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Towards a multilingual modus operandi in the European Union

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Abstract

Multilingualism is one of the pillars of the European Union (EU), enshrined in its treaties and celebrated in its motto, "united in diversity." Yet multilingualism no longer has its own portfolio in the Commission, having been systematically downgraded and now being under the auspices of the Directorate-General for Translation, a directorate which does not have a unit dedicated to multilingualism. Moreover, with the rise of English as the EU's unofficial lingua franca, increasingly more material is produced in English and not translated at all. Therefore, we should ask ourselves whether the EU's de facto linguistic and translation regimes are at odds with the treaties. Drawing together transdisciplinary threads chiefly from linguistics, political science, and political philosophy, this paper assesses the EU's current linguistic regime, while looking at different models of linguistic justice, language rights, and the value of language to propose a new linguistic modus operandi for the EU, grounded in (1) a language, (2) a translation, and (3) a transcultural turn.

Keywords: Multilingualism, European Union, language policy, translation, intercomprehension, linguistic justice.

1. Introduction

Multilingualism is one of the pillars of the European Union (EU). It is implied in its motto, "united in diversity," enshrined—albeit vaguely—in its treaties and

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univocally celebrated in its non-binding documents, as we will see in what follows. However, multilingualism has been systematically downgraded in the EU, currently having no portfolio of its own and no unit dedicated to fostering—or at the very least monitoring—it. Moreover, its de facto language regime is largely monolingual in English, with the vast majority of texts being produced originally in English and many not being translated into other languages at all.

Against this background, the aim of this paper is threefold: (1) to assess the status of multilingualism in the EU institutions, bodies, and agencies today; (2) to embed the EU's current linguistic modus operandi into a theoretical framework to determine whether more multilingualism would be desirable; and (3) to propose strategies to achieve a more multilingual linguistic regime in the EU.

In this context, this paper works with the hypothesis that we might want a more multilingual modus operandi for the EU. After looking at how multilingualism currently works in the EU institutions (Section 1), a theoretical and normative transdisciplinary framework will help us to assess whether a more multilingual regime would be desirable and why (Section 2). In the third and last parts, my vision for a new linguistic modus operandi in the EU, centred around a language turn, a translation turn, and a transcultural turn, will take centre stage.

Before moving on to the first part, let us consider the following quotation from Nils Ringe's book on multilingualism in the EU (2022) to set the scene, so to speak, for the reflection that follows. This is an excerpt from one of his interviews with a senior Commission official about speeches both in the European Commission and in the European Parliament, and the use of English as a lingua franca of sorts (Ringe 2022, 195–196; see Leal 2021):

> You wonder if those people have a personality of their own . . . Most of them would be normal politicians with strong ideas . . . but it would not permeate in their speeches. Their speeches were standard; it could have been delivered by a machine . . . [MEPs] are sort of deprived of their way of thinking and expressing themselves, they are losing part of their soul. And I think a main characteristic of the European Parliament

> in that respect, it is really a soulless institution . . . It's a place where you cannot have real debates . . . People seem to agree, but in fact they keep their nuances for themselves . . .

Though this is an isolated comment in a volume which, for the most part, welcomes the "apparent contradiction" between the EU's language policies and its practices, it is telling in terms of the effect of the use of English in the EU's institutional and political culture (Ringe 2022, 111). The citation encapsulates the dilemma of the apparent pragmatic advantages of a shared language, on the one hand, and the expressive disadvantages of relying on a language in which speakers do not necessarily feel confident and comfortable. Ringe finds, for instance, that "EU actors use English at a seventh-grade reading level on average, compared to the eleventh-grade reading level used by native English lawmakers elsewhere" (2022, 143, see also 154). In what follows, we will explore the implications of this anonymous officer's statement and learn about possible alternatives to the EU's current language practices.

2. Multilingualism in the EU institutions—De jure multilingualism, de facto monolingualism?

How does multilingualism work in the EU institutions, bodies, and agencies? When we talk about language, we should distinguish among at least four factors, namely language policies, language practices, language ideologies, and language discourse. Policies refer to rules, explicit or implicit, overt or covert, written or unwritten, which aim to stipulate language practices. Practices, however, pertain to actual language use and may diverge from policy. Language ideologies, in turn, comprise more subjective attitudes towards language and language use, often influencing and being influenced by practice and policy. Finally, language discourse regards spoken or written communication about language and its value.

These four dimensions are not always congruous and often contradict each other (see Leal 2021, 64–72). In a home, for instance, there may be an explicit rule to avoid swearwords (policy), while parents and children may nevertheless

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use swearwords behind each other's backs (practice). Their ideologies towards swearwords may differ widely depending on their individual profile and the context in which the question arises, and so may their discourse on this topic. Let us see to what extent language policies, practices, ideologies, and discourse diverge or converge in the EU.

