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FACTORS, FEATURES AND CONSEQUENCES OF LANGUAGE COMPETITION AND THE INTERCONNECTION BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND POLITICS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: A CASE STUDY ON THE EU

ABSTRACT: *This article explores the multidimensional interaction between language and politics in the field of international relations, with a focus on language competition and the political role of multilingualism within the European Union (EU). The relevance of the topic stems from the growing role of communication in international politics and the tension between official multilingualism and the de facto dominance of English as a global instrument of political and diplomatic influence. The study argues that language policy is not merely an administrative or cultural matter but, above all, a political tool that reflects the balance of power, identity, and legitimacy – including at the supranational level. The aim of the article is to analyze the relationship between language and politics in international relations through the prism of transactional and discursive dimensions of interlingual interaction, as well as to examine the hierarchization of languages and linguistic stratification within the EU. The research covers the theoretical foundations of interlingual dynamics, the institutional factors shaping EU language policy, and the practical manifestations of its implementation. The findings demonstrate that the principle of linguistic equality, as declared in the EU's normative documents, is in practice gradually transforming into functional monolingualism, driven by pragmatic communication needs and the geopolitical advantage of the English language. This creates a linguistic hierarchy that influences the political positioning of EU member states and limits the potential of less prestigious languages. The conclusions highlight the contradictions between symbolic multilingualism and the actual unification of the EU's linguistic space. These contradictions necessitate a rethinking of language policy as a key factor in integration, democratic representation, and cultural equality within international institutions.*

KEYWORDS: multilingualism; language policy; EU; international relations; English language.

1. Introduction

In today's world, where international relations increasingly depend on the speed, accuracy, and efficiency of communication, language serves not only as a means of exchange but also as a powerful factor of political influence, cultural dominance, and structural integration. This is especially evident in the operations of supranational entities such as the European Union (EU), where

linguistic diversity functions simultaneously as a resource and a challenge for democratic interaction. Against the backdrop of globalization and the dominance of English as the global lingua franca, the EU's multilingual policy – which formally proclaims the equality of all member states' languages – exhibits a range of internal contradictions related to the actual functional hierarchization of languages and the transactional costs of communication. Therefore, this issue is particularly relevant and calls for in-depth examination.

In light of this, the aim of the present study is to analyze the interrelation between language and politics in the realm of international relations, with a focus on language competition, functional stratification, and the paradoxes of multilingualism, primarily within the EU as a unique supranational political entity. The main objectives of this article are: 1) to explore the discursive and transactional dimensions of interlingual interaction; 2) to identify the role of language policy in the institutional and political development of the EU; 3) to examine manifestations of linguistic hierarchy within the framework of official multilingualism and functional monolingualism.

These aims and objectives determine the structure of the article. The following section presents the theoretical framework for studying interlinguality and language as a political factor in international relations, incorporating concepts of semantic and financial transactional costs. The third section is devoted to the integrative and institutional factors shaping EU language policy, its evolution, symbolic dimension, and contradictory practices. The fourth section highlights the conflict between the declared linguistic diversity and the actual dominant role of English in the EU, which creates a new linguistic hierarchy, influences the political positioning of member states, and challenges the feasibility of genuine language equality within the EU. Finally, the concluding section summarizes the key findings regarding the consequences of functional linguistic stratification and outlines potential directions for further research in this field.

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative, theory-driven research design grounded in interpretative and constructivist traditions of international relations theory. Rather than pursuing causal inference or quantitative generalization, the article focuses on conceptual clarification and analytical explanation of the relationship between language, power, and political legitimacy in international relations. Language is treated not as a neutral communicative medium but as a constitutive element of political practice, embedded in institutional structures, discursive regimes, and historically contingent patterns of meaning-making. This approach allows for the examination of how linguistic hierarchies emerge, stabilize, and transform within complex political systems. The study combines conceptual analysis with qualitative discourse analysis and institutional document analysis. Key concepts related to interlinguality, transaction costs, legitimacy, and linguistic hierarchy are examined through their usage in international relations theory and EU-related political discourse. The

European Union is employed as an analytically strategic case study due to its highly institutionalized multilingual framework and its unique position as a supranational political entity that formally enshrines linguistic equality while simultaneously exhibiting functional linguistic stratification. The case of the EU enables an analytically informed assessment of how abstract theoretical propositions concerning language competition and political power materialize within concrete institutional settings. The findings are intended to contribute to analytical generalization rather than empirical extrapolation, offering insights applicable to other multilingual international and supranational contexts.

2. Theoretical Framework for Researching Interlinguality, and the Language–Politics Nexus in International Relations: Discursive and Transactional Dimensions

From a methodological perspective, this section employs an interpretative theoretical approach informed by the linguistic turn in social and political theory. The analysis conceptualizes language as a discursive and practical medium through which political meaning, legitimacy, and authority are produced and contested in international relations. The notion of transaction costs is used as an analytical lens rather than as a measurable variable, allowing for an exploration of semantic and financial dimensions of interlingual interaction. This theoretical framework prioritizes meaning, discourse, and practice over positivist measurement, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of how linguistic structures shape political outcomes in international and supranational contexts.

It is now an established fact that language shapes and structures international and global politics – and vice versa. However, this interrelation between language and politics is particularly salient in the context of transnational, supranational, and integrative processes, which often underpin the phenomenon of language competition in international relations. The key explanation lies in the reality that political actors, institutions, and systems operate within linguistic boundaries and barriers. As a result, international relations are inherently interlingual (Wigen 2015). Since international interactions and practices are expressed and interpreted through language, some degree of shared meaning must be established. Otherwise, discrepancies in interpretation, as well as divergent social and political expectations, may constrain the scope and quality of international relations.

Despite this, international relations theory has not conceptualized interlingual relations, even though it continuously appeals to them. Instead, it operates in a context where linguistic differences are reduced or assimilated – especially in terms of political and diplomatic terminology.

