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English in Europe post-Brexit: An analysis of the post-Brexit
discourse surrounding English as a European lingua franca

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Abstract

This essay examines in what ways the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union negatively affects the status of English as a lingua franca in Europe, if at all. I theorize that English will continue to play a major part in the lives of regular Europeans in the future, but that politicians and other public figures in Europe may push for a change in language policy and language planning in order to further their own language. In order to test this hypothesis, material is collected from the Retriever Media Archive and from LUBsearch, and is analyzed through content analysis as well as, to a lesser degree, critical discourse analysis. While generalizations are difficult to make from a study such as this, results indicate that there is no concrete support for the idea that Brexit will contribute to a decline of the English language in the EU. However, the status of English and other languages appears to be used as a bargaining tool within the discourse, which brings the politicization of languages into the forefront of the post-Brexit discourse.

Key words: lingua franca, language policy, Brexit, media discourse

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1. Introduction

Multilingualism and linguistic diversity have been a part of the European Union's guidelines since its inception.¹ However, the perception and application of multilingualism has changed since the beginning of the EU, and technological development as well as globalization has given the English language an unofficial heightened status.² There has always been certain preferential treatment of some languages in the EU, such as the so-called “working languages”,³ but the recent Brexit referendum has given rise to discussion and debate around how language policy in the EU should be handled in the future, both within its institutions and within the member states themselves.

The focus of this essay is this debate, and its political and cultural significance for the nature of multilingualism in the EU. Because Brexit has been a catalyst for this debate, much of the discussion is centered around the role of English, but through an analysis of the resulting discourse it is also possible to illustrate how language and language policy in general is politicized in the EU. The question of whether English is a divisive or uniting force in Europe is a question that has been asked by linguists as well as social scientists, but perhaps most notably by research professor Robert Phillipson of Copenhagen Business School.⁴ His work focuses on discussing the advantages and disadvantages of a monolingual Europe, where the lingua franca is English. This essay, however, primarily focuses on the developing discourse surrounding this question, and incorporates a sociolinguistic perspective from which to view the discussion.

That languages and language policy can be political is nothing new. David Crystal, for example, describes in his work how the political and military power held by the speakers of a language can contribute to its spread.⁵ It is clear that he sees this as having been the case with English. However, the international success of a language is not only a reflection of the power of its people, but also, as Phillipson discusses, a tool used to acquire further political power. As we will see, this concept is reflected by the European post-Brexit discourse, in how closely power is related to language use and language planning. This relation between power and language is

¹ Glyn Williams & Gruffudd Williams, *Language, Hegemony and the European Union: Re-examining 'Unity in Diversity'* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016)

² Robert Phillipson, *English-Only Europe? Challenging Language Policy* (London: Routledge, 2003)

³ Phillipson, *English-Only Europe*, 117

⁴ Phillipson, *English-Only Europe*, 4

⁵ David Crystal, *English as a Global Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9

crucial to understanding the post-Brexit language discourse, and by extension also to understanding how those who influence legislation might treat English once the UK actually leaves.

1.1 Research question & hypothesis

The aims of this essay are therefore to examine in what ways the United Kingdom's exit from the EU negatively affects the status of English as a lingua franca in Europe, if at all. Since the Brexit referendum, it has been posited that the era of English being the dominant language in Europe is coming to an end. This is a prediction I, like many, disagree with. Instead, my hypothesis is that English will continue to play a major part in the lives of regular Europeans for a long time to come, but that politicians, academics and other public figures in Europe may push for a change in language policy and language planning in order to further their own language and nation. This thesis is illustrated by the sample of the post-Brexit media and academic discourse that comprises the material of this essay. Perhaps a more assertive claim could be made, however I recognize the limitations of this essay in that, for example, American influences on Europe are also important for the use of English in the EU, and the scope of this essay does not allow me to include this dimension in the investigation.

In order to test my hypothesis, I utilize material from a database called the Retriever Media Archive, and material from LUBsearch,⁶ and analyze this material through content analysis as well as, to a lesser degree, critical discourse analysis. These analyses combined serve as the motivation for conclusions reached regarding the discourse around English in Europe. However, in order to contextualize the analysis and the arguments that can be made, I first account for the history of EU language policy, the role of English within the EU, as well as the sociolinguistic theories relevant to examining languages in a supranational context. This leads to a description of the methods and materials used in this essay, as well as the specific ways I choose to apply these methods to my material. I then present the results of, first, the content analysis, and then the critical discourse analysis, in order to subsequently discuss these results and their implications for my hypothesis.

2. Background

⁶ Lund University's term for the collection of databases available to students and employees

2.1 Multilingualism & language policy in the EU

The official stance of the EU is that all official languages are of equal status. Theoretically, a member of the public should be able to receive information in their native language, provided it is an official language. Similarly, those working within the EU, such as in the parliament or commission, should be able to have everything translated into their native language. This is outlined in something called Regulation 1 of April 15th 1958, which “gives the same rights as both official and working languages to all EU languages”.⁷ However, the intended equal status of all official languages has over time become a logistical problem, as the number of member states and official languages in the EU has increased.⁸ In practice, EU institutions function with the help of de facto working languages, or vehicular languages, which are the primary vehicles for day to day communication. The distinction between official languages and working languages originally comes from the early days of the United Nations, which then had six official languages but only two working languages, English and French.⁹

In his work, Phillipson outlines which languages can be considered working languages of the EU and how this practice has shifted throughout the 20th century. At one point, he mentions that “[w]hen the EU was on the political drawing-board in the 1950’s, the principle of parity for the languages of the participating states was established”.¹⁰ By looking at documents drafted by the Commission, Phillipson can conclude that German and French were the dominant languages in the European Economic Community (EEC) until 1970. Dutch and Italian, the other official languages at the time, were not used nearly as much in that capacity. Following 1970, it seems French assumed the highest position in the hierarchy, with “tacit German acceptance”.¹¹ The UK joined the EEC in 1973, but it was not until the mid-90’s that English started overtaking French as a working language. According to David Crystal, the general developing dominance of English was a result of “two factors: the expansion of British colonial power, which peaked towards the end of the nineteenth century, and the emergence of the United States as the leading economic power of the twentieth century.” He goes on to say that “[i]t is the latter factor which continues to explain the world position of the English language today”.¹² As he also says, however, it is since the 1950’s that the greatest amount of change has

