

# Language policy in the European Union

## European/English/Elite/Equal/Esperanto Union?\*

Pia Vanting Christiansen

Roskilde University

This article analyses some of the potential language policy scenarios in a democratic, integrated European Union. It examines how a functional multilingual, democratic, ecological language policy in the European Parliament may ensure equal participation in, and benefit from, democratic processes for both majority and minority language communities. How multilingualism is managed and language policy is formed will be crucial in creating the identity of a future European Union, which the author discusses through a reinterpretation of what the EU might stand for; summarised in the notions of an English Union, an Elite Union, an Equal Union or an Esperanto Union. Language policy issues are especially important with regard to education, as multilingual education could be viewed as a democratic tool safeguarding active citizen participation in an intergovernmental forum such as the EU. Based on a three-language model it is possible to sustain a secure ethnic identity or identities via teaching through the mother tongue(s), as well as by acquiring at least one lingua franca and additional languages through carefully planned and well-organised multilingual education. The article concludes, in the long term, that the optimal language policy alternative would be one employing a planned language (such as Esperanto) as *lingua franca*, as a relay language and as an internal working language for the EU institutions.

**Keywords:** language ecology, language policy, Esperanto, European Union, minority–majority relationships, mother-tongue privilege, multilingual education, lingua franca

The celebration of the European Year of Languages (2001) calls for a critical appraisal of the current language situation in the European Union (EU). Harbouring only 3,4% of the world's living, oral languages, 'Europe' is not particularly linguistically diverse (Baker 1998:351), nor is multilingualism a widespread

phenomenon. Only 44% of the EU citizens claim to be able to participate in a conversation in a 'foreign' language (Eurobarometer 54), and the linguistic resources of minorities are made invisible and consequently marginalized.

A *democratic linguistic foundation* is of paramount importance in EU integration processes in order to ensure a democratic union — which in the near future may combine as many as 28 member states, 24 official/working languages and more than 500 million citizens (Podestá 2001). In May 2004, ten new member states (Cyprus [the Greek part], the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic, and Slovenia) joined the EU and another nine official languages (Czech, Estonian, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Maltese, Polish, Slovene and Slovak) were added to the existing 11; thus 25 member states and 20 official languages are currently represented in the EU (plus Irish, whose status was also recently expanded).

Discussions of language policy in intergovernmental institutions reveal the conflicts involved when these organisations try to include and acknowledge both majorities and minorities. Languages constitute the foundation of democratic negotiation processes. Decisions about language are a major consideration if EU citizens are to be fully involved in political processes, thereby securing democratic citizen participation and overcoming the serious democratic deficit (a deficit which has been officially acknowledged by the Union: e.g. Nye Styreformer 2001:248).

A world where each linguistic group lives isolated, seems unimaginable today. Ignorance of languages can be frustrating: often it is only through the challenge of interacting with new 'foreign' languages that our (linguistic) awareness is raised. It is when communication fails that we are forced to seek new ways. Language is one of the strongest ways of *bonding* with our own ethnic group(s),<sup>1</sup> and it simultaneously allows *bridging* to other ethnic groups. However, language may also function as a clear sign of delimiting groups and may even constitute the main *barrier* to interaction between ethnic groups (Haarmann 1996:842).

Languages play a particularly central role in mediating ideas in information societies, and therefore *critical language awareness* is of paramount importance: languages are foundational for groups to negotiate their status and position. Language plays a key role in reproducing often unequal power relations (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:202) and may constitute a means for the elites to colonise our minds (Ngũgĩ 1994). In order to achieve critical language awareness, power relations, including issues of status and language policy, must be analysed. The EU ought to give as much consideration to its language policy as it does to other social and economic policies (Wodak et al. 1995:120).

Relatively little research has been done on these highly important socio-linguistic questions, and the EU has often treated language policy very superficially and pragmatically (as is the case in the Podestá report), or neglected it altogether. It has, however, recently been forced to face its linguistic challenges because of the expansion of the Union and the emergence of various conflicts.<sup>2</sup> Some analyses of the Union's linguistic problems and challenges do exist (e.g. Phillipson 2003), but they do not appear to have influenced policy-making, and no major empirical studies have been undertaken for a decade.

The importance of an adequate language policy becomes apparent when comparing the status of *majority vs. minority* languages. The European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages ([www.eblul.org](http://www.eblul.org)) estimates that more than 40 million people in the EU belong to a linguistic minority. This number excludes all immigrant minorities, both immigrants who are 'legally' in the EU and those who are undocumented. If immigrant minorities are included in the calculation, it is estimated that some 50 million people belong to a linguistic minority. These linguistic minorities could be described as the most multilingual, and multicultural 'member' of the EU (and demographically among the largest), a way of thinking which emphasises their linguistic resources and their potential contribution in teaching the EU about multilingualism. At present though, these groups receive very scant institutional support, both in terms of the legal framework for minorities (e.g. The European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages) and in terms of educational support. The EU member states thereby neglect an enormous linguistic and human resource. Many researchers (for example Haberland 1991, Nelde 1997, Strubell 1997) have suggested that in the future 'small' member states will face the same problems as minorities encounter today, and hence might have a common interest in investigating and clarifying an explicit, fair language policy.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, EU enlargement underscores the urgent need for an alternative approach to managing multilingualism in the Union. The present state of affairs, in my view, is completely unacceptable.

