Multilingualism in Europe: An Effective French Identity Strategy?  
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In 1994–95, French language policy in Europe underwent a transformation. The overt promotion of French as a European lingua franca which had characterised the French position in the past was replaced with a new policy of promoting multilingualism, which was considered a more effective means of ensuring the status of French within the European Union (EU). This article examines this new French multilingual policy in terms of its intentions and effectiveness as an identity strategy. Not only does it appear to exclude regional languages, France’s multilingual policy does not always translate into a genuine interest in the EU’s other official languages. A recent strengthening of ethnolinguistic consciousness in Sweden provides an example of how the new French tactic may yet backfire: stirring up linguistic nationalisms will only highlight the inconsistencies in the French multilingual policy and may even exacerbate the already declining role of the French language in the European and international arenas.

Introduction

Since the inception of what was then the EEC, promoting French as the preferred lingua franca for Europe has been an official French preoccupation. The extent to which any overt action on the part of the French authorities can influence the linguistic environment of the European arena is highly debatable, especially considering the economic dominance of (American) English even in the European context. Nevertheless, France has placed its trust in language planning as a means of generating a positive French identity. French language planning in Europe can be considered part of an overall French identity strategy of divergence, that is, one which stresses France’s cultural and linguistic differences vis-à-vis its European neighbours. Yet faced with the ineffectiveness of this strategy, the French authorities opted for a change of tactics in 1994–95. A new policy of multilingualism in Europe was considered a more effective means of combating the hegemony of English and ensuring the status of French in the EU. However, the policy has been criticised for being inconsistent (Calvet, 1998; Shelly, 1999). The most obvious inconsistency concerns the lack of status traditionally accorded to regional languages in France. This topic has been the object of much study, not least because of the debate in 1999 surrounding France’s non-ratification of the Council of Europe’s Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Ager, 2001: 93–95; Judge, 2000; Poignant, 2000). Less frequently discussed, however, are those paradoxes which relate to the other official languages of the EU and which are the focus of this article.

The EU currently has 11 official languages: Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish. The next wave of enlargement planned for 2004 could result in the inclusion of up to ten more: Czech, Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Slovakian and
Slovenian for sure; and possibly Maltese and Turkish as well, if Malta and Cyprus insist on the inclusion of these languages in addition to English and Greek, languages which are also used in these countries but which already enjoy official status in the EU. With the possibility of 21 official languages in total, it is not surprising that the EU is under pressure to reform its language regime. But this will not be unproblematic, considering that language is a strong symbol of national identity and independence in these Central and Eastern European countries. As one British civil servant points out, ‘[i]t is politically impossible to ask Czechs and Slovaks, whose languages are very close, to return to the linguistic regime which was used before the partition of the country [i.e. Czech] on the pretence that this would facilitate our work’ (Libération, 27 July 2001). And it is not just the countries which are looking to join the EU that risk taking offence; the increased sense of linguistic awareness which can be observed in many of the EU’s current member states means that any attempt to reduce the number of official languages would not be without certain identity implications in these countries too. As the EU currently considers the feasibility of continuing its policy of integral multilingualism, it thus seems an opportune moment to re-examine the French multilingual policy in terms of its intentions and effectiveness as an identity strategy.

Before considering the particular case of France, this article looks first at what is meant by national identity strategies in the EU context. To understand the change of strategy which occurred in 1994–95, it is then necessary to outline French language policy in Europe as it existed before this period. This is followed by a presentation of the key pillars of the new French policy of multilingualism and an examination of some major paradoxes associated with it vis-à-vis other EU official languages. As a means of understanding whether this policy will prove to be an effective identity strategy for France in the European arena, the focus then shifts to a member state which tends to be neglected in studies of language planning but where the consideration of questions of language and nation is nonetheless particularly instructive, namely Sweden. Finally in the conclusion, various elements of the article are drawn together in order to shed some light on the following two questions:

- To what extent does the new multilingual approach represent a change in French language policy in Europe compared with the approach of the pre-1994–95 period?
- Is this new policy an effective identity strategy for France in the European arena?

National Identity Strategies and the European Union

One of the most important motives for language planning and the formation of specific language policies such as those observed in France is national identity (Ager, 2001). Of the many types of group identity (e.g. family, ethnic, etc.), national identity is one of the most complex. This is due to the large-scale nature of nations, which comprise ipso facto a certain degree of heterogeneity. Every nation thus has many national identities since individuals – and subgroups – conceive of national identity in different ways (Breakwell, 1996: 22). As this article is concerned with official language policy, the main object of study here is
the identity constructed in official circles. This identity is subsequently propagated throughout the country as the legitimate national identity and appropriated to varying degrees.