⁷ Phillipson, *English-Only Europe*, 118

⁸ Phillipson, *English-Only Europe*, 54

⁹ Phillipson, *English-Only Europe*, 117

¹⁰ Phillipson, *English-Only Europe*, 53

¹¹ Phillipson, *English-Only Europe*, 130

¹² Crystal, *English as a Global Language*, 59

occurred for the status of English as a global language.¹³ This change had less to do with “political expansion” and more to do with culture. Crystal says that “[f]ar more important for the English language, in the post-war world, was the way in which the cultural legacies of the colonial era and the technological revolution were being felt on an international scale.”¹⁴ Cultural power, such as we may term it, seems thus to be at least equal in importance to political power, as will be further discussed later on in the essay. In regards to the EU, as English took over as the most widely used working language in the EU in the 90’s, there were still those who opposed its dominance, and French and German are still considered to be EU working languages alongside English to this day. In another work, Phillipson states the following to explain this:

All 24 EU languages have the same rights as working and official languages, and are treated as such for many purposes, depending on the context. The privileged status of the top three relates exclusively to their use as procedural languages for the weekly meetings of the 28 commissioners, and documents for them. The reality of a hierarchy of languages in many EU contexts has no basis in law but reflects market forces and the greater hegemonic clout of certain languages.¹⁵

Language policy is later described by Phillipson as something that is “politically explosive”¹⁶ and “politically sensitive”,¹⁷ and history shows us that this is true. For example, he describes how, in the early 2000’s, “press coverage had identified a ‘plot to impose English on the EU’ (*Irish Times*), ‘Fischer and Védrine against more English’ (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*), ‘Kinnock’s language plan riles the French’ (*The Independent*), and so on”.¹⁸

But as we have seen, English is the dominating linguistic force in the EU right now, and this is not just true of languages used within the institutions. As Williams and Williams say in their work, “the emerging de facto process within Europe involves accepting English as the universal

¹³ Crystal, *English as a Global Language*, 71

¹⁴ Crystal, *English as a Global Language*, 86

¹⁵ Robert Phillipson, “Myths and realities of European Union language policy,” *World Englishes* 36, no. 3 (Sept. 2017): 347, DOI: 10.1111/weng.12270

¹⁶ Phillipson, *English-Only Europe*, 108

¹⁷ Phillipson, *English-Only Europe*, 21

¹⁸ Phillipson, *English-Only Europe*, 20

lingua franca”.¹⁹ This brings us to the theories surrounding English as the most prominent international language in Europe in general, which is what I discuss in the following section.

2.2 English as a lingua franca (ELF)

We have looked at the history of how English has been used by the EU in practice, but in order to perform the analysis we also have to look at the wealth of theories centered around English as a lingua franca, particularly in Europe. Although lingua franca simply means “any language that is used by speakers of different languages as a common medium of communication”,²⁰ English as lingua franca (abbreviated ELF) has a particular terminological significance among linguists. Prominent linguist Jennifer Jenkins states that “in its purest form, ELF is defined as a contact language used only among non-mother tongue speakers”.²¹ The term ELF is also used to refer to both its function as a common language, and its particular grammatical quirks and differences in vocabulary.²² In other words, there are those who believe that the English used exclusively among non-native English speakers is, or is developing into, an internally consistent variety of English with its own grammar. In the context of Europe, this English is often termed “Euro-English”, which Gnutzmann et al. define as “a self-contained European variety of English”.²³ One of the main propagators of this theory has been Marko Modiano, a linguist at Gävle University, whose position piece on this issue features in the academic material of this study. However, the existence of Euro-English as its own variety is highly contested, which will be discussed in more detail in section 5.2 of this essay. According to Heiko Motschenbacher, the theory of Euro-English has lost momentum in recent years, and it seems generally accepted that Euro-English does not exist yet.²⁴ Motschenbacher is also skeptical to the idea of it developing in the future, stating that “European languages may exhibit significant structural differences that are unlikely to result in a homogeneous Euro-English variety.”²⁵ Thus, when theorizing on the future of English in Europe, at least in the context of this essay,

¹⁹ Williams and Williams, *Language, Hegemony and the European Union*, 68

²⁰ Oxford English Dictionary Online

²¹ Jennifer Jenkins. “Current Perspectives on Teaching World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca.” *TESOL Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2006): 160. DOI:10.2307/40264515.

²² Margie Berns, “English as lingua franca and English in Europe.” In *World Englishes* 28, no. 2. (2009): 192,

<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2009.01578.x>

²³ Claus Gnutzmann, Jenny Jakisch and Frank Rabe. “English as a lingua franca: A source of identity for young Europeans?” In *Multilingua*, Vol. 33 (2014): 438. DOI: 10.1515/multi-2014-0020

²⁴ Heiko Motschenbacher, *New Perspectives on English as a European Lingua Franca*. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2013), 10

²⁵ Motschenbacher, *New Perspectives on English*, 16

Euro-English such as it is may have to be dismissed. The ways that Euro-English is discussed and why is however still important. Additionally, ELF in the more general sense is still a frequently used concept and therefore highly relevant to the discussion.

