

English-only Europe? Challenging language policy

Robert Phillipson

London and New York: Routledge, 2003

1. What are the language policy challenges in Europe?

Languages play a central role in the way Europe is currently being integrated. How the European Union and its member states deal with multilingualism has serious implications for individuals, for states, and for international relations.

The languages of European nations are being changed by globalisation, the EU, and English. It is arguable that all continental European languages are on a fast track to second-class status.

The book presents the historical background of linguistic diversity in Europe, and explores how the advance of English is impacting in the economy, science, culture, education, and politics. It explains the policies for multilingualism (via translation and interpretation) in EU institutions. As the EU expands to take in new members, the challenge of coping with many languages multiplies. Despite a rhetoric of the equality of the official languages and working languages, currently twenty, French has always had a special status in EU institutions, one that English is taking over. Language rights are so politically sensitive that language policies tend to be left to 'market' forces.

Criteria for guiding the formulation of language policy and maintaining the rich diversity of languages in Europe are proposed. Forty-five recommendations are made, relating to infrastructure nationally and internationally, reform of the EU institutions, language learning, and research needs. Equality for the speakers of different languages is essential if the EU is to become politically and democratically accountable.

2. Why are languages so important? Language policy axioms

1. Languages are the storehouses of human experience.
2. Identification with a language is central to human culture.
3. European integration is being carried out by means of language.
4. Laws, agreements and negotiation depend on linguistic precision.
5. Many concepts mean something different in different cultures and languages.
6. Most people are better at formulating their thoughts in their mother tongue.
7. Native speakers have clear advantages over non-native speakers.
8. The idea that English is a neutral language is false.
9. Translation and interpretation are vital but can only be partially successful.
10. All forms of public discourse presuppose just and fair communication.
11. The idea that we need ONE language of European communication is false.
12. Effective multilingualism can counteract the EU's democratic deficit.
13. The 'knowledge society' needs to build on multilingual diversity.
14. Education systems inculcate preferred forms of written and spoken language.

15. Most 19th and 20th century states aimed at monolingualism.
16. Education, public and private affairs can operate well in more than one language.
17. Most people worldwide function in more than one language.
18. Some language rights are human rights.
19. Language rights are important because language correlates with power.
20. Globalisation and technology can serve to promote or eliminate languages.
21. Languages can serve to unite or divide people.
22. The world's diverse languages and cultures are intrinsically valuable.
23. Language use and language attitudes are deeply personal.
24. Esperantists are convinced that Esperanto could serve to strengthen all languages.

3. How does Phillipson's book address the issues?

The book has six chapters:

1. The risks of *laissez faire* language policies
2. European languages: families, nations, empires, states
3. Global trends impacting on European language policy
4. Languages in EU institutions
5. Towards equitable communication
6. Recommendations for action on language policies.

Each chapter is introduced by some provocative short quotations that raise key issues. The final section of the book contains some of the key official documents, footnotes with a lot of bibliographic information, and an index.

4. Summary, chapter by chapter

1. *The risks of laissez faire language policies.* The wide-ranging introduction asks whether the increased use of English is serving to unite or divide Europe. It cites examples of discrimination, and steps that several European governments have taken to strengthen their languages. It refers to Eurobarometer data on language proficiency in the mother tongue and foreign languages, reports on ongoing measures to strengthen language learning, and demonstrates what the challenges and competing pressures are. It explains and exemplifies the concepts language policy and language planning, with examples from many parts of the world. It concludes with examples of when language policy issues are reported in newspapers. Typically this occurs when there is a political crisis of some sort, because a government senses that their language is being discriminated against. Unfortunately journalistic coverage of the principles underlying EU language policies is often inaccurate. The chapter makes a strong case for more proactive, explicit language policies.
2. *European languages: families, nations, empires, states.* The myth of the tower of Babel is analysed. The concept 'bread' is explored so as to show how languages differ in both the word forms used and meanings. 'Europe' as a geographical and political concept is traced back to ancestral Indo-European, Finno-Ugric and other languages. The shared heritage of Christianity, Latin and Greek are presented,

leading to analysis of ways in which English has both similarities and differences with the use of Latin earlier. Nationalism has a key language dimension to it, often connected to an ideology of linguistic superiority, an idea often associated with French. But privileging one language, such as Serbocroat in ex-Yugoslavia, does not guarantee political harmony, and there are risks in the way the use of English is expanding. Linguistic identity is a powerful force. Supranational linguistic identities are beginning to take shape. When the EU was founded, a key motive for integrating the economies of Europe was to prevent a recurrence of war. The equality of the languages of the member states, initially Dutch, French, German and Italian, was established. This means that all EU legislation is promulgated with equal force in all official languages. Whether such texts actually mean the same in different cultures is more debatable, because of different world views in each country with its own legal system and cultural traditions. Thus the 'rule of law' forms part of our shared European cultural experience, but how the term is interpreted depends on several contextual factors.

