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MULTILINGUAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN EMPLOYEES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN BRUSSELS

Cette contribution présente une analyse de la communication professionnelle plurilingue dans les institutions de l'Union Européenne à Bruxelles. Les questions de recherche posées ici sont: 1) dans quelle mesure les fonctionnaires européens (allemands) sont-ils plurilingues?; et 2) quelles sont les motivations pour les choix linguistiques? L'analyse des choix de langues entre des fonctionnaires européens est fondée sur des réseaux sociaux. La population envisagée est constituée de six réseaux sociaux individuels qui constituent un "supra-réseau". Les résultats préliminaires indiquent que les fonctionnaires européens sont plutôt bi- et trilingues que vraiment plurilingues. L'allemand, l'anglais et/ou le français remplissent la fonction de lingua franca. Les motivations pour ces choix linguistiques peuvent être retrouvées dans la construction des réseaux sociaux et répondent à l'hypothèse de l'efficacité communicative.

1. Introduction

Applying the theme of communicating in professional multilingual environments to the case of Brussels leaves many possibilities. In this contribution, a characteristic Brussels' multilingual professional context is discussed, namely that of the institutions of the European Union. The employees of these Euro-institutions constitute an integral part of Brussels population and contribute to the city life in their own specific way. The question of language use in these professional settings is, as Wright (2000: 88) confirms, "one of the most knotty problems and interesting challenges".

The theory and findings discussed here are part of a larger research project[1] which focuses on the use of different languages (Dutch in particular) in Brussels. It consists of a non-representative survey within four population subgroups, of which "Euro-officials" is one.[2] As underlying theory and methodology social network analysis is applied. The main objective of the study is to map and explain the use of Dutch from the underlying social dynamics which characterize the networks within which the languge is spoken.[3] This article presents some preliminary results of the ongoing research.

First, some facts and findings about the multilingual character of Brussels and the Euro-institutions are presented. Second, the applied methodology of social network analysis is discussed, both in general and in the context of this study. Next is the presentation and discussion of the findings on the language usage of the Euro-officials. Finally, the

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[1]   This study will be completed by October 2002 as a doctoral thesis.

[2]   The other population subgroups are "genuine Brussels' inhabitants", "Mediterranean migrants" and "Francophone parents of children attending Dutch-speaking schools".

[3]   Only the quality of Dutch is analysed in depth (qualitative analysis of phonetic, lexical and grammatical variables, correlated to the network variables). The qualitative analysis was not completed at the time of presentation of this paper, and is therefore not dealt with as such.

multilingual range of communication between the Euro-officials is summed up in the conclusive notes.

2. Europe in Brussels: facts and findings

2.1. Multilingual Brussels

It is a broadly known fact that Brussels[4] has a bilingual status, incorporating French and Dutch as the two co-existing official languages. Despite what its official bilingual status leads to believe, the linguistic composition of Brussels cannot be restricted to the mere co-occurrence of French and Dutch. The difference in use between the majority language French and the minority language Dutch renders the bilingual situation a certain instability. Language counts have not been held anymore in Brussels since 1947, but it is assumed that approximately 85% of the Brussels' inhabitants are French-speaking, whereas 15 % are supposedly Dutch-speakers. In addition, actual language usage is not limited to either French or Dutch. Only language use for administrative purposes is. Rather, French and/or Dutch occur in certain characteristic blends:

> "(T)he linguistic scene in Brussels is not dominated by two languages but [...] by a multitude of codes and thus the multilingualism of various groups of the population consists of using several of these codes, according to a well-known set of sociolinguistic variables" (De Vriendt/Willemyns 1987: 222).

Also, a shift in linguistic prestige towards Dutch (e.g. Willemyns 1997) should also be taken into consideration when describing Brussels from a linguistic point of view. This perhaps less obvious yet important change emerged slowly over the last 20 to 30 years.

Yet another aspect which adds to the complexity of the language proportions in Brussels is the multitude of languages that are spoken by Mediterranean, European, African, Asian and American migrants, this in addition to French and/or Dutch. English, Spanish, Arabic and many other languages are also characteristic for the Brussels linguistic scene, and therefore cannot be ignored when discussing it. Moreover, together these aspects illustrate that Brussels is not merely officially bilingual, but dynamically multilingual.

