Translation and the Dynamics of Multilingualism

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RÉSUMÉ: Cet article propose de replacer la traduction dans le contexte plus vaste de la macro-dynamique du multilinguisme. On commence par rappeler que la traduction ne surgit en effet pas ex nihilo, mais émerge d’un contexte multilingue et dépend donc de celui-ci ; la pérennité d’une demande pour les services de traduction n’est donc pas garantie. En même temps, la traduction contribue à l’entretien et au développement de la diversité linguistique. Le texte propose donc une identification des mécanismes de la macro-dynamique du multilinguisme, suggérant pour cela une métrique inédite et situant explicitement la traduction dans cette dynamique. Un accent particulier est mis sur le rôle des politiques linguistiques dans cette dynamique, montrant que la traduction en est d’une part dépendante, mais qu’elle constitue aussi une des conditions de leur efficacité. L’analyse débouche sur une série de suggestions concernant le positionnement des traducteurs face aux grands débats de politique des langues ainsi que la formation des traducteurs.

ABSTRACT: This paper proposes to replace translation in the broader perspective of the macro-level dynamics of multilingualism. We begin by recalling that translation does not appear in a vacuum, but that it emerges from multilingual contexts and is therefore dependent on the latter; in the long run, the demand for translation services should not be taken for granted. At the same time, translation contributes to the maintenance and development of linguistic diversity. In this paper, we develop an approach to the identification of the workings of the macro-level dynamics of multilingualism, suggesting a new metric for multilingualism and explicitly positioning translation with respect to these dynamics. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of language policies, showing that translation is largely dependent on them, but that is also constitutes a key determinant of their effectiveness. Our discussion generates suggestions regarding the implication of translators in major language policy debates, as well as the training of translators.

MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS:
Plurilinguisme, diversité linguistique, dynamique des langues, politique linguistiques, formation des traducteurs.
Multilingualism, linguistic diversity, language dynamics, language policy, translator training.

1. Introduction: translation as Cinderella?

Translation seems to be affected by a strange fate: in a multilingual world, it is, arguably, indispensable; yet in discourses about multilingualism, its role is frequently overlooked:
issues such as to foreign language learning, language rights, multilingualism in the classroom, the use of a lingua franca, etc., usually take centre stage, and translation is often treated as merely residual.

Of course, the picture is not wholly bleak: major thinkers like George Steiner and Umberto Eco have repositioned translation as an intellectual adventure in the fullest sense of the term; key political actors in European institutions are quite aware of the importance of language services, and make a point of regularly saying so, suggesting that the contribution of translation to the efficient operation of a multilingual world is gaining wider recognition. Nevertheless, these positive signs should not hide what remains a dominant pattern, which is one in which translation, indispensable though it is in practice, is rarely fully acknowledged as such; to a large extent, this affects interpretation too. By comparison with other fields of human endeavour, language services are often relegated to ancillary positions, evoking the image of a Cinderella confined to domestic chores while her elder sisters, “lingua franca” and language learning, go to the ball — where they enjoy considerably higher visibility.

Why is that so? Seen from the outside, through the lens of an economist who uses the tools of his trade to study language-related questions, this is an intriguing situation that deserves to be investigated.

The first contention – or argument – that I will try to put forward in this lecture is that the role of the translator, if properly understood and properly positioned, is much more significant than is often assumed in the general public and that this role is, in fact, just as significant as the role played by other professionals, ranging from teachers to accountants, and from marketing consultants to experts in multimedia communication, in their respective trades. No-one would assume that the work of these professionals could be performed by bright members of an organisation’s clerical staff, while this assumption is often made in the case of translators. While the readers of this journal probably share may view that such an assumption is incorrect, its incorrectness needs to be established not merely with respect to the demands of professional quality in translation, but also with respect to the larger functions of translation. In order to make this point, I will examine the interconnection between language policy and language dynamics, and examine the specific role of translation in this interconnection.

The persistence of the perceptions just mentioned can be explained in part by the complexity of the processes at hand: although there are objective reasons for recognising the full importance of translation, these reasons are not immediately apparent. Bringing them to light requires some analytical effort. At the same time, I believe that some segments of the translation profession itself are partly to blame for the lack of recognition that affects the profession. I submit that this proceeds from some widely shared, stubborn, but ultimately erroneous views about what translation is and is not about. Hence, the second main argument in this talk is that if translation is to come into its own, and if its full contribution is to be acknowledged, a reconsideration of the meaning of translation and a corresponding broadening of the training of translators is necessary.
Clearly, we are confronting large-scale issues, which are not subsumed under the activity of taking a text in language $B$ and producing an $A$-language version of it. Rather, we should be looking at translation as an activity that has political, economic and social implications. To my knowledge, a full treatment of this question is not yet available anywhere in the literature. Therefore, many questions remain open. However, handling them properly would require a far-reaching investigation; I would therefore like to stress that this paper is only intended as a set of pointers for such an investigation.

The main line of argument in this paper is translation stands to gain by broadening its self-image and fully engaging with issues of language policy; reciprocally, mainstream discourses about multilingualism, as well as about the role language policy, both as a field of scientific investigation and as an area of public policy, stands to gain by taking translation more seriously than is usually done. Hence, this paper proposes to explore some of the mutual relationships between three terms:

- language dynamics (or, more specifically, the dynamics of multilingualism),
- language policy, and
- translation.

It is organised as follows: in Section 2, I propose a general reconsideration of the role of translation, not just as a technical linguistic skill, but as a meaningful component of policy-influenced language dynamics. In Section 3, I briefly review existing contributions in language dynamics and propose a new metric for linguistic diversity in communication, which can pave the way for the explicit modelling of translation in language dynamics. Section 4 examines the implications of this approach, showing how translation fits in the broader framework where it operates both as a consequence of language policy and as a condition for its effectiveness. In Section 5, I discuss the need for translators to get more actively involved in language policy discussions, and derive some of the corresponding implications for the training of language specialists.

