# EU language policy under review

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## Abstract

The challenges caused by the dominance of English in many domains across the European Union (EU), the lack of a viable programme to promote plurilingualism, as well as the problematic nature of having three procedural languages, are scrutinised against the call for Europe to come to terms with its language policy. Issues such as official EU standards for documentation, as well as school guidelines for language education, are investigated from the perspective of envisioning a sanctioned second-language variety of European English. The increased use of English in higher education as a result of Erasmus+ is brought forward as an example of the EU providing funds to support English at the expense of all other indigenous European languages. Moreover, the current order of allowing standard British English special status is criticised as a position which acts as an obstacle to European identity building. It is argued that recognising the importance of the ongoing nativisation processes currently taking place in the use of L2 English in the EU can pave the way for the citizens of the EU to take responsibility for the forms and functions which English will have for mainland Europe. Here, the goal of language learning to facilitate European and global cross-cultural communication is explored, as is the claim that a rendition of a European variety of English bolsters the prospects of identity formation in the EU.

**Keywords:** English language, European Union, language policy, European identity

One can envision the dissemination of English across Europe as a trojan horse, a carrier of ideologies ofttimes foreign to the manner in which the citizens of the European Union perceive themselves and their place in the world at large. My intention here is to juxtapose some of the deficiencies in the European Union (EU) language policy with the rise of English across Europe – which intensified after the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993 and the post-Cold War and Eastern enlargements of 1995 and 2004 – and in so doing, illustrate how important it is that the EU comes to terms with the consequences of this historic shift in the linguistic ecology of Europe. In maintaining the undisputed position as Europe's primary lingua franca as well

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as overtaking French to become the predominant "vehicle" language within the EU apparatus, English has impacted profoundly on virtually all of the autochthonous languages of Europe. The political, social and cultural implications of these developments have not been recognised by the EU, and consequently no effort has been made to regulate the role which English has assumed for Europe. On the one hand the peoples of the EU now have at their disposal a fully functional lingua franca, one which also facilitates cooperation with others throughout the world. On the other hand, the rise of English is having a negative impact on indigenous languages in two important respects. Firstly, we are witnessing substantial domain loss among all languages, which puts an added burden on lesser-used, minority and endangered languages. Secondly, efforts to promote plurilingualism are being hampered by the propensity of EU citizens to be complacent with their role as bilinguals, maintaining proficiency in their mother tongues plus English. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate why, considering these developments, action needs to be taken to regulate English on the part of the EU to address some of the more pressing issues associated with the rise of English.

The very standard for English, paradoxically, is centre stage in this debate. The language, acting as the lingua franca of the Union, is an integral component of unification and as such plays a central role in the emergence of a pan-European identity. The retreat by the British from European unification has made this possible. While there was consensus within the EU in the ante-Brexit era that the British standard was appropriate for Europe, this vision of the language no longer has support in the statistics when we look at actual usage (see Gonçal et al. 2018). It also lacks backing among language scholars. What is emerging instead is support given to new conceptualisations of the language which promise to be more suitable for L2 users. The ELF (English as a lingua franca) paradigms promoted by, among others, Jenkins and Seildhofer (see Cogo and Jenkins 2010), like the call for a second-language rendition of English (Modiano 2017), both investigate how mainland Europeans benefit from abandoning a strict adherence to native-speaker norms. The Euro-English initiative, moreover, specifically envisions English as evolving into a mainland European second-language variety.

There is a review of the EU language policy, and of the problematical nature of some of its components, such as the questionable nature of appointing "procedural language" status to English, French and German; the challenges of plurilingualism at a time when there is a shift taking place, away from the tradition of acquiring French and German, and in Eastern Europe, Russian and instead towards targeting English and Spanish; the upswing in the use of English

in higher education; as well as a discussion of alternatives to nativespeakerism and "inner circle" educational norms in mainland European English teaching and learning (ELT). There is also deliberation on the relationship between the widespread use of a lingua franca and the advent of European identity. It is argued that there is a need for the EU to take responsibility for the forms and functions of English, and in so doing counter the market forces which are setting the stage for the American variety to become the dominant rendition of the language among the citizens of the EU. Distancing English from the constraints of conventional ELT protocols, in my understanding, establishes a better foundation for English to coexist with other languages in a less compromising manner. It can also facilitate the role English can play in European integration and in the establishment of European identity.

