



# **Linguistic and cultural changes throughout the history of the Eurovision Song Contest**

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## **Abstract**

This paper aims to clarify some of the linguistic problems that have arisen in recent years at the Eurovision Song Contest, one of the most important music events in the world. Through an exhaustive bibliographic review and the individual analysis of a large number of entries, it is concluded that linguistic diversity, an identifying feature of the show in the past, has been reduced by establishing a rule that does not oblige artists to sing in the language of the country they represent. English has taken over the reins of this annual competition, although there is still room for the traditional and the ethnic. The research that has been carried out is intended to serve as a reference for all Eurovision followers who wish to expand their knowledge. It also attempts to clarify concepts such as “linguistic diversity”, “identity” and “culture”, which can be extrapolated to other fields of knowledge. It must be noted that not only have linguistic issues been dealt with, but there are references to all the factors involved in the contest. However, it is those phenomena related to languages that form the backbone of the work.

**Key words:** Eurovision Song Contest, languages, culture, identity, Europe, music.

## **Resumen**

Este trabajo responde a la necesidad de aclarar algunos problemas lingüísticos que han surgido en los últimos años en el Festival de Eurovisión, uno de los eventos musicales más importantes del mundo. Mediante una exhaustiva revisión bibliográfica y el análisis individual de un gran número de candidaturas, se extrae la conclusión de que la diversidad lingüística, un rasgo identificativo del certamen antaño, se ha reducido con el establecimiento de una norma que no obliga a los artistas a cantar en el idioma del país al que representan. El inglés ha tomado las riendas de esta competición anual, aunque sigue habiendo espacio para lo tradicional y lo étnico. La investigación que se ha llevado a cabo tiene el objetivo de servir como referencia a todos los seguidores de este certamen que desean expandir su conocimiento. Igualmente, pretende aclarar algunos conceptos como “diversidad lingüística”, “identidad” y “cultura”, que se pueden extrapolar a otros campos del conocimiento. Conviene destacar que no solo se han tratado temas lingüísticos, sino que hay referencias a todos los factores que intervienen en el festival, pero son aquellos fenómenos relacionados con los idiomas los que marcan el hilo conductor del trabajo.

**Palabras clave:** Festival de la Canción de Eurovisión, lenguas, cultura, identidad, Europa, música

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Rationale for the choice of topic**

24<sup>th</sup> May 2008. I was ten years old. At the age of ten, it is normal to be sad about anything: your parents do not buy you the video game you have been waiting for a long time (two weeks at most), a classmate does not invite you to their birthday party, you get a bad grade on a test, etc. I cannot remember why I was down that 24<sup>th</sup> of May, but I do remember how my mood changed: my mother came out to the balcony, where I was crying, and in order to cheer me up she said: “Tonight there's Eurovision, tonight Chikilicuatre is performing”. I had already been dancing the “chiki chiki” for a few weeks and I was looking forward to watching my idol sing live for all of Europe. That night, of course, I tuned in to the contest. After the Russian artist Dima Bilan was proclaimed the winner, all my sorrow was gone. Eurovision managed to lift my spirits for the first time, what I could not imagine was that from then on this festival would bring me so much joy.

I did not miss the next two editions, 2009 and 2010, either but I watched them from the perspective of the average Spanish viewer, the one who ignores that there are semi-finals and who does not fully understand why countries such as Israel or Australia participate. However, in 2011 my life changed without my noticing: on the evening of May 14<sup>th</sup> a young man from Finland made me fall in love with his smile, his guitar and his beautiful ballad “Da da dam”. I am talking about Paradise Oskar, the Finnish representative of the 56<sup>th</sup> edition of Eurovision, which took place in the German city of Düsseldorf. I followed that show with much emotion, hoping that he would win, although it is true that throughout the night other entries caught my attention. In the end it was Azerbaijan who won, certainly not one of my favorites, while Paradise Oskar had to settle for 21.

In the upcoming months I kept listening to all the songs I had liked from that festival, including some that did not make it to the final, and I wished with all my heart that the next Eurovision would arrive soon.

I lived the 2012 edition, in my opinion one of the strongest in the history of the contest, with great intensity: I listened to all the entries as they were revealed, I watched the interviews with my favorite representatives and, of course, this time I followed the two semi-finals, getting angry when some songs did not qualify.

Over the next few years I discovered more and more details about Eurovision, for example, that some countries choose their representative democratically in the so-called

“pre-selections”; that there is an OGAE Second Chance, a kind of competition in which some of the songs that have not won their pre-selections are involved; and that Eurovision Junior still exists, even if Spain stopped participating.

Recently I also became interested in the oldest editions: I streamed all the songs from all the years. In the last few months I have been trying to understand more in depth some of the entries, reading and researching about their messages and the context in which they were written.

My aim is for this TFG to present some of the conclusions that I have reached during all this time, to provide festival lovers with more bibliography and to show how interesting Eurovision can be from a linguistic and cultural point of view.

As this is a very broad subject and since the Degree I am about to complete is named Modern Languages and Translation, I have decided to focus on the linguistic part.

## **1.2. The Eurovision Song Contest: A brief history**

I know that my passion is not shared by a lot of people, so before going into detail it must be explained briefly what Eurovision is:

The Eurovision Song Contest is an annual competition broadcast all over the world which takes place around May (Baker, 2008), usually in the country that won the previous year. Only the member states of the EBU (European Broadcasting Union) are allowed to participate. Each nation selects (either internally or through a pre-selection) a song, released before September of the previous year, and a performer. Once all the entries are known, they are distributed in two semi-finals (except the tracks coming from the host country and the Big 5: Italy, France, Germany, United Kingdom and Spain, which get rid of this sieve). After the live rendition of all the participating songs, only the ten most voted from each semi-final advance to the grand finale, where the winner is determined (Spracklen et al., 2016). The voting involves a professional jury from each country and the viewers, who can support their favorite entries by phoning or sending a text message.

This festival was created in 1956 as a way of bringing European states together through a shared love of pop music (Baker, 2008). The first edition was held in Lugano and only seven European nations participated. Since then, this televised event has massively grown: over the years, a total of 52 countries have submitted at least one song, including

Australia and Morocco. Currently, Eurovision is the world's largest live music event. In 2015 the contest was awarded a Guinness World Record for the longest-running annual TV music competition. However, it has been interrupted by this year's COVID-19 pandemic (*Eurovision TV*, 2020). Speaking of the audience, the figures are also staggering: the show is watched by approximately 180 million viewers from all around the world every year (Johnson, 2019).

### **1.3. Objectives and hypothesis**

Currently the Eurovision rules give the different participating countries the freedom to sing in the language they want. In the last two decades, the vast majority of delegations have opted for English, thus leaving a part of their culture (the language) aside. In this TFG I have tried to find out why.

The main hypothesis I put forward are:

- Those nations involved in the Eurovision Song Contest have been losing their cultural identity over the years, leading to the homogenization of Europe.
- The concept of “European” is something abstract, just a social construction that makes us feel important by belonging to a community.
- Language is the most important way of transmitting culture.
- It is not essential to sing in English to get the message across.
- It is not necessary to sing in English in order to achieve international success.
- Despite all the changes taking place at the festival, there will always be a space for the ethnic.

### **1.4. Methodology**

This project is the result of a diachronic study, which has covered sixty-four years: from 1956, when the festival was created, to 2020, the edition cancelled due to the coronavirus.

Many of the books, journals and articles that have been written on this subject have been consulted, but in addition, detailed analyses of specific entries, cross-checking of data and online surveys have been carried out. Hence, both a quantitative and a qualitative research have been conducted.

To reach conclusions, inductive reasoning has been applied, that is, from isolated cases, a more general point has been reached. Only by studying the submitted songs and their repercussion one by one, it is possible to realize the evolution. Unfortunately, due to the limited length of this paper, I could not analyze all the compositions, but there has been room to talk about some specific cases.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Linguistic diversity**

Language is a means for communication. Some authors such as Daniel L. Everett (2017) argue that language is humanity's greatest invention. Around the world, between 6,000 and 7,000 languages exist, each of them with its own community of speakers. These systems of symbols are the repository of knowledge acquired over centuries and reflect the social, economic and political standing of a given community. As a source of knowledge, each language helps modify the environment: A change in the environment has an impact on language use, and vice versa (Hamawand, 2020, p. 71). From the presence of multiple languages in the world arises the term “linguistic diversity” or “language diversity”.

Linguistic diversity can be defined then as the range of variations exhibited by human languages. It is not a synonym of confrontation, but a source of cultural enrichment. According to Zeki Hamawand (2020, p. 71), “language diversity makes the world more interesting and colorful”.

This phenomenon manifests itself in various European institutions and competitions: As there is more than one country involved, several languages converge, thus creating a scenario of multilingualism (Nikula et al., 2012). David Fernández Vítóres, one of the leading experts in this area of research, has addressed the issue of linguistic diversity and multilingualism within different contexts, including the European Economic Community (now replaced and succeeded by the European Union). Fernández Vítóres (2010, p. 188) states that the twenty-three (twenty-four after the incorporation of Croatian) official languages and the three alphabets (Latin, Greek and Cyrillic) that coexist in the European Union are the perfect example of language diversity, although he points out that there is still work to be done, as some regional or minority languages (such as Galician, Catalan, Basque, Luxembourgish, Maltese or Irish) are not yet official languages of the Union despite having such a distinction in one of the member countries.

Watching the Eurovision Song Contest, linguistic diversity can be also witnessed, as during the show it is possible to hear several languages when the artists sing or while the presenters talk.

However, both in the European Union and at the festival, some languages predominate over others. These vehicular languages have been in the two cases French, German and, more recently, English (Vitores, 2010, p. 187).

For communication to exist, it is essential to use a system of signs with which both interlocutors are familiar (Zeshan et al., 2020), so it is no surprise that French, German and English, three of the most widely spoken languages in Europe, take on such a prominent role. On the other hand, national and minority languages must be safeguarded, only in this way can linguistic diversity be perpetuated.

## **2.2. Defining “culture” and “identity”**

If there is one term which is difficult to define, that is “culture”. Firstly, because it comprises two dimensions: one concrete and one abstract; but also, because it encompasses a large number of disciplines and behaviors. In addition, culture is not a fixed entity; on the contrary, it changes constantly.

The South African anthropologist Adam Kuper (2000) attempted to explain the evolution of this term in the book *Culture: The Anthropologists' Account*. He states that this word has its origin in intellectual discussions in Europe dating back to the 18th century. In France and Great Britain, the adoption of this term was preceded by the word “civilization” denoting political order. The opposite was considered barbarism and savagery.

Initially, in Germany the concept of culture was similar, but with time some nuances began to be introduced until the two terms could be clearly differentiated: Civilization was an external, rational, universal and progressive phenomenon, while culture was related to spirit, to local traditions, to territory. *Kultur* implied a personal progression towards spiritual perfection (Molano, 2007, p. 70).

By the mid-20th century, the concept of culture broadened to a more humanistic vision, related to the intellectual or spiritual development of an individual, which included all the activities, characteristics and interests of a certain community (Molano, 2007, p. 71).

The poet T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) devoted a great deal of thought and writing to social theory and cultural criticism. His perception of culture has undoubtedly got great significance in our present times. Eliot’s profound awareness of the subtleties and

complexities of human life in society has converted him into a fundamental figure within Cultural Studies. From his point of view, culture is the most precious thing for any group of people and so he reminds us that “the deliberate destruction of another culture as a whole is an irreparable wrong, almost as evil as to treat human beings like animals” and that if the culture of the entire world was uniform, culture would not exist at all, we would have a dehumanized humanity (Titus, 2001, pp. 1–8).