The issue of interlinguality in international relations has increasingly become a subject of interest within social and political theory, particularly following the linguistic turn that was initiated

by a number of scholars. In parallel, international relations theory has also undergone a linguistic turn, privileging the political significance of language in the field of international politics. Nevertheless, international relations as a discipline have yet to serve as a theoretical platform for analyzing interlinguality and language interaction as intrinsic features of international political practice. Scholars have acknowledged the importance of understanding how decisions are legitimized and consensus is achieved in relation to specific analytical categories, depending on particular linguistic registers and interlingual interactions (Krebs and Jackson 2007). A prominent example of this is the divergent framing of conceptually overlapping but politically dichotomous phenomena, such as "terrorism" and "freedom fighting." These are legitimized through vastly different political practices depending on how they are perceived by different actors in international politics. Moreover, although the term "terrorism" is now used in nearly every language, it carries starkly different connotations, shaped by each linguistic community's distinct historical experience (Wigen 2015).

Thus, international relations theory lacks a definitive answer to the question of what happens when claims to the legitimacy of certain political phenomena or processes are translated from one language into another, or when political actors attempt to negotiate meaning within existing linguistic boundaries. The theory is not conclusive in its interpretation of interlingual relations, yet it invokes them when attempting to explain international practice. As a result, the contested linguistic framing of political phenomena inevitably leads to differences in how political practices are legitimized. This creates a divergence between relations shaped by actors attempting to legitimate their mutual agreements through specific linguistic registers, and those formed within a monolingual space.

Accordingly, to fully describe international relations, its theory must draw on insights from other social sciences that have addressed the problems of the linguistic turn and interlinguality on a more advanced theoretical level (Adler and Pouliot 2011; Neumann 2002). In other words, international relations theory – and political theory more broadly – should approach interlinguality not merely as a self-contained phenomenon, but as a structure-shaping factor in socio-political interaction. The loss of linguistic meaning in international relations frequently leads to the loss of their socio-political meaning. This demonstrates that the similarities and differences between political languages – or between languages in politics – are always determined by a specific historical context and practice, through which language (or languages) becomes the prerequisite for socio-political interaction (Wigen 2015).

From the perspective of international relations theory, the problem centers on the relationship between languages and their translation, since it is through translation that international relations either acquire or lose their socio-political meaning. This (re)production or loss of meaning can be

framed in terms of transaction costs of translation, which typically take two forms: semantic (pertaining to meaning) and financial (pertaining to resources). This creates a practical challenge for international actors who must operate within linguistic barriers, as the loss of meaning often diminishes the potential for cooperation. However, effective mutual understanding does not automatically lead to amicable relations; rather, a lack of understanding tends to hinder interaction and complicate cooperation.

On the other hand, semantic transaction costs and the resulting socio-political misunderstandings may be offset through financial investments. Nonetheless, even in such cases, states, international organizations, and corporations are generally unable to fully compensate for semantic transaction costs (Lotman: 37). These precede financial costs and are linguistically driven, with a direct impact on the socio-political dimensions of international relations (Wigen 2015). This is evident in the fact that various languages are often practically and stylistically incompatible, despite frequently being perceived as linguistically similar or interrelated.

The picture is further complicated by the fact that cultures and languages are constantly evolving and undergoing transformation. This dynamic nature directly affects historical and socio-political processes, contributing to the inherent instability of international relations. Consequently, linguistic and cultural compatibility – along with the political and social meanings attached to concepts – at a given historical moment does not guarantee their continued compatibility in another. In light of this, maintaining conceptual coherence across languages and cultures requires continuous cross-linguistic exchange, both textual and verbal. As R. Keohane (1984) argued, the institutionalization of linguistic and cultural cooperation reduces the transaction costs of international relations and makes future political interaction more likely and more structured.

The more intensively multiple language communities engage within a shared political discourse, the greater the convergence of the concepts and meanings they employ. Accordingly, the deeper the interweaving of conceptual structures between the parties to international engagement, the lower the semantic transaction costs, which in turn accelerates political communication and decision-making (Putnam 1988; Wittgenstein 1975: 519). Conversely, when international relations between two states are conducted in one language, while domestic politics are legitimized in another, this creates discursive asymmetries. In such cases, political actors are compelled to navigate different systems of legitimation, conceptual frameworks, and linguistic registers (Wigen 2015; Neumann 2007).

As a result, what is considered legitimate in a domestic political context may not be equally legitimate in the international arena – and vice versa (Nexon 2009: 114–115). When such discrepancies become critical, the states or political actors that generate them risk losing their international

credibility and standing in global politics. These challenges are most pronounced when semantic transaction costs are exceptionally high – that is, when linguistic and cultural compatibility is minimal, yet the anticipated socio-political stakes of international cooperation are significant or even critical (Jackson 2016). This is especially relevant in situations where one party is an established global actor and the other is a newcomer or peripheral participant entering the realm of international politics (Neumann 2011: 484).

Ultimately, this means that every interpretation in international relations can only be used to legitimize a limited range of political actions and events. This does not imply that such political actions or events can no longer be reinterpreted, but rather confirms that the definition of the relationship between discourse and practice in international relations is always dependent on the specific historical context. Thus, interlingual relations and competition among languages within international relations constitute a "two-level language game" (Neumann 2007; Wigen 2015). The explanation for this can be found in the ideas of L. Wittgenstein (1975: 229), who emphasized that the meaning of words in language games is intrinsically linked to practice. Similarly, concepts, terms, and commonly used words in international relations are always focal points of intersubjective knowledge and, as such, they inevitably manifest in practice. In other words, as Adler and Pouliot (2011: 6) assert, the practice of international relations consists of competent performances, or more precisely, socially significant models of action that, when carried out with varying degrees of competence, simultaneously embody, enact, and perhaps transform foundational knowledge and discourse in the material world. Paraphrasing this, it is clear that the practice of international relations and world politics is relational and discursive, embedded in action and the repeated use of discursive foundational knowledge. Consequently, the acceptability of a particular interpretation in international relations is an intersubjective matter, subject to contestation, but shared within a collective (Krebs and Jackson 2007). The key point here is that discursive struggle is a contest over which practices will become legitimate, potentially hinging on the interpretation of only a few phrases or even individual words, rather than entire conceptual domains. Thus, the introduction of a new interpretation of certain concepts based on another language or languages is typically seen as a political act, even a reconstruction of society by shifting the boundaries of what is politically possible (Wigen 2015).