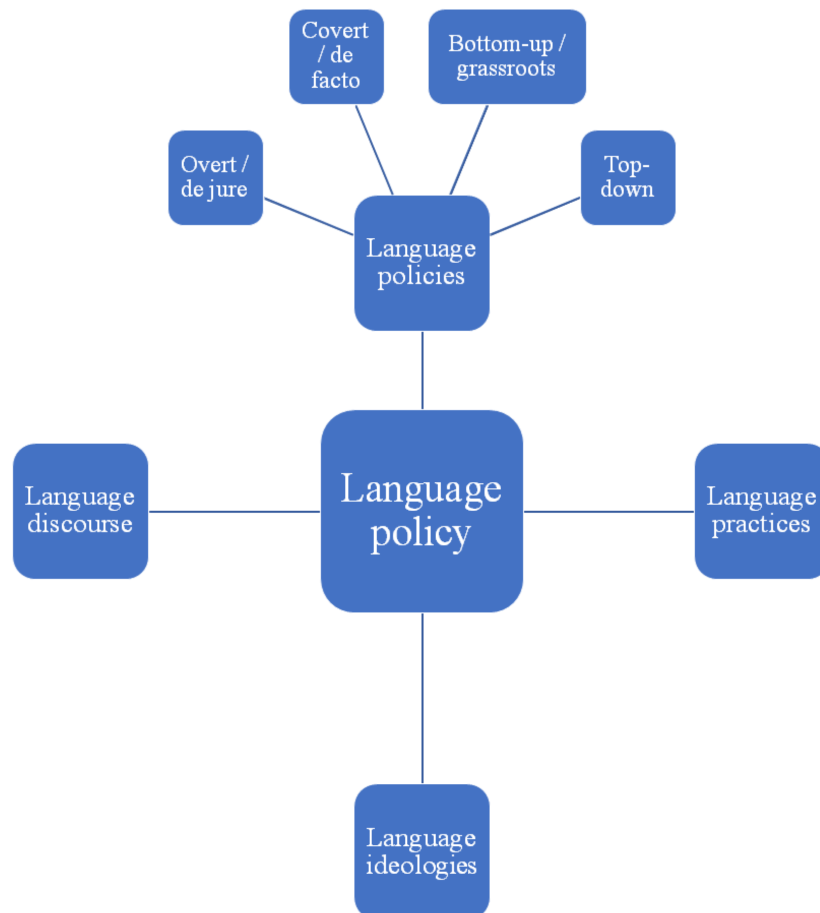

Figure 1. Some key terms in language policy. Adapted from Leal (2021, 72)

If we look at the policy level, there are a number of articles in the Treaties and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights which stipulate, albeit vaguely, that multilingualism should be protected. The very first regulation of the then European Economic Community Council of 15 April 1958 determines, in its first article, that the "official languages and the working languages of the institutions of the Community shall be Dutch, French, German and Italian," and this list has

been updated repeatedly to include 24 languages—most recently in 2013 upon Croatia's accession. This regulation is key not only because it establishes the basis for further articles (more on this shortly), but also because it equates *official* to working languages, thus precluding any language from enjoying a differentiated status, say, as sole working language in the institutions, bodies, and agencies. This notwithstanding, the very same regulation, in Article 6, grants individual institutions the power to determine their own language regime, while bodies and agencies have free rein to decide on their language use in any case. This does not entirely invalidate, but significantly relativises, the regulation (see Leal 2021, 49).

Article 24 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU lays out that "[e]very citizen of the Union may write to any of the institutions or bodies . . . in one of the languages mentioned in Article 55(1) of the Treaty on European Union and have an answer in the same language," whereas Article 55(1) announces that the treaty was "drawn up in a single original in the Dutch, French, German, and Italian languages, all four texts being equally authentic." This article, too, now lists 24 languages (see Leal 2021, 49).

In the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which was made legally binding by the Treaty of Lisbon, there are two hotly debated articles which address the question of linguistic diversity directly, namely articles 21 and 22, respectively:

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

and

> The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.

Though these articles do not define "discrimination" or "respect" in terms of concrete measures and penalties, they do acknowledge, at least symbolically, the importance of multilingualism in the EU and enable the European Court of

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Justice to rule on issues of linguistic discrimination, for instance (for more on this, see de Witte 2008).

These legally binding articles constitute the backbone of the EU's internal language policy. If we look at the EU's *discourse* on language in its non-binding documents, such as reports and online portals, the celebration of multilingualism is univocal and unambiguous. We have a few examples here: "Languages are an integral part of European identity and the most direct expression of culture," "[i]n an EU founded on the motto 'United in diversity,' the ability to communicate in several languages is an important asset for individuals, organisations and companies," "[l]anguages not only play a key role in the everyday life of the European Union, but are also fundamental for respecting cultural and linguistic diversity in the EU" (European Parliament n.d.); "[l]anguages unite people, render other countries and their cultures accessible, and strengthen intercultural understanding" (European Commission n.d.); "[t]he EU . . . is committed to safeguarding . . . linguistic diversity and promoting knowledge of languages, for reasons of cultural identity and social integration and cohesion" (European Commission 2012a, 2); "[e]veryone in the Union is entitled to contribute to the discussion [on EU legislation] in the official language of his or her choice. It is a question of transparency and democracy" (European Commission 2009, 1); "language is not only a means of communication but the expression of the inner world of its speakers. We are all intrinsically different, and our languages express our differences of thought and meaning" (Martikonis & Viola 2017).