## EU language policy

European Union legislation stipulates that each member state has the right to nominate one of its own official languages as that member's official EU language (with only the Republic of Ireland deviating from the custom of choosing their majority language), and EU citizens are guaranteed the right to communicate with the Union, as well as have access to information and documentation, in one of the official languages. At the present time there are twenty-three official languages with member state affiliation, and English, which, while not being a member's designated official EU language in the post-Brexit era, nevertheless maintains official language status (removing English in that capacity requires a unanimous vote of the European Council [see The Treaty of Lisbon 2009], which the Irish government has stated they would not support [European Commission in Ireland 2016]). While providing documentation, translation and interpretation services for twenty-four languages constitutes a formidable challenge, there is consensus among the leaders of the EU that recognising such language rights for all members is the foundation of the EU's commitment to diversity. To further this aim, the EU has also enacted into law language protection initiatives designed to support lesser-used languages (see the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages [ECRML] adopted in 1992 and the Resolution of 21 November 2008 on a European strategy for multilingualism).

At the same time, the European Commission has given widespread support to the notion that there are three "working languages" or "procedural languages", English, French and German. While all twenty-four official languages are

useful for communication between EU citizens and the European Union, the procedural languages, it is argued, ease communication within the EU apparatus itself. Thus, when there is agreement, it is inevitably one of these 'vehicle' languages which are used at conferences and meetings. The concept itself, of three procedural languages, is misleading because it gives the impression that these languages are on equal par. It is English which is the most preferred language for interaction at all levels, and the popularity of English in such respects has been increasing steadily for some time, while French and German are in decline as "working languages'" in the EU (van der Jeught 2015: 135). In 2019 90.5% of all data at the European Council for translation was in English, while the figure for French was 4.4% and for German 0.6%. For the European Parliament the figures were 72% for English, 13% for French, and 3% for German (cited in van der Jeught: 2021: 23). Van der Jeught observes that "the predominance of English as a working language seems overwhelming and still increasing" (2021: 23). It is interesting to note, moreover, that German, with more than 90 million native speakers in the EU (20%), and the status which comes from Germany being Europe's largest economy, has nevertheless been relegated to third place in this competition to enjoy special privilege.

As a result of Brexit, what now distinguishes English from French and German is the fact that English – with just over 1% of the EU population having mother tongue status – is the only procedural language which does not favour a sizable mainland European speech community (I do not feel that people in the EU will begrudge the Irish and the Maltese their advantage here). Thus, all but a tiny minority of EU citizens, when using their English, are communicating in what to them is a second language, something which gives English a clear advantage over other candidates vying for status as the most utilitarian working language of the Union. One can, moreover, question whether the notion of three procedural languages is democratic. Is it fair to give three languages special status over all others and ignore the fact that other larger EU languages, such as Italian, with 60 million native speakers, and Spanish, with 47 million, are circumvented in the process?

Resistance to the acceptance of English as the predominant procedural language comes primarily from France. With possible backing from other member states which have sizable French-speaking communities, such as Belgium and Luxembourg, Francophile language activists heartedly advocate a return to the days when French was the working language of the Common Market, and also enjoyed a prominent position in a number of international organisations (see Stein-Smith 2017). Now, faced with a decline in the status of French and an upswing in the prestige of English, they are positioning

themselves for a fight. Their chances of success are slim at best. For one, while the Germans seem perfectly happy with English, which to them is an acceptable compromise, they have made it clear that they will not sit idly by and watch the EU become dominated by the French language, threatening instead to insist that if French is to gain because of Brexit, German must also take a more prominent position in European affairs. Resistance to French also comes from those Member states in the north and the east of Europe, where the peoples of the Nordic countries and their partners across Eastern Europe have made substantial investments in English and in the process have all but ignored French. They seem reluctant to interact with proficient speakers of French in what to them is at best their L3. Note also that the French, like the English, are notorious for criticising people they feel do not speak their language proficiently. This brand of linguistic chauvinism, or, if you will, language shaming, has no place in the EU and is one aspect of a larger resistance to having French replace English in the inner workings of the EU. We must also keep in mind that both French and German lack the second-language speaker base required to function effectively as a lingua franca for the citizens of the EU.

