

Promoting the European Identity: *Politeness* Strategies in the Discourse of the European Union

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Abstract

This paper presents the preliminary results of a study on the discourse of the European Union (EU). I argue that the EU, as a public institution, is affected by the global spread of consumerism from the private to the public sphere, and the production of new forms of commodities, known as 'public goods'. As the lack of a feeling of European belonging among EU citizens is often thought to fuel Euro-skepticism, I also argue that the European identity is among the main 'products' that need to be advertised to smooth the process of European integration. However, promoting a supranational identity may be particularly problematic in the European context since, generally speaking, Europeans possess well-defined national identities. In pragmatic terms, promoting a European identity may be perceived as a threat to Europeans' national face and provoke further resistance.

Drawing from Fairclough's analytical taxonomy (1989) and Brown and Levinson's politeness model (1987), the study suggests that EU discourse does feature traits of the promotional genre typical of corporate communication, and that the European identity represents a key object of this promotion; the analysis also reveals discursive efforts to safeguard Europeans' positive and negative national face. Although no generalizations are possible, considering the limited sample of EU discourse examined, the findings and pragmatic reading proposed henceforth offer interesting insights for further research in this direction.

Keywords: *European Union, Critical Discourse Analysis, European Identity, National face, Politeness*

1. Globalization and the emergence of public goods

The recent trend of globalization has had an impact on a variety of different domains: the political and economic spheres, education and culture, communication and ideological trends, and so forth. The new world economies have fostered the establishment of the corporate model to maximize profit-making opportunities. This has given a new impetus to the sale of commodities – any type of commodity – as long as some form of benefit is produced. When such benefit is quantified in social terms, rather than in monetary ones, scholars talk about 'public goods' (Rutherford 2000). The label 'public goods' has been coined in opposition to 'private goods', the *default* items for consumption originating in the private sector. Among the numerous outcomes of globalization, Rutherford (2000) claims that the emergence of public goods in institutional domains is one of the most prominent. National defense, public education, social services and identities are all examples of the new social entities that are undergoing a process of *commodification* in the contemporary era. Just as real commodities, globalization has contributed to the entry of these entities 'into the blessed realm of the marketplace' (Rutherford 2000: 6); they are approached according to commercial practices, and they are advertised and possibly 'sold'

(Fairclough 1993). Fairclough (1993: 141) even talks about a reconstruction of social life on a commercial basis: this implies that institutions and organizations, whose main objective is not the production of goods ‘in the narrower economic sense of goods for sale’ have started being designed and managed (Fairclough 1992: 207) ‘in terms of commodity production’.

Since the transformations of modernity are ‘to a significant degree [...] transformations in language’ (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 4), the emergence of public goods has also had an impact on institutional discourse. Fairclough (1992: 207) refers to a real ‘colonization of institutional orders of discourse [...] by discourse types associated with commodity production’. The notion of invasion, however, is not sufficient to describe the overall scenario of this contact phenomenon. In fact, it is also true that corporate orders of discourse are often willingly embraced and appropriated at the institutional level. With special reference to political groups, governments are currently appropriating approaches that are largely used by corporations: ‘it has become fashionable to discuss the nation itself [...] in terms more usually associated with marketing consumer goods’ (Cameron 2001: 8).

Hence, the emergence of public goods has generated a bidirectional trend in today’s institutional discourse. On one hand, we are witnessing the ‘colonization of the public domain by the practices of the private domain’, entailing a significant spread of corporate-style communication in the institutions; on the other hand, we are also witnessing the institutions’ increasing appropriation of practices of the private domain (Fairclough 1995: 138). Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999: 45) talk about a ‘dialectic’ relationship of colonization and appropriation, highlighting the dual dimension of this phenomenon: any colonization can be seen as an appropriation, and any appropriation as a form of colonization, insofar as private sector’s discursive practices seem to be invading, thus dominating, public sector’s discourse, and the latter seems to be appropriating, thus dominating, the former. Hence, we are witnessing a *publicization* of private discourse and, at the same time, a *privatization* of public discourse.

Since today’s corporate communication generally aims at selling commodities and services, with particular emphasis on the customers’ care, the type of genre invading and/or appropriated by institutions is mostly promotional in nature (Fairclough 1993). Thus, when the institution marries some of its traditional discursive traits, usually more impersonal and distant, to the appealing and informal style of the private sphere, it generates a new communicative blend. Public institutions seem to be leaning towards a hybrid form of communication that acts ‘as a vehicle for selling goods, services, organizations, ideas or people’ (Fairclough 1993: 41). And even identities.

2. The European identity

2.1 The European identity deficit

Despite its remarkable past and present achievements, the project of a united Europe has often encountered weak consensus among Europeans, and has frequently been opposed by waves of diffidence and skepticism (Walters and Haar 2005; Bellier and Wilson 2000; Abélès 2000; Schäffner et al. 1996; Fanelli 2006; Banchoff and Smith 1999). Generally speaking, Europeans’ nationalist¹ heritage and solid sense of local membership are often identified as contributory factors to their weak feeling of European belonging (Wright 2000; Phillipson 2003; Garcia 1993; Gastelaars and Ruijter 1998; Jacobs and Maier 1998; Bellier and Wilson 2000).

Since its establishment as the European Coal and Steel Community, in 1951, the European project rapidly expanded, gained a growing number of adherents, and spread consistently to political, administrative and cultural domains – areas that traditionally represented the exclusive sphere of influence of individual European nations (Wright 2000; Schäffner et al. 1996; Thody 1997; Holmes 2000; Walters and Haar 2005). Today, the European Union (EU), the most recent manifestation of European integration, is a structure that has never existed before: it combines national and supranational powers by intertwining state and suprastate systems. Moreover, ‘different from the existing nation states which manage a well-delineated territory, Europe defines itself like an open space’, a vast space that may look intimidating because it can hardly be controlled and because it is neutralizing all types of barriers (Abélès 2000: 39). Hence, it seems less problematic for Europeans to answer the question ‘what is France?’ or ‘what is Britain?’, than ‘what is the EU?’ (Bellier and Wilson 2000: 5).

