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LATIN LANGUAGE: A CONTEMPORARY LANGUAGE FOR CONTEMPORARY EUROPE

Summary. As confirmed by some recent EU recommendations, all languages must have the same rights, according to the principle of equality. This situation requires huge costs and leads states and also civil society to look for other possibilities that are suitable for contemporary times. Today, we seem to have a choice between two kinds of multilingualism: an 'articulated multilingualism' based on three languages (English, French, German), and a 'global bilingualism' (English together with each national language). These two options imply a sort of discrimination in the EU, since they attach more importance to certain languages. Several solutions for a common European language have been proposed, but we have already a language able to satisfy the requirements of practicality, cost effectiveness and equality: Latin, which has been used in Europe for centuries as language of humanities and natural science, bureaucracy and law. We do not need a Ciceronian language, but a modern and up-to-date one, and the proof that Latin language can be suitable for today is provided by various contemporary examples. In the EU, Latin could be taught at school and spread by media, in order to become an administrative language and a language spoken by EU citizens as a *lingua franca*. This is mainly a provocative article, connected with the topic of equality in the EU linguistic policy.

Keywords: European Union, linguistic policy, Latin language, linguistic equality.

Santrauka. Kaip teigiama kai kuriose naujausiose ES rekomendacijose, visos kalbos privalo turėti vienodas teises pagal lygybės principą. Ši situacija reikalauja milžiniškų lėšų ir skatina valstybes bei pilietinę visuomenę ieškoti kitų galimybių, tinkančių nūdienai. Dabar renkamės iš dviejų daugiakalbystės rūšių: artikuliuota daugiakalbystė, pagrįsta trimis kalbomis (anglų, prancūzų, vokiečių), ir globalioji dvikalbystė (anglų ir gimtoji kalba). Šios dvi galimybės reiškia diskriminaciją Europos Sąjungoje, kadangi tam tikroms kalboms teikiama didesnė svarba. Svarstant bendros Europos kalbos klausimą, pasiūlyta keletas sprendimų, bet mes jau turime kalbą, galinčią patenkinti praktiškumo, išlaidų – efektyvumo ir lygybės reikalavimus. Tai lotynų kalba, kuri šimtmečiais buvo vartojama Europoje – humanitariniuose bei gamtos moksluose, kanceliarijoje ir teisėje. Mums reikia ne Cicerono, o šiuolaikiškos kalbos ir, kaip rodo nūdienos pavyzdžiai, lotynų kalba tinka dabartinei situacijai. Europos Sąjungoje lotynų kalbos galėtų būti mokoma mokyklose, ją galėtų skleisti masinės informacijos priemonės ir ji taptų administracine kalba bei *lingua franca*, kuria kalbėtų Europos Sąjungos piliečiai. Iš esmės tai yra provokuojantis straipsnis, susijęs su lygiateisiškumo samprata Europos Sąjungos kalbų politikoje.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: Europos Sąjunga, kalbų politika, lotynų kalba, kalbų lygybė.

Introduction[1]

Today, in the EU, the languages of the state members have (at least formally) the same dignity, as asserted by *CSPM* (2011, p. 3): "Europe needs to develop a language policy that monitors language use and ensures that languages are treated equally".

This situation consists of two main problems: it implies huge costs (translation and interpreting) and hampers the process of integration among the EU members. This is the reason why in recent times possible solutions for improving the linguistic situation have been considered. The European linguistic policy seems to require a choice between two options: on the one hand, there is the proposal of the 'articulated multilingualism' (a trilingualism based on English, French and German), on the other one, the 'global bilingualism', where a common language (English) is placed side by side with each national language (see e.g. Gobbo, 2004, p. 5). Both of these possibilities entail that there are persons who, mastering a foreign communication language at a high level (being mother tongue speakers), are linguistically advantaged in comparison with other people who do not have the same linguistic skills. Thus the choice of a common European language is connected to the problem of equality among all EU citizens.

