Promoting linguistic diversity
Reflections on the language policy of European language policy conferences

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Abstract
To face up to the omnipresence of 'Anglo-American' (as defined in footnote 2), conferences on language policy today address the issue of promoting linguistic diversity. This especially applies to contemporary Europe. Nevertheless, these conferences, which can be regarded as a kind of laboratories or academic microcosm, do not subscribe to clear language policies. Consequently, the predominant language is here, as elsewhere, the Anglo-American. This article outlines the deep division between the postulate of linguistic diversity and reality, and is a call for soul-searching.

> "[…] the paper itself expresses the paradox which it treats:
> it had to be written in English."
> Hartmut Haberland (1989:937)

The official section of the international conference "The Consequences of Mobility: Linguistic and Sociocultural Contact Zones" was rewarding in many respects, but the conference itself cannot be seen as a linguistic contact zone. On the website of the conference, the organizers reflect on the most obvious linguistic consequence of mobility: "The main working language of the conference will be English. We acknowledge the paradox in conducting the conference in a specific language, in contrast to the conference focus on issues of multilingualism, language contact and power."[1]

1. From theory …

One of the key issues of the language policy discourse on a contemporary European and international level is how to handle the problem of the omnipresence of English, or rather

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[1] Website of the conference "The Consequences of Mobility: Linguistic and Sociocultural Contact Zones", Roskilde University, May 23 – 24, 2003.

'Anglo-American'[2], which appears to be gaining in strength as the inevitable European and international *lingua franca*. Even Denmark, which in contrast to countries like France and Iceland, is known for a more implicit language policy, today submits proposals for language policy action programmes.[3]

In the discourse, Anglo-American is increasingly characterized as the language of power on the international linguistic market. On the other hand, languages such as German, French or Swedish, are designated as powerless languages which need to be strengthened and protected.

In recent years, European language policies have led to many recommendations and declarations concerning the question how to face up to the dominance of Anglo-American. The basic statements of this European language policy discourse more or less correspond. They can be exemplified by the "Würzburg Declaration on European Language Policy", which emerged of the international conference "European Language Policy" in Würzburg (2002).[4]

The first item of the declaration is a call for maintenance of the cultural and linguistic diversity as a basis for peace and economic prosperity in the European Union in order to guarantee its future. With this end in view, the third item recommends an intensification of language teaching programmes in the individual European education systems. The second item confronts the omnipresence of Anglo-American: "An international *lingua franca* such as English is expected to foster transnational communication but it should not replace linguistic diversity as a tertiary language."

This language policy discourse is the result of a pan-European fear of the linguistic degradation of the countries' own languages, and ultimately their cultural identities. This struggle is not merely linguistic and cultural, but also scientific, economic and political.[5] Consequently, resolving the language conflict is crucial for the success of the European project. This raises the question of the adequacy and practicability of the requirements. The sceptic would ask if it is actually possible to live up to the European linguistic diversity in practice.

2. … to practice

This is emphasised when conferences on language policy themselves fail to adopt a diverse language policy but use Anglo-American as their working language, thus effectively making Anglo-American the language of power here as well. This is also the case, when the criteria which underlie the choice of working languages are not substantiated or are substantiated, without being justified.

The sociolinguistic/sociocultural conference "The Consequences of Mobility: Linguistic and Sociocultural Contact Zones" considers its explicit and implicit language policy in practice. On the other hand, language policy conferences are held which claim to have a consciously

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[2] In the German research, it is proposed to use the term 'Anglo-American', to underline that (British and American) English owes its status as international *lingua franca* primarily to extralinguistic reasons, that is to the growing dominance of US-American culture, science, economy and politics. Thus, it seems to be appropriate to characterize the 'Anglicism debate' as 'Anglo-American debate'.
[3] See *Sprog på spil – et udspil til en dansk sprogpolitik* (2003).
[4] The "International Conference on European Language Policy" took place at the European Centre of Excellence at the University of Würzburg, Germany, June 6 – 8, 2002. A conference publication will be published.
[5] See Phillipson (2003:70-100) for an analysis of how Anglo-American affects culture, education, science and economy.

promoting attitude towards European multilingualism, while failing to realize that these theoretical recommendations are not met inside their own microcosm.

