

Szabó Orsolya Katalin
**The sociolinguistic profile of English in 21st century
Europe**

Abstract

Today's sociolinguistic dynamics brought about the inclusion of ever larger proportions of society in communication that transcends national frontiers. International communication points more and more towards the use of a single lingua franca. Sociolinguistic research has amply documented how English replaced all other languages as the most frequently used language for international communication. Europe is no exception to this. The language is currently the *de facto* the working language of the European Union, although its use rests on an ambiguous normative basis further to Brexit. The present thesis undertakes to examine the sociolinguistic profile of English in 21st century Europe. It intends to shed light on an anomalous situation whereby the language is used in a wide range of domains but lacks a normative basis when it comes to the use of English as a European lingua franca in the institutional communication of the EU. On the presumption that it is highly unlikely that English will be deprived of its international functions in the short and medium term, numerous researches dealt with the development of the language, pondering the chance of using a specific European language variety of English in the future. The question has become particularly relevant nowadays when the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union might give further impetus to this process.

Keywords: World Englishes, Three Circles Model, English as a Lingua Franca, European Union

Introduction

Globalisation and the ensuing market convergence have set into motion dynamics that have a massive influence on the communication practices by which the world is characterised. The changing system of nation-states, the growing trend of regionalisation and the lifting of state borders reevaluate the sovereignty of the state and create new communities of communication. This sociolinguistically unprecedented era has given rise to a new language phenomenon, referred to by some as the 'English language complex' (McArthur 1998). According to Statista, as many as 1.34 billion people are using English in the world either natively or as a second/foreign language. The world has already witnessed the diffusion of certain languages used for international purposes, what is novel is that the spread has reached such a magnitude that it has become independent of the resources and efforts of the native community (Stevens 1992). English is increasingly being used between people of very different linguistic and cultural backgrounds as an international lingua franca. The language can no longer be exclusively associated with traditional Anglo-Saxon nations as people speaking it as a second/foreign language actually outnumber the native speaker community (González Fernández 2005).

In this global context, the present essay undertakes to present the academic discourse surrounding the use of English in 21st century Europe. The state-of-the-art is contextualised by main English paradigms on the international use of the language as well as by a brief historical retrospect on the international spread of the language. I intend to take stock of the situation by presenting those fields – without aiming to be exhaustive – where the use of English is preponderant. With this regard, language use in the EU will receive particular focus as the principal institutional framework for international communication in Europe. Furthermore, the departure of the United Kingdom from the EU has been a historical momentum not only from a political but also from a sociolinguistic point of view and the main traits of this context will be discussed. Methodologically, the thesis builds upon sociolinguistic research from the 1990s onwards while the sections on the European Union rely both on academic as well as on primary law sources.

1 Theoretical framework

The spread of English in the world raised questions about its social, economic and cultural impact and generated an extensive academic literature aimed at revealing the causes of the diffusion. In the present paper, I intend to categorise these theories as top-down and bottom-up explanations, depending on the perspective. Briefly, top-down explanations emphasize imposition as the main reason behind English language spread, by contrast, bottom-up explanations focus on the individual will to learn one language instead of another.

Researchers stressing the negative aspects of English language globalization see it as a result of a top-down, coordinated language policy serving the interest of English native-speaking countries. Among others, this position may be illustrated through the work of Phillipson (1992, 2003, 2005, 2008) and the subsequent debate that his theory on English imperialism generated. According to Phillipson, the language is being spread in the world through the coordinated language policy efforts of the Anglo-Saxon world as part of the project of making English the default language of international communication. English is being taught worldwide through cultural institutions (e.g. British Council) that transmit not only language skills but also cultural preconceptions. Phillipson suggests that the dominant role of the USA is based on a neoliberal project under which the spread of English is intentionally overestimated. Authors like Pennycook (1994; 2001) call into question the focus on an ‘agency’ behind the spread of English and attribute importance to latent discourses that guarantee the supremacy of English in the world. He speaks of a subtle form of imperialism that contributes to the spread of inequalities and discrimination. Fishman (1996) rejects the theory on the imperialism of English saying that the continued spread of the language is instead due to structural reasons and is related more to its involvement in the modern world economy. English and local languages may complement each other by satisfying different needs and having different social functions. Holborrow (1999) claims that the periphery-centre model fails to explain the realities in the periphery while education and language policies in periphery are measures conforming to the interests of the local ruling class rather than the consequences of cultural imperialism. Piller & Cho (2013: 24) writes an extensive critique about what they call ‘neoliberal language policy’ that naturalises the use of English as prerequisite of global competitiveness and puts non-native speakers under enormous economic as well as psychologic pressure. Through structures of competitiveness created by neoliberal economic policy in the world, English teaching is being

day-by-day legitimized because of its place in global communication, regardless of the social inequality it entrenches.