But how did English reach this level of dominance in the supranational European scene? One could go back centuries to track the development of this language and its native speakers – to whom its prevalence is arguably tied – but unfortunately there is not enough space in this essay for such a detailed account. A brief delineation of the most recent contributing factors can however provide what I believe to be sufficient background for the main ideas of this essay. Phillipson breaks down the two main aspects that he considers to have contributed to the rise of English: Structural and ideological. He describes these two aspects as follows:

Structural implies that material resources underpin the status of the languages or activities in question, hard cash, investment in buildings, companies, products, institutions, university departments, teacher training, time on the curriculum, and much else that generates a pattern of language learning and use. *Ideological* refers to attitudes to languages, beliefs about their value, utility, and merits, and how the consciousness industry uses languages, and shapes our understanding of languages and attitudes to them.²⁶

More concretely, structural aspects involve such things as internet usage, the investment in teaching English in many countries around the world, attractive exchange programs for students to go to English-speaking countries, and the “mobility of labour” leading to a preference for already dominant languages.²⁷ Ideological aspects, on the other hand, include the different ways language policy issues are understood in different countries, “[l]evels of awareness about language policy issues”,²⁸ as well as favorable connotations that one might associate with a particular language. All of these contributing factors seem to be in favor of English in the current European climate. Some of them go back to the mid-20th century, while some evidently arose in conjunction with the popularization of the internet. Either way, it is clear that English has taken on an important role in the European linguistic scene, and this is a phenomenon that

²⁶ Phillipson, *English-Only Europe*, 64

²⁷ Phillipson, *English-Only Europe*, 64-65

²⁸ Phillipson, *English-Only Europe*, 65

I will be analyzing through means of sociolinguistics, which is one discipline that attempts to make sense of, among other things, language use in this context.

2.3 Sociolinguistic concepts

There are several sociolinguistic theories and concepts relevant to this investigation, some of which I introduce here. Teaching a language and/or diffusing a language can be easily summed up into the term *language policy and language planning*, or LPLP. LPLP is to “police, protect and promote language”.²⁹ Wright references the “classic division” of LPLP into *status planning*, *corpus planning* and *acquisition planning*, where *status planning* refers to the official status of a language, for example as a national language, *corpus planning* refers to the manipulation or standardization of a language, and *acquisition planning* refers to how the language is taught and acquired.³⁰ Most sociolinguists whose work I have consulted agree that the process of LPLP is closely connected to the ideology of nationalism and the construction of a nation state.³¹ Among other things, nationalism is an ideology that promotes the idea of a common language being an integral part of a nation state. For this reason, it has heavily contributed to the standardization of languages in Europe. As the connection between LPLP and nationalism is so strong, the promotion of English, or indeed other languages, may be associated with the promotion of a particular nation state above others. In extension, the promotion of a language may be seen as a way to acquire power. This perception is part of what I would term the politicization of language, a phenomenon that is not new to the post-Brexit situation, but certainly a prominent feature of it. This is thus related to how we might see language as connected to power, and the “linguistic hierarchy” that Phillipson speaks of.³²

Another sociolinguistic theory that further illustrates the relationship between language and power is that of Pierre Bourdieu’s *linguistic market* and *linguistic capital*. In *The Routledge Companion to Sociolinguistics*, the linguistic market is described as follows:

Derives from Bourdieu’s (1991) work where society comprises a range of overlapping and interrelated markets. In the linguistic market, linguistic competence (like any

²⁹ Sue Wright, “Language Policy and Language Planning.” In *The Routledge Companion to Sociolinguistics*, eds. Carmen Llamas, Louise Mullaney & Peter Stockwell (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 164

³⁰ Wright, “Language Policy and Language Planning,” 164

³¹ Wright, “Language Policy and Language Planning,” 167

³² Phillipson, *English-Only Europe*, 21

other cultural competence) functions as a form of capital. Different varieties are evaluated in different ways, and the varieties which have the most value or **prestige** are associated with the dominant class.³³

In other words, linguistic capital is a resource for people to employ on the proverbial linguistic market, where certain kinds of speech, dialects or expressions are seen as more appropriate or valuable than others. In the correct situation, English is such a resource, and therefore a powerful tool. It is possible that the number of situations where speaking English is a part of one's linguistic capital could decrease or change character as the UK exits the EU, and therefore awareness of this terminology will aid in the analysis of this essay.

2.4 Previous research

Previous research conducted in a similar vein but in different circumstances and with different methodology can provide additional background to this essay. For example, Victoria Payne examines "attitudes towards English as a lingua franca in Europe's cultural sector", with the help of qualitative material collected from interviews. She comes to the conclusion that the view of English among her interviewees is "generally positive", and that English is mainly seen as a useful tool in communication. However, she also points out that this demonstrated positive view of English is part of a "positive cycle".³⁴ Loosely speaking, this means that a language which is already in a favored position is likely to be viewed positively by those who speak it, and who therefore benefit from its position, such as those who provided the material for Payne's analysis. Here, too, the concepts of linguistic and social capital are central to the discussion, betraying how important they are for perceptions of – and therefore discourse around – languages with lingua franca applications.

3. Theory, Method & Materials

The primary method through which I execute this investigation is content analysis. Content analysis is a method which has grown substantially in the past 100 years. With its origins in the 30's and 40's, it started as a purely quantitative method. However, quantification is not the

³³ Carmen Llamas, Louise Mullaney and Peter Stockwell, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Sociolinguistics*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 220

³⁴ Victoria Payne, "An exploration of attitudes towards English as a lingua franca in Europe's cultural sector." (MA Thesis, Lund University, 2013), 42-44

single focus of this method, and certain kinds of content analysis have since developed which include qualitative aspects. Franzosi, in his account of the development of content analysis, states that “[q]uantification, in this view, goes hand in hand with systematization, rigor, precision, and exactitude in definitions and measurements, with objectivity and replication of procedures and findings, in other words, with a scientific approach to social science”.³⁵ Thus, it appears that some of the original key aspects of content analysis are quantification, systematization, and objectivity. I apply these aspects to my investigation by taking material I have collected through a database called the Retriever Media Archive as well as LUBsearch, and systematically categorizing – or coding – it. Through this process, I can discover patterns in the media discourse which are, to a certain extent, quantifiable. More specifically, I make use of a number of themes into which I sort various expressions or sentences that appear in my data. See section 3.2 for a more specific description of the methodology, as well as my motivations for its design.