2. (Re)claiming the roles of translation

Typically, textbooks present translation as an activity which is largely abstracted from its macro-social context—and, therefore, from language dynamics. Of course, translation theorists are careful to underline the indispensable character of cultural competence for quality translation, thus contextualising translation. However, the focus typically remains on the very specific activity of translating from $B$ to $A$. The translation process itself is usually positioned within a more general perspective on language (more rarely on speech and discourse), and this view of translation is broadly reflected in textbooks in the field as well as in more historical accounts of the emergence of translation studies (e.g. Gentzler, 1993; Pergnier, 1993; Anderman and Rogers, 2008; Guidère, 2008a). The broader perspectives afforded by recent developments in the sociology of translation also leave out, in the main, some crucial questions regarding the social conditions surrounding the activity of translation (Inghilleri, 2005; Wolf and Fukari, 2008).
However, these approaches usually rely on some strong assumptions regarding the contexts in which translation occurs. More precisely, it takes for granted the notion that translation activities must occur or — putting it in economic terms — that there exists a demand for translation and that supply simply has to follow, which incidentally implies that the role of the translator is largely that of a follower. There are exceptions, of course: in the polysystems theory developed by Even-Zahar (1990), translation is viewed as part and parcel of an interlocking of literary systems, and where translations from B to A will carry different socio-cultural implications depending on the “standing”, as it were, of A-language literary creation. Translations from B will occupy more space in the A-language literary system if the latter is young (or emergent), or peripheral, or in crisis. On this view, translation is directly enmeshed in the larger-scale language dynamics. More recently, several contributions in Munday (2007) describe how the very existence of translation and its modalities influence social reality, and Ost (2009) has stressed the essential embeddedness of translation in multilingualism, particularly in connection with language policies (see in particular Chap. 10).

Approaches of this kind, however, remain relatively unusual in translation studies. Putting it differently, it is as if translation, though epistemologically situated, were, save for a few exceptions, phenomenologically isolated, as if there were not much of a “before” or an “after” to translation. There is no doubt that the study of translation per se, even without explicit link-up with the social, political, economic context that motivates it, constitutes a rich field of study on an intellectually rewarding and multi-faceted area of human activity. However, it does not tell us why translation occurs at all. Again, it is apparently assumed that the world is multilingual and that therefore translation is needed — end of story.

But the story is not so simple. Even in a multilingual world, there are many ways to communicate in which the need for translation is reduced or even eliminated altogether. The most obvious strategy for dispensing with translation is large-scale foreign language learning. Consider a region, or group of countries, with three languages in total. Each person has one of these three languages as a mother tongue. If everyone learns only one foreign language (that is, any one of the two languages other than his mother tongue), any randomly selected pair of speakers will always have at least one language in common. Of course, we may want to consider more complex cases, in which there are more than three languages (say 23), and in which people meet not just in pairs, but in groups ranging in size from 2 to $N$, where $N$ is the total number of people in the population. Then one easy way for communication to occur without any translation and interpretation is to get everyone to become fluent in one and the same foreign language (which can be an “outside” language like Esperanto or Klingon, or one of the 23 languages present, like Greek or English in the case of the European Union — all these solutions offering both advantages and drawbacks discussed elsewhere, e.g. Pool, 1996; Grin, 2005).

Some translators (and, perhaps even more so, some conference interpreters) appear to live in a blessed world in which their fine skills are not just necessary now, but always will be. In the short term, this is true. In the long term, it might not. There is no
shortage of voices in Europe, some of them quite influential, who advocate a radical shift away from multilingualism and toward much less multilingual modes of communication, usually through an increased, or generalised, or sometimes even exclusive use of English. For example, the Dutch political scientist Abram de Swaan is on record for having described multilingualism (in the presence of the former Commissioner for multilingualism, Leonard Orban) as “a damned nuisance”\(^1\); the Italian political scientist Daniele Archibugi advocates the use of English to increase political participation by citizens of the European Union\(^2\); the famous American sociologist Amitai Etzioni, who teaches international relations, argues that multilingualism is artificial, costly and plain too complicated\(^3\); and of course, readers of the influential weekly *The Economist* are by now used to its (mainly) pro-English tirades and occasional condescension towards other languages\(^4\), (though other widely circulated newspapers are arguably worse). The arguments marshalled in favour of this linguistic flattening are often powerful ones, and they are usually formulated in terms of *efficiency*, occasionally in terms of *fairness*\(^5\).

As I have tried to show elsewhere (e.g. Grin, 2005) such arguments against multilingualism, which can be very seductive for some politicians, taxpayers and media pundits, are in fact much less convincing when examined at close range. However, establishing this latter point – and demonstrating the economically advantageous nature of multilingualism, *even* if this implies paying for translation services – requires sustained examination, which starts with the identification of robust causal relationships, including some in which translation is explicitly featured.

One immediately obvious relationship is that translation services are provided *because* there is a demand for it, and there is demand for it *because* a society, at a given time in a given space, operates multilingually. It is therefore important to understand the underlying patterns and to identify the reasons *why* the world operates multilingually; this causal chain may be represented with a simple diagram that we shall use as a starting point (Fig. 1):

\(^{5}\) Efficiency and economy are among the arguments invoked to justify the decision, by the Swedish presidency of the European Union, to hold several informal meetings in English only in the second half of 2009 (see [http://www.observatoireplurilinguisme.eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2567&Itemid=1](http://www.observatoireplurilinguisme.eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2567&Itemid=1)); fairness is invoked by van Parijs in several pieces, e.g. 2004a.
It is, in a sense, obvious that translation does not occur in a vacuum, and that translation, whether as an intellectual activity, as a social practice, or as a way to earn one’s living, depends on all kinds of factors upstream; and that the demand for translation services at time $t$ depends on the value of all kinds of variables at time $t-1$. It is therefore all the more surprising that these links have hardly been explored.

However, this vision of translation in context is not quite complete – for at least two reasons.