Bottom-up explanations, such as the one represented by Abram de Swaan (2001), emphasize the individual choice to learn a language. De Swaan proclaims in particular that languages make up a hierarchical constellation in which English is placed at top. Central to his theory is the linking of languages and their speakers, who maintain the whole structure in an interconnected system characterized by an upward trend of language learning, where one learns the language more widely spread than their mother tongue. There are no isolated tongues anymore as enhanced trade and easier mobility involve verbal transactions even in the most peripheral areas of the world. The hypercentral language (English) holds the world language constellation together and is the language of global communication. Along similar lines, Van Parijs (2004) proposes a normative demonstration of the inevitable spread of English in the world. Van Parijs' (2004) theory on the maximin law of communication suggests that the mechanisms of language learning are led by the micromechanisms of motivation and opportunity. This means that if there is a group of random people, one decides which language to speak not by asking which language is the best known on average, but which language is best known by the member who knows it least; in other words, if there is any language known to some extent by all. If there is none, one chooses the language that is known to some extent by most. The maximin criterion can also be described as the criterion of minimal exclusion. The language used in these cases is called the maximin language. The more frequent a language is picked as 'maximin', the stronger the motivation for learning it and the more frequent the opportunity to learn it. In fact, the above-mentioned mechanisms are interconnected: the more a language is learnt in some part of the world, the more likely that language is to be maximin; the more often a language is picked as maximin, the more frequent the opportunity and the higher the motivation will be to use and learn it. Both accounts of representation have been called into question in scholarly literature. Ives (2006) labels them as one-sided and depoliticised why they present the language as solely a question of communicating separating it from issues of political identity, symbolic and cultural community (Ives 2006: 130). Gal (2006) emphasises that the language system as drawn up by De Swaan is limitative for it is based exclusively on standard languages while leaving aside other linguistic categories, e.g. dialects or languages used for instance in the rural peripheries of European countries.

The growing scientific attention as to the spread of the language worldwide lead to the pluralization of terminology used to describe the phenomenon. The expression 'World Englishes' may be used as an umbrella label referring to a wide range of differing concepts about 'Englishes' used worldwide, including English as a Lingua Franca and English as an international language (Bolton 2009). Halliday (2009) describes an international language as a tongue which has moved beyond its nation to become international. It is taken over as a second tongue by speakers of other languages who retain some features of their national forms of expression. The concept of English as an international language has multiple facets in academic literature. On the one hand, it may refer to a World Standard English, a common core variety used in international communication as described by McArthur (1987), on the other hand, it can be used to describe geographically distinctive English varieties developed as a result of the massive use of the language in the world (Bolton 2009). Similarly, according to Oxford English Dictionary, a lingua franca is any language used by speakers of different languages as a common medium of communication. The concept English as a lingua franca has a further, specific meaning. Jenkins (2009) states that English as a Lingua Franca is defined as a contact language used only among non-mother tongue speakers. Berns (1995, 2007) goes further and

believes that English as a Lingua Franca has the potentials to develop into an internally consistent variety of English with particular properties.

A suitable analytical framework to navigate through the plethora of terminology is offered by Braj B. Kachru (1985) and his model of three concentric circles. The circles model breaks with the traditional ontology of languages and places English into three major linguistic categories, that is, varieties, with specific phonological, lexico-grammatical and normative properties. According to Crystal (1997), language variety refers to any system of linguistic expression whose use is governed by situational variables. Bolton (2009) underlines that the notion of varieties when applied to English is dynamic as new contexts, new realities and new discourses continue to emerge.