According to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), all groups in Western societies – be they dominant or subordinate – strive to maintain or generate psychological distinctiveness which itself leads to a positive identity. To this end, dominant groups usually harden their boundaries when they consider that their positive identity is threatened. As for minority groups, a positive identity is sought by means of one or more of the following strategies: social mobility, social creativity and social competition. Social mobility refers to assimilation or acculturation to the dominant group by a minority group or its members. As for social creativity, this takes three main forms. First, the minority can re-interpret its previously negatively-viewed symbols in a more positive light (e.g. a renewed pride in a language formerly considered a patois). Second, new positively-viewed symbols can be created (e.g. the promotion of a new language around which a positive identity can be constructed). Third, the minority can compare itself with a less favourable group, rather than with the dominant group. The final strategy of social competition involves groups competing with one another for scarce resources. As all of these strategies involve some form of a cultural ‘movement’ either towards or away from the other group, they can be conceptualised in terms of the two opposing tendencies of convergence and divergence (Oakes, 2001: 42).

In the context of the European Union, the concept of convergence requires some qualification. The absence of a dominant group in the EU raises the obvious question: convergence to what? In official circles, the term is used in a technical sense to denote the coming together of the economies of member states; it is now most commonly heard with regard to the criteria for judging member states’ eligibility for adoption of the next stage of Economic and Monetary Union (Bainbridge, 1998: 89). However, as an identity strategy, convergence in the EU context may be thought of as an engagement in European integration, a commitment to European ideals and principles, such as the EU’s policy of integral multilingualism. Divergence, however, is much easier to define. It refers simply to the stressing of a country’s cultural and linguistic differences vis-à-vis its European neighbours. Such strategies were clearly observed in France before 1994–95.


Ever since the project began in the 1950s, France has stood out as one of the most fervent supporters of European integration. However, this is not to imply that French national identity was ever intended to suffer because of this process. Indeed, De Gaulle’s preference for a Europe des patries (Europe of nation-states) under French moral leadership famously led him to withdraw his country from the Council of Ministers in 1965. The so-called ‘empty chair crisis’ was only resolved when De Gaulle’s condition for a national veto provision was met in the Luxembourg Compromise in January 1966 (Bainbridge, 1998: 336–342). Another example of France’s insistence on seeing its interests protected in the EU
concerns the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The immense support that the CAP enjoys in France is explained by the fact that, while agriculture may no longer employ a large percentage of the work force, it still remains a core value for French identity, symbolising as it does la France profonde (Hettne et al., 1998: 198).

The EU also constitutes a means of protecting French national interests in the global arena. Not only does it act as a safeguard against American political, military and economic hegemony (Duhamel, 1993: 269–270), European integration also facilitates competition with the United States in fields upon which France has traditionally prided itself, especially research and cultural industries such as film-making (Hagège, 1987: 164). That Europe offered benefits in fighting American domination was clear to De Gaulle when he vetoed the United Kingdom’s application to join what was then the EEC in 1963 and again in 1967 (Jenkins, 1990: 177). Indeed, the view that the United Kingdom is a Trojan horse for American interests is still very much a concern amongst some French commentators today:

Having become the loyal servant (chevalier-servant) of the United States, England is endeavouring to infiltrate Europe. (Lalanne-Berdouticq, 1993: 115)

So while the French have been in favour of convergence in Europe, the condition has been that this be more or less on French terms, and that it help protect French interests. French support for European integration can thus be best understood as an extension of French official nationalism (Hettne et al., 1998: 26). In other words, the EU serves as a means of strengthening the French nation-state, a function which is manifest in the words of the late President Mitterrand from 1994: ‘Never separate the grandeur of France from the building of Europe’ (cited in Ardagh, 1999: 679). While they include an element of convergence, the identity strategies used by France are surely better conceived in terms of divergence, since their aim is to bolster French identity both in Europe and on the world scene.