First, it is important to introduce language policy and recognise its crucial importance. Language policy is itself a product of a certain social and political context; but it also intended to shape this context, through the influence it has on the extent of multilingualism in society. Much of language policy affects translation – either directly, because it makes translation mandatory (for example, by requiring that for reasons of consumer safety, the product composition of medicines be available in various languages), or indirectly, because it protects and promotes a variety of languages; this will, in turn, encourage multilingualism, boosting the need for language services, including translation and interpretation. In order to take this into account, Fig. 1 can be modified as follows (Fig. 2):
Secondly, we do not live in a static world of unidirectional causes and static structures. Rather, the world is dynamic, and various forms of human action are interconnected in multiple ways. This also applies to translation, which is not just subjected to changing patterns, but which can also contribute to these changes. Hence, what we ought to be looking at, if we wish to develop a fuller account of the role of translation in context, is not just the set of arrows travelling to translation in the preceding figures, but also the “feedback” arrows travelling from translation to other constituting elements of its environment, as shown in Fig. 3 below:
At this time, only a few aspects of some the relationships symbolised by the seven arrows in Fig. 3 have been studied. It would be well beyond the scope of what can seriously be done in a one-hour presentation to venture in an extensive examination of all these relationships. However, we can already propose some stepping stones towards an integrative view combining the dynamics of multilingualism, language policy, and translation.

3. On the dynamics of multilingualism

In order to address the question of the dynamics of multilingualism, let us begin by taking a look at language dynamics. This notion can be addressed at two different, non-mutually exclusive levels, namely, internal and external.

“Internal language dynamics” refer to the processes through which any language is liable to change. Morphosyntax and phonology evolve over time. Change can remain slow over extended periods of time, but it may also suddenly accelerate in response to particular conjunction of factors. Some languages, like Icelandic and French, are considered to change at a relatively slower pace than some other European languages, but I am not aware of any systematic comparative research on the pace of aggregate change in different languages, and it is difficult to say if this reputation is factually accurate, or whether it is another one of those unfounded rumours that go round about languages – what Bauer and Trudgill (1998) call “language myths”. But even in the case of a supposedly slow-changing language like French, much of the pleasure of reading a late 19th-century author like Jules Verne (1828-1905) comes from the slightly quaint vocabulary and syntax – my point being that less than 150 years later, nobody writes
quite like that any more. Language change is the result of the interplay of numerous factors (Aitchison, 1991). Though many of these factors are by now well-known, their interaction is not yet fully conceptualised. However, we shall not discuss this further, because my concern here is with external language dynamics – that is, why do some languages spread, while other languages retreat, or even disappear altogether?

The effects of external dynamics are surveyed in various sources such as Martí et al. (2005) in a UNESCO-sponsored World Languages Review. Examples of the processes in question are easy to find. The attrition of Europe’s regional or minority languages (RMLs) like Scottish Gaelic or Ladin are well-known, though small languages on other continents are having an even rougher ride: in early 2010, the press announced the death of last speaker of the Bo language in the Andaman Islands. Some commentators predict the extinction of one language every two weeks over the course of the 21st century. At the same time, we hear that major international languages like English, but also regionally important languages like Swahili or Hausa, are gaining speakers (as a first or second language). The fact that these dynamics are little known open the door to bold scenarios: we may for example wonder if the heyday of English may soon be over, with Mandarin Chinese poised to take the role of worldwide linguistic hegemon, and we may fantasize about the day when top North American universities will allow – nay, encourage – their doctoral students from Chile, Sweden or India to write their PhD dissertations in Chinese – just like many universities on the European continent now encourage the use of English for this purpose. Conversely, we could consider the opposite scenario, where the development of communication technologies accelerates existing patterns of language spread and makes the dominant position of English impregnable. “External language dynamics” refer to all these processes of language spread, maintenance and decline, and because these dynamics necessarily concern the respective position of different languages with respect to each other, they ipso facto constitute dynamics of multilingualism. In what follows, therefore, I shall treat the expressions “(external) language dynamics” and “dynamics of multilingualism” as synonymous.

It is important to note that the word “dynamics” is used here in a fairly demanding sense. It does not merely evoke the idea that “things are not static” or that “things change”. Rather, “dynamics” implies a systemic view of a set of relationships as symbolised by arrows in the diagrams presented in Section 2, including causal ones, which are positioned with explicit reference to the passage of time.6

Needless to say, identifying and explaining language dynamics in this demanding sense is a very difficult task. At this time, there simply is no complete theory of (external)

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6 In a full-fledged dynamic approach, the value of a particular variable at time \( t \) should be explained as a function of the value of the same or another variable at time \( t-1 \), and as a determinant of the value of the same or another variable at time \( t+1 \). For example, the percentage of the population speaking Scottish Gaelic in the Outer Hebrides in 2010 would be seen as the result of the value of various variables (including the percentage of speakers of Scottish Gaelic) in, say, 2000, and it will also co-determine the percentage of speakers in 2020. Not all the work that contributes to our understanding of language dynamics formally expresses the causal links at hand with explicit time indexes, but at least informal reference to the passage of time must be part of a “dynamic” perspective worth the name.
language dynamics. What we have, however, are some contributions that examine one or another aspect of these dynamics:

- the maintenance and decline of minority languages, but also, by implication, the conditions for their revitalisation (for example Giles, Bourhis and Taylor, 1977; Fishman, 1991; Grin, 1992, 2003; Grin and Vaillancourt, 1999; Abrams and Strogatz, 2003; Mira and Paredes, 2005);
- the emergence of a particular language as a medium of communication between two different language communities (for example Carr, 1985; Church and King, 1993);
- the emergence of a hierarchy of languages as a result of patterns of language learning, with the dominant languages enjoying more central positions (for example de Swaan, 2001);
- trends in language learning resulting from strategic interaction between actors (for example Selten and Pool, 1990, 1997; van Parijs, 2004a, 2004b; Ginsburgh, Ortuño-Ortíz and Weber, 2007) or from the evolution of rates of return to language skills (for example Grin, 1997).