In Kachru's model, Standard English Varieties are in a so called Inner Circle. This represents the traditional bases of English such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Anglophone Canada and some of the Caribbean territories. These norm-providing standard language varieties can be distinguished from Englishes spoken in the Outer Circle. The Outer Circle was conceived to represent postcolonial Anglophonic contexts but it can be applied in non-colonial settings as well (see Europe later). These varieties are used in multilingual communities as a second language and have specific endonormative properties. Finally, norm-dependent performance varieties are spoken in the so called Expanding Circle, encompassing those countries in which English plays no historical or official role, but is nevertheless widely used as a foreign language. The Kachravian approach has particular relevance for how we conceptualise English use in continental Europe. Modiano (2017) proclaims that it is no longer appropriate to describe English used in the European Union as an Expanding Circle variety but rather a second language variety in the context of the Outer Circle. He claims in particular that English within the EU has extensive governmental, educational, informational and work-related functionality, which justifies the conceptualisation of the language as an endonormative language variety.

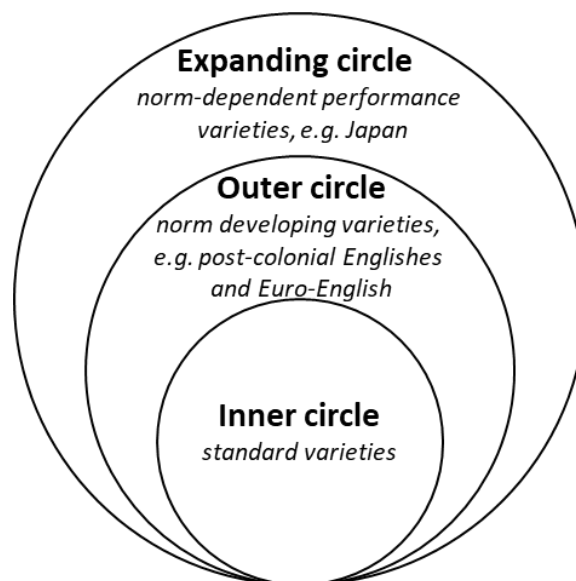


Fig. 1. The Kachravian model of three concentric circles of English used to describe the diachronic development of the language in the world (Source: Kachru 1985)

2 Brief historical retrospect

Contemporary English as we know today developed in the language standardisation period of the 17–18th centuries (Algeo 2010). Previously, the language underwent massive international influences (e.g. Danish, French), which Strevens (1992) describes as a particular predisposition to linguistic hospitality enduring to the present day and paving the way for the multiplication of language varieties we witness today. The expansion of English in the world began with the first colonisations. The overwhelming spread of the language lies mostly in the fact that it successfully took advantage of the subsequent social, political and economic dynamics. When describing the expansion of English in the world, Svartvik & Leech (2006) speak of three overlapping eras of world history, which English benefited from to become a world language. Firstly, in the era of the imperial expansion of European powers, English spread to geographically diverse colonial settings. Secondly, the United Kingdom and especially the rising power of the United States took a leading part in the past industrial revolutions. Thirdly, the era of globalization united the world into a single society that increasingly used English as a common language for international communication. These three historical periods of major importance helped what Halliday (2009) calls the international and global spread of the language.

In Europe it was as late as in the 20th century that English assumed an ever-stronger presence (Berns 1995). The publication of the Treaty of Versailles in English already pointed towards a major influence exercised by the United States – and consequently by English – on the European continent. This influence became more remarkable after 1945 when English supplanted German and French as the first foreign languages taught in Western Europe. In the post-war period, concurrently with the growing political and economic influence of the United States, English started to assume an ever-stronger presence. Berns (2007) claims that this growing power was also furthered by certain developments that characterized the 1960s and 1970s, namely the influx of American and British popular culture as well as the integration of the UK into the European Community, which helped the displacement of French as the only official language in the ECC. In the post-war period, English gradually surpassed all other foreign languages with regard to the number of learners although at different paces within the western and eastern spheres of Europe. Statistics reveal that prior to the enlargement of 2004 more than 90% of all secondary school pupils were learning English in the EU15. After the fall of the Soviet Union, in Central-Eastern Europe English became the first foreign language among secondary school students, although German continued to play a central role as a foreign language in Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Modiano 2009). From the 1990s on, the liberalisation of the market of languages greatly benefited English. In 21st century Europe, it is definitely the most commonly learnt foreign language in every part of Europe and is used for a variety of purposes in communication that transcends national frontiers (Eurostat).

