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Breaching Protocol and Flouting Norms on the European Parliament Floor

Reactions from a Micro- and Macro-context Perspective in 22 Languages

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Abstract

In the plenary sittings of the European Parliament (EP), institutional discourse is regulated by pre-established procedures and multilingualism is guaranteed thanks to simultaneous interpreting into each official EU language. In this setting, political leaders speak in their native language when addressing other Members of the EP and are allowed to hold the floor for a specific amount of time. What happens when such rules and procedures are disrupted? This study analyses a particular breach of protocol, which triggered a number of reactions at different levels of re-contextualisation. These are discussed by considering both the micro- and the macro-context, including the interpreters' output in 21 different languages along with the official verbatim report of proceedings and its translation into English. The results point to variability in terms of editing standards in the verbatim reports and professional practices among the interpreting booths, with potential differences in accessibility by target recipients.

Keywords

European Parliament – simultaneous interpreting – multilingualism – discourse analysis – re-contextualisation – community of practice

1 Introduction

Mario Monti was sworn in as Italy's Prime Minister on 16 November 2011, following Silvio Berlusconi's resignation. At that time, the country was facing a critical debt crisis, with the BTP-Bund spread breaking the record threshold of 500 points and rating agencies downgrading Italy's creditworthiness to alarming levels. The new government was composed of so-called technocrats and highly reputed professionals – not politicians as such. After three months in office, Mario Monti, who also held the post of Minister of Economy and Finance, gave an address to the European Parliament (EP) to discuss the agenda item on economic crisis, growth and employment. Mr. Monti was not new to EU institutions, where he had earned the nickname of 'Super Mario' while in office as Commissioner from 1995 to 2004, notably when he was Commissioner for Competition. The foreign media generally welcomed the appointment of Mario Monti and depicted him as a serious and reliable figure. In early 2012, *TIME* magazine published Monti's picture on its front cover and published an article headlined "the most important man in Europe" (Schuman, 2012). The New York Times referred to Mario Monti as "a well-respected economist" and "a more respectable interlocutor than his predecessor" (Donadio and Povoledo, 2011). An article published in *The Economist*, entitled "The Full Monti" in line with the magazine's typically playful style, listed Mario Monti's virtues as being a "sober, monogamous academic and former European commissioner" (2011), echoing CNN's view that being "[c]ool, calm and collected, Mario Monti could not be more different from Italy's flamboyant former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi" (Smith-Spark, 2011). Furthermore, the new Prime Minister could even speak English without making himself look ridiculous.

English speaking skills have always been the Achilles heel of Italians. According to the 2021 English Proficiency Index, although Italy ranks 35th out of 112 countries and regions, it still sits at the (upper end of the) moderate proficiency bracket (EF 2021). This is slightly better than the position it had back in 2012 in the same index, when it ranked at the *lower* end of the moderate proficiency level (24th out of 54 countries and regions) (EF 2012).

In this respect, Italian politicians are no exception, as can be gleaned from the many sarcastic posts that can be easily found online about their questionable command of English. In fact, when Italian politicians are able to express themselves fluently in English, they are likely to hit the headlines. This was the case in February 2012, when Mario Monti suddenly switched to English to respond to criticism levelled at him off-microphone by a number of Eurosceptic

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) while he was giving a statement in Italian during a plenary sitting of the EP.

The media coverage given to that instance of outstanding code-switching ability by an Italian politician caught my attention, and raised a number of questions with respect to the specific context in which it had occurred, i.e., the EP plenary sitting, where institutional communication is highly regulated and, above all, linguistically mediated and re(con)textualised at different levels. It is interpreted into several different languages at the same time, it is put in writing as a verbatim report of proceedings (which also used to be translated into English at the time of the sitting under consideration) and possibly reported in other languages in the form of news articles.

What happens when institutional communication rules and procedures are disrupted? What is the impact on discourse production, mediation (in this case, simultaneous interpreting and translation) and accessibility, both locally and throughout the wider re(con)textualisation process (van Leeuwen, 2009), entailed in reporting the same discourse in the form of official verbatim reports and news articles?

Starting from a descriptive approach (Mason, 2016), this study aims to contribute to the development of a shared ground between Discourse Analysis (DA) and Interpreting Studies. It looks at the performance of interpreters beyond the linguistic level, thus including 'discourse' and 'action' to address professional practice, identity and ideological issues (see, e.g., Diriker, 2004; Beaton, 2007).

The minor breach of protocol under consideration triggered a number of reactions at different levels which shall be discussed in terms of both the micro- and the macro-context (van Dijk, 2001). In the micro-context, the target texts of all the interpreters who were on duty at the time are analysed to compare their reactions, booth manners and the strategies adopted in each booth. In addition to the interpreters' target texts, verbatim reports are also contrasted with the exact transcript to ascertain the kinds of adjustments that were made in the official report of the sitting's proceedings. In terms of the macro-context, the same dataset is considered from the point of view of secondary users, who can access the same content at a later stage through the EP media services and website.

The next section provides an overview of how institutional communication works, with particular reference to the EP plenary sitting and the (critical) discourse analysis approach that can be adopted to scrutinise it. Then, the methodology section illustrates how the data were collected and analysed. In the last two sections, the results are discussed and conclusions are drawn on the interpreting practices and recontextualisation processes involved.

