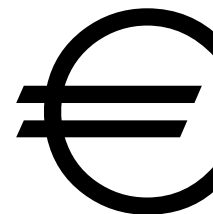


*Euro or eora? Cent or ceint?*

## The new currency and Ireland



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A SINGLE CURRENCY, which has been named in the English language the *euro*, and whose decimal subdivision is called the *cent*, has been introduced by the monetary union of a number of member states of the European Union. Of interest in multilingual Europe are the different ways in which these new words will be adapted to the pronunciation, grammar, and spelling requirements of European languages, whether these languages be official EU languages, other languages of the countries adopting the new currency as their national currency, or other languages used elsewhere in Europe.

Rather than requesting the input of its member states with regard to the proper use of the currency's name in their languages, the European Council has surprisingly decreed that the spelling of the currency and of its subunit shall be identical in all official languages of the EU.<sup>1</sup> It has also directed that the plural and the singular of the words *euro* and *cent* shall be identical in a number of these languages.

It is difficult to summarize the far-reaching consequences such directives would have should they be accepted by legislators or laypersons in Europe. They violate the principle of subsidiarity, which guarantees certain realms

of endeavour to be internal to the countries of the EU, and thus to be outside the scope of the European Council's powers of direction. We will see below that linguistic argument alone will show that the directives of the Council cannot be implemented justly, given the European linguistic situation.

### BORROWING NEW VOCABULARY

In general, when a new word is introduced to a language, it is changed according to relevant phonetic criteria. English speakers borrowed the Czech word *robot*, but adapted it to English pronunciation ([ˈrəʊbɒt] not [ˈrɒbɒt]) and grammar (pl. *robots* not *roboty*). The Arabic word قهوة (*qabwa*) was borrowed via a variety of routes into a number of naturalized forms by the languages of Europe: *kafē* (Basque); *cafè* (Catalan); *kaffe* (Danish); *koffie* (Dutch); *coffee* (English); *kabv* (Estonian); *kabvi* (Finnish); *café* (French); ყავა (*qava* – Georgian); *Kaffee* (German); καφές (*kafés* – Greek); *kávé* (Hungarian); *kaffi* (Icelandic); *caife* (Irish); *caffè* (Italian); *káffe* (Northern Sami); *kawa* (Polish); *café* (Portuguese); *кофе* (*kofe* – Russian); *kava* (Slovene); *café* (Spanish); *kaffe* (Swedish); *kabve* (Turkish); *coffi* (Welsh). In each of these languages, the

<sup>1</sup> See Directive (EC) No. 1103/97 of 17 June 1997 from the European Council: *Whereas ... the European Council furthermore considered that the name of the single currency must be the same in all the official*

*languages of the European Union, taking into account the existence of different alphabets.... This Regulation shall be binding in its entirety and directly applicable in all Member States.*

word has been assigned its appropriate gender and/or declension.

The name of the new European currency and its subdivision are not given to us *ex nibilo*. The name of the subdivision is a truncation of the Latin word *centum* ‘100’, and has been used as a subdivision of other currencies, such as the Australian, Canadian, Hong Kong, New Zealand, and US dollars (*cent*), and the Estonian kroon (*sent*). Many languages have a pre-existing form of this word already in use.

The currency name is a truncation of the name of the continent. The form of the name of the continent has a number of spellings and pronunciations in different languages:

<i>Eiropa</i>	[ˈejropa]	Latvian
<i>Eoraip</i>	[ˈjʌɾˠəpʲ]	Irish
<i>Eurohpa</i>	[ˈeuroˠpɑ]	Sami
<i>Eurooppa</i>	[ˈeuroːppɑ]	Finnish
<i>Europa</i>	[øwˈroːpa]	Danish
	[ɔyˈropa]	German
	[euˈrɔpa]	Italian
		Portuguese
	[euˈropa]	Dutch
		Spanish
<i>Európa</i>	[euˈroːpa]	Hungarian
<i>Europe</i>	[ˈjʊəɹəp]	English
	[øˈrop]	French
<i>Europa</i>	[ɛvˈropa]	Swedish
<i>Evrópa</i>	[ɛvˈroupa]	Icelandic
<i>Ewrop</i>	[euˈrʌp]	Welsh
<i>Ευρώπη (Eyrópa)</i>	[ɛvˈroːpa]	Greek
<i>Европа (Evrópa)</i>	[ɛvˈropa]	Bulgarian
	[jivˈropə]	Russian
<i>Еўропа (Eŭropa)</i>	[ɛwˈropa]	Belarusian
<i>Եվրոպա (Evrópa)</i>	[jɛvˈropa]	Armenian
<i>ევროპა (evropa)</i>	[ɛvˈropa]	Georgian

The simplest thing to do to derive the name of the currency would be to clip the end off of the name of the continent – as is done in Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. According to the European Council’s Directive (EC) No. 1103/97, however, the spelling of the name of the currency must be *euro*. Does this really imply that the forms *eiro*, *eora*, *evro*, *evró*, and *evro* are not “allowed”?

