice, a network established under the Socrates programme as a special source of information on the education systems in the European Union and the EFTA/EEA countries, is in itself an effective technical and political tool.

This has been complemented by more normative actions: the implementation of the European Label for innovative language learning initiatives as well as the promotion of and financial support for *regional and minority languages*. There is also a shift towards institutionalisation, under the leadership of the language policy unit of the Directorate General for Education and Culture. This has led to the organisation of community action on a political level by such means as The Commission's White Paper *Teaching and Learning – Towards a Learning Society* (which emphasises that certain key skills – including language skills – are necessary for all citizens to be able to play a full part in the society – see above part 2.1); the 1996 Green Paper *Education, Training, Research: Eliminating Obstacles to Transnational Mobility* concluded that 'learning at least two Community languages has become a precondition if citizens of the European Union are to benefit from occupational and personal opportunities open to them in the single market'.

This process of shaping new practices and references for teachers, pupils and an increasing number of actors has also targeted an ever wider audience. In 1996, *the European Year of Lifelong Learning* was announced and, above all, the year 2001 was declared the '*European Year of Languages*'. The latter, organised together with the Council of Europe, is an indicator of the Commission's desire to create various forms of co-operation, be it with UNESCO or the Council of Europe¹⁶. This has been followed up by political and legal developments. The shift makes sense since the Education Council in 1976 called for practical actions by Member States to expand

¹⁴ Launched in 1989, comprising notably a catalogue of learning and teaching languages material, as well as a *Guide to Good Practices* for assistantships.

¹⁵ Socrates Compendia Lingua, Action A – language teachers training projects, Action D instruments for language learning and teaching.

¹⁶ The documents issued by the Council of Europe, which are referred to in the conclusion of this paper, evoke the concept of a *European Framework of Reference* for the teaching of languages. In some documents of the Commission, we can find support for the promotion of the use of such a concept, although the action of the Council of Europe concerns 41 States and not only EU Member States.

language teaching and learning. In 1992, the Maastricht Treaty referred, in article 126, to the field of education, which was thereby included in the Union's Treaty for the first time, ('Community action shall be aimed at ... developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States'). In 1995 a Resolution of the Council took stock of the new powers given to the Community in this field and noted that the promotion of linguistic diversity had become one of the major issues in education. The Amsterdam Treaty describes the aim of the EU of creating a *Europe of Knowledge*.

Overall, there has been a global qualitative and quantitative development of language learning and teaching in the EU, within the EU's commitment to the creation of a new space for social practices and identity. The trend involves a steady increase in the means and the people involved. The number of pupils and teachers who circulated within the Lingua Action E (Joint Educational Projects for language learning, Socrates/lingua program), has risen from 19,909 in 1991 to 28,617 in 1997. This tendency applies to most of the new practices launched.

The aim behind this set of policies has been reasserted: promoting communication and understanding amongst citizens of differing linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The whole process of bolstering shifts in the nature and weight of language learning has meant that the EU institutions have gained the opportunity to launch polity-building actions, which can be understood according to what we discussed on the role of language in nationalism. Most of these educational policies are youth oriented. Nonetheless, the fact that they involve transnational networks of teachers and scholars, committed to developing shared practices, norms and references, is an act of community-building, thus those networks stand as Pioneers of a new European culture of linguistic education.

For the young people concerned, ensuring their language proficiency is presented as fulfilling a dual purpose in a changing environment. On the one hand, it is asserted that there is a growing need for plurilingualism in open societies. Foreign language curricula are supposed to target communication and intercultural awareness. This contributes to the idea of a European historical heritage, in which the cultural and linguistic diversity is then seen as positive and valuable for citizens. On the other hand, the emphasis put on new language learning practices is presented as an opportunity to improve the level of employability and adaptability of an increasingly integrated and mobile Europe. The idea is that learning more additional languages holds out the promise of personal and professional enrichment. 'Europe may truly become an area in which widespread language proficiency brings citizens closer together, with free circulation, mutual comprehension and solidarity no longer hindered by the linguistic barrier¹⁷'.