## English and plurilingualism

It is apparent, moreover, that while we have been witnessing a shift toward increased reliance on English, the notion of "plurilingualism" has nevertheless been supported, with a directive from the leaders of the EU that the acquisition of two additional languages over one's mother tongue is a goal worthy of pursuing (*Language Policy* 2022). Language learning is defined by the Union as a "key competence". An important aspect of this call for increased plurilingualism is the Erasmus+ programmes which support the free movement of students, teachers and researchers between European universities. Unfortunately, however, several things have taken place in mainland Europe which have acted to destabilise efforts to promote the learning of additional languages. One is the increase in the number of proficient second-language users of English, many of whom have made English their *personal adoptive language*, and we will undoubtedly see English making even further gains in this respect in the near future because the vast majority of school goers in the EU now have English as a mandatory subject. Not only are children and adolescents vigorously pursuing English across mainland Europe, they are also proving to be quite successful, with more positive outcomes when compared to the

results of studies in other languages such as French, German and Spanish. The fact that more and more colleges and universities are offering courses in English further secures for English a brighter future, while, at the same time, hampering the opportunities for other languages to grow in stature.

As such, while the leaders of the EU support the ideals of plurilingualism and have made considerable investments in programmes designed to inspire people to acquire two additional languages, the outcome has been the opposite, that is to say, what we see is a growing number of people proficient in English, who have increasing opportunities to use the language, while, at the same time, the autochthonous languages of Europe have had to take a step back to accommodate this expansion (see Busse 2017). The result is an increase in bilingualism, not plurilingualism, with English emerging as the most common second language. This dominance is verified by official EU statistics:

> In terms of the most common foreign languages spoken, the linguistic map of Europe is similar to that presented in 2005, with the five most widely spoken foreign languages remaining English (38%), French (12%), German (11%), Spanish (7%) and Russian (5%). There has been a slight drop in the proportions able to hold a conversation in German and French (-3 and -2 percentage points respectively). (*Europeans and their Languages* 2012: 19)

And as to language learning, with figures from 2019:

> English was the most commonly studied foreign language at upper secondary general education level in the EU, with 96% of students learning it. Spanish ranked second (26%), followed by French (22%), German (20%) and Italian (3%). (Eurostat)

Here we see clearly that English, with more than three times more users and learners compared to French, German and Spanish respectively, has a clear lead over other major European languages. This gap between English on the one hand and French and German on the other will most likely increase with future Eurostat reports, while it is likely that Spanish will gain on all other languages except English.

With English acquisition, there is a tendency for people to be satisfied with their status as bilinguals, while in the not-so-distant past there was a greater propensity among language learners to strive to become multilingual. Examples are Finland, where it was commonplace in the past that many Finish nationals were proficient users of Finnish, Swedish and either French or German, while today there are fewer people in Finland with three languages, with most Finns proficient in Finnish and English, and no longer interested in developing their skills in Swedish. As journalist Carina Chela noted in 2010 as the reason for the decline of Swedish in Finland: "other languages are more important in a globalised economy" (Chela). The same thing is taking place in the Netherlands, where multilingualism was in the past commonplace, with

many people speaking Dutch plus two additional languages, usually German and French, while at the present time many young people in the Netherlands have only Dutch and English. The trend throughout Europe is now that people learn English first and with the achievement of proficiency in English are less inclined to continue to devote the resources required to attain proficiency in a third language.

## The decline of mainland Europe's autochthonous languages

French and German, the two most important languages in Europe after English for cross-cultural communication, maintained considerable vitality in many important areas, such as business, culture, education and science, well into the 1960s. A noticeable decline, however, took place in the final decades of the twentieth century that coincided with the increasing use of English not only across Europe but also throughout the world, when English began dominating a growing number of important domains. Now, because of the implications of globalisation in a vast array of human endeavours, as well as the importance of knowing English to navigate the Internet, English has secured its place as the premier medium of cross-cultural communication, and there is no other language competing with English in this capacity. At the same time, while major languages in Europe have declined, lesser-used languages, minority languages, as well as endangered languages have been more severely marginalised, with reduction in usage as well as domain loss as a result of linguistic atrophy. It is the case that some languages are benefiting from revitalisation schemes (where in the Republic of Ireland, for example, Irish is receiving increased support, and in Spain with an upswing in the number of proficient speakers of Catalan), but the general trend in mainland Europe is that all languages large and small are negatively affected by the spread of English, and this has been going on unabated for a good fifty years.