2 Institutional Discourse

2.1 *EP Plenary Sitzings*

Institutional discourse is largely regulated by pre-established procedures, as is the case with plenary sittings of the European Parliament. In this setting, political leaders are expected to speak in their native language when giving official statements to the other MEPs, although English is increasingly used as a lingua franca and is the preferred working language in virtually all EU institutions (Reithofer, 2018).

In the plenary sittings of the EP, multilingualism is nonetheless guaranteed thanks to simultaneous interpreting into each official EU language (Rule 167 of EP Rules of Procedure, European Parliament, 2021), making the EP a unique setting of interpreter-mediated communication. Each speech is translated by professional simultaneous interpreters into 23¹ different languages at the same time, either directly or via a pivot language (e.g., a source speech in Italian may be interpreted directly into English, while the target speech in English may then be used to interpret the same speech into other languages for which there is no interpreter available to translate directly from Italian).

To ensure efficient simultaneous interpreting, MEPs are required to speak one at a time (when they are given the floor) and to always use the microphone (so that interpreters can hear them). Further communicative constraints typically found in this setting concern speaking time and floor allocation, which are managed by the president in charge (European Parliament, 2015). Corpus studies have revealed that the majority of EP plenary source speeches tend to be short (lasting from a few seconds to six minutes, with the only exception being rapporteurs, representatives of other EU institutions, or special guests who are allowed to speak for 30 minutes or more), read out from a written text and delivered at a fast speech rate of up to nearly 160 words per minute² (Bendazzoli, 2010) or even more (Bartłomiejczyk, 2022: 692). Due to these and other challenges, such as foreign accents, fast turn-taking, topic variety and technicality (Dufrou, 2016), EP plenary sittings stand as one of the most

1 As of 2007, with the addition of Romanian, Bulgarian and Irish, there were a total of 23 official languages and 506 language combinations. Croatian was also added in 2013, bringing the total number of official languages to 24 and 552 language combinations. After Brexit, although English is no longer the official language of any EU member state (Ireland opted for Irish Gaelic and Malta for Maltese), it remains the most frequently used language in all EU institutions at large.

2 This is considerably faster than the recommended rate of 100–120 words per minute that is considered comfortable for simultaneous interpreting (Pöschhacker, 2016: 124).

demanding communicative situations for interpreters and are considered to be “the Olympics of conference interpreting” (Seeber, 2017: 66).

All communication exchanged during EP debates is accessible through multiple channels and levels of mediation, both in a synchronous and an asynchronous fashion. Given the political and public nature of EP debates, the proceedings are also broadcast live on Europe by Satellite (i.e., the EU’s TV information service) and on the EP webpage. Recordings of the proceedings are then made available on the EP online video library. Although an official disclaimer specifies that “the interpretation does not constitute an authentic record of proceedings”, interpreters’ target speeches are nonetheless a fundamental source of information that is readily available to all other stakeholders and citizens.

In addition to the interpreting service, a verbatim report of proceedings is produced (also referred to as CRE, for *compte rendu in extenso*). The verbatim report is available on the EP website and can also be downloaded in PDF format. It includes the (revised) full text of all speeches in the language in which they were delivered during a debate (the so-called rainbow version). The CRE used to be translated into each official EU language; this translation service was limited to English from July 2011 and was discontinued altogether at the end of 2012³ (European Parliament, 2012).

For the debate under consideration in this study, the official English translation of the report is still available. Each text/speech is introduced by the full name of the presenter and their political affiliation. The English translation also specifies the language code (in brackets) of the original language in which the speech was delivered. Further contextual information is also included, such as the title of the agenda item under discussion, along with the opening and closing time of sittings and possible occurrences of applause, murmurs of dissent and so on. Indications of these contextual manifestations appear in brackets and italics.

Depending on the agenda items, debates can also be reported in news articles by the EP news services, as was the case with Mario Monti’s statement that is being examined in this study. Indeed, the same item of news was posted in each official EU language at that time (with the exception of Irish Gaelic, Maltese and Slovene), possibly as a result of a translation process.

Although this study focuses on a very specific instance of communication, thus running the risk of being cast as a typical case of “cherry-picking”

3 It is now possible for Members of the EP to request a translation of extracts of the CRE into any EU language and this is provided within 30 working days.

(Mason, 2016: 209), the multiple levels of mediation and recontextualisation involved make it particularly enticing from a discourse analysis perspective.

2.2 *Analytical Approaches*

The output of simultaneous interpreters can be analysed from a number of different perspectives, e.g., focusing on the product and/or the process of language mediation in real time, along with the contextual and interactional features of the situations in which interpreters operate. Indeed, some analytical approaches go beyond a merely linguistic level. Discourse Analysis (DA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) have been particularly useful for demystifying hidden agendas and roles in interpreting practice, e.g., with respect to the interpreters' neutrality, invisibility, politeness, face-work, self-regulation and so on (Okoniewska and Wang, 2022). Initially, these approaches were more widely present in research on written translation and community or public service interpreting (Mason, 2016), but they have also gained ground in conference interpreting research (Torresi, 2009).

