



The Role(s) of Translation in the Dynamics of Multilingualism

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Translation as Cinderella?

- Translation is indispensable but neglected:
 - other issues (L2 teaching/learning, LHR, multilingual interaction, *lingue franche*, etc.) take centre stage
 - translation has famous advocates (e.g. Steiner, Eco), and there some encouraging changes in politicians' perceptions of translation
 - but it still often confined to an ancillary role
 - This situation fails to do justice to the true import of language services: this constitutes the *first argument* of this paper
- Why is it so?
 - The issues at hand are complex \Rightarrow need for fundamental analysis
 - But there is aco-responsibility of the professions themselves, who need to reconsider the meaning of translation (and interpretation, or "T&I")
 - All this carries implications for the training of language professionals: this constitutes the *second argument* in this paper
- These arguments converge with recent work commissioned or carried out by the DGT.



Getting started

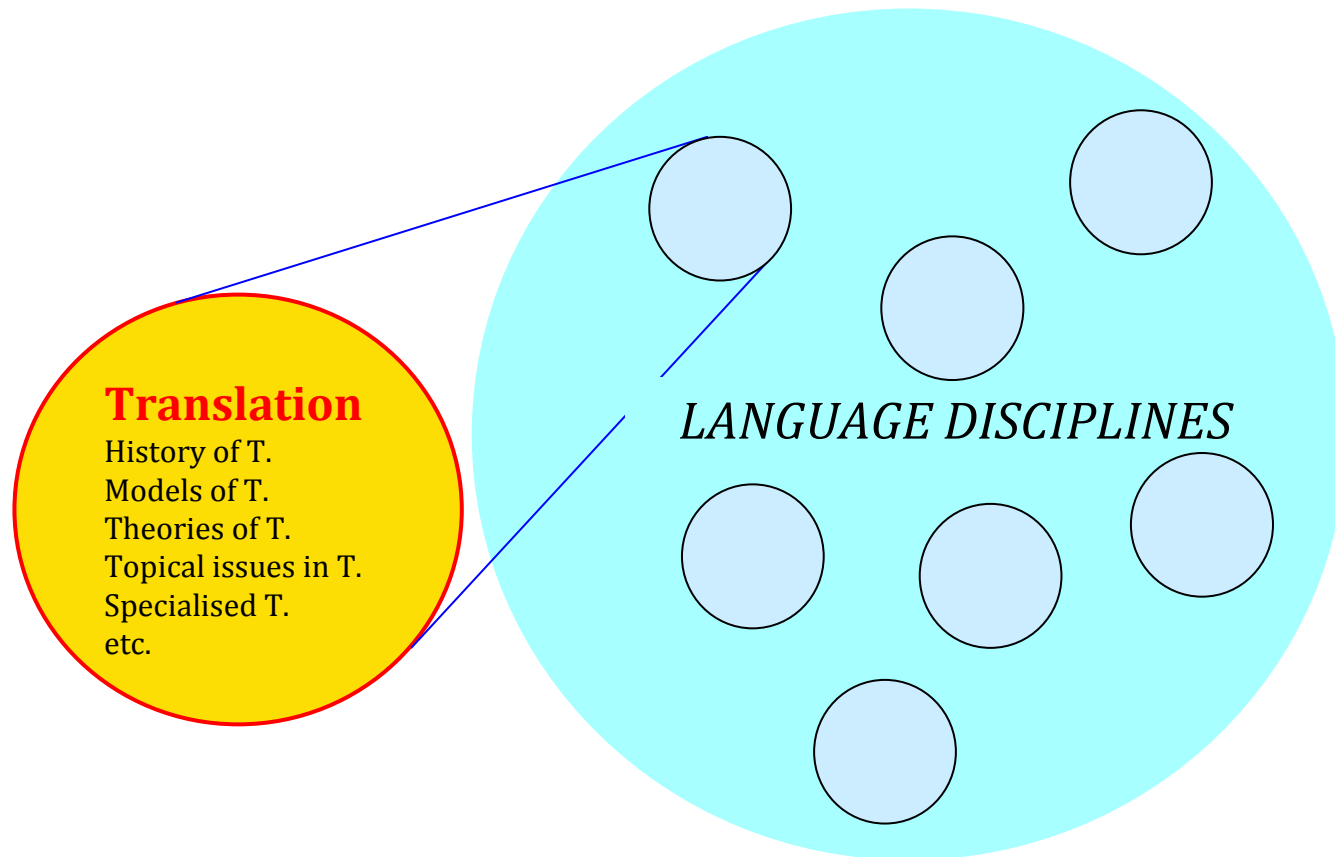
- The core goal of this paper is to *explore the mutual relationships* between:
 - a. Language dynamics (~"dynamics of multilingualism")
 - b. Language policy (by national states, IOs, SNOs, local authorities)
 - c. Translation
- However, these are surprisingly little-explored issues
 - Existing research: "a", "b" and "c"; *some* "a+b"; *a little* "b+c"; no "a+c"; no "a+b+c" at all
 - Hence, many questions remain open, and this talk is an opportunity for exchange & debate