Considering that it has long been used as a symbol of French identity (see Oakes, 2001: 53–64), it is not surprising that France’s strategies of divergence in Europe have made great use of language. From the beginning, certain circles of the French elite sought to have French recognised as the lingua franca of the European institutions. Such was the goal of the Comité pour le français langue européenne (Committee for the French Language) established in 1957 with the help of Hervé Lavenir de Buffon (DLF, 1959; Gordon, 1978: 67–68; Saint Robert, 2000: 38). The Haut comité pour la défense et l’expansion de la langue française (High Committee for the Defence and Expansion of the French Language), founded by De Gaulle in 1966, also had as one of its aims to have French adopted as the language of the Common Market (Gordon, 1978: 7). For a time, these objectives proved relatively successful for two main reasons (Jucquois, 1995: 88): first, the European institutions were situated in three cities with a large proportion of French speakers (Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg); second, French was the official or co-official language of three of the six founding states (France, Belgium and Luxembourg). In this light, it is little wonder that in 1962, 85% of the then EEC’s business was conducted in French (Gordon, 1978: 67).
Not until 1973, with the accession of the United Kingdom, along with Ireland and Denmark, did the efforts to maintain the status of French in Europe become more difficult. Despite the new arrivals, the French authorities were not prepared to see their language decline, as is clearly seen by their reaction towards the democratic solution proposed by Denmark in 1973 to the problem of the growing number of official languages.

[O]n its accession to the Union, Denmark was prepared to make the concession of not using Danish, and favoured restricting the number of languages to two – English and French – on condition that French-speaking members only spoke English and that English-speaking members only spoke French. This proposal was immediately rejected by the British and the French. (European Parliament, 1994: 11)

The fear that French may yield to English as the lingua franca of the institutions was of concern even before UK membership. In the Brussels Le Soir on 20 May 1971, President Pompidou declared that ‘[i]f French does not remain the first working language of Europe, the latter will not be completely European’ (Saint Robert, 2000: 39). One factor which surely contributed to the French no longer vetoing UK accession was the assurance that British Prime Minister Heath purportedly gave Pompidou that the status of French would not change, and that British civil servants working in the institutions would be required to use French (Ager, 1996a: 168). However, whether the British really intended to promote French at the expense of their own language seems unlikely. Indeed, the British ambassador to France at the time is reported to have declared that ‘language is like water, it flows where it wants’ (Deniau, 1995: 93).

Statements like these only served to heighten the resolve of the French to actively promote their language in Europe with the help of newly formed associations, such as the Comité pour la langue de l’Europe (Committe for the Language of Europe) founded in 1979 by François Seydoux, former French Ambassador to the Council of Europe, with the support of Maurice Druon, Jean Dutourd, Gabriel de Broglie and the association Défense de la langue française (Defence of the French Language, DLF) (Shelly, 1999: 314). This movement sought the ‘development of all European languages in all countries of the Community, without favouring English’ (DLF, 1979). But despite its initial pluralistic appearance, closer examination of the declarations of the Comité reveals that it also advocated:

[t]he choice of an official language for Europe, destined to mark its independence and unity; this language can only be French, because its past, its place in the world and its intermediate position between Romance and Germanic languages naturally designates it for this role. (DLF, 1979)

Nonetheless, French progressively lost ground to English in the decade which followed UK membership. With traditional efforts of defending French through strategies of divergence failing, it was only a matter of time before the French authorities opted for a new tactic, one which claimed to promote linguistic diversity in Europe.

The beginnings of the new French policy of multilingualism can be traced back to the late 1980s, a time which saw the emergence of the term *francopolyphonie* to stress the linguistic diversity in another arena, namely that of the Franophonie. In the European context, however, the new approach did not gain real momentum until 1994, the year which witnessed the passing of the Toubon law. Unlike its Bas-Lauriol forerunner, this law introduced measures to promote multilingualism in two key areas. The first concerns inscriptions and announcements made by public bodies, such as those ‘posted or made on a public highway, in a place open to the public or in a public transport system’ (Art. 3). While the law stipulates that the use of French in these domains is compulsory, it also states that, where translations are used, ‘these must be at least two in number’ (Art. 4). This measure was designed to promote multilingualism insofar as it benefits non-English-speaking tourists, for example those who use public transport in Paris (RATP) and the national railways (SNCF). The provision was complemented by a prime ministerial circular of 7 October 1999, which added that, in the interests of increasing access for non-French-speakers, government Internet sites could be translated into English on the condition that at least one other language was also used (*Journal officiel*, 12 October 1999: 15167).