T. S. Eliot has not been the only author who has highlighted the specificity of culture, in fact, all definitions of this complex term make reference to this characteristic:

‘Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action.’

Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952: 181; cited by Adler 1997: 14

‘Culture consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodements and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves.’

T.Schwartz 1992; cited by Avruch 1998: 17

‘[Culture] is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.’

Hofstede 1994: 5

‘... the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next.’

Matsumoto 1996: 16

‘Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour.’

Spencer-Oatey 2008: 3

Image 1: Definitions of culture (Fernández Gil, 2019)

In short, culture is what makes us unique, what allows us to differentiate ourselves from other groups of people, what gives us an identity.

Identity therefore is the set of meanings that define a community, but it can also be the distinguishing character or personality of an individual (“identity”, n.d.). In fact, there are many types of identity (Adams et al., 2017). Some of the ones mentioned in this paper are personal identity, cultural identity and national identity. Every human being possesses multiple identities since each of us occupy different roles within a community, belong to

various groups and claim a number of personal features. Yet, the meanings of these identities are shared by all members of a society (Burke et al., 2009, p. 3).

Personal identity usually refers to properties to which we feel a special sense of attachment or ownership. In order to find out someone's personal identity we must ask ourselves the following questions: "what defines me as an individual?", "what makes me the person I am?" and "what distinguishes me from others?". This personal identity contrasts with national or cultural identity (Olson, 2019), which is characterized by one's perception of himself or herself as a member of a nation or an ethnic group (Liu et al., 2015), and the subsequent embracement of their own traditions, moral values, ideals and beliefs (Marković et al., 2018).

Since different cultures can coexist in the same country, it is important to separate ethnic or cultural (both names are accepted) identity from national identity. In Spain, for instance, there are four official languages, with their respective dialects; some great examples of Moorish architecture, as well as Romanesque and Gothic churches and cathedrals; a large community of gypsies, in addition to immigrants of all nationalities; a lot of music genres and regional dances, together with many other traditions.

The Eurovision Song Contest combines all the identities we have mentioned: the representative of a certain country, as an individual, usually reflects in their music their personal identity; but at the same time the artists belong to a particular social group and live in a specific country, so they and their song also materialize the culture of that community and that country, through elements such as language. In the following pages, some examples of this phenomenon will be presented.

## **2.3. Bibliography on Eurovision**

### 2.3.1. Printed sources

An increasing number of writers, sociologists and anthropologists are showing interest in the Eurovision Song Contest, some focusing on an isolated phenomenon and others on the evolution of the event as a whole.

The participation of non-European states such as Australia or Israel has provided plenty of material to write pages and pages. For instance, lecturer Jessica Carniel in her book *Understanding the Eurovision Song Contest in Multicultural Australia: We Got Love*

(2018) conducts an in-depth study of the Eurovision Song Contest from an Australian perspective. José Luis Panea, a graduate in Fine Arts, analyzes the image that Israel projects at the festival in *Identity, spectacle and representation: Israeli entries at the Eurovision Song Contest* (2018).

Panea has also been interested in other facets of the event, such as the tensions of the contestant countries in the gathered voting analysis and those entries that have been represented by singers from ‘others’ origins. All this is embodied in his paper *Correspondences “in the name of” the song* (2018).

Geoff Tibballs through *The Good, the Bad and the Wurst: The 100 Craziest Moments from the Eurovision Song Contest* (2016) narrates the most memorable moments of the song contest with a touch of satire and humor.

Since 2008, Simon Barclay has been publishing an annual encyclopedia entitled *The Complete & Independent Guide to the Eurovision Song Contest* with updated information on each edition and each participating country. It includes statistics, contest details, results and analysis.

A similar work is *Eurovision Song Contest: The Official Celebration* (2015), by John Kennedy O’Connor, San Marino commentator at the contest.

Gregorio José Colás Melero in his TFG *Programas especiales en televisión. Análisis de caso: Festival de Eurovisión* (2012) relates the coverage given by the media to Eurovision with the audience achieved that same year by this TV show.

But the vast majority of the bibliography on this subject deals with the political and cultural part, emphasizing the idea of identity. Some examples are: Dean Vuletic’s *Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest* (2018), Catherine Baker’s *Wild Dances and Dying Wolves: Simulation, Essentialization, and National Identity at the Eurovision Song Contest* (2008), Paul Jordan’s<sup>1</sup> *The Modern Fairy Tale* (2014), Christ West’s *Eurovision! A History of Europe Through the World* (2017) and Robert Deam Tobin and Ivan Raykoff’s *A Song for Europe: Popular Music and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest* (2007).

The latter is the result of investigations by a group of scholars from a variety of disciplines, including musicology, communications, history, sociology, English and

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Jordan is Head of Communications at the EBU. Since when?

German studies. Particularly relevant to this work is the chapter on race written by Lutgard Mutsaers, who also co-authored a book that has been consulted: *Made in the Low Countries: Studies in Popular Music* (2017).

There are also other sources that deal with the subject of Eurovision in a secondary or indirect way, but have also been used for the drafting of this paper.

### 2.3.2. Online resources

On YouTube, through the contributions of some users, it is possible to access the vast majority of performances and watch the full shows.

The official channel, Eurovision Song Contest, provides users with all the performances between 2005 and 2019, as well as other updated content, such as the ten most watched videos on the channel each month, rehearsals, interviews and games with the representatives.

The acts from older editions can be viewed thanks to other users: 2000ESC2003 (between 2000 and 2003), “VeladaESC” (1999), “escLIVEmusic1”<sup>2</sup> (almost all of the 1980s and 1990s in good quality), “JoaoVelada” (from 1956 to 1973) and “Genlab” (a large number of performances in HD).

Regarding full shows, the work of “Yugovizija” and “Iván Iñarra” has to be mentioned, and for the voting part, the best option is “escbelgium2”.

Additionally, the Eurovision Song Contest has an official website: *eurovision.tv*, where the latest news from the event can be read, information on the artists and the different editions can be found, all the videos uploaded to YouTube can be viewed and merchandising can be bought.

Other websites dedicated to the competition are *Eurovision World* (whose content is very diverse: news, results, surveys, bets), *Wiwibloggs* (tabloid press, although there are some accurate and serious news; they are very active and well-known among eurofans and have their own YouTube channel), *Eurovision-Info.net* (good site to consult results and points), *ESC Today* (full of updated news) and *Eurovision-Spain* (containing information in

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<sup>2</sup> escLIVEmusic1 is an initiative that aims to bring live music back to Eurovision by sharing videos from the time when the orchestra was used at the contest.

Spanish, Eurovision-related events in Spain, rankings, exchange of comments, analysis of entries, Eurovision Song of the Day, and much more content.).

It is also worth remembering the efforts made by all the other users who upload videos they had saved on certain storage devices and by those who have as a hobby to share their knowledge of the event through blogs, Twitter, Facebook or similar sites. Thanks to them, the new generations have the possibility to learn more about the old editions. Some of these Eurovision heroes are mentioned throughout the paper.

### **3. Cultural and linguistic evolution of the Eurovision Song Contest**

#### **3.1. The origins of Eurovision**

In 1945 World War II ended and much of Europe was lying in ruins. Somewhere between 50 and 70 million people were killed (Collis, 2013, p. 143). The continent was terribly fragmented, and an atmosphere of mistrust and insecurity reigned in those countries which had taken part in the conflict. Thanks to several organizations, such as the United Nations or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the situation became more stable (*World101*, n.d.). However, in order to remove all the pressure from the affected countries' shoulders, an exciting music festival had to be organized (Beauchamp, 2016). This is how the Eurovision Song Contest –initially called *Grand Prix Eurovision de la Chanson Européenne*– was born.

The responsible for its creation was the recently formed European Broadcasting Union, and more concretely its president, Marcel Bezençon. He took the inspiration from the *Festa della canzone italiana di Sanremo* (the Sanremo Music Festival), a very popular music festival taking place in Italy every year since 1951 (Carniel, 2018, p. 19). The first edition was staged in the Swiss city of Lugano, on 24 May 1956 and gathered seven countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and, of course, Switzerland. It was primarily a radio show, although some cameras were taping the contest for the few Europeans who had a television set at that time (*Eurovision TV*, n.d.). The shortage of participants was fixed by allowing each nation to present two songs, which did not necessarily mean two singers. The SRG SSR, the broadcasting corporation of the host country, took advantage from this rule and chose a 32-years old Lys Assia to perform both of their entries. The Swiss artist caught the music experts' eye and became the first Eurovision winner with her ballad “Refrain”, sung in French, about her melancholic desire to go back in time to when she was a young lady.



Video 1: Eurovision 1956 – Switzerland: Lys Assia performing “Refrain” (Uzunoglu, 2010)

Her other ditty, “Das alte Karussel” (The Old Carousel), performed in German, is jollier and somehow paved the way for countless Eurovision tracks about puppets, circuses and clowns (Tibballs, 2016, p. 2).

The jurors from each competing state had only two votes, which could be awarded to their own songs. Luxembourg had economic problems and could not afford sending a jury. The Swiss experts, “in an altruist gesture of generosity”, voted on its behalf. Since the results were not revealed, no one could know to whom these points were given, but everyone seemed happy with the Swiss victory and there was no feeling of cheating, so the first edition of this long-lasting competition could be labelled as a success.

Lys Assia clearly regarded Eurovision as an enriching experience, because after her victory she returned the following two years as a participant, and later as a guest or as an invited artist (Smulders et al., 2018). She even attempted to represent Switzerland again in 2013, when she was 89 years old [see image 2].



Image 2: Lys Assia, the first-ever winner of the Eurovision Song Contest, has dropped a hot rap number with Bernese rap group New Jack. “All in Your Head” (Adams, 2012)

Out of the 14 songs which competed in the 1956 edition, 7 were sung in French, 3 in German, 2 in Dutch and 2 in Italian. The English language was not heard during the whole evening, something that would seldom be repeated (Barclay, 2017).

### 3.2. New countries, new rules

The United Kingdom joined the party in 1957. They selected the wholesome soprano Patricia Bredin, who defended a two-minutes-long tune called “All”.



Video 2: Eurovision 1957 – United Kingdom: Patricia Bredin performing “All” (Schlagerparty, 2019)

The short duration of the British theme led to witty questions such as: “Is that ‘All’?”, especially if we take into account that Italy’s Nuncio Gallo, who performed afterwards, was on stage for over five minutes: he did not hesitate to include in his act a fifty-five-seconds guitar solo. In order to prevent such inequalities in the future, a rule that restricted each song to a maximum of three minutes was introduced (Tibballs, 2016, p. 3). It still prevails nowadays, otherwise, due to the high number of participants, the show could last all night.

Austria and Denmark did not want to miss out on the 1957 edition either. The fact that it was held by their neighbor, West Germany, probably helped. The Russian-born Bob Martin became the first Austrian representative: He performed an uplifting ode to his pony which was not able to captivate the juries. Denmark, however, was luckier in its Eurovision debut. The Scandinavian nation seized on a new rule allowing duos to perform at the contest and sent Birthe Wilke and Gustav Winckler. Their entry was called “Skibet Skal Sejle I Nat” (The Ship Must Sail Tonight). Following the song title, Gustav wore a

naval captain outfit and gave his beloved a farewell kiss at the end of the performance, which lasted thirteen seconds, the longest in Eurovision history (Masson, 2012).