3. *Global trends impacting on European language policy.* Multilingualism is becoming more widespread, partly as a result of more continental Europeans using English as a foreign language actively. The factors which have contributed to an increased use of English, and to inertia in formulating language policy, are analysed in a table under 15 headings, ten of which are structural and five ideological or attitudinal. Some are supply factors (investment by Anglo-Americans), some reflect demand (investment in learning English in schools). Language policy experience in Canada, Australia and South Africa is drawn on, so as to show that the management of multilingualism benefits when the goals of language policy are made explicit. The chapter has four sub-sections, on commerce, on science, on culture, and on education, with rich exemplification of ongoing processes for each of them, and exploration of what is involved when territory traditionally occupied by national languages (Finnish, German and Swedish are exemplified) is being taken over by English. Key EU initiatives to strengthen language learning, particular in general education, are reported on. These policy measures are at the interface between the elaboration of recommendations agreed on at the supranational level and national implementation goals and strategies.
4. *Languages in EU institutions.* This chapter goes through in considerable factual detail how the language services of EU institutions are organized, including the question of costs. It explains the various ways that interpretation is organized, and explores the concepts official language and working language. It quotes Regulation 1, the 'Language Charter' of the EU. It cites some experimental studies on the use of languages and attitudes to them. It analyses many of the problems that result in inefficiency, explains how English performs many of the functions that were carried out in French earlier, and considers whether alternatives to the present hierarchy of languages could be envisaged. The world's most complex system of multilingual translation and interpretation has been built up over the past half-century, with these services at the cutting edge of multilingual language policy and developments in language technology. However, there are complaints about inadequacies in the present system, which is under

pressure to make economies. It is important to distinguish between the needs of those working for the EU, parliamentarians, the general public, and legislation. The system has never been subjected to an overall review.

5. *Towards equitable communication.* As a basis for more proactive language policy, this chapter summarizes the research evidence and the experience of several countries. It identifies the goals that language policy serves, and many of the relevant variables that impact on language policy. It draws parallels between economics and language, and relates these to investment in language learning, and the role of the British English teaching industry. It explains which language rights can be considered linguistic human rights, drawing on the work of the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the UN in promoting minority language rights. It sums up a number of cases decided in the European Court of Justice on language issues. These have clarified when complete multilingualism may not be required in the running of an EU institution, and the requirement by member states that products should be described in a particular language. Many of the language policy dimensions are brought together in two competing ways of conceptualizing the modern world, a Diffusion of English paradigm and an Ecology of Language paradigm. One aspect of this deals with whether English now functions as a 'lingua franca' and is no longer dependent on native speaker norms. Analysis of a BBC interview shows how native- and non-native speaker communication can be asymmetrical and basically unfair. One way of introducing more justice in international affairs is by using a non-national language. Esperanto is a living language for those worldwide who have chosen to learn and use it, and could contribute to the EU achieving the multilingual goals that it espouses, and to strengthening equality between speakers of different languages - and save money.
6. *Recommendations for action on language policies.* The final chapter stresses that EU language policy must be based on sociolinguistic realities, matters of cost and principle, practicability and efficiency, and political will. It sketches out worst-case and best-case scenarios, and pleads for language issues to be taken much more seriously by member states and the Union at a time of historic change. Forty-five specific recommendations are made for achieving this, grouped under four headings: National and supranational policy infrastructure, EU institutions, Language teaching and learning, and Research. These concrete proposals bring together much of the evidence of the book into a coherent plan for how language policy can be taken forward in an informed way. There are major national and global interests at stake. Leadership on language policy is needed. Active language policies can avert an American-English only Europe.

5. These endorsements appear on the cover of the book

Globalization and EU enlargement mean that languages from the whole of Europe are coming into even closer contact. This perceptive book makes a sweeping Grand Tour of the political, cultural and economic issues that we all consequently face, and I hope that those who frame language policy will be influenced by it.

Neil Kinnock, Vice-President of the European Commission

An important and timely book, containing a rich and wide-ranging set of ideas about the ‘on the ground’ reality of language policy in Europe. The book is very engaging, and will appeal to a wide range of readers.

Joseph Lo Bianco, Director, Language Australia: The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia

Absolutely essential reading if we are to prevent a linguistic catastrophe in a rapidly anglicizing Europe.

Dafydd ap Fergus, Secretary General of the European Esperanto Union

6. About the author

Robert Phillipson is a Professor at the Faculty of Languages, Communication and Cultural Studies, Copenhagen Business School. His publications include *Rights to language: Equity, power and education* (2000), *Linguistic human rights: Overcoming linguistic discrimination* (1994) and *Linguistic imperialism* (1992). For CV and publications, see <<http://www.cbs.dk/staff/phillipson>>.

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