The Hybrid EU Policy Tool: Towards a Method for Multilingual Critical Discourse Analysis

Suzie Holdsworth
The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

Multilingualism is an official EU policy domain, a complex process involving currently 24 languages governed by the Commission’s principle of ’multiple authenticity’; this means that all parallel versions are considered equal as original policy tools. Moreover, the EU’s Language Charter makes no mention of ’translation’; rather, all texts are ’drafted’. In reality, however, extensive translational activities do take place and the nature of these language transfer procedures presents an interesting paradox for the interpretation of policy content. As officially there are no fixed source or target texts (all texts are parallel ’drafts’), translations can be based on more than one or even several source languages. In this way, language versions become cross-contaminated and the textual content of policy becomes ’hybrid’. In addition, policy narratives are generated not only within one single institution (i.e. the Commission) but also across institutions, forming multilingual chains of discourse. Hybridity therefore occurs not only between language versions but also between institutional stages of those versions.

Neither critical discourse analysis (CDA) models nor translation equivalence theories alone can unravel the complex multilayered relationships inherent in EU multilingual text production; CDA models are designed for monolingual scenarios only and the one-source-to-target constructs of translation equivalence theories cannot take into account the hybrid translational and linguistic phenomena produced within multilingual institutions. The innovative contribution of this paper will be a bespoke CDA methodology for assessing conceptual equivalence within the hybrid multilingual institutional setting of the European Union. A selection of cross-lingual segments from a corpus of EU citizenship discourses in English, French, German and Dutch will be analysed using the conceptual categories of space, time and modality.

Keywords: EU multilingualism, CDA, translation.