

**Conférence Internationale Permanente
d'Instituts Universitaires de Traducteurs et Interprètes**

**2012
CIUTI FORUM**

**Translators and Interpreters as Key Actors in Global
Networking**

United Nations Geneva, 26-27 January 2012

Rethinking Multilingualism in the European Union

Wolfgang Mackiewicz

Conseil européen pour les langues / European Language Council (CEL/ELC)

Monsieur le président,

Distinguished participants,

Meine Damen und Herren,

Cari colleghi e amici,

Before all else, I should like to say how pleased and honoured I am to have been invited to speak at this Forum. As many of you know, CIUTI was a founding member of the Conseil européen pour les langues / European Language Council – of the ELC, as we are commonly known. CIUTI was represented by its then president, Martin Forstner, on the now legendary 1994-95 SIGMA Scientific Committee on Languages, whose members benefited from the advice received from two Commission officials present here today – Pinuccia Contino and Brian Fox.

The ELC was founded in 1997 with support from the European Commission. Its founding members in general terms subscribed to the EU's language regime, and to the Commission's language policy. Just to remind you – it all started with the famous regulation No 1 passed by the Council of the European Economic Community on 15 April 1958, which gave equal status to the official state languages of Member States, making them official and working languages of the EEC – a regulation that is observed by the Parliament and less stringently by other institutions to this very day. This principle of linguistic diversity was later transferred to language education. The Commission's White Paper on Teaching and Learning, published in 1995 in the wake of the Maastricht treaty establishing EU citizenship, set the general objective of "Proficiency in three Community languages" – in at least two Community languages in addition to the mother tongue – the famous 1+>2 formula. Attainment of this objective was regarded as a precondition if EU citizens were to benefit from the occupational and personal opportunities open to them in the border-free Single Market, and special emphasis was placed on the learning of less widely used and taught languages.

Both the language regime established and practiced at European level, and the objective set by the White Paper were, of course, politically motivated. And they were, to a considerable extent, anchored in the notion of monolingual and monocultural Member States or regions within Member States, which, to some extent at least, included the idea that native speakers speak their language better than anyone else. Needless to say, that notion did not hold entirely true even in the mid-nineties, and none other than the heads of state and government revised the original 1+>2 formula in 2002 by calling for improving the mastery of basic skills, “in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age”. In other words, they turned the exclusive language policy of the White Paper into an inclusive policy.

In line with one of its main objectives - to design, launch and manage European projects relating to education, training and research intended to meet the cultural, social and professional needs of an integrated Europe - the ELC was eager to contribute to improving the training of professional translators and interpreters with a view to guaranteeing the functioning of the European institutions and of international organisations; it was also keen to create conditions designed to improve the teaching and learning of languages in all sectors of education. In this way, the ELC sought to support the political aims of the Union.

Of course, even in the mid-nineties, we were aware of linguistic needs that went beyond declared EU aims and policies of the time. One of the ten sub-projects of our first Thematic Network project, carried out from 1996 to 1999, was devoted to Translation and Interpreting; its final recommendations included course profiles for public service and business interpreting, featuring specialization modules for interpreting in legal settings, for medical and psychiatric interpreting and for social interpreting. Another sub-project was devoted to non-Community languages, that is to say, regional languages, migrant languages, and languages of the wider world.

Since the turn of the century, and especially in the past five years, the social landscape of Europe has changed radically as a result of the following and related developments –

- the worldwide process of globalisation,
- internationalization in many fields of human activity, including enterprise, higher education, and research,
- the intensification of European integration,
- the continuing revitalization of regions, including cross-border regions, at least partly in response to globalisation,
- increasing intra-European mobility and intra-European trade,
- large-scale migration into the Union, and
- major advances in communications technology.

These developments have transformed the linguistic and cultural fabric of European societies, as well as individual language use and language use in organizations, and individual language profiles.

Today, all EU Member States, in fact, all countries in Europe are multilingual and multicultural societies. Across Europe, several hundred languages are spoken and used: official EU languages, other official European languages, regional European languages, and non-European languages – referred to as migrant languages or

languages of the wider world, as the case may be. A significant number of people in Europe, including children and young people in formal education, only have a limited command of the language of the region or country where they reside. Moreover, roughly one quarter of all 15-year-olds living in the Union is practically illiterate. At the same time, a new generation is emerging of young multilingual people who have two or even three first languages, but are not necessarily fully literate in both or all of them. And while it is true that more languages are spoken in Europe today than ever before, it is equally true that more English is now spoken in Europe than at any time in the past.

Before I turn to the impact these developments have had, are having, and are likely to have on language mediation, and to new challenges for translation and interpreting, allow me to single out for mention a number of other new linguistic challenges.

- There is a disconnection between the right of EU citizens to live and work in any one of the Member States, and language provision in school education. Children should have the right and be able to achieve literacy in the first language or languages, and full competence in the language of education (if different), and they should have the right to continue the learning of other languages from an early age. These rights make sense from a social and economic point of view. Member States should regard it as their duty to make every effort to align the language provision in formal and non-formal education as far as possible to the diverse linguistic repertoires of their pupils and students. And here, I am not just thinking of the children of EU citizens; I am also thinking of the children of migrants.
- It is becoming increasingly common for children and young people to learn languages in informal and non-formal settings. Because of this, it is important to improve systems and mechanism designed to recognize language proficiency acquired outside formal educational settings.
- In this day and age, it is nearly impossible to predict where European residents of working age will find themselves in five years' time. Because of this, multilingual competences have to be seen in terms of dynamic repertoires, subject to continuous development – be it that a language which is part of a given individual repertoire has to be further developed in response to changing needs, be it that a new language needs to be added to the repertoire, be it that written and oral competence in one's parents' migrant language turns out to be desirable or even required for employability. And here, it is by no means necessary to strive for a high level of competence in all the languages and skills acquired.
- It stands to reason that technology will become ever more important for language learning and language use. To put it differently – familiarity with relevant technological tools, and ability to exploit technological tools for language learning and language use constitute yet another facet of present-day multilingual competence.