In the most advanced projects aimed at promoting language learning, one can discern future trends in EU developments in that field and the way in which citizens would be presented with functional integration. In March 2000, the Lisbon European Council set out a ten-year strategy to make the EU the *world's most dynamic and competitive economy*. The EU administration is supporting projects aimed at bridging the existing gap between what is provided as foreign language education, and the

¹⁷ CLIL report on bilingual education, available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/languages/index_en.

results in terms of learner performance. This could motivate projects upon which to base future policy proposals and developments.

This is the purpose of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) – in French EMILE (*Enseignement d'une Matière par l'Intégration d'une Langue étrangère*). In the report on CLIL development, which represents a socio-pedagogical means by which to integrate language with non-language content, three statements are particularly relevant to the tasks undertaken by the EU authorities.

'Though often driven by grassroots demand for greater multiple language proficiency, its growth has also resulted from top-down measures in certain countries'. The EU has no monopoly over the definition of education policies so that decentralisation is a crucial issue. By stipulating common policies, European actors must deal with the plurality inherent in the European institutional framework and include both local and central authorities as well as all other actors involved in the process.

'There is no available evidence which would support the view that low (5–15% of teaching time) to medium exposure (15–50% of teaching time) would threaten the first language. English language does not have a monopoly position, especially as we shift towards addressing the question of identifying specific competencies in different languages'. This demonstrates the need for that kind of community action so as to obtain positive feedback.

'...best performance in the learning of languages that suits the times, particularly in relation to the labour markets, social cohesion, and the changing aspirations of young people, within the border-free European context'. There is an undertaking to construct an image of Europe as the future stage of our modern societies, leading to the assimilation of language learning and learning on Europe.

Nonetheless, the political voluntarism of EU actors (and above all of the European Commission) is unlikely to continue to avoid recognising the main trends (Domination of English, loss of influence of French and use of 'Europe' by regional nationalists) as it has done so far, the issue being far too sensitive (Laitin 1997, 288). But there is a real struggle, which implies in Europe the EU actors, national authorities and many others. As Laitin (1997) notices, 'English as a foreign language' is a global industry that brings UK in around 6 billion pounds annually on language exports when France spend as much as 1.5% of its GNP on *la Francophonie*. 'People are willing to pay high personal costs to learn English; they have to be bribed to learn French or German' (Laitin 1997, 288).

4. Bilingualism, Social Capital and the Struggle for Power

4.1. Which Bilingualism within the European Framework of National Languages?

EU policy is to foster language learning in order to create a pattern of communication enabling people to identify themselves with a supra-national/European polity. If we focus on the outcome of such a policy, a precise trend becomes clear. In terms of bilingualism, the most common pattern in Europe is to speak one's mother tongue

and English as a foreign language. 71% of Europeans consider that everyone in the European Union should be able to speak one European language in addition to their mother tongue and most of them agree that this should be English.

Two arguments can be raised against the standardization of a European language via a monopoly of English. On the one hand, this would lead to a tremendous impoverishment of *Shakespeare's mother tongue*. English would indeed shift to fit its international role: being the language of international communication (spoken mainly as a foreign language) as well as the technical jargon of the new information and communication technologies. On the other hand, such uniformity constitutes a threat to European diversity and historical heritage.

English is dominant in Europe as a common language. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to consider growing influence of English as the result of a unilateral and targeted policy of EU action. As clearly stated in Anderson's (1991) and Gellner's (1996) studies, modern societies require something that sparks off hope and that fulfills expectations in a changing modern society. Anderson has stressed the role of the printing industry, and above all, the reading of national newspapers, with a common national language, in promoting the feeling of belonging to an *imagined community*. English is used as the language of the new technologies of information and communication, according to EU policies. It is not learnt for itself but for the opportunities it embodies.

'Despite the dominance of English in information technology and as a kind of international lingua franca in some parts of Europe, the struggle for national emancipation is still not completed. (...) Changes to existing states have come about in part because of an incredible tenacity of certain cultures and a simple refusal to homogenize. In these circumstances the issue of language is often crucial' (Barbour and Carmichael 2000, 284).