As a consequence, the enthusiasm of the pioneers of the European Union has been replaced by ‘a more skeptical vision of the future’ (Abélès 2000: 31). More precisely, skepticism towards the European Union seems to be fostered by the idea that, in the long run, European integration could restrict the sovereignty and autonomy of the member states, frustrate Europeans’ democratic values, and jeopardize their cultural and linguistic diversity². Yet, popular participation is what gives an institution full legitimacy; therefore, if popular endorsement and involvement are missing, it can be claimed that the Union lacks a sound democratic foundation³.

Now, it is clear how the formation of a collective identity among Europeans, or at least of a sense of commonality fuelled by the pursuit of common interests and ambitions, could ease the integration process, could confer an unquestionable democratic authority to the Union, and could appease the sense of threat to the cultural, linguistic and ideological heritage of its member states (Bellier 2000; Garcia 1993; Llobera 1993; Wright 2000; Wallace 1993; Walters and Haahr 2005).

2.2 National face and the European identity

Identity is among the entities that are frequently *commodified* in the globalized world, and it is constantly negotiated in institution/individual interactions as a key factor involved in the definition of the social order (Heller 2003: 474). In the European context, it is indeed a supranational identity, a sense of European togetherness, that seems to be among the public goods the EU needs to advertise in this crucial phase of its development; a product that, if ‘consumed’, can help preserve the delicate balance between nationalism and supranationalism. Just as the mass consumption of a product augments the company’s profit, EU citizens’ consumption of a European identity would contribute to the Union’s ‘profit’: the success, acceptance and smooth development of Europe’s integration process. Nonetheless, selling or simply publicizing a supranational identity to Europeans is a challenging and delicate enterprise as, generally speaking, these problematic ‘buyers’ already have well-defined local identities (Wright 2000; Phillipson 2003; Garcia 1993; Llobera 1993; Kastoryano 2002; Gastelaars and Ruijter 1998; Jacobs and Maier 1998; Bellier and Wilson 2000)⁴.

In order to better illustrate Europeans’ sense of national belonging, I will borrow the notion of *face* as intended by Brown and Levinson (1987). In particular, reference will be made throughout this work to what can be considered a pragmatic interpretation of

national identity: *national face*⁵. According to *face* theory, everyone possesses a social *face*, a 'public self-image' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61) or a 'kind of social standing' (Cameron 2001: 79) that is constantly negotiated in conversational exchanges⁶. Indeed, *face* 'can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction' (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61). Generally speaking, it is in the interactants' interest that *face* is mutually protected so that the exchange of information is likely to be successful and the interactants' social *persona* safeguarded (Fairclough 1993).

In this work, I have extended the relevance of *face* from the social to the national community. Europeans tend to be emotionally attached to their local culture and, in general, they are intimately proud and protective of their national heritage and distinctiveness. In pragmatic terms, Europeans generally possess a *national face*, a rooted national esteem that they want others to acknowledge, respect and appreciate. Thus, the concept of social *face* can be reinterpreted in terms of *national face*, a collective public image that nationals of a country claim for themselves and that is commensurate to the sense of reputation that they attribute to their country⁷.

Given Europeans' national pride, advertising a continental identity in the European context represents a high-risk undertaking. Any imposition on the national 'self' and 'wants' could be perceived as a threat to EU citizens' *national face* and as an attempt to replace local values and powers with European ones. This could be compared to a *face*-threatening act⁸ or, rather, to a *national face*-threatening act that risks exacerbating skepticism and resistance towards the EU project. Hence, it is clearly in the Union's interest that Europeans' *national face* is protected or, at least, that Europeans do not perceive it as being at risk.

3. Research context

3.1 CDA: Discourse as a constituent of identity

The term discourse generally encompasses any form of language⁹ use in society (Van Dijk 1997; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Fairclough 1993). A crucial concept associated with discourse is that of social communicative event: discourse is the use that people make of language to convey ideas, thoughts or beliefs within a social context (Van Dijk 1997: 2). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) goes beyond the acknowledgement of the social dimension of discourse. What distinguishes a critical from a non-critical approach to discourse is the fact that critical discourse analysts illustrate how discourse is affected by the social and ideological *status quo* and how it, in turns, affects the construction of 'social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief' (Fairclough 1993: 134). Namely, CDA attributes to discourse social agentivity and defines it 'as a form of social practice' that entails a 'dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it' (Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 258)¹⁰. This calls attention to the interaction of discourse and society: on one hand, discourse is affected by social situations, institutions and structures and adapts to, as well as perpetuates, the features of the social context in which it appears; on the other, the social context is influenced and transformed by discourse itself, which is 'largely responsible for the genesis, production and construction of particular social conditions' (Wodak et al. 1999: 8). In other words, discourse is 'socially shaped' but also 'socially constitutive', as 'it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people' (Fairclough and Wodak 1997:

258). Hence, discourse plays an important role in the ‘constitution and reproduction of [...] social identities’ (Fairclough 1993: 139): any form of linguistic practice can be seen as a constituent of new social structures and identities or a mirror of existing ones (Torring 2005; Fairclough and Wodak 1997). When discourse draws consistently from a marketing approach, though, not only does it become a conveyor of new social identities but a real tool for selling new personalities and collective configurations.

With reference to the European context, scholars claim that discourse, in its various forms, encourages the formation of or directly enacts the European identity. Shore and Black (1994) maintain that the Union has frequently tried to convey images of unity to stimulate the construction of a collective identity among Europeans. Bellier and Wilson (2000: 17, 5) emphasize that ‘building Europe’ is also about ‘imagining Europe’, and refer to ‘recurrent efforts within the EU to create symbols and representations of the EU’. Similarly, Gastelaars and de Ruijter (1998: 9) argue that the Union is trying to produce ‘a cultural commonwealth, mostly by symbolic means’, like a European passport or a European currency¹¹. Fanelli (2006) provides a list of fields where the European identity seems to be ‘under construction’ (e.g. telecommunications, space policy, tourism, governance, etc.) through linguistic and symbolic means, while Walters and Haar (2005) claim that the Union primarily calls on concepts and values of public concern (i.e. security, justice, democracy) to foster the construction of a collective identity. Looking more specifically at textual discourse, Nadel-Klein (cited in Gastelaars and de Ruijter 1998: 9) affirms that ‘efforts to produce a pan-European identity can be read in the publications of the Commission of the European Communities’. According to these views, discourse is widely used to evoke images of unity, spread EU imagery and foster the emergence of a sense of supranational belonging.