European languages and European society

Before focusing on the problem of a suitable European linguistic policy, it is useful to contextualise the European linguistic situation within the relationship between languages and state institutions. According to Dell'Aquila and Iannàccaro (2004, p. 27-47), in the history of Modern Europe this relationship can be divided into four periods:

1) Before the French Revolution: the legitimization of political power derived from religion (*religio instrumentum regni*: 'religion is the instrument of political control'), not from the consensus among subjects, nor from the geographic or ethnic coherence, so the only language to which attention was paid was the language of law (apart from the attention devoted by high-cultured persons to the literary language), mediated by the religious language, usually Latin, and schools educated students on the basis of Latin and Christian authors, even if in reality other languages besides Latin could be used in the relationship between teachers and students. Thus people lived in a very plurilingual society; the authors define it a "condizione di multilinguismo societario naturale", i.e. a 'condition of natural social multilingualism' (Dell'Aquila and Iannàccaro, 2004, p. 27-29).

2   Between the French Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall: the concept of 'nation' (not religion) was the glue that held society together and, gradually, language became basic inside every country (*lingua instrumentum regni*: 'language is the instrument of political control'): the direct consequence was linguistic standardization. Schools played an important role, since their task was to mould the citizen according to the necessities of the state, and the diffusion of a standard language was a way to give the same education to all the people: speakers had to adapt themselves to the language of the state (Dell'Aquila and Iannàccaro, 2004, p. 29-32).

3) During the 20ᵗʰ century in the socialist countries: in the Soviet world, we can see a 'modern version of the medieval theocracy' in the relationship between languages and states (*doctrina instrumentum regni*: 'doctrine is the instrument of political control'). At the very beginning the only important thing was the diffusion of Marxist ideology, not the language(s) used to spread it, but from the 1930s, a process of linguistic standardization took place in the USSR and Russian gradually substituted all the other languages at every level. In some cases the fight against linguistic variety could lead to physical persecutions, such as in Romania under Ceauşescu's dictatorship (Dell'Aquila and Iannàccaro, 2004, p. 38-41).

4) After the fall of the Berlin Wall: in the ex-USSR countries movements supporting national differences have spread, and in parallel there has been the adoption of national languages. On the other hand, in the rest of Europe the loss of importance of the states' role in favour of supranational entities was evident, whose direct consequence was the revival of regional and local particularisms. In the 1990s two important treaties were drawn up in Europe in order to safeguard linguistic variety: the *European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages* and the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*. The former suggests law initiative in order to spread plurilingualism in administrative and educational fields, while the latter points out to the outlines for protecting linguistic variety and the rights of minorities (Dell'Aquila and Iannàccaro, 2004, p. 44-47).[2]

The EU linguistic policy should start from this last point in order to preserve linguistic diversity, that is not only cultural richness, but also a way to safeguard human rights (see e.g. Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, 1997). However, this policy can be compatible with the diffusion and the adoption of a common language in the EU, so to offer a linguistic instrument able to make all EU citizens communicate equitably.

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[2]   These treaties have been almost disregarded, see e.g. Gobbo (2009, p. 56f.) and Carli (2010, p. 9).

Attempts to create a world/European common language

The strongest interest for the creation of a world vehicular language was raised between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, a period when the reliance on the future, on technical and scientific progress, and on the collaboration among all the people pervaded the leading class, scholars and intellectual groups (Astori, 2008b).