In addition to this investigation, there is also a more qualitative dimension to this essay, in the form of a more in-depth analysis of two selected texts found within my material. As we have seen in section 1, there is an established link between language policy, politics and power. As the aspect of power is so important, I believe that an appropriate complementary method to content analysis is critical discourse analysis (CDA), which traditionally focuses on power relations and how they are expressed and utilized through discourse. While content analysis is about analyzing that which concretely appears in the text, CDA is equipped to look at comparatively more abstract aspects of the text, such as implications, intertextuality, context, and that which is remarkable for its absence rather than presence. It is this method that I employ in my more detailed analysis of the two selected texts, *A Brexit for English as EU language* and *Should English remain the main language for EU business after Brexit?*. These texts were chosen because they can be argued to be representative of two major and contesting viewpoints.

Furthermore, theoretically speaking this is a hermeneutic kind of content analysis and study, in that I as the conductor of the investigation must interpret the data in order to categorize and analyze it. Content analysis arguably exists on a kind of spectrum between positivism and hermeneutics, where early forms of the method were oriented more towards positivism, with a

³⁵ Roberto Franzosi, ed. *Content Analysis*. 4 vols. SAGE Benchmarks in Social Research Methods. (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008). doi: 10.4135/9781446271308.

focus on quantification and descriptive processes. With technological advances making it easier to process large quantities of text, the interpretative aspect was, according to Klaus Krippendorff, emphasized. He says that “content analysts have found the symbiosis of the human ability to understand and interpret written documents and the computer’s ability to scan large volumes of text systematically and reliably increasingly attractive”.³⁶ As content analysis continued to develop, it broadened and began to also take on more qualitative features. Of this kind of content analysis and its proponents, Krippendorff says that “[t]he analysts acknowledge working within hermeneutic circles in which their own socially or culturally conditioned understandings constitutively participate”.³⁷ Without this interpretative element, this essay and its particular kind of content analysis would be impossible, as it is not key words I am looking for, but rather key ideas or opinions. These ideas and opinions, and their interactions with each other, can only be interpreted. This is potentially a limiting aspect of this essay, but in combination with the systematic aspects of content analysis and the more free nature of CDA, it can facilitate the execution of this study and testing of its hypothesis.

3.1 Material

The material itself is split into two datasets. One consists of material collected on Lund University’s collection service of databases available to its students and employees, LUBsearch. This is, in other words, the academic dataset, consisting of 11 academic journal articles found through this search engine with the search terms *Brexit + English Language*. Of the 13 results displayed through those search terms, two were excluded for lack of relevance to the topic at hand. This dataset brings the academic debate into this analysis, which I then contrast with the discourse displayed in the media dataset, which consists of material collected on the Retriever Media Archive. The Retriever Media Archive is a Swedish media database, containing around 100 million articles from several different countries.³⁸ While its focus is primarily on Nordic countries, it also contains articles from around 100 thousand international sources. That combined with its easy usability and its detailed search features make it highly appropriate for an investigation of this kind. The Retriever Media Archive contains material from the 1980’s onwards, though in this essay I am only interested in material published after a certain date, namely June 23rd, 2016, which is the date of the British referendum on Brexit. In

³⁶ Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 14

³⁷ Krippendorff, *Content Analysis*, 17

³⁸ “Nordens största mediearkiv,” Retriever, Accessed April 15, 2018.
<https://www.retriever.se/product/mediearkivet/>

order to collect only material relevant to the issue of English language use in this context, certain particular search terms also had to be chosen and applied. The search terms could not be the same as for the academic dataset, considering the different natures of these databases. LUBsearch shows results depending on things such as titles and key words which are attached to the academic work in question, whereas Retriever searches through full text and has no key words available. Through experimentation with several different searches, I therefore found that a large ratio of relevant results appeared through the terms *Brexit + Lingua Franca*. The number of English-language texts resulting from this search as of the cutoff date of 6 April 2018 is 165, but not all are included in the analysis as many are duplicates published in different publications with very few revisions. A number of results were also excluded for being virtually irrelevant to this study despite the appearance of the search terms within the texts. There may also be relevant articles that do not fit the present search terms. This is one disadvantage of this way of collecting material. However, I believe this disadvantage is outweighed by the advantages of material collection through databases such as these. For example, this method allows for a completely systematic approach, where I as the author influence the material selection as little as possible. As previously discussed, being systematic is an important aspect of content analysis, which is why I believe this method of data collection is the most advantageous to this particular study.

3.2 Methodology

As previously mentioned, the content analysis portion of this essay is based around five identifiable themes in the data. These are presented here, for convenience.

1. *English should/will remain the European lingua franca despite Brexit*
2. *English should/will cease to be the European lingua franca because of Brexit*
3. *The status of a language in a supranational context affects the power of those who speak it*
4. *The dominance of English creates a power imbalance among native speakers and non-native speakers*
5. *After Brexit, English will be a better European lingua franca, as outlined by Modiano*

These themes were devised through a combination of deductive and inductive processes, but most are based on theories expressed by academics, as described in the background sections of this essay. Their appearances in the data, and the frequency of their appearances, will be able

to tell us something about where trends in the post-Brexit media discourse are heading. In content analysis terms, these themes are identified as phrases, sentences, or paragraphs which are called context units. This is in contrast to the search terms used to collect the material and determine its relevance, which could conceivably be deemed this study's recording units. In the following quote Krippendorff accounts for one possible way of viewing context units:

Unlike sampling units and recording units, context units are not counted, need not be independent of each other, can overlap, and may be consulted in the description of several recording units. Although context units generally surround the recording units they help to identify, they may precede the occurrence of a recording unit [...] or be located elsewhere, such as in footnotes, indices, glossaries, headlines, or introductions. There is no logical limit to the size of context units. Generally, larger context units yield more specific and semantically more adequate accounts of recording units than do smaller context units, but they also require more effort on the part of analysts.³⁹

It is through these context units that this analysis is conducted. Moreover, a full comparison of the academic dataset and the media dataset is not the focus of this investigation, nor would it be empirically feasible considering the disparate sizes of these datasets, however, a few words of contrast between academia and media will be useful in the endeavor to test the hypothesis of this essay, being that while English will remain the European lingua franca, it has increasingly been used as a political bargaining tool by European public figures.