In this article, I analyse ten future language policy scenarios, selected as representative of the spectrum of language policies available to the European Parliament. These ten scenarios will be evaluated on the basis of a critical theoretical framework developed for this purpose. I examine the current language policy of the European Parliament as this institution is of paramount importance in the negotiation processes of minority/majority relationships. How multilingualism is managed and language policy is formed will be crucial in creating the identity of a future European Union. Where will the integration processes lead us and how will they influence the identity of the EU? Which

‘European Union’ are we moving towards? Answers to these questions depend on how the notion of the EU is understood and they can be formulated in alternative reinterpretations. In the realm of language policy, the trend towards the uncritical expansion of English (Schloßmacher 1996, Phillipson 2003) could lead to an *English Union*, at the expense of all other language groups. A pertinent question thus arises as to how an *Elite Union*, in which only the linguistic elites have a fair chance of participation, would influence the rest of the citizens in the EU. The prospect of an *Equal Union* creating a foundation for all linguistic groups to participate on equal terms — in practice and not only theoretically — is an option requiring sincere analysis. In my opinion, the possibility of an *Esperanto Union* seems to be a valuable alternative, calling for further research and serious consideration.

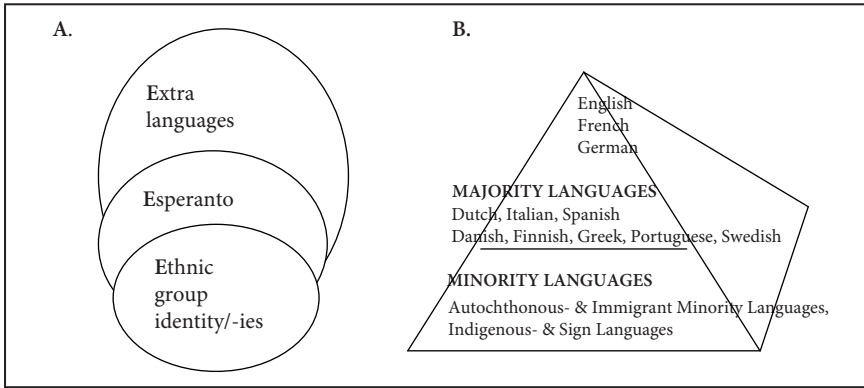
### Theoretical foundations: Two principles for managing multilingualism

Developing a meaningful EU language policy in which both majority and minority language communities would benefit reveals certain principles for managing multilingualism. These principles, I suggest, could be implemented based on needed *criteria of (e)quality* for assessing such a policy (see my discussion ‘Criteria of (e)quality’, below).

In Table 1 I show in simplified form how two vastly different principles could be realised while managing multilingualism in the Union. These principles provide the foundation for my evaluation of future language policy options in the European Parliament. On the one hand a *functional multilingual, democratic, ecological language policy* (A) could be based on a 3+ language formula for the EU (similar to the well-known Indian three-language formula: mother-tongue/regional/official language, as described by Annamalai 1995). Schools would play a central role in ensuring a high degree of multilingualism, which would be the basis for active citizen participation in intergovernmental contexts. The point of departure would be securing ethnic identity (for both majorities and minorities) through the learning of mother tongue(s). A planned language (e.g. Esperanto) would be acquired as a second language and additional languages would follow.

On the other hand, the pyramid in Table 1 represents the consequences of a *linguicist, hegemonic, hierarchical language policy* (B) (EU *de facto*: Schloßmacher 1996), which — unsurprisingly — leads to the marginalization of minority languages and consequently also of minority groups, thereby creating a distinct hierarchisation among the official languages.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1.** Language policy options: A. Functional multilingual, democratic language policy vs. B. Linguicist, hegemonic hierarchical language policy.



If languages are perceived as part of a linguistic market (Haugen 1987, Bourdieu 1994, Calvet 1998, Cooper 1989, de Swaan 2001,), it follows that in a democratic forum, where the aim is participation of *all* linguistic groups, regulations are needed. An explicit written language policy and an associated language plan (status-, corpus-, and acquisition planning: Cooper 1989) could be seen as such a mechanism. A counterbalance to the linguistic market could also be sought through the concept of linguistic human rights (LHRs) (de Varennes 1996, Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas 1994), as this would ensure minimal protection for all linguistic communities to sustain their languages and ethnic identities.

My goal is to develop a suitable framework for analysing different language policy scenarios in an intergovernmental forum such as the EU. I establish three *criteria of (e)quality*, which from a linguistic point of view, are necessary for developing a democratic, integrated Union:

- First, such a language policy needs to *function multilingually*. It has to assist various linguistic communities in their inter-communication, and must at the same time be feasible. The sheer number of interpreter booths in the European Parliament post-expansion might for instance be considered non-functional. A language policy needs to be pragmatically attainable. Moreover, the financial perspective must be considered.
- Secondly, to guarantee full citizen participation, a language policy for an intergovernmental forum needs to be *democratic*, to ensure full participation for both minorities and majorities. Both groups have an interest in ensuring minority rights as part of a democratic system to protect stability and peace (Rannut 1997:141, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:645).

- Thirdly, a language policy needs to be *ecological*. By this I mean that it has to contribute to the ecology of all languages, so that all the different linguistic groups are able to communicate without neglecting any of the languages used. An ecological language policy must create *a sustainable environment for all languages to thrive* (instead of enhancing the emergence of one or two ‘powerful’ ones) and it requires long-term goals and language planning (Mühlhäusler 1996:323).

I argue that a *functional multilingual, democratic, ecological language policy* is a requirement for intergovernmental settings if democratic processes are to take hold, and participation of all linguistic groups is to be ensured. An ecological language policy would also establish a foundation for the harmonious interaction of languages, and consequently of linguistic communities.