3 The place of English in present-day Europe

According to Graddol (2001), no other region has been more affected by the rise of English than Europe. The overwhelming use of the language is first underpinned by an extensive network of English education. According to UNESCO, OECD, Eurostat UOE joint data collection from 2010, 92,7% of secondary school pupils learn English as a foreign language in the European Union. The choice of English is motivated by the perception that learning the language may lead to advantages, as confirmed by the 2012 Eurobarometer survey on

‘Europeans and their languages’. Accordingly, two thirds of Europeans think that English is the most useful language to learn. When it comes to educational standards, Modiano (2017) marks that one can see a decline in the use of the British standard compared to past times when English teaching was centred on the transmission of standard English norms. Nowadays, it is more and more common to think that the idea to keep the British and the American English varieties separate is outdated and there is greater approval of more general competence where the emphasis is on the use of the language as a communicative tool.

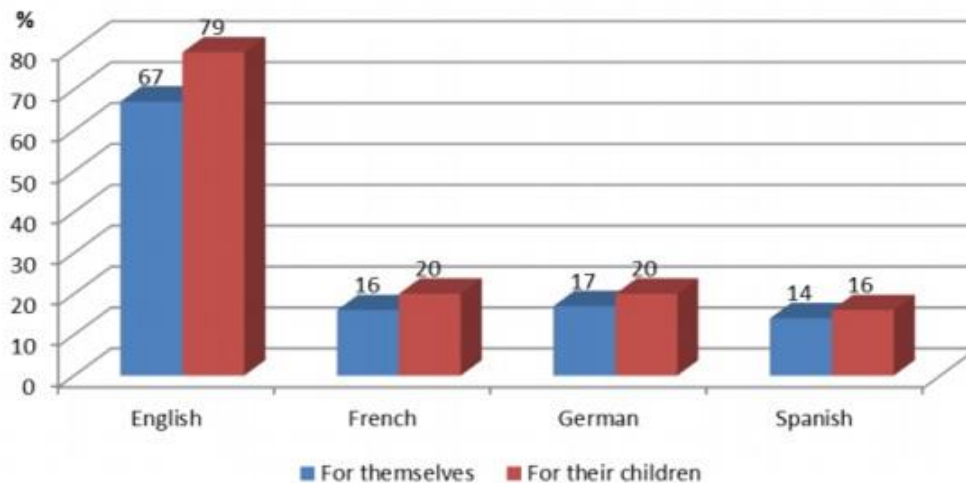


Fig. 2. Perceived usefulness of foreign languages in the European Union (Source: Eurobarometer survey 2012)

Kelly-Holmes (2015:131) describes the cyberspace as the place where traditional language policy aims of national governments are hard to replicate. In fact, as of January 2020, 25.9% of internet users used English online (Statista). Truchot (2002) marks that computing tools and products can in principle be used in any other language, nevertheless, the extension to other languages is mostly limited by market aspects. The supply of computerised products for professional use is also developing in different languages, but the multinational companies often prefer to use the English versions rather than adapt them to the international staff. IT experts systematically tend to prefer products in English even if the products are available in other languages as well. The technological and infrastructural inventions that revolutionised international mobility also lie upon English. Communication in the restricted codes of ‘Airspeak’ and ‘Seaspeak’ take place in English, which requires proficiency for those who use it in order to maximise communication efficiency (Crystal 1997).

A further sector where the dominant position of English is evident and amply documented is science and academia. Mollin (2006) claims that if Euro-English ever existed, it would first materialize within the academic field because other speakers do not use English as often with other Europeans. Currently half of scientific journals are written in English and in European scientific databases references in English predominate (Truchot 2002). This means that not only is English the most commonly chosen language for scientific publication but is also the main language for access to scientific information. Furthermore, English is also increasingly extending its presence beyond journal publication to graduate and post-graduate studies. The internationalisation and globalisation of science is taking place in English and this requires linguistic adaptation from those scientific opinion-makers that want to guarantee an international audience for themselves. This has also attitudinal implications: Ammon (1998) reports

a comparative test in which the English versions of the same articles were systematically assessed more favourably than those in the original Dutch and Scandinavian languages. Languages marginalized as regards the transmission of scientific results tend also to be excluded from the field of university research: in Sweden for example doctoral theses in English are now common to most disciplines (Truchot 2002).

Just as in science, English plays an important role in business communication and marketing as well. Truchot (2002) points out that after World War II, the economies of the European countries became progressively internationalised as they became part of the growing worldwide flow of goods and services. This had substantial linguistic implications: European firms that previously used their national languages found that with the use of English are better placed to form part of this process. The first firms in Europe to turn to English were of Scandinavian origin (e.g. Volvo). In other European countries, the internationalisation of the economy has similarly led to the increased use of English but the explicit assignment of official status to English generally remained an exception. Until the early 1990s these companies were particularly well-established in their countries of origin, having a highly organised and centralised head office. Nowadays they regard themselves as transnational companies that are less identifiable with particular countries. English is the most favoured language of global media and advertising as well (Bhatia 2009). Kelly-Holmes (2015) underlines that global brands opt for a policy of using English to connect with their consumers all across the globe.