As for the portion of this essay which is based on CDA, I apply Fairclough's view of CDA, being "that discourses should ideally be analyzed simultaneously at three levels: text (microlevel textual elements), discursive practice (the production and interpretation of texts), and social practice (the situational and institutional context)".⁴⁰ Within this framework, I apply an analysis of the legitimation strategies utilized by the authors of the two texts selected. The four legitimation strategies are as follows:

³⁹ Krippendorff, *Content Analysis*, 101

⁴⁰ Eero Vaara and Janne Tienari, "A discursive perspective on legitimation strategies in multinational corporations." in *Academy Of Management Review* 33, no. 4 (2008): 986. *Business Source Complete*, EBSCOhost.

1. *Rationalization* – involving common sense, references to experts, and proven statistics
2. *Authorization* – involving references to authorities or those in recognized positions of authority
3. *Narrativization* – involving references to longevity, standardization, and exaggerations
4. *Moralization* – involving references to values, norms and emotions

This particular analysis is compatible with CDA because it is one way of analyzing the text on a micro level while also relating it to larger discursual contexts, such as statements by experts or authorities, as well as well-known narratives which may be commonly used in the discourse. It also has a long history of application in investigations involving CDA, making it a relatively obvious choice of method for a study of this kind.

4. Results

4.1 Content Analysis

Due to international news agencies such as Reuters and Bloomberg creating media content and articles which can be licensed by different newspapers, a large number of duplicate articles appeared in the search results on the Retriever Media Archive. For this reason, 44 out of the 165 texts were excluded. Further, 11 articles appear to have been updated on the same news site and thus registered twice on the archive, bringing the number of texts down to 110. After these exclusions, a preliminary coding shows that an additional 62 texts have little relevance to the topic at hand and are thus not possible to categorize, bringing the grand total of texts in the media dataset down to 48. Before moving on to the results of the analysis of the context units within these texts, I would like to describe what I deem to be relevant or irrelevant in this context, and why some of the other texts were excluded from the analysis. Examples from the data, the so-called context units, will be shown on separate lines and in italics, indicated by a sequential number.

Some texts were more or less unrelated to the subject matter, such as *Book Club: Tregian's Ground by Anne Cuneo*. In this text the term *lingua franca* does appear, but it appears in a context where it is used more metaphorically than it would be used in an academic setting, in

the following way: “music [...] becomes the lingua franca that enables him to cross borders”.⁴¹ This kind of metaphorical use of *lingua franca* also occurs in other texts in the preliminary dataset. I can thus use this type of occurrence as an indicator or rough guideline that the text itself is not sufficiently related to the subject matter at hand, as the search term is not used in the intended manner. Another text, *The Return of Global Russia: An Analytical Framework* uses *lingua franca* in relation to the Russian language, and happens to mention our other search term, *Brexit*, but does not contain any statements which link the two or reference the English language in relation to these two terms. Other texts are less straightforward when it comes to relevance, such as *The Blue Passport is taking back control? No, it was first imposed on us from abroad*, which includes the following sentence:

After Brexit, the UK could decide to switch the second language of our passports from French to Spanish, but it could not eliminate the second language altogether, notwithstanding the fact that English is now the global lingua franca.⁴²

This text was excluded from the analysis because this sentence, as the most relevant part of the text to the topic at hand, still fails to ascribe any particular value to the use of a particular language over another. Most of the context units analyzed involve some form of statement that displays an attitude toward this issue. Either there is a positive stance taken, predicting that the importance of English as a global language in Europe and/or the EU will not diminish in any significant way once Brexit takes place, or there is a negative stance taken, predicting the opposite. Overwhelmingly, the units analyzed fall into the former category, and most of the sentences or paragraphs that denote one of the ideas expressed in the categories are fairly straightforward. Although, one or two of the context units are of a more implicit nature, such as the following:

1. “*The most bizarre attempt yet to derail Britain's departure from the European Union is the demand that we should be forced to conduct Brexit talks in French. While*

⁴¹ Natalie K. Watson, “Book club: Tregian’s Ground by Anne Cuneo,” *Church Times*, April 6, 2018, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/6-april/books-arts/reading-groups/book-club-tregian-s-ground-by-anne-cuneo>

⁴² James E. Baldwin, “The Blue Passport is taking back control? No, it was first imposed on us from abroad”, *The Guardian*, December 22, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/dec/22/blue-passports-taking-back-control-imposed-league-of-nations-burgundy-passport-eu>

this might suit Paris, and the Walloonatic bit of Belgium, I can't see how it would benefit the other 25 member states, who don't speak French but are perfectly comfortable conversing in English."⁴³

This statement implies that English is a language common to all EU countries whereas French is not. A reasonable assumption is therefore that the author of this article does not see this situation changing any time soon, thus leading me to place this context unit in category 1.

There are, however, a number of units which do not take an overt stance either implicitly or otherwise, but that do clearly discuss the changing dynamic of language in Europe and that, in particular, illustrate, point out, or otherwise utilize the connection between language and power. Below are two examples of this:

2. *"French and German officials have lobbied long and hard for their mother tongues to be more widely used in Brussels, but English has been hard to dislodge as Europe's lingua franca. Indeed the choice of languages has strong political, diplomatic and cultural ramifications."*⁴⁴

3. *"While politicians on the left and right in France has seen Brexit as a chance to reinforce the global status of French, other countries would be reluctant to switch to French as their main second language, given the widespread use of English on the world stage and their investment in teaching it."*⁴⁵

These units fall under category 3, which states that *the status of a language in a supranational context affects the power of those who speak it*. Units which fall under this category coincidentally also appear in many of the articles which do take a definitive stance to one side or the other, further cementing the ubiquitous nature of the aforementioned connection between language and power in the context of media coverage. Here it may be appropriate to note that

⁴³ Richard Littlejohn, "Let's Parler Brexit. It's the only lingo they understand! RICHARD LITTLEJOHN imagines negotiations being carried out in Franglais," *The Daily Mail*, October 28, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-3880652/Let-s-Parler-Brexit-s-lingo-understand-RICHARD-LITTLEJOHN-imagines-negotiations-carried-Franglais.html>

