Translation at International Organizations: The Legal and Linguistic Hierarchies of Multilingualism

PRIETO RAMOS, Fernando

Abstract

This paper explores how the legal functions of international organizations condition the scope and properties of translation-mediated multilingualism as implemented in three representative settings: the European Union, the United Nations and the World Trade Organization. To this end, a multi-method interdisciplinary approach is applied encompassing various analyses of institutional text corpora, legal instruments, language policy documents and interviews with translation service managers. The data obtained provide evidence of the interconnection and variations of underlying legal, textual and linguistic hierarchies, together with pragmatic and political factors, as reflected in translation directionality, strategies and quality assurance, and in multilingual text interpretation. It is argued that these aspects serve to reveal the "depth" of institutional multilingualism beyond the "breadth" of language coverage.

Reference


DOI : 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190067205.013.13
TRANSLATION AT INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The Legal and Linguistic Hierarchies of Multilingualism

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Characterizing Institutional Translation

Considering the attention received in Translation Studies, institutional translation is most often associated with translation work conducted by or through institutional language services of national or supranational organizations, regardless of the internal procedural specificities and the level of outsourcing involved in producing the translations for the relevant commissioning institution. In fact, and increasingly so in the light of new technological advances and remote work diversification, the most distinctive element of institutional translation is not its translation agents per se but rather the institutionalized norms and conventions that these must observe, that is, established translation policies and practices to serve institutional purposes in compliance with each institution’s language policy. As contended by Mossop (1988, p. 65), “the goals of a translating institution are what determines the general approach taken in the translations it produces.” It is therefore the purposes of multilingual communication that guide institutional translation processes and agents.

While the goals of international cooperation are multifaceted and thematically diverse, it will be argued that the legal foundations of policymaking and implementation are the common denominator of international institutional missions (Prieto Ramos, 2014) and the starting point to explore the features and variations of translation policies and practices.
which are instrumental to global governance. More specifically, we will examine (1) the legal dimension of institutional translation at international organizations, that is, its scope and relevance quantitatively and qualitatively (see “The Legal Dimension of International Institutional Missions and Texts”), and (2) to what extent this legal dimension conditions the properties of institutional translation and language policy implementation overall. We will hypothesize that the legal hierarchy of each international institutional order has a bearing on institutional multilingualism as applied, with variations depending on the context of multilingual text production. The analysis will explore beneath the “surface” of language regime provisions to determine the “breadth” (understood as language coverage; see “The Breadth of Multilingualism: Language Diversity at Work”) and “depth” (in terms of original drafting, translation directionality and strategies, quality assurance, and multilingual text interpretation; see “The Depth of Multilingualism: Underlying Hierarchies of Languages and Texts”) of multilingualism in practice. In other (more metaphorical) words, a magnifying glass will be applied to global governance instruments in order to examine the warp and weft that weave their multiple linguistic threads into a durable fabric. Whereas previous studies have identified imperfections of “complete institutional multilingualism” (Meylaerts, 2011, p. 746) as regards language coverage (i.e., “multilingual breadth”), the question of “multilingual depth” in terms of properties of multilingual text-making and interpretation calls for further research from an interdisciplinary language policy and legal angle.

In order to address this gap and ensure the generalizability of results, data sets obtained from corpus analysis, institutional legal and policy documents, and structured interviews on several institutional contexts will be triangulated within each setting and compared across settings. The institutions examined include (1) the preeminent intergovernmental organization for global cooperation, the United Nations (UN), and its International Court of Justice (ICJ); (2) a more specialized multilateral entity, also with a highly developed range of rule-making and monitoring functions, the World Trade Organization (WTO); and (3) the four main institutions of the European Union (EU) as the world's largest supranational union: the European Commission, the Council of the EU, the European Parliament, and the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU). The corpora used for the analysis of multilingual text categories are those built for the LETRINT project on legal translation in international institutional settings (see corpus-building details in Prieto Ramos, Cerutti, & Guzmán, 2019).1 They include texts produced in 3 years over a decade (2005, 2010 and 2015) in the three languages common to all of the contexts examined (with the exception of the ICJ): English, French, and Spanish. Finally, interviews on translation and quality management practices were conducted with 45 heads of translation services (and quality advisers at the EU) in Brussels, Geneva, Luxembourg, New York, The Hague and Vienna.

1 “Legal Translation in International Institutional Settings: Scope, Strategies and Quality Markers,” led by the author and supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation through a Consolidator Grant.
The Legal Dimension of International Institutional Missions and Texts

One of the central functions of intergovernmental and supranational organizations in society is regulating the areas of competence and cooperation they are entrusted with by their Member States. This is reflected in the wording of institutional missions for the general public. For instance, the EU’s website describes the organization as “based on the rule of law”; it states that “everything the EU does is founded on treaties, voluntarily and democratically agreed by its EU countries,” and it highlights the lawmaking and judicial functions of its four main institutions; whereas the UN’s website mentions that “the development of, and respect for, international law has been a key part” of its work since the UN Charter set the objective “to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained.” Finally, the WTO describes itself as “the only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations […] it operates a global system of trade rules, it acts as a forum for negotiating trade agreements, it settles trade disputes between its members and it supports the needs of developing countries.”

In fact, the creation and functioning of these and similar institutions rely on binding instruments and legal commitments whose observance is monitored by the institutional bodies themselves in the pursuit of shared objectives, from the foundational treaties or agreements (generally centered on the guiding principles, mechanisms and procedures for decision-making) to more specific regulatory instruments for concrete policy implementation (usually more technical). Lower-ranking decisions and instruments derive from, and must be consistent with, higher-level pieces of international law. They all form a legal framework that can be compared to the hierarchy of laws found in national jurisdictions.

In Legal Translation Studies, Šarčević (1997) and Cao (2007), among others, focus on international lawmaking instruments when addressing institutional legal contexts, in line with the priority attention devoted to legislative genres within the field. From a legal perspective, however, other key functions often neglected in Translation Studies account for significant volumes of multilingual text production, most notably, compliance monitoring and adjudication, including both contentious and advisory proceedings (Prieto Ramos, 2014).

