Imagining Europe’s linguistic diversity in the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly

Zorana Sokolovska a,b,*

a University of Fribourg, Institute of Multilingualism, Rue de Morat 24, CH-1700, Fribourg, Switzerland
b University of Strasbourg, Faculté des Lettres, 14 rue Descartes, F-67084, Strasbourg Cedex, France

A B S T R A C T

This paper aims to show how, despite an egalitarian rhetoric, state and nationalist interests are embedded and can be reproduced in the construction of linguistic diversity in a complex of power relations within an international institution, namely the Council of Europe. As part of this discussion, my paper draws on two successive emblematic discursive events produced within the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council: Recommendation 814 on Modern languages in Europe from 1977 and Recommendation 1383 on Linguistic diversification from 1998. It shows that the imagination of European linguistic diversity is not timeless but dependent on and adaptable to societal conditions and to (inter-)state relationships of power whose dynamics run society, notably through education policies.

1. Introduction

The mission of the Council of Europe’s Language Policy Unit is based on several principles and policies, among which, as stated on its website, is the “Council of Europe language education policy”. This policy aims at the promotion of linguistic diversity and language learning in the field of education. “Language diversity” is described as follows:

LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY: Europe is multilingual and all its languages are equally valuable modes of communication and expressions of identity; the right to use and to learn one’s language(s) is protected in Council of Europe Conventions (my emphasis).1

I would like to draw the reader’s attention to the egalitarian construction of linguistic diversity that is historically promoted and celebrated by the Council of Europe (CoE). Founded in 1949, the CoE is one of the pioneering European interstate institutions that emerged following the end of World War II. It aims to achieve a greater unity between European states by focusing on what these states have in common. In its discourse, linguistic diversity is historically constructed as a common European cultural heritage, and linguistic diversity and equality go hand in hand, following from the idea that all European languages, peoples and states are equal. Therefore, all languages should be equally recognized, taught and used and all of them should equally contribute to the maintenance of the European linguistic diversity. In

* University of Fribourg, Institute of Multilingualism, Rue de Morat 24, CH-1700, Fribourg, Switzerland.
E-mail addresses: zorana.sokolovska@unifr.ch, sokolovska@unistra.fr.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2016.07.004
0271-5309/© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.
other words, the CoE’s discourse on linguistic diversity is constructed and presented as a discourse that undermines hegemonic, monolingual ideologies.

Drawing on Berrey’s (2015) work on the ways power is exercised in the name of diversity, this paper aims to show how, despite an egalitarian rhetoric, state and nationalist interests are embedded and can be reproduced in the construction of linguistic diversity, in a complex of power relations among nation-states that run an international institution, namely the Council of Europe. This lays the basis for a further reflection on how such a construction of linguistic diversity articulates with its promotion within national language education policies. The CoE in an interesting case to consider for its interstate structure, pan-European vocation, its early knowledge production on language (teaching and learning) issues in European states as well as for the acquisition over time of a role of legitimator in this field.

As part of this discussion, my paper draws on two successive emblematic discursive events produced within the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE: Recommendation 814 on Modern languages in Europe from 1977 and Recommendation 1383 on Linguistic diversification from 1998. The adoption of both recommendations was preceded by a debate within the Assembly on which I will focus my analysis in this paper. The 1977 debate on modern languages was one of the first debates on linguistic diversity to emerge within the Assembly. This discourse on Europe’s linguistic diversity arose from a debate on improving interstate cultural cooperation by developing and improving language teaching and learning. This cultural cooperation was one of the conditions for uniting all European states, a principle at the core of the CoE’s political agenda. In 1998, the debate on languages reemerged in the Parliamentary Assembly. By then, geopolitical and socioeconomic conditions had changed, with the emergence of new states in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain. From that point onward, other voices promoting other languages and interests were able to legitimately participate, alongside the “older” ones, in debating and defining the institutional vision of Europe’s linguistic diversity. The new societal conditions set the stage for discursive tensions among the CoE’s older and newer members.

The type of questioning I propose in this paper requires the understanding of an institution as a political field (Bourdieu, 1991), i.e. a field of social relations organized in terms of power in which agents seek to form and transform the visions of the world and thereby the world itself. It is a site of struggles in which agents are continuously engaged in a labor of discourse production by which they seek to construct and impose a particular vision of the social world while at the same time seeking to mobilize the support of those on whom their power ultimately depends (Bourdieu, 1991). All these voices are involved in the same discursive struggle to impose themselves and to simultaneously delegitimize others. It becomes thus crucial, in a political field such as the CoE, to impose one’s voice in the competing heterogeneity of voices in a multilateral debate, where each voice is standing for a different political and ideological agenda (Bakhtin, 1970) still largely anchored in the agenda of the represented nation-state (Pujolar, 2007; Muellmann and Duchêne, 2007). On that ground, drawing on Cameron’s (1995) and Duchêne and Heller’s (2007) argument that discourses on languages are discourses about other types of issues which take place within the scope of language, I argue that the managerial discourse on diversity in an international institution (“diversity talk” according to Moore [2015]) is a discursive terrain for naturalizing more general state political and ideological agendas.