⁴⁴ "Brexit puts English on EU's endangered lingua franca list," *Japan Times*, July 29, 2016

⁴⁵ Ian Johnston, "Brexit could create a new 'language' – Euro-English", *The Independent*, September 20, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/brexit-latest-news-language-euro-english-uk-leave-eu-european-union-a7957001.html>

there is also some overlap between the categories in certain articles – often between non-mutually exclusive categories in one and the same article, but also on occasion in the same paragraph. In other words, some texts contain multiple context units belonging to different categories. As described by Krippendorff, context units as these are do sometimes overlap in this way.⁴⁶ An example from the data, two context units from the same text falling into category 1 and category 3 respectively, can be seen below:

4. *“English has long been considered the lingua franca of business. But when Britain leaves the EU, the proportion of native English speakers inside the bloc will fall from 14 per cent to 1 per cent, and senior EU officials have questioned whether English should remain one of its official languages. It's important that UK businesses realise the value of equipping their employees with language skills to prepare them for the future.”*⁴⁷

5. *“And now more than ever, the UK must heed the EU's official language policy that ‘every European citizen should master two other languages in addition to their mother tongue’. But why are languages so important, and how do employees gain the skills they need to communicate in more than one language in the workplace?”*⁴⁸

For this reason, the units under analysis are the context units rather than the recording units or the texts as a whole, and the total number of context units in the media dataset is 63. When it comes to numbers, category 1 (which, again, expresses that *English should/will remain the European lingua franca despite Brexit*) is the most frequent, with 29 out of 63 units. Category 2, with the opposite sentiment, is far less frequent with only nine occurrences in the media dataset. Category 3, however, with the meaning which connects language status with personal or political power, is the second-most frequent with 16 occurrences. The theory that English will be a better European lingua franca post-Brexit, which is most thoroughly posited by Modiano and that in this study is encompassed by category 5, has six unique occurrences in the 48 texts. Category 4, that *the dominance of English creates a power imbalance among native speakers and non-native speakers*, somewhat overlaps with category 3 in terms of definition,

⁴⁶ Krippendorff, *Content Analysis*, 101

⁴⁷ Panos Kraniotis, “Languages will become a more valuable resource for UK firms after Brexit,” *City AM*, July 19, 2016, <http://www.cityam.com/245696/languages-become-more-valuable-resource-uk-firms-after>

⁴⁸ Kraniotis, “Languages”

and occurs three times in the media dataset. At a first glance, we can therefore see that the idea of the status of English remaining largely unaffected by Brexit is the most prevalent one in this slice of media coverage, by a confident margin. We can also see that language status and its relation to power is explicitly featured in a substantial portion of the results, though it is not always considered. Ultimately, however, the sample size is of such a relatively small size, and the search terms are tailored towards locating results with the topic of attitudes towards the status of the English language in particular. For this reason, the frequency or quantification of categories, such as it is, is only particularly interesting when it comes to category 1 and 2. Otherwise, we may risk running into problems of validity and reliability.

In the academic dataset, the distribution of context units is similar. In the academic dataset, however, there is not a single instance of the sentiment of category 2 being expressed. In other words, authors of this particular group of journal articles – most of which come from the same issue of the journal *World Englishes* – appear to be in agreement that English will continue on as a European lingua franca despite Brexit. One of these articles could be considered less clear on this point in that it is not stated explicitly, but it is still possible to infer from the context units in Seidlhofer and Widdowson that their paper most likely falls into category 1, as they say that, post-Brexit, English will be “freed of its national connections and can be appropriated by the European community as a means of communication of its own”.⁴⁹ In terms of context units, I counted 17.

In eight out of these twelve articles we can also find context units which fall into category 3, emphasizing the relation between languages in this context and some form of power play, political or otherwise. A context unit which shows this can be found in Seidlhofer and Widdowson, and is displayed below:

6. *“There has, of course, long been the assumption that the use of English in Europe will always privilege the Brits and in one way or another subtly serve their national interests and keep them in some degree aloof from too close an integration.”*⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Barbara Seidlhofer and Henry Widdowson, “Thoughts on independent English,” in *World Englishes* 36, no. 3 (Sept. 2017): 360, DOI: 10.1111/weng.12274

⁵⁰ Seidlhofer and Widdowson, “Thoughts on independent English,” 360

However, one quote from Seargeant perhaps illustrates this the clearest, strikes to the core of what this essay aims to investigate, and supports the main thesis of this essay:

7. “And given the relations these movements can have to nationalist agendas, it seems likely that the jousting over the political symbolism of languages will continue to be foregrounded, both in terms of English but also the relative importance of other languages.”⁵¹

This “jousting” and its role in media coverage of Brexit, as well as in statements made by politicians or other public figures, is further explored in section 5.2.

4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

As mentioned, the two texts analyzed through means of CDA are *A Brexit for English as EU language*, appearing on Deutsche Welle, and *Should English remain the main language for EU business after Brexit?* by Andrew Linn, appearing on International Business Times (IBT). These were selected from the 48 texts in the media dataset of the material for this essay. The Deutsche Welle article leans towards the idea that it is possible for the status of English in the EU to be weakened whereas the IBT article firmly argues for the opposite.

4.2.1 A Brexit for English as EU language

A Brexit for English as EU language concludes, as most articles in the post-Brexit discourse seem to do, that Brexit likely will not completely destroy the status of English in EU contexts. The Deutsche Welle article does, however, explore the possibility of a diminished utility for English as an official EU language after Brexit goes through. “English could vanish as an official EU language if Brexit proceeds” is the opening sentence of this text, after which the likelihood of this scenario occurring is discussed.⁵² As mentioned previously in the essay, Fairclough’s CDA talks about three levels or dimensions of discourse, and in these terms, I believe that the discursive practice exercised in this article is the framing of this as a possible outcome for English in the EU.