Limitations of time and space prevent us from discussing each of these approaches, but all of them offer relevant inputs. However, they would need to be combined in order to yield a broad, integrative picture of language dynamics. At this time, research still has quite a way to go before it reaches this goal. Nevertheless, two observations can guide our steps in this direction:

- first, language dynamics are to a significant extent influenced by language policies. Language policies can encourage or discourage multilingualism; deliberately “doing nothing” is per se a form of language policy, particularly if there is a deliberate decision to “do nothing”; but even doing nothing out of ignorance is not without consequences; hence, we could say that there is no such thing as “no language policy”;
- secondly, the above analyses do not mention translation, let alone include it as an explanatory component of their account of language dynamics. Several assumptions can be made as to the reasons of this oversight, but if our goal is, precisely, to examine the role of translation in language dynamics, this needs to be redressed.

The challenge, therefore, is to venture a very simplified and tentative model of language dynamics explicitly featuring language policy and translation. To this end, the first thing to do is to clarify what we want to explain. Our rapid overview of the literature on

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7 The list above should not be seen as exhaustive, although it covers the main directions of research on language dynamics as defined above; however, some econometric work using panel data on the evolution of immigrants' linguistic skills could be ascribed to the language dynamics literature.

8 Translation (and interpretation) may be viewed as a form of banal transaction costs; typically, transaction costs are assumed away in more stylised "frictionless" models. Alternatively, translation and interpretation may be viewed as a transparent stage in a process of information transformation that goes from a situation of inefficient non-communication to a situation of efficient communication.
language dynamics suggests that existing analyses do not actually seek to explain the same thing. Rather, they look at one or another aspect of language dynamics, and there are at least five different “dependent (or ‘explained’) variables” – or, more prudently, classes of dependent variables:

- the vitality of a minority language (e.g. Giles, Bourhis and Taylor, 1977); however, it is not always clear in what units this “vitality” is supposed to be measured – presumably some indicator of intergenerational transmission;
- the percentage of users of a minority language (e.g. Grin, 1992; Abrams and Strogatz, 2003; Mira and Paredes, 2005);
- the use of a minority language, measured in absolute or relative time units (e.g. Grin, 1990; Grin and Vaillancourt, 1999);
- the use of one language (instead of many different languages) by speakers interacting in a multilingual meeting (e.g. van Parijs, 2004a, 2004b), where “use” is presumably measured through absolute or relative frequency (for example., the percentage of meetings held in languages A, B, etc.);
- the relative communicational value of different languages (e.g. de Swaan, 2001), measured in terms of an index based on the distribution of people having different language skills; this communicational value, in turn, influences language learning and hence the distribution of people with different linguistic profiles;
- a certain distribution of language skills among the population (e.g. Selten and Pool, 1990, 1997), measured in terms of the number of non-native languages learned by social actors.

These models vary in terms of the central questions they ask, the assumptions they make about people as learners of languages, the degree of abstraction at which the analysis is positioned, and ultimately sheer complexity — for example, the contributions by Selten and Pool take account of a larger number of factors, but they are also more abstract and more difficult to grasp. Moreover, as pointed out earlier, one limitation (for our purposes) of the contributions mentioned above is that for the most part, they do not explicitly feature translation.

This is why we need to develop something different, in which language dynamics are approached in a perspective that lends itself to the inclusion of translation in the analysis. This suggests refocusing the analysis of dynamics of multilingualism itself, which requires us to have a definition of it. For our purposes, a relatively general definition such as the following will suffice, although it may need to be revisited in further elaborations of this approach:

*multilingualism denotes the fact that aggregate communication in society, rather than taking place through one language only, takes place through several languages.*
In other words, multilingualism will be characterised by a relatively high occurrence of linguistic diversity in oral and written communication. To clarify this definition, however, two main qualifications are in order.

1) First, “communication” is, as always, a risky word, because it can mean very different things depending on whether communication is looked at from the perspective of the sender or of the receiver, or whether the focus is on the message being transmitted. What is more, these notions do not denote neat, clear-cut categories but can be further analysed to uncover their intrinsic complexity. For example, the “message”, rather than some finite and stable entity, is something that can in large part depend on the very process of interaction between sender and receiver. For our purposes, we need not address these complex questions. What matters, however, is to conceptualise communication as an effective utterance. What does this mean? Simply that a message, oral or written, whether emitted in one language (to which a person’s idiolect can be unambiguously assigned, irrespective of syntactic correctness) or more than one language (for example because of code-switching) reaches its goals. “Reaching the goal” means achieving some communicational objectives which concern the receiver, or an adequate proportion of receivers.

2) Secondly, diversity is also a rather vague term (its very vagueness, incidentally, may have something to do with its current popularity in the media, politics, and academia). Van Parijs (2006) breaks it down in three dimensions: richness, evenness and distance, all of which tend to increase diversity. Richness refers to the number of different languages present. Evenness refers to the distribution of these different languages: in a four-language setting, diversity will certainly be higher if each language is spoken as a native language by 25% of the population than if three languages are spoken by 1% each, while the fourth language is spoken by 97% of the population. Distance refers to the extent of differences (for example in morphology, syntax, or phonetics) between the languages present. For our purposes, we shall define diversity only in terms of richness and evenness.

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9 The need for a definition is confirmed by the lack of a clear-cut one even in specialist work. Consider e.g. the book on Multilingual Communication edited by House and Rehbein, where the authors say (2004: 1) that “Generally speaking, ‘multilingual communication’ can be characterized by the following features: the use of several languages for the common purposes of participants; multilingual individuals who use language(s) to realize these purposes; the different language systems which interact for these purposes; multilingual communication structures, whose purposes make individuals use several languages”. Even if we leave aside the ontologically different status of these four possible characterisations, it is unclear how each of them would be operationalized, let alone measured.

10 As regards the goals of effective communication, see Gazzola and Grin (2007: 92), who identify three classes of communicational goals, namely “informatory”, “cooperative” and “strategic”. This distinction is not essential for the purposes of the present discussion; let us simply note that it usually — though not systematically — implies being understood by the receiver.