Finally, a further sector where Anglo-Saxon countries play a predominant role is undoubtedly that of the entertainment industry. During the second half of the 20th century, the production and dissemination of culture was substantially transformed and the vast majority of the cultural products of this new, internationalised and globalised market can be linked to the American audio-visual sector (Truchot 2002: 18). If we take the film sector as an example, we can observe that the European public consumes a very small percentage of films from European origins. The Human Development Report (1999) revealed that the world market for cultural products is increasingly concentrated around Hollywood, whose revenue comes to an ever increasing extent from abroad (50% in 1999 compared to 30% in 1980). According to data released by the European Audiovisual Observatory, the market share of American films is constantly on the rise, while European films are losing ground and enjoy low levels of export.

4 English in the EU language regime

A further field in which the use of English is salient is that of international communication. Crystal (1997) points out that European international organisations, especially in the field of science, tend to choose English as the working language. The present thesis focuses on the European Union, the world's most ambitious example of pooling state sovereignty at an international level and as such, the major institutional framework for communication between European states (Moravcsik 2004). The language regime of the European Union is based on the principle of multilingualism but English is considered as the *de facto* working language in the EU (Kuzelewska 2020).

A language regime can be defined as a set of official and working languages along with rules concerning the use of such languages (Gazzola 2014). The EU language regime is established through the status planning activity of the European Union. Such a status planning activity has to take into consideration a uniquely rich linguistic and cultural composition. Most of the official languages of the EU Member States belong to the Indo-European phylum, more

specifically to the Romance (French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian and Spanish), Germanic (Danish, Dutch, English, German, Luxembourgish and Swedish), Slavic (Bulgarian, Czech, Polish, Slovakian, Croatian and Slovenian), Baltic (Latvian and Lithuanian) and Celtic (Irish) language families, while Greek is an isolate language in the Indo-European group. The other phyla of the languages autochthonous in the European Union are Finno-Ugric (Estonian, Finnish and Hungarian), Semitic (Maltese) and Basque (an absolute isolate). In contrast to the above, genetic categorisation of languages, the language policy of the European Union is based on a functional typology. The functional categories are not disjunctive and the same language can belong to different categories at the same time.

The allocation of languages into functional categories makes up a hierarchical structure where languages perform more or less prominent functions, with the working and official languages of the EU government being at top and the minority and non-indigenous languages of EU Member States at the bottom of the hierarchy. Currently there are 24 official and working languages. The founding treaties do not make a distinction between the concept of a working and an official language, but Regulation No. 1/1958 of the European Council lays the foundation for the operational distinction between the two by providing EU institutions with the right to stipulate in their rules of procedure which of the languages are to be used in specific cases. The designation of a small subset of languages as working languages can be explicit (e.g. the European Commission adopted three working languages in a declaration of the President of the Commission Delors) or can be based on convention established through continuous practice, as is more often the case. With this in mind, we should say that *de facto* working languages stand at the top of the functional hierarchy set up by EU language policy, surpassing the working and official languages determined in EU regulations.