This paper is organized as follows: in the next section, I present the conceptual and analytical framework of my research. Then, I proceed with some remarks on the data and the terrain in order to grasp the complexity of the latter. In the next sections, the analysis of both debates, I examine the discursive construction of linguistic diversity in shifting sociopolitical and economic conditions focusing on the ways state and nationalist interests are (re)produced and how they structure discourse. In the concluding section, I reflect on what it means to encourage linguistic diversity in a multilateral institutional space through the encouragement of language teaching diversification in European nation-state educational systems.

2. The area of study

The valorization of linguistic diversity is linked to the sociopolitical configuration of the new globalized economy (Heller, 2008: Canut and Duchêne, 2011). The new economy, mostly oriented towards information and communication services, leads to a reconfiguration of values attributed to linguistic resources (Heller and Boutet, 2006). In a concomitant and often interdependent way to the growing place attributed to the promotion of linguistic diversity in the economy, a great deal of interest for managing the plurality of languages is manifested in different international sites (Canut and Duchêne, 2011). This is connected to the new visibility that international institutions have gained in the past several decades, as because of their structure, their discourse production has more legitimacy in an international context (Muellmann and Duchêne, 2007; Canut and Duchêne, 2011). Within these international spaces, linguistic diversity becomes thus an object of management, for instance, an object of standardization, as in the case of the European Union institutions. On this subject, Moore (2011, 2015) argues that post-2004 EU-level language and multilingualism policy represents a continuation and a further development of the ideological project of language standardization that can be traced back to the dawn of European nation-statehood. Gal (2012) contributes to this reflection on standardizing linguistic diversity in the EU as a form of upward recursivity of an axis of differentiation that earlier constituted monolingual standards in European nation-states, and thus, in turn, creates and reproduces differentiation and inequalities.

The aim of this paper is to shed light on the power relationships that condition the imagination (Anderson, 1983) of European linguistic diversity. The starting argument is that discourses on diversity, as practices aimed at delegitimizing hierarchies, relations and practices and at minimizing boundaries, raise questions about what diversity includes, excludes and how power is exercised in its name (Berrey, 2015). This paper deals thus with the way the CoE’s discourse on Europe's
linguistic diversity, despite the egalitarian rhetoric, takes the shape of an “instrument for the reproduction of social problems, forms of inequality and majority power” (Blommaert and Verschueren, 2002: 4). The objective is not to just describe “linguistic diversity” as an ideological construct, but to understand its construction through historicity (Duchêne, 2008). This type of questioning requires the understanding of a debate in a larger sense, as “slowly unfolding processes of discursive exchange”: a particular debate cannot be understood without taking into account the long history of discursive exchange (Blommaert, 1996: 11). Each particular debate is entextualized (Silverstein and Urban, 1996) in a specific moment and in specific discursive spaces that are linked to each other through forms of interdiscursivity that (dis)connect these spaces (Gal, 2007). Moreover, entextualization practices involve questions of power (Silverstein and Urban, 1996). Debates are also the locus of reproduction of ideologies (Blommaert, 1996). I consider language ideologies as systems of ideas on the role, status and values of languages that are discursively constructed and maintained by different legitimacy-invested actors and are thus, pre-determined, biased and not neutral (Woolard and Schieffelin, 1994; Woolard, 1998). Ideologies are also understood as discursive practices and thus constitutive of the (de)construction of objects (Foucault, 1969).

3. General remarks on the data and research field

The CoE represents a collaboration platform created for and by European states in the wake of the World War Two (Wassenberg, 2013). One of its main instruments of action are the recommendations addressed to member states by its two main bodies: the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly. The adoption of a recommendation is generally preceded by a debate. The debates I analyze in this paper take place in the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE, which is the discursive space of the CoE institutionally referred to as the “factory of ideas for improving Europe’s laws and practices”. This consultative space is theoretically, as set in the founding text of the CoE, in permanent interaction and collaboration with the Committee of Ministers, the decision-making body of the CoE. State governments are represented within the Committee of Ministers and state parliaments in the Parliamentary Assembly. The latter is the public arena for the emergence, convergence and divergence of the interests defended by parliaments of the member states of the CoE. The parliament of each country nominates a delegation of between two and eighteen representatives – depending on the country’s population – which must reflect the proportions in which political parties sit in their national parliaments. Within the Assembly, parliamentarians can assemble to form national delegations as well as political groups. The Assembly also historically functions through a system of a (variable) number of specialized committees in which the parliamentarians participate (Evans and Silk, 2012). This complex network of relationships that structures the discursive space of the Parliamentary Assembly makes possible the accommodation of various interests, coming from different states and/or different political agendas.

The discursive production on languages within the Assembly goes back to the 1950s and several discursive events mark the achievement of a considerable expert, institutional and international contribution to the development of the field. Within the scope of this paper, I chose to focus on two emblematic discursive events within this institutional structure that contributed to the shaping of the discourse on the CoE on linguistic diversity and that can be considered as a window onto some elements of the circulation of (language) ideologies within the CoE as well as the degree to which these ideologies are shaped by shifting political and economical conditions: Recommendation 814 (1977) on Modern languages in Europe and Recommendation 1383 (1998) on Linguistic diversification. Both were drafted by the Committee on Culture and Education of the Parliamentary Assembly and accompanied by an explanatory memorandum prepared on the authority of the chosen rapporteur that sets out the committee’s reasons for the proposals in the text. The report containing the draft recommendation and the explanatory memorandum is then presented by the rapporteur and debated in Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE and it is adopted if a two-thirds majority is favorable to it. A recommendation contains proposals addressed to the Committee of Ministers, the implementation of which, if adopted, is under the authority of state governments.