The banknotes will bear the text **EURO** and **ΕΥΡΩ** in two different scripts, Latin and Greek. One may presume that Cyrillic **ЕВРО** would also appear, should Macedonian, Russian, Serbian, or Ukrainian become official EU languages. Will Armenian **ԵՄՐՈ** and Georgian **ევრო** also be “allowed”? What about Belarusian **ЕЎРО**?

One may note with interest that in the former Soviet Union, national languages were respected, allowing the Union Republics to use entirely different words, spellings, and declensions for the national currency. On a 1961 three-ruble note, as can be seen below, the following forms all appear – grammatically these are the forms that follow the number 3 in the respective languages: *rubla* (Estonian); *rubļi* (Latvian); *rubliai* (Lithuanian); *карбованці (karbovanци – Ukrainian); манат (manat – Azeri, Turkmen); рубле (ruble – Moldavian); рублі (rubli – Belarusian); рубля (rublja – Russian); сом (som – Kazakh, Kyrgyz); сӯм (sūm – Tajik); сўм (sūm – Uzbek); րոփլ (rouphlu – Armenian); მანეთი (maneti – Georgian).*

Slovenians are at present “permitted” to use their natural spelling *evro*. Does it follow from the Directive that on their accession to EU membership, they will be required to change their spelling? What then would be the potential social and economic cost of such a change-



over, in terms of the necessary revision of elementary educational materials, dictionaries and encyclopaediae, electronic spell-checkers, re-education of users, and so on?

### IDEOGRAPHS

Such questions arise from the assumption implicit in the European Council's Directive which takes no cognizance of either sociolinguistic or ordinary linguistic reality – that the written form of the currency name must be constant and unchanged, as though the four letters were equivalent in an ideographic sense to the abstract currency symbol – note that “\$” means both *dollar* and *peso* – or to a digit – one sees “2” but says *еркowlк* [*erkowk'*], *bi*, *dos*, *to*, *twee*, *two*, *kaks*, *kaksi*, *deux*, *ορι* [*ori*], *zwei*, *δύο* [*dýo*], *kettó*, *tveir*, *a dó*, *due*, *guokte*, *dwa*, *dois*, *ðva* [*dva*], *dva*, *dos*, *två*, *iki*, *dwy*....

What has been ignored are two simple facts. One, that European languages have orthographies which are based on the conventional values of the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic letters as adapted to those languages, and two, that languages which employ alphabetic writing systems generally do not treat strings of letters as ideographs, independent of the normal reading rules.

### SINGULAR AND PLURAL

That the Directive requires that the plural form of the currency name – at least when combined with a figure – should remain unchanged naïvely assumes that all languages do, or can, treat nouns following numbers in the same way. In reality, however, this grammatical environment is particularly rich where European languages are concerned. In many European languages, it is true, the nominative plural is used with numbers above 1. In Celtic languages, however, a digit is followed by a noun in its singular, usually with initial consonant mutation caused by the digit preceding. In Russian, the numbers 2, 3, and 4 are followed by the genitive singular, and numbers from 5 on are followed by the genitive plural. In Estonian and Finnish, the partitive singular is used with numbers greater than 1.

The European Council's Directive goes far beyond the scope of its powers, in that it impinges upon the grammar of natural languages. The Finns refused to accept the Directive. Nominative singular: *euro*, *sentti*; nominative plural: *eurot*, *sentit*; partitive singular: *euroa*, *senttiä*. In Italy, there are two factions: those who consider the correct plural of *l'euro* to be *gli euro* (following the Directive), and those who consider the correct plural to be *gli euri*. The latter group includes *l'Accademia della Crusca*, the most important normative institution for the Italian language.

Let us consider the problem we have in Ireland with the European Council's Directive. As is reflected in the English of the *Economic and Monetary Union Act, 1998*, and in the Irish of the *Acht um Aontas Eacnamaíoch agus Airgeadaíochta, 1998*, the State has accepted the Directive. In the former, the terms *euro* and

*cent* are used invariantly, ignoring the normal plural formation in *-s* which is natural to the English language. From section 11(1) of the Act:

The Minister may provide coins denominated in euro or in cent....

Let us assume for a moment that the pound were being established as Ireland's currency. The text would not read *denominated in pounds or in pence* according to the Act above, but would rather read *denominated in pound or in penny*. Likewise, if the dollar were being established as Ireland's currency, *denominated in dollar or in cent* would be used instead of *denominated in dollars or in cents*. Why then should the text of the Act not read *denominated in euros or in cents*, that is, in standard English? What we see is that, in the English version of the Act, the nouns *euro* and *cent* have been magically transformed (without popular consensus or consent) into special plurals like that of the word *sheep*.

