

The EU institutional discourse – production and consumption environments and principles

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Rezumat

Discursul instituțional al UE reprezintă o categorie hibrid, fiind situat la granița dintre discursul specializat de tip administrative-juridic și de tip politic. Se ridică astfel problema dinamicii sale identitare și legitimării prin sedimentare, precum și a circumscrierii domeniului prin multiperspectivare. Astfel, articolul își propune să evidențieze unele dintre mecanismele de producere și consum al acestui tip emergent de discurs, prin trecerea de la contexte la contextualizare, la delimitarea zonelor de sensibilitate socio-culturală, prin adoptarea unei atitudini proactive. Sunt vizate două paliere majore de investigație: lingvistic și traductologic, cu interfețe interdisciplinare multiple.

Cuvinte-cheie: *discurs instituțional UE, producție, consum*

1. Introduction

Functional approaches in linguistics contribute to understanding the relationship between contexts of language use and the communicative competence of speakers. Communicative competence is a composite, encompassing not only grammar competence, but also discourse competence, socio-linguistic competence (thematic or terminological competence included) and strategic competence (the ability to avoid or manage communication breakdowns) (see Hymes 1972, Canale and Swain 1980).

In line with McKinley (2007), we draw attention to how problems generated by a deficit of communicative competence is likely to deter the development of the specialized knowledge fund and discourse. In fact, the multidirectional functional interaction of the various components of the

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multilayered, dynamic and flexible system of human natural language explains its instrumental value: the representation of the surrounding world and its presentation or sharing of the worldview. In other words, the institutional(ized) discourse in English, in the context of internationalization/globalization, reverberates at the socio-cultural level where Euro-English, as an emerging linguistic variation, can be said to constitute a genuine *lingua franca*, acquiring a strategic value.

2. The EU language and discourse – as a linguistic object of study

The EU language and the corresponding EU discourse may be regarded as hybrid entities, borderline cases, falling within the scope of an interdiscipline that underpins productive interfaces of language sciences – historical linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, cognitive linguistics, semantics, pragmatics, semiotics, intercultural communication, discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis etc. – and of social sciences – anthropology, sociology, political sciences etc.

Therefore, the investigation of the EU language and discourse should move from context to contextualization due to the embedded areas of socio-cultural sensitivity. Admittedly, two levels are at stake: on the one hand, the interpersonal, local, egocentric level, on the other hand, the institutional, socio-centric level, in correlation with the idea of power/authority, solidarity and inclusiveness manifested at the discursive level. From a pragmatic point of view, the creation, assimilation and use of the EU language and discourse, as a legitimized and widely disseminated specific type of discourse, involve the identity dynamics of the participants in the act of communication: endophoric participants – the speaker and the target audience, and exophoric participants – addressees, the endophoric participants positioning themselves epistemically and affectively (Verschuere 1999, Freed 2015, Kiesling 2022).

The EU discourse is, more often than not, assimilated to the institutional discourse as a type of specialized discourse, used for real-life purposes, and ideologically impregnated at the stages of its production, circulation and consumption (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, Gunnarson et al. 1997, Simpson and Mayr 2010, Freed 2015, Irimiea 2017). The institutional discourse comprehensively refers to communication, as a constitutive part of organization, within institutions as social infrastructures (Burns and Carson 2005, Wodak and Weiss 2005, Mosegaard Hansen and Márquez Reiter 2018). Accordingly, the ways in which language is used to create and shape institutions, and the ways in which institutions have, in turn, the capacity to construct and impose discourses, as well as the capacity to promote certain types of identities



that serve the proposed objectives, become the central object of the investigation of the institutional discourse. In other words, language is inherently embedded in social interaction in a contextualized way. It is also worth mentioning that the field of discourse analysis focuses on institutional or specialized texts (political discourses, legal discourses, media discourse etc.). The institutional discourse becomes a set of typical communicative events, prescriptive in nature, which are identified by certain spatial and temporal references. The institutional discourse requires addressing a predetermined topic, and shows highly conventionalized linguistic features, based on models of linguistic behaviour in which the participants play well-defined situational roles.

The institutional discourse research is indebted to several traditions: we recognize strong affiliations with sociology (see conversation analysis), anthropology (see interactional sociolinguistics), critical linguistics (see critical discourse analysis), psychology (see psychology of communication), philosophy and pragmatics (see speech acts etc.). In its evolution, the institutional discourse has focused on institutional and professional contexts (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975), on the analysis of sociolects (Labov and Fanshel 1977), on discourse therapy (Gumperz 1982), on the interaction and critical analysis of courtroom conversation, in the media etc. (Atkinson and Drew 1979, O'Barr 1982, Drew and Heritage 1992). These contexts and fields have expanded significantly in recent decades, up to the level of international organizations, and the conversationalization of institutional discourse is marked by a social mimicry, in which interactions at the interpersonal level are replicated through a compensatory strategy of synthetic personalization and simulated equalization (Fairclough 1989: 62, 221).