Image 3: Birthe Wilke & Gustav Winckler, performing for Denmark at the Eurovision Song Contest 1957 (DR, 1957)

The Netherlands won the contest easily. Their representative, Corry Brokken sang a classic *chanson* in Dutch about a married couple who used to live peacefully and happily together, but not anymore. She received 31 points and due to her victory, the next edition of the contest was celebrated in Hilversum, the principal center for radio and television broadcasting in Holland (Andre, 2017). The most illustrious participant who travelled to Hilversum was the Italian Domenico Modugno. His song, “Volare” (officially “Nel Blu Dipinto di Blu”), became a worldwide hit, with Dean Martin’s version charting simultaneously in the UK and US. Later, the track was recorded by artists of the caliber of Frank Sinatra, Luciano Pavarotti and David Bowie (O’Leary, 2018). “Volare” also won a Grammy Award and was named *Billboard’s song of the year for 1958*. An incredible international reception that did not tally with its Eurovision result: Domenico came third, perhaps because he opened the show, or maybe because the jury was glad to see Lys Assia again on the Eurovision stage, this time singing in Italian about a romantic weekend in Lake Maggiore (Tibballs, 2016, p. 6). Nevertheless, the trophy went to the French André Claveau. His ballad, “Dors, mon amour” (Sleep, my love) is a sort of lullaby intoned by the singer to his lover.

The British, unhappy for their previous year’s result (seventh), refused the invitation. However, Sweden made its debut. The Nordic country opted for the jazz singer Alice

Babs, one of their biggest stars at the time. During her performance, Alice wore the Leksand regional costume, consisting of a demure skirt and an apron.

1958 was the first but not the last time the winning country from the previous year had hosted the contest. As a matter of fact, this method of choosing the venue made the EBU directors' job much easier, and it was an extra motivation for the participating nations, which would seek to send more competitive entries. Therefore, from this year onwards, the winning country of the contest tended to be the host of the next edition.

### 3.3. The awakening of English

In 1959, rock 'n' roll music was in full swing. Some British artists like Cliff Richard, Marty Wilde and Tommy Steele, trying to look like worldwide-known American idols such as Elvis Presley or Buddy Holly, topped the charts (Bell, 2016). However, after their year of absence, the United Kingdom did not send to Cannes (the city in which the 1959 edition was celebrated) a song similar to “Rock Around the Clock” or “Blue Moon on Kentucky”. Instead, they opted for a married couple, Teddy Johnson and Pearl Carr, and the chirpy “Sing, Little Birdie” <sup>[see image 4]</sup>. This tune correlated the birds singing in the sky with Johnson and Carr's enduring love for each other (Tibballs, 2016, p. 7). Although rock fanatics felt offended by this act, the jurors found the chorus joyous enough to place the British entry second (Wilson, 2020). Another Teddy (this time a female one though), Teddy Scholten, lifted the trophy thanks to “Een beetje” (A little bit), an up-tempo number sung in Dutch, thus giving The Netherlands its second victory.



Image 4: Pearl Carr and Teddy Johnson at Eurovision 1959 (ESCXTRA, 1959)

Since the Dutch had already hosted the event, this privilege was given to the BBC. London's Royal Festival Hall was chosen as the venue, and for the role of presenter, the elegant daughter of an Italian marquis was perfect. This is how the long association between Katie Boyle<sup>3</sup> and the Eurovision Song Contest began (Del Amor, 2007).

One country made its debut in 1960: Norway, which was represented by Nora Brockstedt. Her performance of a Sámi girl<sup>4</sup>, who cries "Voi Voi" (an interjection in Sámi), the song's title, while she awaits her lover to come down from the tundra (Hilder, 2015, p. 58) was actually an arrangement of a reindeer-herding call (Tibballs, 2016, p. 9). The track got a praiseworthy fourth place, two behind Bryan Johnson (Teddy's brother), who had the home-field advantage. "Looking High, High, High" does not differ much from other love songs of the competition lyric-wise, but the whistling parts and the catchy chorus managed to captivate the jury, who only placed the British act seven points behind the French entry "Tom Pillibi", by the young Jacqueline Boyer (*Eurovision World*, n.d.).

In a period of three years, the French city of Cannes hosted the *Grand Prix de la Chanson Européenne* twice, since after Jacqueline's victory, the *Palais des Festivals et des Congrès* was again chosen as the venue for the festival (*Eurovision TV*, n.d.). The host entry was called "Printemps, Avril Carillonne" (Springtime, April Rings) and became famous for containing a couple of non-sense lyrics: Guy Favereau, the composer, opened each verse with 'Bing et bong et bing et bong', which had nothing to do with animals coming out of hibernation (the main subject of the song). Little did he know that he was creating a new trend within the Eurovision community: if you cannot think of any words to complete a song, just invent some unintelligible sounds. Academics refer to this lack of imagination as the 'Bing tiddle-tiddle bong' phenomenon (Tibballs, 2016, p. 11).

Although three countries participated for the first time in the 1961 edition (Finland, Spain and Yugoslavia), those who fought for victory were veterans. Finally, the Paris-born Jean Claude Pascal gave the little state of Luxembourg its first gold, whereas the United Kingdom had to settle for silver for the third year in a row (Masson, 2012). The Allison's "Are You Sure?" was perhaps too modern for the still conservative jurors but not for the average British melomaniac: "Are You Sure?" went on to sell over a million records in

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<sup>3</sup> Katie Boyle hosted the Eurovision Song Contest a record four times: 1960, 1963, 1968 and 1974. When the show was held in Birmingham in 1998, Katie returned to the contest as a special guest of the BBC.

<sup>4</sup> The Sámi people are descendants of nomadic civilizations who had inhabited northern Scandinavia for thousands of years (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2020).

the following months. The BBC was so upset because of the result, that it failed to repeat the winning performance at the end of the show (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 259).

The 1962 festival unfolded with numerous lighting issues, which not only prevented the stars installed to illuminate the Villa Louvigny in Luxembourg from fulfilling their function (*Eurovision TV*, n.d.), but also ruined the Dutch performance. This and other misfortunes resulted in The Netherlands finishing last with 0 points (Campos, 2018). To their relief, they were not alone: a total of four countries were completely ignored, including Spain and Belgium (*Eurovision World*, n.d.).



Video 3: Eurovision 1962 – The Netherlands: De Spelbrekers performing “Katinka” (Genlab, 2020)

The remaining country that did not get any votes was Austria, who selected the opera singer Eleonore Schwarz. Although it was the first time that the Austrian representative went home with *nul points*, the Alpine country had already experience in finishing last: this happened in 1957 and 1961 (Barclay, 2017). The Austrian broadcaster ORF, unhappy with the results of previous years, seemed to notice the impact music in English was having at the time: in the early 1960s, the songs of Aretha Franklin, Johnny Cash, Chuck Berry and Barbra Streisand (among others) were played on radio stations all over the world. At Eurovision, the UK was consistently achieving good results. This, plus the need of the Austrians to distance themselves from post-Nazi Germany and to reassert themselves as modern and multilingual citizens, led them to translate into English one verse of their 1963 entry “Vielleicht geschieht ein Wunder” (Winter, 2017, pp. 55–56). It was the first time that a non-English-speaking country chose this language for the festival. Coincidentally or not, Carmela Corren (the performer) achieved seventh place, the second best result for Austria since its debut (Barclay, 2017).



Video 4: Eurovision 1963 – Austria: Carmela Corren performing “Vielleicht Geschieht Ein Wunder”  
(JoaoVelada, 2009)

The 1963 Eurovision line-up included nineteen-year-old French pop star and future fashion icon Françoise Hardy singing for Monaco, the Greek celebrity Nana Mouskouri performing for Luxembourg and the Israeli artist Esther Ofarim (who some years later topped the UK charts with the hit “Cinderella, Rockefeller”) representing Switzerland (Tibballs, 2016, p. 16). The latter was on the verge of victory, but a twist in the voting gave the trophy to the Danish couple Grethe and Jørgen Ingmann (escbelgium2, 2010). Their song “Dansevise” is a mid-tempo tune in which the singer praises the art of dancing. It represents an evolution and a change of style with regard to previous winners. Moreover, Grethe and Jørgen were the first duo to win the contest (Zwart, 2017).



Video 5: Grethe og Jørgen Ingmann - Dansevise (BlueHeavenProduction, 2016)

Denmark’s Scandinavian neighbors were not so popular: both Norway and Sweden finished last with *nul points* (Masson, 2012). This particularly hurt the Swedes, who refused to participate in 1964 citing a strike by its musicians’ union (Tibballs, 2016, p. 20). During this year of absence, they had time to reflect and to analyze the contemporary music industry. They certainly came to the same conclusion as the Austrians two years

earlier and, taking advantage of the fact that there were no language restrictions, participated in the 1965 edition with a song in English: Baritone Ingvar Wixell performed in Swedish a total of six tracks at Melodifestivalen 1965 (the country's most important musical event and their pre-selection for the Eurovision Song Contest). The winner was "Annorstädes vals" (Cooper, 2019). At Eurovision though, the track was entitled "Absent Friend" and, as mentioned, it did not contain a word in Swedish. It was the first time in the history of the contest that a country was not represented by its national language. Despite Ingvar's prodigious voice, it only finished tenth, but the incident led to a new rule being introduced for future editions, stating that all participants had to perform their songs in their native tongue (Jordan et al., 2017).



Video 6: Eurovision 1965 – Sweden: Ingvar Wixell performing "Absent Friend" (ESC 1989, 2016)

This prohibition lasted until 1973, just in time for ABBA to win the contest and become international stars with their hit "Waterloo".

### **3.4. The brief appearance of Irish and Maltese in Eurovision**

During those years when countries were obliged to sing in their own language, the Eurovision Song Contest managed to modernize in several aspects: In the 1966 edition we saw for the first time unconventional outfits, such as the kilt worn by Kenneth McKellar, the UK's representative, or the trouser suit chosen by the Norwegian Åse Kleveland –the woman who later became Minister of Culture in her country was the first female artist to say no to the dress– (Tibballs, 2016, p. 24).



Image 5: Åse Kleveland performing “Intet er nytt under solen” at Eurovision 1966 (Scanpix, 1966)

The 1968 show was the earliest to be broadcast in color, so we could watch Spain's first victory in great detail (Solano, 2017). A year later, a four-way tie at the top between The Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom and the host, Spain made the European Broadcasting Union rethink the voting system, drafting a set of rules the following year to determine to ensure a single outright winner (Tibballs, 2016, p. 33).



Image 6: The 1968 winner, Massiel, with the four winners in 1969 (Eurovision TV, 1969)

Tradition dictates that the winning nation organizes the next edition, but since in 1969 four delegations came first, it was a mystery where to travel the following year. In the end, the contest moved to Amsterdam (*Eurovision TV*, n.d.). The number of songs competing in the Dutch capital was low, as Sweden, Norway, Portugal, Austria and Finland declined the invitation in protest of the previous year's draw (O'Connor, 2005). Out of the twelve songs that were performed that night, the ones that stood out the most were “Knock, Knock, Who's There?” by the already well-known Welsh artist Mary Hopkin, and “All Kinds of Everything” by the rising star Dana. The representatives from

the United Kingdom and Ireland were nineteen and eighteen years old respectively and had two equally charming voices. The confidence of the British delegation in Hopkin was such that they organized a colossal party before the event, but it was finally Ireland's ballad that took the gold (Tibballs, 2016, p. 35). This was the first of seven victories for the Gaels at the festival.