As language represents the main vehicle for national identities, there is a high degree of instrumental conception in a language. We can hardly avoid highlighting the fact that the five countries in our study are the home to the five most spoken foreign languages in Europe. 53% of Europeans say that they can speak at least one European language in addition to their mother tongue, 26% say that they can speak two foreign languages. In addition to their mother tongue, people in Europe tend to know English (41%), French (19%), German (10%), Spanish (7%) and Italian (3%). English and French – to a lesser extent – are spoken by more people as foreign languages than as mother tongues.

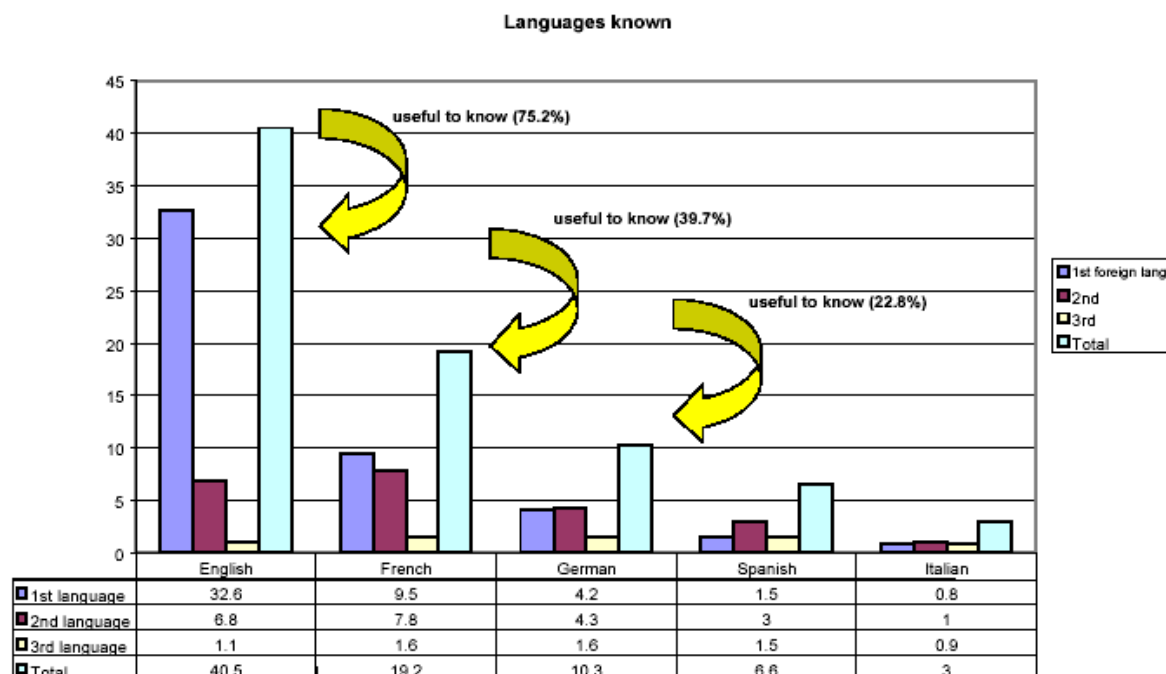
It is obvious that EU developments (enlargement, integration of ever more fields in the community competence...) do have effects on the global European framework, i.e. nationalised culture and citizenship patterns.

'National and cultural boundaries are being broken down. In their everyday lives Europeans often have more than one linguistic identity. Many use different languages at work or at study, like medieval monks inscribing Latin or nineteenth-century diplomats negotiating in French. (...) Potentially, Europeans have a greater range of identities on which to draw than ever. If people in southern Germany use English throughout their professional career and communicate in Alemannic dialect at home,

in what sense do they remain German? Of course, they master Hochdeutsch at school, vote for their Chancellor, and listen to the national news, but in many important ways they function at a regional and international level before a national one' (Barbour and Carmichael 2000, 286–287).

Thus the issue of language skills in Europe also implies looking at the sphere of influence of each of these. Given that the sharing of a language among the national communities was a constituent aspect of social ties and identity, it can also be put forward that, above all, in the five *big* European countries – the ex-colonial powers and the historical core – the persistence of their cultural influence throughout Europe, via the mastery of their languages by foreign citizens, is a burning issue. There can be no question that nationalism is the most significant aspect of the framework within which European construction is taking place and so it is for European languages. Nationalism has shaped Europe and is still shaping it, and languages are of a highly political nature.