## English in higher education

This weakening of mainland Europe's indigenous languages has been exacerbated by the trend among students, teachers and researchers at European colleges and universities to increasingly rely on the English medium not only in the lecture hall but also in the use of textbooks and other course materials. Over the past thirty years or so, a shift has taken place in mainland Europe

where English has become a language used widely in higher education. The medium for thesis work at Masters and PhD levels is increasingly English, and for publication, English has the lead in the European contribution to article and book production, much like Latin's dominance in this respect in the seventeenth century. As Jenkins notes,

> many universities have switched to teaching in English-medium so as to recruit more students and staff from outside their national borders. The internationalisation of universities is thus going hand-in-hand with 'Englishisation', with university campuses paradoxically becoming increasingly linguaculturally diverse on the one hand, and increasingly focused on English on the other. (Jenkins 2018: 91)

One can say, moreover, that the EU has paid little or no attention to the implications of the dissemination of English across mainland Europe in education at all levels, and the ensuing failure to act has continued even though domain loss, as well as substantial Anglo-Americanisation of the lexical register, can now be observed in every EU language.

The use of English in the lecture hall has also increased because of the Erasmus+ programmes, which were initially launched as a means of promoting plurilingualism. In this respect Erasmus+ has not proven to be a success (see James 2019). What has transpired is a giant leap forward when it comes to allocating resources to English, where colleges and universities across Europe have stepped up the training of teachers to ensure that they are proficient in English and can hold lectures in English for foreign students. Ironically, even domestic students find themselves taking courses where English is the medium of instruction because of this competition to attract greater numbers of foreign and Erasmus+ students.

## The emergence of a second-language variety

Going forward, English will continue to gain against mainland European languages. This is because the citizens of the EU are not only expected to be proficient in English for their contacts with others across cultures, for educational purposes and for their use of information technology, they are also required to utilise their knowledge of the English language in their professional undertakings, with increasing numbers of employers requiring English in job application procedures (the vast majority of positions advertised for work in the EU apparatus now have English as a requirement for employment). One result of these advancements is that English is no longer a foreign language in the EU. Based on its importance in so many aspects

of everyday life, English maintains a position in many member states more akin to that of a second language. It is used primarily to communicate with other EU citizens. In this capacity, English has no competition in the race to dominate the linguistic landscape of mainland Europe. As such it is apparent that we are at a crossroads. One direction, continuing with this inability to act, can only result in further uncontrolled English expansion. On the other hand, taking measures to regulate English could result in a more amiable relationship between the lingua franca and the indigenous languages of mainland Europe.

Within the field of sociolinguistics, it is axiomatic that the sole promotion of native-speaker norms in ELT has become problematical, and greater support is now given to the notion that English is a language with a great deal of diversity observable in the usage of both native and non-native speakers. For this reason, there should be more focus on how second-language users utilise English for cross-cultural communicative purposes. This is the core contention of the *ELF* initiative, that the dynamics of non-native speaker to non-native speaker communication are of paramount interest, and that in such contexts native-speaker norms are not necessarily relevant. Instead of conceptualising the language as one best mastered if one attempts to mimic an idealised native speaker of a prestige variety, learners should be able to choose an alternative way forward in their efforts to acquire proficiency in English, and here the attainment of communication skills which are useful in diversified environments, where one interacts with people with differing linguistic profiles, is more in line with what mainland Europeans need when learning their most utilitarian lingua franca. In this respect, English is seen as a platform where diversity and multiculturalism are the prevailing ideological foundations of learning, something in stark contrast to ELT programmes designed to promote the acquisition of near-native or native proficiency in prestigious native-speaker varieties. This latter view, because it is steeped in the ideologies of nativespeakerism, is inappropriate for those who want to celebrate diversity (see Holliday 2005).