To give an example, this paradox – tabooed in the discourse – characterized the conference "European standard languages and multilingual Europe" in Mannheim (2000). Here, the lectures and discussions were interpreted simultaneously, but - as a footnote in the preface to the publication points out – a choice was made: "[…] due to budget limitations, all the 'represented' languages could not be included. Only German, English, French, Italian, and Spanish could be considered." (Stickel 2002:12) Although Englishmen were not represented at the conference, but there were seven German participants, three Dutch, two Danes, two Frenchmen and two Italians, one Swede and one Spaniard. How does one justify the choice of three Romance languages, instead of Dutch or one of the Scandinavian languages?

The conference publication reveals a more conscious language policy. The participants are asked to hand in a parallel text in their native language. Inge Lise Pedersen, a Danish participant, did not comply with this request and explains her decision in her contribution: "It was not possible to speak Danish or the other "small" languages at the meeting in Mannheim [...]. Therefore, you would get a false impression if you find papers in Danish (or Swedish, Finnish, Dutch and Greek) in the publication. I do not write this to blame the organizers that it was not possible to speak Danish at the meeting (there were no practical reasons for this, and if we want to co-operate, we must be pragmatic), but to point out that in the spite of all talk of linguistic multiplicity, equality between the languages represented in Mannheim was out of question." (Pedersen 2002:81f)

This rhetoric of equality also characterizes – as Phillipson (2003) points out – the discussions about the official languages and working languages in the EU. The following stance of the "Würzburg Declaration on European Language Policy" reveals that, at the end of the day, the countries primarily take an interest in their own language (that is their own culture, education, science and economy): "To meet the aim of European plurilingualism the European Union should extend the number of its working languages. In this case German must be acknowledged as one of the working languages within the institutions of the European Parliament."

The incoherent language policy at the Würzburg conference demonstrates that this kind of (linguistic) nationalism is rejected in practice: while the Danes and Finns conform to the declaration and use German as their working language, not only all the British, but also the French and even many Germans gave their presentations in Anglo-American.

The question is: which European languages should function as working languages? How do we justify this special status? The distinction between 'small' and 'big' languages – which Pedersen has referred to – is problematic, mainly because it contradicts the democratic principle of minority protection. Reality focuses on the question of relevance overlooked by ideology: is it relevant that Greeks give their contributions in Greek at an international conference? Pedersen stresses that a pragmatic approach is necessary. However, languages do not primarily follow pragmatic principles. Is it, in fact, possible to make a choice that will satisfy?

The conferences have the intention to live up to linguistic diversity in Europe: in their welcome[6] and in their choice of topics. However, the implementation of multilingualism is problematic, basically for economic reasons: economy of time (at the conference) and economy of space (in

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[6] Stickel (2002:15), for example, welcomes the participants in their own language.

the conference publication). The financial situation requires a choice, yet a legitimate choice is apparently not feasible. Consequently, the predominant or obvious language is – also at the language policy conferences – the language of power.

3. Final remarks

While the conferences at their text level oppose social practice and call for social change, conference practice reproduces the social practice of contemporary Europe.[7] The microcosm is subjected to the same market forces as the macrocosm: the language policy conferences are not exclusively held in Danish, German or Esperanto, because they attract a smaller audience than those held in Anglo-American.

The divide between theory and practice seems deep. When conferences are held on issues of linguistic diversity, that themselves only represent a minority of European languages and which are unable to subscribe to a clear language policy in their own microcosm, it makes one wonder just how the EU is to meet the challenge of multilingualism.[8] The practice of these conferences raises the question, whether a change in social practice is possible, i.e. if the idea of European linguistic diversity is an illusion?

A little soul-searching is called for, if one is genuinely seeking to promote and facilitate the ecology of languages in Europe and stem the tide of Anglo-American self-assurance and predominance.

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[7] The terminology is based on Fairclough's (1992:73) three-dimensional conception of discourse.

[8] De Cillia, Krumm and Wodak (2003:7) point out the tabooed paradox of the European Language Policy: "Es existiert jedoch ein deutlicher Widerspruch zwischen diesen Erklärungen und der sprachenpolitischen Praxis. [...] Die Widersprüchlichkeit europäischer Sprachenpolitik ist im öffentlichen Diskurs allerdings tabuisiert."