Diriker (2004) found that simultaneous interpreters make shifts in the speaking subjects, thus renegotiating their role within the mediated interaction in a way that is normally considered to be against the norm (i.e., keeping the first person as the original speaker). These shifts seem to occur in certain cases, which may be considered as alterations to the standard flow of proceedings at a conference (Diriker, 2004: 85):

- a. apologies of the speakers and/or interpreters
- b. mistakes of the speakers and/or interpreters
- c. overlapping/semi-verbal/inaudible interaction on the floor
- d. problems with the transmission of the interpreter's or speaker's voice
- e. ambiguous or contradictory input on the floor
- f. language/culture-specific discussions or difficult word-connotations in one conference language on the floor
- g. references in a non-conference language on the floor
- h. accusations of misinterpretation from the floor

Similarly, Monacelli (2009) pointed out the self-regulatory operations that are used by conference interpreters to manage directness and politeness, along with the resulting face-saving strategies. Bani (2016) focused on the interpreting strategies that are applied to deal with personal deixis and culture-specific items in journalistic simultaneous interpreting, where these items carry special meaning in terms of inclusion or exclusion within the speaker-audience

relationship. Similar findings were also confirmed in a study of consecutive (conference) interpreting where “interpreters assume an active and involved role in the interpreting process, and take responsibility in the interaction” (Eraslan Gerçek, 2009: 416), again in the event of particular situations arising, such as linguistic or interactional challenges, along with cultural and specific institutional references.

EP debates have also been scrutinised by adopting a DA or CDA approach. Beaton’s studies (2007, 2010, 2013, 2020) once more highlight the “complexity in terms of positioning” (Beaton, 2013: 394) related to simultaneous interpreters during EP debates, particularly the management of lexical items that are ideologically loaded. Likewise, Bartłomiejczyk (2020) detected variability in the interpreters’ approaches to racist statements, as she found that while there is a tendency to mitigate racist speech to some extent, preservation, radical mitigation and strengthening can also be observed. In another study, the same author looked at the interpretation of some Eurosceptic items (Bartłomiejczyk, 2022). In this case, close rendition was found to be the main interpreting strategy (nearly 60% of occurrences), along with strengthening, weakening, omission and elimination. Nonetheless, a word of caution is raised by Bartłomiejczyk (*ibid.*), in that contextual features, particularly those having a strong bearing on the feasibility of simultaneous interpreting (e.g., source speech delivery rate), should be factored in to fully explain possible ideological shifts in target speeches. Despite such a variation in findings, the same author wonders “about possible norms related to [the] transferring of racist discourse that might function among EU interpreters as a community of practice, or perhaps among specific language units (i.e., “booths”)” (Bartłomiejczyk, 2020: 257) and suggests the use of ethnographic research to unearth them.

A ground-breaking study in this respect is Dufrou’s (2016) ethnographic examination of EP interpreters, which focused on how newcomers find their way into the community of practice of EU interpreters through situated learning. Of all the challenges mentioned by Dufrou, two are particularly relevant to the EP setting. First, the magnitude of possible language regimes in EP meetings due to the high number of official languages. Having large language regimes translates into multiple language combinations that have to be covered by the various booths, and hence the need to know exactly where to look for a pivot language and organise turns among the interpreters on duty in the most effective (and flexible) way. Second, the existence of stratified behaviour as a result of the habitual use of interpreting services, including “ways of acting which are considered appropriate and belong to the shared professional repertoire of their community of practice” (Dufrou, 2016: 186). While some form of

ritualised behaviour is indeed detected in the Dutch booth, some differences also emerge with respect to the English and Polish booths that are considered as comparative cases. This is not surprising, as every language (and culture) can draw on different criteria, although such a high profile setting may also exert some pressure on interpreting practice and outline possible shared standards⁴ that should be adopted across all the different booths.

Although the notion of *norm* has been questioned with respect to the use of the first person in simultaneous interpreting (see above), EP interpreters have also been observed adopting a ‘reporting mode’, thus shifting to different speaking subjects, in particular situations (Duflou, 2012). For instance: in cases when there may be ambiguity in matching the target speech with the source speaker (because of fast exchanges between different speakers, interruptions, overlapping speech, lack of details about floor allocation, direct reference to interpreters or to problems with a translation/interpretation in another language, or nonverbal communication); to help other interpreters who are relying on a pivot booth, informing them of the language that will be used by the speaker (this can be crucial considering the wide language regime in place during EP plenary sittings); when technical problems occur; and as a face saving strategy (e.g., in the case of source speaker errors or politically ‘incorrect’ language).

So far, the observation of interpreting (un)shared practices has been limited to some language pairs, without taking full advantage of the multilingual nature of EP plenary sittings. The present study is a first attempt to fill this gap and will provide a comprehensive, albeit ‘cherry-picked’, view of all the interpreting booths at work.

3 Methodology

The dataset analysed in this study encompasses a variety of ‘texts’ relating to Mario Monti’s statement to the EP on 15 February 2012. In particular, the analysis is focused on the moment when Mr. Monti flouts protocol, switching from Italian to English to respond directly to criticism voiced by other MEPS

4 These may also originate in interpreter education in terms of optimisation strategies whereby “interpreters assume some responsibility and some risk, but also provide added-value” (Setton and Dawrant, 2016: 350) as they may ‘better’ the source speech and make it more accessible to the target audience. However, the same optimisation strategies may entail different risks and consequences depending on the context.