Allow me to add a footnote. I firmly believe that multilingual competence is important for all people living in the Union, and that more than ever before it is relevant to employability, competitiveness, social cohesion, citizenship, cultural awareness and personal development.

I shall now turn to translation and interpreting.

When it comes to translation, there can be no doubt that there has been a massive increase in demand – both at European and at other levels – and this not just in terms of sheer volume, but also with regard to the number of languages involved in a given project, so to speak. I currently co-ordinate a two-year EU network project for the promotion of language strategies for competitiveness and employability. Last year, we carried out a survey among businesses and business representative organisations in the EU Member States on companies' linguistic and language-related needs. Admittedly, the results of the survey cannot be regarded as representative, but I think it is interesting that 31 per cent of the respondents regarded translation services as useful, and an additional 18 per cent even as very useful. I do not think that the results would have been the same ten years ago.

As I say, language service companies are having to deal more and more with truly multilingual projects for the world market and are therefore keen to employ graduates both with multilingual skills and excellent project management skills, plus a good knowledge of language technologies.

At the recent EMT Conference, experts felt unable to predict what the translation industry would look like in five, let alone in ten years from now. Speaking personally, I came away with the following impression. Language technologies will definitely redefine the multilingual agenda, as any content will automatically be displayed and / or heard in whatever language you choose. This means that we shall still need multilingual experts to refine the end-product for certain more specialist or critical uses and to manage the multilingual content management systems. However I think there is going to be an increasing divide between different purposes of translation. For example, if the purpose is the straightforward transmission or reception of information, speed and cost may well take precedence over quality – in which case language technology and language technology tools may well carry the day.

Again, speaking personally, I think we may have to revise our training programmes to bring them into line with these developments. However, I think there is more to it. In preparation of my brief presentation, I have recently talked to colleagues from a number of higher education institutions running master programmes in Translation. They told me that there is a huge market for their graduates – not so much in the translation sector, but in the business sector in general. Needless to say, this should make us think.

Of course, there is a trend which seems to run opposite to the trend towards multilingualism in the translation profession. Trainers from a number of institutions tell me that there is a distinct demand for translation into English – even in a country where the slogan is “*nella bella lingua Italiana*”. Allow me to quote from an article in the Financial Times: “You need English to reach the top of many things today: medicine, banking, consultancy, academia.” And, of course, this is reflected in education, research, conferences etc. across Europe. Academic disciplines are becoming more and more internationalized, and, as a result, more and more publications are published in English. Ultimately, this means that researchers will have to be biliterate – publish their research findings in English, and talk to non-specialists in their countries in the regional or national language. The funny thing is that many doctoral students and postdocs do not have the necessary competence in

English – and because of this, more and more universities are setting up service units for the revision and even translation of PhD theses.

Before I move on to interpreting and to my concluding remarks, I should like to remind you that the fact that we now have students who have two or three first languages puts a question mark over the A, B, C regime. I think that we shall increasingly have to recruit students that are multilingual in the sense that they are highly competent in two to three languages. This is definitely what my University intends to do when it launches its Masters in Interpreting.

I fully appreciate that English – or Globish, as it is called more often than not – is a thorn in the eye of many advocates of multilingualism. Again, speaking personally, I have to say that you can't have it both ways. You cannot have internationalization and globalization, and then say that French or German is the most important language under the sky. Until a few years ago, all major conferences in Brussels had interpretation from and into English, French, and German. All this stopped two years ago – now everything is in English. For me, this is not a problem. It all depends on the context. In the conference room, everything is in English. In the corridor, we speak a large variety of languages.

Of course, this means that there is a decline in the demand for conference interpreting in Brussels and elsewhere. But as I told you two years ago, there is an urgent demand for interpreting – and translation, for that matter - in other settings. On 9 December, we had a ceremony and reception at Hogeschool-Universiteit Brussel to mark the publication of the report prepared by the ELC Special Interest Group on Translation and Interpreting for Public Services. The Foreword of the report had been signed by Commissioner Vassiliou, and at the ceremony I handed her the report with a personal dedication. What I am trying to say is this. Whereas in the old days, translation and interpreting were regarded as being immensely important for the functioning of the Union at EU level, we have now come to realize that they are equally important at local, regional, and national level. And whereas at EU level, we still tend to make a clear distinction between translation and interpreting, in other contexts this distinction is disappearing. Needless to say, this is another challenge for training institutions.

I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to CIUTI vice-president Maurizio Viezzi, who chaired the SIG on Translation and Interpreting for Public Services. Maybe, I should also tell you that the Council of Europe has expressed a special interest in the initiative, and that I hope that we shall have a project designed to raise awareness among Council of Europe member states of the importance of this initiative. Can I also say that I am immensely grateful to Commissioner Vassiliou and Directors-General Benedetti and Martikonis for their support.

May I then invite you to join me in applauding our Directors-General – and Maurizio, who unfortunately will only be able to join us later today.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION.