

## **Translation at the European Union and English as a Lingua Franca: Can erasing language hierarchy foster multilingualism?**

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### ABSTRACT

The tension between unity vs. multiplicity seems to be at the heart of the European Union (EU). In terms of language, whereas the EU funds numerous projects to foster multilingualism, it is becoming an increasingly monolingual institution because of the ad hoc use of English as a lingua franca. Furthermore, the issue of the EU's translation medium and its alleged transparency, neutrality and universality plays a pivotal role in this debate. Even though translating and interpreting are some of the key activities carried out by EU institutions, very little is said about its mechanisms, as there is no real distinction between originals and translations. Does this strategy really erase linguistic hierarchy or reinforce it by pushing it out of the debate? The aim of this paper is to explore this main question and propose various ways out of the dilemma.

KEYWORDS: English as a lingua franca, European Union, multilingualism, translation

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

The tension between unity versus multiplicity has been at the heart of the European Union (EU) from its onset, be it economically, culturally, politically or linguistically. Just how much unity is necessary to keep the Union together, and just how much multiplicity is required in order for the Union not to impinge on each Member State's sovereignty?

In terms of language, the EU *does* fund numerous projects to foster multilingualism – various language teaching programmes (such as “Early Language Learning”), exchange programmes for teaching professionals and undergraduate and graduate students (such as “Erasmus”), as well as different language and translation contests (such as “Juvenes Translatores”). At the

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on reflections first published in Leal (2012, 2013 and 2014).

same time, however, it could be argued that the EU is becoming an increasingly monolingual institution because of the ad hoc use of English as a lingua franca. In this sense, the EU appears to be torn between two contradictory notions of language. On the one hand, it seems to perceive language as a crucial element of one's identity, a view akin to Johann Gottfried Herder's or Wilhelm von Humboldt's definitions of language, whereas on the other hand, language is viewed as predominantly instrumental, in line with John Locke's perspective (Leal 2013:64-65).

At the heart of this linguistic tension between unity and multiplicity lies the issue of the EU's translation medium and its alleged transparency, neutrality and universality. Translating and interpreting are some of the key activities carried out by EU institutions. So much so that the Directorate-General for Translation counts on 2,500 staff, while the Directorate-General for Interpretation employs about 4,000 interpreters and freelance interpreters, making the EU's translating and interpreting medium one of the largest in the world (EU DG-Translation n.d.; EU DG-Interpretation n.d.). Yet the EU communicates very little about its translating and interpreting mechanisms and statistics to the outside world. Texts are claimed to be originally produced in all working (and also official) languages, so there is no official distinction between originals and translations<sup>2</sup>.

Does this strategy really erase linguistic hierarchy or reinforce it by pushing it completely out of the debate? In other words, by not putting translation in the spotlight and revealing its mechanisms, by taking translation for granted, has linguistic hierarchy quietly been maintained and strengthened in the EU? Additionally, does this effacement of the boundaries between source and target texts bear anything in common with the contemporary debate surrounding the dichotomy translation-original? The aim of this paper is to explore these questions and propose ways out of the dilemma.

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, a quick look at, for instance, the EU official documents available in English at [http://europa.eu/publications/official-documents/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/publications/official-documents/index_en.htm) (last accessed May 2015) reveals that no text is marked as translation or original, and neither are the ones listed in all the other languages. Therefore, at first glance all documents are originals as readers are given no indication as to which language worked as the source language for all 24 versions of the same document.

## **1. The EU's language policy: multilingualism or monolingualism?**

### *1.1 EU languages: the need for multilingualism*

As of 2015, the European Union has 28 member countries and 24 official languages, namely Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish and Swedish (Wagner, Bech and Martínez 2012:2; EU DG-Translation n.d.). According to Emma Wagner, Svend Bech and Jesús Martínez (2012:1), Articles 3 and 4 of the Treaty on European Union stipulate that “[the Union] shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe’s cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced” and “the Union shall respect the equality of Member States before the treaties as well as their national identities”, respectively. So for Wagner, Bech and Martínez these articles make the EU’s duty to maintain and foster multilingualism evident.

In addition to these articles, there are further legal aspects that have to be taken into account. Indeed, three different articles of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (15, 20 and 24) determine that all citizens of all EU Member States have the right to be informed and to interact with all EU’s instances in their own language (Wagner, Bech and Martínez 2012:4). So for these reasons, the EU invests a lot of effort and resources in translating and interpreting, as the staff numbers involved in translating and interpreting, as well as the examples of initiatives that foster multilingualism mentioned in the Introduction, illustrate.

More recently (October 2010), Directive 2010/64/EU of the European Parliament on “the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings” represented a further step towards increasing language rights and multilingualism (Official Journal of the European Union 2010:1). Indeed, according to paragraph 14 of the directive,

The right to interpretation and translation for those who do not speak or understand the language of the proceedings is enshrined in Article 6 of the ECHR, as interpreted in the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights. This Directive facilitates the application of that right in practice. To that end, the aim of this Directive is to ensure the right of suspected or accused persons to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings with a view to ensuring their right to a fair trial (Official Journal of the European Union 2010:2).

This particular directive is yet another indication of how the EU perceives language diversity, legal equality amongst languages and the right to speak one's native language as paramount aspects of their own institutional structure and procedures.

Additionally, it is important to take into account that there is no formal or legal distinction between "official" and "working" languages, since all 24 languages officially enjoy the same status within the EU. However, only three of them are generally and actively used as "procedural languages", namely English, German and French. English tends nevertheless to be the language of choice (EU Multilingualism n.d.; Leal 2012:49 and 2013:63-64). Why is it the language of choice and what are the consequences of its use as far as multilingualism is concerned? The next section will shed light on these questions.

### *1.2 English as a lingua franca in the EU: the trend towards monolingualism*

Although the EU is recognised as being institutionally multilingual, as pointed out above, it is interesting to note that its very portal for multilingualism, for example, has the vast majority of its texts solely in English, with only a few available in German and French as well. And even though all 24 languages are mentioned in this multilingualism portal, one can hardly find any texts whatsoever in languages other than English, German and French<sup>3</sup>. In fact, the visible lack of information in the official languages is explained in the same portal:

Due to time and budgetary constraints, relatively few working documents are translated into all languages. The European Commission<sup>4</sup> employs English, French and German in general as procedural languages, whereas the European Parliament provides translation into different languages according to the needs of its Members (EU-Multilingualism n.d.; Leal 2013:64).

As this example illustrates, there seems to be a contradiction between the EU's defence of multilingualism, on the one hand, and its actual language use, on the other. For this reason,

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<sup>3</sup> Because the EU does not keep translation statistics and because no official distinction is made between originals and translations, the exact number or percentage of texts that get to be translated is unknown. This issue will be addressed at length in 2 below.

<sup>4</sup> A thorough investigation of the translation practices of the European Commission in comparison to those of the European Parliament would transcend the scope of this paper. However, according to different theorists who have carried out this investigation – such as Peter Ives, for instance – there seems to be little difference between the two, particularly as regards their underlying notion of language (Ives 2004:26-27). In addition to that, it is important to bear in mind that the official language policies of the EU remain the same throughout its institutional set-up (which comprises not only the Parliament and the Commission, but also another 14 institutions and bodies).

countless social scientists and language experts now speak of “*de jure* multilingualism” and “*de facto* monolingualism” or “*de facto* spread of English” in the EU (Ives 2004:26-28; Frost 2004:50-51; Kraus 2011:30). Indeed, for Peter Kraus, the EU’s efforts to foster multilingualism are “all but ritualistic” and merely “pay lip service” to the essential role that language diversity plays in sustaining diversity (Kraus 2011:31). He also argues that the lack both of public debate and of concrete language policies that regulate multilingualism make it evident that this issue is “constrained to symbolic politics” (Kraus 2011:31).

On a similar note, Peter Ives admits that “[a]s a political theorist, I am still concerned by the gap between the theoretical interest in language and empirical questions concerning the politics of language and language policy” (Ives 2004:24). He very rightly points out that no measures have been taken to introduce English as the main second language of the EU or as a lingua franca, and that its use appears to be “driven by a sense of inevitability or pragmatic concern over the cost of multilingualism”, that it is the result not of “some conscious public debate” but is simply a “default” choice (Ives 2004:43).

So it is in this sense that there appears to be a conflict in the EU between *de jure* multilingualism and multiplicity, on the one hand, and *de facto* monolingualism and unity, on the other. Let us look into the nature and the theoretical implications of this conflict in the following section, before we focus on the EU’s translation medium.

### *1.3 Monolingualism and multilingualism: theoretical implications*

One could say that the EU’s predominant concept of language is an instrumental one, i.e. English is used in practice in most cases – along with German and French in a few cases – for pragmatic reasons, so that communication can take place in an easy and efficient fashion. This instrumentalist notion of language goes hand in hand with John Locke’s view, for whom “language is a vehicle to transmit meaning, emotions, judgements and information among individuals” (Ives 2004:28 – based on Locke’s 1693 *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*; Leal 2012:50 and 2013:64). Catherine Frost goes further and claims that this concept of language implies that “linguistic diversity can be an inconvenience or a barrier to communication” (Frost 2004:50) – as Wagner, Bech and Martínez appear to hint at in some of their quotations in 2.1 below.

