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. 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 ([ˈrɒbɒt] not [ˈrobot]) and grammar (pl. robots not roboty). The Arabic word قهوة (qahwa) was borrowed via a variety of routes into a number of naturalized forms by the languages of Europe: café (Basque); café (Catalan); kaffé (Danish); koffie (Dutch); coffee (English); kafe (Estonian); kahvi (Finnish); café (French); ქაფე (qava – Georgian); Kaffee (German); καφές (kafes – Greek); kővé (Hungarian); kaffi (Icelandic); caife (Irish); caffe (Italian); kaffé (Northern Sami); kawa (Polish); café (Portuguese); кофе (kofe – Russian); kava (Slovene); café (Spanish); kaffe (Swedish); kahve (Turkish); coffi (Welsh). In each of these languages, the
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, eura, evo, evró, and evo 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 ՇԻՆ and Georgian შალმ also be “allowed”? What about Belarusian Евро?

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); rubl,i (Latvian); rubliai (Lithuanian); карбованці (karbovantsi – Ukrainian); манат (manat – Azeri, Turkmen); рубле (ruble – Moldavian); рублі (rubli – Belarusian); рубля (rublama – Russian); сом (som – Kazakh, Kyrgyz); сўм (sUm – Tajik); сўм (sUm – Uzbek); сомы (sOm) (rublu – Armenian);  рублі (rubli – Georgian).

Slovenians are at present “permitted” to use their natural spelling evo. 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 socio-linguistic 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 ḥẹ́ł̱̬̬̬́ṉ̬̬̬́́, ḏ̱̫̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬̬...
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 cheint (\(\text{s} \text{\ aeint} \text{\i}\)).

If the text of the Acht as written above were applied to the pound and the penny, or to the dollar and the cent, we would expect sa phunt 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 bpunt nó i bpinginí or i ndollair nó i geinteanna. This would then imply that we should have in eoraí (or in coróinna) nó i geinteanna.

### 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.

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2 Unless the c- here means [s], in which case a mutation may apply, and the pronunciation would be either [s\ aeint\i] or [s\ teint\i]. But this cannot be written with \(-b\); it must be written either s- or t-.
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. 3 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 séimhiú ‘lenition’ nor urú ‘nasalization’. One cannot but consider *ocht euro, *cúig cent, and *eight cent – instead of ocht n-euro, ciúg chént, ocht gcent – 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. neit ‘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 ['dədəjo:] ‘grandfather’, compared to mamó ['məmədəjo:] ‘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 Stáitíochta Głéidh (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 [ˈeːɾoː] or [ˈjɜːɾoʊ] and whether cent is to be pronounced [kənˈtʃeɪt] or [sənˈtʃeɪt].

**CONCLUSIONS**

We have seen above that ceint m4, pl. ceinteanna already exists. The correct Irish Gaelic forms should be eora f4, pl. eorait (cf. deora ‘furrow’, pl. deorait), or – more likely perhaps, on the strength of the English word – eoró f4, pl. eoróinea (cf. bró ‘millstone’, pl. bróima). 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), ciúg 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?

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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’.