The process of making language learning uniform is not a process launched by the EU against the European nations. It is an undertaking aimed at the construction process of the European community which is taking place within the framework of European nations. The issue of finding a common language – and its implementation – is developing within the space left by a range of national demands (the Union pattern of decision-making remains mostly intergovernmental). Targeted policies should take into account each national language's territory, uses and characteristics of the groups of speakers as well as the role of the language in each national identity.



Source: Special Eurobarometer 'Europeans and Languages', February 2001

Overall, the language most often spoken as the first foreign language in Europe is English (32.6%) followed by French (9.5%).

Although French ranks second in terms of usefulness, it is relevant here to compare these figures – from the Eurobarometer – with some taken from Eurydice reports. If the former source gives an insight into Europe as it is today with 15 members, Eurydice – comparing the situation of the 27 countries concerned by the EU and the scheduled enlargements – gives a better view of Europe's future.

The foreign language that is most taught in all European primary schools is English (over 40 % of pupils), with the highest percentage being in Spain (78 %). Apart from English, the most popular foreign language at primary level in the 27 countries taken together, is German, with an average of 7 % learning it. However, in EU countries, French is the second most taught foreign language at primary level (3.3 % on average learn French in the EU compared to 42 % learning English and 2.4 % learning German). But French comes third if we take the 27 countries together, considering the weight of the figures for German-speakers as well as the Flemish community in Belgium; Luxembourg; and Romania (where 86 %, 33 %, 79 % and 33 % respectively learn French – the average for all 27 countries is 4%). French is also the first foreign language in the UK and Ireland. Spanish is taught in most European countries at secondary level, but the proportion of pupils learning it in general secondary education does not exceed 7 % on average. The percentages of pupils learning Spanish is the highest in France (37 %).

The trend of a loss of influence for French in Europe¹⁸ (*external dimension*) should be considered together with the role of French as a language in the national identity (*internal dimension*) to understand the French position on European linguistic standardization and the need to preserve cultural diversity (*l'exception culturelle*). In France, there is a common struggle by both defenders of the Republican idea of the national language (the basis of the *contrat social* which integrates all citizens¹⁹) and by advocates of regional/minority languages. They all denounce the growing monopoly of English. In France, *La République Jacobine* subjugated all the local languages known nowadays as dialects (see part 2.1) through a fairly sophisticated schooling apparatus. French has, thus, for decades, been considered as a superior and unquestioned principle even among the partisans of minority languages.

All countries maintain their own flimsy balance between external and internal aspects of national languages. In Spain for instance, although Castilian is the official language, the constitution accords official status to other languages in Autonomous Communities (Catalan, Basque, etc.). The dynamic of Spanish as a language does

¹⁸ In a recent article, from a newspaper close to the right-wing French government, the decline of French as a working language in the EU is seen as a clear threat. On behalf of national language equality, the idea is to ensure the translation of EU documents into the three main European languages (English, German and French). The threat would lay in the little knowledge of French among elites of countries concern with the coming enlargement as well as in the decrease of the documents issued by the Commission initially drafted in French (58% in 1986, 30% in 2001). The knowledge of French is presented as an international political alternative and the journalist explains how the demands for learning French have increased with the French opposition to the US war in Irak. See, 'Le français lutte pour sa survie en Europe', in *Le Figaro*, 26/06.03.

¹⁹ On this firmly rooted idea of the central role of language and education in the French model of citizenship, one can refer to, for instance, Schnapper (2000).

not lie in the strength of national identity, since languages are considered in some part of the territory as ethno–linguistic divisions. However, in addition to the over 40 million inhabitants of Spain, there are also 300 million South and Central Americans who use this language as their mother tongue and Spanish is the second most spoken language in the US. This characterises the relevance of the link between Spanish and European linguistic standardisation.

The international influence of a language is also a feature of the German language. It is widely learnt across Europe as it is the mother tongue of 100 million Europeans, the official language of many countries and commonly used in Benelux, Scandinavia and all the Central and Eastern European countries. The point is not to gather all the relevant explanatory factors on the situation of national languages as regards bilingualism in Europe. The aim is rather to show that, within this dynamic, many political, cultural and social features are at stake.