Consequently, the very standard for the language must come under review. It will not do to continue to exclusively support a British English order and promote the notion that the English of idealised native speakers in the UK should continue to act as the model for language education in the EU. This brand of the language, what in some quarters is called standard British English, EngEng, the King's or Queen's English, Oxford English or RP, began going out of fashion in mainland Europe in the 1990s, and has declined steadily since then. Currently only a small percentage of learners have this rendition of

the language as their goal while in school, even though a good many teachers continue to openly support the British norm in their teaching as well as in the examination processes and use pro-British textbooks and other ELT materials (many of which are produced in the UK) which endorse English as a language best represented by the British. What has replaced standard British English among learners is American English, which has gained in popularity considerably in the third millennium. But both standard American English and standard British English are culture-specific varieties. When using them, speakers inadvertently promote a world view which is ideologically marked, and one cannot claim that the prevalent ideologies of the USA and the UK, in all respects, accurately reflect the sensibilities of EU citizens. While some may want to nevertheless see these renditions of the English language as a basis for ELT, what we are observing in the language behaviour of learners in classrooms across Europe is a much more diversified rendition of the English language, as well as a possibility that Europeans can now use English which better represents their mainland European identity.

Educational programmes designed to train learners to signify to interlocutors that one wants to assimilate into the Anglo or American sphere of influence are ill-suited to accommodate the needs of mainland Europeans, and this needs to be acknowledged. Such ELT foundations are poorly suited to promote 'unity in diversity', reenforcing instead beliefs in outdated singularities and hierarchies. Bringing a conceptualisation of a European second-language variety to language education would offer learners an alternative to such forms of linguistic indoctrination. Educators would also benefit, seeing as they are often unsure of what to do when teaching English for cross-cultural communicative purposes.

One way for the EU to deal with the impositions of traditional ELT is to define English as a European lingua franca and make European English an alternative to what are fast becoming antiquated norms. Here, as a first step, one could very well envision the EU with its own style sheet for the written language, and in time, we could witness more extensive codification carried out on the features of European English which are in the process of becoming systematic. This would include lexical items, some aspects of syntax and grammar, punctuation, spelling conventions and pronunciation, and the process itself would inevitably lead to the production of dictionaries and grammars of European English. One overriding principle of such a teaching and learning platform would be to conceptualise L2 English in the EU as a gathering of differing dialects all of which are on equal par. This is in stark contrast to conventional ELT ideologies, which advertently establish

hierarchies which position one prestigious norm ahead of regional, social and ethnic variation.

As an example of European English, let us look at lexical usage. Our concern here is with general usage among Europeans and not with the *Euro-speak* jargon specific to *Eurocrats* working in Brussels and elsewhere within the EU apparatus. Some obvious examples are terms such as *Euro-English*, *the four freedoms*, *internal market*, *member state* and *plurilingualism*. These are coinages which are culture specific for Europe and as such are not found in other varieties. What distinguishes European English from other renditions of English is usage which is culture specific for mainland Europe. Another requirement is that such culture-specific features are understood among L2 users of English in the EU and are thus systematic. That it gives its users a sense of belonging (thus providing people with opportunities to form a sense of identity) is also necessary. It is now apparent that there are a growing number of features found in L2 mainland European usage which are culture specific, and this is applicable not only to pronunciation and vocabulary but also to grammar. Examples of pronunciation are words such as *cooperation*, which for many mainland Europeans has four syllables /kō-ˌpə-ˈrā-shən/, while in inner circle varieties it is customary to have five /kō-ˌä-pə-ˈrā-shən/, and *unique*, pronounced not as it is commonly expressed in standard English, /juːˈniːk/, but more like the word *eunuch* /ˈjuːnək/. Examples with grammar are the use of the plural *s* for non-count nouns, such as *informations*. As features such as these gain in usage and thus acceptance, a second language take on mainland European English will receive greater support and thus set the stage for the recognition of a second-language variety. Note also that the probability that the EU will intervene will increase as we witness these nativisation processes accelerate in the years to come.

