

## ZOOMING INTO THE LANGUAGE OF EU DOCUMENTS

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**Abstract:** Translation is a process which has been in a continuous evolution and change of paradigm ever since the *Tower of Babel* and up to *Google translate* means. It has made its steps forward in accordance with the evolution of society and culture. Nowadays, European institutions are producing multiple documents: legislation, political speeches, declarations, directives, administration forms. This paper is zooming into the progress of translation and its present state in European documents texts, how challenging or more trouble-free than other types of translation it is and the difficulties encountered by the translator in the process of translating from the source language into the target language.

**Keywords:** discourse, translation process, EU language, interdisciplinary

### 1. Introduction

The flow of information from the Europe of institutions to the Europe of citizens is now basically made through *English as a second language* as a common means of communication of the political discourses and official/working documents. The European Parliament has consistently presented itself as a bastion of integral multilingualism, an agora of transnational politics. For Kraus (2005:14) the results of the study from 2000 of the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission which issued, for the first time, a special *Eurobarometer Report on 'Europeans and Languages'* are very important. The conclusions showed that young people speaking different European languages use English as virtually the 'natural' medium of dialogue; furthermore, in several European countries English is by far the most frequently required language on the European labour market. According to this study, English was the most frequently spoken first foreign language with a share of 32.6%, followed by French with 9.5%. Kraus remarks that "The strongholds of English knowledge are the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands; French is comparably strong as a second language mainly in Luxemburg, Belgium, Italy and Portugal, knowledge of English being not uniformly distributed throughout the European continent. In the Scandinavian countries, the German speaking area and the Netherlands, competence in English as a foreign language is on average higher than in other parts of the EU." (<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/49733/1/509150772.pdf> )

But the desire to acquire a foreign language, in general, and English, in particular, went along with an almost equally powerful impulse of the Europeans to defend their own native language considering the next round of expansion. The view that the increase in the number of EU member states will lead to the introduction of a common language is not shared by a majority of respondents and the Brexit context has complicated even more the situation.

European English as a regional variant of global English became a generalized form of *Eurospeak*, a lingua franca of the European institutions, having a comfortable monopoly position. Admittedly, the process of communication within the Union has such a high practical and symbolic profile because it has an essential contribution to the progressive constitution of a political community. Emerging after the social-political centralization of the EU states, the EU language has the role of a suprastate transmitter and a national-institutional receiver through vertical communication. The main criticism addressed to this Eurospeak is that it is confined to the political-administrative use, lacking in figurative shades, able to shape EU documents and legal acts as a new *wooden language* ( Jianu 2016:155).

## 2. Framing discourse in an interdisciplinary way

We can trace back discourse in the ancient times of Aristotle, who made a connection between man's political nature and the power of speech (Greek *logos*); the text seems to imply that the 'purpose' of the human power of speech is to do with man's political nature. Aristotle characterizes speech as "serving to indicate what is useful and what is harmful, and so also what is just and what is unjust" ( Fairclough, 2012:19).

According to Fischer (2003), discourse is more than just a discussion or talking:

"The meanings of the words used and the statements employed in a discourse depend on the social context in which they are uttered, including the positions or arguments against which they are advanced. At the level of everyday interaction, discourses represent specific systems of power and the social practices that produce and reproduce them." Fischer (2003: 73)

Fairclough (1992, 2003) claims that *discourse* is basically the social use of language in social contexts. EU discourse can be seen as a political-social structure with practices and policies determined by different social events, i.e., *discourse as social practice* - within a much broader social space, where one may essentially need social and pragmatic knowledge in order to operate effectively. EU English, as the language of the main European institutions, can also be examined in relation to *discourse as text* - operating essentially within a textual space (language structure and its functions/ intertextuality) and *discourse as genre* - an analysis beyond the textual product to incorporate context in a broader sense, the way text is constructed, but also for the way it is often interpreted, used and exploited in specific institutional or more narrowly professional contexts to achieve specific disciplinary goals.

The popularity of *discourse* in social research owes a lot in particular to Foucault. When analysing the relationship of discourse to power, Foucault et al. (2016) focus on the discursive construction of social subjects and on knowledge and the functioning of discourse in social change, analysing the way discursive practices are constitutive of knowledge transformed into discursive areas such as science, law or politics. The authors equally endorse that discourse actively constructs society along its various dimensions, which include the social subjects, social relationships, the objects of knowledge, forms of self and perceptual frameworks.