This work follows the same path and presents the preliminary results of a qualitative study on the discourse of the European Union. This investigation is conducted on a small corpus of written EU texts and focuses on the discursive strategies that help sketch a new European self in Europe’s social context. The texts selected for this analysis are primarily descriptive and informative. They consist of three brochures, one leaflet and two websites featuring a range of services offered by the Union, describing projects carried out at the community level, and outlining opportunities for Europeans. More specifically, the documents deal with issues such as popular involvement in the integration process, the exercise of EU citizenship’s rights, the common currency, employment opportunities at the European institutions and so forth. These issues may become particularly problematic, when handled by an institution that is hardly able to achieve adequate popular consensus; hence, these texts have been chosen because they likely display sophisticated communicative techniques.

The documents are in English, they are all available online, and since they must reach a large audience, their language is clearly non-technical and easily accessible to most types of readers. The choice of selecting documents belonging to different genres (i.e. brochures, leaflets, websites) is also deliberate as it provides a wider, albeit certainly not exhaustive, spectrum of EU written discourse intended for the general public which may highlight cross-genre discursive features in the style adopted in Union-to-citizen communication. Nonetheless, research focusing consistently on a single text type can be of interest to investigate any genre-specific approaches to the promotion of a European identity.

3.2 Research frameworks and objectives

The first goal of this analysis is to identify traces of promotional discourse or discursive traits that fulfill a promotional goal confirming the two initial assumptions: first, confirming that the European Union, as a public institution, is affected by the communicative style typical of the private sector and, more specifically, that EU discourse, as the discourse of a public institution, displays traits of promotional genre; second, confirming an attempt to *market* the European identity, where identity is intended as a sense of continental togetherness, involvement in and commitment to the growth of a united Europe and the pursuit of shared goals.

To determine if a promotional intent actually underlies these texts, it is important to identify specific traits that belong to, or are usually associated with, advertising and marketing discourse, as well as any other discursive attempt aimed at affecting the audience's ideas and perceptions of European society. In other words, it is important to assess how the author tries to alter the social context by influencing the addressee's wants and perceptions of reality and of what is desirable. To this end, the analysis will rely on the classification proposed by Fairclough in *Language and Power* (1989). According to Fairclough (1989: 112), the formal features of a text may possess experiential, expressive and relational values. A textual trait carries experiential value if it conveys 'the text producer's experience of the natural or social world', a type of representation which is based on a person's ideology and knowledge of the world as it has been experienced. Expressive values convey the author's evaluation of a specific aspect of the world, and have to do with the individual's personal assessment and stance vis-à-vis a given reality. Finally, when a formal trait possesses relational value, it enacts or establishes some sort of relationship between the author and the readership.

For the purpose of this research, only Fairclough's expressive and relational values will be taken into consideration. The expressive dimension is important as it refers to the potent evocative function of language: the skilful expression of a certain view of reality and of what is acceptable and desirable may affect the interlocutor's opinions and persuade him/her to endorse this view. Of course, the higher the persuasive talent and evocative ability of the author, the higher the chances of influencing the addressee. Relational values are also particularly interesting for this work because of their power to enact social *liaisons*: the choice of specific textual features 'depends on, and helps create, social relationships between participants' (Fairclough 1989: 116). In this paper, the notion of national *face* has been postulated: *face* is the object of a constant negotiation intended to establish, maintain or alter social relationships. The type of relationship that the Union is able to establish with its audience may affect its audience's interest, appreciation, trust and enthusiasm vis-à-vis the institution. This, in turn, may determine Europeans' approval of EU actions and the replacement of Euro-skepticism by a sense of Euro-confidence leading, eventually, to a higher popular involvement. Hence, any discursive attempts to re-establish and affect the relationship between the Union and its citizens may represent a first step towards a more solid success and progress of European integration.

Values are carried by textual features, the visible counterpart of an underlying communicative strategy. To explore the relational and expressive values featured in these texts and speculate about the author's agenda, I will examine some relevant textual¹² traits belonging to the macro-categories discussed by Fairclough (1989: 110-111): grammatical and lexical features and larger-scale textual structures. More

specifically, I will focus on personal references, interrogative forms, passivization, lexical features, textual sections and visuals.

The second goal of this work is to identify traces of *politeness* used to modulate the assumed promotional style. Since the presence of a *national face* in Europeans has been assumed, and this implies the need to safeguard this *face* publicly, the second objective of this work is to determine whether the presumed promotional approach attributed to the Union responds to a larger pragmatic design. To this end, I will take Brown and Levinson's taxonomy of *politeness* strategies as a reference to identify manifestations of polite behavior.

Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that when *face* is at risk, participants adopt strategies that enable them to handle and possibly minimize *face* threats. These strategies are grouped under the label of *politeness*, and often guarantee the smooth development of a communicative event (Thomas 1995; Kasper 1997; Blum-Kulka 1997; Cameron 2001). *Face* consists of two complementary parts: positive *face*, which is about one's desire to be socially appreciated, supported and approved of, and negative *face*, which is about one's wish not to be imposed upon, of seeing one's own actions 'unimpeded by others' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 62). Hence, two types of politeness exist that correspond to the two types of *faces* at stake: positive *politeness* conveys the speaker's/writer's desire, whether real or just simulated, to attend to the audience's wants and desires and to establish a cooperative connection with the interlocutor; negative *politeness* satisfies the interlocutor's negative *face*, 'that is, his or her need for freedom from imposition', and conveys the speaker's/writer's respect vis-à-vis the interlocutor's *haves*, status or ideas (Blum-Kulka 1997: 51). For a 'polite' reading of the discursive strategies adopted by the Union, I will consider and interpret the same lexical, grammatical and textual elements examined in the first part of the analysis according to their potential function as positive or negative *face* savers. Since the concepts of *face*, FTA and *politeness* have been relocated from the social to the national context, this second analysis tries to attribute to the traits examined a broad *face*-saving value that may account for the use of such traits, instead of others, in the particular scenario where they appear. Clearly, EU texts are intrinsically *national face*-threatening for the very fact that they exist. The European Union is per se the 'taboo topic'¹³ for EU-skeptics, and its self-promotion represents an inherent threat to *national face*. The attempt to involve Europeans in EU activities and any assumptions on EU citizens' values, wants and desires are also inherently *national face*-threatening, as they force a status quo and presume acts and feelings of the interlocutor. Hence, it could be claimed that the only polite behavior not to threaten Europeans' *national face* would be the *non* circulation of these documents. Obviously, the scope of this investigation goes beyond this unfruitful reading of EU discourse. The European Union is a fact: it exists and is already part of Europeans' everyday lives. Therefore, it would be illogical to stick to a superficial interpretation of these texts and pretend that the institution can easily be ignored and effaced from Europeans' world by impeding the circulation of its literature. In this study, these documents and their construction will be examined at a deeper and finer level and contextualized within what is an already established European scenario.