The position on EU linguistic standardisation varies according to the way the national language has been used in the nation–state. The conflict relates to the idea of a universal means of communication. The issue is not only what language is to dominate on the European stage, but what uses are associated with the knowledge of this language.

4.2. Bilingualism, Social Capital and Linguistic Habitus

On the link between the knowledge of a very language and its uses (what group tends to know which language?), it is interesting to note that the knowledge of English decreases in accordance with the age of the respondent and, above all, the level of studies (so medium to high level students and managers are the most likely to master English). Spanish presents the same pattern but French differs. People who stopped studying earlier tend to believe that French is more useful than those who studied longer (41% of those who left school before 15 and 34% of those who studied at least up to 20 years old). 42% of manual workers and 45% of people staying at home think that French is one of the two most useful languages to know, more than in any other occupational group. German is above all popular among students (26%) and free–lance workers (25%), and it is the least popular among the unemployed (19%).

In Europe, most parents of children aged under 20 (93%) say it is important that their children learn other European languages. Parents were most favourable to their children learning foreign languages in the new Länder of Germany –100% – and in Spain – 96%. When asked for what reasons they think it important that their child(ren) learn other European languages at school or university, parents tend to answer first because they want them to improve their job opportunities (74%). The other reasons given by parents are: ‘because the language is widely spoken in the world’ (39%) or ‘widely spoken in Europe’ (36%). 34% of parents reply ‘because they want their children to be multilingual.

Does this instrumental attitude enable the emergence, via a common language, of a shared sense of identity? Alain Tarrius has studied the international circulation of European professional elites between Paris, London and Brussels (Tarrius 1992,

2000). His aim was to take an anthropological approach to sociability networks developed by high-level professionals, mobile within Europe due to increasing international exchange initiatives. Are they creating new territory? Are they inventing new forms of citizenship? His conclusions tend to be negative. Mobile professionals are in the end just like tourists. They come and go, always the same, and develop a reserved use of the social spaces experienced. Tarrius describes the eradication of any form of social link – especially the sentimental aspect – in the relationship between those migrants and the place they pass through. Two categories of professional migrants are concerned by this assertion. Those who constantly keep on the move for their job (*professionnels circulants*) and those who are temporarily living abroad for professional purposes (*professionnels temporairement delocalises*). The former group is usually composed of young executives, who need to prove their ability to their firm before gaining advancement and being allowed to settle down in their country with a better job. Working abroad is then viewed as a negative stage in a career. Furthermore, firms tend to rationalise mobility to the mere conception of short, efficient technical tasks. The second group includes both those settled abroad for a period of time and international civil servants. In general, the latter travel as often as possible to keep in contact with their home administration so as to be able to return to their country of origin. The professionals temporarily living and working abroad, whatever their nationality, tend to gather in old parts of the city, recreating national-based settlements, enjoying their cosy interiors whenever they can, on the pattern defined by their colleagues who had the same experience before them. All in all,

‘Les voies du brassage volontariste indéterminé, si chères à de très généreux propagandistes de l’Europe des porosités, sont donc peut-être dérisoires si elles ne reconnaissent pas d’abord l’advenue historique des identités migrantes’ (Tarrius 2000, 61).

While people migrating on a hereditary basis (*migrants professionnels de père en fils*) settle in distant places and add to the culture due to their ability to interact with the people in the country – such as the diaspora networks of Italians dealing in handcrafts or traditional trade – circulating elites, whatever their number, are absent from the cities they transit. They might represent the most advanced bilingual groups in the pattern taking place in Europe nowadays (managers or executives, speaking English fluently and competent in technology/business languages) but they are far from paving the way towards the hoped-for shared feeling of belonging to the Euro-polity.

Despite the fact that they constitute one of the very groups addressed by *fragmented rights, access and belonging to European citizenship practices* (Wiener 1998), they can in no way be seen – at least, at first sight – as pioneers of *Europeaness*. On the other hand, they may appear as a kind of caste (Le Galès 2003), with the strengthening of social boundaries at the European level. Language, thus, goes from being a vehicle for common experience to becoming a means for social division. Herein may lie one of the most clear-cut dangers for European citizens:

‘The modern-growth orientation has one immediate consequence : pervasive social mobility. (...) We are not mobile because we are egalitarians, we are egalitarians because we are mobile. The mobility is in turn imposed on us by social

circumstances (growth entails innovation, new jobs and techniques, justified expectation of moral improvement rather than terror) (...) With a rapidly changing technology and its associated occupational structure, the latter simply cannot be stable. Hence there is no way of running a modern society with a system of castes or estates' (Gellner 1996, 26).