Four-part structure of this presentation

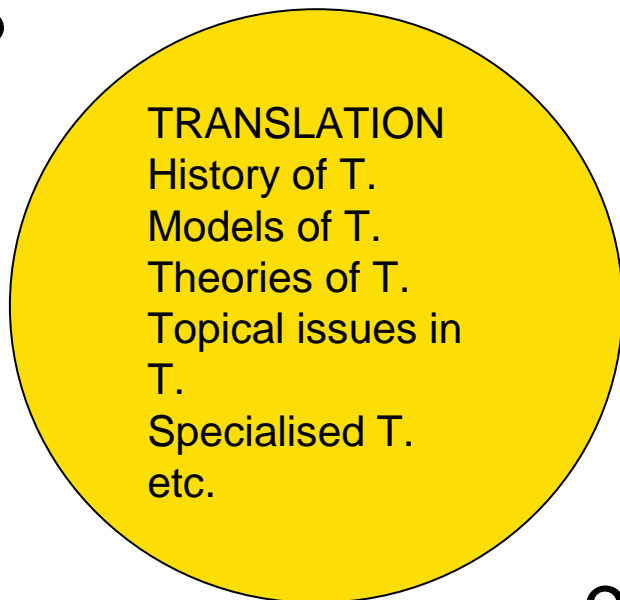
1. Translation in context: preliminary overview
2. Elements of macro-level, external language dynamics
3. Interconnections between the preceding two
4. Implications (i) policy involvement of the language professions; (ii) training for the language professions

Usual (“epistemological”) anchoring of translation




But translation is often “on its own”

?



?

- No context → No answers to the question “*why* translation?”, where “*why*” has two aspects: because of what *causes*? With what *consequences*?)
- Some rare exceptions in translation studies (e.g. “polysystems theory”)
- This narrowness confines the translator to a *following* role
- Hence, translation has epistemological anchoring, but lives in phenomenological isolation



How relevant are these “context-less” approaches to translation?