In order to evaluate different language policy scenarios in the European Parliament, I offer a more in-depth explanation of a *functional multilingual, democratic, ecological language policy (A)* below. I will also consider a *linguicist, hegemonic, hierarchical language policy (B)*. Although this policy is not an exact counterpart, its various components demonstrate the opposite end of a continuum ranging from an ‘ideal’ to an inadequate language policy.

Each component locates a given language policy on a scale from *functional multilingualism* to *linguicism* (discrimination against linguistic groups), or on a continuum from *democracy* (which includes a degree of ethnic equality) to *hegemony*, where certain languages or groups dominate and rule. Finally, a language policy could range from enabling an *ecological* environment, where all languages receive appropriate conditions for survival, to the formation of language *hierarchies*, where the status and position of certain ‘majority’ languages are favoured and maintained.

#### *Principle A: Functional multilingual, democratic, ecological language policy*

##### 1. *Criteria of (e)quality*

In this section I will clarify in greater depth the central concepts involved in an ‘ideal’ language policy. Table 2 sums up the *criteria of (e)quality* necessary for creating the foundation for harmonious interaction between different languages. It is based on the work of researchers in the field of sociolinguistics (for further elaboration see Christiansen 2002).

**Table 2.** Defining a functional multilingual, democratic, ecological language policy.

1. Functional multilingual	2. Democratic	3. Ecological language policy
<b>MINUS</b> – Semilingualism (Hansegård 1979) – Domain loss (Ammon 1990) – Languages as a problem (Ruiz 1987)	<b>MINIMUM</b> a. Universal suffrage, periodical free elections b. Power shared: Judicial/legislative/executive, transparency c. Economic conditions: a certain minimum d. Protection of minorities	A. Human rights perspective (Tomaševski 1996) B. Equality in communication C. Multilingualism D. Protects languages & cultures E. Protects the sovereignty of the state
<b>PLUS</b> + Languages as a resource (Ruiz 1987) + Languages as a right (Ruiz 1987) + Horizontal (Beardsmore 1982) + Learnt additively with CALP (Cummins 1980, Lambert 1975) + Pragmatic mechanism (Heugh 1987) + Values: equality, cultural plurality, non-discrimination, democracy & efficiency, a multicultural Union (Cwik & Erasmus 1985)	<b>MAXIMUM/QUALITY</b> e. Democratic forums f. Interaction among the citizens and between citizens and institutions g. Equality of rights h. Minorities represented (real representative government)  <b>LINGUISTIC RELEVANCE</b> + Several lingua francas, democratic control, active participation in decision making processes, possible to follow debates in Parliament, run for candidacy, equal negotiations	F. Active learning of new Languages (Tsuda 1994) G. Explicit law concerning domains (official/working/doc. language) (Ammon 1991) H. Language plan (status-/corpus-/acquisition) (Cooper 1989) I. Counterbalance linguistic 'market value' (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1994) J. Language ecology: harmonic interaction between languages (Haugen 1987, Mühlhäusler 1996)

## 2. Functional multilingual language policy

For a multilingual language policy to be functional certain criteria must be fulfilled. The outcome of a multilingual language policy must not be that individuals become *semilinguals* — people who lack vocabulary, correction etc., and who therefore have a limited ability to function within a given language. This could result in serious identity problems (Hansegård 1979). It is also important to avoid *domain loss*, a situation in which each language is associated with distinct and differentiated functions, as discussed extensively by Ammon (1991). In essence, the concept of *functional multilingualism* (Heugh 1997) regards languages as both a group right and a group resource. Perceiving language as both a *right* (legal protection) and a *resource* (contributing to the totality) should not be regarded as a contradiction in terms, but as complementary.

Language loss is not only an individual tragedy (loss of identity) but also a waste of resources for society as a whole. Moreover, a functional multilingual language policy contributes to eliminating the perception that multilingualism is a *problem* (Ruiz 1987; see also Kontra et al. 1999). A functional multilingual language policy should ensure that new languages are learnt *additively*, without replacing or displacing the mother tongue[s], and to the level of what Cummins (1980) calls CALP (cognitive and academic aspects of language proficiency).

On the basis of the suggestions of a working group on language issues in the EU (Cwik & Erasmus 1995) I argue that a functional multilingual language policy must include values such as equality, cultural plurality, non-discrimination, democracy and efficiency, and moving towards a multicultural Union.

Education plays a key role in guaranteeing the achievement of functional multilingualism among the citizens of a given region. Multilingual education could be viewed as a democratic tool safeguarding active citizen participation in an intergovernmental forum such as the EU. The European (Union) Schools are an example of how students can be educated to become high-level multilinguals (Baetens Beardsmore 1995) through a three-language model (based on the Indian three-language formula: Annamalai 1995, Khubchandani 1997). Additionally, Skutnabb-Kangas presents different recommendations (summarised in Skutnabb-Kangas & García 1995) for how multilingual education can be successfully organised.

### 3. *Democratic language policy*

The relationship between language and access to democratic processes is of paramount importance (Smith & Wright 1999). Democracy is a complex, ambiguous, and manifold concept and therefore needs defining in the context of an EU language policy, not least because, as we have already noted, it is often acknowledged that the EU suffers from a vast democratic deficit (Goodman 1983:33, Habermas 2001:62, Smith & Wright 1995:5, Wæver 1993:83). Blondel and others (1998) have examined this democratic deficit by studying (via 13,000 questionnaires in nine languages) the participation of EU citizens in democratic processes. The survey showed that the election turnout for the European Parliament was approximately 20% lower than at national elections (p. 31), and nearly half of the respondents showed indifference to a possible dismantling of the EU (p. 239).