A discourse is a reflection of social practices with individual elements such like nouns and sentences (elements of linguistic structures) which generate structures such as genres and styles. The concepts of *discourse* and *genre* in particular are used in a variety of disciplines and theories (Dejica 2004, Dejica 2011), *genre* referring to ways of acting and *discourse* to ways of representing and the styles to the ways of being. Under the

circumstances, words become concepts through the condensation of a wide range of social and political meanings. According to Fairclough (2003: 24), genres play a significant role “in sustaining the institutional structure of contemporary society — structural relations between local government, business, universities, the media, etc.”

Mainstream literature points out to the idea that English in EU discourse has more and more defined itself as an identity shaped by the social, cultural and economic context of EU, the EU discourse becoming a *hyper genre* or a *super genre* (notably Bhatia, 2014) and resulting in the *Europeanisation* of official documents (global structures, textual formats, lexical and syntactic influences, etc.). Definitely, the EU context, globalisation, cultural awareness and technological change have significantly influenced English in creating a specialised *language* pertaining mainly to the administrative and legal fields.

Howarth and Torfing (2005: 59) observe that the subject of analysis cannot be the language of a sovereign Euro-state, by just simply making the step from the state to the EU.” Instead, we have to operate in a perspectival mode, understanding the *different* ways that meaningful worlds are constructed which all include ‘Europe’ but in different forms. The internal dynamics of each of these narrative struggles, as well as their mutual relations, have to be grasped to understand the stability and fragility of the complex constellation called Europe.”

Even discourse analysis has, over the past two decades, become interested in understanding EU politics and “there are at least five discursive analytical approaches to the study of EU politics; the Copenhagen school, the governance school, critical discourse analysis (CDA), frame analysis and discursive institutionalism (DI). Although feeding on each other, the approaches differ in their analytical assumptions and preferred units of research” (Lyngard:2019:).

### 3. EU English identity and complexity

#### 3.1. EU English vocabulary

Over the years English has expanded its vocabulary either through exposure to other cultures (loans) or through word formation (coinages). Its progress reflects it being in the position of language of those in power. Wodak (2001:11) states that “Language provides a finely articulated means for differences in power in social hierarchical structures. Very few linguistic forms have not at some stage been pressed into the service of the expression of power by a process of syntactic or textual metaphor.”

As English has increasingly come into worldwide use, so have the changes in its vocabulary. English as the main working language of the EU has been subject to change; among the most notable features at the morpho-syntactic and lexical level, we list:

- creation of new terms and phrases: *climate neutrality, green deal, intellectual outputs, multiplier events, social inclusion, strategic partnership, transition scheme, transnational project meetings, etc.*
- the coexistence between the full names and elliptical forms, or abbreviations: *The Council of the European Union – the Council, The European Commission – the Commission, The European Community – the Community, The Treaty establishing the European Economic Community – The Treaty of Rome - The EEC Treaty – the Treaty, The European Union – EU, etc.* ( [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/styleguide\\_english\\_dgt\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/styleguide_english_dgt_en.pdf) )

- use of phrases that are close to nonsense: *positive risks, qualitative impact, etc.*
- derivatives using the prefix *euro-*: Eurocentric, *Euro-lections, Euroscepticism, Eurospeak, etc.*
- use of complex meaning legal terms - for instance, *acquis*: "the body of common rights and obligations that are binding on all EU countries, as EU Members. It is constantly evolving and comprises: the content, principles and political objectives of the Treaties; legislation adopted in application of the treaties and the case law of the Court of Justice of the EU; declarations and resolutions adopted by the EU; measures relating to the common foreign and security policy; measures relating to justice and home affairs; international agreements concluded by the EU and those concluded by the EU countries between themselves in the field of the EU's activities" (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/acquis.html>).
- non-discriminating language – for instance,
  - *Mother and Father* are replaced by *Parent 1* and *Parent 2*;
  - reference to *transgender people/persons* instead of *transgenders*;
- use of euphemistic structures for sensitive issues: *active ageing / lifelong learning*
- *retirement* instead of *retirement ageing population* instead of *old population*, use of *older people / older persons* or *the elderly* rather than *old people / old persons*, to avoid suggesting that being old is an undesirable state; *employment policies* replacing *unemployment*; *special needs* instead of *disability*, etc.;
- idiomatic structures such as *big data analysis, forward-looking fields, meaningful participation, sustainable growth*,
- contexting the use of double plurals (collocation): *forum - forums* (generic us), *fora* only in relation to ancient Rome; *index - indexes* (books), *indices* (in science, economics); *medium - mediums* (life sciences, art), *media* (press, communications, IT); *memorandum - memorandums, memoranda* (interchangeable), *maximum - maxima* (in mathematics, science), *maximums* (in other contexts), etc.