We can therefore deduct from the EU's policies and discourse that the predominant ideologies (admittedly a tricky construct—see Woolard 1998) confirm this celebration of multilingualism. In fact, multiple Eurobarometer surveys corroborate this assessment, as it is natural to expect that the EU's internal policies and practices both reflect and spill over to the citizens in the member states. For instance, 81 percent of respondents to the 2012 special Eurobarometer report on "Europeans and their languages" agree that all EU languages "should be treated equally." However—and this is an important caveat—69 percent believe that Europeans should "be able to speak a common language," and over half (53 percent) feel that "a single language" should be adopted by EU institutions to facilitate communication. While the survey did not enquire further into which

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language that should be, 67 percent of participants see English as "one of the two most useful languages for themselves," whereas 79 percent consider it "the most useful [language] for the future of their children" (European Commission 2012a, 141).

To sum up thus far, language policy and discourse seem to go hand in hand, while ideologies—which are harder to pinpoint in any case—are somewhat torn between the symbolic imperative of linguistic diversity and the apparent pragmatic advantages of a common language. How about language practices? English has overtaken French and stands today at a clear distance from the other 23 official and working languages as the most used language across all institutions and settings. In 1997, for example, English was the drafting language of 45 percent of the documents translated in the Commission; in 2007, this proportion had risen to 62 and then further to 85 percent in 2020 (European Commission 2009, 2020; see also Sandrelli 2018, 64; Cliffe 2019). Legal drafting is estimated to take place even more predominantly in English—95 percent versus 5 percent in French (Barbier 2018, 337). In a 2016 survey at the Commission, 95 percent of staff declared that English was "the most used language when performing their duty," while 90 percent estimated in 2009 that English was their "main drafting language" (see, e.g., recruitment notices PE/219/S and PE/200/S—see also Robinson 2014, 194, and Leal 2021, 60).

There is thus a disconnect between policy and discourse, on the one hand, and practice, on the other, with ideology reflecting this contradiction. Let us bear in mind here that no formal decision has been taken to elevate the status of the English language within the EU's institutions, bodies, and agencies. All 24 languages enjoy the exact same status as official and working languages, as already noted, and any modifications would require treaty changes and hence unanimity among all 27 member states.

Two key questions emerge here, namely (1) what is the EU's jurisdiction in the realm of language policy and (2) is there a portfolio dedicated to multilingualism given its symbolic prominence in the EU? Regarding the first question, the EU has exclusive competences, such as the customs union; shared competences with the member states, such as agriculture; as well as supporting competences, such as health. Language policy lies outside the EU's jurisdiction as it has no remit to legislate or to harmonise existing legislation in this area.

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What about the question of a commissioner's portfolio for multilingualism or linguistic diversity? There are 27 commissioners, one commissioner per member state, and they cover portfolios such as equality, justice, social rights, and democracy. Multilingualism constituted a portfolio in its own right briefly, between 2007 and 2010, under Leonard Orban of Romania. At the time, many saw the elevation of multilingualism and the allocation of an exclusive commissioner to it as a fudge to produce portfolios for Romania in Bulgaria, which had just acceded to the EU (see, e.g., Buck 2006). Before then, in the 2004–2007 presidency, multilingualism used to be explicitly incorporated into the portfolio for "Education, Training, Culture and Multilingualism." After the end of Orban's mandate, in the second Manuel Barroso presidency (2010–2014), a similar arrangement was in place, whereby multilingualism was incorporated into the portfolio for "Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth." Between 2014 and 2019, it remained under the Commissioner for "Education, Culture, Youth and Sport," albeit absent in name. Today it remains absent in name and has been allocated to Johannes Hahn, the Commissioner for "Budget and Administration," specifically under the auspices of the Directorate-General for Translation (DG-Translation).

I have recently interviewed the head of DG-Translation to enquire, among other things, about this disconnect between policy and practice—de jure multilingualism and de facto monolingualism in English, so to speak (Leal 2021, 207–214). As the below quotations unveil, the main takeaways from the interview are that the current custodians of multilingualism in the EU perceive the dominance of English as non-existent because the equal status of all 24 official languages is guaranteed in the treaties. When confronted with the statistics presented earlier—some of which they themselves had issued—they retort that using English is a natural decision given that most people happen to speak it anyway (Leal 2021, 210–211):

> There is no formal decision to favour the use of one language or another for internal communication and interaction. English has replaced French as the most widely spoken common language within the institutions not by design but because it is the language that the great majority of these generations'

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> EU officials have learned at school as first or second foreign language and master best to communicate in the multilingual environment.
>
> . . .
>
> We see no paradox [between the EU's de jure multilingualism policy and its de facto internal language regime], as the de facto use of English as the most common drafting language in the Commission is not the result of a political or administrative decision but the consequence of pragmatic considerations and internal needs for communication in a language that all actors can speak in a multinational, multicultural, multilingual environment.