A democratic language policy could potentially play a key part in at least enabling active citizen participation. However, from a linguistic point of view, the present EU institutions appear to function in a remarkably undemocratic manner. Examples of the EU's linguistically undemocratic nature include the following:



- Citizens have to know English (sometimes French, seldom German) even to be informed about the Union's language learning programs (Tokatlidou 1997:243).
- Too many prominent speeches, e.g. Romano Prodi's 'The EU & its Citizens: A matter of Democracy' (DN:SPEECH/01/365), are only available in a very small portion of even the official languages (only in Dutch, English, French, German, Italian).
- In certain instances the Union does not accept applications in one of the 'major' official languages, namely German (Schloßmacher 1996:78).
- The official newsletter *Innovation & Technical Transfer* appears only in one of the official languages, namely English, thus marginalizing all other language groups (Ammon 1994:6).
- A job advertisement for information and communication staff unashamedly states: *Excellent working knowledge of English (preferably mother tongue)* (www.european-voice.com 26.02.02), and thus excludes and discriminates against a vast majority of the EU's citizens.<sup>5</sup>

Without a democratically sound linguistic foundation, language becomes the main barrier hindering active democratic participation. Therefore, a democratic continuum (ranging from minimum to maximum or, rather, quality democracy) needs to be defined to assess how different language policy solutions can function inclusively and in a democratically sound way. Different minimum conditions need to be fulfilled to guarantee a certain degree of democracy (universal suffrage; periodic free elections; shared power through separation of judicial, legislative and executive powers; transparency; minimal economic standards, and protection of minorities).

In a quality democracy, though, citizens should be able to participate actively in democratic forums and have the option to engage in debates, discussions, and dialogue. In a truly representative government, minorities not only require protection but must also be present in all democratic processes, including a voice in Parliament. There must be equality of linguistic rights as well as the possibility of linguistic participation.

#### 4. *Ecological language policy*

An ecological language policy must create a sustainable environment for all languages involved. The Japanese scholar Tsuda (1994) suggests two paradigms for the analysis of language policies: *diffusion of English* and *ecology of language*. An ecological view of language would, in his opinion, include a human rights perspective, equality in communication, multilingualism, protection of

languages and cultures, protection of the sovereignty of the state and active learning of new languages (Tsuda 1994). To concretise Tsuda's vision, I believe that an ecological language policy should include explicit laws concerning the domains in which different languages should function, i.e. official languages, working languages, languages of documentation (Ammon 1991), and an associated language plan (relating to status, corpus, and acquisition: Cooper 1989). This would serve to counterbalance the unequal linguistic 'market value', and could be achieved by protecting languages through the establishment of basic linguistic human rights (LHRs: Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1994).

We have now explored some of the factors involved in creating a *functional multilingual, democratic, ecological language policy*. These describe an 'ideal' language policy. In the section below I will consider some of the components that lead to the production of a language policy which is *linguicist* (unfairly discriminating on the basis of language), *hegemonic* (favouring only a few dominant languages) and *hierarchical* (dominated by a few languages).

#### *Principle B: Linguicist, hegemonic, hierarchical language policy*

The concept of *linguicism* was coined by Skutnabb-Kangas in 1986. She has defined it as "ideologies, structures and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, regulate and reproduce an unequal distribution of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language" (Skutnabb-Kangas 1988:13). The term is related to, and defined in connection with, other forms of discrimination such as racism, ethnicism and sexism (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:369).

The notion of *hegemony* (Gramsci 1971) can be seen as "the values and practices that the elites use to legitimise themselves." Consequently dominant values are often accepted at face value (Phillipson 1992:72). The idea that certain languages are more 'European' or more suitable for operating in inter-governmental contexts than others is one example of how hegemony works (Phillipson 1997). A hegemonic language policy allows for the dominance of a few languages (and consequently groups) over others. Such dominance is often taken for granted and seen as self-evident.

Linguicist and hegemonic practices contribute to maintaining language hierarchies in the European Parliament as well as in other intergovernmental institutions. Languages at the top of the hierarchy function in the most prestigious domains, e.g. as parliamentary languages. The separation of languages into certain domains is maintained through linguicist and hegemonic discourses, which also serve to justify their powerful position (van Dijk 1997).

It is important to acknowledge and identify language hierarchies as it is not only the languages themselves, but also their users who are hierarchised due to the inherent attached 'linguistic capital'. In this manner, through linguistic capital, the individual is defined in the social realm (Bourdieu 1994:686, Fran-goudaki 1997:336).

In sum, a *functional multilingual, democratic, ecological language policy* can be part of guaranteeing both majorities' and minorities' access to democratic participation as well as promoting harmonious interaction of languages and thereby of the respective language groups.

The realm of education is of utmost importance if such a language policy is to work. On the basis of a three-language model it is possible to sustain ethnic security via teaching through the mother tongue(s), as well as by acquiring at least one lingua franca and additional languages through carefully planned and well-organised multilingual education. It is critical to acknowledge that language hierarchies, linguisticism and hegemony are central concepts in analysing the domains in which a certain language is functioning. Mother tongue(s) are an essential part of ensuring inter-ethnic democracy (Fishman 1994), and *linguae francae* (in Ammon's term) are needed in intergovernmental forums.