2.2. The presence of the European Union and its officials

A considerable part of the European migrants mentioned above reside in Brussels as employees of the European Union. The Euro-institutions in Brussels employ about 20.000

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[4]   Henceforth, the term "Brussels" denotes the entire Brussels Capital Region area, which comprises 19 communities of which Brussels-city is the central one.

officials, of which almost 15.000 are not Belgian.[5] All these officials work in one of the five Euro-institutions that are represented — either fully or partially — in Brussels: the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions. The European Commission, however, is the largest Euro-institution, not only in Brussels but of the entire EU. As a result, the greater part of the Brussels' Euro-officials work for the EC.

Except for one institution that is situated in the city centre, the Euro-buildings are grouped together in what has become known as "the European Quarter" of Brussels. This is located in the administrative area, just outside the actual city of Brussels. The quarter, a melting pot of European nationalities, is mostly a non-residential area. Large-scale urban renewal projects during recent years have considerably expanded the European Quarter. A prestigious development, yet at the expense of housing facilities for Brussels' inhabitants (De Lannoy/Lammens 1999).

2.3. The institutions' language policies and working languages

The EU employs the general language policy to apply the official languages of the member states as working languages. The membership of fifteen countries implies the use of the currently eleven working languages. These are, chronologically ordered: French, Dutch, German and Italian since the onset; English and Danish since 1973; Greek since 1981; Spanish and Portuguese since 1986; and Finnish and Swedish since 1995. Plurilingualism therefore has always been a constant factor in the institutions. No other international organisation uses so many languages; hence the EU-language policy is unprecedented (Wright 2000).

A language policy of this kind is of course prone to debate. On the one hand, there are ongoing discussions about the demand for the incorporation of other officially recognised languages, like Catalan and Welsh. In this respect also Irish and Luxembourgish should be included, although these countries did not insist on this. This proves that the EU does not always apply the language policy to the letter. On the other hand, the more working languages there are, the more difficult actual use of all of them becomes. Multilingual use of the working languages basically comes down to all documents of the institutions being drawn up in the official working languages, and speeches being simultaneously interpreted into the other official working languages. According to Wright (2000), however, these demands are not met consistently. Depending on the kind of interaction between the officials, sometimes only the wider used official languages are applied, functioning as vehicular languages. "These vehicular languages are, in essence, French, English and sometimes German" (Wright 2000: 164). Consequently, proposals have been issued for a simplified language policy, but none of these have been approved to date.

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[5]   Information to be found at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/represent/be/neder/brusseleu2/brusse01.htm

2.4. Recent findings

An important fact for the subject of this article is that "all the research in the 1990s reports increasing use of French and English in the institutions of the EU" (Wright 2000: 167). Wright (2000) provides an overview of several studies into the matter, including her own, and they all give evidence of "significant shortfall between the ideal of plurilingual policies and the bilingual/monolingual reality" (Wright 2000: 169). However, these studies were usually carried out on the language use of high level officials, such as members of the European Parliament. The discrepancies are most obvious when formal, large-scale interactions are compared to informal, unscheduled interactions. In the former, the language policies are usually applied, whereas the latter seems to encourage the use of vehicular languages:

> Here communication is task driven and will be organised in the most effective way and not necessarily to respect the commitment to linguistic pluralism. MEPs will use whatever achieves their purpose, usually French and English. MEPs who are not competent in French or English are forced to rely on assistants with language skills to help them interact in the less formal arena. (Wright 2000: 169)

In our study, however, the focus lies on language usage among lower level officials. Here the matter of work being task driven and organised as effectively as possible is perhaps even more so prevalent. Consequently, the question automatically poses itself to what extent this particular context will be characterised by bilingual and monolingual communication, instead of by the prescribed plurilingualism.

Another significant conclusion drawn from a previous study is that "English and French appear to be assuming the role of *lingua francas* for the mainly Germanic north and the mainly Romance south respectively" (Wright 2000: 170). Again, this finding emerged when studying the language use among high level officials in the act of lobbying. Nevertheless, it will be an interesting aspect to consider in the professional settings discussed in this article.

In general, data on communication in the Euro-institutions illustrate that when actual conversational language is used, officials tend to behave as ordinary language users. Instead of maintaining the multilingual policy, they opt for mainly French and English as linguae francae in order to get their message across with a minimum of effort and a maximum of result. In this respect, Euro-officials do not seem to differ from Euro-citizens in general. Consequently, the statement that "[m]ultilingualism, as it is practised in Europe, appears to favour only the most prestigious languages" (Labrie/Quell 1997: 4), largely applies for its officials as well.