DG-Translation also stresses that the trend is to have less information available in languages other than English. Currently, only binding documents are available in all official languages, while non-binding information is increasingly available in English only. Unofficial estimates set the proportion of online content published by the EU in English only at 88 percent in 2008, and this figure is likely to be higher today (see Küchler 2008). Despite calls for more integration, accusations of democratic deficit, and an ever-expanding EU, DG-Translation forecasts a decrease in their translation output (Leal 2021, 207):

> Rather than increasing the budget for in-house translation staff, the trend is to exploit as much as possible progress in language technologies (including machine translation) and further use of external freelance translators, employing an agile and flexible resource model comprised of internal resources, complemented by professional freelancers from member states and use of state-of-art technology. In addition, one way of reconciling demand for translation with available resources on the supply side has been to manage demand. This meant establishing clear rules on which documents exactly must be translated under all circumstances, and which documents can be translated with the available resources (human, financial and technical).

What seems even more relevant than DG-Translation's general attitude towards the role of translation and multilingualism in the European project is the fact that they do not have a dedicated unit or team monitoring multilingualism or seeking to foster it. They have the mammoth task of enabling an efficient multilingual communication flow, which keeps their staff and resources

constantly on edge. The fact that multilingualism has been allocated to them seems to be yet another symbolic gesture, retaining it in some form rather than removing responsibility for it from the Commission completely; and after all, translation is one of the main mechanisms through which organisations can function multilingually, so it may seem natural to bundle the two under a single unit. We will come back to the question whether this arrangement is adequate in what follows.

In this section, the EU's internal language policies, discourse, ideologies, and practices were in the spotlight, along with the discrepancies among them. To complement the picture, we addressed the EU's (lack of) jurisdiction in this realm, while also considering multilingualism as a portfolio in the bloc. The main question that arises here is whether the dominance of English, coupled with the EU's lack of both competence and resources in the area of language, can be considered a problem at all and why (not). In the next section, this conundrum will be embedded into a theoretical framework to ultimately answer this question.

3. Transdisciplinary theoretical framework for multilingualism: Linguistic justice, the value of language, and language rights

Is it necessarily a problem that there is a disconnect between language policy and practice in the EU, and that the EU lacks the competence, the resources, and the institutional framework to foster—or at the very least monitor—multilingualism? Some, such as Nils Ringe, find this mismatch an advantage in that adopting an ad hoc common language while maintaining a de jure multilingualism policy "depoliticises" the EU (2022, 9), largely because most people inside the EU are pretty much forced to express themselves in a language (today English) which they do not speak particularly well (let us not forget the quotation that opened this paper). This, in his view, makes communication more straightforward and collaborative, less nuanced and hence less politically charged. As argued elsewhere (Leal forthcoming), it is debatable whether the depoliticisation hailed by Ringe is not a result of the EU's institutional framework (i.e., its transnational

https://doi.org/10.7203/Just.2.24859

set-up) rather than of its language practices. Furthermore, as Ringe himself acknowledges, this alleged depoliticisation through the use of English may have a negative impact on citizens' identification with the EU—especially considering that there is already a crisis in access to information in languages other than English in the EU, and that EU English alienates native-speakers as well (Ringe 2022, 198).

To answer the question suggested above on whether the mismatch between policy and practice is necessarily a problem, I suggest first looking at the question of language through the prism of linguistic justice. There are two well-known models here—one by Philippe van Parijs and one by François Grin—which depart from the same notion that the dominance of any single language (today English) gives rise to injustices but arrive at radically different conclusions. Next, let us look at different appraisals of the value of language and multilingualism—by, for instance, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Elana Shohamy, and Robert Phillipson, who place emphasis on language rights. Third and finally, we will scrutinise some of the main criticisms of these assessments of the value of language and of the notion of language rights, including those by David Cassels Johnson and Paul Ricento, among others, while continuously embedding these views into Grin's and van Parijs's models of linguistic justice. The aim of this section is to survey the literature in this field from the points of view of linguistic justice, the value of language (or lack thereof) and language rights, so that we can arrive at conclusions regarding the current status of EU multilingualism, outlined in the previous section.

Van Parijs, for his part, contends that English should become not only the EU's but the world's official lingua franca (2011). In his view, the only way to eliminate linguistic injustices is to grant access to high-quality English-teaching across the globe—even if that entails the risk of the gradual disappearance of many of the world's more than 7,000 languages. He argues, for example, that "[n]o one's honour or dignity is being threatened if a language with whom no one identifies is […] left to agonize and die" (van Parijs 2008, 37). Projecting a scenario in which the principle of territoriality is lifted, and English is introduced as the world's lingua franca, he concludes that (van Parijs 2015, 242),

https://doi.org/10.7203/Just.2.24859

> In a high-mobility, high-contact world, lifting the territoriality principle would no doubt eventually result in flattening the linguistic surface of the earth. But this would amount to nothing more terrible than turning the whole planet into a large number of Republics of Ireland, with only vestiges of the local languages – in the names of most places, many people, and a few institutions – and with a somewhat idiosyncratic way of pronouncing the lingua franca, now promoted to mother tongue status. Why would it be such a loss, especially if matched against the tremendous economic and cultural advantages of sharing the same language worldwide?