What bilingualism are we talking about? Herein lies the crux of the matter. If 41% of Europeans declare that they master English, only 14% think they have a good level of this language. There is a discrepancy between learning a language, using it and confidence in using it. 27% of English-speaking managers defined their level of English as very good, compared to only 8% among workers. This refers to the issue of language status (official? written/spoken?). Proficiency in speaking a language relates to a communication system, a mental universe, or a history. We do not regard in the same way the bilingualism of rural inhabitants, regional minorities, immigrants or intermarriage couples and that of executives, researchers, and international civil servants (speaking English and then other languages). The mastering of several languages is then part of social capital, which can be seen as a distinctive feature in the reproduction of some elites. In France, if bilingual curricula are thriving, these mainly involve English or German to a lesser extent, but none of them cover Portuguese or Arabic, languages of social importance in France (Pfefferkorn 2000).

This dimension of language skill is clearly presented in Abdelmalek Sayad's work (1999). The case in point concerns the linguistic handicap of Arab migrants in France. Sayad uses a study dealing with the role of native languages in psychiatric treatment. This study states that Arabic speakers can only express their emotions through their body as their language lacks words and concepts to do so. Arabic, as a language, is supposedly one of those concrete languages, a language of action and experience, deprived of intellectual ambitions for *thinking about the world*, and thus, of only practical use. Those languages would be opposed to languages that reveal abstraction, rationality and intellectual projection into a higher culture and a higher civilisation, in the humanist tradition.

But what about the social conditions of use of both these classes of languages? In this situation, the misunderstanding between the Arabic-speaking patients and the hospital staff is more due to the history of those speaking Arabic (migrants, workers or others that are culturally adapted) and to the situation where the interaction takes place (precise and technical language of the elite working as professionals in a psychiatric structure). On the former point, Michel Tribalat (1995) has shown how crucial the mastery of French was in the process of acculturation of migrants. But this command of the national language of the host society has nothing to do with coincidence. Arab migrants coming from countries where France is either still an official language or the language of the former colonizing country, master French and this concerns 70% of them. This has to do with the level of study and with the social capital of the individual. So these aspects might be more relevant than the essence of Arabic as a language as regards the gap separating the only Arabic-speaking patient and a certain type of medical staff.

It is therefore hardly surprising that most of the children of Arab migrants in France stand their ground as regards the fact that, despite often using Arabic with their parents, French is their mother tongue and will be the one and only language for their

own children (Mucchielli 1998). In other respects, there is more to the act of talking (be it in one's mother tongue or in a foreign language) than the aspect of linguistic skills.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) proposed a theoretical conception of this approach to bilingualism. He observed, on the grounds of his anthropological studies in Algeria, that bilingual individuals did not shift by chance from one language to the other, but that the use of one language or another rather depended upon the topic of the discussion, where it took place and the relationship between the two speakers. As far as the learning of languages is concerned, the question is then: Is it possible to teach a language when language is what is being used for teaching? The schooling system does not only teach languages, native or foreign, but also attitudes towards this language which is linked to a larger relationship between things and beings. In short: *expression linguistique (discours) = habitus linguistique + marché linguistique*. The *habitus linguistique* is not at all an independent characteristic: it is a dimension of the *habitus* as a system of schemes generating practices and perceptions. Knowledge of only linguistic competence is not enough as it does not indicate what will be the value of the linguistic performance on the linguistic market. On the linguistic market, expression or speech targets receivers who are able to assess the performance. Language proficiency enables a speaker to produce speech, but speech tailored to a precise situation (linguistic market).