The two first attempts to create new vehicular languages in order to ensure all the people communicate equally took place in the second part of the 19th century, when J.M. Schleyer and L.L. Zamenhof created respectively *Volapük* and *Esperanto* (see e.g. Gobbo 2009: p. 84). But also in the following century, several vehicular languages were created by linguists (or by scholars interested in linguistics). Among these, Gobbo (2009, p. 84-101) lists:

1) Peano's *Latino sine flexione* ('Latin without inflections'): starting from Leibniz's theories about language, Peano created a language based on Latin (but without declensions), by formulating three rules in order to simplify the coherence of Latin nouns, adjectives and verbs;
2) Couturat's *Ido*, created at the beginning of the 20th century to replace Esperanto, and rejecting the influence of the languages spoken in Central and Eastern Europe;
3) De Wahl's *Occidental*, based on English and above all on French, which led to the formulation of the three rules known as 'De Wahl's rules', dealing with the conversions between verbs and adjectives;
4) Jespersen's *Novial* (*Novial* is *nov-ial*, i.e. 'new International Auxiliary Language'), based on a mix of the vehicular languages previously created and influenced by English;
5) Ogden's *Basic English*, a form of simplified English, based on a vocabulary of 850 words divided into three categories (things, qualities, operators), and inspired by the principles contained in the 17th century Port Royal's grammar; it did not have great success, but inspired other attempts, the most recent of them is *Globish*, created by J.-P. Nerrière in 1998;
6) Gode's *Interlingua*, created after the Second World War on the basis of Romance languages and English, and influenced by German and Russian as 'controlling languages'.

Besides these, we can add *Europanto*, created by an Italian Diego Marani in 1996; it is not a real language, but "a system for the creation of a new language of the future", as provocatively asserted by the author (Astori, 2010,116). Marani himself (cited in Astori, 2008a, p. 25) says Europanto is based on Basic English, but its vocabulary can accept words from any European language, referring to the international words that every average-cultured person knows.

Another suggestion for the problem has been recently suggested by Castorina (2010),[3] who proposes a common and up-to-date language, whose linguistic structures may be simplified according to linguistic universals, while the vocabulary should accept the greatest number of words with a high Transparency Index and European Diffusion ("Indice di Trasparenza e di Diffusione Europea", p. 41): this attempt is based on multilingualism[4] (see p. 39, and Blanche-Benveniste, 1997). Castorina (2010, p. 41) asserts that the institutionalisation of a European register for every language and of a common European register can limit the disadvantage of people who do not speak English or one of the other prevalent languages.

Features of the European common language

First of all, a European common language should respect the criterion of usefulness, according to the criteria of the International Auxiliary Language stated by the *Délégation pour l'adoption d'une langue auxiliaire internationale*, founded in Paris in 1901 (Astori, 2008b, p. 111):

1) to be suitable for daily relations of social life, for trade and for scientific and philosophical relations;
2) to be easy to learn for anyone who has an average basic education, especially for people of 'European Civilization';–
3) not to be one of the national languages.

Similar instances have been recently proposed by Gobbo (2004, p. 12), who suggests Esperanto as a 'federal European ecological' language and fixes these four requirements: a) it must be a Pan-European language; b) it must be tested and well-functioning (its vocabulary must be wide); c) it must be easy to learn and regular; d) it must not be the mother tongue for any EU citizens when adopted.

Limited to Italy, we can mention also Castorina (2010, p. 39): in his opinion the international intelligibility is more important than carefulness or grammatical correctness, because the principal function of languages is to meet the requirements of a speakers' community and not to conform to a concept of purity and perfection hardly definable and achievable.

Objections to aforesaid common languages

By analysing the aforesaid common languages in the light of these criteria we can see that none of them is suitable for today's necessities.

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[3] His interests in multilingualism and language policy led him to found 'Eurolinguistica-Sud' (http://www.eurolinguistica-sud.org/), an association devoted to safeguard European languages inside contemporary society.

[4] Some documents by the European Parliament and by the European Council stress the importance of the knowledge of ancient Greek and Latin, both considered as valuable resources in promoting plurilingualism (Castorina, 2010, p. 46).