In this paper, I will particularly focus on the debate in the Parliamentary Assembly that preceded the adoption of each recommendation. The debate in this discursive space is a new phase of entextualization of the report, i.e. a result of the multiple appropriations of the report by a number of institutional actors that interpret and embed various parts of it, as well as responding to the arguments of others. In order to understand the emergence and the content of each debate, I will respectively give a concise historicization that will provide the necessary elements to facilitate the comprehension of the analysis that will follow.

4. Managing linguistic diversity in 1977: conditions, ideologies and constructs

Languages emerged as a preoccupation already in the early years of existence of the CoE as a part of the debates on improving interstate cultural cooperation. In 1962, the first space of expertise was created for the domain of education. The
latter was put into service of improving a cultural cooperation between the member states. Language questions were examined from that moment on in this specific space by language (teaching and learning) experts. The first discursive product was the Resolution (69) 2 on an Intensified modern language teaching programme for Europe adopted in 1969. This Resolution is the discursive basis of the imagination of “linguistic diversity” as a resource and not as a problem. The education was put into service of the maintenance of “linguistic diversity” and for that aim, languages were conceived as a means of communication (and not – only – objectified as a part of the European common heritage). Moreover, the Resolution insisted on language teaching democratization and generalization, that is, an egalitarian and inclusive approach, non-restrictive in terms of social class, profession, age and nationality. Since the beginning of the 1970s, the expert work within the CoE was centered on improving the language learning process: “the emphasis was shifted from teaching to learning, from pure knowledge and information transfer to an active if not critical and even creative involvement on the part of the learner, from prescribed learning to motivation-based learning” (Trim, 1981). Language learning was conceived as a lifelong process based on the learners’ interest, needs and motivation. The learners’ linguistic development was imagined as individual, independent, and responsible. The learner’s conception as autonomous and responsible drew on the emerging neoliberal logics in the 1970 that put the individual at the center of its preoccupations (Harvey, 2005).

In September 1977, a report was elaborated as a sort of evaluation on progress since 1969. Mr Frederik Piket, a Dutch parliamentarian, was in charge of the report drafting in the name of the Committee on Culture and on Education. Following the elaboration of the report, a debate reemerged in the Parliamentary Assembly. The central subject of Mr Piket’s report, Modern languages in Europe, on which the debate was focused, was the need for language teaching diversification as a decade had passed without a considerable progress in the language teaching domain. The encouragement of the diversification of languages in school systems was underpinned by two major politico-linguistic processes. On the one hand, language teaching in Europe granted an almost exclusive priority to English in the context of rising international mobility, professional and/or leisure, and of new technologies that establish and maintain international contacts. On the other hand, the institutional debate on European linguistic minorities and their languages became more mainstream. This debate emerged in the 1950s and was renewed in the 1970s, in the framework of the Galway Conference (1975) and the Bordeaux Conference scheduled for 1978, both organized by another discursive space of the CoE, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

The report debate in the Parliamentary Assembly consisted of eight interventions. The approach to linguistic diversity in this debate was constructed on the basis, established in the 1960s, that it would foster European heritage and richness, but also in an opposition to the dominance of English in Western European countries: This is seen very explicitly below in comments from three parliamentarians:

Mr Piket (Netherlands) (Translation). - In my own country, for example, whereas in former times we had the opportunity to learn three languages, French, English and German, I regret that nowadays — and that is mentioned in my report, and Mr Brugmans has also expressed regrets about this — French is no longer compulsory in schools after the age of 12.

Mr Beith (United Kingdom). - I would be as critical of the dominance of French in British language teaching as the report is, by implication, of the dominance of English in the language teaching of other countries.

Mr Reid (United Kingdom). - I think that between the lines of this document [the report], however, there is a basic fear that we have a lingua franca in Europe already, and that is English. Indeed, Mr Piket quotes from Le Monde de l’Education of April this year, pointing out that in France, in 1958, 76% of children learning a language learned English, and that although the French Government thereafter concentrated on diversification, today, according to the most recent figures, 84% of children learning a second language in France are learning English.

Here we see the discourse of English as an imminent menace to the harmonious picture that the CoE wished to attribute to European linguistic diversity. The parliamentarians also assert a sense of urgency for diversification of languages taught on the basis that English has already become a de facto lingua franca. Since the 1969 recommendation, the minimum required was the learning of one foreign language. In 1977, considering the reported popularity of English, the expressed view was that the learning of one foreign language would not be sufficient, because the success of English would lead most learners to choose to learn English, creating the conditions for the restriction of their repertoire to their mother tongue(s) and English. In reaction to this, the institutionally-acquired knowledge of multiple languages was constructed as an individual and societal source of enrichment and an asset allowing the access to a shared European cultural heritage and identity, to geographical and/or social mobility and to the labor market. It would seem thus that the aim of the discourse of fostering linguistic diversity via language teaching diversification and the introduction of several language-learning options was to create the conditions for setting up concrete prevention measures against the expansion of the study and usage of English. Linguistic diversity would be a sort of firewall against the rise of English. Constructed like this and legitimimized by the majority, the discourse on linguistic diversity, societal and individual, delegitimized the official teaching of only one language, whether English or any other.