3.2.1 Personal references

One of the first traces of an appealing person-to-person approach is the use of the pronoun 'you' to address the reader(s) and 'we' (exclusive) to refer to the institution. The use of these references results in a greater involvement of the citizen and

‘personification’ of the institution. As Fairclough (1995: 145) explains, ‘the personalization of both the institution (we) and the addressees (you) [...] simulates a conversational and therefore relatively personal, informal, solidary and equal relationship’ between the two parties. In particular, the use of ‘you’ to refer directly to the reader is a technique widely used in advertising to increase the degree of involvement of the addressees and minimize the perception of impersonality of most mass-communication texts (Fairclough 1989: 128).

We hope that *we* have shown *you* some of the great variety of work carried out by the EU institutions (European Communities 2003)

Do *you* want to give *us your* opinion on EU policies and influence their direction? (European Communities 1995-2005c)

The use of the inclusive ‘we’ to refer jointly to the citizens and the institution establishes an even closer tie between the two parties, which are represented as a unique entity and are assumed to share a same perspective. This technique is a potent claim of commonality and shared aims subtly conveying a sense of closeness and unity between the author and the addressees.

The Euro, *our* money (European Central Bank [n.d.]

Instances of first person singular also occur in the texts. They mainly appear in titles and headings in the interrogative form:

Who else could help *me*? (European Ombudsman, 2005)

What are *my* chances of success? (European Communities, 2003)

An important marketing-specific dimension in the use of first person singular references is the appropriation of the reader’s voice. In these examples, it seems as if it is the reader who is formulating the question: it is not the Union interrogating the audience, but it is the audience interrogating itself. This marks a temporary change in the Union’s role: the individuality of the institution and that of its citizens coincide for a moment, resulting in the utmost sense of closeness between the Union and Europeans.

By reading these questions and being able to identify with the potential *asker*, the readers are persuaded that the issues mentioned in the questions are really part of their own concerns. This strategy is broadly defined as ‘manipulative’ presupposition (Fairclough 1989: 153-4). Presupposition is ‘what can be taken as common ground for participants’ (Fairclough 1989: 152) and it may be considered as manipulative, if it is purposely generated to maneuver or control the interlocutor’s ideas or perceptions. In advertising, for example, consumers can be partially controlled by ‘attributing to their experience things which [the text producers] want to get them to accept’ (Fairclough 1989: 153-4). Fairclough explains that presuppositions are ‘cued in texts’ by participants by means of specific linguistic tools; in particular, ‘wh-questions’ are often among the formal features that activate presupposition (Fairclough 1989: 152). Hence, the question ‘Who else could help me?’ assumes that the reader truly needs or wants help from the institution, just as ‘What are my chances of success?’ (referred to employment opportunities at the EU) presupposes the reader’s interest in applying for a job at the European Union.

The use of first person singular references is ranked among the positive *politeness* strategies labeled as ‘Presuppose/raise/assert common ground’ in Brown and Levinson’s taxonomy (1987). In particular, when the addresser opts for a shift of

deictic centering, or a ‘personal-centre switch’ and ‘speaks as if the central person were the hearer’, s/he performs a ‘point-of-view operation’ (Brown and Levinson 1987: 118). In other words, the Union tries to merge its point of view with the reader’s in an attempt to affect the reader’s perception of his/her role in what is being said and to emphasize a commonality of ideas and interests. The use of ‘we’ (inclusive) is also ranked as a tool that creates sympathy and a sharing of perspective between the parties involved.

The pronoun ‘you’ could also be interpreted as a positive *face*-saving trait. Cameron (2001: 132) explains that the combined use of ‘I’ and ‘you’ can be read as a manifestation of positive *politeness* - ‘the kind of *politeness* that says ‘I like you’’ - as it tends to personalize interaction and connote a high degree of intimacy between the parties. Moreover, ‘you’ can also be interpreted as a marker of in-group membership, in Brown and Levinson’s model¹⁴. Whilst the English language does not have a ‘T/V syste’ expressly distinguishing the honorific from the non-honorific pronoun, there are alternative ways of conveying distance and formality, such as passivization or third person reference as tools for self- or other-reference. The choice of consistently using a more personal form of address and, in any event, a form of address that is not conventionally considered as honorific or formal, has the pragmatic intent of presupposing familiarity and emphasizing that the two parties belong to a same group or somehow lie at the same level.

3.2.2 Interrogative forms

In the following examples, the Union seems to anticipate questions and doubts that the readers may have on the matter discussed.

What does the selection process involve? (European Communities 2003)

What if he cannot handle the complaint? (European Ombudsman 2005)

Why Solvit? (European Communities 1995-2005b)

Questions on the European Union? (European Communities 1995-2005a)

Rutherford (2000: 16) explains that ‘advertising [...] normally organizes fears and desires [...] among target populations in order to construct and sell a range of social products’. By formulating these questions, the Union raises fears and desires that may or may not be shared by the readers, but that will certainly be taken into consideration by them for the very fact that they have been raised and mentioned in the texts. This technique shows the Union’s concern (whether real or just simulated) for its citizen’s needs and its willingness to provide full and transparent information on the services/opportunities described. The Union, therefore, is trying to reassure the readers on the matter discussed and win their confidence, in an attempt to raise popular interest and appreciation.

Fairclough (1989: 126) explains that ‘asking, be it for action or information, is generally a position of power, as too is giving information – except where it has been asked for’. Therefore, it should also be noted that, providing information in response to an information request helps reduce the authority and perceived power of the information provider. What is more, if such request is formulated using the first person singular, it is the reader that, through manipulative presupposition, is put in a power position. Indeed, the combination of the interrogative form with first person singular reference generates a double subtle effect: the readers are put in a power condition because, through the manipulation of their assumptions, they take up the

role of askers; at the same time, the perception of the Union's authority as an information provider is minimized because it seems as if the information supplied has actually been requested.