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2 See https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-in-brief. In its “easy to read version,” the website presents these functions as follows:

“The European Commission suggests laws. The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union discuss these laws and decide if they want these laws to happen in Europe. If they decide that a law must happen in Europe, all countries of the European Union must work to make this law happen in them […]. The Court of Justice of the European Union […] makes sure that all laws happen correctly in the European Union.” (https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/easy-to-read) (original emphasis).


Building on this inclusive approach, a full mapping of institutional text production over 3 years (including all publicly available texts in the three languages and settings of the LETRINT project) has revealed other functions connected to those noted, encompassing preparatory work (e.g., technical reports in lawmaking processes) and derived communication (e.g., activity reports, press releases), as well as internal administrative functions instrumental to each institution (see full categorization matrix in Table 22.1).

From a more ideological language policy angle, and not strictly based on corpus analysis, Koskinen’s (2014, pp. 487–488) classification identifies similar “regimes of textual and translation practices involved in the art of government,” from more “introverted” to more “extroverted” layers: “maintenance” (“foundational, documentary, administrative”); “regulative” (“juridical, official, legal”); “implementational” (“informative,

### Table 22.1 LETRINT Text Categorization Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Functional Categories</th>
<th>Subcategories Based on Relevance to Main Function (Illustrative Genres)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Law- and policymaking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Hard law</td>
<td>a. Key (e.g., agreements, regulations, directives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Secondary (input, instrumental or derived; e.g., technical reports, proposals, minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. Soft law and other policy formulation</td>
<td>a. Key (e.g., declarations, resolutions, guidelines)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Secondary (input, instrumental or derived; e.g., records, technical reports, letters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Monitoring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1. Mandatory compliance monitoring</td>
<td>a. Key (e.g., States' reports, monitoring bodies' reports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Secondary (input, instrumental or derived; e.g., procedural notes, background papers, letters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. Pre-accession monitoring</td>
<td>a. Key (e.g., communications, questions and replies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Secondary (input, instrumental or derived; e.g., reports, statements, notes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3. Other monitoring and implementation matters</td>
<td>a. Key (e.g., reports, working papers, communications)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Secondary (input, instrumental or derived; e.g., agendas, press releases, notes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Adjudication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Key (primary case documents, e.g., requests, appeals, judgments)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Secondary (input, instrumental or derived; e.g., activity reports, summaries, press releases)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Administrative functions (not included in other categories)</td>
<td>(e.g., budgets, reports, staff notices)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1. Organization's human resources, finance, and procurement</td>
<td>(e.g., minutes, presentations, reports)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Prieto Ramos (2019, p. 40).*
instructive”); and “communicative, image building” (“symbolic, persuasive, political”). She places “regulation” at the center of what she describes as “governing by translation” (Koskinen, 2014, p. 488).

The textual mapping conducted as part of the LETRINT project has brought additional insights into the components of institutional translational activity, not only as regards the interconnection between text categories but also the translation volumes per functional category and genre (Prieto Ramos, 2017). Multilingual lawmaking documents, the most normative expression of institutional missions, are systematically found at the top of each legal hierarchy, but their degree of enforceability and their quantitative prominence vary per institution. Legal acts constitute the largest subcategory of translation at the EU institutions (except for the CJEU). Together with policy documents, they account for approximately half of their translation work. In this supranational context, the application of legislation is overseen by the European Commission through internal procedures where not all documents are translated or publicly available, which explains the lower volume of accessible texts on monitoring and implementation matters. The reverse applies to the WTO and, more acutely, the UN, where soft law predominates over hard law, but both subcategories are quantitatively very limited compared to texts translated in monitoring procedures. Finally, documents translated in adjudication account for the smallest proportion at the UN (under 4%, essentially at the ICJ), as opposed to almost one third in the case of the EU (within the CJEU) and the WTO (dispute settlement bodies).

The key legal dimension of institutional translation is confirmed by those responsible for language services. During the LETRINT interviews, they unanimously highlighted the quantitative and qualitative relevance of the translation of texts perceived as “most legal.” Translation departments’ representatives from the three EU institutions involved in producing multilingual legal acts (the Commission, the Council and the Parliament) described legislative translation as their main activity and provided figures that roughly correspond to those obtained in the LETRINT project. In the case of lawyer-linguists at the Council and the Parliament (who were interviewed separately as they form a separate body in charge of legal quality assurance of texts), the ordinary legislative procedure actually accounts for the bulk of their work, and the rest of what they do is also legal text revision. Their very existence as a staff category with a legal background shows the pivotal role assigned to legal linguistic accuracy in EU multilingual lawmaking. At the CJEU, lawyer-linguists are actually entrusted with all translation work, which is devoted to judicial proceedings (including secondary administrative and derived texts for or on the Court’s functions), and is thus essentially perceived as legal translation.

UN informants also placed the legal dimension at the core of their translation activities, particularly as regards the work of the International Law Commission and, in Vienna, the UN Commission on International Trade Law, as well as Security Council and General Assembly resolutions (at the headquarters in New York) and human rights treaty body monitoring procedures (mostly in Geneva). Finally, at the WTO, language service heads identified dispute settlement as the most prominent (albeit thematically

5 The breakdown of translation volumes will not be examined in detail here.
diverse) area of legal translation within the organization, while they also recognized the relevance of legal awareness in framing most of the translation work according to the WTO agreements and not only key legal genres.

THE BREADTH OF MULTILINGUALISM: LANGUAGE DIVERSITY AT WORK

What is the connection between institutional legal functions and language regimes in terms of language coverage in practice? What determines the variations in the number of languages of translation, if any, in specific contexts or text types? The most salient difference between the language regimes of the settings under examination has a legal explanation: The EU’s inclusive regime comprising official languages of all of its Member States responds to the legal obligation to publish its legal acts in the languages of the countries where they are directly applicable. As an integral part of the law of Member States, from a legal and political perspective, it would be unthinkable to exclude some of these States from the principle of equal treatment for legal purposes. However, this level of linguistic inclusion would be impossible to implement with 193 Member States at the UN (where the official languages are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish) or with 164 at the WTO (whose official languages are English, French and Spanish).