---

6 All excerpts are taken from the official translation of the Council of Europe (PACE 110, 29th session, October 1977). The Council of Europe has two official working languages in which official translation is provided: English and French. The use of other languages in a debate is marked by “(Translation)”, and both English and French translations are officially provided.

Please cite this article in press as: Sokolovska, Z., Imagining Europe’s linguistic diversity in the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly, Language & Communication (2016), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2016.07.004
other. Indeed, the supporters of the discourse fostering linguistic diversity explicitly opposed attempts to debate the possibility of one language of international communication, such as Esperanto (Mr Brugnon (France)):

Mr Piket (Netherlands) (Translation). - I am also thinking of Esperanto, which is an artificial language. Is it difficult or easy to learn? I do not know; but in any case it is not backed by that culture which lies at the foundations of our European languages. When we think of the English language, the French language, the Italian language or the Spanish language, we see different cultures taking shape behind those idioms.

Mr Aano (Norway). - I fully agree with what Mr Piket and others said about the disadvantage of a constructed language — let us not call it an artificial language — such as Esperanto. That will obviously lack the cultural background and spiritual milieu.

One can note that the arguments against the usage of Esperanto that were articulated by the Dutch and Norwegian parliamentarians reproduce the essentializing ideology according to which one language equals one culture, and consequently reproduce the ideological architecture of the nation state in a form of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995).

At the same time, the discursive space of the Parliamentary Assembly, because of its structure (sketched in the previous section) made it possible for the other parliamentarians to exit the framework of official-languages-centered debate and, in the specific case of the debate on Modern languages in Europe, to put forward other language-political interests linked to the issue of minorities and their languages (referred to as “regional” and “minority”). Indeed, while the question of the adoption of one and the same language for communication in Europe, artificial or living, found itself in a discursive impasse, several parliamentarians proposed to consider teaching of languages of minorities. This would seem consistent with language diversification. However, the issue of languages of minorities was still a sensitive one and lacked an international legal recognition and protection. Therefore, for the most fervent supporters this debate was the occasion to demand more recognition and protection for these languages:

Mr Reid (United Kingdom). - I come from a country which is both multilingual and multi-cultural, and which has a history of a thousand years of Celtic language before Anglo-Saxon became the lingua franca. As a member of the Scottish National Party, I am concerned about the fate of regional languages elsewhere within Europe.

[...] The report deals with the mainstream of language teaching in Europe. It is concerned with the broad objectives of mobility, of tourism, of migrants. That is quite proper. But the report has not given enough emphasis, as one or two other speakers have intimated, to the position of minority languages within Europe.

The report refers constantly to “the rich pattern of language throughout Europe”, but it concentrates too much on the majority languages, even though it makes reference to opposing any hierarchy of European languages.

The recognition and protection of these languages was to be gained by an international institution, like the CoE that has the legitimacy and the authority to recommend to member states actions to member states in favor of these languages. The CoE could authorize and legitimate the construction of a linguistic diversity in which regional or minority languages would be an officially recognized part.

Mr Beith (United Kingdom). - Within the United Kingdom we have two living minority languages, Welsh and Scottish Gaelic. Both have emerged from a long period of hostility; Welsh is now extensively taught in schools but Gaelic is only beginning to be so taught. I do not believe that minority languages are in any way a barrier to learning other, foreign ones. I hope that the Council of Europe, therefore, can do something to dispel the notion that there is any justification for not supporting and assisting minority languages.

The question of the recognition of minority languages reveals the politico-ideological complexity that underpinned the process and justified the top-down approach:

Mr La Combe (France) (Translation). - The second part of my remarks concerns a question raised by Mr Beith, that of regional languages.

I would make so bold, Mr Piket, as to urge my views upon you. You are aware that in the United Kingdom just as in France or in Spain regional languages give rise to important political problems, which arouse intense feelings among some of my compatriots as, I am sure, they do among yours, among the British, the Spaniards and others among the nineteen countries of the Council of Europe. This problem is a serious one.

I would venture, then, to insist that these regional languages are mentioned in this forum. They have been and they can still be a means of enriching human culture. Consequently, without wishing at all costs to reconstitute nations or to preach nationalism, I believe that it would be no bad idea in planning the culture of our children, or at least of those born in these regions, if we were to encourage them to learn first naturally the language of their country and then foreign languages; but in addition perhaps to preserve their original tongue, that is, their regional language.

In the context of 1977, putting forward languages other than the official ones could be subversive because of the lack of institutional recognition. This would explain both La Combe’s insistence (“I would make so bold, Mr Piket, as to urge my views upon you”) and language learning hierarchization in which regional languages are positioned at the bottom (“to learn first naturally the
language of their country and then foreign languages; but in addition perhaps to preserve their original tongue, that is, their regional language." [my emphasis]. Moreover, it suggests a double hierarchy, between the official languages and the foreign languages (chosen by the State) and between both these categories of compulsory languages and “regional” languages, that hold an accessory status.