It can be claimed that this strategy assumes both a positive and a negative *politeness* function. In terms of positive *politeness*, by showing awareness of the citizens' fears, doubts and perplexities, the Union claims 'common ground' with the audience to prove or simulate that the people's fears are the institution's fears; second, by providing answers and clarifications on the matter discussed, the Union demonstrates or simulates cooperation and solidarity and shows its willingness to attend to the readers' needs (for information)¹⁵. This establishes a cooperative *liaison* and prompts a feeling of trust in the audience.

In terms of negative *politeness*, the Union addresses the negative *face* of the reader as it creates a perception of non-imposition. Indeed, the use of questions as a justification for supplying information helps minimize the threat of supplying information that is not actually requested. Namely, receiving an answer in response to a question that you have formulated (or that you are led to think that you have formulated), reduces the perception of having that information 'imposed' upon yourself without justification – that is, without an originating question justifying the information supply. Furthermore, by giving information on its services and workings, the Union seems to invite the readers to judge by themselves the value of what is being offered. In other words, the Union seems to acknowledge the readers' right to freely decide whether the EU project is beneficial enough to be worthy of their approval. Hence, what is also reduced is the perception of the Union's interference with the readers' self-determination. As a matter of fact, by controlling the type and amount of information supplied, the Union does affect its citizens' assessment, but it is clearly the readers' perception of non-interference that counts.

3.2.3 Passivization

In general, the passive voice perfectly 'accords with the impersonality and distance of the institutional identity' (Fairclough 1989: 149). However, in the texts examined, the passive does not always appear as an unmarked feature of institutional discourse. If numerous instances of passivization may be justified by the formal style typical of public institutions, others strategically appear in contexts where impersonality and distance are particularly beneficial for the image of the Union. Hence, the passive voice may partially depend on a deeper agenda. In the examples below, the action described may damage the reputation or highlight the fallibility of the institution:

If the case is not resolved satisfactorily during the course of the inquiries, the Ombudsman will try to find a friendly solution which puts right the case of maladministration and satisfies the complainant. (European Ombudsman 2005)

Nevertheless, if a problem goes unresolved, or you consider that the proposed solution is unacceptable, you can still pursue legal action through a national court or lodge a formal complaint with the European Commission. (European Communities 1995-2005b)

The lack of agentivity produced by passivization creates a general effect of non-responsibility, which is exploited to conceal the Union's weaknesses, deficiencies or unsuccessful performance. This choice is understandable from a promotional point of view: if the Union's goal is to attract and inspire trust, there is no point in highlighting a few unhappy episodes that may damage its image and cast light upon its fallibility.

However, it is also true that mentioning these episodes, and therefore being honest with the audience, can certainly help win the reader's appreciation.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 194), the passive voice is among the strategies adopted to avoid any clear and direct reference to the agents involved in the *face*-threatening act (FTA). In these examples, the FTA is represented on a macro-level by the broad context of the document, urging the endorsement of and participation in the unpopular EU project (with all the implications that this may have). On a micro-level, the sentences deal with the institution's shortcomings: citizens are asked to endorse an institution that, not only is unpopular, but may also fail to meet their needs. This clearly increases the seriousness of the threat.

Hence, passives are firstly used to address the negative *face* of the readers: they minimize the fallibility of the institution as they enable the author to avoid attributing directly and clearly such fallibility to the Union. Since the 'fallible' subject is omitted, the impersonality of the statements reduces the threatening potential of the FTA. Moreover, the lack of agentivity makes these statements sound as general truths referred to uncontrollable events (e.g. 'if a problem goes unresolved' implying *problems sometimes go unresolved*). This attenuates the responsibility of the Union in such failures by implicitly evoking the unforeseeable.

The reassuring statements immediately following these examples ('the Ombudsman will try to find a friendly solution' and 'you can still pursue legal action') focus the reader's attention on the options available to solve the problem. This also contributes to diminish the seriousness of the institution's failure, given that, apparently, it can easily be remedied. In this case, the pragmatic effect generated is instead that of a positive *politeness* move: the Union shows cooperation and commitment to attend to the citizens' needs as it provides alternative routes for the resolution of their problem.

In the corpus, the passive voice is also used to distance the Union from its own actions, thus attenuating its perceived authority and intrusion in Europeans' lives.

On January 1 2002 the euro banknotes and coins were put into circulation.
(European Central Bank,[n.d.]

This agentless passive obfuscates the actual performer of the action and attributes the responsibility for the circulation of the Euro to an unclear subject. This strategy attends to the readers' negative *national face* as it reduces the perception of top-down imposition, which is particularly strong in the case of the Euro, as it is demonstrated by the many debates linked to its introduction and its impact on the cost of living.

Fairclough (1989: 123-4) includes passivization and the 'obfuscation of agency' among the textual features carrying experiential values. They convey an underlying ideological stance vis-à-vis the role played by the logical subject of an action and his/her responsibility for the effects of such action. However, in the examples cited above, passivization does not seem to reflect a perception of reality based on the Union's experience and ideology. In other words, I argue that the Union is aware of being responsible for its failures (e.g. for its inability to solve a case) and for its actions (e.g. for the introduction of the Euro); therefore, it would be debatable to argue that the Union, based on its experience and ideology, actually perceives a lack of responsibility on its part. Rather, I would argue that the institution is aware of such responsibility/agency and tries to conceal it through the passive voice: passives are conveniently exploited as marketing tools thanks to their properties of impersonalization and 'responsibility-avoidance'. Hence, in the particular case of self-

effacement, it can be claimed that passives mainly carry expressive and relational values. Indeed, the Union deliberately omits messages that can damage its image and create further skepticism, and chooses to portray a 'face-safer' picture of efficiency, reliability and non-intrusiveness. This makes the Union more trustworthy, EU integration more 'desirable' and the European identity in general a more marketable product.

