

Book Review

***Observing Eurolects: Corpus analysis of linguistic variation in EU law.* Edited by Laura Mori.** John Benjamins, 2018. ISBN: 9789027201706, 394 pp.

Although often thought of as self-contained, homogeneous entities, all of the world's languages are made up of countless different varieties and sub-varieties, which are continually emerging, shifting and disappearing. Varieties of the same language can differ with regard to their phonetic, lexical, syntactic, or stylistic content, and can be relatively close to the so-called 'standard variety' or significantly distant from it. These variations may be the result of geographical difference, such as between British and American English, but can also be due to different registers, such as the difference between the language used when talking to a friend on the phone and when delivering a formal address. This concept of varieties within languages is the central thread running through *Observing Eurolects*, which seeks to answer its overarching hypothesis: has the multilingual EU legislation environment given rise to a new variety of legal language, known as a 'Eurolect'?

Observing Eurolects is the result of work carried out by the members of the Eurolect Observatory Project, which has taken an innovative approach in examining variational patterns in legal language. The contributors are fifteen academics from universities across Europe. The book takes a systematic approach, dealing with each language separately in different chapters before bringing the results together to reach a final conclusion. The opening chapters provide the details of the

methodology used to investigate the languages in question. In order to carry out large-scale analyses and sophisticated data visualisation techniques, the project uses methods from corpus linguistics to compile and analyse different EU languages across a ten-year time span (1999-2008). One of the greatest strengths of this book is that it standardises the methodological framework across the study of all eleven languages involved, meaning that the results can be effectively compared and cross-referenced, enabling more comprehensive conclusions to be drawn.

In order to explain how the putative new language varieties may have developed in practice, the research adopts the concept of translation-induced language change, which is based on the premise that if languages are in contact in a translation environment for long enough and if this contact is intense enough, then language change can occur. In this context, the multilingual EU environment constitutes an ideal point of study, since it has created a '*sui generis* language contact scenario' (9). Huge numbers of legal texts are drafted and translated by the EU institutions each year across all the official languages, therefore languages are in constant contact with each other in translation. Consequently, as attested by the various studies in this book, this situation may well encourage linguistic features to be copied across different languages to form subtly new varieties.

In the preface, Ingemar Strandvik discusses the frequent critical remarks made about the readability and jargon of EU legislation, which often receives the derogatory label of 'Eurospeak', despite the fact that 'EU law works surprisingly well' (vii). In opposition to such views, the term 'Eurolect', first used by Goffin in 1990 (12), rejects the pejorative connotations around the language used in EU texts. Indeed, this book builds an argument that EU legal language does not differ solely in its use of isolated 'Europeisms', but in fact displays much wider variation on many linguistic levels in comparison to corresponding national legal languages (13).

Each chapter provides an enlightening opening section on the recent history of the language in question with regard to its incorporation into the EU system, from original founding members to recent joiners, and then goes on to compare the language used in EU directives to the

language of national legislation which implements them. In the chapter on Netherlandic Dutch (Chapter 3), Gert De Sutter and Fee De Bock highlight the various lexical differences between EU and national legislation. For instance, when addressing issues around migrants, the EU texts have a 'clear preference' for the term *asielzoeker* 'asylum-seeker', while the national legislation tends to use the more stigmatising *vreemdeling* 'stranger' (55). To show that these differences are not solely limited to terminology, they demonstrate how the national legislation uses coherence marking more frequently, thereby constituting variation in the discursive features across the two varieties (60). Likewise, the study on German shows that the EU variety contains many non-adapted loan-words, such as the English term *recycling* in words like *Recyclingbetriebe* and *Recyclingmaterial*, while the German national legislation contains hardly any such occurrences (155). A great many English loanwords are also identified in EU Polish, and English is shown to influence its morphology and structure too.

Similar conclusions are reached across a whole range of languages including Italian, Greek, Spanish, Finnish and French, as the various contributors build a convincing body of evidence that the EU varieties of these languages constitute genuinely distinct versions. This appears to be largely due to the influence of English on these languages, but the section on English itself also demonstrates that a distinct English Eurolect has emerged, including loanwords and calques from French such as *vis-à-vis* and *competent authorities* (74). Rather than relying on the assumption that the prominence of English will be the overwhelming factor in shaping these new language varieties, *Observing Eurolects* clearly sets out a case that the complex multilingual environment of the EU means that there are many, varied sources and directions of influence behind the linguistic changes identified. There does however seem to be some inconsistency around the contributors' views on whether this is a positive or negative evolution. There has long been a debate in linguistics over whether the changes brought about by language contact should be considered a kind of contamination of the purity of a language, or simply an inevitable process of linguistic evolution. Although *Observing Eurolects* does not address this debate directly, some contributors use the negatively-

loaded terms ‘interference’ (118) and ‘alienation’ (324), while others point to the beneficial aspects of such contact-induced change, such as the chapter on EU Italian, ‘which has been positively affected by language contact in multilingual drafting: legislative texts written in Italian Eurolect...are better responding to the need for a plain legislative language’ (238). The book therefore does little to advance this particular discussion in either direction.

Only two of the languages studied in the book, Maltese and Latvian, fail to reach the conclusions that distinct EU varieties have emerged, largely due to the fact that there was already large-scale English influence on these languages in general, which could not be specified as being EU-rooted. Indeed, given the recent political context, the discussions in this book force the reader to consider the fate of EU English itself within a post-Brexit European Union. Mori notes the power of English within the institution, stating that by 2015 ‘81% of the documents translated by the DGT of the Commission were originally drafted in English’ (7); but will this power wane or will EU English continue to diverge from its national legal variety?

Observing Eurolects is an engagingly written and innovative study of contact-induced language change in the specific EU context. It builds a strong argument that a new variety of legal language, known as a Eurolect, has developed as a result of language contact within the EU institutions. This hypothesis is supported by swathes of qualitative and quantitative data which highlight the existence of these varieties, obtained using a standardised methodology to allow the results across all the languages in question to be compared on an equal footing. The results can be practically applied to inform EU and national legal drafting and translation in these languages in the future. This book is ideal for readers with an interest in the interaction of language and law, and anyone curious about the evolution of languages and the intricacies of linguistic variation.

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