This logic within international relations theory, regarding the neglect of interlinguality in the practice of international relations and world politics, is driven by the fact that today the "privileged" language of international relations, both at the theoretical and practical levels, is English. No other language can rival English in terms of its importance for political relations between states. This means that a hierarchical structure of international communication languages has been constructed,

which reduces transaction costs within interlinguality (Lake 2009). This is especially true in the context of the modern world, where the majority of communities are bilingual, using two official or national languages in certain states, or one national language and one (depending on context) or even multiple languages of international communication (Wigen 2015). Moreover, these hierarchical relationships in linguistic systems are typically not derived from the current influence of individual states, although they indirectly define their socio-political power. For example, Japan may economically surpass France, but French remains more prestigious when it comes to international political legitimacy. This results from the fact that French, like English today, was once institutionalized in international communication, and also because French historically served as the language of much of European aristocracy and diplomacy. A similar structure applies to the Arabic language, which remains prestigious in a number of countries despite their socio-economic lag behind those whose languages are not widely used. Consequently, the cause of linguistic hierarchy and limited interlinguality in the world is globalization, as it, even though not the cause of interlingual relations, plays an important role in the emergence of a particular distribution of languages and linguistic hierarchies in a multipolar world. This confirms the view held by scholars that language is not simply an epiphenomenon of power but an integral part of socio-political reality (Wigen 2015), which complicates the structuring of interlingual relations and language competition in international relations, diplomacy, and geopolitics (Putnam 1988: 434).

3. Integration and Institutional Factors and the Consequences of Structuring the Space of Interlingual Politics and the Relationship Between Language and Politics in International Relations: The Example of the EU

We propose to trace and verify theoretical arguments and assumptions based on an assessment of the integration and institutional factors and the consequences of structuring the relationship between language and politics in international relations using the example of the European Union (EU). Methodologically, the European Union is approached as a paradigmatic and heuristic case study of institutionalized multilingual governance. Its relevance lies not only in the scale of its linguistic diversity but also in the legal codification of language equality combined with the practical necessity of streamlined political communication. This makes the EU particularly suitable for examining the tension between normative multilingualism and functional monolingualism. The case study does not aim to evaluate the effectiveness of EU language policy per se, but rather to use the EU as an analytically rich environment for testing and illustrating broader theoretical claims regarding language competition, hierarchy, and political power in international relations.

From a legal standpoint, the EU recognizes the equality of languages of all states, nations, and ethnic groups within its structure, as well as all nationalities and ethnic groups inhabiting the member states of the EU. Legally (for instance, according to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages) and conceptually, multilingualism is an intrinsic factor and tool for promoting democracy, as well as a desired and effective means of communication in public debates, since it reinforces the values of tolerance and recognition of differences between social groups and minorities (Dyvnych 2017). Furthermore, linguistic and cultural diversity is inseparable from active European citizenship, and thus forms a component of European identity. The nature of official multilingualism in the EU is reflected practically in almost all its actions and ceremonial, declaratory, and "constitutional" activities, particularly in the work of certain institutions, as well as in the publication of decisions affecting citizens of member states and when citizens of any member states address EU institutions (de Swaan 2007: 10–11).

This is due to the fact that throughout its existence (since 1992/1993), during which there were 24 official languages at the time of the study, and earlier in the European Economic Community (since 1957), which initially had only 4 official languages (Kruse and Ammon 2018; Vftores 2011), the EU developed and nominally promoted a corresponding language policy aimed at developing, representing, and preserving linguistic diversity, maintaining a balance between languages, and promoting democracy in the European region (Ammon 2015; Coulmas 1991; Kruse 2012). Since its founding (in the 1950s) and transformation (in the 1990s), the EU has positioned itself and continues to do so as a supranational entity in which member states are required to maintain their core rights and functions, including cultural autonomy. This institutionally limited the powers of EU institutions, particularly in the area of language policy, as language was fundamentally considered an important part of culture (Kruse and Ammon 2018). Therefore, the principle of multilingualism has always guided the EU's language policy, as the protection of multilingualism has consistently been perceived as a guarantee of preserving the national identity of member states, especially in light of the fact that their languages gained "symbolic" significance due to their role in the formation of national states. Moreover, the "one state – one nation – one (national) language" rule applies in almost all EU member states (Coulmas 1991; Wright 2000), even though it was not the basis for the formation of the EU. From the organizational and systemic perspective of the EU, which is not a single state with a unified ethnic and linguistic community, the support of multilingualism is also symbolic in the structural context, as the EU's language policy "acknowledges" this symbolism and expresses it through numerous manifestations of linguistic diversity, often accompanied by the mantra of the complex connection between multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Accordingly, the regulation of linguistic diversity and the development of language policy

in the EU can be traced back to the very beginning of the creation of this supranational organization, as the language issue has always been inevitable and complex due to the national progress of individual countries and the ever-increasing complexity of the kaleidoscopic international relations within the EU. The development of EU language policy has always been shaped by the opposition of two postulates – the protection of multilingualism and diversity as symbols of the ongoing cultural autonomy of member states, and the provision of a unified pan-European (supranational) communication framework in the pursuit of the EU's common goals (Bellier 2002; Kruse and Ammon 2018). On the one hand, diversity and multilingualism lie at the heart of European identity and are integral to the institutional and political process, bringing perspectives for improving communication through translation, interpretation, and personal engagement. On the other hand, progress in achieving various forms of unity, particularly through the lens of integration, is a prerequisite for establishing the status of certain languages or languages as used in international contexts. This holds true as the peoples of the EU member states speak their native languages (the number of which increased after each stage of EU enlargement), whereas the political elite (at all stages of the EU's development) uses several of the most widely spoken languages. Therefore, combining these trends, especially from the perspective of national and ideological identification and their mutual reconciliation, has always been a task in developing the EU's language policy and constructing the European space, which would account for all national specifics without being confined by national and regional borders (Bellier 2002). Given that EU language policy is theoretically meant to be interpreted as a political entity, it necessarily involves the integration of language issues on at least three levels – in the sphere of official policy, in the world of political institutions, and within the context of the large multilingual and nationally diverse European society. It is also understood that linguistically, the EU is not simply a political object, but the result of a "delicate game" between linguistic differences and political and administrative cultures within European services and agencies responsible for drafting laws and policies (Bellier 1996).