(who were not using a microphone and had not been given the floor, i.e., breaching protocol even further), along with other relevant written texts. The aim is to explore the possible reactions to the flouting of speaking procedures, to determine how these are recontextualised in the different target media and to ascertain to what extent EP interpreters may manifest shared professional practices across the 21 language booths.

The video with the original sound track and the sound track of all the booths is available from the EP online video library,⁵ and the written texts (verbatim and news reports)⁶ are all accessible on the EP webpage.

The sample includes transcribed spoken data and written data:

- Exact transcript of Mario Monti's speech
- Verbatim report: both the CRE (rainbow version) and its English translation
- Exact transcripts of the interpreters' output into 21 languages
- A news article about Monti's statement that was issued by the EP news service in 20 languages. Due to space limitations, this article and its multiple language versions are not discussed in this study.

The transcription of the interpreters' output from the different booths was managed by the author for his working languages (i.e., Italian, English and Spanish) and with the kind help of other colleagues (interpreters, language experts and researchers) for the other languages. The external transcribers received the audio clip with the recording of the excerpt to be analysed, the exact transcript of the original speech and a file with a two-column table in which they were asked to write the transcript of the interpreter's output in one column and its literal translation into Italian or English in the other column. The only annotations used in the transcription concern empty pauses (...), filled pauses (ehm), vowel or consonant lengthening (:), and audible contextual items included in square brackets (e.g., if the interpreter turns the booth microphone off, the floor becomes audible; these items thus include possible applause or segments of the source speech).

The very limited duration of the speech segment under consideration (approximately two minutes) may well be counterbalanced by the scope of

5 The video is available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/vod.html?mode=unit&vodLanguage=EN&playerStartTime=20120215-15:05:03&playerEndTime=20120215-15:32:00#>.

6 The CRE (rainbow version) is available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-7-2012-02-15_IT.pdf.

The verbatim report in English is available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-7-2012-02-15_EN.pdf.

The news report in English is available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20120210STO37773/>.

the analysis as it covers 21 interpreted outputs at the same time. Finding language professionals to transcribe all the languages involved was not an easy task, but the short duration of the recording did not discourage my colleagues who kindly provided their disinterested help despite their busy agendas. For larger projects, specific funding would be necessary to coordinate such a wide-ranging multilingual transcription and analytical effort.

After listening to all the recordings and finalising the exact transcript of the segment under consideration, the descriptive approach led me to concentrate on the following items: paraverbal features; microphone management; shifts in the speaking subject; and coping tactics or strategies to deal with source speech disruption resulting from the breach of protocol.

4 Analysis and Discussion

The analysis is divided into two parts. First, I consider the source speech and provide the exact transcript, along with a comparison between its recontextualisation in the form of an official verbatim report (the CRE) and its official translation into English. I then look at the output of the 21 interpreters on duty and highlight their reactions in terms of professional practice with respect to the items discussed in the previous section.

4.1 *Source Speech*

When PM Mario Monti gave his statement to MEPS, the agenda item was listed as “Economic crisis, growth and employment”. These were particularly critical topics for Italy and the entire EU at that time. As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, Mario Monti addressed the EP hemicycle as Prime Minister of Italy, as he had been appointed to the role three months previously to much international appreciation, following Silvio Berlusconi’s resignation. His speech lasts 26 minutes and 48 seconds in total (2,821 words), a particularly long intervention in comparison to the standard (shorter) duration of the average speech event in EP debates. The Prime Minister gives his speech in Italian, maintaining eye contact with part of the audience for most of the time, seldom looking at written documents on his desk. The average speech rate is approximately 107 words per minute, which may be considered unusually ‘slow’ for the speech rate normally found in EP debates. In fact, there are as many as 15 (short) interruptions as a result of MEPS applauding (with a final standing ovation).

A few minutes before the end of Mario Monti’s statement (at 23’05”), as he explicitly mentions that it will be the last point in his speech, murmurs of

dissent are voiced by some MEPS (off-microphone) when Mario Monti is referring to the possibility of reconciling democracy with integration. PM Monti is looking down at his written papers when this interruption occurs. He then stares at the MEPS in front of him and reacts impassibly by codeswitching to English, in an ironic and direct response to the murmurs of dissent, with several interruptions for applause from other MEPS, and then completes the remaining part of his speech in Italian. The last sentence that is spoken in English is a direct response to the question “Who elected you?”, which is also voiced multiple times during the applause. This final sentence includes a self-repair by PM Monti, who also apologises for his mistake (he refers to the European Parliament and then corrects himself, referring then to the Italian Parliament instead). The exact transcript of this particular section of Monti’s speech in English is provided below. The specific segment under analysis, which includes codeswitching, is highlighted in grey.