An unusual event occurred in 1972: Ireland sent a song in Irish, unlike all previous years' entries, which were in English. The country made its debut in the 1965 edition and until this edition they seemed to ignore their first official language<sup>5</sup>. They tried their luck with Sandie Jones' "Ceol an Ghrá" (The music of love), but its 15th place motivated the country to bury this language when it came to submitting a song to the contest (Motherway, 2013).



Video 7: Eurovision 1972 – Ireland: Sandie Jones performing "Ceol an Ghrá" (JoaoVelada, 2010)

Malta's Eurovision debut had occurred one year before (1971) with a song in Maltese, "Marija l-Maltija" (Mary, the Maltese Girl) and in 1972 the little archipelago participated again with the duo Helen & Joseph, who also performed in Maltese "L-imħabba" (Love). In both occasions they came last.

Maltese is a language of uncertain origin; it was deeply "restructured" or "refounded" on Semitic lines during the Arab domination, between 870 and 1090 A. D. It has since then followed the same path as other spoken varieties of Arabic, losing almost all its inflections and moving towards analytical types; the close contact with Italian helped in this process, also contributing large numbers of vocabulary items (Rissanen et al., 1992, p. 593)

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<sup>5</sup> The Constitution of Ireland of 1937 clearly states in the first paragraph of its Article No. 8 that Irish is the national language of the country and its first official language. English only has the status of second official language, as specified in its second paragraph (Fernández Vítóres, 2010, p. 169).

Maltese is therefore a very different language from all those that exist in Europe. For this reason, from their next participation onwards the language they will choose will be always English, which also enjoys the status of official language in the country and it is easier to understand for the European viewers.

At Eurovision then, Irish and Maltese represent two examples of official languages that have been abandoned to the detriment of English due to the very small number of speakers or because of their lack of similarity to other European languages.

Besides the efforts that certain organizations are making to preserve both languages (Motherway, 2013), it is also the responsibility of the residents themselves to learn them and not let them fall into oblivion. Otherwise, a very important part of the culture of these two countries would be lost.

### **3.5. ABBA's impact**

The Irish victory of 1970 was followed by two winners singing in French. This linguistic balance prompted the EBU to abolish in 1973 the rule that forced the artists to use the language of the country they represent (Schacht et al., 2017). It did not take long for the Nordics to benefit from this change in the rules: for the 1973 edition Sweden, Finland and Norway translated their songs into English. At the close of the voting, “You're Summer” (Sweden) finished fifth, “Tom Tom Tom” (Finland) was sixth and “It's Just a Game” (Norway) came seventh (*Eurovision World*, n.d.). These three countries improved significantly their positions from the previous year –none of them managed to reach the top 10– by singing in Shakespeare's language (*Eurovision World*, n.d.) and repeated the maneuver in 1974, with the Netherlands joining the English party.

The 1974 edition is one of the most iconic in the history of the contest because of the number of celebrities who participated in it. Some of them are Gigliola Cinquetti (who gave the Eurovision trophy to Italy in 1964) was once again the standard-bearer of her country; Peret, one of the greatest exponents of Catalan rumba, interpreted “Canta y sé feliz” (Sing and Be Happy) <sup>[see image 7]</sup>; Paulo de Carvalho, whose “E depois do adeus” (And After The Farewell) would be used as the anthem of the Carnation Revolution, an uprising carried out against the Portuguese authoritarian regime; and Olivia Newton John, Australian singer and actress known internationally for her role in the film *Grease* (1978),

defended the colors of the United Kingdom, where this edition was held (*OGAE Spain*, n.d.).



Image 7: Peret singing “Canta y sé feliz” in Brighton, host city of Eurovision 1974 (EFE, 1974)

Newton-John’s life has alternated between Australia and the UK. Her success reflected how Australian cultural products became popular in Western Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. While Australia’s belonging to the Anglophone realm did facilitate the international careers of its artists, these cultural products were not mere imitations of the British ones, but also reflected the development of a distinct identity (Hay et al., 2019, p. 21).

However, the real stars of that year were the members of the Swedish group ABBA, who won with their song “Waterloo” and enjoyed unprecedented success around the world thanks to this and many other songs.

ABBA was created in Stockholm in 1972. They participated for the first time in Melodifestivalen in 1973 with the song “Ring-Ring” and a year later with “Waterloo”. This second time the quartet obtained the first place, thus achieving the opportunity to share their music with the whole of Europe (Ward, 2016). Thanks to a catchy melody and

their own distinctive sounds, characterized by the harmonies of female voices and a musical effect created by producer Phil Spector (Televisión Pública, 2014), ABBA gave Sweden its first Eurovision victory.



Video 8: Eurovision 1974 – Sweden: ABBA performing “Waterloo” (mozpiano2, 2009)

Their songs had a commercial impact that led them to become the most successful artists in their record company, selling more than 375 million albums worldwide (today they still vend between two and three million copies annually). Furthermore, they topped the charts from several countries between 1972 and 1982 (*OGAE Spain*, 2014).

ABBA's music has been used in various soundtracks, such as in *Muriel's Wedding* and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (both from 1994). This revived interest in the group. In 1999, their tracks appeared in the hugely successful musical *Mamma Mia!*, whose adaptation to the big screen became the biggest box office hit in the UK in 2008 (*OGAE Spain*, 2014).

Their success brought great prestige to the Eurovision Song Contest, encouraging artists from all over Europe to take part in it; and their victory provided the template for dozens of other competition entrants, some hugely successful, others not so. It is no coincidence that one year later another group won the contest: Teach-In's “Ding-A-Dong” had simpler, more insipid lyrics than “Waterloo”, but its catchy chorus made the musical experts vote for it (Tibballs, 2016, p. 51). Britain's two later victories (1976 and 1981), namely Brotherhood of Man's “Save Your Kisses for Me” <sup>[see image 8]</sup> and Bucks Fizz's “Making Your Mind Up” were boy/girl four pieces performing up-tempo bubblegum songs (Sheridan, 2012), and the same thing happened in 1978 and 1979, when Israel selected two vocal groups and won both times.



Image 8: Brotherhood of Man's "Save Your Kisses for Me" (Dutch Broadcast Foundation, 1976)

Sweden has been dragging along ABBA's imprint for many years. Most of the compositions they have submitted to the festival are somehow reminiscent of their most illustrious group. Even 30 years after that first victory they continued to repeat the formula with which they became known around the world, with songs like "Listen to your heartbeat" (2001) or "Give me your love" (2003).

The rule that gave delegations the freedom to sing in any language they wished was maintained until 1976 (inclusive) (Motschenbacher, 2016, p. 125). While the EBU initially saw that this measure had helped singers to carve out a niche for themselves within the European music industry and to cross the borders of the entire continent, it soon became clear that the number of countries opting for English was too high, and that national languages had been relegated to the background (Vuletic, 2018, p. 43). Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands continued to renounce their own languages in 1975 and 1976, but in addition to that, for the 1975 edition the German singer Joy Fleming translated the last stanza of "Ein Lied kann eine Brücke sein" into English; the Belgian Ann Christy was a little less discreet and did the same with more than half of the song "Gelukkig zijn" (Being Happy); Malta abandoned its Semitic language derived from Arabic for the first time, and thanks to English, they improved the last place they had achieved in their two previous participations (Barclay, 2017, p. 44). If we add to this the fact that the United Kingdom and Ireland did not innovate from a linguistic point of view,

almost 50% of the songs of that year were sung totally or partially in English. About 16% were performed in French, thanks to France, Luxembourg and Monaco.

In 1976 the figures were more or less the same: Malta and Sweden withdrew, Liechtenstein was to debut (the song they had selected was called "My Little Cowboy" and the lyrics were also in English), but in the end could not participate because it was not a member of the EBU (Cava, 2016); Germany and Belgium returned to their roots, probably because they did not succeed with the previous year's strategy; but Italy, which was represented by a duo comprising Al Bano and the American Romina Power, did translate the verses of the latter (Motschenbacher, 2016); and for the first time Switzerland and Austria also sang entirely in English.

From 1977 to 1999, linguistic diversity returned to be a feature of the contest. Countries such as Morocco, Iceland or Cyprus made their debut during this period, introducing new languages or consolidating some of those already present.

### **3.6. A case of plurilingualism: The Swiss trio Peter, Sue and Marc**

It is not uniformity, but variety, that defines Switzerland. In little Switzerland, four national languages are spoken in addition to numerous dialects. There is also a distinction between the culture in the mountains and the culture on the central plateau, while life in a mountain valley is different from that in the big city (García et al., 2017, p. 61).

The "four national languages" that are mentioned in this excerpt are German, French, Italian and Romansh, the latter evolved from Latin and it is spoken mainly in the southeastern canton of Grisons, which makes it endemic. This linguistic mix is the result of the historical processes leading to the composition of modern Switzerland. The country presents a model for the European Union with respect to the accommodation of various official languages (Strazny, 2005, p. 1060).

*La Confédération suisse* has been alternating the language of its songs from the beginning of the contest. We have previously mentioned that Lys Assia was the first artist to show her country's linguistic diversity by performing "Das alte Karussell" in German (1956), "Refrain" in French (1956) and "Giorgio" in Italian (1958). However, in the following years the trio Peter, Sue and Marc surpassed the first Eurovision winner's feat: this music group from Bern was chosen in four occasions to represent Switzerland and each time they sang in a different language.

They first appeared in Dublin, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1971. “Les illusions de nos vingt ans” (The Illusions of our Twenties), a melancholic ballad in French about a desire to rescue the dreams and hopes of youth, ignoring the impositions dictated by society. The running order did not benefit them: Séverine, the French artist chosen by the small principality of Monaco who turned out to be the winner, sang right before them; and two tracks that presented different views of the world: Katja Ebstein’s “Diese Welt” and Karina’s “En un mundo nuevo”, which finished 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> respectively, were played immediately after. Peter, Sue and Marc settled for the twelfth place, out of seventeen participants (Masson, 2012).

In the 1976 edition, the Swiss trio sang, this time in English, “Djambo, Djambo”, a pleasant little ditty about a retired clown, once ‘the best that ever was’ but now living on faded memories (Tibballs, 2016, p. 55). Peter, Sue & Marc were accompanied on stage by a man dressed as a clown, who played the barrel organ and the guitar. He was received with such warmth that the trio gave Switzerland a fourth place (*Eurovision World*, n.d.).



Image 9: Peter, Sue and Marc at the Eurovision Song Contest 1976 (Mieremet, 1976)

In 1979, Eurovision was held in Jerusalem, following Izhar Cohen and Alpha-Beta’s victory. Their “A-Ba-Ni-Bi” became a worldwide hit (Panea, 2018b, p. 130). The song deals with the way in which children relate to love in comparison with adults (O’Connor, 2005). Israel’s victory implied that, for the first time, the contest would be celebrated in a territory that does not politically belong to Europe, a piece of news that did not sit well with Israel’s Arab neighbors, who put pressure on Turkey not to go to Jerusalem. Finally, the Turks, in order to avoid problems, declined the invitation of the EBU that year

(*Eurovision TV*, n.d.). Switzerland, for the third time represented by Peter, Sue and Marc talked about a second-hand shop. “Trödler and Co.”, whose lyrics were in German, was played with recycled materials instead of guitars, drums or basses. Despite the good intentions, it could only reach tenth place (*Eurovision World*, n.d.).