To talk *Wall Street English* or *Internet English* requires matching other aspects to the interaction. Then it becomes understandable why managers are confident of talking *good English*, and the more confident, the more they use it, whereas unemployed or low-skilled workers do not. A question must be asked when focusing on bilingualism: Is one person socially able and authorized to master, and then use, more than one language? 65 % of Europeans who do not speak anything else than their mother tongue tend to believe that learning an additional language would be too difficult while 64% think it would be too time consuming. Moreover, 54% of this same group declare that they would not learn another language if they had the chance and 49% do not regret the fact that they do not speak additional languages.

5. Conclusion: 'Talking Diversity', towards a European Common Language?

There are still a number of hurdles that stand in the way of a common European model of communication – and its implementation in educational systems. It seems that this pursuit of a *universal* language in Europe has reached a deadlock. It is therefore unlikely to continue in the same mould. European linguistic policy has developed in the space vacated by a consensus arising between European national particularities.

All along this paper, we argued in the sense of a global idea of state formation throughout language policy. We stood for nationalism being an ideology leading to a mixing of a homogenized national culture and a common roof, i.e. a nation-state. David D. Laitin (1997) offers a kind of alternative. He also sees the linguistic trends at stake in Europe today as a lens to understand the process of European state formation. Nonetheless, he argues that this process has much more similar

characteristics with India – as a post-colonial consolidated state – than with France – as a classic European nation-state. It is indeed carried in the latter pattern – which took place in 16th to 18th century Europe – that the process of state formation went together with a process of language rationalization, leading to a unique national language. But Laitin points out how this common wisdom has been jeopardized in the post-colonial framework. The bargaining and struggle of power between central rulers, regional actors and post-colonial bureaucracies have driven the Indian linguistic pattern not towards a unique national language but rather towards a unique language constellation, built around Hindi and English plus regional and minority languages, which is widely accepted today. The point of Laitin is to see the outcome of the main trends at stake in Europe (Europeanization of English as the *Lingua Franca*, tenacity of state languages in educational systems and the European opportunity for regional languages/identities) leading to more complex language repertoires. 'That will be a unique European constellation, reflecting a unique European identity. The languages in the constellation will not at all be unique to Europe but the specific constellation of them will be the core of the European linguistic identity' (Laitin 1997, 278). The language repertoires would include English, main state languages and eventually regional/minority languages. The European state *in-the-making* would then appear as multicultural; based on multilingualism. This process would be reinforced by the rule of 'Europe' in post-soviet nationalism within countries concerned with the enlargement as well as in regions promoting their regional nationalism within this greater polity that is Europe.

'Individual multilingualism will become normal. States consolidating in the twenty-first century will promote an international lingua franca, central state languages, and regional languages as well. Whether this outcome gets recognized or not in a political bargain, it is likely to emerge as the de facto European language constellation of the next century' (Laitin 1997, 289). Nonetheless, there are other claims around the nature of the common European language or *Lingua Franca*. Some of the leads explored advocate for a genuinely European item. One of these, which is not brand new, consists in choosing Esperanto as the common European language. According to Georges Kersaudy (2000), the tensions Europe faces over the linguistic issue do foreshadow the ones the Union is about to meet in other fields: politics, social affairs, transports and communication, or the media. He sees in Esperanto, considered as the international language, the solution for making communication match Europe's natural diversity. This language, presented in 1887 by Dr Zamenhof, and which is today spoken by over 10 million people worldwide, was meant to create a 'modern Latin' and was developed within the long tradition of the pursuit of a *perfect language*.

Esperanto has been created based on the structure and content of the main European languages, finding what they all had in common to form a new linguistic tool. Esperanto offers the possibility for overcoming two of the main bones of contention preventing the search for a common language going any further. The first is, if ever Esperanto was adopted as the unique working language of the EU, this would solve translation difficulties as there would be one original text that would be the sole reference for translations into each of the European languages. Esperanto as a neutral auxiliary language would guarantee total equality between other languages.

The second path that Esperanto would open is directly related to the learning of languages. Learning Esperanto, as it is a language created on the basis of the common elements in languages, is the best way to overcome psychological hurdles in learning languages, that are mostly relevant among French and British people, convinced that they are *not gifted* to do so.