Volapük has the merit of being the first invented language, but it does not fit for daily communication, and also *Ido*, *Occidental*, *Novial* and *Interlingua* have not been met with success for this reason. *Basic English* is useful, but its vocabulary is too scarce, and since it is based on a modern language it favours English mother tongue speakers. *Latino sine flexione* has been almost forgotten after Peano's death (1932). *Esperanto* is certainly a planned (and vehicular) language which has received more success. I would mention, for instance, the objections to Esperanto (in relation to Latin) pointed out by Kent (1922); among them there are the following: too simple morphology ("this very simplicity contains a disadvantage, since a single sound is often so heavily charged with meaning that an undue speed in comprehension is demanded", p. 40), the anomalous syntax ("prepositions govern the nominative case, unless there is an idea of motion toward, when they govern the accusative", p. 40), the lack of idiomatic expressions, and the fact that certain phrases are intelligible only after being translated into another modern language.

Of course, the use of English also has to be considered. Today it is natural to think of English as the vehicular language *par excellence*, in Europe as in the world; according to Waquet (1998, p. 320), the success of English is due to the fact that for speakers (apart from mother tongue speakers) it is just a means of communicating thoughts, an auxiliary work language without a symbolic capital common to the entire Europe, a capital made not only of the sacred and profane texts, but also of values, beliefs and experiences shared by all the people.

However, this assertion is questionable in the light of the remarks by Phillipson (2009: p. 57), who points out the connection existing between the power of English language and the economical and political power of the Anglo-Saxon world:

"Critical sociolinguistics faces a major challenge in teasing out and theorising how globalization dovetails with Americanization and Englishization. Linguistic imperialism entails unequal exchange and unequal communicative rights between people or groups defined in terms of their competence in specific languages, with unequal benefits as a result, in a system that legitimates and naturalises such exploitation. Linguistic imperialism was manifestly a feature of the way nation-states privileged one language, and often sought actively to eradicate others, forcing their speakers to shift to the dominant language".

This concept was already highlighted by Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1997, p. 37):

"Even if American power has set the agenda, or at least the framework, Britain is still possibly the 'world's leading nation' in the global English teaching business. […] The English language is certainly important for the British economy. English for business is business for English".

A valuable solution: to speak Latin

Among the various languages suitable for everyday life there is a language which can satisfy the aforesaid requirements (see point 4) and, in addition, it is not a

mother tongue language nor the official language of a state:[5] Latin. Of course, Latin as the EU language raises objections; we can recall, limited to Italy, Gobbo (2009, p. 60), who rejects Latin as a European vehicular language for three reasons: the rules of classical Latin make language planning difficult; there are at least two pronunciations (the classical one and the ecclesiastical one); Latin is linked to the past for the issues of historical memory. These three remarks do not look very binding, since every language can be planned and become useful for speakers. In fact we can object that Baltic, Slavic and German modern languages have declensions, and that any language which tries to become a vehicular language has to face the problem of different pronunciations, due to the various speakers' mother tongues. Latin is linked to the past according to the *opinio communis*, but this remark does not mean that it is not useful for contemporary times: it suffices to look at Egger (1992-1997), who translates many 'contemporary' words.[6]

Table 1

Some entries taken from Egger (1992-1997)

vol., p.	Italian entry	Latin entry
I, 22	'aeroplano' ('plane')	aëronavis
I, 63	'autolavaggio' ('car wash')	autocineti lavatio
I, 64	'automobile' ('car')	autocinetum
I, 80	'barman'	thermopola
I, 301	'fashion'	mos
II, 189	'robot'	robotum
II, 189	'robotica'	ars robotica
II, 191	'rush'	*nisus extremus*, *impetus*, *contentio*
II, 266	'yacht'	lembus lusorius

Thus, the basic requirement is to choose an up-to-date Latin, not a language similar to Cicero's, because if all EU citizens have to understand Latin it must not be an elite language. Therefore, it has to be noticed that Latin language is the language of the Roman Law, which is the source of today's European Law: thanks to Latin all European states and citizens would have a valid instrument, able to avoid the misunderstandings due to translations among many languages in such an important field. Finally, the adoption of Latin as the only EU official language would make the EU save huge amounts of money avoiding many translations, as supported by Sturm (2002, p. 319).