The short speech segment under consideration includes a wide range of situations for the interpreters. In addition to switching to another language, the primary speaker uses irony, interrupts and repeats himself amidst applause, responds directly to a member of the audience and self-corrects with an

TABLE 1 Exact transcript of Mario Monti’s speech segment with back translation

Source speech	Back translation in English
[<i>starts looking at papers on desk</i>] l’ultima considerazione ... signor Presidente ... ehm che ho poco tempo di sviluppare ma mi permetto di ... fare riferimento a un articolo che questa mattina è uscito nella stampa francese, italiana ... e tedesca e che ho ehm ... firmato con l’onorevole Sylvie Goulard ... ehm noi abbiamo bisogno ehm di ehm conciliare e per ora non ci riusciamo tanto bene ... ehm integrazione di cui abbiamo bisogno in dosi sempre maggiori ... e ... democrazia alla quale non vogliamo certo rinunciare ... come si fa a conciliare [<i>raises head</i>] a conciliare democrazia e integrazione? Ebbene ehm ... [<i>murmurs of dissent</i>]	the last point ... Mr. President ... ehm which I have little time to develop but I dare to ... make reference to an article that this morning was published in the French, Italian ... and German press and that I ... ehm signed with MEP Sylvie Goulard ... ehm we need ehm to ehm reconcile and for now we do not manage very well ... ehm integration of which we need in increasingly higher doses ... and ... democracy to which we do not certainly want to renounce ... and how can one reconcile [<i>raises head</i>] reconcile democracy with integration? Well ehm ... [<i>murmurs of dissent</i>]

TABLE 1 Exact transcript of Mario Monti's speech segment (*cont.*)

Source speech	Back translation in English
<p>ehm I think it is deeply possible to reconcile democracy and integration ... of course integration [<i>applause</i>] ... of course of course only a deeply superficial ehm ehm insular culture might consider might consider that ... that ... [<i>applause</i>] might ... [<i>call of 'Who elected you?'</i>] might ... [<i>call of 'Who elected you?'</i>] might naively might naively believe that integration means a super-state [<i>call of 'Who elected you?'</i>] ... on on [<i>call of 'Who elected you?'</i>] [<i>shh and booing from audience</i>] ... a vast majority [<i>bell</i>] in the European Parliament sorry in the Italian Parliament [<i>laughter</i>] ... ehm ...</p> <p>Signor Presidente, scusi se mi faccio prendere dalla passione per l'integrazione europea che ... sono sicuro [<i>applause</i>] ... integrazione [<i>applause</i>] ... integrazione europea che non significa affatto a <i>super-state</i> ma significa un continuo operare del principio della sussidiarietà ... d- deve essere riconciliata con la democrazia ... vediamo in questo momento cosa può accadere se le persone in certi Stati membri hanno l'impressione che l'integrazione avvenga a scapito della democrazia [<i>continues</i>]</p>	<p>Mr. President, pardon me if I let myself be carried away by the passion for European integration which ... I am sure [<i>applause</i>] ... integration [<i>applause</i>] ... European integration which does not at all mean a <i>superstate</i> rather it means a continuous operating of the principle of subsidiarity ... it has to be reconciled with democracy ... we see in this moment what can happen if the people in certain Member States have the impression that integration occurs to the detriment of democracy [<i>continues</i>]</p>

apology. Further breaches of protocol come with interventions from other MEPS off-microphone and without being given the floor, which is why at some point the president rings the bell to summon them to stop speaking.

Table 2 shows how all these situations were represented in two versions of the verbatim report, i.e., the CRE and its official translation into English:

TABLE 2 Verbatim reports: CRE and English translation (my emphasis)

CRE	Official English translation
<p>L'ultima considerazione, signor Presidente, che ho poco tempo di sviluppare: mi permetto di fare riferimento a un articolo apparso stamani sulla stampa francese, italiana e tedesca e che reca la mia firma unitamente a quella dell'onorevole Sylvie Goulard. Noi abbiamo bisogno di conciliare – cosa che per ora non ci riesce tanto bene – integrazione, di cui abbiamo bisogno in dosi sempre maggiori, e democrazia, alla quale non vogliamo certo rinunciare. Come si fa a conciliare democrazia e integrazione? Ebbene ...</p>	<p>The final point, Mr. President, which I have little time to develop: I beg to refer to an article published this morning in the French, Italian and German press, and which bears my signature along with that of Ms. Sylvie Goulard. We need to reconcile – and for now we are not managing to do this so well – integration, which we need in ever increasing doses, and democracy, which we certainly do not wish to give up. How do you reconcile democracy and integration? Well ...</p>
<p>I think it is deeply possible to reconcile democracy and integration. (<i>Applause</i>)</p>	<p>(<i>Murmurs of dissent</i>) I think it is certainly possible to reconcile democracy and integration. (<i>Applause</i>)</p>
<p>Of course only a deeply superficial, insular culture ... (<i>Applause</i>)</p>	<p>Of course, only a deeply superficial, insular culture ... (<i>Applause</i>)</p>
<p>... might naively believe that integration means a super-state. (<i>Call of 'Who elected you?'</i>)</p>	<p>... might naively believe that integration means a super-state. (<i>Call of 'Who elected you?'</i>)</p>
<p>A vast majority in the Italian Parliament. Signor Presidente, la prego di scusarmi se mi faccio prendere dalla passione per l'integrazione europea, la quale non significa affatto un superstate ma piuttosto un continuo operare del principio della sussidiarietà e deve essere riconciliata con la democrazia. È ben evidente in questi giorni cosa possa accadere se i cittadini, in taluni Stati membri, hanno l'impressione che l'integrazione avvenga a scapito della democrazia.</p>	<p>A vast majority in the Italian Parliament. (IT) Mr. President, please forgive me if I am overtaken by my passion for European integration, which does not mean a superstate at all, but rather a continuous operation of the principle of subsidiarity and needs to be reconciled with democracy. It is clearly evident in the last few days what might happen if citizens, in certain Member States, get the impression that integration occurs to the detriment of democracy.</p>