In this paper, the following research questions will be examined: How multilingual is the communication between lower Euro-officials in the actual working environment? What are the underlying motivations for the linguistic choices they make? Are English and French

also in this professional setting used as linguae francae? If so, do preferences emerge for either English or French according to geographical background of the speakers?

3. Methodological framework: social network analysis

3.1. The use of social network analysis

In order to be able to provide adequate answers to the research questions mentioned above, the network analysis approach is used. Social network analysis is able to uncover the social dynamics which underlie particular language use. It assumes that language behaviour, especially linguistic variation in bilingual or multilingual surroundings, is socially motivated. Therefore, language interaction is studied within the relevant communicative contexts of social networks. From the 1960s and 1970s onwards, the network analysis approach has known an increasing success in the field of sociolinguistics. Especially Milroy's Belfast study (Milroy 1987) showed the possibilities this approach has to offer. The basic postulate of network analysis is "that people interact meaningfully as individuals, in addition to forming parts of structured, functional institutions such as classes, castes or occupational groups" (Milroy 1987: 45-46). However, personal networks are more than mere communication networks. In addition to the latter, the former has a primordial social function. The messages in social networks are in fact transactions which are governed by the principle that the value gained from the interaction must be equal to or greater than the cost (Boissevain 1974). The network concept allows for the account not only of the social, situational contexts in which language use takes place, but also of the interactional process which render languages their social meaning. Also the fact that this concept, "unlike that of socio-economic class, is not limited by intercultural differences in economic or status systems", makes it a very valuable tool for sociolinguistic analysis (Milroy 1987: 178).

Social networks are comprised of chains of kinship, friendship and relations. The central person to whom the personal network is anchored is called "ego". Three basic concepts characterise the build up of social networks. First, the structural characteristic "density" expresses the extent to which the members of the network know each other. This concept reflects the number of links within the network. "Multiplexity", on the other hand, is an interactional characteristic which deals with the nature or content of the links. A link that connects two language users as both friends and colleagues, for example, is multiplex. Segments of networks which display high density are labelled "clusters". The main hypothesis within network analysis is that "density and multiplexity usually go together, and that dense, multiplex networks act as norm enforcement mechanisms" (Milroy 1987: 137). It is also agreed upon that, generally, networks in rural areas tend to density and multiplexity, whereas networks in urban areas display spareness and uniplexity.

Job-related aspects can play an important role in the build up of social networks of individuals. When considering the social influences which "impinge on and effect the structure of networks, and thus behaviour", Boissevain (1974: 83) lists the aspect "occupation" as second most important, only preceded by "kinship"

Various types of social networks have been identified. This aspect of network analysis theory will however not be elaborated upon in this article. It suffices to know that only first-order personal networks are dealt with. These are limited to contacts with whom ego is in direct and regular contact. Occupational contacts are often considered as part of interactive networks, in which ego does not maintain relationships for personal ends. This as opposed to exchange networks, usually containing family and close friends.

3.2. Empirical approach

The study of which a small part is presented here takes the form of microlinguistic, qualitative research. The data used for analysis, obtained by means of a random small-scale survey, is non-representative for the population subgroup under investigation. Due to all kinds of practical limitations, the number of personal networks per population subgroup was narrowed down to five or six. In the subgroup "Euro-officials" discussed here, a total of six interconnected personal networks is analysed. Comparable to Milroy's approach as a friend of a friend (Milroy 1987), the initial contact with the German Euro-officials was made as an acquaintance of an acquaintance. For the selection of the other informants "snowball sampling" (cf. Johnson 1994: 133) was partially applied: ego A provided us with three other contacts (B, C and D), of whom the third supplied another two (E and F). Of the amount of data collected within this "supra network" of six linked personal networks (see Appendix I for a visual presentation), mainly that which is related to actual communication in professional settings is presented and analysed here.