The second area in which the Toubon law advocates multilingualism is education: ‘The command of the French language and the knowledge of two other languages are part of the fundamental goals of education’ (Art. 11, § II). This latter point was taken up many times in the first half of the following year, when France held the presidency of the European Union. For example, a European Commission memorandum on multilingualism stated that ‘[t]he development of language ability and the teaching of living languages should constitute a priority’ (European Commission, 1995: 6); another resolution from 31 March 1995, this time issued by the Council of Ministers, underscored the need to ‘promote ... qualitative improvement in knowledge of the languages of the European Union within the Union’s education systems’ and ‘take steps to encourage diversification in the languages taught in the Member States, giving pupils during their school career and students in higher education the opportunity to become competent in several languages of the European Union’ (Council of Ministers, 1995: 1).

In light of such statements, it is not surprising that it is in the field of education that the French authorities have shown the clearest signs of continued commitment to multilingualism. Indeed since September 2000, the teaching of living languages has progressively been increased at primary level. Justifying his decision to allocate an additional 10.7 million euros (70 million francs) from his budget for this purpose, the Socialist Minister of Education, Jack Lang, declared that ‘we cannot keep making statements about Europe and the world without reaping the consequences. France cannot claim to play a leading role without being exemplary itself’ (*Le Monde, Supplément*, 15 September 2001). In addition, the French secondary school system is the only one to offer, from the sixth grade (*sixième*) to the level of the *baccalauréat*, the possibility of studying 12 languages: Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, English, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Polish,
Portuguese, Russian and Spanish (Saint Robert, 2000: 54). The European Year of Languages in 2001 also gave France the opportunity to reaffirm its policy of multilingualism. For example, the setting up around the country of multilingualism centres (points plurilinguisme), equipped with multimedia and more traditional autodidactic language courses, was designed to encourage the learning of at least two foreign languages – including regional languages and French as a foreign language – amongst members of the general public (DGLF, 2001).

The new multilingual policy seems even to have permeated some of the non-governmental agencies, which have traditionally adopted a more defensive approach to the protection of the French language. As part of the association Le Droit de comprendre (The Right to Understand), the Comité européen pour le respect des cultures et des langues en Europe (European Committee for the Respect of the Cultures and Languages in Europe, CERCLE) calls on those responsible for the revision of the treaties ‘to include as part of the objectives of the Union the development of cultural production and the respect of linguistic pluralism along with the economic, diplomatic, legal and military objectives’ and ‘to affirm clearly the equality of the official languages as a condition for the equality of rights of the European citizens and for the democratic functioning of the European institutions’ (CERCLE, no date specified). Amongst the first signatories of the petition are such well-known intellectual figures as Julia Kristeva and the late Pierre Bourdieu.

With its new policy, France now sees itself as the champion of linguistic diversity, the defender of minority languages and cultures in the face of the steamroller effect of English as a global lingua franca (Shelly, 1999: 312). In the words of one commentator, French multilingualism is about ‘promoting a humanitarian model of development where the right of all to their language and culture would be recognised and respected’ (Saint Robert, 2000: 6). But it is precisely on this point that French language policy is paradoxical.

The Paradoxes of Multilingualism à la française

Much of the discourse at odds with the French policy of multilingualism emanates from a certain intellectual elite. Particularly well represented are senior civil servants, often with scientific backgrounds, figures such as Hervé Lavenir de Buffon, Gabriel de Broglie, Xavier Deniau and Michel Guillou. Another is Philippe Lalanne-Berdouticq who, in his book Pourquoi parler français (Why Speak French), makes unfortunate remarks about the Irish language. While Irish does not enjoy official status in the EU, it is what is known as a treaty language, that is, a language in which important documents such as treaties are translated. At the time of Ireland’s accession in 1973, the Irish authorities did not insist on the inclusion of their language in Council Regulation No. 1, which stipulated the official and working languages of what was then the European Community (Labrie, 1993: 77–79). This is not to say that the Irish are any less proud of their language (see Williams, 1999: 271–272) and it is precisely this pride that Lalanne-Berdouticq does not respect. Commenting on how Irish will probably never fully recover from the imposition of English, he adds that ‘[m]oreover this is not desirable as far as the spread of the French language is concerned. An English-speaking
Ireland learns French as a first foreign language. A Gaelic-speaking Ireland would learn English out of economic necessity’ (Lalanne-Berdouticq, 1993: 172). These words are symptomatic of a tendency amongst many elites in France to promote French at the expense of other languages. Further on in his work, Lalanne-Berdouticq disregards other languages in a similar manner, by engaging in ideological acrobatics worthy of Antoine de Rivarol to claim the unsuitability of all other languages for the role of European lingua franca.