The pitfalls of this model have been revealed by various scholars (see, e.g., Gosseries & Vanderborght 2011; De Schutter & Robichaud 2015), not least because of its blatant disregard for languages other than English and the utopian character of its core aims—epitomised in the vision of an Anglophone monolingual world. Yet it remains influential in that it established the notion of linguistic justice in view of the world's current linguistic landscape (see, e.g., De Schutter 2018).

In contrast to van Parijs, Grin contends that we need a *different* model of linguistic justice altogether—one based on multilingualism as an asset. His studies, which focus primarily on the economic impact of language, show that a multilingual world is both more prosperous and fairer (Grin 2010 and 2018). Furthermore, looking specifically at the dominance of English in Europe, he finds five types of "transfers," as he calls them, that native speakers of English enjoy automatically, and estimates that these transfers amounted to 17 billion euros in the EU alone back in 2005. They include "privileged markets" (i.e., the quasi monopoly over translation/interpreting and English teaching branches, including exchange programmes, learning materials, etc.), "communication savings effort" (i.e., no translation/interpreting expenditure for native speakers as non-natives make the effort and financial investment to learn English), "language learning savings effort" (i.e., because English is so widely spoken, native speakers do not need to invest the time and money into learning additional languages), "knock-on effects" (time and resources allocated to translation/interpreting services, language learning and foreign language teaching can be devoted to something else), and "legitimisation effects" (i.e., native speakers are almost always in a better position to control the agenda, negotiate, influence others etc. as their

https://doi.org/10.7203/Just.2.24859

language "carries intrinsic legitimization") (Grin 2015, 132–134; see Leal 2021, 148). The bottom line for Grin is that regardless of how we perceive the importance of multilingualism or lack thereof, these transfers or injustices are palpable, quantifiable, and cannot be ignored.

These two models of linguistic justice hinge on the value of language and multilingualism, which is perceived differently by van Parijs and Grin. While van Parijs attributes no intrinsic value to language diversity and is not interested in the factors that often compel or even coerce speakers to stop using a particular language in favour of another, Grin underlines the economic value of multilingualism while also stressing its intrinsic value as a key element in speakers' identity layers.

Moving on to the second part of this section, how do others perceive the value of language and multilingualism, which culminates in their notion of language rights? Skutnabb-Kangas, for instance, stresses what she sees as the intrinsic value of language and the concomitant need for universal, collective linguistic human rights. When a language disappears, it is a loss tantamount to a loss of biodiversity—a view which traces back to Einar Haugen's notion of ecology of language proposed in 1972. When children are prevented from speaking their mother tongue, it is an act of violence—Skutnabb-Kangas speaks of "linguistic genocide," drawing on the UN definition of genocide of 1948 (Skutnabb-Kangas 2006, 278).

This "ecology-of-languages paradigm" is often linked with the "universal linguistic human rights paradigm" due to their shared call for collective linguistic rights. These two paradigms also overlap somewhat with Robert Phillipson's "linguistic imperialism paradigm," which he defines as "unfair privileging of the use of one language" and specifically "the uncritical acceptance of English having a 'natural' right to be the default language, and a blind belief in English as a 'lingua franca' of Europe" (Phillipson 2006, 357). In these three paradigms, the intrinsic value of language takes centre stage, in the sense that a speakers' ligatures (see Kraus 2018; Leal 2021, 141–144; Leal 2023) to a certain language or languages suffice to justify any efforts to maintain or foster these languages.

Elana Shohamy also highlights the intrinsic value of language, though her focus lies on linguistic injustices in education. She criticises what she sees

as the systemic, structural monolingualism and nativism of school systems which dismiss—and often openly discourage—pupils' multilingualism to favour monolingualism in the state language or bilingualism with this language plus English. She adds that the notion of language "as a closed and finite system" dovetails with "the idea of the nation-state as a closed and finite society to which only certain people had the legitimacy to belong," which means that those "who had the right blood" were the "native-speakers" (2006, 31–32; see Leal 2021, 22). Shohamy perceives languages through a postmodern lens, emphasising their hybridity and embracing such notions as translanguaging and language fusions to deconstruct the traditional notion of languages as monolithic units whose boundaries are clear-cut in speakers' minds.

These appraisals of the value of language and language rights by Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson, and Shohamy are at odds with van Parijs's model of linguistic justice, and only marginally match Grin's model of linguistic justice, both outlined above. For van Parijs, there will always be linguistic injustices due to the natural pecking order among languages, so that the only recourse is to ameliorate these injustices. The value of languages is either negated of ignored, as the point is rather to mitigate linguistic injustice not by promoting languages or granting minority speakers language rights, but rather by having everyone switch to English. Grin, in turn, may occasionally note that languages entail expressive value; yet the bulk of his work is dedicated to proving and quantifying this value in economic terms.