The declarative data about the language use at work were obtained by means of "interview style" (Milroy 1987: 62-63) with the ego's of the personal networks. "Spontaneous style" (Milroy 1987: 62-63), in this case collecting observed data during actual professional activities, proved to be impossible, so that we had to resort to reported data provided by the ego's during interviews. Interviews with the respondents were conducted by means of a questionnaire containing open questions concerning personal background, language use, language attitudes and network build-up. Only the data concerning matters directly or indirectly related to their professional activities will be described and analysed here.

The network data were obtained through a reported reconstruction of the ego's personal networks. The contacts, ranked according to frequency of interaction, were limited to 15 to allow for a thorough analysis. For each contact given we also asked to describe the content of the relationship and the language(s) spoken in it. All this information enabled us to determine a substantial part of the respondents' personal networks.

3.3. Build-up of the networks: focus on the professional links

3.3.1. Density and multiplexity variables

A general interpretation of the density and multiplexity values[6] (see Appendix II) shows that the personal networks of the six Euro-officials are neither dense nor multiplex. Such results coincide with the fact that networks in urban, industrialised areas tend to display spareness and uniplexity. This does not imply, however, that these networks will act as the opposite of norm enforcement mechanisms when language usage is concerned. It simply means that the openness of the networks will leave more room for the presence and use of more than one language.

The density values do not differ considerably. The multiplexity values, on the other hand, do show some variation. Network C is most multiplex, whereas network E is less than half as multiplex. Consequently, the least dense network is also the least multiplex one. The reason for the relatively open networks C and A to have a relatively high multiplexity is that ego's C and A in particular have many colleagues who also function as friends, but who do not all know each other. The most remarkable fact about the multiplex nature of these networks is that multiplexity is limited to double relationships as friends and colleagues (or vice versa). Therefore, it may be assumed that the professional links in the networks are of relative importance to their build-up. This is in accordance with Boissevain's findings (see 3.1.). Another conclusion to be drawn from the values and nature of the multiplexity is that for ego's C and A, personal and professional life are strongly intertwined, while ego E (apart from being married to a Euro-official) keeps business and pleasure more separated. A look at only the professional links in the networks will reveal even more about their composition.

3.3.2. Overview of the professional links

This study only focuses on the professional links within the individual networks (see Appendix III). Ego A has a total of 7 professional links out of 15, which means that almost half of her network are colleagues. The colleagues with whom she interacts daily form a cluster since they all know each other. The others do not know each other, but in addition to being colleagues these are also friends of ego A. Consequently, these 4 links explain the relatively high multiplexity of A's rather open network.

In network B, 7 of the 17 contacts are work-related, and interaction occurs mainly on a weekly basis. Some of the colleagues know each other, although they do not form a tight cluster. The rather high density of this network is mainly caused by a strong family cluster. Therefore, the overall impact of professional links is less strong within this network.

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[6]   The multiplexity is limited to the egolinks, since the ego's were not always able to claim whether there existed more than one relationship between the other contacts given. It should also be kept in mind that these values count for only part of the entire personal networks (i.e. for ± 15 contacts given).

As many as 9 of the 16 egolinks in network C are professional contacts. They are divided into 3 clusters in which the colleagues know each other, but there is only one connection between 2 of the 3 separate clusters. This, together with a number of loose private contacts, explains the rather open character of network C. The fact that 5 of the 9 colleagues also function as friends, accounts for the relatively high multiplexity of the egolinks.

With only a third of the contacts in network D being colleagues, this network is ranked as the second least influenced by the professional environment. Although the 5 colleagues do not form a perfect cluster, there is a strong interconnectedness between them. This relative professional density is strengthened by strong ties with family, neighbours and acquaintances. The fairly high multiplexity is caused by the fact that 4 of the 5 professional egolinks are diplex colleague/friend-ties.

With 4 out of 15, network E contains the least professional contacts. This confirms the earlier made statement that ego E keeps business and pleasure separate. Although she has more colleagues than this, her not mentioning them among the first fifteen contacts indicates the unimportant role they play in the build-up of her network. Only 2 connections between the colleagues and various loose private contacts account for the low density. The low multiplexity is due to only 2 professional links being multiplex. On the whole, however, this means that half of the professional links is multiplex. Compared to the other networks — in which multiplexity is limited to the professional links as well — the relative multiplexity of network E proves to be not that low.