### 3.2. EU English morphology and syntax

Morphology and syntax are two areas in which we can observe a formalization and standardization of EU English by:

- an abundance of nominal abstracts derived from neologisms: *digitalization, implementation, formation, creation, etc.*;
- use of nouns converted from phrasal verbs - these are often hyphenated or written as single units: *handout, comeback, turnover, follow-up, run-up, etc.*;
- use of new verbs converted from nouns/adjectives: *to combat, to guard, to landscape, etc.*;
- rich use of use of passives (too numerous to exemplify across the EU texts and discourse);
- intensive use of modal verbs expression official obligation / authority (*shall, should*) and permission (*may*);
- complex syntax with adversative and copulative, cumulative and disjunctive clause:

*This means backing productive investments in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, creation of new firms, research and innovation, environmental rehabilitation, clean energy, up- and reskilling of workers, job-search assistance and active inclusion of job seekers programmes, as well as the transformation of existing carbon-intensive installations when these investments lead to substantial emission cuts and job protection.*

([https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/finance-and-green-deal/just-transition-mechanism/just-transition-funding-sources\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/finance-and-green-deal/just-transition-mechanism/just-transition-funding-sources_en))

### 3.3. Spelling rules

Writing in clear language is of utmost importance in the EU documents and at the same time can be difficult, since much of the subject matter is complex and more and more is written in English by (and for) non-native speakers, or by native speakers who are beginning to lose touch with their language after years of working in a multilingual environment. This is why it is important to be a regulated, a clear, simple and accessible language. As a general rule, British English is preferred, while very colloquial British usage should also be avoided. European Commission has recently updated its English style guide, a handbook for authors and translators in European institutions ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/styleguide\\_english\\_dgt\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/styleguide_english_dgt_en.pdf)).

The official translation documents transmit and keep these rules among others:

- avoid double consonants and vowels hyphens are often used to avoid juxtaposing two consonants or two vowels: *co-education, part-time, re-entry, re-examine*;
- prefixes before proper names are hyphenated: *mid-Atlantic, pan-European, pro-American, trans-European*, etc.
- surnames are not normally uppercased in running text (*thus Ms Brown* not *Ms BROWN*), unless the aim is to highlight the names (e.g., in minutes). At the end of EU legislation, the surname of the signatory appears in upper case.
- acronyms with up to five letters are always uppercased: *COST, COVID-19, ECHO, EFTA, NASA, NATO, SHAPE, TRIPS*, etc., but acronyms with six letters or more should normally be written with an initial capital followed by lower case: *Benelux*, etc.

### 4. Conclusions

EU English is obviously different from 'real English' regarded as a sub-language, a reflection of the fact that the European Union as a unique body has had to invent a terminology to fully describe its activity. In a Europe that encouraged multilingualism, there permanent staff of around 1,750 linguists and 600 support staff, the European Commission has one of the largest translation services in the world, a pool of 3,000 freelance interpreters and about 250 support staff; IATE, short name for *Inter-Active Terminology for Europe* (<https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/iate?locale=en>) which is an interinstitutional data base available not only for the Commission staff and EU institutions, but also for the wide public; IT combines terminological data from all institutions and EU organisms, handling approximately 8.7 million terms and 500,000 abbreviations. As far as automatic translation is concerned, the European Commission has utilized MT since 1976; the first system offered 18 pairs of operational languages

and could produce 2,000 pages of raw translation per hour. In 2013, the Commission launched a new system MT@EC, increasing efficiency and productivity(<https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-official-language-of-the-EU-European-Union-Euro>).

Apart from being the main working language in EU institutions, English is also the preferred language in unofficial situations, outside the meeting rooms, on the corridors of EU institutions and not singular are the voices requiring English as the main official language in EU which would reduce not only translation costs, but make communication easier.

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