One of the earliest attempts at regulating language policy (language regime) within the European Union – despite the fact that there is no official EU language policy as such, given that such a policy is considered politically perilous to the integrative unity of the Union (Bellier 2002) – was Regulation No. 1 of 15 April 1958 (EEC Council 1958), adopted within the framework of the European Economic Community. This regulation stipulated that the accession of any new Member State must be accompanied by the inclusion of its national language into the list of the Union's official languages (the most recent instance at the time of research occurred upon Croatia's accession to the EU in 2013). Nevertheless, such regulation has always been, and remains, only partially and inconsistently implemented. Its application has been significantly influenced by the EU's enlargement and

the need to enhance the functionality of EU institutions and bodies (Vftores 2011).

A notable development was the adoption of the non-binding *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* in 1992 (which, to date, has not been ratified by all EU Member States). The Charter's main objective was to protect and promote Europe's historical regional and minority languages – approximately 70 in number – particularly where these languages lack official status (Grin 2003: 58). However, it was during this period that the responsibility for managing EU language policy began to shift from European institutions to so-called "subsidiary institutions" within individual Member States. In theory, this was intended to help preserve the linguistic diversity the EU sought to promote in a region that, in its supranational communications, increasingly leaned toward monolingualism (Vftores 2011), particularly due to growing political and linguistic tensions among the Union's most commonly used institutional languages.

One manifestation of these political and linguistic tensions concerns the EU's language regime and the correlation between linguistic and political influence of certain Member States, as well as of countries that are no longer EU members – most notably the United Kingdom and Ireland (since their accession in 1973, although the UK left the EU in 2020) – and other Member States where English is widely used (see Table 1 for details). France and Germany, on the other hand, have traditionally opposed the growing dominance of English, due to the historical diplomatic status of their own languages (Vftores 2011). For instance, French was the dominant language of international relations from the late 17th century until the end of World War I in 1918 and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. Conversely, the status of German as a leading language in international relations declined after the outbreak of World War II in 1939, and especially after the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. As a result, the competition over the status and future of various languages within the EU has become a central political reason for the Union's nominal and official, albeit limited, linguistic diversity (de Swaan 2007).

This issue is further complicated by the lack of unanimous agreement among Member States on multilingualism policy. The United Kingdom (no longer an EU member at the time of analysis), Germany, and France have typically been reluctant to relinquish the political advantages associated with the representation of their national languages in EU institutional and non-institutional spheres (Vftores 2011). This became particularly evident from the 1990s, when among the three predominant languages in question, English emerged as the most widely used institutional language in the EU, followed by French, and with German being the least used – despite having the largest number of native speakers in the EU (Bellier 2002).

This situation placed German and French political leaders in a challenging position. On the one hand, if they were to pursue reform of the EU's institutional language system based on rational

considerations, they would have to support the adoption of a single international working language, which would most likely be English, given its strong global presence. On the other hand, if they opposed the establishment of a consolidated institutional language regime, English would continue, by inertia and de facto, to dominate within the EU's institutional structures. As a result, French and German actors sought a third way in developing EU language policy – one that would avoid diminishing their political power through the declining status and frequency of their national languages within EU institutions.

Notably, since the early 1990s, France began shifting its political-linguistic strategy within the Union (Adamson 2007: 27), a development reflected in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 (Giordan 2004: 3). This treaty formally referenced linguistic diversity and the principle of subsidiarity as "cornerstones" of EU educational policy. In other words, France – along with certain other Member States – succeeded in securing protection for linguistic diversity at supranational, national, subnational, and regional levels within the EU. This, in turn, partially restored the political influence of certain Member States in this context, primarily through the creation and promotion of a political foundation aimed at protecting the French language (and others) in opposition to English (Adamson 2007: 38; Giordan 2004: 4; Pup 2004: 10).

In conclusion, in some EU Member States, the policy of multilingualism is pursued genuinely and with a commitment to preserving linguistic diversity. In others – particularly more influential states – it functions primarily as a political instrument for protecting and promoting their own national languages at the supranational level, especially French and German, as well as their broader national interests (Shelly 1999: 315; Giordan 2004: 4). However, such a policy has often led to unintended consequences, namely the collateral diminishing of the status and influence of French and other languages competing with English at both national and supranational levels (Adamson 2007: 27). This discrepancy becomes particularly striking in light of the fact that countries like France actively advocate for the protection of multilingualism at the supranational level, yet fail to implement such policies domestically, where linguistic diversity remains limited (Wright 2006: 49). A vivid illustration of this contradiction is the case of the aforementioned European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, adopted in 1992. Although France was one of the key promoters of the Charter at the supranational level, it not only failed to effectively implement it nationally but even obstructed its application (Vftores 2011). French politicians often referred to themselves as "champions of global linguistic diversity" (Shelly 1999: 312), yet the peak of this contradiction occurred in 1999, when France's Constitutional Council ruled that ratification of the Charter was unconstitutional, effectively rendering it invalid domestically (Adamson 2007: 35).

This development demonstrated that the gradual weakening – and even disappearance – of

minority languages, not only in France but across other EU member states (such as the erosion of the Irish language in Ireland), may serve to strengthen the position of the French language within the EU (Bellier 2002). It also reveals the strong link between national and supranational strategies and the political will behind them: some EU countries are willing to defend European linguistic diversity only insofar as this diversity bolsters the international standing of their own national languages within the EU (Adamson 2007: 20).

All of this highlights the ineffectiveness of Franco-German or other strategies aimed at resisting the spread of English in the EU – even in areas where French, German, or other languages were previously dominant (Vftores 2011). This is evident both within and beyond EU institutions, particularly given that English clearly leads in non-institutional domains such as education, science, business, culture, and media.