## Future Scenarios for the European Parliament

In the previous section I developed a theoretical framework for evaluating different language policy options. In this section I will present ten possible language policy scenarios for the European Parliament (Table 3). I will evaluate the various scenarios in view of my *criteria of (e)quality* described previously, represented by a *functional multilingual, democratic, ecological language policy* (A). On the other hand, certain factors may lead to a degree of *linguicist, hegemonic, hierarchical language policy* (B).

Many alternatives for language policy in the European Parliament have been put forward and a comprehensive discussion of all possible language policy scenarios in the European Parliament would be far too ambitious for the purpose of this article. In the following, I will discuss and evaluate the suggestions I have found most interesting in developing a *functional multilingual, democratic, ecological language policy*. Some of the scenarios do to some extent bear a resemblance to one another, but I have included them to make the discussion as broad-based as possible. Some of the more 'visionary' scenarios (e.g. scenario 8: Swahili as a world language) will be considered to illustrate and assess which advantages and consequences these alternatives could possibly offer.

Simultaneously, they also demonstrate where the more 'realistic' scenarios fall short. Finally, it should also be mentioned that the scenarios presented do not necessarily exclude each other.

The consequences of different language policy scenarios in the immensely important realm of education are also included in my chart, as education is by no means a 'free-flowing-agent' existing in a vacuum unattached to macro-level decisions. Decisions concerning which languages are taught in schools are highly influenced by their respective 'international' status, e.g. in the European Parliament (Bourdieu 1994:56–7). Schools play an important role in reproducing unequal power relations. The scenarios in Table 3 are presented to stimulate discussion: many details can be questioned and it would be useful to elaborate the details at a later stage.

**Table 3.** Evaluating future language policy scenarios in the European Parliament.

Criteria of (e)quality	Language policy			Consequences for education
	Functional multilingual (A) or Linguistic (B)	Democratic (A) or Hegemonic (B)	Ecological (A) or Hierarchical (B)	
Scenario 1 Language policy <i>de jure</i> (20 official languages)	A. Multilingualism praised	B. Rhetorical democracy B. Partial protection of minorities (autochthonous)	A. Ecological interaction between 20 official languages B. 'Invisible' minority languages	A. Mother tongue valued (if an official language) & A. 2 'foreign' languages learned by all
Scenario 2 Language policy <i>de facto</i> (Schloßmacher 1996)	B. Tendency towards monolingualism in the EU institutions B. Low degree of functionality B. Discrimination of 'small' & minority languages	B. Low degree of democracy B. Mother tongue advantage not taken seriously	B. English hegemony B. LHRs <sup>6</sup> of all other languages neglected	B. Traditional monolingual education B. Tendency towards English monopoly B. Linguistic genocide for minorities
Scenario 3 'Free' market (English only)	B. Complete monolingualism B. Discrimination of all other languages	B. Undemocratic for all other language groups B. Mother tongue advantage not taken seriously B. English hegemony maintained	B. Low degree of ecology B. Low degree of LHRs	B. 'Monopoly' for English
Scenario 4 Podestá report (asymmetrical translation)	A. A higher degree of functionality (than scenario 2) A. Higher quality of translation/interpretation (than scenario 2)	B. The degree of democracy would depend on the relay language(s) chosen	A. Translation via relay language(s) would promote ecology B. Regulations & naming of languages missing	A. Many ethnic languages would be learned, thereby securing a high degree of ecology in the EU
Scenario 5 Several languages (combination of English/French/German/Italian/Spanish)	A. Relative functionality of the languages mentioned B. Discrimination of all other groups	B. Undemocratic for all other language groups	B. A certain degree of ecology B. Poor degree of LHRs for all other groups	A. A higher degree of educational plurality (than scenario 4)

Scenario 6 English/French/ German — no mother tongue use (Van Els in Skutnabb-Kangas 2000: 668)	B. Communication limited as there is no mother tongue use A. Still functional multilingualism due to equality between language groups	A. Most demo- cratic solution as mother tongue advantage made visible	A. High degree of ecology i.e. 'big' language groups forced to acknowledge mother tongue advantage & learn new languages A. More LHRs	A. Require huge educational- & political changes, in particular in forcing 'big' language groups to functional multi- lingualism
Scenario 7 Latin as <i>lingua franca</i>  (van der Hek in Coulmas 1991:31)	A. No linguicism as all languages would be equalised	A. High degree of democracy as all languages would be equal in respect to mother tongue advantage	A. High degree of ecology	A. If Latin were a <i>lingua franca</i> and part of education all ethnic languages would be learned additively
Scenario 8 Swahili as world language  (Ngũgĩ 1993:41)	A. Swahili could be- come working language in the EU A. New centres created	A. High degree of democracy as all other ethnic languages would be equal A. Signalling a value of African cultures	A. Equality would secure a high degree of ecology in EU	A. Swahili would become one of the languages taught in educational institu- tions
Scenario 9 Multilingual dialogue & 'learn neighbour- ing languages' (Posner 1991)	A. No linguicism as all languages would be equal A. High degree of com- municative function- ality B. Low degree of func- tionality as there is no common <i>lingua franca</i>	A. High degree of equality and democracy	A. Linguistic ecology in the EU would be promoted	A. 'Small' languages would attract more learners A. Many languages would be acquired receptively
Scenario 10 Ecological language policy (incl. Esperanto & LHRs)	A. Complete functional multilingualism A. All could learn a planned language e.g. Esperanto, as well as A. Mother tongue(s) and A. Additional languages	A. All ethnic groups would receive equal treatment A. Therefore a high degree of democracy A. And the creation of a democratic public's sphere	A. High degree of linguistic ecology in the EU	A. All (min. & maj.) would be taught through mother tongue(s) to a high degree of multilin- gualism

(for further elaboration see Christiansen 2002).