To sum up, in both a dichotomous and complementary perspective, the parliamentarians considered on the one hand the national and minority languages, and to some extent the languages of migrants, as contributors to linguistic diversity, and on the other hand, English as having the effect of diversity reduction and homogenization. The discourse of diversity as richness drew on the conception of diversity as anchored in European history and tradition, having a genuine presence and possessing an authentic, longstanding heritage. English, as one of the most learned languages in Western Europe, found itself in a dominant position regarding the other languages, thus threatening the legitimacy of learning and using these other languages. Therefore, the aim of the institutional doctrine of linguistic diversity was to fight the hierarchy of languages, reproducing the idea that all languages are equal and equally important, aiming to strip English from the status and the role of a lingua franca and not to neglect minority languages. In order to do so, two parallel but divergent imperatives had to be reconciled: 1. the need of a practical and immediate need to learn languages and immediately to capitalize on language knowledge for purpose of communication and thus cooperation and 2. The recognition of the social and cultural significance of teaching languages that should not be erased by the emphasis put on its practical significance. The development of a linguistic repertoire composed of several languages was presented as a possible and acceptable solution. It was an attempt to institutionally manage individual linguistic repertoires, as a guarantee that the learning and usage of official (national) languages would not be supplanted by English or regional languages.

5. Ideological reproductions and political negotiations in 1998

The following debate on languages within the Parliamentary Assembly took place twenty-one years later, in 1998, and was linked to a specific initiative of one particular parliamentarian. First, it is important to consider the historical and sociopolitical conditions that provide the backdrop for this event.

The fall of the Berlin wall in November 1989 is considered to mark the end of the division of Europe, the end of communism and the end of the cold war. The new Détente that followed created the conditions for a new world order and disorder, a world both unified and fragmented. Progressively, since the end of the 1980s, all European countries engaged in the transition to democracy, creating the impression that Europe was evolving towards more homogeneous systems based on egalitarian relationships. But the democratic transition and consolidation of Europe was endangered by the reappearance of border issues and nationalisms and transnational flows (Vaise, 2011). Simultaneously and also linked to the transition to democratic systems, transformations of the European economy also took place. Major contributing factors included the expansion of the neoliberal model as developed by the United States and Great Britain that undermined both the rise of the European Economic Community and the progressive opening towards the Eastern European markets (Harvey, 2005).

The initiative for what would become the report on Linguistic diversification was already undertaken in 1996, when the rapporteur, Mr Jacques Legendre, a French parliamentarian, tabled a motion for a recommendation to the Parliamentary Assembly. This motion for a recommendation on the linguistic diversification that was to take place in the educational systems of all member states of the CoE was partly an entextualization of a former initiative already undertaken on national level by Mr Legendre, acting as French senator. In the framework in the former initiative, Mr Legendre studied the data on language teaching in the French educational system and evaluated the results in regard to linguistic diversification and to teaching efficacy in France. While centered on language teaching in France, the report also provided elements for the elaboration of a recommendation that was tabled to the Parliamentary Assembly, already favorably-oriented towards diversity in language teaching and in language usage. This entextualization process allows me to argue that the linguistic diversification that Mr Legendre promoted within the CoE was anchored in a process of encouraging linguistic diversification primarily in France, and most particularly because he believed that the reciprocal diversification of language teaching would be beneficial for the teaching and the expansion of French elsewhere.7

The discussion of the report on Linguistic diversification took place in the Parliamentary Assembly, in an enlarged CoE in which new state actors were present. In 1998, forty states were members of the CoE. An excerpt from the report summary allows me to grasp what was presented as the main preoccupation and motivation for the elaboration of the report:

While there is no disputing the importance of an international language of communication - nowadays English - in the context of globalisation, its knowledge appears insufficient if Europe is to stand its ground in the face of international economic competition and preserve its cultural diversity.

There should therefore be more variety in modern language teaching in Council of Europe member states, in parallel with the mastery of national, and where appropriate regional, languages.

Indeed, the report on *linguistic diversification* recalled that English came to the fore after the Second World War, and argued that although the importance of the language should not be neglected, it was crucial to manage the place of English in Europe on an equal footing with the other European languages. Finally, the report did not construe English as problematic for what it is, but because of the uniformization tendency that was constructed as inherent to the usage of English and the fact that “[t]he lingua franca in fact boils down to a question of power” (Doc. 8173), English as a lingua franca is therefore not be neutral, but represents powers, interests and ideas (Fishman, 1994), in this case, from English-speaking states.

Apart from the unanimous against the possibility of exclusive usage of English and rallying for linguistic diversification, what stood out of the report discussion in the Parliamentary Assembly was the (re)conceptualization and the negotiation of the term “mother tongue”, on which I will focus my analysis in order to reflect on the stakes of promotion of mother tongues in the process of linguistic diversification. The closing intervention in the discussion that was pronounced by Mr Legendre shed a new light on the report allowing a (re)reading of the motion for linguistic diversification axed on mother tongues:

Mr Legendre (France) (Translation). - The words “mother tongue” were not used in the report by accident. It is clear that the need to know foreign languages must not work to the detriment of the mother tongue. Riding roughshod over a mother tongue is a sure way to provoke an extremely strong and justified rebuff. The spirit of this report is primarily one of respect for mother tongues. Whether they are widely or little spoken, they are close to the heart. We must remember this, respect them and give them a voice.