The Swiss trio participated in Eurovision for the last time in 1981, this year opting for Italian. “Io senza te” (Me without you) was a very personal ballad that well deserved the trophy. However, it was not the only interesting act and the voting proved incredibly close: With two rounds to go, there was a triple tie on top of the scoreboard between the UK, Germany and Switzerland, who had yet to vote (Tibballs, 2016, p. 70). In the end, Bucks Fizz were the ones who convinced the jury the most. Switzerland had to settle for fourth place (*Eurovision World*, n.d.). Despite its placing, “Io senza te” is still considered a timeless masterpiece by many *eurofans*.



Video 9: Eurovision 1981 – Switzerland: Peter, Sue and Marc singing “Io senza te” (Αννα Ελβίρα, 2011)

The only language that Peter, Sue and Marc did not master (or at least did not dare to defend at the festival) was Romansh. As a matter of fact, this minority tongue has not been heard frequently in Eurovision: The vocal group Furbaz was the only one that let us enjoy this evolution of Latin: the classy “Viver senza tei” (To live without you) could be labelled as a *host entry*, because it was performed in the edition held in Lausanne. Céline Dion had been proclaimed winner the year before with the powerful “Ne partez pas sans moi”, setting the bar very high. However, Furbaz were up to their predecessor.



Video 10: Eurovision 1989 – Switzerland: Furbaz performing “Viver senza tei” (escLIVEmusic1, 2014)

### 3.7. Racial diversity on stage

If there is something that characterizes the Eurovision Song Contest, it is inclusion: throughout its more than sixty years of existence we have seen artists of all nationalities, all ethnicities and all social groups. The 2017 slogan, “Celebrate diversity”, perfectly sums up the idea of the event: to feel proud of what makes us unique and to share that rarity with the rest of the world.

Historically, the countries that have been most committed to diversity are small, since their low population did not allow them to resort to indigenous singers and had to contact artists from larger states, culturally linked to them. Luxembourg, for example, was represented by several French, Dutch, Belgian and German artists. In fact, four of its five victories have been achieved by French artists: Jean-Claude Pascal (1961), France Gall (1965), Anne-Marie David (1973) and Corinne Hermès (1983). The remaining triumph (1972) belongs to the Greek Vicky Leandros (Panea, 2018a, pp. 100–101). Because of this phenomenon, only two of the total of entries from this country have been performed in Luxembourgish: 1960 and 1992. Luxembourgish is one of Luxembourg’s official languages, but there are two more: German and French (Weber, 2009, p. 89).

The Netherlands has been the first and the most constant nation in sending black or mixed-race representatives, this has happened a total of 18 times. Lutgard Mutsaers (2007, p. 65) in *A song for Europe* lists and analyses in detail all the Dutch entries headed by such artists between 1964 and 2005.

**Table 6.1** “New-Dutch” representation in the Eurovision Song Contest, 1964–2005

<i>Year</i>	<i>Performer</i>	<i>Song</i>	<i>Points</i>	<i>Ranking</i>
1964	Anneke Grönloh	“Jij bent mijn leven”	2	10th
1966	Milly Scott	“Fernando en Filippo”	2	15th
1970	Patricia & The Hearts of Soul	“Waterman”	7	7th
1972	Sandra & Andres	“Als het om de liefde gaat”	106	4th
1976	Sandra Reemer	“The Party’s Over”	56	9th
1978	Harmony	“‘t Is Oké”	37	13th
1979	Xandra	“Colorado”	51	12th
1989	Justine Pelmelay	“Blijf zoals je bent”	45	15th
1992	Humphrey Campbell	“Wijs me de weg”	67	9th
1993	Ruth Jacott	“Vrede”	92	6th
1996	Maxine & Franklin Brown	“De eerste keer”	78	7th
1998	Edsilia Rombley	“Hemel en aarde”	150	4th
2000	Linda Wagenmakers	“No Goodbyes”	40	13th
2005	Glennis Grace	“My Impossible Dream”	Out in Semi-Finals	

Image 10: “New-Dutch” representation in the Eurovision Song Contest, 1964-2005 (Mutsaers, 2007)

However, we must add some artists who have competed in recent editions: Edsilia Rombley, who after finishing fourth in 1998 returned in 2007 singing “On Top of the World”; Hind, of Moroccan origin, could not make it to the 2008 final with “Your Heart Belongs to Me”; Joan Franka, of Turkish descent, prepared in 2012 a performance that combined some Native-American elements, including a headdress <sup>[see image 12]</sup>, in a pop song with certain arrangements typical of country music (Panea, 2018a, p. 101); and the Surinamese Jeangu Macrooy, chosen to represent the Dutch chain AVROTROS in 2020 (although this has been canceled by the COVID-19, Jeangu has already been confirmed for the 2021 edition) (Jansen, 2020).



Image 11: Milly Scott, considered the first black singer to participate in the Eurovision Song Contest, represented The Netherlands in 1966 (Koch, 1966)



Image 12: Joan Franka performing “You and me”, the song with which she represented The Netherlands in 2012 (Eurovision TV, 2012)

The presence of these singers at the Eurovision Song Contest is usually justified by the phenomenon of migration. The Netherlands, for example, receives thousands of immigrants every year, most of whom come from Turkey (as it the case of the father of the aforementioned Joan Franka), Suriname (Humphrey Campbell, Ruth Jacott and Jeangu Macrooy were born there), Morocco (Hind) and Indonesia (Anneke Grönloh, who has the privilege of being the first non-white woman to participate in the competition, came from that archipelago) (*Expansión*, 2019). Both Suriname and Indonesia were Dutch colonies (Renzaho, 2016, p. 320), so the cultural ties between these states are quite strong.

However, during the 1990s we saw an unusual number of dark-skinned singers on behalf of the French delegation, this was due to the cultural policies carried out by Minister of Culture Jack Lang, who held this office from 1981 to 1986 and then again between the years 1988 and 1993 (Rambaud, n.d.).

France is a power that took great advantage of imperialism and still retains certain overseas territories.

Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyana and Reunion Island, which became French colonies in the 17<sup>th</sup> century are now overseas departments or DOM. Whilst some colonies gained independence between 1958 and 1976, others, like Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, Mayotte, French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, New Caledonia and the southern and Antarctic French possessions remained or became overseas territories or TOM. The status of territorial unit confers greater independence from Metropolitan France (International Business Publications, 2012, p. 17)

Lang’s cultural policy regarding the contest consisted of internally selecting a number of entries emphasizing ethnic minorities, especially those originating from the Caribbean and the Maghreb, and regional languages, in order to give an image of modernity and vitality to the contest (Vuletic, 2018, p. 167).

The Guadeloupean Joëlle Ursull came joint second in 1990 with her “White and Black Blues”, a song composed by French multitalented Serge Gainsbourg dealing with the need to overcome the prejudices of skin color and the difficulties she has to face in a white society. An accordion, the synthesizer (which was starting to become incredibly popular in the early 1990s) and above all a strong percussion made this song stand out from all the others competing that night and from all those that had been performed on the Eurovision stage until then.



Video 11: Eurovision 1990 – France: Joëlle Ursull performing “White and Black Blues”  
(escLIVEmusic1, 2012)

Joëlle was succeeded by Amina Annabi, Franco-Tunisian singer, and her vindictive ballad “C’est le dernier qui a parlé qui a raison” (It’s the last one who spoke who is right). On the basis of this proverb, widely used in France, Amina tackled a pressing issue, then as now: the oppression of women in the Arab world (Leu, 2019). In this case, French, one of the most spoken languages in Europe, served Amina to express her concerns, to share her point of view on this delicate subject. Furthermore, the singer introduced Arab flavors and elements in her performance, which pleased the jurors from all over Europe. At the end of the voting, Amina finished in first place with 146 points, the same amount received by the Swedish singer Carola and her catchy “Fångad av en stormvind” (“Captured by a stormy wind”) (Leu, 2019). As there were already rules deciding who would win in case of a draw, the required calculations were made, and the trophy was awarded to the country that received the most 10-point lots, that is, Sweden.



Image 13: Amina performing “C’est le dernier qui a parlé qui a raison” in Rome (Panea, 2018)

One year later it was the turn of Kali, an artist from Martinique who brought for the first time the Rastafarian aesthetic to the contest and performed a reggae song in Haitian Creole called “Monté la riviè” (Go up the river). Kali composed the music at the age of seventeen, inspired by a march up the river in Saint-Pierre. This song of his youth reached the limelight when Kali wrote the lyrics with Remy Bellenchombre <sup>[see image 14]</sup> and performed it in Eurovision 1992. At the contest, he sang a couple of phrases in French (“*Entre les roches et les racines, un jour tu verras la source de la rivière*”, meaning “Between the rocks and the roots, one day you’ll see the river’s source”), thus creating a very interesting combination of languages. Kali came eighth out of twenty-three and was heard by no less than 350 million spectators (Berrian, 2000, p. 133). A real triumph for Martinique!

Créole (version originale)	Français (traduction)
Monté la riviè, wo, whoa...	<i>Montez la rivière, whoa</i>
Entre les roches et les racines	<i>Entre les roches et les racines</i>
Un jour tu verras la source de la rivière	<i>Un jour tu verras la source la rivière</i>
Monté la riviè, oh...	<i>Montez la rivière oh</i>
Wouvè zorey ou	<i>Ouvrez vos oreilles</i>
Fòk ou aprann kouté bri dlo-a	<i>Il vous faut apprendre à écouter le son de l'eau</i>
I ké toujou montré'w la pou kontinyé	<i>Il vous montrera toujours la voie pour continuer</i>
Kontinyé, oui, pe pe ba...	<i>Continuer, oui</i>
Ou pé ké janmen swèf	<i>Vous n'aurez jamais soif</i>
Pli ou ké monté pli dlo-a ké fré	<i>Plus vous montez, plus l'eau sera fraîche</i>
Pli ou ké lé bwè pli ou kè lé monté	<i>Plus vous en boirez, plus vous monterez</i>
Monté la riviè, wo	<i>Montez la rivière, wo</i>
Entre les roches et les racines	<i>Entre les roches et les racines</i>
Un jour tu verras la source de la rivière	<i>Un jour tu verras la source de la rivière</i>
Monté la riviè, wo	<i>Montez la rivière</i>
Wouvè dé zyé'w gran	<i>Ouvrez vos grands yeux</i>
Toujou gadé koulè dlo-a	<i>Il vous faut regarder la couleur de l'eau</i>
Anmizi ou ka monté, i ka vini pli klè	<i>Quand vous montez, elle sera plus claire</i>

Image 14: Lyrics and French translation of “Monté la riviè” by Kali (Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Français, 2019, p. 87)

The good results obtained by these three entries led the French delegation to opt for diversity throughout the decade: Patrick Fiori’s “Mama Corsica” (1993) contained two lines in Corsican, the group L’Héritage Des Celtes performed “Diwanit Bugale” (1996) in Breton (Mayer, 2015, p. 160) and Marie Line, whose parents were from Martinique, introduced some innovative sounds in the repetitive “Où aller” (1998) (Panea, 2018a, p. 103).