Others defend the value of languages and multilingualism while remaining critical of such notions as ecology of language, translanguaging, linguistic imperialism, and linguistic genocide. David Cassels Johnson and Paul Ricento, for example, who are both in favour of preserving and fostering multilingualism in their own individual ways, find the ecological metaphor counterproductive, not least because if we say that languages form an ecosystem much like fauna and flora, then it follows that some species are inherently stronger than others, will prey on others, etc. (see, e.g., Johnson 2013, 52; Ricento 2015). As for blurring the boundaries between languages denoted in such notions as "translanguaging," thinkers like Grin warn that they preclude the protection of given languages by preventing them from being named as "monolithic units" (Grin 2018, 264).

https://doi.org/10.7203/Just.2.24859

Of course, languages are constructs, products of nation-building forces which are not necessarily commendable. However, abolishing "named" languages altogether com

The "linguistic imperialism paradigm" has attracted criticism particularly for its uncritical reliance on terminology derived from the natural sciences despite its overt affiliation to postmodern thought (see, e.g., Johnson 2013, 52). The "linguistic human rights" movement, in turn, has been lambasted for its contradictory call for collective and individual language rights, as the two can be seen as irreconcilable (see, e.g., Spolsky 2004, 130, 218).

Debating the relative merits of these models of linguistic justice, the value of language, and language rights would transcend the scope of this paper—and this has been done elsewhere (Leal 2021). The bottom line here, however, is that there is a strong case for a multilingual world. Without intending to roll out the debate on the instrumental versus the expressive value of language afresh, languages do shape worldviews and vice-versa (Leal 2019). Eliminating multilingualism for pragmatic reasons would be like saying we should all think in the same way to make matters easier. We can take the political route—language cannot be dissociated from political power; we can take the economic route—the dominance of a language entails profits to its native countries; we can take the historic route—English has not become the world's lingua franca of sorts through an innocuous, natural process, so on and so forth.

The brief literature review presented here should not lead to categorical conclusions as to what models, theories or frameworks are correct or incorrect. As announced in the introduction, the intention is rather to suggest a transdisciplinary, multifaceted, theoretical multilingualism framework inspired by these disparate views, while also offering a practical framework of action for the EU (presented in Section 3). However laudable, van Parijs's quest for linguistic justice may be more successful by incorporating aspects of Grin's research on the economy of language, which confirms the (economic) value of multilingualism. Similarly, while the different calls for language rights outlined here are based on the legitimate notion that languages entail crucial ligatures in their speakers' life-worlds (see Kraus 2018; Leal 2021, 141–144), they may profit from expanding their horizons beyond a strictly

https://doi.org/10.7203/Just.2.24859

language-as-right orientation, to recall Richard Ruiz's celebrated framework of language orientations (Ruiz 2016). In a language-as-resource orientation, the intrinsic value of language remains in the spotlight, while also celebrating the (economic, educational, cognitive) value of multilingualism to all—and not merely to minority language speakers. The threefold turn proposed in section three is precisely an attempt to move beyond the language-as-problem and the language-as-right orientation to a language-as-resource orientation (Leal 2021, 64–72; Ruiz 2016).

The EU is unique in its political autonomy, in its set-up, and in its language policy. What happens here sends a clear message to the world about the languages that matter, about the importance of multilingualism (or lack thereof). The EU has the awesome challenge to unite half a billion people in diversity, so when the EU's custodians of multilingualism claim that their language practices are not a result of some conscious and open debate but rather of unchecked market forces, perhaps it is time to rethink the EU's linguistic regime.

4. Towards a multilingual modus operandi in the EU: A language turn, a translation turn, and a transcultural turn

What could a new linguistic modus operandi for the EU look like? Whichever shape and form they take, any changes would have to be piecemeal and gradual. Language practices and ideologies do not lend themselves to instant change, for instance, upon the introduction of language policies, be they bottom-up or top-down. Transformations in policy must reflect existing ideologies and practices, at least to a certain extent. And particularly in the case of the dominance of the English language today, its roots extend far beyond the realm of language—"language" is, after all, implicated in all areas of society. In this light, the linguistic modus operandi presented in this section is a holistic organon structured around a language turn, a translation turn, and a transcultural turn (for a detailed table of the organon, see Leal 2021, 181–182).

The language turn is inspired by the linguistic turn in philosophy in the late 19th century. The linguistic turn then was about recognising the ubiquity of language regardless of the object of study—whether the philosopher

https://doi.org/10.7203/Just.2.24859

approached ethics, metaphysics, etc., discussions and reflections took place in languages, which in turn shaped, defined, limited, coloured these discussions and reflections. Language thus became an unavoidable aspect to be considered in any philosophical investigation from then onwards (see Leal 2019, 231–234). The same applies in the context of the EU: whether we approach the monetary policy, the customs union or agriculture, these talks, speeches, reports, negotiations, *take place in language*, and the language in which they take place *matters*. Will Kymlicka famously remarked that we can replace, for instance, religious symbols in schools and court rooms through nothing, but we cannot replace language (see De Schutter & Robichaud 2015, 89). In my interviews in the EU institutions, I heard it time and again that everyone is too busy dealing with pressing matters, that there is no time to be wasted on language questions. The lack of awareness of the role of language in these pressing matters is evident and requires a shift in mentality.