As expected, the text in the CRE does not display any features of spoken language, such as repetitions, self-repairs, pauses, ungrammatical constructions and so on. There are also some differences in terms of register with respect to the exact transcript (Table 1 above), as in “ho firmato” [I signed] vs. “reca la mia firma” [it bears my signature], or “scusi” [sorry] vs. “la prego di scusarmi” [please pardon me]. Contextual events, such as applause and calls from the audience off-microphone, are indicated in brackets and italics. If we look at the official English translation of the CRE, an additional contextual event is indicated in brackets and italics: “(*Murmurs of dissent*)” appears just before PM Monti decides to switch to English. This contextual information is not provided in the CRE, but it is arguably an important piece of information for understanding the reason behind the code-switching. Two further differences should be pointed out. The first concerns the translation of an impersonal reflexive verb in Italian: “come si fa a conciliare democrazia e integrazione?” appears in English with the second person pronoun “How do you reconcile democracy and integration?”. While the second person pronoun can also be used with an impersonal meaning in English, the particular setting and communicative situation at stake (EP debate) might load pronominal references with additional ideological value (Boyd, 2016). The question in Italian is understood as being directed at everyone, including the PM himself, yet in English it sounds as if the speaker remains excluded and the question is directed at other subjects, which does not appear to be the intention of the source speech. The second difference is a revision in the section of speech originally delivered in English: “deeply possible” in the CRE (which mirrors the oral delivery of the speaker) is changed to “certainly possible” in the English version of the verbatim report. This is seemingly an issue of the collocation of these English words. In the BNC (British National Corpus, 100 million words) there are no occurrences of “deeply possible”, while there are 41 occurrences of “certainly possible”. A similar result can be found in much larger corpora, such as the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English, 1 billion words) with 1 vs. 463 occurrences respectively, and the NOW corpus (News on the Web, 14.7 billion words) with 0 vs. 4,630 occurrences respectively.

4.2 *Target Speeches*

The source speech by Mario Monti was interpreted by 21 simultaneous interpreters into 21 languages at the same time, i.e., each official EU language at that time with the exception of Irish Gaelic. Such a vast language regime is efficiently managed through a team sheet, which includes information about the interpreters that are present in each booth and their working languages.

In the session under examination, according to the relevant team sheet there are three interpreters in each booth, except for the English booth where two additional interpreters are listed (with Irish Gaelic). All interpreters but one have English as a working language – this interpreter is in the Slovak booth and their working languages are Czech, Polish and German (German as an active language).

Seven booths (Bulgarian, Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Slovak and Slovenian) do not have an interpreter with Italian as a working language, so it is safe to assume that the output of the English booth was selected as the pivot by these interpreters, who then translated from the English interpreter's output into their respective languages. In fact, the English interpreter's voice can be heard in the background, and this is also the case in the Romanian booth even though two of the three interpreters on duty have Italian as one of their working languages.

This means that when Mario Monti switches to English, the interpreters listening to the English *relais* can press the 'floor' button (a noise of this nature can actually be heard) to listen to the original channel directly, which should become audible anyway as soon as the interpreter in the English booth switches their microphone off. Indeed, at that point the interpreters in the English booth do not need to translate, while those in the Italian booth have to start translating Monti's English statement into Italian. In three booths only (EL, FR, PL) it is possible to notice that the interpreter hands over to another booth mate when the source speaker switches to English.

In general, all the interpreters' output in the other languages shares several features resulting from the particular characteristics of that source speech segment (see above): additional pauses, syllabic lengthening, particular prosodic markers and variations in volume. In some cases, the unusual situation and the PM's ironic reply gives way to clear laughter (CS, RO, HU) or at least a subjectively perceivable amused reaction in the interpreter's voice (ES, FI, IT, LT, LV, NL, PT, SV).

As regards microphone management in the booth, interpreters have the option to leave the microphone on, press the mute button or switch it off. The main difference is that when the interpreter's microphone is switched off, the floor's sound track takes over and becomes audible (in the video). On the other hand, if the mute button is pressed, total silence is maintained until the same button is released. Considering the multiple levels of service users (not only MEPS but also external viewers of the debate, either live or viewed on the online video library) within the context of EP debates, whether a booth microphone is switched off or not can provide external viewers with either an increased or decreased sense of participation. In this particular case,

whenever the booth microphone is switched off, it is possible to hear applause as well as repetitions in the source speech (e.g., might ... might ... might). Across the various booths, different choices can be appreciated with respect to microphone management, as indicated in Table 3.