In this century, France has also given the chance to represent them to a couple of Afro-descendants: Ortal (2005), of Andalusian and Berber roots, and Jessy Matador (2010), born in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Panea, 2018a, p. 103). While the first did not manage to stand out, the second achieved a huge success with “Allez, olla, olé”, mainly because the song was used for the 2010 FIFA World Cup (Palacios, 2010).



Video 12: Eurovision 2010 – France: Jessy Matador performing “Allez, olla, olé” (Eurovision Song Contest, 2016)

Although there have been several black entrants throughout the history of the contest, only one of them has won: The Aruban Dave Benton represented Estonia in 2001 with his musical partner Tanel Padar (Yard, 2020).



Image 15: Tanel Padar and Dave Benton singing “Everybody”, the song which gave them the Eurovision victory (Eurovision TV, 2001)

Unfortunately, these entries are always coupled with racism. This type of discrimination that has been taking place in the most “developed” countries for centuries is far from being eradicated. At Eurovision, black or mixed-race artists have had to face a double challenge: on the one hand, to perform in front of millions of viewers, and on the other, to endure the mockery and humiliation they receive because of their skin color.

If we take a look at the votes, no pattern has been repeated (Yard, 2020), since there have been black singers who have achieved enviable positions, such as the aforementioned Dave Benton, the British Imaani (who came second in 1998) or the Austrian Cesár Sampson (third in 2018), while others did not receive the support of either the public or the jury.

However, this reality becomes evident when we listen to the testimonies of the artists. Andrew Lloyd Webber, famous British composer who joined Jade Ewen on piano in the 2009 edition, suggested in a Radio Times interview that black contestants fared worse in the voting. Jade, whose mother is Jamaican, performed the song “It’s My Time” and finished 5<sup>th</sup>, but Lloyd Webber admitted that he was asked why he had brought a black artist. According to him, the UK should have gotten second place, but it did not because of countries like Ukraine: “I think we would have come second but there's a problem when you go further east. If you're talking about Western Europe - Germany, fine; France, fine; Spain, fine; Greece, fine; Scandinavian countries, fine. But Ukraine? Not so good.” (*BBC News*, 2012).

Actually in Ukraine the right-wing Freedom Party attacked the ground-breaking selection of a Gaitana, Afro-Ukrainian, to represent them in 2012. “Millions of people who will be watching will see that Ukraine is represented by a person who does not belong to our race,” said Yuri Syrotyuk, leader of the party (Karpyak, 2012).

The aforementioned Amina admitted in an interview with a British newspaper that she was under a lot of pressure, and labeled an action by Carola, the 1991 winner, as racist: When Amina went to congratulate her, the Swedish singer turned her back on the Franco-Tunisian performer (Randanne, 2017).

Similar situations have happened to several other artists, from our own Remedios Amaya to Norway’s Stella Mwangi. This shows that the road to equality is not yet fully covered and that much work remains to be done in order to integrate these artists into the European music industry.

Among the many tragedies caused by the cancellation of this edition is not seeing a year full of black excellence come to life. Eurovision 2020 had a record number of dark-skinned singers: 7. Sweden, Denmark, Israel, Malta, San Marino, Czech Republic and the Netherlands, all bringing diversity to the table. Thankfully five of these acts have been confirmed for the upcoming contest (Yard, 2020).

### **3.8. Ireland’s hegemony during the 1990s**

The 1990s was a decade where Eurovision rapidly changed. Communism fell in Europe, which brought new states to the stage, a free language rule came back, public voting was introduced and the orchestra disappeared (Zwart, 2017).

In the book *Eurovision, un fenómeno paranormal* (2004), Juan Luis Ayllón refers to these years as “the renaissance of the festival””, since it recovered the prestige it had lost in previous years.

The first edition of this new decennium was won by Italy: Toto Cotugno performed in Zagreb “Insieme: 1992”, a ballad that called for unity between the different European countries after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This was not the only entry of the night that spoke of peace, freedom and love: The Austrian song was entitled "Keine Mauern mehr" (No more walls), Germany informed us that we were "free to live" (Frei zu leben) and the fifteen-year-old Emma, representing the United Kingdom, asked us to "give a little love back to the world" (Tibballs, 2016, p. 91).

The year after, the competition moved to Cinecittà, a film and television studio complex in the eastern part of Rome where more than 3,000 films have been shot up to the present date. At the end of a close voting sequence, in which confusion and Toto's (who co-presented the show with the other Italian winner, Gigliola Cinquetti <sup>[see image 16]</sup>) constant mistakes reigned, a high number of Mediterranean countries occupied the highest positions (France came second, Israel third, Spain fourth, Malta sixth, Italy seventh and Cyprus ninth) (Iván Iñarra, 2013).



Image 16: Toto and Gigliola, presenters of the 1991 edition (Eurovision-fr.net, 1991)

SVT, the Swedish broadcaster in charge of the 1992 edition, chose Malmö as the venue. A record number of participants was registered (23), as the Netherlands returned to the competition after one year's absence. The top three places were taken by three songs in English (*Eurovision TV*, n.d.): Ireland's Linda Martin, who already had experience at Eurovision, received the trophy thanks to the track “Why me?”; the second place went to

Britain's Michael Ball and his "One step out of time"; while the bronze was achieved by the Maltese artist Mary Spiteri and "Little Child". It was the first time that this small archipelago managed to get on the podium, a fact that encouraged them to keep participating in future editions, ceasing to be sporadic visitors and turning into a committed delegation.

In 1993, the top 3 was not much different. Ireland, more specifically the small town of Millstreet, hosted the festival and Ireland took again the first place. The popular singer Niamh Kavanagh, born in Dublin, performed "In Your Eyes", receiving a standing ovation and 183 points, twenty-three more than England's Sonia Evans (*Eurovision World*, n.d.), the pre-show favorite, and her most direct rival for victory. Finally, "Better the Devil You Know" finished second, while Switzerland, represented by Canadian Annie Cotton, was third. In the run-up to this contest, the European Broadcasting Union finally started to grapple with the explosion in the number of potential participating countries, caused by the dissolution of the Eastern bloc, and also by the disintegration of Yugoslavia, which had traditionally been the only communist country to take part in the contest. For the first time, a pre-qualifying round was introduced, but only for countries that had either never participated in the contest at all, or in the case of former republics of Yugoslavia, had not previously competed as nations in their own right. Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania and Estonia were left to battle it out in a special competition called *Kvalifikacija za Millstreet* in Ljubljana on April 3<sup>rd</sup> for the mere three places available at the grand final in Millstreet. In the end, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia were the ones edging through (Vovidis, n.d.). The Bosnian team, including singer Fazla, made it to the plane under a hail of gunfire as they temporarily escaped from their war-torn nation to take part. Fazla's song was called "Sva bol svijeta" (The Whole World's Pain) and spoke of the suffering caused by the war that was taking place in the country, but the European juries did not share Fazla's pain and placed him 16<sup>th</sup> out of 25 (Tibballs, 2016, p. 99).

Following Niamh's triumph, ESC 1994 was staged at the Point Theater in Dublin. Ireland clinched the gold again, breaking a double record: it was the first country to win the Eurovision Song Contest six times (a feat that, so far, only Sweden has managed to match) and the first to win three consecutive editions. The emotional "Rock 'n' Roll Kids" won over the judges, who could be seen for the first time thanks to satellite links. The duo comprising Paul Harrington and Charlie McGettigan scored a total of 226 points, the

highest score ever at Eurovision up to that date. The runner-up, Poland's Edyta Górniak, scored 166, which is not bad considering it was the first time the Slavic country took part in the competition (*Eurovision TV*, n.d.). Poland was not the only state to make its debut: six more countries joined that year (Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Romania, Russia and Slovakia). Most of them were completely ignored, only Hungary and Russia got decent positions, 4th and 9th respectively. In fact, Hungary's Friderika Bayer's fourth place has not yet been surpassed by the rest of the Magyar representatives (ESCBubble Team, 2019). The ultra-modern “Lonely Symphony (We will be Free)” did not make the British very proud, as they had to settle for tenth place, but little can be blamed on Frances Ruffelle and her talented backup singers.



Video 13: Eurovision 1994 – Ireland: Paul Harrington and Charlie McGettigan performing “Rock ‘n’ roll kids” (Paul Harrington, 2008)

At the 40th anniversary of the event, in 1995, Ireland continued to break records, hosting the contest for the third time in a row. To ensure that the competition did not last more than three hours, the EBU prevented the countries that had occupied the last seven positions in the previous edition from participating and granted the privilege of returning to the competition to the 1993 bottom 5 (Turkey, Slovenia, Israel, Denmark and Belgium), which for the same reason were unable to delight us with their music in 1994 (*Eurovision TV*, n.d.). Slovenia, Israel and above all Denmark proved to be strong rivals, but the other two Scandinavians (Norway and Sweden) and Spain were the ones who fought for the victory. In the end it was the group Secret Garden, which, despite being made up of an Irish-born violinist, defended the colors of Norway, who took first place. Their composition “Nocturne” is a predominantly instrumental piece –containing only 24

words–, which can be encompassed within the New Age movement, very popular at the time. The second place went to Anabel Conde, a nineteen year-old Malaga girl who dazzled all of Europe with her interpretation of the song “Vuelve Conmigo” (Come back with me) (Alonso, 2018). Jan Johansen, the Swedish representative, took the lead during most of the voting, but gradually lost positions. In the end, he won the bronze medal. Neither Ireland, nor the United Kingdom, nor Malta got the stratospheric amount of points of previous years, these three nations were relegated to intermediate placings, without a doubt it was the least satisfactory edition for the “trio of English”.



Video 14: Eurovision 1995 – Norway: Secret Garden performing “Nocturne” (escLIVEmusic1, 2012)

Both the Irish and the British immediately got their act together: the former achieved their seventh victory in the 1996 edition thanks to “The Voice” of Eimear Quinn, while the latter sent the Australian artist Gina G, who enjoyed enormous success thanks to her “Ooh... Aah... Just a Little Bit”, which only reached eighth place in the contest but went on to become a huge international hit and was even nominated for a Grammy Award (IMDb, n.d.).

In 1997, for the first time, it was the public who decided the winner of the competition. However, only the United Kingdom, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland and Germany managed to make this system work: The residents of the other countries had to wait one year to vote. The UK won the contest thanks to Katrina & the Waves, who scored an unprecedented 227 points with their song “Love Shine a Light” (Escudero, 2017). The hosts, represented by Marc Robert’s “Mysterious Woman”, came second. The most revolutionary entry came from Iceland: Paul Oscar broke new ground with his performance on a white leather sofa, flanked by four women in leather dominatrix outfits [see image 17] (Eurovision TV, n.d.). Cyprus and Turkey also stood out, despite being the first

to perform, they finished 5th and 3rd respectively, their best results to date. Malta's representative, Debbie Scerri, came ninth but she did take home a prize, the Barbara Dex Award, a recognition introduced that year rewarding the most hideous outfit. It takes its name from the Belgian representative of 1993, whose style failed to convince fashion experts. The light blue and purple striped dress that Debbie wore did not benefit her, but she got a meritorious position after all.



