

Observatoire européen du plurilinguisme

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1) Languages in businesses: the story of a small Copernican revolution

Sometimes there are profound developments which we are not paying attention to. It is the case of the way to deal with the question of languages into businesses.

Often taken up in the political and journalistic discourse, the main idea, which generally accepted and which is frequently reduced, is the following: in order to make business at an international level, only one language is necessary and this language is English. No need to invest into less spread languages, everybody can speak English; it is cheaper to invest on that language and that language only. Anyway, if everybody were speaking the same language, we would understand ourselves much better. Languages are obstacles for exchanges. To make business easier, we have to enforce one single language.

Although very simplistic, these ideas are for the most part shared by the social body in most of the European countries. Or, as Einstein said: "It is more difficult to destroy a prejudice than an atom".

Increasing numbers of studies have been showing that English is not enough, to quote the auspicious phrase of Leonard Orban, former European Commissioner for Multilingualism.

Little at a time, studies are profoundly changing the way to deal with the linguistic question in businesses, leading to a complete inversion of perspective, a small Copernican revolution of some sort.

The [ELAN report](#) was published at the end of 2006. The European Commission commissioned it to a British research centre and it underlined that a lack of abilities in languages make European companies loose business. The ratios calculated could be argued. Highlighting the fact that 11% of companies are loosing markets because of inadequacies in languages does not tell us the impacted volume of business, but we can guess it is very important.

In 2008, after the [Businesses forum for multilingualism](#), a group of business managers and experts under the chairmanship of Etienne Davignon published a new report under the aegis of the European Commission. With the title "Languages, that is our business", this report strengthens the conclusions of the ELAN report. It calls to attention the risk of a loss of competitiveness compared to emerging countries which are overwhelmingly investing in languages and concludes with the necessity to promote policies for the encouragement of multilingualism at all the levels of the public and private decision-making chains, from the governments to the small companies. They can consist, for example, in investing in the linguistic training, employing staff with different mother

tongues and insuring a multilingual communication via the Internet

[In Sweden](#), a comparative study established a connection between linguistic policies and performances in exportation. This study, which carried over samples of Swedish, German and French companies, concluded that German companies which have the most developed diversified skills in languages were performing better in exportation than Swedish companies which are more focused on one single language, French companies being in an in-between position.

[In Switzerland](#), studies undertaken under the direction of François Grin in particular, show that if Switzerland had to do without their plurilingual abilities, it would grow poorer of about 9% of its GDP.

At the same time the [DYLAN project](#) (DYLAN: Dynamique des langues et gestion de la diversité, 2006-2011 / Language dynamics and management of diversity) gathers a big quantity of observations which, between the companies' philosophy, the representations of the actors and the everyday practices, let appear realities which are much more complex than everything we would suppose happen in companies which are using the all-in-English as an almost sacred exclusive identity card. Other executive teams have orientations opposed to making a flexible plurilingualism and a changeable geometry, obviously not excluding English, the foundation of distinctive global strategies. A first study published by the team from the [University of Basel](#) under the direction of George Lüdi is very illuminating in this respect.

We also have several surveys undertaken in precise region, thus in [Lorraine](#), in [Alsace](#) and in [Catalonia](#), which show us how companies are fitting into networks of proximity and global networks, in which languages would be a tool that cannot be avoided, a kind of adaptation to the environment in which English brings part of the answer but does not cover all the needs.

The [Report to the Parliament on the enforcement of the law of the 4th of August 1994](#) comprises also very interesting information on the policies and practices developed by big international businesses in France.

You could think that this type of questioning concerns only the non-English speaking countries. It is not the case at all. In the United-Kingdom, they are seriously worried about the consequences in the decline in modern languages learning. Fascination for a monolingual and monocultural world, including the decline of modern languages is one warning sign, and is insane and a source of deep worry at the same time, for the highest [educational institutions](#) and the [British Employers](#). The last study undertaken on request of the Confederation of British Industry concluded that the languages businesses need the most are first and foremost French, German and Spanish, followed by Polish and Chinese. Today, with many partners, including the OEP, the British Council took the initiative of a European project, [Rich Language Europe-L'Europe riche de ses langues](#), the aim of which is to develop multilingualism (plurilingualism) in Europe, including of course in the United-Kingdom.

The European Commission integrated all the deep trends of the European society which disrupt the received ideas. Already in 2008, the communication of the European Commission, [Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment](#) presented orientations which will still demand years before they can be translated into actions, all the more that they require the determination of the national governments which is often lacking, the latter are often signing resolutions absent-mindedly and are working on doing the opposite to what they committed themselves in.

The European Commission operated a small Copernican revolution in its manner of dealing with the question of languages in businesses, stopping to consider languages as an obstacle to exchanges, but rather taking people as they are, respecting their diversity of languages and cultures even when we are dealing with consumers and workers, and seeing the linguistic and cultural diversity as an entirely significant richness to integrate in the business strategy, of which many can play perfectly today.