What is especially noteworthy is that the dominance of English in the EU did not emerge through artificial imposition or coercion, but as a result of rational decisions made by individual actors – including political speakers, institutions, and governments – who increasingly chose to acquire or improve their English skills as a tool for enhancing their international presence. Since the 1970s, multilingualism has progressed significantly in the EU – at least with regard to the most prominent European languages. However, this multilingualism evolved primarily as a rational desire among Europeans to learn, in addition to their native tongue, a second language they perceived as the most effective.

As a result, in the competition among the principal languages of powerful EU member states, multilingualism has paradoxically led to the weakening of French, German, and other languages, while reinforcing the position of English. This occurred despite the fact that, in the 1970s, the proportion of EU citizens proficient in French, English, and German was roughly equal – around 10% (Vftores 2011). Consequently, the initially anticipated balanced multilingualism within the EU has in practice resulted in the advancement of monolingualism in supranational communication.

In this context, the most recent EU language policy concept at the time of this study – adopted in 2001 and also only advisory in nature, as there is no official EU language policy – was articulated in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*. It nominally seeks to: preserve and protect linguistic heritage; transform linguistic diversity from an obstacle into a source of mutual enrichment and understanding; facilitate the acquisition of modern European languages to promote mobility, mutual understanding, and cooperation; eliminate prejudice and discrimination among Europeans; establish uniform language learning standards across Council of Europe member states to enhance integration and policy coordination; and promote multilingualism and multiculturalism among Europeans.

The principles and ideas of this policy have been discussed repeatedly at high-level events. Additionally, numerous EU resolutions and programmes have been adopted to increase public awareness of the importance of foreign language knowledge for scientific, socio-economic, and political development. However, due to objective reasons, the practical achievement of full language equality in the EU remains unlikely. Integration processes and the need for effective communication necessitate the prioritization of overarching European norms over national ones. This creates an inevitable demand for working languages of interethnic communication – and even for the dominance of certain languages (Dyvnych 2017; Kruse and Ammon 2018).

It is therefore logical that only the languages of the most populous and economically/politically powerful European nations – those that also serve as migration hubs – can realistically serve as such working languages. Notably, the EU officially recognizes French, German, Spanish, Italian, and English as international communication languages. However, English has in recent years become the dominant and most widely used language, assuming the role of a de facto *lingua franca*, even in the aftermath of Brexit (Phillipson 2003; Schlossmacher 1996; Wodak and Wright 2006).

This is exemplified by the fact that, despite institutional requirements for multilingualism, certain EU bodies – most notably the European Commission – consistently prioritize English in communications with member states (Bellier 1999; Dyvnych 2017). A contributing factor was the 2001 position of then-Commission President Romano Prodi, who argued for the exclusive use of English in internal institutional work as a solution to translation-related challenges. In contrast, the European Parliament that same year adopted a resolution opposing the removal of certain languages from translation processes, although the number of languages used was significantly reduced (Bellier 2002).

The results of these processes are evident in historical data from the Directorate-General for Translation in Germany. In 1997, 45% of all documents submitted for translation by the European Commission were in English; by 2014, this share had risen to over 80%. Even when multilingualism commissioner Viktor Orbán of Hungary – known for his Eurosceptic views – held office in 2007, English still accounted for 70% of the documents processed by the Translation Directorate in Germany.

Hence, despite rhetoric supporting linguistic diversity in the EU – and the existence of related legal frameworks – English has come to occupy an increasingly dominant role not only in European institutions but also in the corporate sector, the media, and many forms of international EU activity. As a result, English is now considered the most widely used official language of the EU, having long ago opened the door for global market forces and communication trends that have cemented its dominance as the primary medium of international exchange within and beyond the Union (Phillipson 2003).

The overview of the current state of affairs allows us to argue that, in practice (rather than merely formally or declaratively), EU language policy and practice are characterized by the coexistence of several mutually contradictory processes and phenomena.

On the one hand, the EU is nominally committed to multilingualism, as all official languages of the Member States are also official EU languages. Consequently, all EU legislative acts, regulations, and documents must be drafted and disseminated in all of these official languages. As of early 2024, there were 24 official languages, despite the EU having 27 member countries. Accordingly, citizens and public institutions of the Member States have the right to address EU bodies in their national language and receive a response in the same language (Bellier 2002). In addition, simultaneous interpretation is provided for official languages during plenary sessions, working group meetings, and other institutional proceedings of the European Parliament, European Commission, and European Council. However, initial interpretation is typically conducted in English, French, and/or German, and only subsequently into other languages (Gazzola 2006), a list that has recently been significantly narrowed in practice. This multilingual rule generally applies only to meetings at the highest political levels (e.g., with MEPs, Commissioners, heads of state, or ministers). By contrast, at informal meetings, it is common to use English, French, and the language of the host country as the working languages, following an unwritten convention (Dyvnych 2017).

On the other hand, internal language policy within the EU differs from the language policy applied within its institutions and bodies. Individual institutions and bodies have their own language rules, which are more limited than the broader logic of constructing interlingual relations based on the official languages of the EU. For example, the European Court (or the Court of Justice of the European Union) in Luxembourg operates exclusively in French (a result of France's influence on the continental legal system; although citizens of EU Member States can submit inquiries in their native languages (Bellier 2002)). In contrast, the European Central Bank in Frankfurt uses only English. Meanwhile, the working languages of the European Commission in Brussels are English, French, and German, and the Office for Harmonization in the Internal Market in Alicante uses English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish (Kruse and Ammon 2018; Vftores 2011). Overall, a general rule can be observed: the more political the institution and the greater its outreach to the public, the more official languages it tends to use. In other words, some EU institutions and bodies primarily adhere to the principles of European linguistic diversity, while others follow the principles of European integration and unity (Bellier 2002).

As a result, the most widespread working languages within the EU tend to be: languages with demographic, socio-economic, and political weight (German, English, French, Italian, Spanish); languages with global status (English, French, Spanish, and to some extent German); languages with

established functional roles in EU operations (e.g., English in economics, trade, technology, and science, or French in internal administration) (Dyvnych 2017). At the same time, numerous informal committees preparing formal sessions of EU institutions often lack a consistent language regime and either have no official translators or operate with very limited translation support from the EU budget (Ammon and Kruse 2013). Consequently, these bodies frequently resort – sometimes spontaneously – to using a language understood by all participants or a language for which Member States are willing to finance interpretation, a privilege typically available only to larger and more economically developed states (such as Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and formerly the United Kingdom) (Kruse and Ammon 2018).