The assets of French as a language of reference for Europe were and remain evident. This language needs to be European, which obviously excludes Arabic or Japanese, but which also removes a specifically European characteristic from those languages of which the great majority of speakers live on the other side of the Atlantic: English, Spanish, Portuguese.

This language needs also to have excelled as a recognised vehicle of civilisation, which, despite their merits, eliminates many languages of a local nature. It must also have proven itself in our time in the fields of science and economics, which for example, despite its past glory within the field of culture, would not be the case of Greek. Finally, the learning of this language, at least to some degree of fluency, should not pose too many difficulties, which excludes Russian. (Lalanne-Berdouticq, 1993: 207)

To be sure, Lalanne-Berdouticq and the others mentioned make up the old guard, those who lament the decline of their country and language on the world scene (Flaitz, 1988: 117, 187). But similar opinions are not uncommon amongst a wider public and have even been expressed by linguists.

French seems to be today at Europe’s disposal …, as a language fairly well placed to give voice to a great shared design, all the more since, despite the presence of Great Britain which renders the situation complex, the adoption of Anglo-American as the principal language of Europe would remove much of the persuasive force from the European Community’s efforts to build an independent identity. (Hagège, 1987: 301)

It is difficult to know to what extent Hagège was toeing the political line here in an effort to further his own career. Indeed, the most influential figures in state-run language initiatives in France have rarely been linguists with objective opinions about language. But this observation is itself an indication of the views of many in official circles. One may not wish to describe official French language policy as explicitly against other languages; nonetheless, certain practices and measures which aim to promote French in Europe have an indirect effect on the status of other official languages of the EU. Examples include the French proposal in 1995 to reduce the number of working languages of the EU, French language training for foreign civil servants and the guide to the use of French in the European institutions.

**French proposal to reduce the EU’s number of working languages**

In December 1994, just before the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden, the French Minister of European Affairs, Alain Lamassoure, indicated that France intended to use its presidency of the European Council during the first
half of 1995 to find a solution to the language problem. More precisely, he proposed to reduce the number of working languages to four or five, of which one would be French. Many of France’s European partners found this proposal unacceptable: the Dutch denounced the ‘French attack’; the Greeks threatened to take the French government to the European Court of Justice; and on a visit to Paris in January 1995, the Swedish Prime Minister insisted on speaking Swedish, when he might otherwise have used one of the languages proposed by the French, presumably English (Ager, 1996b: 109; Wright, 2000: 164). Lamassoure consequently modified his proposal, stating that such a measure would not be necessary until the EU was faced with the prospect of 20, 25 or even 30 official languages.

This time has now come and the EU is currently preparing itself for the accession of 10 new member states scheduled for 2004. One important component of the preparation is the administrative reform of the Union, including its linguistic regime. This is why in July 2001 Romano Prodi’s team suggested reducing the number of working languages of the Commission (Libération, 27 July 2001). In fact, the Commission already limits itself to English, French and, to a lesser extent, German (Labrie, 1993: 111). It is in these languages that working documents are circulated before final versions thereof are translated into the 11 official languages. What was being proposed was the reform of the first stage of this process; instead of being translated into English, French and German, working documents would only be circulated in the language in which they were originally drafted. The French and German Foreign Ministers, Hubert Védrine and Joschka Fischer, vehemently protested in a letter written jointly to Romano Prodi. In particular, they argued that the proposal would only further reinforce the hegemony of English, considering that this language is already used to draft 55% of working documents, as opposed to 44% for French and only 1% for German (Le Monde, 8 August 2001).

Irrespective of whether the French and German concerns are legitimate or not, this matter calls into question the true nature of the French policy of multilingualism. Even if it was inconsistent with the new multilingual approach, France’s proposal to reduce the number of working languages in 1994–95 could still be justified on practical grounds. But Védrine’s reaction to the latest proposals only reveals the hypocrisy of the French policy and leads one to wonder why Lamassoure had such difficulty in understanding the concerns of the Greeks, the Dutch, the Swedes and others in 1994–95. Could it be that the promotion of multilingualism is little more than the promotion of French under another guise?