11 Distance is not irrelevant, but it also carries awkward implications: consider a setting with languages X, Y and Z, where X and Y are closely related (and may in fact be mutually understandable with little effort), while Z is unrelated to either one. Assume that Y is a majority language, while X and Z are threatened minority languages. Thus, the distance XY is smaller than the distance YZ. If the goal
We can then define a “diversity score” $D$ as the product of the number of languages actually used in aggregate communication (both oral and written) by the value of the Simpson index of fractionalisation of that same communication:

$$D = N \times 1 - \sum_{j=1}^{N} s_j^2$$  \[1\]

The first term on the right-hand side of equation [1], that is “before the multiplication sign”, is $N$. $N$ is the total number of languages present. We assume all languages present to be used, even if only exceptionally. The second term on the right-hand side of equation [1] is the Simpson index of fractionalisation.\(^{12}\)

The “$s_j$” in this expression refers to the relative share of each language in effective communication, which is itself given by the number of occurrences of effective communication taking place in language $j$ divided by the total number of occurrences of effective communication across the $N$ languages present. It is important to note that $s_j$ is defined in such a way as to take account of the number of receivers of any given utterance: a TV broadcast watched by an audience of 5 million is more important, all other things being equal, than a late-night show viewed by a few thousand.\(^{13}\)

Should we want to give relatively more importance to richness or evenness respectively, we could re-define $D$ as:

$$D = \rho N \times \eta \left( 1 - \sum_{j=1}^{N} s_j^2 \right)$$  \[2\]

In the basic case, $\rho = \eta = 1$, but if we want to give richness more prominence, we simply need to set $\rho > \eta$ (and conversely if, on the contrary, we want to give evenness more importance).

In this duly qualified definition, multilingualism can be measured through the diversity score, obtained by computing the aggregate number of (“effective”) oral and written utterances in a given space over a given period. In order to move on to actual measurement, we would need to tally up the total number of utterances addressed to others, whether orally (formal speeches, turn-taking in informal interaction, radio and television broadcasts, everyday conversations etc.) or in writing (published materials, of language policy is to preserve linguistic diversity, and if resources for this purposes are scarce, the policy recommendation (if based on a concept of diversity including "distance") would be to focus on the protection of language $Z$, while abandoning language $X$ to its sorry fate. This is, of course, highly debatable in political as well as policy terms.

\(^{12}\) The Simpson index is also known as the Greenberg index of linguistic diversity; it is by definition equal to one minus the Herfindahl index of (industrial) concentration.

\(^{13}\) See appendix for suggestions regarding the handling of this point.
websites, advertising, etc.) in each language, also taking account, in each case, of the number of receivers.

Tallying up the sum total of communication so defined is, of course, a daunting task in practice. However, what matters is that (i) it is relatively straightforward in theory (and after all, any all fresh inquiry needs to start with theoretical considerations) and that (ii) for application to actual language policy questions, the difficulty can be substantially reduced by focusing on specific forms of communication in specific settings. We might for example examine internal, work-related written communication taking place within the European Commission (working documents on policy matters; administrative information such as circulars; collective or personalised e-mails and letters; signage on European commission premises; other internal information posted on billboards). Ultimately, the criterion is what counts as a relevant aspect of a person’s linguistic environment.14

4. Where does translation fit in macro-level language dynamics?

As already pointed out in Section 2, it stands to reason that translation exists because of linguistic diversity. Putting it differently, if the value of the diversity score $D$ is higher, it means that more languages are used and that total communication is more diverse; and as a consequence of higher diversity, the demand for translation services is higher, all other things being equal.15

What matters, however, is that translation is particularly sensitive to those components of multilingualism that depend, in turn, on explicit language policies in favour of multilingualism.

Some translation services would of course be in demand for various reasons. Consider for example the following two-language situations:

- a company in country $X$ where language $X$ is spoken, trying to sell its products in country $Y$ where language $Y$ is spoken, will need to translate texts like product composition, instructions for use and possibly safety warnings from $X$ to $Y$; in a similar context, an advertising campaign created in language $X$ will need to be translated in language $Y$, and possibly localised;

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14 On this view, it is not just the production of fresh material that counts, but also the dissemination within the institution of documents produced elsewhere. For example, the relaying within a Directorate General of the European Commission of a policy document in English produced by the OECD increases the share of English in the Commission and affects its diversity score – negatively, since this reduces the evenness component of diversity.

15 There are very few economic models studying the demand for translation, and then they focus on literary translation; see Hjorth-Andersen (2001), Mélitz (2007), or Ginsburgh, Weber and Wyers (2007). Explicit linkages between language dynamics and translation are few, one exception being Pym (2006: 744) who posits “globalization as an economic process that has certain consequences for the social role of translation”.
literary works produced in language X will have to be translated in language Y if they are to reach non-X-speaking individuals in country Y; TV programs produced in language X will have to be dubbed or subtitled in language Y before being aired in country Y.

Nevertheless, we should observe that:

- much professional translation work takes place in the public sector, to serve the needs of national or regional authorities that have a policy of bi- or multilingualism, and therefore need to make all kinds of documents available in its designated official languages; this is, of course, a result of language policy;\(^\text{16}\)
- this obviously also applies to international and supra-national organisations, which are instituted by sovereign states, and apply language-related regulations stemming from language policy;
- some of the translation work produced in and for the private, “free-market” sector is directly determined by language policy – for example, when such policies mandate the use of local languages on product packaging for reasons of consumer safety;
- other translation work in the private sector is dependent on the very existence of linguistic diversity. Linguistic diversity, however, is often highly dependent on political choices in favour of diversity which, in turn, translate into pro-diversity language policies;
- the translation of linguistically specific goods like books and audiovisual products – or, more generally, of “cultural” goods and services (though using this adjective admittedly runs the risk of stretching the notion of culture a bit far) are presumably immune from the above observations and are, therefore, not dependent upon language policy. However, language-policy inspired measures play a significant subsidising role in the translation of cultural goods and services – and literary translation is a negligible part of aggregate translation services anyway.\(^\text{17}\)

Thus, even in its strongest redoubts, much of the translation industry is directly or indirectly dependent on language policies that protect and promote multilingualism, often through the protection and promotion of the variety of individual languages that make up this multilingualism. This is even more true of interpreting – particularly conference interpreting, which is certainly at least 95% dependent on the fact that because of language policies to that effect, international and supranational organisations are variously bilingual (Council of Europe; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), trilingual (World Trade Organisation), hexalingual (United Nations) or “tricosalingual” (European Parliament). All these language policies do not fall from

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\(^{16}\) The relative share of the private and public sector, however, remains difficult to assess. Recent research on the size of the language industry (European Commission, 2009) identifies private sector supply, as distinct from demand (which is distributed between the private, public, and “third” sectors).