3.2.4 Lexical features

As explained in the previous sections, some formal features possess expressive values because they convey the text producer's evaluation of reality. Expressive values play a key role in the persuasive and appealing intent of the text producer as they have the power to influence the reader's perspective on a specific issue. Walters and Haar (2000: 143) specify that 'concepts like freedom, democracy, justice, security and citizenship feature prominently within the discourse of European integration'. Indeed, the texts examined feature what Jacobs and Meier (1998: 29) define as 'optimistic Euro-discourse' and evocative language: frequent references are made to concepts like closeness, efficiency, cooperation, success, shared goals, opportunities and other positive and heartening feelings.

The European Personnel Selection Office is *firmly committed* to the principle that the organisation must be a *true reflection* of the society *it serves* (European Communities 2003)

This official website offers you all the information related to this *momentous* occasion (European Central Bank [n.d.]

SOLVIT: *Effective problem solving* in the Internal Market (European Communities 1995-2005b)

Your *direct* line to the European Union (European Communities 1995-2005a)

As Jacobs and Maier (1998: 29) emphasize, it seems that 'a new kind of European patriotism and solidarity is being generated appealing to a shared feeling of 'grandeur', a consciousness of common responsibilities and opportunities and a sense of a shared European future'. When these lexical elements are combined in appealing catchphrases, then, their persuasive potential is notably intensified:

A career in the heart of Europe (European Communities 2003)

There's no job like it (European Communities 2003)

If you do not try, you will never know (European Communities 2003)

The Euro...banknotes, coins and more... (European Central Bank [n.d.]

Your voice in Europe (European Communities 1995-2005c)

'Catchy headlines' and slogans are marketing tools consisting in the textual realization of 'features of commodity advertising genre' (Fairclough, 1993: 146): they are likeable advertising *formulae* that capture the readers' attention (e.g. 'The Euro...banknotes, coins and more...'; 'a career in the heart of Europe') and invite the audience to appropriate the benefits of being part of the Union (e.g.: 'if you do not try, you will never know'; 'your voice in Europe'; 'there's no job like it'). The invitation to participate in European integration is even more convincing if made through the direct voice of a third party, as the following quotations show:

I think that organisations like SOLVIT are an example of the true European spirit which we as citizens all need to promote: for its efficiency, its pragmatism and for bridging European law and rights closer to the European citizen. (European Communities 1995-2005b)

Your Voice in Europe is the European Commission's 'single access point' to a wide variety of consultations, discussions and other tools which enable you to play an active role in the European policy-making process. (European Communities 1995-2005c)

In terms of polite outcome, the positive values and beneficial goals evoked in the texts are likely to be appealing to or shared by Europeans. The values expressed are indeed *national face*-saving as they refer to principles like democracy, popular sovereignty, reliability and institutional transparency, among the major concerns of Euro-skeptics. By highlighting them, the Union is simulating awareness of the reader's desires, expectations and objectives. Hence, the text producer attends to the audience's positive *face*: it asserts or implies knowledge of the wants and concerns of its interlocutor by reiterating that the two parties are 'cooperatively involved' in accomplishing or assuring these values, which are primarily national values (Brown and Levinson 1987: 125). Of course this cooperation is still unbalanced, leaning toward the Union's side; this explains the numerous calls for greater popular involvement and participation featured in these documents.

3.2.5 Textual sections

Some of the documents in the corpus give an account of cases, or 'success stories', where the application of the service provided has been particularly successful, or report the respondents' comments of appreciation and praise for the service's efficiency. These sections are titled:

What people say about SOLVIT (European Communities 1995-2005b)

Success Stories (European Communities 1995-2005b)

Can you Give Some Examples? (European Ombudsman 2005)

The use of sections highlighting the company's success, showing the good quality of a product or proving customer's satisfaction are typical of corporate advertising and often recur in traditional promotional texts. By including the past triumphs and having them told through the direct voice of the customer, the corporation demonstrates its clients' contentment and the great value of its products. By emulating this approach, the Union gives evidence of its social utility and presents itself as providing good and efficient services to Europeans, in the attempt to gain popular approval.

From a pragmatic perspective, while in the previous categories the Union often showed (or simply simulated) willingness to attend to the readers' wants and pursue the same objectives, these sections prove that this is not just a desire: it is a fact. Indeed, the Union is already attending to Europeans' wants and is concretely helping them achieve their goals. What is more, the institution's assistance is particularly efficient, judging from the respondents' enthusiastic comments and degree of satisfaction. Hence, an ingenious pragmatic interpretation of these sections suggests that they fulfill a positive *politeness* function: they do not simply show the institution's awareness or willingness to attend to the citizens' needs, but they prove the Union's tangible attendance to such needs.

The quotation of the following eloquent comment made by a respondent is worthy of attention:

My contact with yourselves has really restored my faith in the workings of the European Union (European Communities 1995-2005b)

By including this remark, the Union performs an act of self-threat: it damages its own image, its own public *face*, as it admits that skepticism is widely spread among Europeans and acknowledges that ‘the workings of the European Union’ may be perceived as unreliable or inefficient. However, this statement also brings to light the renewed confidence Europeans can pay to the institution, and encourages Euro-skeptics to experience European integration and exercise their rights, so that their trust in the Union can be restored. The fact that this comment is made by a British citizen, then, is particularly meaningful, given that the British are usually considered among the most fervent Euro-skeptics.

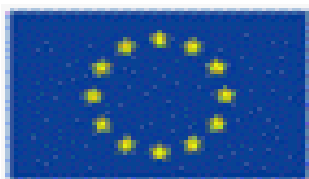
3.2.6 Visuals¹⁶

According to critical discourse analysts, not only language but also other types of semiosis, such as graphic representations and visuals, are key elements of social practice (Wodak et al. 1999; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Fairclough 2005). Indeed, icons, symbols, and numerous other visuals play a major role in the advertising industry. If consistently reproduced, they turn into easily recognizable marks of a specific brand or affiliation and help ‘create a world which potential consumer, producer and product can jointly inhabit’ (Fairclough 1992: 211). The promotional effect of images, symbols and colors is defined by Rutherford (2000: 11-12) as a ‘peripheral route’ of persuasion where the reader is not engaged or consciously willing ‘to elaborate an argument’. The emotional appeal provoked by suggestive visuals ‘might be much more telling than any overtly rational approach’ (Rutherford 2000: 11-12).

Phillipson (2003: 59) claims that ‘if an EU supranational identity is ever to become a profound experience for Europeans, the shared values that this identification will draw on will have to [...] take cultural and linguistic symbolic form in specific types of communication and imagery’. In the European context, symbols help establish an underlying thread across EU domains and institutions, and represent a recognizable sign of relation to the European Union.