This dynamic reinforces the notion that if a Member State can continuously promote the use of its national language within EU structures, it gains prestige for its language as a foreign language and strengthens national identity and communicative capacity for its representatives. However, if a state lacks the resources or political leverage to ensure its language is used in EU settings, it often opts to reduce the number of working languages, sometimes settling on the most widespread one. In this context, English has gained and continues to gain prominence and preference – both formally and informally – in intra-EU communication.

Thirdly, the language policies of EU Member States also seek to promote foreign language learning. At the Union level, a strategic objective has been formulated whereby each EU citizen should ideally speak, in addition to their mother tongue, two other official EU languages. This goal is intended to foster intercultural understanding, reduce national biases, and enhance the mobility of social and cultural capital (Limbach and Gerhards 2012). Nevertheless, despite this commitment to regulated linguistic diversity and multilingual institutional functioning, English is widely perceived and positioned within the Union as the most commonly spoken and used language. It is especially regarded as the language that best facilitates cooperation in a multinational and multicultural environment, thereby contributing to the resolution of both national and pan-European issues.

4. Competition, Hierarchy, and Functional Stratification of Languages and the Paradox of Multilingualism in the EU: Between the Justice of Linguistic Diversity and the Pragmatism of English Dominance

The analysis presented in this section synthesizes insights derived from discourse analysis and institutional examination to identify patterns of linguistic competition and hierarchy within the EU. Rather than advancing normative judgments, the section adopts a relational analytical perspective, tracing how language status and functionality emerge from the interaction between political

power, institutional practice, and communicative pragmatism. Linguistic hierarchy is thus treated as an analytical outcome of these interactions, not as an a priori assumption.

An overview of the nominal and actual effects of the language regime in the EU reveals, as scholars (Kruse and Ammon 2018) argue, that within the EU as a supranational organization – especially against the background of nominal multilingualism and the actual predominance of certain languages, primarily English, as international means of communication – there are ongoing processes of variable ranking and hierarchization of all official languages. This occurs based on the spread, influence, and functionality of the languages themselves and their speakers. This provides grounds for distinguishing several functional groups of languages within the EU, even though they are varieties of specific national languages of individual member states.

The first group consists of the working languages of EU institutions and bodies, also referred to as the "procedural languages of the EU," which occupy the "top of the hierarchy." Typically, this group includes up to five languages (though not always with the same gradation), depending on the particular institution or body. The second group comprises the so-called "official EU languages," from which the previously mentioned group is derived. These languages (which, at the time of the study, numbered 24) are used for official communication between EU institutions and member states. They are also used to authenticate accession acts of member states to the EU and all binding EU legislative acts. At the same time, the official languages of some member states are also "working languages" for certain EU institutions, albeit under a limited language regime.

It is noteworthy that the number of official EU languages is fewer than the number of EU member states, because: first, 6 of these languages serve a total of 12 EU member states (e.g., Dutch – Belgium and the Netherlands; English – Ireland and formerly the United Kingdom; French – France, Belgium, and Luxembourg; German – Germany, Austria, and Luxembourg; Greek – Greece and Cyprus; Swedish – Sweden and Finland); and second, 2 EU member states use additional languages (e.g., Ireland uses Irish, and Finland uses Finnish). Thus, the official languages of the EU are organized according to a scheme in which 8 languages for 12 member states are combined with 16 languages for 16 member states, together totaling 24 languages serving 28 countries before the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU (Kruse and Ammon 2018), and now serving 27 member states.

Finally, the third group consists of the so-called "national official languages of the EU member states," part of which is constituted by the previous group. The specificity of this group lies in the fact that, unlike the EU official languages, it additionally includes Luxembourgish in Luxembourg, which does not have official status in the EU (Bellier 2002). In general, each EU member state has at least one national official language.

At the same time, some EU member states have more than one national official language, and some languages hold the status of national official languages in more than one EU member state. This provides the basis for the further distinction and ranking of several more language groups within the EU (Kruse and Ammon 2018). Among them, a special place is held by the group of so-called "regional official languages" in other member states, for example, German in Belgium and Italy, while also being a national official language in Germany, Austria, and Luxembourg.

Nonetheless, there are cases where regional official languages have such a status in other member states but not in their original areas of use. This includes, for example, Catalan, Basque, and Galician in Spain, West Frisian in the Netherlands, Sorbian (Wendish) in Germany (Vftores 2011), as well as Welsh and Gaelic in the United Kingdom before Brexit. A distinct category in the ranking is also occupied by the so-called "indigenous (or autochthonous) minority languages" of EU member states, which are protected under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, since they do not have the status of national official languages anywhere. Examples of such languages include Kashubian, Karaim, Lemko, Romani, Tatar, and Yiddish in Poland, or Danish, Frisian, Low German, Romani, and Sorbian in Germany, among others.

The list of language groups in such a ranking would be incomplete without including the so-called "indigenous (or autochthonous) minority languages" of EU countries that are not protected under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, since those member states have not ratified this legislative act.

Lastly, the hierarchical list of language stratification in the EU ends with the so-called "exogenous (or allochthonous) minority languages," which are not protected under any legislative or recommendatory act of the EU. Typically, the speakers of such languages are immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in EU member states. Additionally, EU language regulations also apply to certain other categories of languages, such as so-called "sign languages," classical languages, and modern foreign languages in specific member states (Branson and Miller 1998; Kruse and Ammon 2018).
From a conceptual perspective, the empirical picture demonstrates that a reduction in the distance between the status of dominant and non-dominant languages within the EU increases dissatisfaction with multilingualism policy, whereas an increase in this distance fosters multilingualism (Kruse and Ammon 2018). Therefore, the commitment or lack thereof by EU member states to the protection and promotion of linguistic diversity is a condition for shaping the current language policy and language regime within the EU. In this regard, researchers note the need to distinguish several core areas of understanding EU language policy, including: the support or lack of support for minority languages; the promotion or lack of promotion of individual multilingualism (the mother tongue plus at least two additional languages); the general support or lack of support for multilingualism; and the

provision of equal status for all official languages of the EU member states. The fact is that despite declarations of linguistic diversity in the EU, the current practical situation leaves much to be desired. Gaps exist in virtually every area of the implementation of European language policy, including issues related to the ratification of international acts and recommendations on the protection of minority languages (Lebsanft and Wingender 2012), the study of foreign languages (Kruse 2012), and, ultimately, the realization of actual multilingualism, especially against the backdrop of the use of various languages and language regimes in EU institutions and bodies (Kruse 2016; Spolsky 2012).