Network F, finally, contains the highest number of professional links: 11 out of 16 contacts are colleagues. While the two monthly work-contacts (of which one is diplex) are loose ties, the others are divided up into two tight clusters. The first evolves around the German boss, the second is also linked to ego's family. As far as density and multiplexity are concerned, networks B and F are very alike. This overview shows, however, that the actual build-up of both networks is very different. Network F's relatively high density is caused by tight professional clusters, as opposed to network B's tight family cluster. The multiplexity, on the other hand, can be compared. Both ego F and B have 3 diplex contacts (colleague/friend). This proves that density and multiplexity alone do not provide a sufficient insight into the structure and content of networks. A descriptive analysis is indispensable as well.

4. Euro-officials at work: how multilingual are they?

4.1. Language use in the working environment

4.1.1. Language knowledge

Each of the interviewed Euro-officials claimed to be multilingual. When asked about their language knowledge, respondents B and C said to speak four languages, and respondent D and E said to know five. Respondents A and F claimed to master six and seven languages respectively. In addition to their mother tongue German, they all speak English and French. Spanish and Dutch is mastered by four of the respondents. Three people know Portuguese: respondent E because she also has the Portuguese nationality and respondent F because he is married to the former. Italian belongs to the repertoire of two of the respondents. Except for respondent B, who has a Ph.D. in Engineering, the respondents all had higher language education. Three of them (D, E and F) work as translators, two are personal assistants to directors, and the engineer has the function of "scientific officer". When asked about the main languages(s) spoken at work, different answers were given (see Appendix IV).

4.1.2. Different languages with different colleagues

For further insight into the multilingual nature of the communication at work, the different languages used in the various professional links will now be discussed for each network. Approaching actual language usage through social interaction patterns will not only show whether the respondents apply their multilingualism to the fullest at work, but may also provide justifications as to why certain languages are used in certain situations.

a) Network A:

Respondent A talks German with her German colleagues, who are also friends of hers (one of whom is respondent D). Both with her Finnish boss and her British colleague English is used. Interaction with her Italian colleague happens in French, although respondent A claims to have a basic knowledge of Italian. English and some French are thus used as common languages; German is only used with colleagues/friends of the same nationality. This application of languages largely coincides with the reported language knowledge of the respondent. However, although Italian belongs to the respondent's repertoire, it is not applied with the Italian contact.

b) Network B:

Respondent B uses English with his British and Greek colleagues. German is reserved for interaction with the two German colleagues, of whom respondent A is one. Also the Dutch colleague is addressed in German, although respondent B knows Dutch sufficiently well to

conduct a conversation.[7] French is only used with the Flemish/Polish secretary, but she herself turns to English when talking to other colleagues. In fact, interaction among the colleagues of respondent B is conducted uniformly in English. With the Danish colleague English and German are used by respondent B. However, despite the fact that this Danish colleague must have a conversational mastery of German, he talks English with the other German official. In this network, the respondent employs English, French and German as common languages, while his colleagues only use English among each other. This respondent thus uses all the languages of his linguistic repertoire, except for Dutch.

c) Network C:

In network C, language use among the other colleagues in the daily and weekly interaction clusters of this network is limited to English. The cluster that groups the monthly professional contacts has French as the common language, except for the German and the Dutch-speaking Belgian officials who speak English to each other. Respondent C herself addresses her Irish boss, British colleague/friend and Belgian Dutch-speaking colleague in English; the mother tongue is used with the German colleague. French, however, is also used extensively by respondent C: with two Belgian French-speaking colleagues, with the French colleague/friend and also with the Danish colleague/friend. The Danish colleague, as already mentioned, speaks English with other colleagues. In other words, respondent C seems to prefer French to English as a common language. The range of languages used by the respondent largely coincides with her reported language knowledge, yet she considers English to be the main language of professional interaction. The use of Spanish is not required for professional ends. It is used, however, in personal links.

d) Network D:

Respondent D uses German with her German colleagues/friends (one of whom is respondent A), and Portuguese as well as German with respondent E. The Italian colleague is addressed in French; the British colleague/friend in English. This British official only uses English with the other officials as well. The professional links in network D are thus mainly trilingual. This respondent fully utilises her language knowledge in the professional context. Spanish is not used since there are no Spanish links.

e) Network E:

The range of language use in the professional links of network E is mainly restricted to Portuguese and German, this in accordance with the reported languages used at work. In addition to her husband/colleague (respondent F) using German as well as Portuguese with her, respondents E's two main colleagues are Portuguese. Consequently, only Portuguese is used within this small cluster. The only other colleague/friend mentioned is German (respondent D), with whom German and Portuguese is spoken. Interaction between respondents D and F is conducted in German.