As a first step in this process, we need to see, within the EU, the establishment of guidelines which are mainland European in origin. It will not do to pretend that the British standard meets today's challenges. That it was vigorously promoted by the UK government, as well as by British subjects working for the EU with documentation, translation and interpretation services in the ante-Brexit era, was a direct result of Britain's participation in European unification. Now however, in the post-Brexit era, the UK government no longer has any say in the matter (see Chríost and Bonotti 2018 and Modiano 2017 and 2020). This should also be applicable for British nationals currently working for the EU that actively promote the British standard. They are essentially advocating a language ideology which is political in nature. The British, in leaving the EU, should cease in their efforts to promote British English in

this part of the world. It is the citizens of the EU who will determine the way forward, and here, it is apparent that many of them have traces of American English in their speaking, and in their writing when they produce documents, and they as well as others are often confused as to what is right or wrong, American or British, with the result being that they have a mixture of the two major varieties where one can also often observe the interjection of transference features from their mother tongues.

This blending, where influence from the American variety is on the increase, is in fact what is the most common usage today among the citizens of the EU. While this in my understanding indicates that the time has now come to stop exclusively promoting the British norm, doing so without having an alternative at hand would mean that American English, by default, would become the de facto standard for mainland Europe. This is not, in my opinion, a prudent way forward. It would simply mean that we trade one intrusive basis for language teaching and learning for another which is equally if not more invasive. Furthermore, I find it difficult to believe that anyone would seriously want the European lingua franca to be a behaviour which requires that one impersonates someone from England. I would have the same opinion of the suggestion that standard American English held such a position.

Within the EU apparatus, we need to draw up guidelines which represent the prevalent descriptive grammar of L2 English in mainland Europe. Moreover, it is important that the EU promotes the understanding that when and if European English becomes an accepted vision of English for the EU, it will take on the same status as legitimate inner circle varieties such as American and British English (see Modiano 2009 and 2017). European English could be, for Europe, a recognised second-language variety much like Indian English and Nigerian English. Unfortunately, however, while the increasing prevalence of European English is already apparent in the language usage of many EU citizens, it has not as yet received recognition. What does get a good deal of attention, on the other hand, is the use of slang, often referred to as *Euro-speak*, among many Eurocrats (Balič 2016). Somssich refers to this as "a 'contaminated' form of English, bearing the traces of foreign influence apparent in constructions and phrases which are often incomprehensible to English natives themselves" (2016: 111). Here, efforts must be made to come to an understanding of what can and should be done about Euro-speak terminology so that we can establish an order within the EU which facilitates mutual comprehensibility, not only within the EU apparatus but also between employees of the EU and EU citizens. It is certainly conceivable that some lexical items can be accepted and deemed

legitimate even though they are not acknowledged in other varieties of English, but the more obstruse features, those which can cause misunderstanding, must be recognised as such, with the result that they become less prevalent in both the written and the spoken language.

## Lingua franca usage and identity

Any discussion of the notion that there is an emerging mainland European identity in the making must presuppose that the EU project, its ambitions to bolster unification, is a realistic goal which will not be stifled by key member states leaving the Union. While the withdrawal of Britain was a serious blow to the idea of a unified Europe, what has emerged in the aftermath is that the EU is now consolidated almost wholly on the continent where the four freedoms have made interaction across borders much more prominent in comparison to the past. We can also witness an increasing reliance on one language, one which is showing signs of evolving into a second-language variety. As such, while it is possible to envision the lingua franca as contributing to the establishment of belonging within the context of the nation state, it is not possible to speak of the EU experiment as having anything in common with the conventional way nations rally behind a shared sense of identity. Such a myth of assumed sameness is not possible for the EU. Instead, what we have here is a nation state in the making which has made a firm commitment to diversity. In this respect it would be illogical to speak of Europeans as sharing one common identity based on the widespread use of a mother tongue. The way European identity is coming into being is far more complex. It is nevertheless the case that where there is a prevalent lingua franca it is possible to establish distance from the original seat of the borrowed language through widespread culture-specific usage, and in so doing introduce a sense of belonging to a political entity. It is in this sense that the idea of a second-language variety can operate as a marker of identity for L2 users across mainland Europe. Within the EU, a primary sense of identity is expressed using the L1. When using English as a lingua franca within Europe, L2 users of English have their regional markers of identity, while beyond Europe, when the citizens of the EU use their distinctive L2 English, there is every reason to believe that they are perceived as proficient users of a global lingua franca. Obvious ties to inner circle speech communities are, in this respect, broken. As such, a nativised form of the English language for Europe has the potential to provide the citizens of the EU with a linguistic space where they would be

given free rein to express their unique sense of belonging without signalling to others that they are auxiliary members of what to them are foreign spheres of influence.