This reflects the more distant position of intergovernmental organizations from national legal systems, not only in how international law is ratified at the domestic level through specific procedures but also as regards the languages used to authenticate legal instruments and communicate policies globally. As pointed out by the UN, its six official languages “are the mother tongue or second language of 2.8 billion people, nearly half the world population, and are official languages in more than half the States in the world.”6 However, only English and French are working languages for internal communication of the UN Secretariat and the entire organization, and they are the only official languages of the ICJ, while the other UN official languages can be working languages in other UN-specific organs or regional bodies.7

This means that the communication of many Member States (e.g., to fulfill national reporting obligations) and their citizens (e.g., in human rights individual complaint procedures) with the UN may require additional translation outside the official channels of the UN language services or using languages in which national representatives are not necessarily competent. Apart from the further linguistic distance mentioned, the additional arrangements or adaptations made from languages that are not official at the UN may represent an additional disadvantage for the communication of these nationals (including in negotiation processes) and higher risk of quality gaps in their

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7 For a legal and historical overview of UN languages, see http://ask.un.org/faq/14463.
notifications, which in turn may undermine effective communication in monitoring or coordination procedures.

The selection of six languages also entails limiting the linguistic scope for the UN’s dissemination of official documents at the local level. Concerns have been raised on this issue within the UN, for example, at the 2016 Symposium on Language and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One of the conclusions pointed to the need to enhance multilingualism in outreach activities: “The rhetoric surrounding the SDGs stresses inclusiveness, two-directional communication, and reaching the world’s least advantaged citizens, but our disregard for the very essence of human communication—namely language—can easily make a mockery of such rhetoric and close us in on ourselves” (Marinotti, 2016, p. 9). In order to ensure broad dissemination among local communities, “[t]ranslating key documents into a handful of official languages or lingua francas is not sufficient” (Marinotti, 2016, p. 7). One of the solutions proposed at the symposium was to establish “a global network of linguistic actors at different levels necessary to create a truly global, democratic, and accessible information network, which must include the use of traditional and local media” (Marinotti, 2016, p. 7). Yet, it is worth noticing how the institutional “core business” is associated with “key documents” available in “a handful of official or lingua francas.”

This selective approach is even more marked at the WTO, with three official languages. Demands by China and the Russian Federation to add their UN official languages to the WTO language regime at the time of their accessions, in 2001 and 2012, respectively, were refused on budgetary grounds. In fact, even the most inclusive regimes apply pragmatic criteria to reconcile legal obligations with resource and feasibility limitations. In the case of the EU, official languages do not include all (co-)official languages at the regional level but only national languages proposed by Member States before accession and unanimously approved by all Member States at the Council. Special agreements have been signed with Spain and the United Kingdom for the translation of documents needed for communication between EU institutions and EU citizens in (co-)official regional languages that are not EU official languages, such as Catalan and Welsh. Furthermore, as noted by Meylaerts (2011, p. 747), immigrants’ languages fall outside “national citizens’ and territorial minorities’ linguistic and translational rights.”

If we focus on the Union’s official languages, legal priorities are recognized in the EU’s language policy provisions, which leave considerable leeway for establishing mixed systems for internal and external communication. According to Council Regulation No 1 determining the languages to be used by the European Economic Community, “[r]egulations and other documents of general application shall be drafted” in the official languages (article 4), and these must also be the languages of publication of the Official Journal (article 5), whereas the EU institutions “may stipulate in their rules of procedure which of the languages are to be used in specific cases” (article 6). In practice, while legislation and “documents of major public importance or interest are produced in all 24 official languages[,] other documents (e.g. correspondence with national authorities and decisions addressed to particular individuals or entities) are translated only into the languages needed,” and “procedural languages”
are used for “internal business” (e.g., English, French and, to a lesser extent, German at the European Commission).  

The European Parliament applies a flexible pragmatic approach based on “users’ real needs,” described as “resource-efficient full multilingualism” in the Parliament’s Code of Conduct on Multilingualism (Decision of the Bureau of the European Parliament of 16 June 2014, article 1). According to this approach, preparatory documents may be available in a small number of languages or even just one depending on users’ needs, particularly in parliamentary committees (see also, e.g., Gazzola, 2006). Overall, English has been the main working language across institutions, particularly since the 2004 EU enlargement (see below, “Language Asymmetries in Multilingual Text-Making and Interpretation”). The only exception is found at the CJEU, where the only procedural language is French and a system of four additional “pivot” languages (English, German, Italian and Spanish) was introduced in 2004 for documents such as requests for a preliminary ruling and Advocate Generals’ opinions (see explanation of the CJEU’s “hourglass model” of translation management in Wright, 2018).

The data obtained in the LETRINT project confirm the reality of several coexisting layers of full and reduced multilingualism at the EU. The first mapping and downloading of all texts available in at least one of the project languages revealed the most marked difference in favor of English among the three settings analyzed (see Tables 22.2 and 22.3), with 62.54% more texts accessible in English than in French and 76.56% more

| Table 22.2 Number of Texts Compiled from 2005, 2010 and 2015 per Language |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                                 | Texts in English | Texts in French | Texts in Spanish |
| European Union                  | 174,174         | 107,160         | 98,646           |
| United Nations                  | 30,859          | 27,725          | 22,222           |
| World Trade Organization        | 17,911          | 17,458          | 17,485           |
| Total                           | 222,944         | 152,343         | 138,353          |

| Table 22.3 Difference Between the Number of Texts per Language in Each Setting |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                                 | Texts in French | Texts in Spanish | Texts in French | Texts in Spanish |
| Texts in English versus…        | +62.54%         | +76.56%         | +10.3%          | +38.87%         |
| Texts in French versus…         | +8.63%          | +24.76%         | –              | –0.15%          |

than in Spanish, as opposed to +11.3% English versus French and +38.87% English versus Spanish at the UN, and +2.59% and +2.44%, respectively, at the WTO. These figures show a clear correlation between the number of official languages and the use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) for certain purposes. The most important difference between the use of French and Spanish, however, is found at the UN (+24.76%), which reflects the role of French as a working language together with English across UN bodies and its status as an official language at the ICJ. By contrast, the number of texts available in the three official languages of the WTO is remarkably even, with only a slight surplus of texts in English and the only positive (but negligible) comparative difference found for Spanish over French in the institutions examined.