⁵¹ Philip Seargeant, “The symbolism of English on the Brexit battleground,” in *World Englishes* 36, no. 3 (Sept. 2017): 358, DOI: 10.1111/weng.12273

⁵² “A Brexit for English as EU language,” *Deutsche Welle*, June 28, 2016, <http://p.dw.com/p/1JFCR>

Multiple times the article cites statements by the Polish chairman of the European Parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee, Danuta Hubner, who appears from the quotes to believe that the removal of English as an official EU language is a real possibility. The article quotes her arguably unequivocal statement that “[i]f we don't have the UK, we don't have English”.⁵³ This is a clear example of a reference to authority, and thereby the legitimation strategy called authorization. By doing this, the author of the article can support its central idea, which is to discuss the idea of English being removed as an official EU language, and to convey that this is seen as a possibility by some. The strategy of rationalization also occurs when the article notes that “[Hubner’s] remarks prompted the Wall Street Journal to observe that the European Commission had begun using French and German more often in its external communications since Britain voted to leave the EU last Thursday.”⁵⁴ These two strategies seem to be the main ones utilized by this author, as authorization is continually used through quotes from various EU treaties which explain the circumstances under which English could disappear as an official language. For example, in order for this to happen, there would have to be a unanimous vote by the remaining EU member states. While this is unlikely to happen, this article nevertheless shines a light, intentionally or otherwise, on the way politicians and other figures utilize language policy as political statements relating to specific countries and their influence. In CDA terms, this is also an illustration of the social practice within which this article exists, and the same kind of strategies also seem to occur in several other articles in the media dataset of the content analysis portion of this investigation.

4.2.2 Should English remain the main language for EU business after Brexit?

Should English remain the main language for EU business after Brexit? discusses EU language use in the context of business practice, but makes several very general claims as well. The article, by University of Westminster’s Andrew Linn, begins with what could be considered tongue-in-cheek tone, stating that “[a]fter Brexit, there are various things that some in the EU hope to see and hear less in the future. One is Nigel Farage. Another is the English language”.⁵⁵ This is a clear example of narrativization, as it paints a literary picture – a dramatization – and uses humor to draw in readers. This article, too, cites European politicians and their anti-English statements in the aftermaths of Brexit, strengthening the ubiquitous nature of this practice in

⁵³ “A Brexit for English as EU language,” *Deutsche Welle*, June 28, 2016, <http://p.dw.com/p/1JFCR>

⁵⁴ “A Brexit for English as EU language,” *Deutsche Welle*, June 28, 2016, <http://p.dw.com/p/1JFCR>

⁵⁵ Andrew Linn, “Should English remain the main language for EU business after Brexit?”, *International Business Times*, July 4, 2016, <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/should-english-remain-main-language-eu-business-1568858>

the discursive and social practice of the post-Brexit discourse. As these politicians who are cited can be considered in positions of authority, this could be an example of the authorization strategy. A subsequent citation of the European Commission is certainly such an example in this article. The main thrust of the article appears to be that the status of English in the EU is not dependent on the status of the UK in the EU, and to legitimize this claim the author utilizes both rationalization, narrativization, and, arguably, moralization.

The strategy of narrativization is further used through a comparison of English to Latin. The author emphasizes that while English has native speakers, “it is those who have learned English as a foreign language [...] who now constitute the majority of users”.⁵⁶ Authorization is used throughout the rest of the article and seems to be the main way that the author legitimizes his thesis and arguments. For example, he references the 2012 Eurobarometer, a kind of survey which reported favorable attitudes towards English as a second or foreign language. Subsequently, the author references several sources, statistics and projects which support his thesis, such as how much money is invested into the teaching of English, and how many people around the world speak English as a second language as opposed to a first language. To conclude the article, the author utilizes a form of moralization, a strategy which consists of references to certain values, normative expressions and/or emotional appeals. The final sentence of the article reads: “Much about the EU may be about to change, but right now an anti-English language policy so dramatically out of step with practice would simply make the post-Brexit hangover more painful.”⁵⁷ The emotional expressions and implications of this statement are what make this an example of moralization.

Unlike the previous article, this one is more argumentative and less speculative. It also utilizes more references to expert statements and statistics – rationalization – rather than references to statements by authorities – authorization. The subject position of the author is also clearer in this article than the previous one, and the expressive way the author uses subjective narrativization and moralization shows this. This not to say that this article is subjective and therefore less accurate – the sources referenced instead make a strong case for the author’s thesis.

⁵⁶ Linn, “Should English remain the main language”

⁵⁷ Linn, “Should English remain the main language”

5. Discussion

5.1 The Euro-English debate

In journalism in general, the Brexit referendum itself seems to have inspired a large part of the press coverage that makes up the bulk of my material. Statements by EU politicians are also, as mentioned, frequently quoted in these articles. In the academic journals, however, one particular position piece has inspired much of the material in the dataset. Marko Modiano's journal article has been a catalyst for a lot of the resulting discourse, just Bolton and Davis say in the issue of *World Englishes* where most of the academic dataset stems from.⁵⁸ The Modiano article itself takes the somewhat controversial stance that the absence of native English speakers in the EU – or the significant decrease in native English speakers – will allow the remaining Europeans with English as a second language to form their own variety of English, Euro-English.⁵⁹ To discuss this claim and other related, speculative statements made by Modiano, the symposium in *World Englishes* was created, and many of the articles focus on refuting some of these claims made by Modiano. Schneider, for example, says the following in response to Modiano's Euro-English theory:

Seidlhofer (2011) and others have repeatedly emphasized, ELF is to be conceptualized not as 'a variety' with forms and norms of its own but rather as a socially defined usage context which allows for a lot of flexibility and variability, communicative accommodation and negotiation. And this is something quite different (and much more realistic) than a fairly rigid notion of 'a Euro-English'.⁶⁰

Although, while arguing against claims such as these, most of the authors in the academic dataset also agree with Modiano's assertion that English will remain the European lingua franca. Context units in the media dataset, however, sometimes agree with or suggest agreement with Modiano's more controversial statements, such as the following context units:

⁵⁸ Kingsley Bolton and Daniel R. Davis, "Brexit and the Future of English in Europe," in *World Englishes* 36, no. 3 (Sept. 2017): 303, DOI: 10.1111/weng.12263