## English-language norms in schools and in higher education

Consequently, there is a need to come to terms with school education and the free movement of students at the tertiary levels. Let me begin with addressing school education. Here, we see the basis for learning English throughout life beginning with how children at primary and secondary school engage the English language. What I propose is that greater care is taken to encourage school-age children to make up their own minds as to what kind of English they will want to learn. Their teachers would in this sense be coaches or mentors who help learners reach their goals. Leaners could make a choice between attempting to acquire a native-speaker rendition of the language such as American or British English. They could also, if they prefer, work toward other goals, such as targeting European English, where learning the language as a lingua franca is prioritised. In both cases learners would be made familiar with the need to see in English opportunities to communicate across cultures as opposed to training to engage native speakers of inner circle varieties. This would quell the current confusion which is felt by many practitioners across Europe. If British English is fast losing its position as the most prominent variety to target in language education, and if American English seems to be taking its place even though it is given little official support, some other approach must be on offer.

What about college and university students? Here we see a great deal of resistance to reducing the importance of English, especially at graduate level. Across Europe, as well as throughout the world, English has become mandatory in advanced research programmes. In the hard sciences it is no longer possible to carry out research without knowledge of the English medium (see Ammon 2001). In field after field, we are now seeing English as the only avenue for publishing scientific results. But in other areas, and especially in foreign language studies, in disciplines across the humanities, as well as in the field of education, there are greater opportunities to use other languages. One thing that can be done is for Erasmus+ to include programmes where students prepare to go abroad by studying the language of their host country for two years before leaving their home country. As such, they would be able to attend lectures in the language of the host university. The EU could finance

the institutional costs of the two years of language study, as well as provide funding for the host university to train teachers to better accommodate foreign students who are in the process of attaining proficiency in the host country language. The students, as well, could receive extra-incentive-funding for their participation in "language of host country" Erasmus+ programmes.

If this were implemented, if students, the students' home institution and host universities were given funding for their involvement in such educational schemes, there would be two things that would emerge which are positive. One is that more students would use study abroad initiatives to learn an additional European language which is not English. This should lead to greater numbers of European citizens becoming plurilingual. Another positive outcome is that the universities involved would be investing in languages other than English. Some may want to argue that this is not something which would in all likelihood have a tangible effect, that the numbers of students who learn a third language in such programmes would be too few to make any real difference. I disagree. Such initiatives would certainly be successful if substantial funding were available. Anytime we reallocate resources from English to other languages, we are participating in a larger effort to reduce the impact of English language spread. This does not mean that our English-language proficiency would necessarily suffer. It would simply mean that we are stepping up our efforts to promote language learning.

## Conclusion

The problems which we now face in the EU are complex and not easily rectified. English, in the post-Brexit era, shoulders a great deal of responsibility for unification and for the establishment of European identity, yet little is done to regulate how the language operates in education as well as within the inner workings of the EU. This is because the issue itself is so controversial. On the one hand we have those who want to continue to have English as the dominant language in the EU, while on the other hand we have those who argue for French, and to a lesser degree other languages. But because the issue itself is thought to be sensitive, few make public statements or attempt to initiate change through legislation. The result is that little is done to address the current conundrum we are now facing. To continue to ignore the effects of the dissemination of English in the EU will only exacerbate the problem. Nevertheless, it is now clear that action needs to be taken to bolster the vitality of all of our indigenous European languages as a counterweight to English.

This is because bilinguals, with competence in their mother tongues plus English, will be more likely to pursue proficiency in an L3 if more languages have greater utility. Thus, there is a need to increase support for initiatives to protect lesser-used, minority and endangered languages. We need to offer more funding for publishers who produce books in such languages, increase subsidies to produce apps, continuing education services, public events, radio and television broadcasting (including news services) and web sites, as well as allocate funding so that the languages can be studied more extensively in public schools and in higher education. It would be wise, moreover, to provide local citizens with information, such as health bulletins, social services announcements, and voting instructions, in their medium. All of these measures would result, it is believed, in greater numbers of people feeling that it is meaningful to acquire proficiency in a third language.