The documents downloaded include drafts and exclude webpages and texts that are not available from public databases. Their volumes, which were compared with statistics provided by the institutions for triangulation purposes, offer a very comprehensive picture of language regime implementation and the growing use of ELF at the EU in particular. No major diachronic variations were found in the comparative proportions shown in Table 22.3 at the UN and the WTO between 2005, 2010 and 2015. However, variations were significant in the EU databases, particularly at the European Parliament (see Table 22.4), where the number of texts in English more than doubled those in French over one decade. They were three times higher than the volume in the second most used language in 2015, as opposed to a modest difference in 2005. The EU database that yielded the most marked difference for that year was the Public Register of the Council of the EU, with English texts almost doubling those in French, a trend that climbed steadily through the 10-year span covered by the corpora.

This trend is congruent with the pattern (in the three LETRINT settings) of prioritization of key legal functions for full multilingualism, as opposed to administrative and secondary functions (input, instrumental or derived), which are subject to more frequent

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Council of the EU - Public Register</td>
<td>10,576</td>
<td>6,379</td>
<td>14,875</td>
<td>6,494</td>
<td>12,151</td>
<td>4,911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curia – Press releases</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUR-Lex</td>
<td>11,466</td>
<td>11,253</td>
<td>12,230</td>
<td>11,728</td>
<td>11,300</td>
<td>11,456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Commission – Press releases</td>
<td>3,549</td>
<td>2,480</td>
<td>3,948</td>
<td>2,393</td>
<td>1,327</td>
<td>732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44,532</td>
<td>35,481</td>
<td>61,471</td>
<td>42,233</td>
<td>68,171</td>
<td>29,446</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9 Apart from the limited stability and durability of webpages, and the resulting traceability issues for a diachronic comparative study, web contents would overlap, to a large extent, with fact sheets, press releases and other genres compiled as part of the project.
Variations of multilingualism. For instance, the Language Service of the Council’s General Secretariat has acknowledged that it translates “[a]lmost all legislation and many major policy documents” into all official languages, whereas “many other documents are not translated at all or are only translated into a limited number of languages”; it has estimated that “70% of the total pages produced for the Council are not translated at all since, for practical purposes, most of the Working Parties work on the basis of a text drafted in a single language” (General Secretariat of the Council, 2012, p. 8). In practice, as in the case of Parliament committees and internal procedures at the Commission, the chosen lingua franca is most often English.

As mentioned above (see “The Legal Dimension of International Institutional Missions and Texts”) and confirmed during the LETRINT interviews, due to the less visible nature of the Commission’s monitoring role, the use of English as a pivot or only language of communication in confidential investigations is not registered in public document statistics. The translation of national legislation into English for monitoring purposes actually accounts for an important volume of work into that language at the Commission. LETRINT’s textual mapping results also confirm that translation and publication policies in compliance and policy enforcement procedures involve a varying (reduced) number of languages, including English or the Commission’s three procedural languages and the languages of the Member States affected by the procedure in question, where these languages are different.

The main guiding principle seems to be pragmatic needs, as stated by the Commission (see note 8), particularly as decisions have implications for specific States and stakeholders. For example, fact sheets on the Commission’s infringement decisions are accessible from the Commission’s press release database in all official languages. However, full press releases about letters of formal notice and referrals to the CJEU are only available in the Commission’s three procedural languages and the languages of the Member States affected. In the case of decisions in antitrust and merger procedures, English is the preferred procedural language for full publication together with the language of the country affected, should this be different from English. This explains the figures obtained from the dedicated press release database of the Commission (see Table 22.4). It also illustrates the approach adopted for the translation of web content (not mapped but partially represented in the LETRINT project; see note 9), which is summarized as follows in The EU Internet Handbook for information providers:

Content should be published in all official EU languages:
- if users would be seriously disadvantaged by not having the content available in their language, e.g. unable to exercise basic rights, understand basic obligations
- if needed to ensure the right to participation — to enable the public to contribute to the policy-making process through consultations
- if publication in all languages is legally required
- for stable corporate content.

In other cases, the range of languages should be evidence-based and chosen according to:
who will use the information and for what purposes
• which languages the users are likely to understand
• the availability of resources to translate and manage multilingual content.\textsuperscript{10}

It adds that “content for a specialist audience” (including technical information, research funding calls, speeches, campaigns, fora and blogs) “may be published in just a few languages, or even just one.”

At the UN, some background information and questions submitted in monitoring procedures are only available in the language of the country under review and English. Otherwise, the variations of language coverage seem to be more circumscribed to the administrative uses of working languages. Overall, across all the institutions examined, given the predominant use of English as a lingua franca, English translation services tend to devote considerable attention to input documents that are not necessarily translated into all languages.

**The Depth of Multilingualism: Underlying Hierarchies of Languages and Texts**

Once the multilingual scope of institutional communication has been briefly described, we will focus on the properties of that “multilingual fabric” in the light of its translation-mediated making, that is, the “depth” of multilingualism as revealed in the way texts are produced in their different language versions. This raises questions such as the following: How do the legal hierarchies and requirements of international and supranational law condition translation strategies and quality assurance practices? To what extent is language parity fact or aspiration in such processes? What are the implications for the interpretation of multilingual law?