Image 17: Paul Oskar performing “Minn hinsti dans” in the Point Theater, Dublin (Eurovoxx, 1997)

The 1998 Eurovision Song Contest held in Birmingham culminated in one of the most exciting voting sequences ever and proved that Europe was more open-minded than we might have thought, because the transsexual singer Dana International won the trophy with her song *Diva* <sup>[see image 18]</sup>. This ode to the powerful women of history and mythology scored 174 points on the night of the festival. Her victory had a strong impression on the world, and she became a cultural icon. Actually Dana is one of the reasons why the Eurovision Song Contest is so important for the LGBT+ community nowadays. In Israel, despite not having the support of all sectors, thousands of people celebrated on the streets, and the singer completed the cultural revolution she started with her first album; a symbol of liberalism and human rights. The United Kingdom came in second for a record 15th time with Imaani, the first-ever black singer to represent the country; and the Netherlands obtained their best result since 1975 and finished in fourth place. The Italian broadcaster RAI decided to withdraw indefinitely (*Eurovision TV*, n.d.).



Image 18: Dana performing again at the end of the gala. She wore a feather jacket designed by Jean-Paul Gaultier (Getty Images, 1998)

The last edition of the decade could not have been more different from its predecessor and all the previous ones, as a series of rules destroyed the traditional values of the contest. For the first time since 1976, the EBU allowed delegations to sing in the language of their choice, with several countries abandoning their official tongues at the expense of English. This rule was intended to give all participants the opportunity to achieve an international career using the most universal language and not to benefit those countries having it as official or co-official: The United Kingdom, Ireland and Malta (Linn, 2016, p. 63). It has been proved during this chapter that these have achieved envious positions throughout the decade due to this “privilege”. Moreover, the use of a live orchestra was dropped as a way to conserve money for the show. It was also decided that France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom, as the highest-paying European Broadcasting Union members, would automatically be allowed to participate every year, irrespective of their previous result, this is how the concept of "Big Four", extended to "Big Five" a few years later when Italy returned to the competition, was created (Eurovision TV, n.d.).

The Swedish Charlotte Nilsson won the contest with “Take Me to Your Heaven”. The song had been seen as rather old-fashioned in Sweden but the audience thought differently. “Take Me to Your Heaven” won at a time when ABBA were enjoying a revival in the European charts and the similarities in musical style were noted by the media (Eurovision TV, n.d.). Sweden beat off strong competition from Iceland, for the relief of the electronic store BT, who promised a refund to all those who bought a television on the day of the competition if Selma won with her catchy “All Out of Luck”.

Out of the 23 acts who participated that year, 14 sang at least part of their tune in English, a figure that will grow in the editions of the new millennium.

Draw	Country	Artist	Song	Language <sup>[6]</sup>	Place	Points
01	Lithuania	Aistė	"Strazdas"	Samogitian	20	13
02	Belgium	Vanessa Chinitor	"Like the Wind"	English	12	38
03	Spain	Lydia	"No quiero escuchar"	Spanish	23	1
04	Croatia	Doris Dragović	"Marija Magdalena"	Croatian	4	118
05	United Kingdom	Precious	"Say It Again"	English	12	38
06	Slovenia	Darja Švajger	"For a Thousand Years"	English	11	50
07	Turkey	Tuğba Önal & Grup Mistik	"Dön Artık"	Turkish	16	21
08	Norway	Stig Van Eijk	"Living My Life Without You"	English	14	35
09	Denmark	Trine Jepsen & Michael Teschl	"This Time I Mean It"	English	8	71
10	France	Nayah	"Je veux donner ma voix"	French	19	14
11	Netherlands	Marlayne	"One Good Reason"	English	8	71
12	Poland	Mietek Szcześniak	"Przytul mnie mocno"	Polish	18	17
13	Iceland	Selma	"All Out of Luck"	English	2	146
14	Cyprus	Marlain	"Tha'nai Erotas" (Θα'ναι έρωτας)	Greek	22	2
15	Sweden	Charlotte Nilsson	"Take Me to Your Heaven"	English	1	163
16	Portugal	Rui Bandeira	"Como tudo começou"	Portuguese	21	12
17	Ireland	The Mullans	"When You Need Me"	English	17	18
18	Austria	Bobbie Singer	"Reflection"	English	10	65
19	Israel	Eden	"Yom Huledet (Happy Birthday)" (יום הולדת)	English, Hebrew	5	93
20	Malta	Times Three	"Believe 'n Peace"	English	15	32
21	Germany	Sürpriz	"Reise nach Jerusalem – Kudüs'e seyahat"	German, Turkish, English, Hebrew	3	140
22	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Dino & Béatrice	"Putnici"	Bosnian, French	7	86
23	Estonia	Evelin Samuel & Camille	"Diamond of Night"	English	6	90

Image 19: Eurovision 1999 running order, songs, languages and results (Wikipedia Contributors, 2020)

### 3.9. Celtic rhythms and invented words

Throughout the history of Eurovision, we have listened to several songs containing nonsense lines and titles. This idea was taken to a new level in 2003, when the RTBF – the public broadcasting organization delivering radio and television services to the French-speaking region of Belgium and which is responsible for half of the Belgian entries– tried something completely new: a song performed from the beginning to the end in a made-up language, and therefore totally void of literal meaning (Mutsaers et al., 2017). The group that had the privilege to defend such a unique tune was Urban Trad.



Video 15: Urban Trad – Sanomi (Martínez, 2006)

“Sanomi” competed in the tensest Eurovision final until the voting system changed a few years ago and added an extra tension: in that edition, being the winner of the festival or being third depended on just 3 points. Sertab Erener (167), Urban Trad (165) and t.A.T.u (164) could all be proclaimed champions (*Eurovision World*, n.d.). Finally, the Belgians had to settle for silver, although they were surely happy: the made-up language had given them their best result at Eurovision since 1986.

In 2008, they tried to repeat the formula, but Ishtar could not reach the final with her catchy “O julissi” (Motschenbacher, 2016, p. 137).

By the way, the election of Urban Trad in Belgium came with controversy: when shortening the song for the festival, the heads of Belgian television left out Soetkin Collier, another of the group's vocalists, because she was linked to radical right-wing parties a decade before the festival (*Eurohits*, 2008).

Terry Wogan, BBC's commentator for Eurovision, made the following comment on the Belgian song: “Three languages to choose from in Belgium, and they had to make up their own!”. Terry's statements could be quite polemic, but here, he definitely had a point (Tibballs, 2016, p. 128).

#### **4. Critical analysis: “Anglovision”**

With the definitive suppression of the rule that prohibited participants from singing in a language other than that of the country they represented, the festival has become very homogeneous. English has done Eurovision a disservice, as, despite the increasing number of entries per year, the musical and linguistic variety is not as vast as it could be.

### Eurovision entries featuring a language other than English 2007-2019

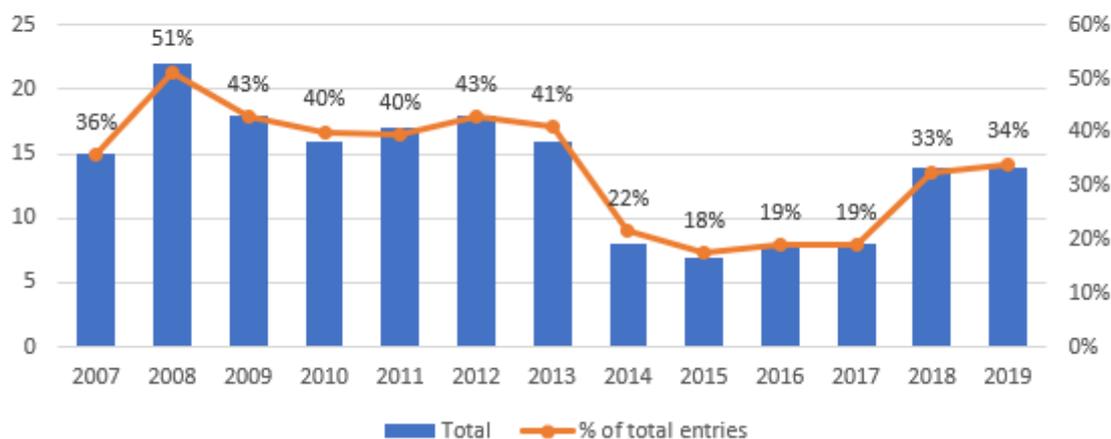


Image 20: Eurovision entries featuring a language other than English between 2007 and 2019 (John the GO, 2019)

If we take a look at this graph showing the number of entries in English by year, we will see two upturns: one in 2008 and one in 2018. This is probably due to a fairly widespread custom at the festival: imitating the previous year's winner. The 2007 festival was won by Serbia's Marija Šerifović with the Balkan ballad “Molitva”, while Salvador Sobral gave the first victory to Portugal with his “Amar pelos dois” in 2017. Marija and Salvador have been the only champions of this century who have sung entirely in a language other than English, although the two songs from Ukraine that achieved first place, “Wild dances” and “1944”, contain part of the lyrics in Ukrainian and Crimean Tartar respectively. The latter's victory in 2016 was fraught with controversy, as the song performed by Jamala was a criticism of the Russian occupation of the Crimean Peninsula. The Eurovision Song Contest rules prohibit songs containing political slogans, but for some reason it overcame the censorship, and not only that, it took the gold medal, even though it was not the most voted for by either the jury or the public.

The second place in that edition went to Australia. This nation has been participating in Eurovision since 2015 because of the large following for the contest –the Australian public channel SBS has been broadcasting it uninterruptedly since 1983 (Hay et al., 2019, p. 4) – and due to the possibility of SBS commercially expanding the Eurovision brand in Asia (Vuletic, 2018, p. 210-212). SBS is an associate but not active member of the EBU, making Australia the first non-member country to take place in the competition (Hay et al., 2019, p. 132). They first appeared in the 2014 interval act: Jessica Mauboy

was chosen by the public broadcaster to perform the song “Sea of Flags” while the European audience cast their votes. Since then, they have not missed a single appointment and have achieved quite a few good results, especially from the music experts.

It is undeniable that, in these last twenty years, we have seen it all: a puppet character representing the country that has won the most times, the eccentric Verka Serduchka and his tinfoil suit, Finnish rock monsters, angels and demons, stage invaders, Russian grandmothers, a song about social networks, artists coming out of coffins, the bearded Conchita Wurst, and even opera singers “levitating”.

In addition, the technological advances of these last decades offer the artists endless possibilities: the delegations take great care of the costumes, the props, the camera shots, the lights and all those elements that can enhance a performance. These resources, if well used, can serve to transmit the message. It could be said that the visual part has become almost as important as the musical part. For all this, Eurovision is worth seeing. In Spain, despite the persistence of the stereotype that it is a very geeky festival and that "it is all politics", it is the non-sporting event that generates the most audience.

However, from my point of view, there is a lack of that linguistic factor that makes the songs so special and allows a total celebration of diversity. Luckily, not all countries have succumbed to the universal language: some like Italy, Portugal and Spain remain true to their roots and others like Hungary, Serbia and France have alternated English with their national languages. Even invented (see 3.8) and minority languages (Samogitian, Võro, Karelian, Udmurt...) could be heard. Below, I present a series of culturally-relevant performances that we have recently seen on the Eurovision stage:



### Vânia Fernandes – “Senhora do mar”

Vânia is a Portuguese singer who won Operação Triunfo (a talent show) in 2007 and the Festival da Canção in 2008, which made her the representative of Portugal in Eurovision 2008. “Senhora do mar” is fado-inspired and tells the story of a widowed woman, whose husband, a fisherman, lost his life at the sea (Murray, 2008).