The texts analyzed in this work confirm this trend. In terms of symbols, all the documents considered are linked by a common element: they all reproduce stars, one of the distinctive marks of the Union. The flag of the EU (a circle of twelve stars on a blue background –figure 1), a background comprised of blurred stars or simply stylized stars consistently appear in these texts.

Figure 1. European Union Flag



Their insistent reproduction creates an unconscious perception of EU belonging: they serve as subliminal marks of EU sponsorship that make a text easily recognizable as

an EU text. In terms of the color matching featured in the documents, blue and a limited range of yellow-orange shades are the dominant tints throughout the corpus. Blue and yellow are the colors of the European flag and their reproduction in contexts that do not explicitly portray the flag generates a potent suggestive effect related to this symbolism. Finally, as far as pictures are concerned, several images portray EU executives, professionals at work or simply groups of people. On one hand, this helps ‘humanize’ the institution and bring it closer to its citizens; on the other, it also proves the Union’s appropriation of the corporate-style imagery, thus reducing the gap between the renewed institutional culture and corporate culture.

The text called *Europe Direct* (figure 2) deserves some extensive remarks.

Figure 2. Europe Direct¹⁷



This document is a one-page leaflet featuring a very limited amount of text. In a very condensed portion of space, the two main symbols of the EU project reproduce the values at stake: a semi-circle of stars and a blurred image portraying a group of people convey the salient messages of unity, cooperation and European membership. A toll-free number is also provided to enable the reader to get in direct contact with the Union. This poster replicates the many ads of associations publicizing services or corporations advertising after-sales support, revealing how far-sighted the Union’s approach is: if an after-sales stance is adopted, it means that the sale of a product is envisaged. By calling the EU, whether for informative or participative purposes, the readers demonstrate their interest or willingness to contribute to European integration. Hence, the ‘product’ has been ‘sold’: the citizen is starting to feel involved enough, or European enough, to assume a proactive behavior and participate in the Union’s activity. At this point, the EU offers ‘after-sales’ assistance and advertises its support to the citizen’s endorsement of the EU project. In this poster, the institution is implicitly assuring its readers that, once they are ready to call the European Union, and therefore to get involved in its activity, they will receive the institution’s prompt support and will be assisted in the exercise of their rights and of their new European identity.

Brown and Levinson (1987) do not explicitly include visual communication in their taxonomy of positive and negative politeness strategies. However, since images possess their own grammar (Kress 2003; Kress 2000; Kress et al. 1997), they can be considered as full and complete communicative systems comparable to verbal text and, as such, they can be read, analyzed and interpreted. Hence, if we were to provide

a graphic dimension to Brown and Levinson's model (1987), it would be reasonable to include the visual elements mentioned above among the strategies claiming 'common ground' between the parties, creating a common environment where ideas, values and objectives are shared and jointly pursued. In particular, recurrent symbols and colors can be equated to real 'in-group identity markers': they do not simply evoke a sense of European membership but they truly enact such membership. Indeed, if the elements used to establish a common thread among Europeans try to foster a sense belonging to a common group, their frequent reproduction creates a sense of familiarity as the reader recognizes these items and associates them with a collective enterprise. Hence, since Europeans do not share the same linguistic code, it seems that a common graphic code is spread in order to establish a pan-European 'visual jargon' bringing EU citizens together, 'a common Euro-symbolism' truly enacting a collective identity (Jacobs and Meier 1998: 23).

4. Discussion and conclusion

This preliminary analysis suggests that two main types of relational values are conveyed in the texts examined. First, a relationship of closeness and cooperation: the Union repeatedly expresses a sense of togetherness and commitment to achieve goals and values that are beneficial for the common good (i.e. democracy, progress, transparency, social utility). This friendly and cooperative relationship is complemented by the attempt to convey positive feelings and a pervading sense of efficiency and reliability, which make European membership more enviable and appealing. Hence, these texts also feature some important expressive values: the author provides a positive and enthusiastic portrait of the EU system, resources and potential in an attempt to instill the same enthusiasm and fascination in the readers.

However, a relation of respect and non-intrusiveness also seems to be established. In a few cases, the strategic self-effacement of the Union helps soothe the perceived impact of its role, actions and power over EU citizens. In particular, remoteness is conveyed, through lack of agentivity and pronominal shifts, between the institution and concepts like interference, responsibility and fallibility; this helps conceal the institution's weaknesses and minimize its perceived authority over Europeans' lives and over their right to self-determination on the integration issue. This self-effacing attitude is in clear contrast with the feelings and images of closeness, cooperation and togetherness evoked and overtly prompted throughout the corpus; however, it represents a precious discursive strategy when dealing with delicate issues that can damage the Union's image or exacerbate Euro-skepticism. Therefore, it must be specified that only limited and strategically-placed occurrences of self-effacement appear in the texts to help support the overall positive and cooperative atmosphere consistently evoked, thus making it more believable.

Although no generalizations can be made, this communicative strategy and the interpretation of the function it fulfils provided in this work suggest that a promotional intent exists on the part of the institution. The Union seems to market a feeling of togetherness, European membership and commitment to a bright continental future - more broadly, a true European identity - in order to fully 'sell' the EU project or, at least, make it desirable. In doing so, the Union stimulates both a civic and more utilitarian support of the Union, relying on EU citizens' exercise of rights and enjoyment of benefits, as well as a more emotional involvement in European integration, calling on a pan-European thread, a sense of commonality, and the pursuit of a collective destiny. From a critical perspective, the Union is not only promoting a

European identity, but it is actually enacting such identity by consistently reproducing concepts and images that are aimed to alter Europe's current social configuration. In other words, this use of discourse is, itself, an 'act of identity' on the part of the Union, an actual establishment of a collective identity, which simply needs to be fully appropriated by EU citizens¹⁸. However, it has been highlighted how sensitive Europeans may be on the issue of national identity and how diffident they often are on actions taken at the EU level. Assuming the Union's awareness of its addressees' national pride and resistance in joining the EU project, the discursive traces minimizing the imposition of specific views and actions upon the citizens can also be read as a promotional tactic: the Union shows respect to the hostile audience and attenuates any perception of coercion to win the audience's confidence and appreciation.