**Language Asymmetries in Multilingual Text-Making and Interpretation**

The first aspect to be considered when analyzing the properties of multilingualism is the nature of its creation or “fabrication,” starting with the drafting of originals and the directionality of translational activity. In the settings under examination, English prevails as

the main drafting language of originals (with the exception of the CJEU\textsuperscript{11} and the ICJ\textsuperscript{12}), and translation is the predominant means of producing multilingual texts. The most remarkable alternative to translation, a system of co-drafting implemented at the Third UN Conference on the Law of the Sea between 1973 and 1982, has remained an exception. The Drafting Committee of the Conference created “language groups” that worked on the treaty texts in the six UN official languages and whose coordinators met regularly in order to avoid interlinguistic discrepancies (see Nelson, 1986; United Nations, 1985, pp. 362–371). While it was concluded that language groups facilitated the “task of coping with drafting problems” (United Nations, 1985, p. 365), co-drafting techniques were subsequently abandoned. The UN addressed the topic of “drafting and languages” as part of its “Review of the Multilateral Treaty-Making Process” (title of General Assembly resolution 36/112 of 10 December 1981 and of a final report on the subject published in 1985). The 32nd, 35th and 37th sessions of the General Assembly raised the following two questions, among others summarized in the report (United Nations, 1985, p. 131):

- “Should treaties continue to be formulated simultaneously in all languages in which their text is to be authentic, or should they originally be formulated in only one or two languages, with additional versions established by a special procedure later?” The majority position was in favor of the status quo.

- “If negotiation in multiple languages is to continue, should the example of the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea be followed, of establishing a subgroup for each language […]?” Despite several positive replies, there were also negative reactions, and an overwhelming lack of explicit interest in adopting the co-drafting technique.

The debate, however, illustrated what was becoming the norm in negotiation processes across international organizations. The Spanish delegation, for instance, stressed the need to “prevent one language (generally English) from gradually monopolizing such work” and argued that “[t]he increasing informality of negotiations, the use of small negotiating groups and the logistical difficulties of holding several meetings at once . . . are leading to the artificial imposition of a single language, placing non-English-speaking delegations at a disadvantage” (United Nations, 1985, p. 135). This statement is indicative of an institutionalized practice based on pragmatism and language prestige rather than mandatory procedural provisions (see above, “The Breadth of Multilingualism: Language Diversity at Work”). English is often chosen for drafting purposes as it is chosen for global communication in trade, finance or innovation. This de facto order reproduces a “hierarchy of languages” in which English is “the key

\textsuperscript{11} As the Court’s working language, French is the language of deliberations and drafting of judgments but most often not the mother tongue of legal drafters. On the implications, see, for example, McAuliffe (2012).

\textsuperscript{12} Court orders and judgments are prepared and published in the two official languages of the Court, and the French text is often authoritative.
medium for prestigious purposes” and “proficiency in English correlates with socio-economic privilege” (Phillipson, 2003, p. 7; see also, e.g., De Schutter & Robichaud, 2015; Van Parijs, 2011).

In turn, this hierarchy contributes to a “gulf between the Anglophone elites who research, discuss, and write policies, and the billions called on to implement these policies at the individual level, creating levels of frustration that may remain unnoticed by the elites themselves, precisely because of the monolingual environment in which their deliberations take place” (Marinotti, 2016, p. 2). At another recent UN symposium on multilingualism, the same issue was highlighted as “reducing communication to lingua franca can lead to diplomatic miscommunication and misunderstandings between Member States and the loss of cultural nuance”; diplomats were urged to “negotiate legally binding documents in other languages and not simply in lingua franca even in informal settings” (McEntee-Atalianis, Tonkin, Iwasaki, & Lajiadou, 2018).

This state of affairs fosters a systemic strategy of “translation from a central language” (Pym, 2008, p. 86), rather than full multidirectional translation as expected of “complete institutional multilingualism” (Koskinen, 2014, p. 485; Meylaerts, 2011, p. 746). In the case of EU institutions in particular, other major (working, procedural or pivot) languages are also given a particular status that restricts full multidirectionality for the sake of cost-effectiveness (see above, “The Breadth of Multilingualism: Language Diversity at Work”). All in all, like the warp strung lengthwise on a loom, it is most often English (French in the case of the CJEU) that constitutes the basis of multilingual texts, and this conditions the rest of the text-making process since English gives shape to the original concepts and reasoning (see also Hernández, 2010).

A UN diplomat recently suggested that “a ‘culture of translation’, in which English was the norm and other working languages were languages of translation, was stifling the voices and discourses of other language groups and acting against the principles of multilingualism” (McEntee-Atalianis et al., 2018). In an organization in which “multilingualism refers to the use, in fairness and parity, [of] its official and working languages” (Fall & Zhang, 2011, p. 2), language imbalances have been a recurrent matter of concern and the subject of two recent Joint Inspection Unit reports (Fall & Zhang, 2011; Kudryavtsev & Ouedraogo, 2003) aimed at examining and improving multilingualism in the UN system.

At the WTO, trade negotiations and other core business are carried out in English, which is the language of the overwhelming majority of originals, although an important proportion of submissions by the parties to trade disputes are made in Spanish or French. Between 2005 and 2007, exceptionally, one of those disputes (including the relevant panel report) was fully conducted in Spanish (Mexico — Anti-Dumping Duties on Steel Pipes and Tubes from Guatemala). In this case, the parties were Spanish-speaking countries. However, in many other instances, States whose languages are not official at the WTO (or the other institutions) use English for their submissions (see above, 13)}
“The Breadth of Multilingualism: Language Diversity at Work”). This kind of situation was raised at several LETRINT interviews as a source of quality issues, particularly in the case of the UN and the WTO (see examples in Hewson, 2013, pp. 270–274). The use of English as a lingua franca also means that this language is appropriated by its institutional users, of multiple mother tongues, thus contributing to the development of “institutional Englishes” tailored to organizations’ needs but of reduced vocabulary and idiomaticity, and distant from “local Englishes.” Each institutional variant of ELF is the hybrid result of input from native and non-native drafters of various professional backgrounds. The case of “Eurospeak” or “Eurolect” has attracted particular attention (see, e.g., Goffin, 1994; Sandrelli, 2018).

The fact that EU English is the only variant of “Eurospeak” that is not primarily mediated by translation (i.e., by native language professionals) may have compounded text readability problems over the years. As noted by Jeremy Gardner in his latest compilation of “misused English words and expressions in EU publications,” “English-speaking readers should be able to read [EU] documents in versions that are linguistically at least as good as the translated versions (something that is currently often not the case)” (Gardner, 2016, p. 2). It is hence no surprise that, as early as 1999, an internal campaign, “Fight the Fog,” was launched by the European Commission to promote plain English15; and a similar call was publicly made by UK minister Peter Hain in 2001 to simplify what he called “Euro-babble,” “virtually unintelligible to a new Europe minister” like himself, “let alone an average voter.”16 The potential impact of the “Euro-babble” on UK citizens’ perceived distance from EU politics remains a relevant question in the context of Brexit (see below, “Translation Strategies and Quality Assurance Priorities”).