Turning now to the Irish text, we find in section 11(1) of the Act:

*Féadfaidh an tAire monaí arna n-ainmniú san euro nó sa cent a sholáthar....*

This text attempts to avoid the problem by translating the English *in euro or in cent* as *san euro nó sa cent* 'in the euro and in the cent'. But we have a problem here with *sa cent*: Nouns beginning in *c-* (pronounced [k]) must lenite after *sa* and the word at a minimum should be written *sa chent* ([sə çen<sup>h</sup>tʲ]).<sup>2</sup>

If the text of the *Acht* as written above were applied to the pound and the penny, or to the



From a poster by the Euro Changeover Board of Ireland.

dollar and the cent, we would expect *sa bhunt nó sa phingin*, or *sa dbollar nó sa cheint* (cf. Tomás de Bhaldraithe, *English-Irish Dictionary*, 1959, *s.v.* "cent"). If the Irish text were faithful to the English text (assuming that the English text employed plural forms as it should), we should then have *i bpuint nó i bpinginí* or *i ndollair nó i gceinteanna*. This would then imply that we should have *in eoraí* (or *in eorónna*) *nó i gceinteanna*.

## GENDER

According to article 6(1) of the *Acht um Aontas Eacnamaíoch agus Airgeadaíochta, 1998*, following the European Council's Directive (EC) No. 974/98 of 3 May 1998, it is stated that *is é an euro airgeadra an Stáit*, 'the currency of the State is the euro'. Although the masculine pronoun *é* is used, the feminine form *an euro* is used instead of the masculine form *an t-euro*.

2 Unless the *c-* here means [s], in which case a mutation may apply, and the pronunciation would be

either [sə s<sup>h</sup>en<sup>h</sup>tʲ] or [sə t<sup>h</sup>en<sup>h</sup>tʲ]. But this cannot be written with *ch-*; it must be written either *s-* or *ts-*.

The genitive also appears in the Act, in the title of Chapter II, *Córas Airgeadra an Euro* ‘the Euro Currency System’. If the word is feminine, the two clauses have to read *is í an euro airgeadra an Stáit* and *Córas Airgeadra na hEuro*; if the word is masculine, the two clauses have to read *is é an t-euro airgeadra an Stáit* and *Córas Airgeadra an Euro*.<sup>3</sup> The mixing of genders seen above is not permitted in the Irish language.

Rather more shocking is that it seems to have been accepted that the words *euro* and *cent* shall be “immune” to grammatical mutation following numbers, implying that the name of our national currency is considered to be a foreign word, attracting neither *séimbiú* ‘lenition’ nor *urú* ‘nasalization’. One cannot but consider \**ocht euro*, \**cúig cent*, and \**eight cent* – instead of *ocht n-euro*, *cúig chent*, *ocht gcent*<sup>4</sup> – to be anything but errors according to the most basic of normal rules of Irish grammar and orthography.

Further, the spelling of the word *euro* itself, when compared with the ordinary rules of Irish orthography, would imply that the first half of the word, *eu-*, should signify what is now written *éa-*; cf. *ḡeul* ‘sixpenny piece’ > *réal*. There must also be an error in the second half of the word, since *-o* should be *-ó*; cf. for example that *e* precedes *-o* in *daideo* [dʲadʲo:] ‘grandfather’, compared to *mamó* [mʲamʲo:] ‘grandmother’).

We already have an official word for *cent* anyway. As we saw above, *ceint* appears in de Bhaldraithe’s *English-Irish Dictionary* (Oifig an

tSoláthair 1959) and in the official government business dictionary *Foclóir Staidéir Ghnó* (An Gúm 1989) as well.

Finally, since pronunciation is not indicated in the Act above, guidance has to be given as to whether *euro* is to be pronounced [ˈe:ro:] or [ˈjʊəro:] and whether *cent* is to be pronounced [kʲɛnʲtʲ] or [sʲɛnʲtʲ].

## CONCLUSIONS

We have seen above that *ceint* m4, pl. *ceinteanna* already exists. The correct Irish Gaelic forms should be *eora* f4, pl. *eoraí* (cf. *deora* ‘furrow’, pl. *deoraí*), or – more likely perhaps, on the strength of the English word – *eoró* f4, pl. *eorónna* (cf. *bró* ‘millstone’, pl. *brónna*). The genitive singulars should be *na heora* (or *na heoró*) and *an cheint*, and normal mutations must apply: *ocht n-eora* (or *ocht n-eoró*), *cúig cheint*, *ocht gceint*. In the English language, the correct plurals in all contexts must be *euros* and *cents*. The other options are both ungrammatical Irish and ungrammatical English.

The European Council has no right to prescribe, or even to endorse, the orthographical or grammatical forms of *any* word in *any* language, whether official or not. This right belongs to the people of Europe. Will we in Ireland exercise this right, and insist on the proper terms *eora* (or *eoró*) and *ceint* for the Irish name of our new currency?

3 It is just possible that the word *euro* is being considered a neuter noun, but since the neuter gender was lost in Irish before the ninth century, one may consider this to be unlikely; in any case the

nominative and genitive would probably have been *an n-euro* and *an euro* if the neuter had survived.  
4 ‘Eight euros’, ‘five cents’, ‘eight cents’.