In pragmatic terms, the publications examined feature discursive traits broadly serving as positive and negative *national face* savers. The Union conveys a feeling of familiarity and collective membership and shows willingness to attend to the citizens' wants and to cooperate to accomplish shared aims (positive *politeness*). Yet, in doing so, the institution explores a dangerous territory – the formation of a supranational identity and the endorsement of a form of supranational state – and has to face a problematic audience, already possessing a local identity and already part of a national territory. Hence, to deal with this complex situation, the Union seems to make use of discursive tools that enable it to disappear from the surface grammar. Such tactical self-effacement reduces the perception of the institution's intrusion into Europeans' lives and its imposition on their self-determination (negative *politeness*).

These discursive strategies have the power to affect the readers' perceptions on the integration issue. First, what is conveyed is that EU integration should not be seen as the result of top-down political imposition, but as the natural and historical trajectory of a European collective progress. Second, Europeans are led to perceive that their endorsement of the Union is neither induced nor coerced by the institution, but is the result of a free choice: if and when they decide to endorse the EU project, trust the Union and feel part of it, this will depend on their free-will, on their interest in and appreciation of EU activity. Thirdly, it is conveyed that the endorsement of the European project is a wise and desirable choice because European integration is per se beneficial for Europeans' common good and for the prosperous future of the member states.

These remarks and the interpretation of EU discourse offered in this paper stem from a subjective reading of the EU publications examined. As Cameron (2001: 138) points out, 'texts can support an infinite variety of readings, and we do not have independent access to the intentions of the text producers [therefore], it is impossible to prove using discourse analytic techniques that a text exemplifies a particular ideological stance'. The analysis of a larger corpus of EU documents would certainly help confirm the communicative trends observed. Even so, interpretations differing from the one proposed in this paper are certainly legitimate and encouraged, as they can help expand the ongoing debate on the European identity.

As a final remark, I would like to specify that, in this paper, I tried to illustrate one of the possible routes that may have been adopted at the European level to overcome what is considered as one of the main obstacles to European integration: the lack of a feeling of European belonging in the population. My discussion is neither meant to support nor to condemn the Union's alleged promotion or enactment of a collective

identity through discourse: the interpretation of EU discourse I have offered is not intended as an assessment on whether the *commodification* of the European identity, for the purpose of facilitating European integration, is legitimate or beneficial. Nonetheless, this promotion may well be readable by some critical discourse analysts as a sign of top-down oppression and as a manipulative practice that should be denounced and challenged. Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 259) explain that a distinctive feature of CDA is that 'it intervenes on the side of dominated and oppressed groups and against dominating groups'. In this view, discourse choices and strategies are often seen as ways of manipulating thought, attitudes and social relations, as ways of craftily perpetuating the dominant group's ideology (Johnstone 2002). Determining whether the texts examined are ultimately fair is not the objective of this work but may certainly be an interesting elaboration on my argument. Hence, although I simply tried to identify some interesting textual traits featured in EU discourse, and interpret them within the particular European social context where they are used, this work undeniably offers an alternative reading of EU discourse that may represent a starting point for formulating further hypotheses on this debated topic.

¹ Today, the term 'nationalism' often carries pejorative connotations as it tends to be associated to extremist xenophobic movements. It is important to highlight that, in this work, nationalism is treated as a synonym of patriotism, national pride and national belonging, denoting a sense of allegiance and attachment to one's country (cf. Llobera 1993), and it is not meant to imply a racially-prejudiced stance.

² On these issues, see Bellier (2000); Weiss and Wodak (2000); Garcia (1993); Llobera (1993); Wright, (2000); Phillipson (2003); Schäffner et al. (1996); Walters and Haar (2005); Phillipson (1994); Picht (1993); De Witte (1993).

³ On the notion of 'democratic deficit', see Bellier (2000); Walters and Haar (2005); Beetham and Lord (1998); Lipschutz (2004).

⁴ EU member states consist of a culturally diverse population that displays a multi-layered thread of identities tracing not only national roots but also regional, provincial, municipal backgrounds. In this work, the choice to refer to national identity is by no means intended to portray a limited picture of what Europe truly is today and what it has been in the past, or to conceal the growing multicultural composition of its member states derived from migration flows. Instead, this choice is meant to focus the study primarily on intra-EU dynamics (EU vis-à-vis its citizens and its member states). Speculations on intra-member states' dynamics of identity and belonging, although interesting, have been deliberately left out. It is certainly worth expanding on the conflicts arising at the subnational level, just as it would be interesting to observe how internal affairs affect national identity preservation and European identity building (see Wright 2000; Llobera 1993; Picht 1993).

⁵ Brian Morgan (2005), personal communication.

⁶ On the notion of *face*, see also Goffman (1967).

⁷ This definition of *national face* is adapted from the definition of *face* provided in Thomas (1995).

⁸ For a definition of Face-Threatening Act (FTA), see Brown and Levinson (1987).

⁹ Language is intended here as the range of 'semiotic elements' characterizing social life. This includes both language in its strict sense but also forms of visual semiosis (Fairclough 2005: 77-78; cf. Wodak et al. 1999; Fairclough and Wodak 1999; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999; Kress et al. 1997).

¹⁰ See also Fairclough (1993).

¹¹ On this topic, see also Fanelli (2006); Abélès (2000).

¹² Text should be intended in a broad sense as the corpus will be considered from a *multimodal* perspective (on the notion of 'multimodality', see Kress et al. (1997); Kress (2000)): this investigation will not be limited to the linguistic dimension of the documents collected, but will also refer to visual and graphic elements such as textual sections, symbols, images and colors, among the key semiotic components of modern public discourse (Wodak et al. 1999; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Fairclough 2005; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999).

¹³ For a description of 'taboo topics' see Brown and Levinson (1987).

¹⁴ See Brown and Levinson (1987: 107).

¹⁵ Strategy 7 and 9 in Brown and Levinson (1987); see also Kasper (1997).

¹⁶ All the images displayed in this section are copyrighted European Communities, 1995-2005®.

¹⁷ The poster presented in this work has recently been replaced by a renewed and restyled version. The *Europa* website is constantly updated, therefore, the documents retrieved for analysis may be subject to change and revision.

¹⁸ On the notion of 'act of identity' see Cameron (2001: 170).

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