However, in view of the EU's efforts to foster multilingualism, one could argue that its predominant, underlying notion of language is actually the opposite of Locke's. Along these lines, Ives reminds us of two German-speaking philosophers, Johann Gottfried Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt, who are representatives of the opposite view of language, i.e. not as a mere vehicle for communication but rather as "central to culture, identity, how we perceive the world, and how we structure our lives" (Ives 2004:29).

Indeed, if we examine the EU's official attitude towards linguistic diversity, we see that far from perceiving it as "an inconvenience" or "barrier to communication", the EU invests a lot of effort into stating precisely the opposite: that multilingualism is not only one of its cornerstones, but also one of its distinctive features. Nevertheless, despite the "positive celebration of linguistic diversity" noted by Ives (2004:30), and despite its countless efforts to foster multilingualism, the EU does use English as its *lingua franca*, as a mere instrument or vehicle for communication.

Back in 1979, the translation theorist Werner Koller saw three ways to overcome "language barriers" ("*Sprachbarrieren*" – Koller 1979:20) in linguistically diverse settings such as the EU, namely: (i) the development of a universal artificial language, (ii) the adoption of one or two world languages ("*Weltsprachen*") or large languages ("*große Sprachen*"), or (iii) the development of more efficient machine translation tools (Koller 1979:20). For him, the second alternative seemed the most promising, again for pragmatic reasons. And in Koller's view, this alternative would not entail a decrease in the demand for translations; on the contrary. In his opinion, the adoption of one or two "world" or "large languages" would actually stimulate the translation market, increasing the demand for translations involving these languages – a conclusion similar to Juliane House's in a study of the impact of English as a *lingua franca* on the demand for translation (House 2012:12-13; Leal 2013:65). It is also important to remark that the 2011 edition of Koller's abovementioned book kept these excerpts unchanged, which reinforces their validity in today's settings. Looking at the EU today, could it be argued that Werner Koller was right? Section 2 will address the question of translation in the EU and whether it is at odds with its notion of language discussed here.

## **2. The EU's translation medium: language hierarchy erased?**

### *2.1 Originals and translations: when boundaries are removed*

As argued above, in order to ensure “respect [for] the national identities of its Member States” and “equality before the law” (Wagner, Bech and Martínez 2002:1-2), the EU invests a lot of resources in its translation medium. But despite the enormity and relevance of this medium, “translation” itself – its mechanisms, its consequences, its statistics – is not an often debated subject between the EU and the wider public. Why is this the case?

As Emma Wagner, Svend Bech and Jesús Martínez explain, all translations done by the EU's translation medium will be published in the Official Journal of the European Union “not (...) as a translation, but as an *original*, an authentic piece of Community legislation, with a legal force identical to that of all the other language versions” (2002:47 – their emphasis). Indeed, the question of authenticity appears to be at the heart of the EU's decision to – at least officially – erase the boundaries between translation and original. Wagner, Bech and Martínez (2002:7) stress that this principle stems from the Final Provisions of the EC Treaty, which stipulate that the Treaty was “drawn up in a single original in the Dutch, French, German and Italian languages, all four texts being equally authentic” and that the subsequent versions of the Treaty produced in the other languages of the EU “shall also be authentic”. As a result, if a text has been translated into ten languages, one does not speak of “one original text and ten translations” but rather of “11 language versions” or “11 originals” (Wagner, Bech and Martínez 2002:8).

Wagner, Bech and Martínez also emphasise that not all texts produced by the EU are translated into all the official languages, as already indicated in 1.2 above. They add that it “may be sufficient to translate [them] into one language for information (usually English or French), since all Eurocrats know English or French or else they learn them – fast” (2002:9). In addition to *into* which languages EU documents get to be translated, another – perhaps even more relevant – question is *from* which language or languages they are translated. According to Wagner, Bech and Martínez (2002:8), “the European Parliament's rules of procedure [1999 version] do not mention the existence of an original text”. However, in a later chapter (2002:70) they reveal that “most of the texts written inside the EU institutions

are produced in English or French by non-native speakers of those languages” and add that “in recent years, English has overtaken French as the main language of drafting in the EU institutions”. This is due to the fact that “it is unreasonable to allow everyone to write their contribution in their mother tongue” since it would, in the authors’ opinion, “take too long (*because of translation*) and would impose an additional burden on translation services that are already fully occupied” (Wagner, Bech and Martínez 2002:71 – my emphasis).

So although officially and formally all documents issued in any of the 24 official languages of the EU are equally valid, “authentic” and “original”, within the EU a distinction between originals and translations must be made for practical reasons. For Wagner, Bech and Martínez, for instance, a typical example of the organisation of work at the Directorate-General for Translation includes an “English original to be translated into all official languages” and a “Greek original to be translated into English, French and German” (2002:85). Similarly, when these authors interview fellow EU translators, they make clear references to “original texts” and their quality (Wagner, Bech and Martínez 2002:118-144).

Thus it seems that within the EU distinctions between translations and originals have to be made for obvious pragmatic reasons, but these distinctions disappear as soon as texts are published as a means to ensure both their legal equality and authenticity. Hence, not presenting certain (mostly English) texts as originals and others as translations is an attempt to erase linguistic hierarchy and foster status equality amongst all official languages. But how valid and successful has this attempt been? By not openly placing translation and its mechanisms in the spotlight, is the EU not quietly and uncritically maintaining linguistic hierarchy? And how harmful can linguistic hierarchy be to the EU’s precious notion of multilingualism?

In addition to these questions, it is also vital to ask why within the EU the term “translation” is promptly associated with lack of validity and authenticity – so much so that all texts are treated as originals<sup>5</sup>. What does this say of the EU’s underlying notion of translation and

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<sup>5</sup> Within international organisations this attitude towards originals and translations is by no means exclusive to the EU. A similar policy is in place at the United Nations, for instance. Article 111 of the Charter of the United Nations (adopted in 1945) begins with the following sentence: “The present charter, of which the Chinese, French, Russian, English, and Spanish texts are equally authentic (...)” (Charter of the United Nations n.d.). Unlike the EU, however, the six official languages of the UN are all working languages as well – as Rule 51 of the General Assembly Rules of Procedure states. This means that not only do they enjoy the same status, but also

transcultural communication? What does it say of the hierarchy between so-called “originals” and “translations” and the subsequent role of translators in society? What is the impact of the EU’s attitude towards translation in society as a whole? The following section will address these questions from a more theoretical, epistemological point of view.

## *2.2 Translation at the EU and the language paradox: theoretical implications*

Looking at the current status of the EU in terms of language and translation, it becomes clear that Werner Koller could be right when he suggested that the adoption of one or two world or “large languages” would be the best way to work with linguistic diversity (Koller 1979:20). In effect, it seems that the concentration on a few working languages has proven to be the most efficient way to overcome “language barriers” in the EU. However, the paradox remains: the EU is torn between a notion of language as a crucial element of one’s identity and one’s notion of democracy and sovereignty, on the one hand, and a predominantly Lockean view of language, whereby multilingualism represents an obstacle to communication, on the other.

Referring to the fact that linguistic diversity lacks “political thrust” in the EU, Kraus asserts that

As a concept that is supposed to equally satisfy nation-states and stateless nations, majorities and minorities, dominant and dominated groups and (...) should not collide with the smooth functioning of the Common Market, diversity is at risk of becoming just permissive diversity, a formula successful to the extent that it does not involve any sacrifices or costs for those who claim to act on its behalf (Kraus 2011:31).

Ives, on the other hand, emphasises the theoretical contradiction underlying the paradox of the EU’s de jure multilingualism and de facto use of English. In his view, the two terms of the paradox may coexist harmoniously as long as the EU endorses Locke’s instrumentalist notion of language, i.e. as long as it perceives language as a mere vehicle for communication. But because the EU simultaneously refuses to see language diversity as a barrier to

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that all speeches made in one of the official languages must be interpreted into the remaining five languages – as stipulated by Rule 52 of the General Assembly Rules of Procedure (General Assembly of the United Nations n.d.). But like the EU, the UN “has always shown a tendency towards a clear predominance of English, the true working language of the Secretariat and the real official language used in most negotiations” (Baigorri-Jalón 2004:30-31 – translated by Anne Barr). Jesús Baigorri-Jalón (2004:34) goes further and asserts that “(...) the UN experience of more than fifty years has demonstrated the progressive ascent of English to the rank of universal language of communication within the organisation. No country interested in taking part in any real negotiation would send to Headquarters a representative who does not speak English”.

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communication but uses English precisely to transpose the “language barrier”, Ives claims that there is a serious contradiction in the Union and hence an “irresolvable tension” between “de jure multilingualism” and “de facto use of English” (Ives 2004:27).

Catherine Frost, commenting on Ives’ conclusions above, asserts that the two antagonistic views of language, namely Locke’s versus Herder’s and Humboldt’s, may no longer be able to represent the linguistic reality of the EU. In effect, she believes that both tendencies are well integrated in the Union today and hence may not be perceived as extreme, self-excluding opposites any longer – as Ives’ opinion may appear to suggest. In Frost’s view, this integration of Locke’s and Herder’s notions of language manifests itself already at the subnational level, and here she mentions the Irish language as an example:

The Irish example is worth thinking about here because it presents a perplexing combination of high support for a language as a cultural object and low support for day-to-day bilingualism. It therefore illustrates how a disjunction can develop between language attachment and language use (Frost 2004:52).

Frost explains that however cherished Irish may be in Ireland, this does not mean that most people use – or are willing to use – Irish in their everyday lives. In other words, “while voluntary attachment to the language [Irish] remains strong, this attachment does not require that the Irish language be front and centre, even in Ireland’s public institutions” (Frost 2004:52). The example of Ireland illustrates how one people can simultaneously treasure a language for its intrinsic values (Herder’s view) and use a different one as an instrument for communication (Locke’s view). Frost concludes that maybe there is no paradox after all, but rather that we need to adapt our theoretical tools to reassess the issue of multilingualism in the EU. This would entail rethinking categories such as “Herder’s notion of language” or “Locke’s notion of language” because “language use does not lend itself to neat categories of intrinsic or instrumental value” (Frost 2004:52; Leal 2013:68).

Juliane House (2003) appears to point in a similar direction, as she proposes a distinction between “languages for communication” and “languages for identification” (instrumental and cultural view mentioned above, respectively) (House 2003:560). Addressing the question of English as a lingua franca (ELF) specifically, House maintains that

Because ELF is not a national language, but a mere tool bereft of collective cultural capital, it is a language usable neither for identity marking, nor for a positive (...) disposition toward an L2 group, nor for a desire to become similar to valued members of this L2 group – simply because there is no definable group of ELF speakers. ELF users, then, use ELF as a transactional language for their own communicative purposes and advantage (House 2003:560).

Similarly to Frost, House goes on to conclude that “[u]sing ELF for instrumental purposes does not necessarily displace national or local languages, as they are used for different purposes” (House 2003:560). Indeed, in relation to the EU, she believes that despite the “illusion of multilingualism in the EU, and the lip-service paid to the ideal of a multiplicity of languages” (House 2003:561), the use of English as a lingua franca as what she calls a language for communication “strength[ens] the complementary need for native local languages that are rooted in their speakers’ shared history, cultural tradition, practices, conventions and values as identificatory potential” (House 2003:562).

Therefore, can one speak of a paradox after all? And what does the EU’s attitude towards translation bear in common with the contemporary debate on originality in translation studies? Let us look into these questions in the following section before returning, in 3 below, to Kraus’, Ives’ and Frosts’ suggestions discussed here.

### *2.3 Original versus translation: the contemporary debate*

Jacques Derrida’s contribution to the question of multilingualism and diversity in the EU help clarify to what extent the EU’s attitude towards language and translation constitutes a paradox or not. In 1992 he published a volume entirely dedicated to the then latest developments in the EU – *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe* (translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas). His question (below) effectively summarises the tension between linguistic difference and linguistic unity – what would later become de jure multilingualism and de facto monolingualism:

What philosophy of translation will dominate in Europe? In a Europe that from now on should avoid both the nationalistic tensions of linguistic difference and the violent homogenization of languages through the neutrality of a translating medium that would claim to be transparent, metalinguistic, and universal? (Derrida 1991/1992:58)

As of this date it is easy to ascertain that the EU has successfully avoided “nationalistic tensions of linguistic difference” by opting for the de facto “violent homogenization of languages”<sup>6</sup>, enabled mostly through the “default” (Ives 2004:43) use of English as a lingua franca and through the EU’s universal translation medium. In other words, the EU has avoided linguistic tension by not concretely addressing it, as Ives and Kraus defend. This applies not only to its lack of concrete language policies, but particularly to its translation mechanisms, that push linguistic hierarchy completely out of the debate by not differentiating originals from translations, as well as by not putting language in the spotlight (Leal 2014:306-307).

Here it is important to make a distinction between the obliteration of the boundaries between translations and originals at the EU, on the one hand, and the questioning of the notion of originality in contemporary thought, on the other. In effect, the distinction between “original” and “translation” has been the object of heated debate in translation studies in recent decades. It could be argued that Hans Vermeer’s much discussed dethroning of the so-called original text in favour of the far less glamorous notion of “offer of information” (“*Informationsangebot*” – Vermeer 1982) provided one of the sparks<sup>7</sup> that would ignite this debate in the years to come (Leal 2014:90-91, Snell-Hornby 2006:61-62, Vermeer 1997:9). Embedded – particularly, but not exclusively – in poststructuralist discourse, the relegation of the then mighty original text led to the fierce questioning of the notion of originality altogether – and hence to the questioning of the very boundaries between translation and original.

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<sup>6</sup> The notion of “violence” in Jacques Derrida’s reflections on law and justice plays a vital role here. In his ‘Force of Law: “The Mythical Foundation of Authority”’ (translated by Mary Quaintance), he asks the following: “How are we to distinguish between th[e] force of law (...) and the violence that one always deems unjust? What difference is there between, on the one hand, the force that can be just, or in any case deemed legitimate (not only an instrument in the service of law but the practice and even the realization, the essence of *droit*), and on the other hand the violence that one always deems unjust? (Derrida 1992:6). Discussing Montaigne and Pascal and their notion of “mystical foundation of authority”, Derrida argues that “[s]ince the origin of authority, the foundation or ground, the position of the law can’t by definition rest on anything but themselves, they are themselves a violence without ground” (Derrida 1992:14). In short, for Derrida the notions of law and justice inevitably entail a violent force which, in the case of the EU’s translating medium, cannot be underestimated.

<sup>7</sup> Due to space constraints, it would be impossible to give an in-depth overview of this issue as it would go beyond the scope of this paper. The concept of originality in translation may be approached from numerous different perspectives and the one presented in this paper is simply one of them. For more on this issue, see for example Laiho (2013).

Fuelled chiefly by the developments made by poststructuralist thinkers particularly in psychoanalytical theory and literary studies, Lawrence Venuti, for instance, claims that “[n]either the foreign text nor the translation is an original semantic unity; both are derivative and heterogeneous” (Venuti 1992:7). In a similar vein, Suzanne Levine asserts that “there are no originals, only translations” (Levine 1992:83). Rosemary Arrojo also stresses the fragility of the concept of originality in postmodern times and uses this argument to raise the status of translations in relation to their respective “original” texts (Arrojo 1997).

However, the questioning of the nature of translations and original texts in translation studies has little to do with presuming them to be the *same*; rather, it is about their *statuses* being the same or, in other words, about translations not being hierarchically inferior to so-called originals (Leal 2014:239-240, Rodrigues 1999:22). This change of status should help – and arguably *has* helped – to raise the status both of translators in society and of translation studies as an academic discipline in its own right (Arrojo 1998:25-26).

Therefore, the theoretical deconstruction of the notions of original and translation – along with their respective statuses – has proven to be fruitful in translation studies. Yet this bears little in common with the EU’s attitude towards translation, which in short entails the *complete effacement* – as opposed to the *critical questioning* – of the boundaries between original and translation. The questioning of the concept of originality is a crucial feature of postmodern theories in general (see for example Barthes 1974, Fish 1980 and Kristeva 1980). If “original” texts are ineluctably – at least to a certain extent – derivative of other texts, then it makes no sense whatsoever to attribute translations a lower status.

At the EU, this dynamics original-translation is hence the opposite of the one underlying the contemporary debate on originality. To return to the EU and the rationale behind its underlying notion of translation, the lack of official use of the word “translation” is not justified on the epistemological grounds discussed in the previous paragraphs, but is rather tied to the notion of “authenticity”, as Wagner, Bech and Martínez explain (2002:7). In this sense, it seems that at the EU the status of translations is indeed inferior, as they would not be deemed authentic enough if they were not labelled “original”.

In other words, based on the sources and arguments presented here, it seems that translations are labelled “originals” in the EU not thanks to an underlying notion of status equality between translations and originals, but rather for the opposite reason, i.e. because translations (if openly called “translations”) would raise questions of legitimacy and authenticity. Not only that, they would also put language hierarchy in the spotlight since their vast majority would consist of texts produced in languages other than English, whereas the vast majority of the “originals” would be in English (Wagner, Bech and Martínez 2002:70).

Thus, it appears that by not officially distinguishing between translations and originals the EU quietly adheres to the age-old precept that translations are inferior to their so-called “originals”, that they are in other words nothing but less valid, less authentic versions of perfect “originals”. From this perspective, “originals” in turn can be assumed to be complete, perfect and hence fully valid and authentic. By not calling translations “translations” but rather “originals” for concerns over authenticity and legal validity, the EU arguably hints at translation not being a legitimate, trustworthy means of communication – which ultimately could be claimed to defeat the very objective of its intricate translation medium, at least ideologically speaking.

This view of translation on the part of the EU endorses not only the common sense notion of translation as a falsification, but also the translators’ image in society as a falsifier. Moreover, it endorses scholarly thought on translation in the past two millennia, which according to Rosemary Arrojo and George Steiner has stubbornly and relentlessly revolved around the notions of equivalence, (un)translatability and fidelity (Steiner 1975/1998:251; Arrojo 1992/2003:72-73). Therefore, despite the EU’s intention to erase language hierarchy by pushing it out of the debate, it seems that it is indeed reinforcing it, along with the age-old belief that translations are not to be trusted. But how could the EU critically acknowledge language hierarchy, ensure the legal validity and authenticity of their documents whilst at the same time not relegating translation and translators to their typically inferior role in society? The poststructuralist reflection on language and translation might offer a few ways out of the dilemma, as argued in the next section.