Such language asymmetries tend to be reproduced in legal text interpretation patterns, despite the equal authenticity principle enshrined in article 33(1) of the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT) and in EU law (see, e.g., Derlén, 2009; Kuner, 1991). As noted by international lawyer Shabtai Rosenne in the 1980s, “the interpretation of multilingual texts cannot be divorced from the manner of their preparation” (Rosenne, 1987, p. 694). Consequently, the weight assigned in practice to each language usually corresponds to its status in the original drafting process, which in turn contributes to consolidating the role of the language of negotiation and travaux préparatoires. It is no coincidence that, as predicted by Nelson (1986, p. 199), the unique co-drafting method adopted by the Drafting Committee of the Third UN Conference on the Law of the Sea could have “the effect of giving added importance to the comparison of the authentic texts as a means of interpretation, perhaps even to a greater extent than is envisaged in the Convention on the Law of Treaties itself.” As pointed out by Rosenne

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14 He identifies five categories of problems “(i) problems of syntax; (ii) lexical choice and collocation; (iii) specific linguistic choices, and in particular the use of modality and aspect; (iv) other miscellaneous language problems; and (v) the presupposed cultural background.”


(1987, p. 695), this was illustrated by the Case concerning filleting within the Gulf of St. Lawrence between Canada and France. In its award of July 17, 1986, the arbitration tribunal compared the six language versions of the phrase “fishing vessels and equipment” (in article 62 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea) in order to clarify its meaning.

Paradoxically, in the EU context, where comparative interpretation is not a subsidiary rule as in article 33 of the VCLT (to be applied only if the presumption of semantic unity is refuted) but a mandatory one at the national and supranational levels, the comparison of the growing number of language versions is more aspiration than practice. The fact that the language of originals is not acknowledged in EU legal acts exacerbates what Schilling (2010), among others, considers “illusory” equal authenticity of all language versions, and the idea that the number of authentic versions should be limited for the sake of foreseeability and legal certainty.

According to Derlén (2011), the paradox between the theory of CJEU rules of interpretation and the reality of their impracticality contributes to multilingualism being perceived as “a problem, a difficulty and an obstacle” (p. 143), rather than an asset. He aptly argues that, as national courts are seemingly aware of “de facto originals” of EU law (p. 154), the situation could be improved by recognizing the role of English and French, together with the national language, for mandatory comparison. This proposal would be consistent with the gradual shift whereby most EU legislation is currently drafted in English, while the CJEU has maintained the previously dominant EU language, French, as its working language.

Overall, an analysis of explicit instances of comparison in the case law of all the settings covered by the LETRINT project (see Prieto Ramos & Pacho Aljanati, 2018) suggests that, rather than being fully embraced by the courts as a natural way of acknowledging multilingualism and defining legal meaning, comparative interpretation is more often (albeit rarely) triggered by the need to resolve divergences detected by the courts (especially in advisory proceedings at the ICJ and the CJEU) or to consider language-specific arguments raised by the parties to support their cases (notably, at the WTO Appellate Body; see, e.g., Condon, 2010). The correlation between the scope of the language regimes and the frequency and feasibility of comparative interpretation must be nuanced by legal considerations, but overall it serves to illustrate the real “depth” of multilingualism of international and EU law as applied.

Translation Strategies and Quality Assurance Priorities

How is the “multicolor weft” interwoven under and over the “warp of originals” to create institutional textual output? What are the priorities in translation decision-making?

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17 See full award in Reports of International Arbitral Awards (Vol. 19, pp. 223–296, see n. 22, p. 258) (available from https://dx.doi.org/10.18356/19b200ec-en-fr).
18 In Case 283/81, Srl CILFIT and Lanificio di Gavardo SpA v. Ministry of Health (EU:C: 1982:335, para. 18), the CJEU established that “an interpretation of a provision of Community law thus involves a comparison of the different language versions.”
Translation at International Organizations

To what extent are institutional legal hierarchies a determining factor in setting those priorities and in assuring the quality of the output? Considering that the ultimate goal of all institutional drafters is effective communication to fulfill institutional functions within the applicable legal framework (see Characterizing Institutional Translation), translation strategies must meet, above all, the requirements of legal certainty, predictability and consistency between institutional texts. This calls for maximum accuracy and concordance between all languages in which the function is accomplished, that is, “fidelity to the single instrument” (Šarčević, 1997, p. 215) as well as to precedents and institutional discursive conventions, which can be traced through organization-specific guidelines and databases.

As noted by Koskinen (2008, p. 19), “all institutions constrain and regulate behavior”, and this applies to all institutional drafters and roles, including translators. It is no surprise that features associated with institutional translation such as anonymity, standardization, normativity and authoritativeness (see, e.g., Koskinen, 2000; Prieto Ramos, 2018; Schäffner, Tcaciuc, & Tesseur, 2014) are common to the broader lawmaking, monitoring and adjudicative functions to which institutional translation is instrumental. Such features ultimately derive from the very nature and requirements of each international legal order and its mandatory procedures.

Together with accuracy and consistency, other priorities in translation decision-making can be associated to the interaction between supranational and national law. On the one hand, when establishing shared notions at the international level, neutrality and detachment from national system-bound concepts is expected in order to avoid confusion and overlaps. This is explicitly mentioned in the Joint Practical Guide of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, principle 5.3.2: “terms which are too closely linked to a particular national legal system should be avoided” (European Union, 2015, p. 18). However, national and supranational meanings of the same term may coexist within the same legal order as confirmed by the CJEU, for example, in Case 283/81 Srl CILFIT and Lanificio di Gavardo SpA v. Ministry of Health [1982] ECR 3415 and Case C-103/01 Commission v. Germany [2003] ECR I-5369.