French language training for foreign civil servants

Another example of the promotion of French which is potentially detrimental to other European languages is the teaching of French to foreign civil servants. Since the beginning of the 1990s, French cultural institutions abroad – such as Alliances françaises and French Institutes – have offered French language courses to civil servants of other EU member states, as well as those from the Central and Eastern European countries which have applied for membership. These programmes are financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: for example, in the lead up to the last enlargement in 1995, the French cultural centres in Oslo,
Helsinki, Stockholm, Vienna, Innsbruck, Salzburg and Graz benefited from 840,000 francs in 1994, and were expected to receive another 2,420,000 francs for 1995 and 1996, and 840,000 francs for 1997, 1998 and 1999 (Journal officiel, 4 August 1994: 1916). Table 1 provides an indication of the number of civil servants in EU member states and Central and Eastern European candidate countries who benefited from these courses in 1996, 1997 and 1998.

Table 1 Number of civil servants from EU member states and Central and Eastern European candidate countries who received language training funded by the French state in 1996–98 (DGLF, 1998: 29, 31; Journal officiel, 14 January 1999: 109)

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From 1994, civil servants from Austria, Finland, Norway and Sweden who were to work in Brussels were also offered stages at the École nationale d’administration (ENA) in Paris and the Centre de Strasbourg. Aiming to improve French language skills and knowledge of European and French institutions, the programme was also made available to senior company executives, economists, lawyers and especially specialised journalists. The first year saw 72 people (i.e. 18 from each candidate country) participate at a cost of 1,264,500 francs (Journal officiel, 4 August 1994: 1916). The programme was later extended to include all civil servants already working in Brussels. In 1998, 15 civil servants from Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and the Czech Republic participated as well; from 1995 until 1998, the ENA also offered French language courses and training about European issues to 300 Polish civil servants (DGLF, 1998: 31).

While more recent statistics could not be found, it is more than likely that France’s actions are just as intensive today, considering the current debate over reforms to the linguistic regime in preparation for further enlargement in 2004. Once again, a question comes to mind: if France claims to be the champion of linguistic diversity, why is it trying to convince its European partners to use French in EU dealings instead of their own languages?

Guide to the use of French in the European institutions

Yet another instance of a paradox of the French multilingual policy is the publication in 1998 of the guide Le Français dans les institutions européennes.
Developed by the Délegation générale à la langue française (DGLF), the Ministère des affaires étrangères and the Secrétariat général du comité interministériel pour les questions de coopération économique européenne (SGCI), and under the authority of the Prime Minister, this guide is aimed at all French people who have dealings with the EU institutions (e.g. MEPs, civil servants, representatives of companies and professional organisations, etc.). The guide is presented as a reminder of one’s linguistic rights in the EU, but an analysis of its content – and in particular its precise wording – reveals that it is better described as a reminder of one’s obligations regarding the use of French. For example, one is told that in official meetings ‘French people only express themselves in French, including when they preside over a meeting’, while ‘[a]ll French people use the French language in their contacts with one of the EU institutions: post, telephone, fax, email, etc.’ (Ministère des affaires étrangères, 1998). Far from reminding French people of their rights, the use of the present tense here leads one to believe that the statements should be interpreted as orders. And while the guide is designed to promote French in the face of the threat from English, it clearly considers that the use of French is more important than that of other EU languages.

In dealings with representatives of delegations from other member states, French should be privileged every time it is understood by the interlocutor(s). Failing that, French people will express themselves preferably in the language of their interlocutor, if they know it. (Ministère des affaires étrangères, 1998)

As with the two previous examples – the French proposal to reduce the number of working languages and the French language courses offered to foreign civil servants – it must be noted that the positions expressed in this guide are more representative of the traditional French strategy of divergence, and not of a new, multilingual policy which is based on a true principle of equality between languages. It comes as no surprise, then, that multilingualism à la française has met with a certain scepticism amongst France’s European partners. One such country is Sweden, which offers a particularly instructive case for comparison in the European context. Not only have the Swedes decided to put the French multilingual challenge to the test, they also seem to be following the French example of using it to pursue more covert policies of divergence.