In the following discussion I will examine the different language policy scenarios outlined above, and show how languages (and thus language groups) benefit from the various policy alternatives to different extents.

The EU currently upholds the principle of complete multilingualism *de jure* (among the 20 official languages), which is an admirable stance (scenario 1: see Rome Treaty article 217 and Regulation no. 1/58). In practice however, the *de facto* language hierarchies are thereby being concealed (scenario 2), and a vital area of interest such as the linguistic agenda — the foundation for the negotiation processes — is left to 'the free market' or to short-term

ad hoc pragmatic decisions, which I find completely unacceptable. It is irresponsible that an explicit, written language policy (such as in South Africa: see LANGTAG 1996) does not exist in the EU institutions at present, nor is there a long-term language plan for the European Parliament. In this way, the EU substantially weakens its own trustworthiness whilst its linguistic democratic deficit entirely undermines active citizen participation. Additionally, the consequences for linguistic minorities are catastrophic, tending towards linguistic genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000).

English is increasingly gaining ground in EU institutions (as documented by, for example, Phillipson 2003, Schloßmacher 1996, de Swaan 2001), and issues surrounding language policy seem to be treated merely rhetorically (see Recommendation 1383 [1998]: Linguistic Diversification, The Council). The EU's current (and inadequate) language policy (scenario 3) benefits Great Britain disproportionately by providing it with a significant advantage in terms of mother tongue, thereby unacceptably undermining the intended democratic nature of the EU (Grin 2003b, van Parijs 2003). The effects of mother-tongue privilege on negotiation processes in intergovernmental bodies are not given due consideration and the consequences for other language groups are ignored. The imagined *lingua franca* status of English is thus undermining the status of all other languages.

The status of English as an imagined global language (Crystal 1997), makes it imperative to discuss the 'English only' scenario — a scenario which would be ridiculed if it were any other language. Most researchers would agree that English is a 'global' language today because of the history of colonisation and the current role of the USA. Many would be very sceptical about naming it a 'neutral' language (as, for example, Crystal 1997 does), and some would consider it 'a killer language' (Graddol 1996, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:46), thereby emphasising the devastating effect of English on all other language groups (see also Phillipson 1992).

The perceived international status of English is nevertheless crucial and requires further research (see Seidlhofer 2001). In fact, English is used more as a *lingua franca* than between mother-tongue users (Kachru 1996:908) — a reality with implications for teaching English as a foreign language (for instance concerning accent: Bourdieu 1994:18). Viewing English as a post-colonial, imperialistic language might reduce anglomania in the EU. Its current situation could to some extent be compared to that of Latin in the Middle Ages, when Latin was the only powerful language (Voigt 2001). It could however be counterbalanced by *reducing English to equality*, as suggested by Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (Phillipson 2003).

Written to prepare Parliament for the expansion of the EU, the Podestá report constitutes another attempt at formulating an EU language policy (scenario 4). Although it proposes several solutions to the EU's linguistic dilemma, the report takes a very narrow and pragmatic approach. While it attempts to discuss the future of official languages in the EU, it does so in very vague terms and mainly with respect to the costs of translation and interpretation. The report concludes that post-expansion 'controlled multilingualism' is needed, without clearly defining the concept. Translation, the report suggests, should be carried out through relay language(s), but it does not specify which language(s), nor does it explore the consequences for other languages or groups. Furthermore the report has not been followed up with any in-depth research on language alternatives after EU expansion. In economic terms this suggestion would probably be beneficial in the short run and could also improve the quality of translation and interpretation. The crucially important decision of choosing the language(s) to be used in this asymmetrical translation would, however, need clarification. Further research into the consequences for other languages would also be essential.

Another suggestion for the European Parliament's language policy proposes several working languages (English/French/German/Italian/Spanish, scenario 5). Such a policy might appear more effective in the short term than the current situation, but obviously would predominantly benefit the languages and groups in question. German is one of the groups favoured by this scenario: in the year 2000 approximately one fourth of the EU's citizens spoke German as their mother tongue (Eurobarometer 54). Surveys show that this 'majority' language is currently marginalised in EU institutions (Schloßmacher 1996, Philipson 2003). The fact that a demographically large — and wealthy — language group needs to struggle to obtain basic linguistic rights in the EU should serve as an example for both 'small' and minority languages, in that they too need to demand a just language policy.

If the EU sincerely wishes to include *all* its citizens (majority- as well as minority-language communities) in the democratic process, in the long run scenario 5 is both insufficient and inefficient, especially in light of the expansion of the EU. Scenario 5 does entail a degree of multilingualism but, especially after the expansion, major groups will be excluded from the advantage of mother-tongue use. Additionally, the need for a large number of relay languages would not substantially improve the financial situation of the language services.

The Dutch researcher Theo van Els (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:668) has suggested the exclusive use of three working languages (scenario 6), on condition that no one use their mother tongue. From a democracy perspective (defined

by Mirón 1999:94 as including equality, fairness, and justice) this scenario seems the best compromise *in the short term*, not least because it addresses the mother-tongue privilege, which many researchers agree to be a substantial advantage (Ammon 1991:1, 300–1, Frangoudaki 1997:366, Phillipson 2001:4, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, Volz 1994:91, van Parijs 2003). As Fishman emphasises (1994:57), the mother tongue is the point of departure in ethnolinguistic democracies. Highlighting the mother-tongue privilege (also an economic issue: see Grin 2003a) would force the ‘big’ states to significantly alter their educational systems in favour of multilingualism and ‘foreign’-language teaching. It would symbolise a new phase of linguistic equality with a higher degree of democratic interaction between majority and minority languages.