On the other hand, when dealing with national system-bound terms in monitoring and adjudication processes, the specificity of the national system must be reflected in the target languages; reformulation techniques range from the borrowing (e.g., systematic in the case of references to national judicial bodies in CJEU texts) to literal or conceptual formulations (more frequent at intergovernmental organizations), avoiding misleading references to realities that are too specific to a target-language national system (e.g., reformulating High Court in the context of a common-law country report as Audiencia Nacional, a court specific to Spain). This effort of “neutrality” is obviously more challenging at intergovernmental organizations, in scenarios where a particular target language is the official language of several national jurisdictions, and “common denominators” or “conceptual compromises” must be found for the entire language community.

Finally, readability (essentially understood as text accessibility, clarity or comprehensibility), which is presupposed as a central concern and objective of any professional translator, takes higher priority in the case of explanatory texts for general dissemination,
such as press releases and webpages on institutional policies. Curiously, feedback from the LETRINT interviews suggests that websites have not been a priority for institutional language services for many years. The translation of websites is either assigned to specific units or regarded as an addition to the “core business.” This seems to support the idea of a secondary derived role from a legal perspective. However, this does not mean that webpages are less important for institutional communication. On the contrary, the relevance of these texts in the search for legitimacy, accountability and recognition has become paramount in the era of the internet and other mass media. It is through this interface, rather than legal instruments, that most citizens learn about the work of international organizations and form opinions about the uses of their taxes to fund them.

As also concluded by Schäffner et al. (2014), even within the same institution, translation priorities may shift depending on genres and purposes. It is institutions’ “functions in society” rather than ideological aspects that “play the most important role for translation practices and translation strategies” and “the way translation is organised, conceptualised and executed” (Schäffner et al., 2014, p. 508). As is apparent from our analysis, the legal dimension of such functions condition translation strategies to a large extent. However, focus on “core business” priorities and primary demands of accuracy and consistency should not prevail at the expense of idiomaticity and readability. According to Koskinen’s own experience as an institutional translator at the European Commission, “the overall institutional attitude […] does not encourage any degree of cultural adaptation, nor perceive translators as experts in intercultural communication,” but there is “a clear, albeit unwritten, preference for surface-level similarity, which is assumed to guarantee that readers of the various translations all get the same message” (Koskinen, 2000, p. 54).

While this attitude has certainly evolved since the turn of the millennium and cannot be generalized, it is true that institutional translation habits are predisposed to strict formal concordance between language versions. They tend to look inward into the complex “self-maintenance” machinery of accumulated conventions and procedures, and focus on the immediate institutional recipients (revisers, commissioning departments, delegations, etc.), rather than looking outward. It is hence pertinent to ask whether the benefits of further creativity and cultural adaption (as restricted as they may be to specific genres and purposes) are sufficiently considered. Nonetheless, translation cannot be a scapegoat for the poor quality of original texts. According to our experience and observation in the field, translations may actually improve the readability and overall quality of complex or poorly written original texts through a combination of skills, including a fair amount of wit and creativity that may not always be apparent to the target reader.

Translation quality assurance practices, a pivotal component of translation service provision, also align with the hierarchy of key and secondary legal functions that permeate the conceptualization and features of translation outlined in this chapter. LETRINT interviewees pointed to binding legal instruments and adjudicative decisions, as well as texts involving a high level of risk or political visibility (including parliamentary or ministerial resolutions and other plenary documents), as the most revised and the least frequently outsourced. The reverse applies to secondary functions, particularly administrative, input and, more generally, documents with a low impact or a short life span.
Calls for tenders, competition notices, speeches and press releases tend to occupy an intermediate position, depending on the institution and the sensitivity of the matters or the actors involved.

While all institutions conduct risk assessments according to similar criteria, the translation quality guidelines of the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Translation (DGT) stand out for their scope and level of detail. They are an exemplar of the recent trend toward a more dynamic conceptualization of quality based on the functionalist principle of “fitness for purpose,” that is, according to the priorities of the communicative situation and the relevant translation strategy, rather than a “one-size-fits-all” approach to quality. In these guidelines, DGT quality advisers identify five text categories and establish risk assessments, recommendations on sensitive or problematic aspects, and the minimum level of quality control for each category and subcategory. The text categories are “A. Legal documents; B. Policy and administrative documents; C. Information for the public; D. Input for EU legislation, policy formulation and administration” (Directorate-General for Translation, 2015, p. 4).

As stressed by some quality advisers during the LETRINT interviews, these categories are not intended as a strict hierarchy, but most translation managers perceived them as a hierarchical pyramid. In fact, all A subcategories (legal acts and documents used for inquiries, procurement, funding schemes and recruitment) as well as a B subcategory (“high profile documents such as white and green papers, multiannual strategy documents, highly political communications” [Directorate-General for Translation, 2015, p. 11]) concentrate the most systematic recommendations for full revision. In the case of information for the public (press releases and articles, speeches, leaflets, brochures, web texts, etc.), special attention is drawn to audience, purpose, readability, naturalness and usability, but revision can be combined with review, except for “high impact documents such as articles for publication in the press or press releases on topics sensitive for the member state of the language in question, for which full revision is recommended” (Directorate-General for Translation, 2015, p. 15). Finally, lower quality requirements are set for most input under category D when documents are “for internal use and not for publication” (Directorate-General for Translation, 2015, p. 17).

The discourse employed in these recommendations also reflects the underlying layers of primary legal and secondary institutional functions, and the corresponding translation priorities, aimed at a compromise between accuracy and consistency in law- and policymaking, and enhanced adaptation and readability when informing the general public about the “core business.” Translation at the Commission is described as “institutional translation and multilingual law-making” (Directorate-General for Translation, 2015, p. 2). “This text production” must “comply with the legal requirements of multilingualism, but also with the Commission's political objectives: bridging the gap between the EU and its citizens; involving citizens and stakeholders in the political process at European level; and convincing them of the added value of European cooperation” (Directorate-General for Translation, 2015, p. 1). When referring to readability in category C, recommendations clearly warn against literality by inertia, as critics of traditional attitudes would argue:
[...] word-for-word translation or sticking closely to the surface structure of the original is seldom the way to go. The message should be clear and the language idiomatic so, if necessary, paragraphs and sentences may be split, merged, restructured or rearranged. Sometimes the semantic content or the rhetorical means used in the original may have to be modified to suit the audience.