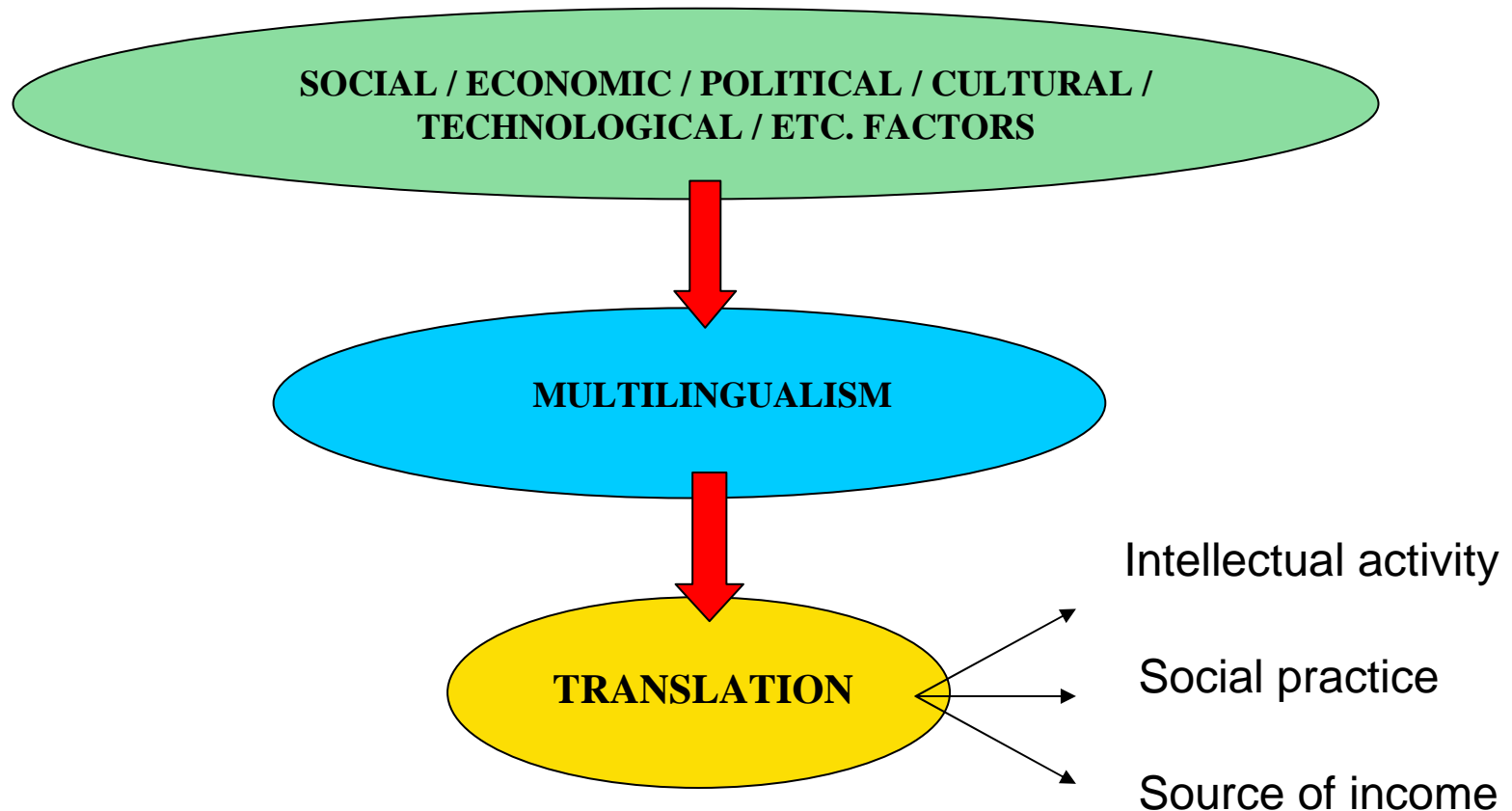
- It seems taken for granted that “there always has been a *demand* and there always will be”
- ... *really?*
- In some contexts, the need for translation could be reduced through high-level, generalised L2 learning, e.g. “anti-multilingualism agendas”:
 - Example 1, in a 3-language case: 1 foreign language → generalised understanding between any pair of speakers
 - Example 2, in 23-language case: 1 *lingua franca* → generalised understanding in groups of any size
- Hence, some translation would no longer happen if the political/policy context changed...
- Much translation would disappear if “anti-multilingualism” voices have their way...