Using Latin as a *lingua franca* (scenario 7) would place the citizens of the EU on fairly equal terms with respect to learning the language. This suggestion was put forward by the then Member of the European Parliament van der Hek, who feared that the expansion of American English would make Europe dependent on the USA, and therefore suggested Latin as a counterbalance (Coulmas 1991). This scenario’s major advantage is that it equalises almost all EU citizens by requiring that they learn a new language. The same applies in scenario 8.

I discuss the consequences of Swahili as a world language (scenario 8), as suggested by Ngũgĩ (1993:40). Such a development would serve to undermine the present centre/periphery structures (Galtung 1980, Ngũgĩ 1993). If Swahili (or another language) turned into a new ‘global’ language, new centres of power would be created. EU members would be wise to integrate that language into their educational systems and the language in question could potentially be used as one of the Union’s working languages.

Posner (1991) recommends multilingual dialogue (scenario 9), a situation in which all Europeans engaging in international communication have competency in one language *productively* and a range of languages *receptively* (see also Arntz 1997, Gellert-Novak 1994:135, Klein 2000).

A *functional multilingual, democratic, ecological language policy* (scenario 10) would require that all the inhabitants of the EU (both minorities and majorities) acquire advanced-level proficiency not only in their mother tongue(s) but also in other languages, through the educational system (via the three-language model practised by the European Schools: see Skutnabb-Kangas 1995). In addition to the mother tongue(s), a planned language could be learnt (e.g. Esperanto). If this planned language simultaneously gained status as a primary working language of Parliament, full and equal access to democratic processes in intergovernmental forums (in this case the EU) could be secured.



Furthermore, ethnic majorities could learn additional languages to promote diversity. The minorities, for their part, could learn one of the official languages of the states in which they reside.

In addition, learning Esperanto has a propaedeutic advantage (Blanke 2001:93) in that Esperanto supports more effective learning of further languages. The multilingual dialogue (receptive multilingualism as suggested by Posner 1991) could be useful in combination with this alternative. Furthermore, launching a planned language would significantly alleviate the financial situation of the EU's language services and would also improve the quality of translation and interpretation (See further Fettes 2003a, Fettes 2003b, Fettes & Pool 1998, Tonkin 1996).

### Conclusions: European/English/Elite/Equal/Esperanto Union?

My discussion of present and alternative language policy scenarios has, I hope, revealed the complexity of language policy options. The different scenarios clearly benefit different language communities to different extents.

Mother-tongue speakers of English profit from the current situation, in which language policy is not discussed in a democratically responsible manner (scenarios 1, 2, 3). Attempting some kind of language policy (the Podestá report, scenario 4) is a step in the right direction, but it is vague and irresponsible to omit pinpointing which languages will be used in translation and interpretation and to neglect discussion of educational aspects. To learn one language or a few languages for the purposes of EU administration and as relay language(s) in which speeches and documents would be interpreted and translated (scenarios 5, 7, 8, 10) would to a large extent solve the financial problem faced by the language services. The pertinent question is which language(s) to select.

If the *criterion of (e)quality* for a given language policy is that it be *functionally multilingual, democratic and ecological*, the suggestion of van Els (scenario 6: three working languages English/French/German, but no use of mother tongue) is the most democratically sound, fair and equitable, in the short term. Despite the fact that to a degree it constrains communication by prohibiting mother-tongue use, it has the advantage of underlining the privilege of mother tongue use in intergovernmental contexts.

*In the long term*, however, the optimal policy alternative would be scenario 10, employing a planned language (such as Esperanto) as *lingua franca* and thereby contributing to establishing a democratic public sphere in the EU. Esperanto might further serve as relay language and as an internal working

language for EU institutions. The EU's citizens and politicians could still employ one of their own states' official languages in their interaction with the Union, but speeches and documents would only be translated via the planned language.

One of the major advantages of introducing a planned language as the first new language in educational institutions is the possible creation of new European forums where citizens of different member states could — also linguistically — participate in democratic processes on more equal terms. Moreover, learning Esperanto supports the learning process of other languages and additionally it can be learnt more effortlessly than other languages.

Educational systems would inevitably require a major transformation if a planned language were to become the EU *lingua franca*. Everyone, majorities and minorities alike, would be able to learn their respective mother tongue(s), and subsequently learn a planned language as a second language. Minorities would additionally learn one of the official languages of their respective states, and majorities could learn additional neighbouring or domestic minority languages, including indigenous and sign languages. However, it would not be wise to transform the educational systems instantaneously, as more research is still needed. While the Esperanto option does hold some disadvantages (for example, the educational systems would require a major transformation), it accords with the ecology of language paradigm (Tsuda 1994) and *in the long term* appears to be the best compromise.

Language policy is of paramount importance in regard to the EU's identity. What kind of European Union do we want? An English Union? an Elitist Union? an Equal Union? or possibly an Esperanto Union? Does the current Union accord only rhetorical value to 'democracy, solidarity, and human dignity' (see the Nice treaty 2000/C 364/91) or could the EU possibly become a genuine project of its citizens, practising democracy and solidarity also linguistically by including all people living within the area, both majorities and minorities? In a truly multilingual, democratic Union we cannot allow some languages — and thus language groups — to be more equal than others.

