

Being a Bilingual in Europe



Catalan?

Vlaams?



Fries?

ONLY ENGLISH?

- An impression of what it is like to be a bilingual in Europe which will be a combination of the
- biased , idiosyncratic and anecdotal
- general and factual
- simply to stimulate discussion

Here comes the anecdote

It's the early nineties

Francine

Mike

What language did they use?

French L1
English L2
Dutch L3
German L4?

English L1
French L2
German L3
Dutch L4

German L1
English ? L2
French L3
Dutch ?L4

Ursula

Wolfgang

German L1
English L2
French L3?
Dutch L4

Dutch L1
English L2
German L3
French L4

Piet

Jim

English L1
French L2
Spanish L3
Dutch L4



Increasing pressure to boost
levels of multilingualism
across EU

Communication on Multilingualism

On 22 November 2005 the European Commission adopted a

The more languages you know, the more of a person you are'
(A Slovak proverb)

L1 plus 2 others

700 Reasons for Studying Language

Higher Education Academy: Subject Centre for Language, Linguistics and Area Studies

- Europe has – 20 official languages and 60 more indigenous ones.
- There is a real sense in which a monolingual person, with a monolingual temperament, is disadvantaged or deprived.
- *Crystal, D. (2000) Language Death (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)*

- There are good grounds for conceiving the natural condition of the human being to be multilingual. The human brain has the natural capacity to learn several languages and most members of the human race live in settings where they naturally and efficiently use their brains in precisely this way...
- People who belong to a predominantly monolingual culture are not used to seeing the world in this way, because their mindset has been established through centuries of being part of a dominant culture, in which other people learn your language and you do not learn theirs.

- *Crystal, D. (2000) Language Death (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)*
From <http://www.llas.ac.uk/700reasons/reasons.aspx?keywordid=743>

- If young people leave school in a state of entrenched monolingualism or faltering and apologetic bilingualism, they will not enjoy equality with their more 'mobile' peers elsewhere in Europe when it comes to opportunities for further study, training, work experience or employment.
- *Scottish Executive, Ministerial Action Group on Languages (2000) Citizens of a Multilingual World: Key Issues* (www.scotland.gov.uk/library3-education-mwki-07.asp)
<http://www.llas.ac.uk/700reasons/reasons.aspx?keywordid=743>

Those who are monolingual in English may run the risk of being perceived by others as having a limited and possibly arrogant outlook on life

- *Scottish Executive, Ministerial Action Group on Languages (2000) Citizens of a Multilingual World: Key Issues* (www.scotland.gov.uk-library3-education-mwki-07.asp)
<http://www.llas.ac.uk/700reasons/reasons.aspx?keywordid=743>
- <http://www.llas.ac.uk/700reasons/reasons.aspx?keywordid=743> is from ©Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies a Subject Centre of [The Higher Education Academy](#)



Periodic public opinion surveys for
European Union.

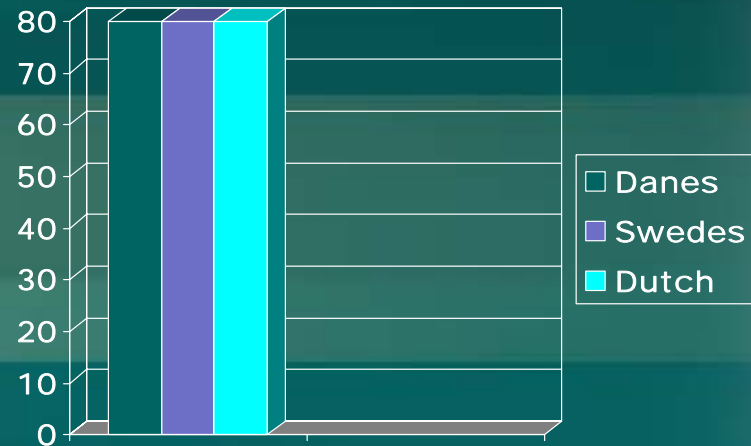
Representative sample/ 15 years or over.