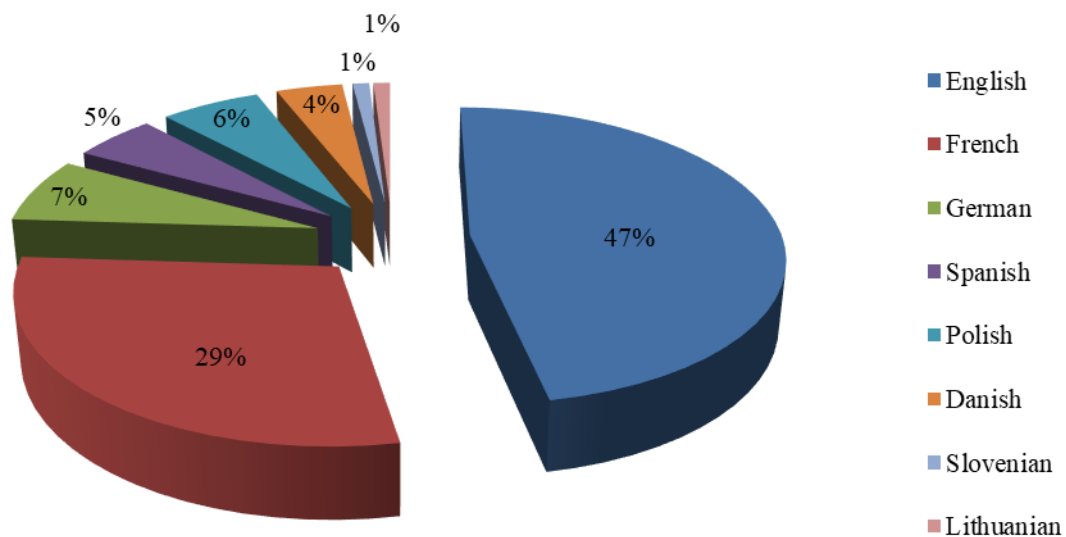


Fig. 3. Languages used in twenty-eight observed meetings in the European Commission (Source: Forchtner 2014)

English reflects the socio-linguistic situation in the EU (Kuzelewska 2020). As outlined in the previous chapter, the language has a dominant status in a wide-range of domains and as such is the language spoken by most EU officials. Taking the European Commission as an example Forchtner (2014) found that the European Commission is clearly characterized by the everyday use of English and that the priority given to French in the 1990s ceased to exist after the last

few enlargements. The incorporation of Northern, Central as well as Eastern European officials, whose primary foreign language was English, boosted the spread of English as the major language of internal communication. The predominant use of English characterises the external communication level as well. Kruse & Ammon (2013) observed 134 press conferences in the Barroso Commission and found that commissioners from the Eastern European countries with only one exception exclusively use the English language. In none of the observed cases was German used as a foreign language, while French was only used by two commissioners. As pointed out before, the dominance of the English language in EU institutions is linked to the language skills of the EU staff and the knowledge of English by ordinary people who learn it as the most spoken foreign language (Kuzelewska 2020).

5 English in post-Brexit EU

The former chapters highlighted that English fulfils lingua franca functions in a wide range of fields, including the institutional realm of the European Union. Obviously, Brexit cannot pass unnoticed in this thesis. The United Kingdom ratified the withdrawal agreement from the European Union on 23 January and it came into force on 31 January 2020. The departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union left the remaining Member States in a completely new sociolinguistic context and gave rise to a couple of questions as to the future. First, when it comes to the status planning activity of the European Union, it is unclear which functional category will English be placed in and on the basis of which legal basis. Second, when it comes to the corpus planning activity of the EU, it is subject of debate whether the language can be considered as – using Kachru’s terminology - as a norm dependent performance variety or as a norm developing variety and what future sociolinguistic developments might take place further to Brexit.

The English language is one of the EU’s official languages because the United Kingdom identified it as its own official language, furthermore, English is a *de facto* working language. However, further to Brexit, English *de iure* loses this status, as Ireland and Malta have declared Gaelic and Maltese respectively as their official languages for the European Union. In order for English to keep its status, the 1958 Council Regulation on the official languages should be changed unanimously by the remaining Member States (Kuzelewska 2020). The possibility to drop English as an official language in the EU got loud reaction in politics right in the aftermath of Brexit referendum. Danuta Hübner, the head of the European Parliament’s Constitutional Affairs Committee (AFCO) warned that English might not remain one of the European Union’s official languages after Britain leaves the EU. French politics seemed to be particularly eager to comment on the allegedly decaying position of English in Europe. Robert Menard, a member of the extreme-right National Front in France proclaimed that the English language no longer has any legitimacy in Brussels. Jean-Luc Mélenchon tweeted that English can no longer be the third working language of the European Parliament. On the other hand, rumours on the possible exclusion of English from EU official languages stirred up indignation as well. In a statement issued by the Irish Representation of the European Commission, Dublin reminded that the dropping of English from among the EU’s official languages would require the unanimous vote of the Council. The Republic of Ireland issued an official statement on the EU homepage challenging any attempt to call into question the status of English in the EU. Despite the previously outlined precarious legal status of English in the European legal and institutional complex, the dominance of English in Europe seems immovable. (Bolton & Davis 2017;

Modiano 2017; Saraceni 2017; Seidlhofer & Widdowson 2017). As Modiano (2017) highlights, most representatives of Member States, particularly those from Scandinavian as well as Eastern European countries, feel that removing English from the EU agenda could undermine their ability to communicate, not to mention the infrastructural challenges such a decision would entail (e.g. when it comes to the requalification of interpreters and translators).