These gaps are particularly noticeable in the context of the "economic instrumentalization of language" (Krzyzanowski and Wodak 2011: 124) and the mismatch between the status of official and working or "procedural" (mainly English, French, and German) languages in the EU (Kruse and Ammon 2013). They are inherited from the institutional irrelevance of EU language policy and the context of understanding the organization as a supranational corporation of civic and national states, which by definition inclines toward multilingualism (Kruse 2014). This became especially evident after 2014, when Jean-Claude Juncker assumed leadership of the European Commission, as all manifestations of linguistic diversity policy in the EU were practically suspended, with the exception of the "Erasmus+" education program. Even this program was no longer focused on the study, as previously regulated (Kruse 2012), of at least two foreign languages, but primarily on a single foreign language – mainly English – as the second language of EU citizens (Ammon 2010; Ammon 2015). While this brought some expected positive effects for the EU's economy, mobility, and identity, it also greatly increased the tendency and practice of communication among citizens, organizations, states, and institutions within the EU not in national languages, but in English – the language deemed to offer "the greatest success" (Ammon and Kruse 2013; Kruse and Ammon 2013; Kruse and Ammon 2018; Schlossmacher 1996). Though this does not formally contradict EU official documents, as according to the interpretation of Regulation No. 1 of 15 April 1958 (EEC Council 1958), every institution, individual, and organization is entitled to choose whichever language is most appropriate for communication.

In summary, this shows that despite all the calls and declarations about the importance of multilingual development in the EU, in practice there has recently been a gradual movement toward a de facto monolingual structure of EU institutions and bodies (Kruse and Ammon 2018). In other words, linguistic equality is in fact not characteristic of the EU. Despite the Union's formal capacity for multilingualism among Europeans, it continues to promote English as the most widespread second language in the region – one that the majority of EU citizens have sufficient proficiency in – especially in comparison with French and German (Wodak and Wright 2006), and particularly in

terms of its dominance on the internet. On the one hand, this is especially evident against the backdrop of a decreased commitment by the European Commission to furthering linguistic diversity. On the other hand, it is politically risky and ambiguous, particularly considering the realities and expectations of an ongoing democratic deficit, especially in light of and following the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU – a country that has been and remains one of the main promoters of English within the Union.

Accordingly, the significance of the English language in the EU is not merely due to the influence of the United Kingdom, but also a result of the perception of English as a global, international language. In other words, English has become the EU's lingua franca not only due to the influence of the UK, but also because it is globally perceived as the language of international communication under the influence of the United States on the world stage (Graddol 1997; Phillipson 2003: 105, 175; Wodak and Wright 2006). On one hand, this fully corresponds to "blind polling" on how many languages the EU should use in its institutional processes to ensure effective communication and cooperation. Nearly all EU member states rationally and justifiably prefer a language system built on the smallest possible number of languages, rather than one that promotes linguistic diversity. On the other hand, each EU member state of course wants its language to be among the EU's working languages (de Swaan 2001; Vftores 2011). Therefore, from the perspective of rational choice theory, a unanimous resolution of the direction of EU language policy development is essentially impossible, as it leads to an "institutional deadlock" that prevents any reform of the EU language regime (de Swaan 2001: 169).

Statistics on the Knowledge of the Most Widely Spoken Languages (as First and Second Languages) in EU Countries, in Percentages (as of 2012 and 2024) (European Commission 2012; European Commission 2024; Language Knowledge 2024)

Country	English		French		German		Spanish		Russian	
	2012	2024	2012	2024	2012	2024	2012	2024	2012	2024
Austria	73	59	11	11	97	98	4	4	2	1
Belgium	38	61	81	83	23	18	5	10	4	2
Bulgaria	25	30	2	3	8	5	2	3	23	14
Greece	51	52	9	6	9	7	1	2	1	2
Denmark	86	90	9	11	47	50	4	9	0	0
Estonia	50	59	1	2	22	14	1	2	56	74
Ireland	99	97	17	13	7	7	4	7	1	1
Spain	22	39	12	13	2	3	98	97	1	0
Italy	34	34	4	10	3	4	8	6	0	1
Cyprus	73	80	11	9	5	7	2	1	4	5
Latvia	46	55	1	3	14	18	1	2	67	91
Lithuania	38	45	3	3	14	12	1	1	80	66
Luxemburg	56	71	96	94	71	66	5	15	0	1
Malta	89	91	17	13	3	4	1	4	0	1
Netherlands	90	95	29	27	71	61	5	9	0	0
Germany	56	66	15	16	98	98	4	8	6	4
Poland	33	31	4	1	19	5	1	1	26	5
Portugal	27	42	24	13	1	1	10	9	0	1
Romania	31	27	23	7	7	3	5	3	3	1
Slovakia	26	40	2	2	22	21	1	2	17	15
Slovenia	59	62	3	2	48	33	3	4	5	2
United Kingdom	97	–	19	–	9	–	8	–	2	–
Hungary	20	31	3	2	18	13	1	2	4	2
Finland	70	82	3	4	18	19	3	4	3	4

France	39	42	97	97	8	6	13	14	1	1
Croatia	49	45	4	4	34	15	2	1	4	1
Czech Republic	27	43	1	5	15	20	1	3	13	15
Sweden	86	91	11	12	30	25	5	10	0	1
EU Average	51	50	26	25	32	29	15	17	6	4

This conclusion is further reinforced by the fact that although English is the most widespread or "central" language of inter-institutional communication in the EU (de Swaan 2001), it is still not the language spoken by the majority of European citizens – especially when considering the population sizes of the EU member states. Rather, it is predominantly the most commonly spoken second language across the region (Bellier 2002). This is clearly illustrated in Table 1, which presents data for both 2012 and 2024 (where grey highlighting indicates an increase in percentages). These figures suggest that Europeans are indeed moving toward multilingualism, yet with a distinct preference for English as the language most often learned in addition to their native tongue (Drobot 2018). In both 2012 and 2024 (despite Brexit), more than half of the EU population spoke English either as a native or a second language, whereas French and German each accounted for less than one-third of the population, with a tendency toward further decline.