### **3. Language and translation in the spotlight: ways out of the dilemma**

Catherine Frost, Peter Ives and Peter Kraus demand a different attitude from the EU as regards its attitude towards language. For an institution that places so much emphasis on the value of cultural and linguistic diversity, the evidently and rapidly increasing use of English as a lingua franca cannot and must not go unnoticed. Ives' and Kraus' outcry for some public debate discussed above is indeed very justified and worth further discussion, although not necessarily entailing concrete or significant changes as far as the functioning of EU institutions is concerned – including the functioning of its Directorate-General for Translation. The objective of overtly debating the issue of English as a lingua franca is to acknowledge that the issue exists, which allows one to perceive it critically and to follow its development over time. Let us bear in mind here that similarly to the concept of “translation”, not officially used at the EU, the concept of “English as a lingua franca” must be taken for granted as well, since no measures have been taken to introduce English as the EU's main language, and its ad hoc adoption has not in any way been overtly addressed by the EU (Ives 2004:43).

Even if the EU wanted, it could not drastically and instantly contain the spread of English as a lingua franca as it transcends its realms. This would not be in its best interest, since the ad hoc use of English by non-native speakers of English is clearly an important instrument in the EU's translation medium (Wagner, Bech and Martínez 2002:70-71). What the EU *can* do nonetheless is to put translation in the spotlight by acknowledging its mechanisms rather than carry on – again for pragmatic reasons – as though the issue did not exist. In this sense, Ives and Kraus argue for a concrete measure that could and should be taken by the Union, i.e. to overtly and critically address the use of English as a lingua franca. Though it does not entail significant changes in the actual functioning of the EU, their recommendations operate on a more practical level when compared to Frost's conclusions – discussed below.

Overtly addressing the issue of English as a lingua franca, as Ives and Kraus contend, would inevitably entail overtly addressing the issue of translation. By not distinguishing between originals and translations the EU appears to be erasing language hierarchy, but only at first glance. Yet not informing EU citizens of what has been translated from which language into which language constitutes a mechanism which quietly and uncritically maintains both language hierarchy and the ad hoc, “default” use of English. Similarly, by not clearly

stipulating that most texts are produced in English for practical reasons, this ad hoc use of English as some obvious tacit agreement remains un-reflected upon and undebated. Of course it could be argued that the wider public is probably not directly interested in the intricacies of the EU's translation activities; however, these activities do lay bare questions of power and hierarchy, which in turn are of paramount importance as far as the inevitable tensions between unity and multiplicity in the EU are concerned.

Unlike Peter Ives and Peter Kraus, Catherine Frost calls our attention to the need to adapt our theoretical and epistemological tools to better comprehend the issue of language diversity in the EU; she points to the need to do away with self-excluding, extreme opposites and to admit that, in reality, extreme opposites – such as Locke's and Herder's or Humboldt's understanding of language – may coexist in relative harmony (Leal 2013:69). Indeed, it seems evident that the EU's current linguistic circumstances – particularly as regards translation – require adapted epistemological tools. Self-excluding opposites can no longer apply, since it is obvious that the ideological protection of multilingualism and the pragmatic use of English go hand in hand and do coexist harmoniously in the EU. And let us not forget Werner Koller's and Juliane House's conclusions (addressed in 1.3) here regarding the use of one or two "large languages", in the case of the former, and of English as a lingua franca, in the case of the latter. Both agree that adopting one or two main languages does not necessarily have a negative impact on translation, but simply restricts language combinations – as indeed appears to be the case with the EU's translation medium (House 2012:12-13; Koller 1979:20).

So what new epistemological tool do we need to understand the dynamics between multilingualism and monolingualism in the EU? In his aforementioned 1992 work, Derrida offers an answer that – however unaware he might have been of the future developments in the EU – seems very fitting to today's context. In a typically deconstructionist gesture, Derrida calls for the double bind, for a double injunction:

First tension, first contradiction, double injunction: on the one hand European cultural identity cannot be dispersed (...). It cannot and must not be dispersed into a myriad of provinces, into a multiplicity of self-enclosed idioms or petty little nationalisms, each one jealous and untranslatable. It cannot and must not renounce places of great circulation of heavy traffic, the great venues and thoroughfares of translation and communication, and thus, of mediatization (Derrida 1991/1992:38-39).