This article has not offered a comprehensive description of all factors involved in creating a multilingual language policy for the EU: such a description would be far too ambitious for a single essay. But perhaps it will enrich our understanding of the relationship, status and interaction between minority and majority languages and serve as a contribution to the current discussion of language policy options in a future European Union, ensuring that the various alternatives receive a qualified evaluation.

## Notes

\* This article is mainly based on my MA thesis: “FLERSPROGETHED — Mehrsprachigkeit — multilingualism: sprogpolitik i EU” (supervised by Hartmut Haberland and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Roskilde University, Denmark 2002) and subsequent research to bring the article up to date.

1. In this article I use Allardt’s definition of an ethnic group. He defines an ethnic group on the following criteria: 1. Self-categorisation, 2. Common descent, 3. Specific cultural traits e.g. language, 4. Social organisation for interaction both within the group and with people outside the group. According to Allardt it is necessary that some members fulfil all the criteria, but all members need only fulfil one criterion (Allardt 1981:43 in Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:172–5).

2. For example, the German politicians boycotted meetings without German interpretation during the Finnish presidency in 1999. In addition, in 2001, a joint protest was made by the German and French foreign ministers concerning the marginalized status of these two ‘majority’ languages (Fisher & Védrine 2001).

3. When senior state officials recently met in Dublin to discuss the draft constitution the Spanish prime minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, called on the EU to recognise “the status of Spanish state languages other than Spanish” (i.e. Basque, Catalan and Galician) ([www.eurolang.net](http://www.eurolang.net)).

4. Pyramid (B) in Table 1 is based on Schloßmacher’s 1996 investigation of the *de facto* status of the EU’s official languages; therefore the new languages joining the EU post-expansion have not been included.

5. Ferguson has collected some 300 job advertisements and complained about the situation, and an apology followed.

6. LHRs = Linguistic Human Rights.

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## Resumé

### *Sprogpolitik i EU: Europæisk/engelsk/elite/ligestillet/esperanto union?*

Denne artikel analyserer nogle af de mulige sprogpoltiske scenarier i en demokratisk, integreret europæisk union. Den undersøger, hvordan en funktionel flersproget, demokratisk, økologisk sprogpolitik i Europaparlamentet kan sikre lige deltagelse i og udbytte af de demokratiske processer for både majoritetens og minoritetens sproggrupper. Den måde hvorpå

flersprogethed bliver håndteret og sprogpolitik forment vil være væsentlig i skabelsen af EU's fremtidige identitet, hvilket kan opsummeres i en ny fortolkning af det, som EU kunne stå får fx en Engelsk Union, en Elite Union, en 'ligestillet' union eller en Esperanto Union. Sprogpolitiske temaer er særlig relevante i forhold til uddannelsesområdet, da flersproget undervisning kunne anskues som et demokratisk redskab til at sikre aktiv borgerdeltagelse i mellemstatslige fora såsom EU. Ved hjælp af en tre-sprogs-model er det muligt at støtte (en) sikker etnisk identitet(-er) gennem undervisning via modersmålet(ene), hvor der samtidig læres mindst ét fællessprog og yderligere sprog igennem grundigt planlagt og velorganiseret flersproget uddannelse. Artiklen konkluderer, at det mest gavnlige sprogpolitiske alternativ langsigtet ville være at benytte et planlagt sprog (fx esperanto) som fællessprog, oversættelsesprog (relay language) og internationalt arbejdsprog i EU institutionerne.

## Resumo

### *Lingva politiko en la Eŭropa Unio: Eŭropa/anglalingva/elita/egaleca/Esperanta Unio?*

La artikolo analizas kelkajn potencialajn lingvopolitikajn scenarojn en demokrata, integrita Eŭropa Unio. Ĝi ekzamenas la procedon, laŭ kiu funkcikapabla multlingva, demokrata, ekologia lingva politiko en la Eŭropa Parlamento povus garantii al majoritataj same kiel minoritataj lingvokomunumoj egalecan partoprenon en demokratiaj procedoj kaj profiton el ili. La maniero, laŭ kiu oni mastrumos multlingvecon kaj formos lingvopolitikon, estos decide grava en la kreado de identeco de estonta Eŭropa Unio — kion la aŭtoro resumas en la nocioj de Anglalingva Unio, Elita Unio, Egaleca Unio aŭ Esperanta Unio. Lingvopolitikaj demandoj estas aparte gravaj rilate al edukado, ĉar oni povus konsideri multlingvan edukadon kiel demokratian garantiilon de aktiva civitana partopreno en interregistara forumo kiel EU. Surbaze de trilingva modelo oni povas subteni sekura(j)n etna(j)n identeco(j)n per instruado pere de patrino(j) lingvo(j), kaj ankaŭ per akiro de almenaŭ unu interlingvo kaj aldonaj lingvoj per zorge planita kaj bone organizita multlingva edukado. La artikolo konstatas, ke, en pli longa perspektivo, la optimuma lingvopolitika alternativo konsistus el planlingvo (kiel Esperanto) kiel interlingvo, relajsa lingvo kaj interna laborlingvo en EU-instancoj.

### *Author's address*

Pia Vanting Christiansen  
Florensvej 5, 1th  
2300 København S, Denmark  
pvanting@ofir.dk

### *About the author*

Pia Vanting Christiansen holds an MA (in English & German) from Roskilde University, Denmark (2002). Other language policy related projects completed during the MA include Christiansen et al. 1997, 1998.