\(^{17}\) Some literary translation is also performed by persons who do not describe themselves as translators, but as writers. Consider for example the major novel *Agaat* by the South African writer Marlene van Niekerk, originally written in Afrikaans, which was translated into English by another published author, Michiel Heyns.
heaven: they exist because at a given point in time, there is political will to preserve multilingualism. Of course, this will does not necessarily reflect a fondness for multilingualism as such; rather, preserving multilingualism may simply be seen as a logical implication of other, non-linguistic goals such as “democratic participation”, “fairness”, “appropriate treatment of cultural identity”, “prestige of different parties” (such as member states), etc. (Gazzola, 2006). But this political will, in turn, is not something that should be taken for granted: it is under constant attack from the advocates of a lingua franca, and multilingualism has to be defended, among others, with scientific arguments on the value of multilingualism – and the costs of giving it up. In any case, it follows from the above that it is in the interest of translators and interpreters to enter the fray and become explicitly supportive of language policies in favour of multilingualism—as well as of the research that provides the ammunition for such language policies.

The work of translators is in the interest of linguistic diversity too – it is, in fact, indispensable to it. Limitations of space prevent us from developing a full-fledged theoretical argument, but we can start with a general observation which finds ample illustration in reality: people will use a variety of languages (instead of only one) if three conditions are present. These three conditions are: the capacity to use these languages, opportunities to use them, and the desire to do so. Typically, therefore, language policies will try to influence capacity, opportunity and desire – in varying proportions depending on context and objectives. Translation itself is a key conduit for language policy, because it reinforces capacity, opportunity and desire. In fact, the work of the translator:

- helps to establish or disseminate equivalents, in various languages, of terms initially coined in the language in which the corresponding concept or material reality was developed (this holds in particular for technical and scientific innovation), thus developing the capacity of people at large to formulate their ideas in their respective languages;
- provides opportunities to use these languages, by contributing (in the spirit of the Catalan principle of normalització, that is, “making something normal”; see Bastardas Boada, 1987), the use of a variety of languages in all sociolinguistic domains;
- validates people’s desire to use a variety of languages, because translation into these languages is a way of establishing the latter’s social legitimacy.

Moreover, some indirect effects of translation operate through the development of language technologies (or, to use the compact French word for this, traductique), thus highlighting the role of the language industry in language dynamics. For example, tools like “Trados” may become ever more quick and flexible. Such developments can therefore lower the cost of multilingualism in general, and increase the cost-effectiveness of translation as one strategy – in complementarity with other strategies – for communication in multilingual contexts.

18 The underlying analytical framework is known as the “Policy-to-outcome path”, or P-TOP, presented in Grin and Vaillancourt (1999) or Grin (2003). The P-TOP model is backed up by a formal model of language choice (Grin, 1990).
In sum, translation is deeply enmeshed in the dynamics of multilingualism: it exists because of multilingualism and encourages it, and it is in constant relation with language policies: it largely depends on them but is also indispensable to their implementation. Translators are, as suggested in the introduction to this paper, full-fledged players in these processes.

5. Proactive translators and translation training

I have just called on translators to take the full measure of the importance of multilingualism and the policies that support it. In this closing section, I would like to take a closer look at two questions that directly arise as a consequence, namely:

- are some pro-multilingualism policies particularly deserving of support?
- what are the implications of our discussion for the training of translators and interpreters?

Let us start with the first of these two questions, returning to a classic typology in language policy due to Robert Cooper (1989), who distinguishes between corpus planning, status planning and acquisition planning. We may debate just how widely applicable this typology really is, but it often proves convenient, and in any event, this question is not central to our discussion. What matters is that this typology helps us to single out status planning, which has to do with the position of a language vis-à-vis other languages, or languages vis-à-vis one another, as distinct from corpus planning (which is concerned with questions such as the choice of a writing system, spelling reforms, or terminological development) and acquisition planning (which is concerned with the teaching and learning of languages).

There is, indeed, a sticky point here: language policies that promote multilingualism will have two potentially contradictory effects on translation. On the one hand, they cause translation and interpretation activities to increase; on the other hand, they promote foreign language learning, which, all other things being equal, will tend to erode the need for translation and interpretation – particularly in the non-regulated parts of the operations of the private sector. Consider for example the case of middle managers in the private sector who need to keep abreast of developments in their trade around the world. Typically, this information will be available in different languages, possibly much more than in their native language, making the translation of texts necessary. Yet the more foreign languages spoken by these middle managers, the less they will need translations to keep themselves informed about their trade.¹⁹

For now, let us simply note that this is why members of the language service professions should in particular support status planning measures: not only do these measures have an unambiguously positive, and often quite direct impact on the diversity

¹⁹This carries specific implications for contents of translator training that I return to in the second part of this section.
score $D$ (which is a fairly straightforward indicator of the actual extent of multilingualism in society), and therefore serve the cause of linguistic diversity; they also have a positive and quite direct impact on the demand for translation and interpretation.