TABLE 3 Microphone management

Frequency Microphone	0	1	2	3	4	5
Muted	BG, EL, PT	ET, FI, LV, MT, SV	LT, RO, SK		HU	
Turned off	BG, EL, PT	DE, FI, NL	CS, ES, IT,	DA, ET, FR, SL	SV	PL

Only three booths (BG, EL, PT) keep their microphones on all the time (it is possible to hear the source speech in the background when the interpreters are not speaking). In the other booths, the interpreters either mute the microphone (no sound at all can be heard), or turn it off so that the floor becomes directly audible in the video recording. These two options are detected once or multiple times (up to five) in the short segment under consideration. The interpreters in the Polish booth turned their microphone off the most. In addition to the points at which PM Monti is interrupted by the applause of other MEPs, their microphone is turned off whenever the interpreters swap over, both at the beginning and at the end of code-switching.

The last statement in English by Mario Monti includes a self-repair and an apology, as he responds to the call of “Who elected you?” by saying “a vast majority in the European Parliament sorry in the Italian Parliament” (due to the fact that he was appointed Prime Minister as a result of a resignation and not following a general election, as explained in the introduction).

Across the various booths, different strategies appear to be used by EP interpreters. Nearly 40% mention both the *reparandum* (R1) and the *reparatum* (R2),⁷ while the remaining interpreters only mention the *reparatum*, thus

7 According to Levelt (1983), the essential components of a self-repair are the *reparandum* (i.e., the item to be repaired), an editing phase (usually an interruption with a pause, hesitation, an apology or other verbal material to introduce the repaired item) and the *reparatum* (i.e., the result of the repair).

skipping the source speaker's self-repair. It is only in one booth that this point is omitted altogether:

- R1 + R2 ES, HU*, LT, NL, PL, PT*, RO, SV**
 - R2 only BG*, CS, DA, DE, ET*, FI*, FR, IT, LV*, MT*, SK, SL
 - Omission EL
- (*misinterpreted; **R2+R1+R2)

Far from criticising these interpreters' performance, it is interesting to note that almost one third of the interpreters fail to deliver the correct meaning of the last sentence in the segment under consideration. This is not surprising, as the last sentence, including the source speaker's self-repair, is totally unrelated to the previous unit of meaning. In fact, it is spoken in response to a question ("Who elected you?") from another MEP off-microphone. As a consequence, the question cannot be heard by the interpreters, which taxes their full understanding.

The last item in the analysis concerns shifts in the speaking subject, which are to be expected in this segment as it is similar to the various instances or situations in which these shifts tend to occur (Diriker, 2004: 84–85; Dufrou, 2012, see above). In this particular segment, the source speaker switches to a different language twice (first from Italian to English, and then back to Italian again); interventions are made off-microphone by MEPs who have not been given the floor by the president; and the primary speaker makes a mistake (when mentioning the European Parliament instead of the Italian Parliament), apologises for the mistake (editing phase) and self-corrects. Interestingly, the majority of the interpreters do not display any shift in the speaking subject despite all these situations. The only cases in which shifts occur are presented below.

TABLE 4 Shifts in the speaking subject in the interpreters' output

Booth	Target speech [back translation]
EL	<i>Συνεχίζει ο πρωθυπουργός Μόντι στα Ιταλικά, ε, στα Αγγλικά</i> [continues Prime Minister Monti in Italian, well, in English]
ET	Kuidas neid kahte terminit lepitada ütleb kõneleja [how to reconcile these two terms says the speaker]

TABLE 4 Shifts in the speaking subject in the interpreters' output (*cont.*)

Booth	Target speech [back translation]
IT	una grande maggioranza: del Parlamento italiano risponde ... il presidente Monti [a great majority in the Italian Parliament replies ... president Monti]
LT	dauguma did-žiausia dauguma didelė dauguma Europos parla-, ehm atsiprašau, Italijos parlamente, sako kalbėtojas [majority largest majority big majority in the European parla-, ehm excuse me, Italian parliament, says the speaker]
PL	większość w parlamencie europejskim przepraszam mówca się poprawia w parlamencie włoskim [majority in European parliament sorry speaker corrects himself in Italian parliament]
RO	o mare majoritate din parlamentul european si se corecteaza imi cer scuze in parlamentul italian [a large majority in the European Parliament and he corrects himself I apologise in the Italian Parliament]

The first shift taken into account is found in the Greek booth and occurs right at the first code-switching point (when PM Monti switches from Italian into English). In fact, the Greek interpreter on duty needs to swap with another interpreter in the same team, and she verbalises that the source speaker is continuing his statement in English before handing over to the other interpreter (who has therefore been alerted to this shift by their colleague). Yet, a similar shift does not occur at the following code-switching point, when the source speaker starts speaking Italian again. None of the interpreters in the other booths verbalise this change in the primary speaker's language. However, another shift in the speaking subject can be detected at this point in the output of the Estonian interpreter, who does not explicitly state the PM's language change (in fact this interpreter has already been translating from the output of the English booth, so therefore the source language remains the same for her), but adds "ütleb kõneleja" (says the speaker) at the end of the question about reconciling democracy with integration.