⁵⁹ Marko Modiano, "English in a post-Brexit European Union," in *World Englishes* 36, no. 3 (Sept. 2017): 314-315, DOI: 10.1111/weng.12264

⁶⁰ Edgar W. Schneider, "The linguistic consequences of Brexit? No reason to get excited!" in *World Englishes* 36, no. 3 (Sept. 2017): 354, DOI: 10.1111/weng.12272

8. *“Ironically, in the wake of the awful British referendum voting the UK out of the European Union, it may be the fact that the UK no longer owns it that saves English, even as little England slides further into global insignificance.”*⁶¹

9. *“However, rather than being an impetus for English to no longer be used in the EU, as Barnier’s proposal suggests, Brexit in fact strengthens the case for promoting English as the lingua franca of the EU.”*⁶²

The latter of these two articles also goes on to say that Brexit and its consequences will make English “a much more neutral language of communication than any other European language”, and that we might be able to call it “a new Esperanto”.⁶³ These statements are both in line with Modiano’s theory that the UK’s exit from the EU will change the nature of English in Europe on a semantic and syntactic level.

5.2 Political instrumentalization of languages

As mentioned, the media dataset shows a fair amount of references to politicians and public officials, quotes which illustrate the significance ascribed to languages in a supranational context. As we can see through the academic dataset, this appears to be acknowledged by academia as well, such as by Bolton and Davis. They describe the press coverage as “somewhat sensational” and recount how several articles achieve these sensational headlines by referring to statements made by various politicians.⁶⁴

It is possible that this kind of political instrumentalization arises in part because of a desire to promote one’s own nation or prevent another nation’s language from threatening one’s own, as implied by Saraceni in the following context unit:

⁶¹ David Dodwell, “‘Little England’ may be in decline but not the English language,” *South China Morning Post*, July 8, 2016, <http://www.scmp.com/business/global-economy/article/1987199/little-england-may-be-decline-not-english-language>

⁶² Matteo Bonotti and Diarmait Mac Giolla Chríost, “English could be a more successful Esperanto in a post-Brexit EU,” *Yahoo News*, May 10, 2017, <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/english-could-more-successful-esperanto-162346935.html?guccounter=1>

⁶³ Bonotti and Mac Giolla Chríost, “English could be a more successful Esperanto”

⁶⁴ Bolton and Davis, “Brexit and the Future of English in Europe,” 302-303

10. “In his article, Modiano raises a number of important issues regarding the role of English in post-Brexit Europe. **In many ways, this discussion is very much about nationalism and its resurgence.**”⁶⁵ [emphasis mine]

Just as Wright does in her chapter on language policy and language planning (LPLP), Saraceni here connects language and nationalism. Another example of English as a lingua franca being mentioned in connection with the idea of nationalism, or “English exceptionalism,” this time from an article in the media dataset, is the following:

11. “English exceptionalism has many sources: Westminster’s democratic tradition; its imperial past; and its special relationship with the U.S. English is the world’s lingua franca”.⁶⁶

Many of the context units sorted into category 3 accomplish something similar to these two. It is clear to me that language has a strong place in various political ideologies. The results of this essay’s analyses indicate that the way languages are discussed is especially important in parts of the post-Brexit discourse. When English and its position as the European lingua franca features in this discourse, it often occurs in a similar way to how it occurs in the two articles I have analyzed through CDA. That is to say, it occurs within a discussion of power, agency and politics. As Crystal says, “[p]redicting the linguistic future is always a dangerous activity”.⁶⁷ This investigation is not necessarily a prediction of the future, but rather an examination of potential effects of the way we speak about languages, particularly in the context of the EU.

6. Conclusions

To summarize, we have seen that the majority of articles in the media dataset and all of the journal articles in the academic dataset agree that the status of English in the EU will remain largely unaffected by Brexit. We have also seen that the link between languages and power is

⁶⁵ Mario Saraceni, “Post-Brexit English: A post-national perspective,” in *World Englishes* 36, no. 3 (Sept. 2017): 350, DOI: 10.1111/weng.12271

⁶⁶ Miguel Otero-Iglesias, “English are the exception - Europeans dig the EU,” *Politico*, November 7, 2016, <https://www.politico.eu/article/europeans-dig-the-eu-english-are-the-exception-brexit-euroskeptics-eurozone-european-union/>

⁶⁷ Crystal, *English as a Global Language*, 76

often raised in the context of discussions around the idea of English as a European and global *lingua franca*.

Although it has been possible to see that all authors in the academic dataset of this study more or less agree that the role of English as the chief European *lingua franca* is unthreatened, some, like Deneire, simultaneously emphasize the necessary continuation of a “plurilingual” Europe.⁶⁸ Ultimately, all aspects of this investigation has shown that in this slice of media coverage and linguistic discussion, the position of English within the EU is perceived as secure. Despite this, it also appears to be a topic widely utilized for rhetoric effect, especially in terms of political discussions.

Due to the limited scope of this essay, generalizations are difficult to make. However, through a hermeneutic perspective on trends in the post-Brexit discourse as they relate specifically to the key word and search term *lingua franca*, we can draw the following conclusions. As hypothesized in the thesis statement, there is no concrete support for the idea that Brexit will contribute to a decline of the English language in the EU, particularly not among the general public. However, a possible interpretation of the results observed in this study is that while English will remain the European *lingua franca*, it has been and increasingly will be used as a bargaining tool by European politicians and public figures, bringing with it a politicization of languages as one of the main features of the post-Brexit discourse.

Moreover, if we are to believe the likes of Modiano, the future might bring a type of English which – regardless of whether or not it becomes a legitimate variety of English – is less associated with the UK or other Anglophone countries than before. If this were to happen, perhaps the politicization of languages that we can observe in this study would not be seen as necessary anymore. A possible future study with more time and resources than I have had here could potentially examine this connection between the UK and the English language closer, to see whether it shows any indication of weakening, as theorized by some of the authors mentioned previously in this essay.

⁶⁸ Marc Deneire, “The British leave, but European Englishes remain,” in *World Englishes* 36, no. 3 (Sept. 2017): 338, DOI: 10.1111/weng.12267

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