Keeping in mind the importance that Mr. Legendre granted to promoting linguistic diversification as a means of preserving the learning of French, the protective stance towards mother tongues in the process of linguistic diversification was a means of promoting the French language in other states’ language learning programs. By the same token, from a general point of view, the term “mother tongue” would be another way, less explicit, equally symbolic and more acceptable, of defending the national language and its place on an (inter)national level which could also be approached as another form of banal nationalism. The intervention of the Finnish parliamentarian expressing support for linguistic diversification via the encouragement of mother tongues seems to go in the same direction:

Mrs Isohookana-Asunmaa (Finland). - The learning of a foreign language is built on the mother tongue, as various studies conducted in different parts of the world among refugees and minority peoples have confirmed. Therefore, the first concern should always be to ensure a good mastery of the mother tongue. […] the introduction of Finnish as a teaching language in Sweden has meant that Finns in Sweden have the courage to speak Finnish. In addition, they also have a strong bicultural identity.

For the Finnish parliamentarian, the encouragement of the teaching of Finnish in the neighboring country could create the conditions for reestablishing the link between the Finnish population with the language and the country from which they originate. This intervention also could be interpreted from the point of view of the discourse on the protection of minority languages “as the basis of linguistic diversification” (Mrs. Isohookana-Asunmaa (Finland)), Finnish language being one of the minority languages officially recognized in Sweden. However, its double status of national and minority language and its encouragement by a Finnish parliamentarian would suggest a more national interest-motivated stance disguised in the discourse on mother tongues, thus confirming the articulation of certain nationalism.

Nonetheless, not every member state of the CoE enjoyed the same advantages of having its national language taught and recognized in and by other countries. In the period of the debate, the case of the Russian language is emblematic, as it was still a sensitive period as far as matters linked to Russia were concerned, including the question of the Russian language. After a long and controversial membership procedure (Wassenberg, 2013), Russia joined the CoE in 1996 still recovering from the political and economic crisis that followed the dissolution of the USSR. The learning and the usage of Russian was represented as being in decline as a consequence of the economic and political decline of Russia’s power, which had to wait to regain strength to be able to invest in renewing the widespread teaching and use of Russian. The decline was also seen as a consequence of the independence gained by the former Soviet republics and their will to detach themselves politically, administratively, and in terms of their identities from Russia, which, as a correlate, involved a linguistic detachment and created the conditions of possibility for learning other languages. An example is supplied by the record of the parliamentarian representing Hungary, ex-satellite state of the Soviet Union:

Mr Kelemen (Hungary). - The importance of teaching modern languages in the post-Soviet democracies is now emerging, as western European languages were at a disadvantage during the dictatorship.

His conceptualization of the language teaching situation during the “dictatorship” contrasts with the one by the Russian parliamentarian, who positions herself on the side of the Russian population still living in the post-soviet states and their impossibility to reestablish the bond with their language and their country:

Mrs Kulbaka (Russian federation) (Interpretation) supporting the draft recommendation, said that 150 million people spoke Russian in what had been the USSR. There was no need for interpreters since everybody could speak Russian. The entire population was familiar with world culture because they could all speak Russian. Since the demise of the USSR, only in Kazakhstan and Moldova was Russian still used as a second state language. In Estonia, Lithuania and so on there were few signs of Russian still being used. There were 30 million Russian speakers in former Soviet states who were no
longer allowed to have their children educated in the Russian language. These children should not be denied the opportunity to learn Russian.

L’oratrice lance un appel à ses collègues pour que l’héritage de Pouchkine et de Tolstoï ne soit pas perdu. Les erreurs du passé soviétique ne doivent pas servir de prétexte pour condamner une grande langue de civilisation. […] 9

To a large extent, the future of the Russian language depended on Russia. The praesidium of the Department of Education had recently taken new initiatives to promote the teaching of Russian. She said that the learning of foreign languages was the basis for developing a full personality and helped in the understanding of foreign cultures. A federal programme had also been established to encourage the teaching of Russian in foreign countries and its use in international organisations.

She hoped that there could be a unified approach to the teaching and learning of foreign languages. Once Russia had recovered from its economic crisis it would once again redouble its efforts to preserve and promote the Russian language.

The intervention of this parliamentarian which is clearly – linguistically – pro-Russian is marked by a desire to distance the language question from the Soviet past in front of her international colleagues. Her intervention represents an attempt to purify the Russian language of its bonds with the political past of a former political entity that this same language contributed once to define and legitimate. This detachment of the Soviet past also appears as a crucial process in the construction of state attachment to the shared values by the CoE and its members. However, at the same time, while the parliamentarian sought to rebind Russian language to the territory of 1998-Russia, one can notice a tendency to exit this territorial limitation in order to re-actualize the usage of Russian, most of all, within the territories where there existed favorable conditions for its expansion and anchorage, i.e. ex-Soviet territories where Russian-speaking individuals lived in 1998 but would be deprived from the learning and usage of the Russian language. In that way, she reproduces the former political unit from which she sought a detachment, in the form of the newly created Russian nation-state.