(Directorate-General for Translation, 2015, p. 12)

It will be relevant to examine the impact of these remarkable efforts to improve DGT’s quality assurance policy in a context of resource constraints and increasing outsourcing (see Strandvik, 2018). As in the other settings analyzed, it is financial limitations that ultimately drive pragmatic decisions in line with policy priorities. The proportions and modes of quality control of in-house and outsourced translations respond to similar criteria but vary between institutions, text types and even languages within the same organization.

The details of quality assurance implementation will not be addressed here. It is worth mentioning, however, that a new sense of urgency to improve the clarity and effectiveness of communication with the public has emerged at the EU institutions in recent years. The threat of Brexit and other forms of anti-EU discourse in Europe has certainly stimulated more determined actions in this direction, as illustrated by the impressive multimedia campaign “What Europe Does for Me”19 launched in the runup to the 2019 European Parliament elections.

Concluding Remarks

The combined analyses of institutional text corpora, legal frameworks, language policy documents and translation managers’ (and quality advisers’) perceptions have provided ample evidence of how legal factors, together with financial and political considerations, impact the breadth and depth of translation-mediated multilingualism as implemented in three representative international settings. The legal hierarchy of each institutional order, and the concomitant priorities of semantic accuracy and intertextual and interlinguistic consistency, are mirrored in the conceptualization, strategies and quality assurance of translation. The quantitative and qualitative prominence of legal functions, despite their variations per institution, is common to all the translation settings examined. It affirms the relevance of applying the paradigm of legal translation, with its variability of legal parameters and communicative scenarios, to this sui generis field of practice governed by organization-specific conventions.

Regarding the scope of multilingualism, the most significant difference between language regimes is also grounded in legal considerations. The EU’s principle of equal authenticity of its Member States’ national languages is primarily a requirement of

19 https://what-europe-does-for-me.eu/.
legitimacy and direct enforceability of EU law and not just a symbolic corollary of diversity. In practice, however, full EU multilingualism is only systematic in the case of legal acts and “core business”, and coexists with various forms of reduced multilingual-ism for the sake of cost-effectiveness. These involve the use of working, procedural or pivot languages, particularly for “internal business,” and entail a distinction between primary and secondary functions (including input, instrumental or derived functions) also elicited through textual mapping and categorization in the LETRINT project. Establishing priorities for complete multilingualism thus also implies identifying hierarchies of textual categories in accordance with the legal hierarchies that frame institutional functions.

The limitations of multilingualism, which are inherent to any resource-constrained selection of official or working languages, present more internal layers and variants in the case of highly inclusive regimes such as the EU’s. In fact, the broader the language coverage, the more compelling the need to introduce “correctives” for pragmatic reasons and the starker the contrasts become between full and restricted multilingual-ism within the same setting. The WTO, with only three official languages, facilitates mother-tongue accessibility to a lower proportion of Member States, but its trilingual translation policy is systematically applied to all non-confidential documents. This organization engages in no significant restriction of language policy implementation for specific purposes, as opposed to the UN or the EU systems of working or procedural languages. It is in the latter context that LETRINT’s textual mapping has revealed the largest volume of documents not translated in all EU official languages and the most marked (and rapidly growing) surplus of texts available in English (with the exception of the CJEU).

These findings also point to a parallel trend: the predominant use of English for negotiatiating and drafting originals. Although this is not indicated in EU legal instruments, the language of the “vanishing original” (Dollerup, 2004) is most often English, as in the other two settings. In the words of Van Parijs (2011, p. 123), the “growing tension […] between efficient communication in today’s EU and the wish to assert parity of esteem among its official languages” is proportional to “the number of recognized languages” and “the asymmetric learning of just one of these languages.”

The widespread use of ELF at international organizations reflects and encourages a global hierarchy of languages that hinders linguistic parity and perpetuates imbal-ances in the implementation of multilingualism. The language of originals shapes the content to be conveyed in the other languages and dictates translation directionality. Furthermore, as a result, it usually prevails in the interpretation of multilingual law at the expense of interlinguistic comparison. This apparent sign of pragmatism not only may hamper legal certainty but can also be regarded as the ultimate test of the value assigned to multilingualism by those who strive for the uniform interpretation of its legal core. In the case of the EU, this is aggravated by the impracticality of comparing 24 languages.

The appropriation of a language for global communication by native and non-native speakers also has a bearing on the quality of the originals and the features of “institutional
Englishes” as opposed to more idiomatic “local Englishes.” In our examination of the scope and properties of translation-mediated multilingualism, the key aspect of output quality cannot be decoupled from this issue of originals as institutional translation is a quality filter itself from which original texts are often deprived. The strategies applied in their translation echo the legal priorities of accuracy and consistency, and legal relevance criteria are accordingly embedded in text profiling and risk assessment in quality assurance practices. The need for harmonization and streamlining, heightened by the growing number of official languages, has led the EU institutions to adopt the most explicit and structured approaches to translation quality policy. As encapsulated in the DGT Translation Quality Guidelines, recommendations are also made to enhance readability and cultural adaptation of informative texts for the public, challenging surface-level similarity and promoting awareness of communicative fitness as a condition for quality. Recent political developments in Europe have added momentum to this approach and illustrate why effective multilingual outreach matters.

The multilingual fabric of international governance results from the intersection of the legal, textual and linguistic hierarchies examined here. Its warp is framed by legal functions and is most often strung in English, while the weft adds more or less varied colors and pattern depending on the intended use and the skills, time and tools employed. Whereas the appearance of the product will be visible on the surface, other qualities of the underlying threads need to be examined more closely. Likewise, the assessment of institutional approaches to multilingualism must pay heed not only to language coverage but also to translation properties and linguistic asymmetries in the production process. The balancing act between translation quantity and quality emerges as a complex systemic choice in light of the legal, political and financial considerations highlighted here. Without the weaver’s skillful attention, however, the fabric of multilingualism could well prove unsuitable or even unravel.

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