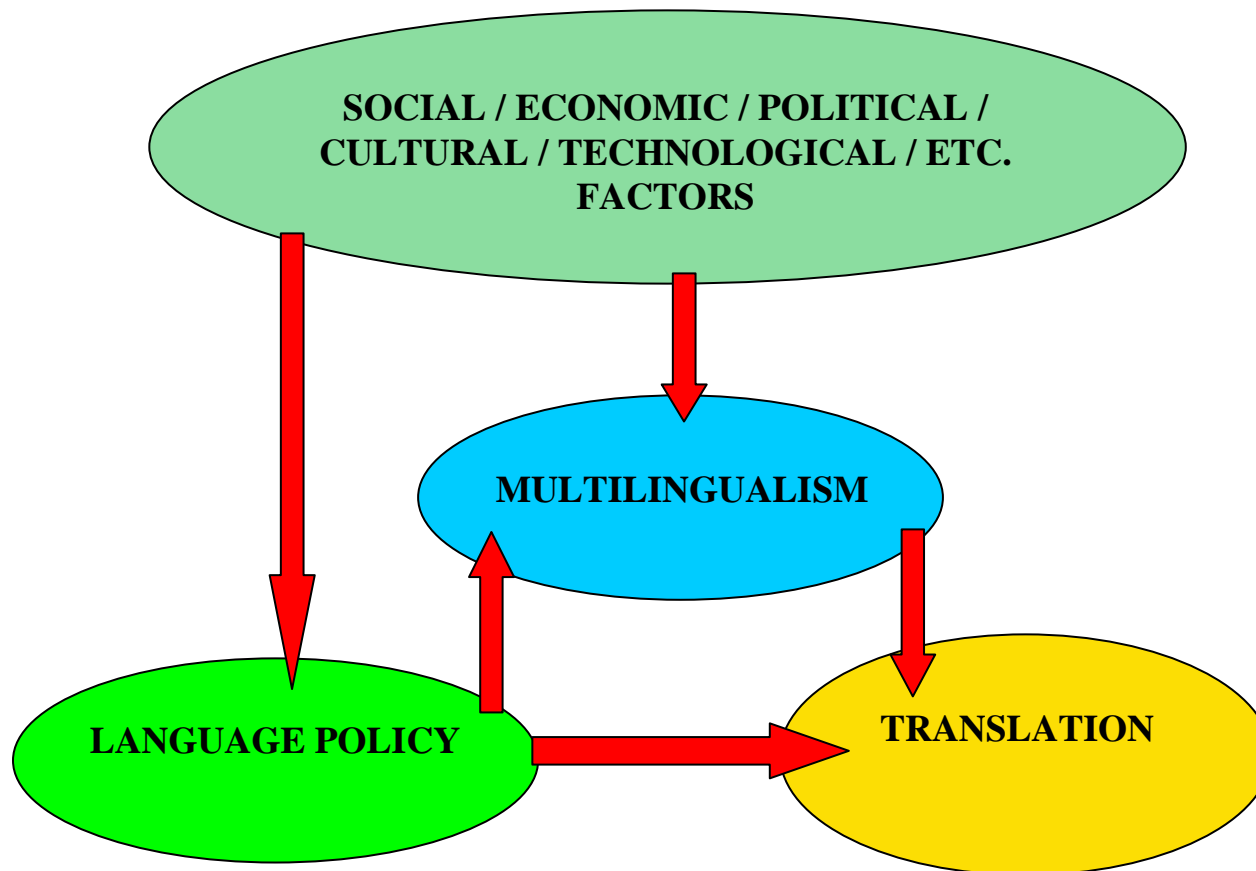
Anti-multilingualism voices/decisions

- Academics (various disciplines), e.g. Abram de Swaan claiming that “multilingualism is a bloody nuisance” (<http://euobserver.com/879/26742>), Daniele Archibugi, Amitai Etzioni, Philippe van Parijs...
- Media: *The Economist*; *Financial Times*; *WSJ*
- Politics: Swedish Presidency (series of English-only informal meetings in october-november 2009) (http://www.observatoireplurilinguisme.eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2567&Itemid=1)
- Usual arguments: *efficiency* and/or *fairness*
- These arguments can be countered, but with relatively involved analysis ([1] → “value of multilingualism”; → [2] need to “anchor” translation in a model of multilingualism)
- *Note: the risk is not a GIVEN language (English or other); the risk is uniformity*