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[5] Apart from Vatican City (see *CA*, 2008, p. 1088). But Latin should not be seen as the 'language of Catholic Church', as shown by the fact that encyclicals are written in a modern language and then translated into Latin, and that priests almost always use modern languages during services. In addition, it has to be noticed that in the past it was first of all the language of culture; in fact it has been used over the centuries for science and medicine, philosophy and literature.

[6] Another evidence that Latin fits for everyday life is given by Astori (2009); about the first edition (1995, Milano: Vallardi) see Williams (1996).

Latin in the contemporary world

Latin has been used in Europe over the centuries as the language of philosophy, literature, science, administration and religion, and it has been a grammatical model and comparison for different languages (Waquet, 1998, p. 306f.); in addition, in the field of science, Latin has played a first-rate role until recent times and the scientific names of plants and animals are still Latin.

We have several instances showing that the Latin language is as suitable as any modern language for daily usage and non-specialist purposes: first of all *Vicipaedia*, the Latin version of *Wikipedia*, containing about 60.000 articles (http://la.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Pagina_prima). In addition, a few years ago *Harrius Potter et Philosophi Lapis* and *Harrius Potter et Camera Secretorum* (the Latin translations of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*) were published by Needham (2003 and 2007), and in 2004 the movie *The Passion of the Christ* by Mel Gibson came out at the cinema, where Latin was used together with Aramaic. Latin can be used for publishing reviews, such as *Latinitas*, founded in 1953, completely written in Latin and dealing with literary, philological, historical, and scientific topics that also include a *Diarium Latinum*, devoted to the news. Another example is *Vox Latina*, founded in 1965 and since 1975 edited by Universität des Saarlandes, which is published four times a year in issues of 160 pages each. It has spread in Europe, America, Asia and Africa, and it deals with various arguments: there are news, historical and social topics, poems and lexicographical questions. *Melissa*, a review published by the homonymous Belgian foundation since the 1980s, can also be mentioned. A tangible proof that Latin fits for daily usage is provided by mass-media. There are two transmissions called *Nuntii Latini*, one broadcasted by Radio Vaticana, one by Radio Helsinki, and in Germany Radio Bremen broadcasts some news in Latin. The newspaper *Ephemeris*, founded in Warsaw in 2004 and published online (http://ephemeris.alcuinus.net/) can also be mentioned; its motto is the most famous sentence of the Latin playwright Terentius: *Homo sum: humani nihil a me alienum puto*: "I am a man: I believe nothing of human to be unrelated to me". Latin is also used by *Sodalitates Latinae*, free associations where people meet in order to speak Latin. These examples show that the Latin language belongs to a cultural *humus* involving different people not only as a written language, but also as a spoken language.

The Latin oration spoken by M. Capanna in the European Parliament (13/11/1979) leads to consider that Latin is an 'impartial' language, as confirmed by some issues of the past. In fact, Latin was used for a long time in Central Europe and in plurilingual states: it is noticeable in the case of Hungary, where five different modern languages were spoken in the 17th century, but Latin was the administrative language (Waquet, 1998, p. 119.). In England Latin was supported instead of French in the field of diplomacy at the beginning of the 19th century (Waquet, 1998, p. 306); besides (see p. 231.), in some periods of the

20th century Latin was perceived as a bulwark against the Marxist theories coming from Eastern Europe (in Soviet Russia Latin was banished from school in 1920, see p. 271) and American utilitarianism. Finally, I would underline that in 2006 the website of Finland (http://www.eu2006.fi/NEWS_AND_DOCUMENTS/NEWSLET-TERS/EN_GB/NEWSLETTERS/INDEX.HTM) gave space to the information in Latin 'as a homage to European civilization and to its roots, that go back to Classical Antiquity' (*CDS*, 2006).