**Putting French Multilingualism to the Test: The Case of Sweden**

As was the case with France, an understanding of current Swedish language policy in Europe requires a certain knowledge of the historical context. From the 1920s–30s, it became progressively taboo to speak of a Swedish national identity. This phenomenon was explained by the rise of social democracy in Sweden, coupled with the negative reaction of the Swedes to the racial theories developed by the Nazis. The Swedes claimed to have no identity, or they spoke of negative or inverted nationalism, concepts which still exist as a popular myths to this day (e.g. Herlitz, 1995: 54–56). But since the end of the 1980s, Sweden has been undergoing a nationalist revival, resulting in part from the progressive decline of the Swedish model and from the challenge posed by increased immigration (Oakes, 2001).
The late 1980s was also the time when Sweden began to turn once again towards a Europe it had neglected for nearly a century. In a similar way that it had succeeded in generating a positive identity on the world scene, Sweden now hoped to become the new ‘intellectual force’ (Karaveli, 1997: 76) of the EU, for example by teaching its European partners about the virtues of political transparency, ecological concerns and sexual equality. The difficulties that Sweden encountered in accomplishing its ambitious goals soon after joining the Union in 1995 only contributed to the nationalist revival underway; the Swedes began to defend more rigorously their position and interests, including their language. This is the first time that Swedish has been accorded official status in an international forum. It is, therefore, no surprise that the Swedes are reluctant to give this up and have consequently decided to put the French policy of multilingualism to the test.

Guidelines to promote the status of Swedish in the EU

Two years before the publication of similar instructions in France, the Swedes issued their Riktlinjer för att främja svenska språkets ställning i EU-samarbete (Guidelines to Promote the Position of the Swedish Language in EU Cooperation). This document declared that ‘[t]he government and parliament … attribute the greatest importance to the position of the Swedish language in the European Union’ (EU-sekretariatet, 1996: 111) and that ‘[t]he Swedish language should not be treated worse than other comparable languages (e.g. Danish, Finnish, Greek and Portuguese)’ (EU- sekretariatet, 1996: 112). The guidelines also commented on the question of interpretation.

As far as Sweden is concerned, the best alternative is either an interpretation into and from all official languages, or an interpretation limited to English and French. In the latter case, there is a strong Swedish interest in affirming English in preference to French. (EU-sekretariatet, 1996: 112)

Two observations can be made from this statement: first, the Swedes value the status of their language in the EU; second, when they are obliged to make a choice for practical reasons, the Swedes prefer English over French. This latter point recalls the words of the former Secretary of the Italian Delegations to the European Assemblies in his response to various comments made by the aforementioned Lalanne-Berdouicq:

> to claim that when it is English which oppresses, this is the devil, while when it is French which takes its place, it is heaven, is not only a swindle, but also an illusion which will never be realised – worse still, which opens the way for English. (Chiti-Batelli, 1987: 117)

In this way, French efforts to promote the French language could, in fact, have the adverse effect of undermining its position.

Plan of action for the promotion of the Swedish language

Two years after the guidelines, Svenska språknämnden (the Swedish Language Council) proposed a plan of action for the promotion of the Swedish language. Many of the Council’s recommendations stemmed from concerns which resulted directly from Sweden’s membership in the EU. For example, the first recommen-
dation was to ensure that Swedish remain an official language of the European Union: ‘The principle that it should also be possible to use Swedish as a working language in the majority of EU contexts must continue to be upheld if and when the Union is enlarged’ (Svenska språknämnden, 1998). Another recommendation related to the possibility of making the use of Swedish mandatory in safety instructions, patent specifications, operating instructions, product information and standards, etc. Justifying its arguments in terms of consumer protection and occupational health and safety, the Swedish Language Council was clearly inspired by certain provisions of the Toubon law here, just as it was in relation to the question of public signage: ‘All signs displayed in public institutions must be in Swedish, although they can of course, in addition, be in English and other languages’ (Svenska språknämnden, 1998). In order to examine these proposals further, the Swedish authorities set up a parliamentary committee in October 2000 made up of language specialists and representatives from all political parties (Kulturdepartementet, press release, 5 October 2000). In April 2002, the committee published its deliberations (SOU, 2002; see also Oakes, forthcoming), which suggested no fewer than 80 measures for the protection and promotion of the Swedish language. Many of the measures proposed stem directly or indirectly from Sweden’s membership of the EU, thus attesting to an increased awareness, at least at the official level, of Swedish as an EU language.