This is not to say that translators should actually oppose foreign language learning: widespread individual multilingualism, after all, is part of what multilingualism is about, and as has been stated several times already, multilingualism is a *sine qua non* condition for the very existence of translation and interpretation. But then not all language learning carries the same implications. Some language learning is suspect – and potentially detrimental for diversity; this is in particular the case of common applications of the so-called “1+$>2$ model”, in which Europeans are encouraged to learn two foreign languages (or more, hence the “bigger than” sign in the expression). Although this is never stated officially, what this means in practice is that one of these foreign languages is English; thus, the “1+$>2$” model is fundamentally unstable (see Grin, 2006 for a detailed discussion), because the teaching of the second foreign language is often a sham – all the resources and emphasis are placed on the first foreign language, usually English, and actors do not necessarily see any good reason to learn two foreign languages. The result, in predictable illustration of what van Parijs (e.g. 2004b) calls the “minimex” model, is a decline in diversity as measured by the diversity score. A preferable approach to foreign language, and one which deserves the unstinting support of the language professions, is the one put forward by a working group of intellectuals headed by the Lebanese novelist Amin Maalouf, who drafted a report for the European Commission (Commission européenne, 2008). In this report, Maalouf and his colleagues put forward the concept of PAL, or “personal adoptive language”: each young European would be encouraged to go far and deep in the learning of one other European language and the associated culture, in order to expand his personality through intimate acquaintance with another linguistic-cultural sphere. This does not exclude the study of a language of wider communication (LWC), but significantly de-emphasises it. This makes sense as part of a committed “multilingualist” approach that also relies on the widespread use of translation.

Let us point out that foreign language learning by people at large does not make the skills of professional translators’ redundant for at least three reasons:

- first, L2 learners will tend to achieve very heterogeneous levels of competence, and few will reach the level where they feel fully self-confident when using an L2 or L3, orally and in writing. Whenever a certain quality needs to be guaranteed, the language professional remains indispensable;
- secondly, even when receptive or productive quality is not essential, users may opt for translation for simple reasons of comfort;
- thirdly — and this ties in with research in Québec and Catalonia about language in advertising and commerce — people often reveal a preference for accessing various goods and services in their native language, even if they are fluent in another language.

Another creative approach to language learning that deserves wholehearted support is “intercomprehension”, or “receptive competence” (Conti and Grin, 2008; ten Thije and
Zeevart, 2007). In an “intercomprehensive” perspective, the emphasis is placed on the acquisition of receptive skills in related languages, that is, those that belong to the same language family, like Romance, Germanic or Slavic, for example. If people have been trained to understand messages (particularly written texts) in languages close to their mother tongue, they can be expected not to need these messages to be translated. For example, a native speaker of Spanish could access a text in Italian, Portuguese or French without requiring a Spanish translation of the original.\textsuperscript{20} Prima facie, this strategy looks like it might reduce the need for language services. Actually, it makes these services even more relevant for three reasons. They can be illustrated with reference to the European Commission, which could be expected to work in 23 languages, but in practice uses only three “languages of procedure” (English, French and German) for its internal business:

- firstly, intercomprehension (or “IC” for short) can serve to reintroduce multilingualism in contexts from which it would otherwise have been excluded, usually for cost reasons. This is precisely the issue for internal Commission business. By strengthening multilingualism, IC it creates a favourable climate for translation and interpretation;
- secondly, a document goes through several stages. Thanks to an IC-based system, it can be drafted in any of 23 official languages, and will, for the purposes of internal business, only be translated into one language per language group (other than the language group to which the language of the original draft belongs). The number of versions will depend on how “IC language groups” have been constituted, but given the current linguistic make-up of the EU, twelve IC groups are plausible (Grin, 2008). But when such a document reaches the stage where it needs to become public, it will still need to be translated in order to ensure that it is available in the EU’s 23 official languages; however, the internal work upstream will have taken place much more multilingually than under the current arrangement;
- thirdly, the efficient implementation of an IC-based system requires a form of linguistic support on demand for users. For example, Commission officers, even if they have received IC training, may want advice from a trained language specialist who can help them lift a perceived ambiguity in a text they have to read in a language related to their mother tongue. Translators are, of course, the best possible language specialists to provide just this kind of interactive service.

“Good” foreign language learning expresses a truly multilingual ethos and encourages the use of several languages – not a juxtaposition of diglossic pairs made up of one local language plus a dominant language like English. Let me stress, as I always do, that the problem is not “English” as such. The problem is linguistic dominance, no matter which language finds itself in a dominant position, as soon as it is the mother tongue of some — but not all — of the people in the area considered.

\textsuperscript{20} A wide range of teaching materials for IC has been developed, particularly for the Romance and Germanic languages, with support from the European Commission; see Conti and Grin (2008), Part III.
In connection with the preceding point, it is necessary to debunk a common myth known as “Euro-English”, “globish” or “English as a lingua franca” (sometimes called “ELF”). Without going as far as saying that Euro-English simply does not exist (a cogent argument, once one looks at the anecdotal nature of markers of Euro-English), what can easily be shown is that what does exist is of no policy consequence. Euro English and “English as a lingua franca” may tempting journalistic gimmicks, but the fact remains that non-native speakers are striving, with more or less success, towards native-speaker norm; after all, there are some 400 million native speakers of English in the world, and they still constitute a model that counts. Learners are flocking to English-speaking countries to learn relatively standard English, notwithstanding undisputed regional variation. In spite of sustained research in applied linguistics on “ELF”, precious few linguistic features departing from dominant native usage have actually stabilised, and they do not, by any stretch imagination, amount to an alternative to English, let alone a “language” other than English. If viewed as something “different” from native English, Euro-English or ELF is rather anecdotal. When confronted with this rejoinder, distinguished ELF scholars make the convoluted claim that actually, ELF is not “another” language, but rather a situation, essentially defined by the fact that English is used for communication among non-native speakers (including situations of interaction in which some native speakers are also involved). This claim, of course quickly runs into logical tangles that are never addressed in the literature, leaving the discourse of ELF specialists on rather shaky ground.