The importance of “language deprivation”, which would be a consequence of that detachment, is highlighted notably in the intervention of another Russian parliamentarian that intervened in the debate, especially when this deprivation is considered as falling under an official decision, i.e. artificial way (“manière artificielle”) of rejecting Russian language:

Mr Zhebrovsky (Russian Federation) (Interpretation) […] He drew attention to the changing shape of Russia. Russians wanted to become more familiar with the culture of neighbouring countries. On the other hand, people in former Russian states were losing their knowledge of the Russian language and culture.

[…] He admired the work of the commission which worked to promote the French language abroad and noted that French was thriving in Canada and Algeria. 10

In formulating a critique of the rejection attitude, the parliamentarian uses the strategy of banalization, i.e. he strips out the specificity of the Russian will to maintain Russian language in the ex-Soviet republics, by making reference to the status of the French language in the countries of the former French colonial Empire, thanks to power institutions specifically created for its maintenance and promotion in those geographical spaces. That way, he would be able to demonstrate that the case of Russia(n) is not isolated and that it should not result in a such an exclusion of the Russian language in neighboring countries; that is natural to (want to) maintain the usage of the ex-dominant language in its ex-territory of influence. In this sense, this parliamentarian was also reproducing the former political unit that does not exist in the same shape anymore. Also, the alignment of the Russian case with the French one could also be interpreted as a way of establishing an international alliance – “a language power bloc” (Pujolar, 2007) – that in this case would seek to gather former political forces that would protect their cultural/linguistic policies in the form of international cooperation in their former territories. This process of redrawing strategies, by seeking international alliances and influence that also mobilize language and language ideologies, was intended to create a platform so that states could negotiate their interests in the new economic and political conditions and could strive for a share of power in the international arena (Pujolar, 2007).

To sum up, the debate from 1998 revealed the persistent perception of a linguistic hierarchy in Europe. English was the unofficially recognized lingua franca, and other languages would struggle to find their place. The debate, throughout the encouragement of linguistic diversification, brought to light the negotiation of the value of “mother tongue” particularly in the service of the promotion of nation-states and of the nation-states concerned by these languages. I will develop this more in the concluding remarks which consider both debates.

9 This paragraph appears in the official French translation of the interpretation. “The orator invites its colleagues no to let Pushkin’s and Tolstoy’s heritage to be lost. The mistakes from the Soviet past should not be a pretext for condemning a big language of civilisation” (my translation).

10 Excerpts from the French translation of the interpretation, slightly more detailed:

« […] Sur le territoire de l’ancienne Union soviétique, l’enseignement d’une deuxième langue est déjà acquis mais l’on s’efforce, de manière artificielle, de rejeter la langue russe, aussi bien en Ukraine que dans les pays Baltes ou dans certaines républiques asiatiques. […] L’orateur dit son admiration pour les parlementaires et le Gouvernement français qui défendent la francophonie, tout comme le fait la communauté francophone du Canada. […] le français y est encore très largement parlé grâce, notamment, aux efforts des instances de la francophonie qui œuvrent également dans les pays d’Afrique noire francophone, lesquels n’ont pas renoncé – et ajuste titre – à la pratique du français. Il est déplorable que, pendant ce temps, d’aucuns s’emploient à rejeter l’usage de la langue russe sur le territoire de l’ancienne Union soviétique. »

Please cite this article in press as: Sokolovska, Z., Imagining Europe’s linguistic diversity in the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly, Language & Communication (2016), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2016.07.004
6. Concluding remarks

Drawing on the official debate reports from 1977 and 1998, I have examined how the discourse on linguistic diversity within the CoE’s Parliamentary Assembly has been constructed – while being socio-politically negotiated by different political and institutional actors representing specific political interests – in a multilateral international institution under shifting socioeconomic and geopolitical conditions. The existence of linguistic diversity in Europe was never denied, as the parliamentarians recognized it as de facto. However, the state of European linguistic diversity as perceived by the parliamentarians was not satisfying, hence the elaboration of the 1977 report and the emergence of the debate in the Parliamentary Assembly. According to the debate, too much value was attributed to English and on the contrary, not much value or recognition was granted to non-official languages. Therefore, the debate became the locus for the discursive construction of a made-to-measure linguistic diversity with the aim to rebalance the value distribution among languages in Europe and specifically to grant an institutionally-approved place for the English language in Europeans’ linguistic repertoires without encouraging its dominance across the continent. In 1977, this construction resulted in Recommendation 814 on Modern languages that encouraged “the teaching of modern languages, taking account of the particular needs of less privileged groups, particularly migrants; the need to diversify the languages taught; the cultural advantages of maintaining language minorities in Europe [and] the pedagogical aspects of language learning”. The solution for the issue of the reported learners’ predilection for English was not directly formulated but implicitly implied in “the need to diversify the languages taught”. In 1998, English continued to be conceived as standing out of the harmonious European linguistic diversity and therefore measures for more variety in modern language teaching in the CoE member states were recommended anew. Once again, the Parliamentary Assembly became a space of imagining Europe’s linguistic diversity, this time in the complex context of emerging political entities, globalization and the reproduction of “older” member states’ interests. It resulted in Recommendation 1383 on Linguistic diversification in which “the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers make linguistic diversification a priority of language policy”. The debate that preceded the recommendation adoption showed that language teaching diversification was also mobilized as a means of granting an institutionally guaranteed place for mother tongues. The debate also illustrated the particular usage of “mother tongue” as a substitute for the promotion of nation-state languages in the case of Russian and French, for example. This allowed a shift from the national political issue that “national language” represents to “mother tongue” as an individual matter, placed in the zone of identity, cultural, belonging, and seemingly disconnected from the different national and political projects in which this shift finds its roots. The case of the Russian language as mother tongue from which the Russian-speaking population in former Soviet territories was deprived highlighted the link between language and political issues and thus the sociopolitical and economic factors impacting the variability of the value of a language in the teaching/learning process and ergo in the imagination of the European linguistic diversity. This confirms that the imagination of the European linguistic diversity is not timeless but dependent on and adaptable to societal conditions and (inter-)state relationships of power whose dynamics run society. Moreover, while promoting an egalitarian approach and celebrating the teaching and learning of languages, the teaching of specific languages was less encouraged than others, thus creating conditions for linguistic and social differentiation.