Various researches took on board to show the distinctive features of a Euro-English variety already as early as from the 1990s on (Berns, 1995; Jenkins 2001, 2003, 2009; Modiano 2009; Seidlhofer 2001). Among the first, Berns (1995) identified a series of linguistic adaptations that appear in a more coherent and recurrent manner. She found such specific features as lexical borrowings (e.g. as the use of ‘eventual’ in the sense of ‘probably’ borrowed from French and German); discursual nativization, that is, when English lexis and syntax is used while maintaining conventions of the native language (e.g. rhetorical pattern or argument structure); the use of EU-specific metonyms (e.g. Nice for the Treaty of Nice). Seidlhofer (2001) found some commonly used constructions, lexical items and sound patterns, which are incorrect in standard English but unproblematic in English used between Europeans. Modiano (2017) highlights that the above outlined deviations from the standard in European communication have led to discontent among English native speaker communities. EU bureaucrats, mainly of British origin, have voiced various concerns about the decline of their language in EU contexts, one illustrative example to this is the publication ‘Misused English words and expressions in EU publications’ issued by the Translation Directorate of the European Court of Auditors. This document sustains in particular that ‘over the years, the European institutions have developed a vocabulary that differs from that of any recognised form of English. It includes words that do not exist or are relatively unknown to native English speakers outside the EU institutions and often even to standard spellcheckers/grammar checkers and words that are used with a meaning, often derived from other languages, that is not usually found in English dictionaries. Some words are used with more or less the correct meaning, but in contexts where they would not be used by native speakers.’ Numerous authors undertook to forecast the future developments English in Europe awaits. According to Modiano (2017), Brexit represents an unprecedented historical moment in Europe not only in a political but also in a sociolinguistic sense. Post-Brexit EU officials will no longer find their use of English under scrutiny from native speakers who seem eager to uphold their own standard. Accordingly, it is highly probable that English will evolve as other second-language varieties under influence from the community of mother tongues of the people of the EU. Seidlhofer (2001) and Jenkins (2015) stress the functional aspects of Euro-English. According to Seidlhofer, ELF shall be conceptualised not as a language variety but rather as a specific social context which allows for a lot of flexibility and variability. Jenkins (2015) describes English as a ‘multilingua franca’ whereby the linguistic resources are repertoires in flux and part of the mobile resources of lingua franca users.

Discussion

Cross-border trade, the international flow of capital, information and labour have led to the emergence of a linguistic world order in which English plays an indisputably leading role. The overwhelming dominance of the English language is thoroughly represented in academic literature. The modelling of this phenomenon in terms of the ‘three concentric circles’ by Braj B. Kachru serves as an analytical guide to navigate through the abundance of relating literature and terminology. The paradigmatic change proposed by Kachru challenges the traditional

linguistic orthodoxies and proclaims that the language belongs to those who use it, while deviation from standard norms is a normal element of language development. It is against this background that processes of European international communication have been examined.

It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that English made its way into the European language palette, where traditionally French was used in the diplomatic, German in the scientific field. Following the change of regime in the Soviet satellite states, English assumed a dominant role in Central and Eastern European countries as well, even though it initially had to share the status of the most popular foreign language with German. In today's Europe, the use of English language dominates in many areas, including education (both language and public education), information technology, tourism, science, culture and business. The rise of English in Europe in these areas represents the regional projection of the neoliberal global order.

The present-day sociolinguistic profile of English in Europe is characterised by a wide-spread use also the institutional realm of the European Union, the main political superstructure encompassing European states. The European language regime hardly takes into consideration this preponderant status. In the new institutional context of the European Union, the United Kingdom is not a Member State and English is *de iure* not an official language anymore. Brexit, on the one hand, has intensified anti-English rhetoric but more importantly, it highlighted that English is no longer just one of the official languages, but is the most widely used language among EU officials and the basic pillar of the European language regime. With the United Kingdom breaking with the EU, the legal status of English is shaking, as none of the remaining EU Member States has previously designated it as an official language. On the other hand, the departure of the United Kingdom may serve as a catalyst for the future codification of a European English variety. This may put on the agenda the reform of the European Union language regime in a direction in which both the status and the corpus planning activity of the EU might take on a new perspective.

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