The language turn is hence about raising awareness of the importance of language, with the aim to engender gradually a new appreciation of the role of multilingualism in the EU. This new appreciation can be instilled through top-down measures, such as campaigns, summits, opinion polls—much like the notion of European citizenship was engendered gradually. The goal is to have a shift towards de facto (not only de jure) multilingualism in the internal workings of the Union. The language turn also entails a number of practical steps to be undertaken at the institutions, bodies, and agencies to ensure that staff are multilingual in a range of languages, and that these languages are actively used in speech and writing. Within this turn, efforts to achieve a more balanced distribution of drafting languages should be undertaken as well—a quasi-natural consequence of more actively multilingual staff working in a more actively multilingual environment.

The translation turn is inspired by the translational or translative turn in the humanities, which, in a word, is about the awareness that a translational dynamic permeates all our contacts, relationships, conflicts. Translation—latu senso—is what makes communication possible, even within a single language. Much like the language turn, the translation turn proposed here is about raising awareness of the pivotal part played by translation (and interpreting) in the EU. Translation

https://doi.org/10.7203/Just.2.24859

is not a half-decent compromise to solve the problem of multilingualism, but rather the monumental bridge that brings different linguacultures together. This awareness-raising effort can be embedded in the campaigns, summits, and opinion polls mentioned earlier. Additionally, the translation turn entails an increase in the translation output not only within the institutions but also for the general public, so that more information is made available in languages other than English. Without access to information, there can be no effective citizen participation.

Let us remember here that this flies in the face of the current trend to *reduce* the number of translations announced by DG-Translation. The translation turn also entails making translations visible—an issue into which we cannot go here due to space constraints, but which traces back to the principle of authentication of translations, whereby originals and translations are placed on a par with each other (for more on this, see Leal 2022). Finally, the translation turn requires transparency in the distribution of languages in the EU as well, embodied in more frequent and more detailed translation statistics.

Both the translation and the language turn are made viable through the third and final turn, namely the transcultural turn. The transcultural turn is grounded in intercomprehension, that is, the passive multilingualism that occurs naturally between related languages and that can be achieved far more easily and quickly than active language learning. Intercomprehension, when practiced for example in school, goes hand in glove with transcultural competence or, in other words, the ability to navigate among different cultures, as well as to recognise and celebrate their differences.

Similarly to the other turns, the transcultural turn is undergirded by a new awareness of the role of transcultural competence in the EU—the awareness of the fact that there are no monolithic cultures, hermetically sealed to each other anyway. If the EU offered training in intercomprehension, this would represent a key step towards a multilingual modus operandi, whereby, for instance, multilingual drafting can take place, multilingual quality control of translations can be realised and departments can operate on a multilingual basis, without the perceived need to settle on a common language. Interestingly, DG-translation has assessed and confirmed the potential of intercomprehension in

https://doi.org/10.7203/Just.2.24859

improving the quality of their work and in optimising it, as unveiled in a report from 2012 (European Commission 2012b). These conclusions notwithstanding, the directorate continues to operate on a common language basis rather than on a multilingual basis (see Leal & Ó Riain, forthcoming).

These three turns together should lead to a multilingual modus operandi in which both English and translation/interpreting retain their important roles. English is only spoken well by a minority of EU citizens, estimated at roughly 8 percent of EU citizens in 2012—excluding native speakers, whose numbers have decreased to 1 percent of the EU's population in the wake of the UK's withdrawal from the bloc (European Commission 2012a; see Leal 2021, 60–61). Still, English remains the most spoken additional language in the EU and beyond, firmly entrenched as a useful tool in various settings. The objective is thus not to displace English—not least because language practices do not necessarily change once policy is introduced, as already noted. Trying to suddenly get, say, EU officials to use less English out of the blue would be somewhat like telling young children to conjugate a particular verb correctly, or like the Académie Française banishing the use of certain words. It may work to a certain extent, but the effects are extremely limited, and it can backfire—as we see, for instance, in the education language policies in Ireland regarding the revitalisation of Irish (see Leal & Ó Riain, forthcoming). In the spirit of the language-as-resource orientation (Ruiz 2016), the aim of these turns is rather to ensure that future generations appreciate the value of language, of translation/interpreting, and of intercomprehension in the EU, and actively make use of them in their exchanges—instead of feeling obliged to rely on a lingua franca of sorts.

As for the future role of language services (translation and interpreting) in the EU, despite the potential of intercomprehension to enable enhanced mutual intelligibility both in written and spoken communications, translation and interpreting will remain pivotal both in the EU's internal and external communications. While it is true that the Romance, Germanic, and Slavic language families cover over 90 percent of the EU, there are five additional language families among the EU's official languages (see Leal 2021, 162–163). Furthermore, it is unrealistic that a significant portion of the population would

https://doi.org/10.7203/Just.2.24859

one day acquire enough intercomprehension skills in more than two language families—even if education systems stepped in and implemented a policy of teaching intercomprehension. Additionally, even in those cases in which individuals do acquire above average intercomprehension skills, this kind of passive multilingualism would not suffice, say, in official situations, whereby closer familiarity with, for instance, legislation is imperative. In this sense, the turns proposed here aim to complement, not take over, the roles currently played by language services and English in the EU.