2001

- 47% EU CITIZENS CLAIM TO BE MONOLINGUALS
- If they know an L2 it is more likely to be:
 - **English 41% > French 19% > German 10 %**

- About 80% of Swedes, Dutch and Danes claim to know English



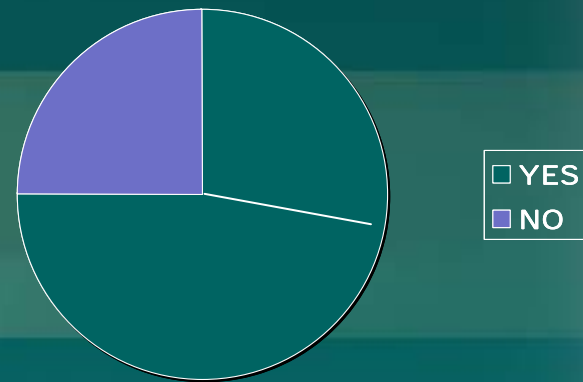
- On average, about a **third** of Europeans claimed to know English “well”:
 - Swedes 88%, Dutch 52%
- **What about the UK?**
 - 49% Brits claim an “elementary knowledge” of French.
 - 58% claim to use it ‘occasionally’
- Dutch and Nordics claim to use English for “1 hr every day”



2005

- *Can you speak 2 languages well enough to have a conversation?*

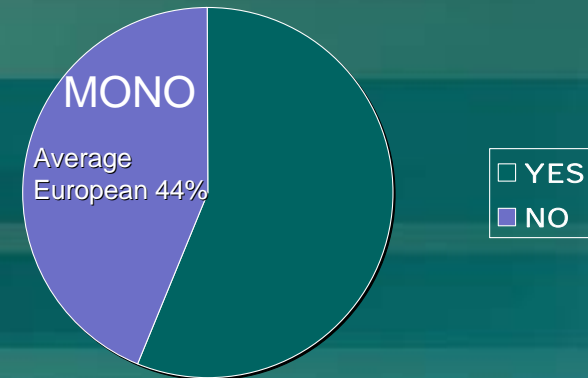
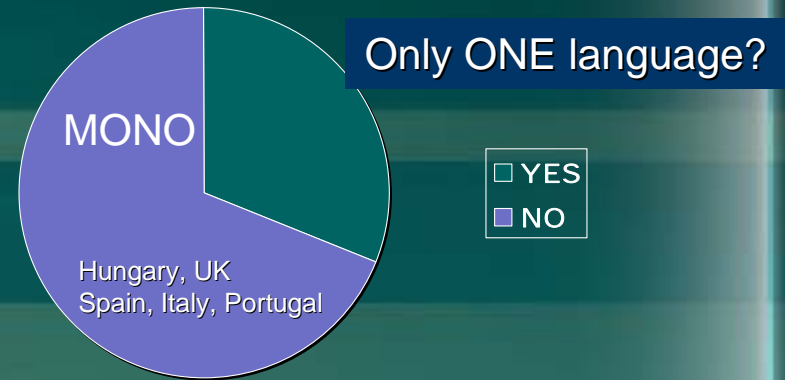
On average, 72% Europeans said 'non, nein, no, nie,' etc.



– Only 25% Dutch said 'nee'

%Monolinguals: only 1% in Luxembourg, the top-ranking country

- 62% of respondents from the UK admitted they “could not speak any language other than their mother tongue”.
- UK is followed closely by Italy, Spain and Portugal. Only Hungary leads the UK!



This compared with
an average of 44%
across the EU

Focus on the Netherlands

Gert Booij, G. English as the lingua franca of Europe: a Dutch perspective.

- **The Netherlands** (together with Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) is where
 1. English has a very dominant position as a 'foreign' language, and
 2. English is developing into a real 'second' language

Gert Booij, G. English as the lingua franca of Europe: a Dutch perspective.

1. English is a compulsory subject at school.
2. In 1986, it was introduced into the last two years of primary education.
3. So it's hard to find purely monolingual speakers of Dutch under the age of 50 (De Bot et al. 2000).
4. (between 2 and 50?!)