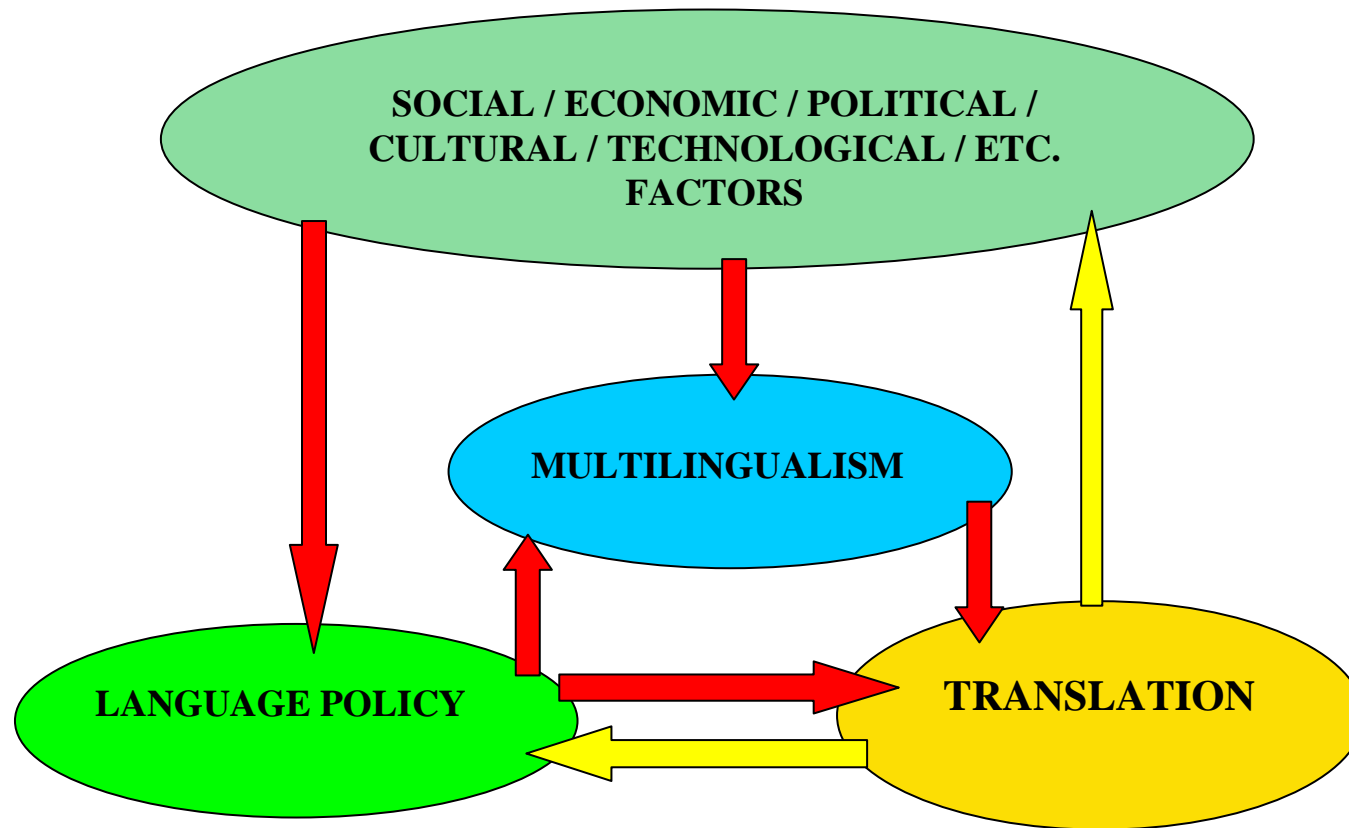
1/ Translation *depends* on multilingualism



2/ Introducing language policy



3/ Translation as a contributor to change





Two types of language dynamics

- Internal language dynamics
 - Evolution of morphosyntax, phonology over time
 - Owing to a variety of factors
 - Periods of rapid vs. slow change
 - Not all languages undergo the same rate of change
 - Beware of “folk linguistics” and “language myths”: even *supposedly* slow-changing languages (like French and Icelandic are not static (example: read Jules Verne!))
- >|< *External* language dynamics: languages expand, contract, and sometimes become extinct...