In their study on international agencies as new sites of discourses on multilingualism, Muehlmann and Duchêne (2007) already pointed to the fact these spaces are an important institutional and discursive terrain on which social inequality is constructed, maintained, and potentially mitigated. Although these discursive spaces address language questions on an international level, the ideology of these institutions shows that the nationalist perspective remains dominant and continues to shape discourses on multilingualism (Muehlmann and Duchêne, 2007). The analysis undertaken in this article reflects on the appropriation of the discourse on linguistic diversity for reinforcing state political and ideological agendas. My analysis has shown that nation-states pursue national policies and reproduce the ideological patterns of nation-state repeatedly in the shape of banal nationalism while contributing to the international construction of the discourse on linguistic diversity. This was identified in the essentializing language ideologies that are found in the ideology of nation-state construction and maintenance, and are linked to issues of territoriality, cultural authenticity, and the role of mother tongues. However, the different parliamentarian interventions I have examined showed that for some states banal nationalism is beneficial and for others, disadvantageous – according to the state in question and to its sociopolitical status at the time of the debate. In the discursive space of the Parliamentary Assembly that goes beyond the nation-state framework, banal nationalism was also contested by the promoters of minority languages and of the idea of one language for communication, while state positioning continued to be shaped by static ideologies in shifting sociopolitical and economic conditions.

The analysis undertaken in this paper allows me to contribute one last reflection. What stands out in the discourse on linguistic diversity as imagined in both debates is the construction of the CoE’s discourse on languages as not only allowing the pursuit of national policies and the preservation of national prerogatives but also contributing to the construction and legitimation of the CoE as an international institution and authority in this domain. Indeed, the CoE has historically constructed cultural and linguistic diversity as a powerful asset for creating a pluralistic and democratic Europe. This discourse production is moreover appropriated by the CoE for its historical aim of uniting European states (Statute 1949), materialized in the advocacy of an egalitarian approach towards languages in order to guarantee consensus between the heterogeneous set of

voices and to pave the way for European cohesion. Additionally, this discourse and thus knowledge production (Foucault, 1969) on linguistic diversity and the role of CoE as an authority have acquired considerable legitimation throughout the field of education, which is the privileged terrain of intervention of the CoE since the 1960. That being said, note that the imagination of linguistic diversity analyzed in this paper took place while discussing reports on language teaching diversification. The imagination of linguistic diversity would therefore be effectively legitimated by the degree of linguistic diversification in European educational systems. Moreover, teaching modern languages appears as a mechanism for managing linguistic diversity by maintaining the existence of its different linguistic components, preserving the equality of their constructed values and regulating the admission of new components. The success of the Council’s top-down approach on linguistic diversity is however conditioned by the implementation of measures on national, and if applicable, on regional level, within educational systems that fall under state authority. From a Bourdieusian perspective (1991), educational systems are a terrain of reproducing differences and inequalities, and of conversion of resources, also throughout the language teaching offer as these systems possess the delegated authority necessary to engage in a universal process of durable inculcation in matters of language. By means of this inculcation, educational systems and states as language regulators legitimate, develop but also control the construction of linguistic diversity as not all languages are admitted in the educational market. However, if the educational market keeps being dominated by the linguistic products of the dominant power and tends to sanction the pre-existing differences in capital, the same sociocultural ideologies of differences risk to be reinforced and perpetuated, and paradoxically legitimated by the CoE in its celebration discourse on linguistic diversity that contributes to its own legitimation and to the protection of national prerogatives. A legitimacy-granting vicious circle reproducing inequalities seems to be constructed on the terrain of the institutional discourse on linguistic diversity that transcends international spaces.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Alexandre Duchêne, Maria Rosa Garrido Sardà, Bonnie Urciuoli and Alexandra Jaffe for the comments and suggestions made on the previous drafts of this article.

References