The other cases in Table 4 relating to shifts in the speaking subject occur at the end of the speech segment in English, when PM Monti corrects himself and apologises for saying that he was elected by a vast majority in the European (instead of the Italian) Parliament. The interpreter in the Italian booth provides only the ‘correct’ version of this last statement in English, but also adds “replies president Monti” at the end, thus hinting that some form of side interaction is going on between Mario Monti and other MEPS. On the other hand, the interpreters in the Lithuanian, Polish and Romanian booths translate both the *reparandum* and the *reparatum*, but add “says the speaker”, “speaker corrects himself” and “he corrects himself” respectively – a typical face-saving strategy when self-repair is employed by the source speaker.

Finally, a further type of shift can be found in the Spanish target text. The interpreter in the Spanish booth appears to display a systematic reaction whenever there are interventions off-microphone (which cannot therefore be translated), as she explicitly mentions that there are “intervenciones fuera de micrófono” (off-microphone interventions):

TABLE 5 Shifts in the speaking subjects from the Spanish booth

Spanish target text	Back translation
<p>y cómo podemos conciliar la democracia y la integración ... intervenciones fuera de micrófono ... yo creo que es algo meramente perfectamente posible el reconciliar tanto la democracia y la integración ... [applause <i>of course</i>] y claro que ... tan solo..... una cultura insular y superficial a lo mejor pueda ... considerar ... [applause <i>might</i> applause <i>might</i> applause <i>might naively mi-</i>] y quizá de manera muy ino:cente piense que la integración significa tener un superestado ... intervenciones fuera de micrófono ... una gran mayoría del parlamento europeo del parlamento italiano ... señor presidente</p>	<p>and how can we reconcile democracy and integration ... off-microphone interventions ... I believe that it is something merely perfectly possible to reconcile both democracy and integration ... [applause <i>of course</i>] and it is clear that ... just..... an insular and superficial culture may perhaps ... consider ... [applause <i>might</i> applause <i>might</i> applause <i>might naively mi-</i>] and maybe in a very naive way think that integration means having a superstate ... off-microphone interventions ... a great majority of the European parliament of the Italian parliament ... mr president</p>

In both cases, the information is provided at a slightly faster speech rate and by flattening the intonation range. This type of meta-comment appears to be useful both for participants who are directly involved in the debate and are listening to the interpreters through their headsets, and for indirect participants watching live transmission of the debate or viewing it later on the internet. A speculative explanation behind such a distinctive strategy may be linked to the fact that the interpreters in this booth were somehow able to perceive the voices of the MEPS who were speaking off-microphone or had a clearer sense of the situation.

5 Final Remarks

The analysis conducted in this study focuses on different forms of re(con)textualisation of the same instance of communication. It considers a particular segment of a political statement which was delivered by Mario Monti before the European Parliament, including multiple disruptions to the standard protocol underpinning EP debates.

Starting from a descriptive approach and taking into account the general setting in which all these situations occurred, I then looked at how they were represented and managed through the multiple language mediation activities that are typically found in EP plenary sittings.

The analysis highlighted a variety of reactions to the series of flouted norms, as well as critical differences in how the same discourse may be received depending on the target medium, e.g., its written representation in the form of the verbatim report (including editing mismatches between the CRE and the English translation) and its spoken representation in other languages as a result of simultaneous interpreting (including variations in interpreting practices between and among 21 language booths).

As regards the most interesting reactions, it is worth mentioning that some interpreters verbalised explicitly what was taking place, whereas others only translated the source text: the two strategies may be more/less appropriate depending on the target users that one has in mind, as these range from micro-context participants directly involved in the communicative situation (e.g., the other MEPS) to macro-context users accessing the same situation from other locations and channels (the EP sittings are broadcast online and on TV) at the same time, or even subsequently through the EP online video library.

A greater sense of participation for asynchronous viewers can also be achieved through microphone management, as the floor sound track becomes

audible when interpreters switch their microphone off (if it is muted, no sound at all can be heard), for example during the short interruptions to the PM's speech as a result of other MEPS applauding. Again, considerable variation was detected across the 21 interpreting booths with respect to microphone management (see Table 3).

The meta-comments and shifts in the speaking subject that were found in the output of one third of the interpreters further confirm that interpreting and translation are socially (and politically) situated activities, where interpreters and translators play a fundamental role in re-contextualisation processes, and also with respect to knowledge access, dissemination and control (production and comprehension of discourse). However, such practices appear to be neither shared nor standardised, and therefore deserve further investigation across all the interpreting booths.

Although this study merely 'cherry-picked' a small segment of interpreter-mediated communication, it ventured to explore it across multiple languages, taking advantage of the unique language regime of the most multilingual international institution ever. Notwithstanding the high level of ritualised practices that can be detected in institutional communication, the variety of reactions by the community of practice under consideration may point to a broader need for shared procedures and best practices among professional interpreters. Whether these exist, or are really useful, in all the target languages/cultures can only be ascertained through further research, possibly including retrospective feedback by the interpreters involved. In addition, the reactions of the target recipients could be examined experimentally, so as to test and assess the preferred strategies which may eventually lead to validated and highly inclusive best practices in professional simultaneous interpreting.

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⁸ All online references were last accessed on 19 December 2022.

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