It may be that native speakers of English have to make allowances when they find themselves in such contexts, for example by avoiding colloquialisms that non-native speakers are unlikely to be familiar with; and there are some courses designed to help native speakers of English address non-native interlocutors and be understood by them. But such courses last, at most, a day or two – a far cry from the years of investment required to acquire fluency in English as a foreign

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21 Typical features of ELF include tendencies to: (1) drop the final “s” in the third person singular present tense; (2) use of “who” and “which” interchangeably; (3) omit definite and indefinite articles where they are required in standard English, or adding them when they are not; (4) invent plural forms for nouns like “information”, “advice”, etc.; (5) use the singular form of the demonstrative ‘this’ even before a plural noun; (6) broaden the use of certain verbs like “make” to create non-standard constructions like “make sport”, etc.; (7) use only one form of tag questions like “isn’t it?” even where standard usage would have required adaptation (e.g.: “aren’t they?”, etc.); (8) lifting perceived ambiguities in various ways, for example by inserting prepositions where standard usage does not (e.g., “discuss about something”) (see Seidlhofer, Breiteneder and Pitzl, 2006). All this is undoubtedly very interesting — but it does not amount to another language; no conclusive argument is ever made that this matters at all; and the fact remains that non-native speakers never request to be taught non-standard forms like these.

22 A new line of defence sometimes adopted by some proponents of ELF, perhaps for lack of any actual rejoinder to these challenges, is to draw on some claims in applied linguistics according to which the very notion of “languages” is obsolete. Since languages are also social constructs, and since the identification of language in speech is arguably difficult in many instances of interaction (a point that conversation analysis is fond of stressing), what exists is only “language”, rather than distinct “languages”. This argument, however, soon caves in under its own excessiveness: if “languages” do not exist then why, pray, do people insist that a meeting in held in English (or, if you prefer, ELF), rather than German, French. Is too naïve to suppose that this might have to do with the fact that German, French and English are different languages? In any event, most linguists, in fact, seem quite happy with the notion of “languages”, both for scientific purposes and for practical use (Dewaele, Housen and Wei, 2003).
language (estimates of the effort needed to reach this goal are in the range of 10,000 to 15,000 hours of study and practice; see Piron, 1994). Thus, ELF changes nothing to the problems of efficiency and fairness associated with any linguistic hegemony (again, this holds whether the “hegemon” is English or any other “natural” language). Ultimately, all the talk about ELF may at most serve to obscure issues of power and inequality — even if this is not the goal pursued by ELF specialists.

Summing up the points made in this section so far, we can say that translators and interpreters should become more attuned to the relevance of language policy. They should in particular support language status-oriented language policies that aim at preserving linguistic diversity, if only because this type of policy tends to have a particularly direct impact on the need for language services. Among education-oriented language policies that encourage foreign language learning, novel approaches that bank on receptive competence or intercomprehension” (IC) or on the notion of a “personal adoptive language” express a truly “multilingualist” ethos, and deserve strong support from the language professions.

All this has implications for the training of translators and interpreters.

Firstly, familiarity with language policy, and a basic grasp of the analytical tools used in language policy, is, in my view, a necessary part of their training. It is the type of knowledge and analytical skills developed through the study of these subjects that enable them to position themselves as full partners in the dynamics of multilingualism, and these dynamics are literally vital for the language professions.

Secondly, due attention must be paid to new types of employment for translators and interpreters. This need has been eloquently illustrated by the recently published report on the Size of the language industry in the EU commissioned by DG Translation and made public in November 2009 (European Commission, 2009). This report points out the increasingly large range of language professions in which translators end up working. This diversity should be reflected in the curriculum of future language professionals. The foregoing discussion yields several examples: I have just mentioned the need for linguistic advice on demand for the smooth implementation of IC-based systems. Another example is that of “monitoring” — what is known in French as “veille multilingue”; see Guidère, 2008b). Because of the long-term spread of foreign language skills, translators’ skills in the private sector are likely to be required relatively less for strictly traditional translation tasks, where the translator is given a text in language B and asked to produce an A-language equivalent. These skills will certainly remain in demand; however, translators will increasingly be required to perform monitoring tasks, which in turn rely on a range of associated skills: the capacity to select and synthesize information, to move confidently between the generic and the specific, and to grasp the meaning of the broader context. Increasingly, translators will be called upon to make decisions regarding information selection and dissemination. Along with this comes increased responsibility,

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23 For reasons which we do not have the time to discuss here, it is only for “designed” languages like Esperanto or Klingon that this problem does not arise, or only to a much lesser extent.
and this represents a momentous change for the profession; it is only reasonable to adapt
the training of future translators accordingly.

If the full scope of the language professions is duly acknowledged by connecting
them to language policy, and if the corresponding implications for training are spelled
out, then careers in multilingual communication are arguably more exciting than ever.

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APPENDIX: MEASURING MULTILINGUALISM IN COMMUNICATION

If “utterances” in different languages are used as the basic unit of measurement of multilingualism, the number of utterances needs to be adjusted to take account of the number of recipients (listeners, readers, etc.).

As a first approximation, we may assume that if a speaker (or writer) addresses an audience of, say, one thousand, then this instance of communication should count as one thousand in our reckoning, whereas if the speaker had addressed only one listener, this same instance would have counted as one. Suppose that a total of $K$ utterances is made in language $j$. Each utterance reaches a specific number of recipients $R_k^j$, where $k = 1, 2, \ldots, K$. Then $s_j = (\sum_k R_k^j)/R$, where $R$ is the total number of receivers of all messages.

However, it is probably more realistic to assume that in terms of resulting aggregate diversity, the importance of the marginal listener, for each individual utterance, is positive but decreasing. Thus, we would be led to pick an appropriate logarithmic-type transformation of $R_j$ for each individual utterance (oral or written) in language $j$. One possibility is to call on Zipf’s law, which applies not only to the relationship between the frequency and rank of words in natural languages (a constant according to Zipf), but also to Internet pages (Adamic and Huberman, 2002). If the most frequently consulted page has been accessed $t$ times, the second most frequently read will be accessed $t/2$ times, the third $t/3$ times, and so on. Thus, $P_j$ pages in language $j$ give rise to a total number of “messages” $M_j = R_j(1 + 1/2 + 1/3 + \ldots + 1/P_j)$. Moving to the continuous case, the term $M_j$ can be re-expressed as:

$$
\int_1^{P_j} \frac{1}{x} \, dx = R_j \cdot \ln(P_j)
$$

If this pattern holds more generally, it can be used as an approximation of the actual number of “effective utterances”, and evenness can then be expressed as $(M/M)^2$, where $M = \sum_j R_j \cdot \ln(P_j)$.