La langue bo s'est éteinte



OCÉAN INDIEN. Le dernier membre d'une tribu des îles Andaman appartenant à l'une des plus vieilles cultures du monde vient de mourir, a annoncé la semaine dernière l'ONG Survival International. Agée de 85 ans environ, Boa Sr était la dernière personne à parler le bo, une des dix langues des Grands Andamans. On estime généralement que la tribu des Bo vivait depuis soixante-cinq mille ans dans ces îles. Avant 1858, leur population s'élevait à 5000 personnes.



About external language dynamics

- They examine the position of languages *vis-à-vis* one another (thus dynamics of languages \cong dynamics of **multi**lingualism)
- Many cases of decline, maintenance, revival and spread are well-identified for different types of languages:
 - European RMLs (Gàidhlig, Cymraeg...)
 - Regional vehicular languages (Swahili, Hausa...)
 - LWCs (Spanish, French, Chinese, Russian); particular case of English
- “Dynamics”: not just a vague notion of “change” (>|< something “static”); implies a time path, in which variables at time t are influenced by variables at time $t-1$ and influence variables at time $t+1$: formally, $V_t = f(V_{t-1})$



Models of language dynamics

- At this time, no full-fledged theory, whether in the language disciplines or in “language economics”
- But there are partial theories, e.g.:
 - ⇒ maintenance, shift or revival of RMLs
 - ⇒ emergence of a language of communication between two different language communities
 - ⇒ emergence of a hierarchy of languages
 - ⇒ language learning resulting from strategic interaction
- However, there are missing elements:
 - *Often*: role of language policy and planning (“LPP”)
 - *Always*: translation (there is only a handful of papers in the economics of translation, all of them focusing on literary translation)



We need towards an extended model of language dynamics

- It should explicitly feature LPP and translation (→ need to organise the analysis around a different “core” variable), such as...
- “Multilingualism” (for our purposes) in communication:
 - « *The fact that aggregate communication in society, rather than taking place in one language only, takes place through several languages* »
[i.e. through a diversity of languages]



Operationalising the definition

- Communication → *effective utterances* (messages that are perceived by the receiver and by and large reach their goals [informatory, cooperative, strategic])
- Diversity = f (richness, evenness, distance)
 - *Richness*: # of languages
 - *Evenness*: distribution of languages (i.e., 0.25 x 4 is *more diverse* than 0.01 x 3 + 0.97)
 - *Distance*: difference between languages (more interlinguistic distance ⇒ more diversity; but not politically meaningful)
- Only “richness” and “evenness” are truly relevant to multilingualism ⇒ definition of a “diversity score” ***D*** based on the language(s) used in all effective utterances in a given setting
- Example: *all internal written communication in an organisation* (working documents, administrative circulars, e-mails, signage on the premises, etc.)
- ... ultimately, what needs to be computed is whatever is considered relevant for characterising a *linguistic environment*




Fitting language services into this framework

- Translation (and interpretation) exist *because* of linguistic diversity; more linguistic diversity implies a higher value of D ; this, in turn, means more need/demand for language services)
- The demand for language services is *particularly sensitive* to components of multilingualism that depend, in turn, on language policy (‘LPP’)




There exist relatively “LPP-immune” language services, such as:

- Foreign sales of consumer goods w/o language specific content (or sales in other language region of multilingual countries): language services for labelling, advertising, localisation.
- Language-specific goods, in particular cultural goods: literary translation, dubbing & subtitling
- *But...*



LPP remains a determining force in the demand for language services [A]

1. Much professional translation and interpretation takes place in the public sector (national, local, but also IOs and SNOs): *directly dependent upon decision to have 1, 3, 6,... 23 official languages!*
2. Some of the translation work produced for the private sector (e.g. companies) results from public policies (e.g. legislation on the labelling of goods, product composition, safety instructions; languages in the a-v media, etc.)