There is also a need to begin seriously questioning the prioritisation of the three working languages, English, French and German. It benefits the EU to instead support the belief that no autochthonous mainland European language should have such standing. Instead, it would perhaps be wiser, in my opinion, to put all the mainland European languages on equal footing, with all of them having no explicit advantage, and instead only make special provision for one tongue, English, as a way of creating a level playing field. This is, for the most part, already the case, so making this linguistic order official would not in any significant manner change the current situation. Moreover, in this way, speakers of lesser-used languages would experience their interactions with native speakers of larger languages, especially French and German, as being more equal.[1] It would also put an end to the possibility that the French were in the process of succeeding in their attempt to replace English with French as the primary procedural language of the EU apparatus.

Work also needs to be carried out to define the most suitable forms and functions which English can have for the internal workings of the EU as well as for the peoples of mainland Europe. There is a need to explore the possibility of recognising English from a second-language variety perspective as opposed to insisting that English, for Europeans, is a foreign language (see Berns 2009 and Modiano 2000 and 2009). This would facilitate the recognition of a mainland European identity within second-language teaching and learning, something which is essential if we are to coexist with this lingua franca without

1. The total number of EU citizens with languages spoken as a mother tongue by less than 12 million people in the EU is *c.*90 million or one fifth of the EU population: Greek 10.7, Czech 10.7, Swedish 10.3, Portuguese 10.3, Hungarian 9.8, Bulgarian 7, Danish 5.8, Finnish 5.5, Slovak 5.5, Croatian 4, Lithuanian 2.7, Slovenian 2.5, Latvian 1.9 and Estonian 1.3.

succumbing to its tenacity to assimilate its users into the Anglo-American sphere of influence.

The primary issue, however, as I see it, is the need to come to a better understanding of what language standards are to be promoted in schools. While this is best done at the member-state level, some indication from Brussels as to what is most judicious would without doubt clear up much of the uncertainty which is widespread throughout Europe. Such actions would indicate that mainland Europeans are now taking control of the role which English plays in their lives. They have the potential to substantiate the conviction that native speakers of British English can no longer dictate what is right and wrong for European second-language users of the tongue. This can assist efforts to make clear the understanding that while English does function as the mainland European lingua franca, the languages of Europe are nevertheless of primary importance, and the EU, like the citizens of the Union, are ready to take whatever action necessary to ensure the health and vitality of all our languages. It is in this respect, with a commitment to support the linguistic diversity which defines Europe, that we can begin to position English as a benevolent lingua franca, one which assists us in our need to have a universal language without unduly wreaking havoc on our mother tongues and subsequently on our indigenous cultures. It is in this way that we can celebrate the unity in diversity which is at the very heart of European unification.

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## Résumé

Les défis causés par la prédominance de l'anglais dans de nombreux domaines à travers l'UE, l'absence d'un programme viable pour promouvoir le plurilinguisme, ainsi que la nature problématique d'avoir trois langues procédurales, sont examinés à la lumière de l'appel lancé à l'Europe pour bien définir sa politique linguistique. Des questions telles que les normes officielles de l'UE en matière de documentation, ainsi que les directives scolaires pour l'enseignement des langues, sont étudiées dans la perspective d'envisager une variété sanctionnée d'anglais européen en langue seconde. L'utilisation accrue de l'anglais dans l'enseignement supérieur à la suite d'Erasmus+ est présentée comme un exemple de l'UE fournissant des fonds pour soutenir l'anglais au détriment de toutes les autres langues européennes autochtones. De plus, la situation actuelle où l'on accorde un statut spécial à l'anglais britannique standard est critiqué comme une position qui agit comme un obstacle à la construction de l'identité européenne. Il est avancé que la reconnaissance de l'importance des processus de nativisation en cours dans l'utilisation de l'anglais L2 dans l'UE peut ouvrir la voie aux citoyens de l'UE pour assumer la responsabilité concernant les formes et les fonctions que prendra l'anglais en Europe continentale. Ici, l'objectif de l'apprentissage des langues pour faciliter la communication interculturelle européenne et mondiale est exploré, tout comme l'affirmation selon laquelle l'évolution d'une variété européenne de l'anglais pourra renforcer les perspectives de formation de l'identité dans l'UE.


**Mots clés:** langue anglaise, Union européenne, politique linguistique, identité européenne