How to spread Latin language

The spread of Latin would imply the will of political and economical power, as it happens in the case of English. So Latin could be spread not only by schools,[7] but also by mass-media, by internet and by advertising. Then Latin should be used in the administrative field, where it would be suitable, like in the Catholic Church, which now requires an up-to-date Latin in writing its acts; as Waquet (1998, p. 156) points out, now the Latin of *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* does not mirror Ciceronian style, since it employs a huge number of new words, but it is respectful of Latin grammar. Of course, it would take some years before it could gain ground in daily communication, spread by mass-media and taught at school. In supporting Latin as a common language, Kent (1922, p. 41.) rejects both Ciceronian Latin and Peano's *Latino sine flexione*, while suggesting a variant similar to the Latin spoken during the Middle and early Modern Ages.[8]

At this point the argument of the reputation of the Latin language in contemporary Europe has to be faced. Rossi (1996, p. 199-202) thinks that Latin has been viewed under a negative light because it has been considered socially discriminatory, and because it has been usually taught at school in a little appealing way, being the study of language based only on memorization of grammatical rules. This position is maintained by Miraglia (1996, p. 223.), who argues that in Italian schools students of Latin usually translate before understanding instead of understanding before translating. In his classroom, in Naples, he taught Latin on the basis of the *Cambridge Latin Course* (Miraglia, 1996, p. 230-233). In regard to schools, Latin could be studied as a vehicular language and the study of literature should consider not only the texts dating back to the Ancient Times, but also the ones belonging to the Middle and Modern Ages. Fortunately, in some countries there is a renewed recent interest in Latin driven by popular culture, such as in the UK, where "the number of state secondary schools offering Latin has soared from 200 three years ago to 459" (Asthana, 2007).

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[7] That can take advantage from Ørberg (1989-1990), a valuable method for teaching Latin on the basis of the active competence.

[8] I would mention the epigrams written in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania during the 18th century, which show a simple Latin, far from a classical style (see Vaškalienė, 2006).

Conclusions

We can observe that the linguistic situation in contemporary Europe shows some similarities with the Middle Ages, when people spoke lots of different languages and dialects, but Latin allowed all the people who knew it to go beyond the linguistic fragmentation;[9] now we have to choose our European common language and to be careful of the consequences of this choice, in order not to discriminate the EU citizens. Latin would be at the same time suitable for contemporary usage and it would be a politically correct choice, since it would not be the mother tongue of some people.

People usually think Latin regards only Ancient Rome, the times of Caesar, Cicero, Augustus. Latin was certainly born in the ancient times, but it has always been used in Europe over the centuries, and it is still used today. First of all, we have to pay attention to the way we suggest Latin as a contemporary language: it has to be proposed as a resource, not as a model. We do not have to think of Latin as a means to copy the magnificence of the Roman Empire, but as a means of communication throughout contemporary Europe (and the previous examples show it is possible) placing all EU citizens on the same level, and avoiding any linguistic discrimination in the EU.

Suggesting Latin as the EU common language is, first of all, a provocation connected with the topic of equality in the EU linguistic policy: the aim is to show that a 'dead' language like Latin can also become the common EU language. The main difference between English (*de facto* today's EU vehicular language) and Latin is just one, and it regards the social aspect: English is powerful and it is perceived as powerful by the common opinion. This fact increasingly favours English also in relation to other EU languages that may be reduced to dialects in the not distant future. In this regard I would remind the famous saying by M. Weinreich, who asserted that the difference between a language and a dialect is that a language is a "dialect with an army and a navy".

The EU aim is to make all European states and citizens collaborate with each other by providing the same rights to everyone, and linguistic policy should respect linguistic diversity. To conclude, I would call to mind that EU motto ('United in diversity') has been translated into Latin: *In varietate concordia*. This is an idea we must not forget.

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[9] This remark is referred to anyone who had a deep knowledge of Latin. But also today English is an elite language, since only a few percent of people speaks it so well as to properly use it in different fields.

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