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[7]   The interview with respondent B was conducted entirely in Dutch.

f) Network F:

Respondent F speaks German with his wife/colleague (respondent E), with his German boss, with a German colleague/friend and with a Dutch colleague/friend. Thus, despite a good conversational knowledge of Dutch,[8] the mother tongue is opted for when interacting with the Dutch colleague/friend. The other Dutch colleague is addressed in English, so that again the knowledge of Dutch is not applied. Respondent F usually addresses the Portuguese director-general of his department in Portuguese; only occasionally French is used. He quite often talks Portuguese with his wife/colleague and tries to do so with his Portuguese colleagues as well. However, more often than not he turns to French when interacting with the other two Portuguese officials. With both the French colleagues French is spoken. This is also the case with the Spanish colleague, despite the fact that respondent F claims to master Spanish. French is by far the most used language amongst the other officials of the daily interaction cluster. Only the two Portuguese officials differ in this respect; they employ their mother tongue with each other. In the weekly interaction cluster French and English are claimed to be used equally within singular connections, except for interaction between the German colleague and respondent E, which is conducted in German. Although respondent F speaks as much German as French at work, he judges the latter to be the major language of interaction.

4.2. Motivation for linguistic choices

In theory, the most obvious motivation for interacting multilingually on the work floor of the Euro-institutions is that knowing several languages is a prerequisite to the job. However, such a motivation cannot account for the specific linguistic choices discussed above. As the previous analysis also showed not all of the Euro-officials studied here apply their multilingualism to the fullest. Although their open network structures allow for a flexible use of other languages in addition to German, the application of their multilingual repertoire tends to be fairly rigid. Language use is dominated by a few "preferred" languages (cf. Baetens Beardsmore 1986). On the whole, multilingual communication by these Euro-officials at work is restricted to German, French and English, with a (minimal) amount of Portuguese in three of the networks. In general, the choice of one or more[9] preferred language(s) is said to be "determined by factors which change the significance of a given language across time, according to the subject's case history, and in line with subjective self-assessment of relative fluency" (Baetens Beardsmore 1986: 35). Various more specific motivations which incorporate the peculiarity of the linguistic choices made are discussed below.

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[8]   The interview with respondent F was conducted entirely in Dutch.

[9]   Originally, the concept "preferred language" was applied to bilingualism (cf. Baetens Beardsmore 1986: 35). Here its meaning is extended to the context of multilingualism.

4.2.1. Professional clusters

A first motivation for this language behaviour is based on social network theory. Instead of focussing on the general structure of the entire networks, however, the professional links are the main point of interest here. Hence, the professional clusters described here (see also Appendix III) are not as much influenced by the overall density of the entire network as they are by the density of clusters themselves. Consequently, the usually high professional cluster density enforces the use of only one or a few norm languages, these being German, French and/or English. Additional languages known, such as Dutch, Italian and Spanish is some of the networks, are excluded from use.

4.2.2. Linguae francae

The restriction of the multilingualism among these lower level Euro-officials can further be motivated by the lingua franca theory discussed earlier. French, English and German, which are the most widely used and thus strongest working languages within the Euro-institutions, function here as vehicular languages. When it comes down to accomplishing a task with a minimum of effort and a maximum of result, these officials employ common languages shared by the colleagues. Therefore, language use within the six networks discussed here is dominated by linguae francae, namely German, French and English. The lingua franca theory also accounts for the elimination of languages mastered by the respondents, but not used when the opportunity presents itself.

In addition, also the more specified "communicative efficiency hypothesis", which states that "in a multilingual community the choice of a certain language as the lingua franca depends more on the number of its speakers and therefore on its usefulness and accessibility (...) than on its socioeconomic prestige" (Pash 1997: 46), proves to be valid here.[10] Although German, French and English may be the most prestigious of the working languages within the European institutions, they are not chosen because of this aspect. Efficiency is the prevalent explanatory factor for the linguistic choices made in the professional environment.