On the other hand, however – and here is where the double injunction becomes complete:

it cannot and must not accept the capital of a centralized authority that, by means of trans-European cultural mechanisms, by means of publishing, journalistic and academic concentrations – be they state-run or not – would control and standardize, subjecting artistic discourses and practices to the grid of intelligibility, to philosophical or aesthetic norms, to channels of immediate and efficient communication, to the pursuit of rating and commercial profitability (Derrida 1991/1992:39).

Indeed, in a later work he would say that “pure unity or pure multiplicity – when there is only totality or unity and when there is only multiplicity or dissociation – is a synonym of death” (Caputo and Derrida 1997/2004:106). In other words, the Union must – double bind – at once overtly and consciously fight and embrace “pure unity” and “pure multiplicity”. This is probably the most crucial challenge the EU will have to overcome as its survival definitely depends upon it – not only in linguistic terms, but especially in political and economic terms (Leal 2014:304, 308).

At first glance, Derrida’s suggestion operates on a more epistemological level, similarly to Catherine Frost’s, and hence does not necessarily prompt practical measures that should be taken by the EU. After all, the very idea of a double bind can have less to do with concrete action and more to do with awareness of the importance of each of the “sides” that make up the double bind. Let us think here of the image of the knot suggested by Derrida elsewhere (1996:26-31): when faced with a double knot of this kind, one may try to loosen one knot, but not without causing the other one to be tightened. The lack of watertight opposition between the terms of the dichotomy unity-multiplicity does not allow us to opt “purely” for one side instead of the other, because opting for or favouring one side should heighten our awareness of the importance of the other side and make us cautious about binary either/or dichotomies.

Could Derrida’s point give rise to more practical measures in terms of the EU’s attitude towards language as well? By looking at the two indented quotations above and the two “sides” they describe, it seems clear that the EU constantly makes decisions sometimes akin to one and sometimes to the other. Again, it would be impossible to opt “purely” for one side or the other as “pure unity” or “pure multiplicity” would certainly be “a synonym of death”

for the EU (Caputo and Derrida 1997/2004:106). However, it *would* be possible to work on the balance between these two sides. To return to the knot analogy, we must remember not to loosen one knot too much lest the other become too tight. When it comes to the use of language, it is evident that the tendency towards the use of English as a lingua franca (towards unity, towards the second “side” in Derrida’s indented quotations above) outweighs the call for multiplicity. Therefore, for the purposes described in this paper, any concrete measures on the part of the EU should address this imbalance and work to loosen this knot a little.

As regards translation more specifically, it seems imperative that the EU at long last rethink its underlying notion of language and translation when it opts to completely erase the boundaries between source-texts and target-texts. The extensive efforts put into ensuring translation studies is recognised as a discipline in its own right and improving translators’ working conditions across the globe can hardly have any impacting, enduring effect when institutions as relevant the European Union openly defend that their documents must all be labelled “originals” for reasons of validity and authenticity. And let us not forget here that this is merely a question of terminology – after all, these “original” texts are in fact translations done by the EU’s colossal translation medium. However, at the end of the day it is these questions of terminology that ultimately shape ideologies – and as long as large-scale, global institutions such as the EU refrain from using the word “translation” (as their legislation on this issue discussed in 1 and 2 above seems to indicate), we can hardly expect that society as a whole will ever acknowledge the validity and authenticity of translators’ work.

#### **4. Final remarks**

If the use of English as a lingua franca provides comfortable unity and saves the Union’s time and resources – as seems to be the case – the call for multilingualism must be allowed to remain and must be strengthened to the same extent as the use of English as a lingua franca. In a Derridean double gesture, the use of English as a lingua franca must be accompanied by fierce criticism of this same use. Perhaps the EU is already half way there: its countless efforts to foster multiplicity and celebrate diversity certainly help to counterbalance the predominance of English as a lingua franca. The next step, as contended by Kraus and Ives, would be to adopt a more transparent and critical approach as far as the actual use of language in EU institutions is concerned.

A further step would be to overtly regulate and debate translation and its actual mechanisms, putting language hierarchy in the spotlight so that it can be acknowledged, criticised and deconstructed; so that the use of English as a standard first language does not take place uncritically and in a subterranean way; so that all EU citizens have a chance to learn what languages are used when and how often; so that – perhaps most importantly – translations can finally be perceived and acknowledged as legally valid and authentic as they are, i.e. *as translations*.

To sum up, the dominance of English in the EU and its impact on translation need not be perceived as inescapable developments over which we have no influence. They can and should be taken more critically, not as default, natural developments, but rather as conscious choices motivated by a number of factors and entailing a number of consequences – as discussed in this paper.

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