There is indeed a lot of work to be undertaken in the field of language education. As we discussed earlier, the educational systems, as they are now, tend to promote limited bilingualism (English for trade and communication). This is supposed to bring more career and employability opportunities to the learners. This idea can be found either in official Community reports or in the parents' expectations. Nonetheless, 24% of Europeans would be motivated to learn a foreign language if it enabled them to understand people from other cultures, which is almost as high as the 26% of those for whom its use at work would be a sufficient incentive. But if they were to learn a foreign language in addition to the one they already know, people's first motivation would be to use it on holidays abroad (47%). This is mainly the case for Germans (59%). Personal satisfaction is also an important motivation for learning a language (37%) (in Italy this accounts for 41%).

Because of the restricted practices of foreign language learning, and its incoherence with many of the original objectives, there is a genuine attempt to define new socio-pedagogical methods of teaching to resolve the quandary of how to deal with a plurality of cultures in the educational system²⁰. This paves the way for wider consideration of how to take otherness into account, since in our societies children from Europe or from other continents grow up together. For some of the actors in this debate, pupil exchange programmes promote the encounters with other young people. This builds on the European dimension of uniting everyone through the common values of Europe *in-the-Making*. This is perceived as a great opportunity for Europe, to generate exchanges that bring about mutual identification with places and structures through common values and cohesion. This aim is widely developed among actions supported by the Council of Europe.

The idea is to introduce intercultural competence into the teaching of languages, through new methods. This would guarantee that the proclaimed objective of including the cultural dimension in language learning would no longer be obscured nor suppressed. The threat exposed here is one we have already discussed, i.e. that of the awareness of other cultures and ways of life disappearing under the stress put on efficiency in the language learning process. Certain experts involved in researching this problem have proposed the creation of new techniques for teaching languages, based on the idea of social identity. Here, the diversity revealed in the process of discovering other ways of communicating is used as a positive feature. This implies carrying out a study on the *clichés*, the way in which each group needs to confine others in categories and biases in order to function itself. This brings about an understanding of social constructions of reality, by finding what aspects groups have changed so that an internal sense of belonging is promoted by dwelling on differences, and what aspects have remained common to all groups. This approach

²⁰ See, for instance, *Construire l'identité européenne. Altérité, Education, Echanges*, Association pour le développement des échanges et de la comparaison en éducation (ADECE) – III^e Colloque International– Conseil de l'Europe, available at: <http://adece.u-strasbg.fr>.

puts into perspective the plurality of identities everyone has to deal with, and, it leads to an understanding of the importance of the national identity.

This path presents a certain advantage. When pupils are offered the opportunity to consider a language as a means of communication and a way of shaping the representation and perception of the world, they might gain an insight into what constitutes the *habitus*. Thus, it opens the way to a less restrictive use of other languages.

'L'universel, c'est le local moins les murs' (Miguel Torga, quoted by Pfefferkorn 2000). As is now widely held in urban studies (Le Galés 2003, Tarrius 2001), one could consider the European Union as a multifarious cosmopolitan space, open to people coming and going, where getting to meet each other is the most common feature. This might match some of Ernest Gellner's prognostics for moderating nationalism. 'The European convergence seems particularly marked, for instance, in the sphere of youth culture (...). In so far as it is true, advanced industrial cultures may come to differ, so to speak, phonetically without differing semantically: different words come to stand for the same concepts. (...) Phonetic diversity without semantic diversity may lead to less friction, especially if, for work purposes, people are bilingual, or one language is the idiom of work' (Gellner 1996, 48).

Etienne Balibar (2001) gives a clear *synopsis* of this debate. He advocates a reorganisation of educational practices, in order to eliminate the romantic conception of language as a closed whole, the expression of a closed community. His hypothesis resembles that of Umberto Eco in that they both stand for a European language, not legally or formally defined, but a constantly changing system of crossed uses.

'...Autrement dit, c'est la traduction. Mieux encore, c'est la réalité des pratiques sociales à différents niveaux, le medium de communication dont tous les autres dependent' (Balibar 2001, 318).

This practice of translation has only been developed today by a few citizens, classics scholars and anonymous migrants (workers who are often treated as illegal when not from an EU country). Balibar promotes the launching of a policy inspired by the spirit of the *grandes révolutions culturelles*. He sees in the issue of language one of the four crucial undertakings (the three others being justice, social affairs and borders) to be accomplished before obtaining a hint of a Europe that is democratised for all the citizens living there.

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