4.2.3. Mother tongue

The slight preference for German (and Portuguese in the case of respondent E) to French or English which is noticeable in most of the networks, can be explained by the prominent role the mother tongue plays. Despite their multilingual repertoire and the per definition multilingual nature of the professional context, the respondents usually prefer talking German to another language they master adequately. In fact, respondent F openly admits to taking advantage of the fact that one of his Dutch colleagues speaks German well, in order to be able to use German instead of having to turn to Dutch or English. Although it can not be

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[10]   This as opposed to the "prestige hypothesis" (Pash 1997: 45).

concluded from this study with certainty, the officials, when possible, seem to direct their professional interactions partly according to the language background of the colleagues. The difference between daily contacts on the one hand, and weekly and monthly contacts on the other, supports this assumption. Usually the German colleagues (and sometimes friends) are weekly and/or monthly contacts, whereas the daily contacts constitute a wider range of nationalities. In other words, the direct and "appointed" daily colleagues can have either nationality, and language use is adjusted accordingly. The indirect and more freely "chosen" professional contacts on a weekly or monthly basis, however, are quite often Germans or German-speaking, so that the mother tongue is applied.

4.2.4. Regional background

In addition to the preference for German as the main lingua franca, the professional links in the networks also display distinct inclinations towards either English or French. As described in the analysis, certain professional clusters are clearly dominated by either French or English as linguae francae, especially when it concerns interaction among the other officials. When the majority of the interlocutors originate from the northern parts of Europe, English is the shared language, as is the case in the daily interaction cluster in network A. When, however, most of the members of a cluster originate from the southern parts of Europe (e.g. in the daily interaction contacts of network F), then language usage is restricted to French. Singular interaction among officials whose nationalities are linked geographically, whether inside or outside the clusters, are characterised in the same way.

A special case in this respect is that of the weekly interaction cluster in network F. This professional cluster groups a German, a French and a Dutch official. Language use in these 3 singular links was claimed to be bilingual French/English, implying that French and English alternate with each other. There seems to be no apparent preference for either language, although it could well be that the initiator of the interaction chooses either English or French according to his regional background, and that the responder complies with this choice. Unfortunately, our study was not able to determine this.

4.2.5. Status

An important additional influence on the dynamics of inguistic choice in the professional networks is that of status. A difference in status between two employees marks their language interaction. Lower ranked employees tend to adapt when communicating with a higher ranked employee. In network F, status plays a crucial role. Respondent F only occasionally employs Portuguese with the Portuguese colleagues who work on his floor. He usually talks French with them, because Portuguese demands too much effort. With the Portuguese director-general of his department, however, respondent F usually converses in Portuguese. When he switches to French to increase the fluency of the conversation, he is

asked to continue in Portuguese. In fact, respondent F claims that talking Portuguese with the director-general is obligatory for employees who master the language.

Higher status also motivates linguistic choice in networks A and C. The Finnish and Irish supervisors respectively both employ only English with the officials who work directly under them, even with officials who have a Romance language as mother tongue. A preference for English due to a less adequate knowledge of French could justify this marked linguistic choice. Inadequate use of a lingua franca could well result in misunderstandings which could undermine the functioning of the department. Respondent F's direct superior, on the other hand, adapts to the language background of the officials who work for him. This German boss speaks German with respondent F, but switches to French when interacting with five officials under him who all speak Romance languages. Here a valid explanation for the language choice is the strength in numbers of his non-Germanic subordinates, possibly combined with a relatively more adequate knowledge of French.

However, both kinds of linguistic choices made by the various superior employees coincide with the already mentioned "communicative efficiency hypothesis", which is also labelled the "numbers-of-speakers hypothesis" (Pash 1997: 46). Higher status employees use their superiority to choose as lingua franca that language which guarantees the task driven interaction to be as efficient as possible. Consequently, also the higher Euro-officials in the networks analysed here tend do prefer efficiency over prestige when choosing a particular language as lingua franca.

5. Conclusive notes

By close analysis of six personal networks of lower Euro-officials, we have attempted to illustrate that multilingual communication in this professional context is mainly restricted to practical trilingualism in the form of German, French and English. The underlying linguistic choices are motivated by the relative strength of the ties in the professional clusters, the impact of linguae francae and the mother tongue, and the consequences of differences in status between interlocutors. In fact, the structure and content of the professional ties may influence the entire build-up of the networks to the extent that work contacts become exchange links instead of mere interactive links (see 3.1.). Such dominance of the profession accounts for the particular, somewhat isolated social position Euro-officials tend to occupy in the Brussels' population.