This trend is mirrored institutionally: for instance, by 2015, approximately 80% of legislative proposals in the EU were initially drafted in English rather than in other official languages. This corresponds with English's global and European positioning as an international or global language, or language of international communication – even in the post-Brexit context.

Consequently, English in the EU has long performed not only communicative but also political and institutional functions. Although the EU's official language policy is founded on the principles of multilingualism and linguistic equality, in practice, English increasingly functions as a *lingua franca*, reflecting latent power hierarchies within the political-linguistic domain (Swales 1997). Formally, each member state's language holds equal status within EU institutions, but in reality, English is most frequently used for translation, as well as for formal and informal communication – confirming its privileged position.

It is also noteworthy that English has not only displaced French in many spheres, but its prominence has been reinforced by both EU integration processes and its global role as the language of international trade, infrastructure, aviation, diplomacy, and digital technologies (Phillipson 2003). Even after the United Kingdom's departure from the EU in 2020, the use of English has not diminished, as its dominance was and continues to be driven largely by the influence of the United States (Gerhards 2012). Against this backdrop, the growing role of English in education has become one of the key mechanisms of its institutional entrenchment. In most EU countries, over 90% of schoolchildren and nearly all university students study English, viewing it as essential for professional and personal development (Van Parijs 2011). Particularly notable are cases such as Austria, Denmark, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Germany, Finland, and Sweden, where over 70–80% of the adult population is proficient in English. In contrast, Central and Eastern European countries

– especially Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, and Hungary – show significantly lower levels of proficiency, contributing to the emergence of socio-linguistic barriers in accessing opportunities within the EU itself.

Given this, the phenomenon of *Euro-English* – a simplified and functionalized variety of English adapted for intercultural communication within the European context – has become increasingly prominent (Phillipson 2003). This variety is not a cultural replica of British or American English but rather a translanguaging construct shaped by the demand for communicative efficiency. It occupies a "hybrid space" between national languages, enabling Europeans not only to interact but also to participate in the production of public discourse (de Swaan 2001).

However, this unification has a downside. On the one hand, it facilitates mobility, trade growth, access to knowledge, and the formation of a European public sphere. Indeed, some studies suggest that a shared language can increase bilateral trade volumes by more than 40% (Van Parijs 2011: 112–113). On the other hand, excessive Anglicization may result in linguistic and cultural homogenization, which contradicts the EU's ideal as a polity grounded in equal multilingual citizenship (Gerhards 2012). This is why Swales (1997) directly compared English to a "linguistic Tyrannosaurus Rex" that roams freely through Europe, displacing other languages in its path.

Thus, the rising prominence of English in the EU does not eliminate concerns over the equity of its spread – particularly in light of the understanding that language justice is inherently linked to social inequality. Proficiency in English has increasingly become a prerequisite for participation in political, educational, and economic processes. Those who lack it risk being marginalized or, as some put it, "becoming foreigners in their own companies." Considering that English-speaking countries account for more than 40% of global GDP, and that the wealthiest EU member states also tend to exhibit the highest levels of English proficiency, the language question acquires a clear economic dimension.

In response to these challenges, alternative approaches are emerging: promoting multilingual competence, preserving national languages in digital and scientific domains, and ensuring equal access to language education for all social groups in the EU. Ultimately, as De Swaan (2001) notes, supporting a shared language should not negate the necessity of maintaining linguistic pluralism – since democracy in the EU must be grounded not only in the formal right to speak any language, but in the real possibility of being heard.

5. Conclusions

This article has examined language as an important yet controversial factor in international

relations – one that goes beyond a purely communicative function and takes on the characteristics of an institutional and political resource, a symbol of political legitimacy, and a tool of influence. Theoretical analysis has shown that interlinguality and linguistic competition in international political discourse carry profound social, semantic, and financial consequences. The inclusion of the concept of transaction costs has made it possible to view linguistic barriers not only as obstacles to effective communication, but also as factors that significantly influence decision-making dynamics, the distribution of power resources, and the structuring of global and regional interactions.

The example of the European Union illustrates how officially declared multilingualism within this integrative entity coexists in practice with the functional dominance of the English language, which is gradually displacing other languages from key spheres of interinstitutional, political, and international communication. Despite the legal enshrinement of the equality of all official languages of EU member states, a stable linguistic hierarchy is forming, within which certain languages – especially English – receive privileged status. This is driven by the political weight of respective states, economic expediency, the availability of translation resources, and the influence of globalization processes. The EU thus serves as an example of a complex, multilayered language policy where declared equality is often undermined by institutional practice. Multilingualism plays both inclusive and exclusive roles: on the one hand, it proclaims democratic values; on the other, it reproduces and entrenches linguistic inequality, particularly in terms of access to decision-making, participation opportunities, and political influence. This is evident in the functioning of EU institutions and in educational, informational, media, and administrative spheres.

In conclusion, EU language policy can be viewed as a site of latent conflict between the principles of cultural diversity and pragmatic efficiency, between national interests and the imperatives of integration. This state of affairs calls for further research aimed at:1) identifying the implications of linguistic hierarchization for the democratic legitimacy of the EU; 2) analyzing the discursive strategies used by individual states to promote their language preferences; 3) developing mechanisms to overcome linguistic asymmetry at the supranational level.

Such research could contribute to the development of a more balanced EU language policy – one that not only ensures the symbolic presence of all languages but also guarantees fair access to participation in political decision-making and the shaping of a common European space.

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