LPP remains a determining force in the demand for language services [B]

3. Even supposedly “immune” sectors like literary translation are often dependent on state subsidies, which in turn depend on a LPP decision to support diversity (through translation)
 4. Ultimately, *all* services in multilingual communication depend on multilingualism, and multilingualism is largely dependent on LPPs to that effect
- *Note: these policies do not necessarily reflect a fondness of multilingualism/diversity itself; they may serve other needs THROUGH multilingualism, e.g. “democratic participation”, “fairness”, “appropriate treatment of cultural identities”, etc.*



Language services also help *maintain* multilingualism

- People use a variety of languages because three conditions are present (cf. “P-TOP model” → general language use – applicable to communication, the determining the variable D presented above):
 - Capacity to use these languages;
 - Opportunities to use them;
 - Desire to use them
- Translation contributes to all three:
 - Develops capacity among users by disseminating words/terminology
 - Provides materials required to operate multilingually (→ Catalan *normalització*), increasing opportunities
 - Helps establish the social legitimacy of all target languages, and hence their desirability
- Added impact through language technologies:
 - They lower the cost of multilingualism in general
 - They increase the cost-effectiveness of translation as *one* strategy (in complementarity with others) for communication in multilingual settings.



Implications [P1]: support pro-diversity language learning!

- L2, L3 learning in general, because this is at the heart of a *multilingual ethos*, but:
 - support in particular “PAL”-based approaches, where PAL=“personal adoptive language”; see *Un défi salutaire* (“Maalouf Report” to Commissioner for Multilingualism)
 - beware of “1+>2 model” (unstable)
- L2, L3 etc. skills do not threaten translation, because:
 - It does not replace professional quality wherever the latter is required (and LPP, among other things, defines many contexts where professional quality *is* required!)
 - T&I still often required by users for reasons of comfort
 - There is frequent preference of receiving information, services, etc. in one’s L1, *even among fluent bilinguals* (e.g. studies on Catalonia, Quebec).



Implications [P2]: support *intercomprehension!*

- “Intercompréhension” (IC) among related languages = Receptive competence (in related languages)
- Longstanding history of support by the EU (*EuRom4 project, now EuRom5 for Romance languages; equivalents for Germanic languages*)
- IC helps to reintroduce multilingualism in contexts from which it could otherwise be excluded ⇒ contributes to multilingualism as a determinant of demand for language services
- Gives rise to new language services (ILA: “interactive language assistance”)



Implications [P3]: debunk language myths!

- Common myth: “English as a lingua franca” [ELF], a.k.a. “globish”, “Euro-English” (Note *again*: the issue is *NOT* English per se, but any hegemonic language) ⇒ indirectly justifies a push towards using more so-called “ELF” ⇒ weakens multilingualism, because in fact “ELF” is not substantially different from English:
 - Manifestations of ELF are linguistically anecdotal
 - The concept of ELF is epistemologically wobbly
 - The use of ELF changes nothing to the serious social problems of efficiency and fairness posed by linguistic hegemony



Implications [T]: Broaden training of language professionals

- Language policy must be part of the curriculum of translators and interpreters
 - Language policy is literally *vital* for the language professions – it is particularly obvious for conference interpreting
- There are new types of work for translators
 - Diversification within the language industry (ref.: 2009 DGT study)
 - Multilingualism and globalisation imply the development of monitoring (“veille multilingue”) ⇒ need for associated skills (information selection and dissemination; capacity to synthesise problems and “navigate” issues between the generic and the specific) ⇒ increasing *autonomy* and *responsibility* of language professionals
- It is only reasonable to develop training accordingly
- ... summing up, these are exciting times to be a language professional

Merci – Danke – Grazie – Grazia !