Language attitudes towards Swedish as an EU language

The two previous examples – the guidelines and the plan of action to promote Swedish – demonstrate that, in addition to the effects of globalisation and international migration (see Boyd & Huss, 2001: 1; Oakes, forthcoming), Sweden’s membership of the EU has been partially responsible for the change in Swedish attitudes towards the national language. While the situation of Swedish was long taken for granted (Teleman & Westman, 1999), there is an increasing sense of linguistic awareness amongst Swedes today, as shown by recent studies on the corpus and status of Swedish in Europe. For example, there has been much discussion in recent years over the possible existence of an EU Swedish, and what its effect on the standard language might be (e.g. Svenska språknämnden, 1998; SOU, 1998; Edgren, 2000; Ekerot, 2000). Other studies have examined the status of Swedish. For instance, Melander (2000) looked at language use amongst Swedish members of the European Parliament, the Social and Economic Committee and the Committee of the Regions. When asked if they thought it was important to use Swedish as much as possible in the EU, the respondents answered positively, as exemplified by the following citation:

Yes. To preserve national identity, so that Swedish does not deteriorate into a ‘poor’ language which cannot express itself in important domains. If Swedish cannot be used, the Swedes will no longer accept the EU. (Melander, 2000: 125)

Positive attitudes towards Swedish are observed amongst the general public too. In a survey of upper secondary school children in Sweden (Oakes, 2001), it was found that language was far from constituting an insignificant element of Swedish identity in the European context. These attitudes demonstrate once
again not only how the Swedes are putting the French policy of multilingualism to the test, but also how they are using it to pursue a policy of divergence.

Conclusions

This article has not sought to criticise multilingualism as a policy per se, nor even the attempts of the French authorities and others to defend their language, efforts that many would say are well justified. Rather, the aim has been to evaluate the compatibility of these two aspects of French language policy, and their use as strategies to generate a positive French identity in Europe. As mentioned in the first section, these aims can be expressed in terms of two questions. First, to what extent does the new multilingual approach represent a change in French language policy? As the French authorities rightly point out, there are many inconsistencies in official EU rhetoric, which claims to be dedicated to linguistic diversity but which indirectly favours English. However, there are many paradoxes inherent in multilingualism à la française as well. As Calvet (1998: 319) notes, the paradoxes can in fact be explained in terms of a consistency in French language policy at another level, that which is concerned with the defence of the French language.

French language policy has a deep teleological consistency leading it to a theoretical inconsistency and to different strategies. It does not defend the same principles everywhere because it defends French everywhere, even if it never says it aloud, and even if it does not always know which strategy it should adopt to defend it. (Calvet, 1998: 319)

So while there has been a change of strategy in French language policy in the form of a new preference for multilingualism in Europe (convergence), the underlying goal of promoting French (divergence) remains the same. Current French language policy in Europe can, therefore, be described as an example of ‘divergence in convergence’ (Oakes, 2001: 153). Indeed, this observation can be made with regard to France’s policies towards Europe in general, as attested by former Prime Minister Jospin’s (2001) speech on the future of the Union.

I do not separate France from Europe. Like many other convinced Europeans, I want Europe, but I remain attached to my nation. Building Europe without breaking up France – or any other European nation: that is my political choice.

Apart from the addition of ‘or any other European nation’ – which is indicative of the new pluralist strategy – Jospin’s position on Europe does not appear to differ greatly from that of De Gaulle in the 1950s and 60s.

Now that it has been revealed that the underlying aim of the new French policy of multilingualism is the promotion of French, and not of multilingualism per se, it is possible to comment on its effectiveness as an identity strategy. This was the second research question posed. To quote Calvet (1998: 313) again, the ‘enemy’ of French language policy is English. But the problem is that France’s efforts to promote its language in Europe often have a negative effect on the other languages of the Union. As this article has shown, France’s new policy of multilingualism is not always translated into a genuine interest in other
languages. Not only has this observation been made by the Basques, Bretons and Corsicans but also by the Swedes, the Greeks, the Dutch and others. This is why many of France’s European partners have decided to put the policy of integral multilingualism to the test; moreover, many are also taking the example of France and considering measures to protect the corpus and status of their own languages in the EU. The nationalist revival which is currently sweeping Sweden provides a good example of the adverse effect that the new multilingual strategy could have for France: stirring up linguistic nationalisms will only highlight the inconsistencies in the French policy and may even exacerbate the already declining role of the French language in the European and international arenas.

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**Notes**

1. This article develops ideas presented at the Association of French Language Studies (AFLS) conference in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium in August-September 2001 under the title *Le Plurilinguisme en Europe: stratégie identitaire efficace pour la France?* In addition to the two anonymous JMMD reviewers, I would like to thank Jenny Cheshire at Queen Mary, University of London, for her helpful comments on a draft of this article. Remaining errors are of course my responsibility alone.
2. Oslo was included here as Norway was originally a candidate for EU membership. Following the negative referendum result, Norway subsequently withdrew its application for membership.
3. Available at: www.kultur.regeringen.se

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