Gert Booij, G. English as the lingua franca of Europe: a Dutch perspective.

- Some secondary schools are even bilingual or have bilingual streams.
- These bilingual streams are not primarily for foreign children, but are explicitly meant for Dutch children raised monolingually at home, in order to enhance their chances for an international career.

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1. English is used in a number of domains: internet, job market, industry and trade, and very strongly in advertisements and commercials, apparently also because the use of English has snob appeal.
2. In education, it is used at universities at the graduate and postgraduate level, **in particular to accommodate foreign students who do not speak Dutch.**

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1. It is also the language in which most doctoral dissertations are written. So the **Netherlands** differ from most other West-European countries which require dissertations in the native language.

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- Dutch universities require the dissertation to be written in Dutch, German, French, or English, but in practice at least 80 % of the dissertations are in English (almost 100 % in the natural sciences and in linguistics).
- Nowadays, you need to provide specific reasons for writing a dissertation in Dutch: English is the default language choice.

Gert Booij, G. English as the lingua franca of Europe: a Dutch perspective.

1. Some years ago, the Dutch Minister of Education proposed to teach a substantial part of the curriculum in English instead of Dutch: this raised a storm of protest in parliament and society.
2. HOWEVER...
3. The University of Utrecht has a University College with a curriculum taught in English, and the agricultural university of Wageningen has decided to teach in English as much as possible.
4. This is also true of the Law Faculty in Utrecht



Graduating Anglo-American style in Utrecht!

LEARN DUTCH!!!!

1. "English has a very strong position in the **Netherlands**, but [...] ample space for both the national language, other foreign languages and migrant languages" (De Bot et al. 2000.).
2. The strong position of Dutch can also be concluded from the fact that for immigrants who want to take their place in Dutch society, the acquisition of Dutch is an absolute necessity

Division of Labour

- Is Dutch is not threatened by English?
- Answer:
- English gives access to international culture and the world at large
- Dutch gives access to Dutch culture, society, and history.
- The existence of Dutch is not threatened at all, although the lexical stock of Dutch is affected

This Picture doesn't tell the whole story

- “Despite the fact that at secondary school English is a compulsory subject and that other languages [..] are offered as options.....
- the foreign language proficiency of the average Dutchman does not go beyond that needed for general communication at a very basic level

This Picture doesn't tell the whole story

- “Drastic changes over the last decade”
- More and more students opting not to study languages
- Pattern also observable at university
- Institutions responding to demand
- Result decline in sophisticated uses of standard English (more use of “Global English”?)

- Curiously reminiscent of the situation in a very different country, namely the UK.
- In both cases, it does not reflect a disinterest in language learning per se but a career-motivated choice relating to formal education.
- Languages can/will be learned or maintained in informal contexts or later in formal contexts when top priority goals have been achieved.

Almost The End

What language did they use?

French L1
English L2
Dutch L3
German?

Francine

Mike

English L1
French L2
German L3
Dutch L4

German L1
English L2
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German L1
English L2
French?
Dutch minimal

Dutch L1
English L2
German L3
French L4

Piet

Jim

English L1
French L2
Spanish L3
Dutch L4



Everybody used their own!

français

Francine

Mike

English L1

Deutsch

Ursula

Wolfgang

Deutsch

nederlands

Piet

Jim

English L1



- This is not something that happens every day in every corner of Europe but:
- It is an indication of a **pragmatic approach** to multilingual use that you find in many parts of Europe.

The End

G Booij

- Booij, G. English as the lingua franca of Europe: a Dutch perspective.
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- *Language Policy.*, in Th. Bongaerts & K. de Bot (eds.), *Studies in Honour of Theo van Els*. Nijmegen: Kath. Universiteit Nijmegen, 143-156.
- Bot, K. de, Evers, R. & Huibregts, I. (2000), *A Sociolinguistic Profile of English in the*
- *Netherlands*. (ms., University of Nijmegen)