



# Imagining Europe's linguistic diversity in the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly



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## ABSTRACT

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.

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## 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).<sup>1</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe. Education and Languages, Language Policy. [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/division\\_EN.asp?](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/division_EN.asp?) (accessed on May 3 2016).

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; Muelhmann 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 (Muelhmann 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

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