

This weekend I am blogging in Paris where I spoke at the “[Multilingualism - Migration, Territories, Europe](#)” conference, organized by the [Eurozine](#) network of European cultural magazines. It is in fact the 21st European Meeting of Cultural Journals, a 25 years old network run by a ten years old organization, Eurozine, that organizes content exchange for both print and online. Translation is a crucial in such circles, but that was not the primary topic this time. The issue on the agenda was multilingualism(s).

Abraham de Swaan from Amsterdam somehow did not show up. The day was opened by the anthropologist of ancient civilizations, [Prof. Clarisse Herrenschmidt](#), who in 2007 published a book on language, number and code. This is not an academic detail as ‘multilingualism’ is often associated with Babel. For her the tower of Babel represents the unity of all languages. For us, the mother language is the unity of languages. From there we go out to learn other languages. For Herrenschmidt the dream of one language is a fantasy. The use of a global language (in our age English) is that we limit our thoughts. Something is lost, in particular when we write. The capability to express ourselves is being limited.

The next speaker was [Prof. Ruth Wodak](#) from Vienna, now at Lancaster University in the UK where she studies multilingualism on the level of the European Union. She is part of the 6th framework program called [DYLAN](#). What is the cost of monolingualism in terms of misunderstanding? Ruth’s thesis is that multilingualism saves money. It is not expensive because it saves us from numerous conflicts and creates the basis of dialogue. Critical discourse analysis. Not that anything for granted is what her discourse analysis is all about, not just ‘negativism’. According to Timothy Garton Ash the problem of Europe is not treaty squabbles but language: “Europe’s problem is not Brussels but Babel.” According to Wodak the problem is not the tower of Babel with its open, unfinished character but the Fortress of Europe image. What fails is the democracy deficit. Anyone who read the draft of the European Constitution can see that the 200 pages is a genre failure. It is not a constitution. The identities and borders are fluid and shifting anyway. Remember when talking about ELF (English as Lingua Franca) that only half the population of Europe does not speak English. Only 13% have English as their mother language. In the knowledge-based economy multilingualism. She continued to tell about the Xenophob Project and pointed at the fact that this European Commission even has its own member for multilingualism, [Leonard Orban](#) from Romania.

In my contribution I emphasized the rapid changes in used languages on the Internet and the rise of so-called national webs that are often based on national languages. A possible way out of this dangerous development of creating new enclosures would be not to promote global English as a mediator but hybridization, a creole development of interface cultures that brings together languages on one screen. At some point I will post my text here.

Then Gérard Wormser of [Sens Public](#) and one of the organizers of the event, spoke about the proposal to mingle literacy we all share in network cultures. Scientific committees are not always the right format - but there still is a need for governance. Do we follow a public trend? Experimental publishing has to deal with impossibility of translation (see the Cross x Words (mots croises) project, a website that was launched during this event).

The challenge of culture is how to deal with the non-profit character of the work and the need to survive in a market economy. The human factor is so important. This is what the Sens Public project has brought up. Cultural empowerment is what happens here, from organizing workshops, conferences, publications. The willingness to do (stuff) is at the centre of our concern. However, we have to keep in mind that not everything can be translated. Translation is based on admiration. The dialogues are based on real conversations, which then get translated, and stored, in digital, networked artifacts like texts and reviews.

The Aristotle scholar Barbara Cassin is the author of a work on untranslatable philosophical terms and a more popular book called Google-Moi (an article from Le Nouvel Observateur in English can be found [here](#)). Cassin neither supports Globish (Global English) nor a hierarchy of language as Martin Heidegger once proposed (Greek, then German, etc.). She described the experience she made with the Google automated translation software that always goes through English if one asks to translate language A to B. According to Derrida there is an untranslatable body of language. The Anglo-Saxon are wrong. We do not talk in concepts, we talk in languages.