

*Partecipazione, esclusione linguistica e traduzione: una valutazione del regime linguistico dell'Unione Europea*

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Studi italiani di linguistica teorica e applicata XLIII, 1 (2014), pp. 227-264

SUMMARY

This article deals with the evaluation of the effectiveness and the fairness (or linguistic justice) of the current language policy of the European Union (EU). By linguistic justice, I mean the distributive consequences of language policies on the relative position of citizens and stakeholders. More precisely, I address the following question: what would be the allocative and distributive effects on European residents of a change of the current multilingual language policy of the EU, which is founded on the formal equality between 24 official languages? Using statistical analysis and data provided by Eurostat, I correlate data on the knowledge of first and second languages of EU residents with data on their age, income, education and social status. I calculate the percentage of residents who do not understand a given language by country and by socio-economic status. Then, I use this percentage as an indicator to identify who would win and who lose if a restrictive language policy were adopted by the institutions of the EU (e.g. an English-only or an English-French-German language regime). I show that a change in the current language policy of the EU would have significant distributional consequences among countries and social groups. A drastic reduction in the number of official and working languages of the EU would disadvantage not only (and quite obviously) the residents of some countries; it would also be significantly detrimental to EU residents with a low level of education and low income, and to the socially excluded. Hence, empirical evidence shows that providing multilingual communication through 24 official languages is more valuable for the weakest sections of society. In this perspective, multilingualism can contribute to the social cohesion in the EU. By contrast, data show that monolingualism (e.g. an English-only language policy) or a language regime based on three official languages only would create significant inequalities among EU residents based on their social status. Finally, this article shows that an English-only language policy or a language policy based on three languages would be much less effective than multilingualism in conveying information about EU public policies to EU economic agents, and, more specifically to EU residents working in economic sectors affected by such policies.