To this regard, there is the [CELAN project](#) (réseau pour promouvoir la compétitivité et l'emploi par

des stratégies linguistiques / the network for the promotion of languages strategies for competitiveness and employability), in which the EOP is committed. On the basis of a better knowledge of linguistic practices of the companies and mainly their needs, it aims at putting at their disposal resources to make languages a competition advantageous tool for them.

Beyond the economic aspect which can appear reductive to some, the civilisation implications are huge.

To read:

- [Un rapport officiel conclut à la nécessité économique du plurilinguisme \(ELAN\)](#)
- [Les langues font nos affaires \(Rapport Davignon\)](#)
- [Le multilinguisme suisse contribue au PIB](#)
- [Sociolinguistica Band 23: Sprachwahl in europäischen Unternehmen /Choix linguistiques dans les entreprises en Europe](#)
- [Les effets des compétences linguistiques sur la performance à l'exportation des entreprises françaises, allemandes et suédoises](#)
- [Building for growth : business priority for education and skills](#) (Education and skill survey 2011, by Confederation of British Industry and Education Development International)
- [Le plurilinguisme au travail entre la philosophie de l'entreprise, les représentations des acteurs et les pratiques quotidiennes](#) (études dans le cadre du projet européen DYLAN)
- [Dans les entreprises lorraines, le plurilinguisme avant l'anglais](#) (Etude de l'OREFQ)
- [Rapport au Parlement sur l'application de la loi du 4 août 1994](#)
- [En Alsace, le bilinguisme franco-allemand et le plurilinguisme plébiscités par les entreprises](#)
- [Presentació de l'estudi ELAN.cat:...](#)
- [Rich Language Europe-L'Europe riche de ses langues](#)
- [Projet CELAN](#) (Réseau pour la compétitivité et l'emploi par des stratégies linguistiques)

2) Among the most recent updates of the website

- [Marche du 18 juin 2011 pour la langue française et la Francophonie](#)
- [Les enfants bilingues méconnus par les systèmes éducatifs](#)
- [La Francophonie se mobilise pour le multilinguisme au sein de l'IRENA](#)
- [Time to vote for your favorite Language Learning Blog 2011](#)
- [Parution : Traduction et communautés \(Jean Peteers\)](#)
- [El reconocimiento del bilingüismo en hijos de emigrantes: Un triunfo...](#)
- [Teaching and living with two or more languages :... \(F. Grosjean\)](#)
- [L'UNESCO lance la deuxième version de Miftaah](#)
- [Finding on Dialects Casts New Light on the Origins of the Japanese People](#)
- [Language barrier limits European Internet users, study shows](#)
- [Vers des principes directeurs de l'UNESCO en matière de politiques linguistiques](#)
- [Langues : cinquante experts se réunissent à l'UNESCO \(30 mai – 1er juin\)](#)
- [SNCF - Primes de langue des agents commerciaux : ...](#)
- [Costruzione di una identità plurilingue e pluriculturale dell'Europa nel mondo](#)
- [Swedish teacher lands EU 'tongue stories' award](#)
- [e-commerce : Bruxelles veut faire tomber les barrières linguistiques](#)
- [El 90% de los europeos prefiere acceder a los sitios web en su propia lengua](#)
- [Poliglotti4.eu – A Language Observatory in the making](#)
- [Dummheit überwindet belgische Sprachgrenze](#)
- [Langues étrangères sur Internet en UE : l'anglais n°1 incontesté](#)
- [L'Europe multilingue investit dans la traduction en ligne](#)
- [Multilingual Aspects of Fluency Disorders: Howell, Van Borsel \(Eds\)](#)
- [Diritti Linguistici: convegno annuale all'Università di Teramo](#)
- [Por uma língua viva \(Portalingua\)](#)

- [Lingua franca : rêve ou réalité ?](#)
- [10% of the EU population speak a regional or minority language](#)
- [Deutsch am Arbeitsplatz.de](#)
- [Un réseau d'enseignement international menacé à Bruxelles : pétition!](#)
- [Etats-Unis : l'enseignement du français à l'université résistera-t-il à la crise ?](#)
- [Pourquoi la langue et les études françaises dans le monde ? J. K. Musinde](#)
- [Escenarios bilingües, el contacto de lenguas en el individuo y la sociedad](#)
- [Désir de traduire et légitimité du traducteur \(18 juin\)](#)
- [Language Learning by Adult Migrants: Policy Challenges and ICT Responses](#)
- [Apprendre les langues à l'université au 21e siècle](#)
- [16 de mayo: Reconocer el bilingüismo de los hijos de migrantes:...](#)
- [User language preferences online, Eurobarometer analytic report](#)
- [Atti "La lingua italiana in Europa e nel mondo: Strumento di multilinguismo,...](#)
- [Sorosoro : La reconnaissance du bilinguisme des enfants de migrants :...](#)
- [«La lengua ayudó a las empresas españolas»](#)
- [Les cerveaux bilingues vieillissent différemment](#)
- [L'écologie linguistique au Luxembourg \(Sorosoro\)](#)
- [Social, socializare, societate. Profiluri ale traducerii si interpretaarii](#)
- [La communication en famille bilingue: en quelle langue parlent les enfants ?](#)
- [Lancement du "Glossaire de la construction durable"](#)
- [Some thoughts on bilingualism \(F. Grosjean, Sorosoro\)](#)
- [Crise mondiale, en route pour le monde d'après \(F. Biancheri\)](#)

3) The EOP really needs your support, become a member or make a donation

If you enjoy this *Newsletter*, if you like the EOP site on the Internet and, in general, if you wish to support its action, you can [become a member of the EOP](#) or [make a donation](#). The EOP, plurilingualism and languages need you.