The value of the institutional discourse in use is given by the way in which it is flexibly shaped according to the patterns of verbal interactions at the interpersonal level. The institutional discourse is contextualized by association with specialized languages, which strengthens its informative and performative value at the micro-individual, meso-institutional and macro-social level. The exercise of power and control through the manipulation of language is based on the roles assigned to the participants in the communication process, at various stages of interaction, from the production of the discourse to its consumption and to the feedback (Fairclough 2003, Van Dijk 2006, Koller 2009). All of these point to the degree of conventionalization and functionalization of the institutional discourse, of evaluating its impact and of the underlying ideology and axiology – it is what Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) term *sedimented discourse*. The dialectical power-knowledge relationship is placed in the area of the cognitive poetics of the text – the meaning of the text depends



on the author and readers, being generated and negotiated in social interaction. In this line of approach, participants and their roles can also be detected at the inferential level.

3. The EU language and discourse – translation perspectives

Furthermore, the translation-oriented perspective, seen as complementary to the linguistic analysis (including terminological concerns), is intended to identify patterns of identity construction of the EU discourse and the establishment of benchmarks in the translation of these texts in order to proactively meet the criteria of efficiency and effectiveness in communication. Without a shadow of doubt, the existence of translation runs parallel to the history of humanity, being determined by a constellation of (geo)political, economic and socio-cultural factors. The various fields of activity have led to the multiplication of specialized translation areas and upscaling of the translation industry. If literary translation has been a constant in this landscape, specialized translations have undergone a different evolution, with a fluctuating interest in their subfields. Thus, international policies that promote and support multilingualism, multiculturalism, the recognition of minority rights, professional mobility and the free movement of people, in conjunction with the establishment and unprecedented development of political and economic institutions such as the EU, have secured a privileged position to institutional translation.

Institutional translation (also known as *official translation*), is broadly defined as translation within a legally constituted political entity, a supranational organization, an institution – Mossop (1988, 1990) exemplifies this through studies of the Canadian Government Translation Bureau. The concept of *institutional translation* has drawn considerable attention for the past two decades, generating, however, other controversies related to the conceptual delimitation of the term *institution* (Pym 2004, Koskinen 2008, Kang 2019). If we seek to finely tune the theoretical contributions, we should also note the fact that official translation is becoming a potential subfield of institutional translation, operating at the national level and comprising the translation of official documents such as identity documents, study documents, regulations, administrative procedures etc. Koskinen (2000: 57) proposes the generic term of *intercultural translation* with reference to the communication between the EU and Member States and with recipients outside the EU institutions, intercultural translation being subdivided into *inter-administrative translation* -between the Commission and national authorities, translations used for communication between the Commission and the lay population, and *legal translation* (for instance, the



translation of directives, decisions etc.) for which the communicative method is recommended. Koskinen (2000) also discusses the disregard of the conventions of the target language and culture for other types of text (for example, press releases and reports). Malmkjær and Windle (2011) prefer the term *Public Service Translation* to *institutional translation*, this terminological proliferation and lack of consensus indicating the magnitude and complexity of the phenomenon.

The very fact that the institutional activity is based on proactive communication (Salmi-Tolonen, 2004) and that translation has „bloomed” in Europe through its institutionalization within the European Commission in Brussels, where the Directorate General for Translations (DGT) operates, and through the establishment by the Council of the European Union of the Translation Center for the EU Bodies in Luxembourg in 1994, represent solid evidence of the importance of providing high-quality language and translation services. For example, as stated in the annual report, the total number of pages translated within the DGT amounted to 2,597,000 in 2022, „the second highest volume after the peak in 2021 of 2,770,000 pages” (https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/782e4be4-36aa-4bcf-bc1e-4d6db4b06079_en?filename=DGT_AAR_2022_en.pdf); 2,346,000 were translated in 2020, an increased value of 18.7% compared to 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/annual-activity-report-2020-translation_en.pdf).

4. Conclusions

The main conclusion to be drawn is that the EU institutional discourse has the ability to evolve empirically in perfect alignment with the changes of the society, being used in communication as a tool of social cohesion. It is equally noteworthy that the role of the English language in shaping the EU discourse is due to the transfer of authority brought about by the ascendancy and expansion of English globally. The production and large-scale consumption of the EU discourse (in English or in translated texts as equally authentic versions) are, therefore, intended to make the EU institutions more accountable and democratic.

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