Management of multilingualism in institutional settings: the recruitment of staff for EU institutions

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This paper is based on the Language Management Theory (Fairbrother, Nekvapil & Sloboda 2018), according to which language management is defined as various agents' behavior toward language as it appears in discourse. Status and power of the crucial agents (EU institutions, Member States, CJEU) are determined by legal regulations, but their interests often diverge.

The recruitment of staff for European institutions is organized by an agency which is established specifically for this purpose – European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO). Since persons applying for jobs come from all member states and speak many languages, various problems arise. Therefore, EPSO tries to look for solutions to these problems by managing the multilingual practices in a way which has to comply with EU language law. This paper analyzes legal aspects of the management of multilingualism of the recent decade, during which some member states contested EPSO's tendencies to reduce the multilingualism. The analysis draws upon several cases which have been decided by the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU). It concentrates on the problems of languages in which EPSO is supposed to announce jobs, and on the extent to which this office is allowed to lay down the (number of) languages in which candidates are expected to communicate with this office. The third area is related to the entitlement of EPSO to limit the choice of the second language to English, German, and French. It is revealed that notices of open competitions, which come out in the Official Journal of the EU, have to be published in all official languages. On the other hand, there exists some legal space for restriction of choices of the second language.

Due to its metalinguistic focus, the concept of language management appears very adequate and promising. Its scope is broad enough to encompass very heterogenous ways of behavior toward language.

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References: Fairbrother, L., J. Nekvapil & M. Sloboda (Eds.) (2018). The Language Management Approach. A Focus on Research Methodology. Berlin: Peter Lang.