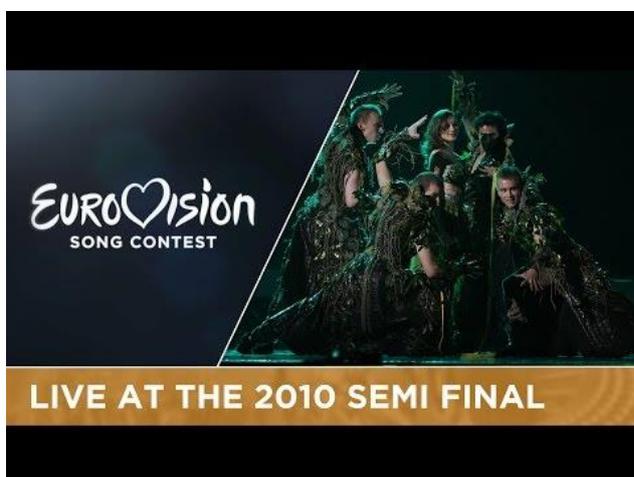
Teräsbetoni – “Missä miehet ratsastaa” (Finland 2008)

After winning with Lordi in 2006, Finnish TV viewers thought that rock could be the secret combination to win the hearts of European televoters. For that reason, in 2008 Teräsbetoni, a heavy metal band represented the country with a thundering rock-song in Finnish (*Eurovision TV*, 2008).



Nelly Ciobanu – “Hora din Moldova” (Moldova 2009)

“Hora” is a traditional folk dance accompanied by traditional music. In an interview, Nelly said that this type of ethnic songs is in her DNA and that she was very happy to perform “Hora din Moldova” on the ESC stage. She sang it half in English, half in Romanian in order to be understood by everyone (*Eurovision TV*, 2009).



Kristína Peláková – Horehronie (Slovakia 2010)

An ethnic pop song about a mountainous region in central Slovakia. Kristina impersonates a wood nymph in the stage act, and the four dancers accompanying her are there to save her from evil forces. The lyrics were written by Kamil Peteraj, a famous Slovak poet (*Eurovision TV*, 2010).



### Joci Pápai – “Origo” (Hungary 2017)

This track was described by Joci himself as a mix of styles: “it’s modern world music – electronic beats meet with Hungarian and gypsy styles, an extraordinary yet finely balanced combination.” He came back to the competition in 2019 with another marvelous composition: “Az én apám”, which could not qualify to the final (Zwart, 2017).



### Artsvik – “Fly with me” (Armenia 2017)

A curious case: this Soviet artist only half followed the slogan “Celebrate diversity”, because although the song does have some very Caucasian sounds, the lyrics are in English, resulting in a strange but interesting product. The stage director of this performance is Sacha Jean-Baptiste, one of the most popular women among the eurofandom for her creativity and designs.



### Mahmood – “Soldi” (Italy 2019)

“Soldi” combines a very personal message – about his father, who left his mother when Mahmood was six – with a contemporary musical style (West, 2017). The video clip of the song accumulates more than 160 million views, making it the second most viewed in the history of the festival, surpassed only by another Italian entry, “Occidentali's Karma” (2017).

\*All these videos can be found on the official Eurovision Song Contest YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/eurovision>). All rights belong to the EBU.

At the end of the day, as long as there is something that differentiates us, culture and identity will never die.

## 5. Conclusions

The Eurovision Song Contest has changed a lot throughout its history. Gone are the days of that first edition, made up of only seven delegations, the orchestra and several rules that now seem archaic.

As we have seen in the course of this paper, the cultural dimension has not completely disappeared, but the language diversity has been considerably reduced when countries were no longer constrained to sing in their own tongue, as the majority of them chose to translate the songs or directly compose in English.

The participation of states like Australia has caused a lot of controversy, but once we get over that initial shock, we realize that we are not really that different from the inhabitants of these places and that being European is an abstract and hard-to-define concept. Because of globalization all the cultures are interconnected in one way or another. Our concerns and worries also plague other people in the world.

Love, peace, friendship and family ties are topics we can all talk about to a greater or lesser extent, since we have experienced them in the first person, no matter where we are from or what language we speak. For this reason, the vast majority of songs performed at the Eurovision Song Contest have revolved around these subjects. However, all the songs had their own personality, as they were sung in the language of their country. Languages do not only serve to communicate a message (which is often quite unsubstantial) but also contribute to the musicality of the words, to give the song a unique sound. There have been cases of entries with a marked ethnic touch defended in English, such as “Düm tek tek” (Turkey 2009) and the aforementioned “Fly with me”, and although it is easy to enjoy them because of their powerful and catchy instrumentation, they give the impression of being incomplete, as there is no concordance between the voice and the melody. One can thus conclude that language is a fundamental way of transmitting culture and that common themes can only be differentiated by the way they are expressed. A romantic ballad will never be the same if it is sung in Icelandic or in Bosnian. Nevertheless, it is possible to filter only some elements of a culture without the result being bad at all.

“Düm tek tek” has actually become one of the most famous Eurovision songs in recent years, garnering 62 million views on YouTube, a pretty impressive number that not many entries can surpass. However, the two songs that have made the most impact are in Italian:

Francesco Gabbani's "Occidentali's Karma" and Mahmood's "Soldi". The tremendous popularity of both tracks indicates that it is not necessary to sing in English nowadays to savor the sweet smell of success.

In the past, in order for the message to reach every home around the world, it had to be supported by a clear staging; a melody in accordance with the lyrics, but at the same time attracting the attention of the audience; and an emotional interpretation, thanks to which a certain empathy with the artist would be generated. All of these parameters had to be taken into account in order to succeed in the competition, so Eurovision was more than a song contest, but, of course, the music was the most important aspect, and the singer had to know how to defend it live, as this determined whether the music-loving customer bought the album that they would release shortly after the contest or not. Currently, thanks to a technology that allows to carry out any idea, it is possible to reinforce the message in a visual way, projecting it on the screens, with overprints or by means of unusual devices. Although these phenomena serve to enhance a performance, they can lead to a decrease in musical quality, as delegations sometimes rely on these effects to score points, rather than opting for original and innovative songs.

This year, the situation caused by the COVID-19 has deprived us of the Eurovision Song Contest. Instead, on the day of the final (Saturday, May 16, 2020) we were able to watch a special program called *Europe Shine a Light*, in which the representatives chosen for this edition (briefly) presented the songs they had prepared to perform live and gave us a message of hope by covering the track with which Katrina and the Waves gave the last Eurovision victory to the United Kingdom. We also saw unreleased performances by previous years' winners, as well as illuminated monuments from the participating countries.

The Netflix film *Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga* (Ferrell et al., 2020), an American comedy about two singers from the small town of Husavik who fight to become Iceland's representatives at Eurovision, has recently been released as well.

Moreover, to fill the gap left by the cancellation of the festival, the Eurovision channel carried out an initiative that consisted of broadcasting every Saturday one of the editions already held; the viewers did not know which one it was going to be until fifteen minutes before the streaming. A hashtag (#EurovisionAgain) was also implemented so that the spectators could comment on it via Twitter. Every Saturday, this hashtag became trending topic in several countries, such as Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Thanks to all these ideas, we eurofans have been quite entertained these last months, and the wait until next year's show has become more bearable. My wish is, firstly, that it can be celebrated, and secondly, that the delegations continue to be committed to diversity and (hopefully!) to their national languages.

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<sup>6</sup> There are other videos that have been consulted, as can be seen in the section 6.2, but do not appear directly in the work

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## **7. Attached documents: Summary in German**

Der Eurovision Song Contest ist eine der bekanntesten Fernsehsendungen der Welt. Jedes Jahr nehmen etwa vierzig Länder an diesem Wettbewerb teil. Dies war jedoch nicht immer der Fall. Die erste Ausgabe, die 1956 in Lugano (Schweiz) stattfand, sollte einen durch den Zweiten Weltkrieg geteilten Kontinent vereinen.

In den ersten Jahren des Festivals sangen viele Gewinner/innen auf Französisch, die offizielle Sprache in mehreren an der Eurovision teilnehmenden Staaten. Jedoch wurde Englisch nach und nach immer beliebter unter den Eurovision Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmern. Eine Reihe von Regeln musste eingeführt werden, die die Künstler/innen dazu verpflichteten, eine der offiziellen Sprachen des Landes, das sie vertraten, zu verwenden, aber dadurch wurden Länder wie die Türkei oder Finnland, deren Sprachen im geringen Maße auf der Welt gesprochen werden, eindeutig benachteiligt. Gleichzeitig erzielten diejenigen Staaten, die Englisch als Amtssprache hatten, vor allem in den 1990er Jahren hervorragende Ergebnisse. Daher kehrte 1999 die Regel der Sprachfreiheit zurück. Im Laufe dieser Arbeit wird deutlich, dass Englisch heutzutage zum absoluten Protagonisten geworden ist, obwohl es immer noch Platz für das Traditionelle und Ethnische gibt.

Die Gründe für die Übernahme der englischen Sprache in das Festival werden in der gesamten Bachelorarbeit erklärt, zusammen mit anderen sprachlichen Phänomenen, die in der Geschichte des Festivals aufgetreten sind, wie die Anwendung erfundener Sprachen in Liedern. Zusätzlich wird ein Fall von Mehrsprachigkeit: das Schweizer Trio Peter, Sue & Marc diskutiert. Seine vier Teilnahmen sind ein getreues Spiegelbild der Situation in der Schweiz, in der vier Sprachen nebeneinander existieren, nämlich Deutsch, Französisch, Italienisch und Rätoromanisch.

Auf kultureller Ebene wird die Frage nach dem Einfluss einer der wichtigsten Gruppen in der Musikgeschichte, ABBA nachgegangen. Dieses schwedische Quartett gewann das Festival in 1974. Sein Sieg revolutionierte die Show und die vier Bandmitglieder genossen internationalen Erfolg. Die Auswirkung von schwarzen und gemischtrassigen Künstlerinnen und Künstlern auf das Festival wird ebenso analysiert: Sie brachten neue musikalische Bewegungen sowie Themen mit, die zuvor noch nie behandelt worden sind, wie zum Beispiel der Respekt vor anderen Kulturen oder die Unterdrückung von Frauen in der arabischen Welt. Leider wurden einige von diesen Sängerinnen und Sängern aufgrund ihrer Hautfarbe Opfer von Rassismus und Diskriminierung.

Die durchgeführten Untersuchungen sollen allen Eurovision-Forscherinnen und Forschern als Referenz dienen, die ihr Wissen über das Festival erweitern möchten. Aus diesem Grund wird ein großer Teil der vorhandenen Bibliographie zum Eurovision Song Contest angeboten. Auf diese Weise können sich die Leserinnen und Leser weiterhin über dieses Thema informieren.

Noch dazu sollen in diesem Projekt einige Begriffe wie „sprachliche Vielfalt“, „Identität“ und „Kultur“ in Verbindung mit der Geschichte des Festivals (1956-2020) angesprochen werden, die auf andere Wissensbereiche übertragbar sind. Es sei angemerkt, dass nicht nur verschiedene linguistische Aspekte behandelt werden. Zugleich werden zahlreiche Besonderheiten des TV-Programms, der Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmer aufgezeigt. Es sind aber die sprachbezogenen Phänomene, die den roten Faden der Arbeit markieren.