The EOP is an association regulated by French law but is greatly international thanks to its members and partners. Despite the support for project that we get from public authorities for the organisation of big events such as Conferences, despite the structural help finalised by the Ministry for Culture (Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France / General delegation for French language and the languages of France), the EOP needs the support of its members, individual or legal entity, to develop its activities. If you think that the voluntary work of the EOP is useful and that you should support it, then join us and become a [member of the EOP](#).

4) Which linguistic policy for foreign students?

It is a fact. Not only the international mobility of students has rapidly been increasing for the last ten years, but the European countries, among which the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain and Belgium on the first places, are by far the most attractive destinations worldwide. Thus, contrary to all generally accepted ideas on the brain drain to the United-States, European countries welcomed in 2006 twice as much foreign students that the United-States. In fact, the restrictions to enter the United-States since the event on September 11th, 2001, the registration fees which are usually quite high in the United-States and the lower competitiveness of American universities, many factors are at stake. The fact are that the intra-European movements are also increasing significantly and that the proportion of foreign students increases with the level of study. Thus in France, 25% of students preparing a doctorate are foreign when they are 15% for a Master and 10% for a Bachelor. This is a movement which has to be accepted and encouraged.

Which is the linguistic policy we should have towards these students? These students must of course take advantage of their long stay to learn the language and culture of the welcoming country and also acquire a good European culture.

Organising on purpose courses all in English for these students, whether they are in Europe or

outside Europe, is an astonishing non-sense which is contrary to the interests of the welcoming countries and Europe as a whole. If they are coming to study in Europe, it is because Europe has great assets, they are not coming to better their English. So, we have to organise for them intensive linguistic and cultural courses which allow them to follow the classes in a manner which put them on an equal level to native speakers. No doubt motivation, which has to be strong at this level of study, will allow them to broaden their range of linguistic and cultural abilities, which will be an additional opening for them.

5) Announcements and publications

- [Lingue per un cuore europeo - LEND](#) *Il seminario nazionale di formazione e aggiornamento 'Lingue per un cuore europeo - costruzione di una identità plurilingue e pluriculturale dell'Europa nel mondo' avrà luogo a Torino (Italia) nei giorni 28-30 Ottobre 2011.*
- [Terminologies \(I\) : analyser des termes et des concepts](#) - Travaux interdisciplinaires et plurilingues, Vol. 16, dir. Jean-Jacques Briu, Peter Lang, 2011
- [Le plurilinguisme au travail entre la philosophie de l'entreprise, les représentations des acteurs et les pratiques quotidiennes](#), dir. Georges Lüdi, ARBA 22, Acta romanica Basiliensa, octobre 2010
- [Le français, notre maison, petits essais sur l'usage du français aujourd'hui](#), collectif, Fondation Défense du français, Ed. Zoé, 2010
- [Identité et langue française. De la législation linguistique dans le Jura](#), Pierre-André Comte, 2010
- [Traduction et mondialisation](#), coord. Michael Oustinoff, Les essentiels d'Hermès, 2011
- [Une langue venue d'ailleurs](#), Akira Mizubayashi, Gallimard, 2011
- [Séminaire REAL-TICE - Comment tirer le meilleur profit des TICE en classe de langues](#), Madrid ? 22-25 juin 2011
- 500 parents d'élèves du réseau d'établissements biculturels OETC à Bruxelles, menacé d'asphixie financière par le ministre de l'éducation, écrivent à ce dernier et lancent une pétition. [Voir la pétition](#)
- [Colóquio: Educação Bilingue e Bilinguismo](#), 20 e 21 de junho de 2011, [Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian](#)
- [The 4th ENIEDA Conference on Linguistic and Intercultural Education](#)
- [Infolettre n°24 de DLF Bruxelles-Europe](#)
- [Les médias de la diversité culturelle dans les pays latins d'Europe](#), dir. A. Lrenoble-Bart et M. Mathien, Emile Bruylant, 2011
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6) [Read gain the former newsletter of the EOP, click here i](#)

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O.E. P. - 4 rue Léon Siché F-75015 Paris, France –

<http://www.observatoireplurilinguisme.eu/> - <http://www.efm-mehrsprachigkeit.eu>

- mobile : ++33 (0)6 10 38 68 90