As is the case among citizens of the EU, "language spread favours the emergence of lingua francae" (Labrie/Quell 1997: 23) among officials of the EU as well. This study shows the difference in use between German (in particular), French and English and languages from smaller linguistic communities. Language use by lower Euro-officials in this respect is also similar to that of higher Euro-officials, even to the extent that the choice of the lingua franca is geographically determined (cf. Wright 2000). In other words, the range of

communication between employees of the Euro-institutions is not substantially more multilingual than that of ordinary citizens. Rather than its individual officials, only the institutional body of employees as a whole displays a mandatory plurilingualism which exceeds the mere linguae francae. When it comes down to the officials as individual speakers, however, a pragmatic trilingualism of preferred languages — which coincide to a great extent with the linguae francae — is the mean. Euro-officials, therefore, generally function as ordinary language users. The artificial multilingual environment they work in urges a well-considered choice of linguae francae which allow for the job to be accomplished. Communication is conducted by efficiency, also when language choice is concerned. The use of specific linguae francae is merely a communicative strategy to avoid further "delay, choice or prioritising of information and loss of meaning" (Wright 2000: 171) which already undermines the plurilingual regime in the Euro-institutions.

Appendix I: Supra network of German EU officials[11]
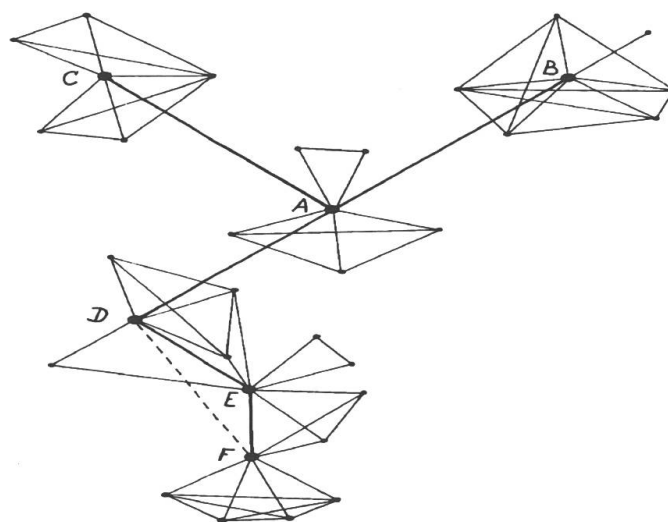
Appendix II: Density and multiplexity per individual network (%)

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Density	24.2	29.4	25.7	34.2	22.5	29.4
Multiplexity	26.7	17.7	31.3	26.7	13.3	18.8

[11] Due to graphical limitations, the visual representation of the supra network is restricted to the daily contacts.

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Appendix III: Professional links per individual network[12]

Ego A	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
	Finnish boss	German coll./friend	German coll./friend
	Italian coll.	German coll./friend	German coll. friend
	British coll.		

Ego B	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
	Polish secretary/ Friend	*Danish coll./friend*	German coll. (A)
		British coll./friend	
		Greek coll.	
		German coll.	
		Dutch coll.	

Ego C	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
	Irish boss/friend	*Danish coll./friend*	Belgian coll./friend
	German coll.	*British coll./friend*	German coll.
	Belgian coll.		Belgian coll.
			French coll./friend

Ego D	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
	Italian coll.	**German coll./fr.**	German coll./friend
	German/Port.	*British coll./friend*	
	coll./friend (E)		

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[12] Professional contacts who know each other are indicated by (a combination of) bold and/or underlined type, italics, and/or special font. Unmarked type indicates no relationship.

	Daily	*Weekly*	*Monthly*
Ego E	**Husband/coll. (F)** *Portugese coll.* *Portugese boss*	**German coll./frien (D)**	

	Daily	*Weekly*	*Monthly*
Ego F	*Wife/coll. (E)* **German boss** **Portugese coll.** **Spanish coll.** **French coll.** **Portugese coll.**	<u>*German coll./friend*</u> <u>French coll.</u> <u>Dutch coll.</u>	Portugese director/general Dutch coll./friend

Appendix IV: Main languages(s) claimed spoken at work

	Main language(s) at work
A	French, English and German
B	English, German, some French
C	English
D	German and French
E	Portugese and German
F	French

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