Three measures would facilitate and, in one particular case, constitute a prerequisite for the implementation of these three turns, namely (1) making language policy a shared competence in the EU; (2) creating an agency for language policy and planning; and (3) increasing the budget for the EU's language services. The first measure would allow for the EU to legislate, alongside the member states, in matters of language. While it is true that the steps pertaining to the threefold turn do not require any legally binding acts, making language policy a shared competence would be a welcome development in view of the discrepancies among EU countries regarding the protection, rights, and recognition of linguistic minorities. This measure is, however, very unlikely to be implemented soon, as it would require treaty changes and unanimity among the member states. As this would be the ultimate top-down measure in this realm, it may only become imaginable once a shift in mentality has started taking place.

The second measure has become a truism, as so many have pleaded for it (see, e.g., Phillipson 2016, 145–152). Creating an agency for language policy and planning would be key in terms of having a dedicated unit to monitor and foster multilingualism both in the institutions, bodies, and agencies and in the member states. To mitigate concerns that one such agency could exert too much of a unifying power in an area which has widely different implications in different member states, the Commission could take advantage of the existence of the Commission Representations in the member states to have 27 units dedicated to multilingualism comprising this pluricentric agency. Also, measure one would ensure that the EU's competences in this realm remain

https://doi.org/10.7203/Just.2.24859

shared with the member states. While creating a centralised agency may require jumping through a number of bureaucratic hoops, having Commission officials (or antennae, as they are called) in the Commission Representations dedicated to multilingualism may pose fewer administrative and legal challenges.

The third measure is the only one which constitutes a prerequisite for the turns proposed here, as an increased translation output would require a larger budget. Currently, the budget allocated to all language services across the EU's institutions, bodies, and agencies amounts to just over two euros per citizen per year (Gazzola 2014, 232). Were this budget to be reduced or cut altogether, the member states would have to foot the bill for their own translation and interpreting needs. In other words, cutting down on language services at EU level merely pushes the costs down the line to the individual member states (see Gazzola & Grin 2013, 103-104). An increased budget would allow for non-binding information to be made available in languages other than English. Currently, the EU's calls for tenders and expressions of interest, for example, are available in English only, thus arguably discriminating against those EU citizens who are not fluent in that language. Budget negotiations have become increasingly strained and contentious, so allocating more funds to language services would be no picnic. Much like measure one, perhaps this measure would become more feasible once more decision-makers can appreciate the role of language in the European project, as well as the potential of multilingualism to foster integration and ameliorate the democratic deficit.

5. Final remarks

In this paper, the EU's (chiefly internal) language policies, discourse, ideologies, and practices were surveyed, arriving at the conclusion that there is a gap between, on the one hand, policy, and discourse, which favour multilingualism and, on the other, practice, which is largely monolingual in English for pragmatic reasons. Language ideologies, in turn, seem ambivalent, as reflected in the citizens' conflicted attitudes towards language and linguistic diversity. This overview of

language policies, practices, discourse, and ideologies was complemented by an analysis of the EU's current lack of jurisdiction in the area of language, coupled by an assessment of the current place dedicated to multilingualism in the EU's institutional framework, which was found to be insufficient given the symbolic prominence of linguistic diversity in the bloc.

The question of the mismatch and the inactivity of the EU in the realm of language was then embedded in a theoretical, normative framework drawing together threads from different disciplines. Though some perceive this disconnect positively and/or push for English to play the role of lingua franca in more settings, it was argued here in favour of more multilingualism. This is not only due to concerns over the linguistic injustices and profits generated by the elevation of a national language such as English to the status of lingua franca, but also because of the conviction that languages constitute important ligatures in their speakers' life-worlds (see Kraus 2018).

To engender a more multilingual modus operandi in the EU, three turns—a language, a translation, and a transcultural turn—were suggested here. These turns were complemented by three additional measures, namely making language policy a shared competence, creating a pluricentric agency for language policy and planning and increasing the budget for language services.

It would be unrealistic to expect any of these changes to materialise any time soon. My conversations in different EU institutions reveal that there is no appetite to go into the language question—be it for a lack of courage or for a lack of awareness. However, changes can be engendered at the grassroots level as well—bottom-up initiatives often require the agency of a single individual and have the potential to impact many. The EU is not short of grassroots initiatives that showcase multilingualism and its value, and these initiatives might gain momentum as the EU grapples with the aftershocks both of Brexit and the coronavirus pandemic and comes to terms with the war in Ukraine. Questions of unity versus multiplicity (see Leal 2021) have become as pressing as ever, and as passive contentment gives way to scepticism and disaffection, the EU will need to revisit the cultural—and, by implication, linguistic—question to ensure its survival.

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