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1

Language, the National and the Transnational in Contemporary Europe

Patrick Stevenson and Clare Mar-Molinero

This book takes its cue from the coincidence of two key moments in recent European history: 2004 saw both the 15th anniversary of the events of 1989 that launched the post-Cold War era and the accession to the European Union of ten new member states, which gave the process of social transformation within and across national boundaries throughout Europe a new impetus. At the same time, the accelerated process of unification has renewed and heightened the tension between national and supra-national interests. One of the most tangible manifestations of this tension – between the promotion of, and resistance to, social, economic and political unification – is in conflicting language ideologies, policies and practices. The contributions to this book offer the first attempt following the enlargement of the EU to describe, analyse and evaluate the nature and implications of these complex language issues and to construct an agenda for research on the politics of language in the new European context.

In the decade or so following the publication in 1991 of *A Language Policy for the European Community* (edited by Florian Coulmas), a substantial body of research emerged, addressing language policy questions primarily from a national perspective (for example, Barbour and Carmichael 2000, Extra and Gorter 2001, O'Reilly 2001 and Hogan-Brun and Wolff 2003). More recently, increasing attention has been paid to the effects of globalization and the transnational flow of goods and services but also the transnational traffic of people and therefore of language(s), both physical and virtual (see, for example, Maurais and Morris 2003, Gardt and Hüppauf 2004, Wright 2004). Yet a tension remains between these two preoccupations: between the static framework of the national, with its fixed parameters, and the fluid forms of the transnational. This book reflects this tension: some chapters, especially in Part

I, deal explicitly with transnational phenomena and processes, but even those that focus on case studies located within the political boundaries of nation-states explore issues that arise through social processes and individual practices which traverse and permeate these boundaries.

The book is organised in two parts. Part I scrutinizes the fundamental theoretical and conceptual issues that provide the thematic link between all the chapters and invites readers to take a critical stance towards language questions in the European context by confronting them with the contemporary legacy of European language policies in other parts of the world and by situating the ensuing debates in the context of globalization. These chapters ask questions such as: what kinds of linguistic phenomena are the proper object of study in this context? To what extent are language ideologies and policies today still influenced by the ideas that spawned linguistic nationalism in the 18th and 19th centuries? In what ways and to what effect have European ideas about language shaped notions of identity and belonging in former colonial settings? What are the implications of these non-European experiences for the newly emerging Europe? What is the relationship between transnational 'world' languages and their birthplace in Europe?

Part II then explores in detail some of the specific ways in which language ideologies underpin policies, and the relationships between policies and practices, in particular European settings. The chapters in this part of the book raise questions such as: in what ways and for what reasons is the concept of a 'national language' used to sustain the idea of homogeneous 'national cultures' in a supposedly 'post-national' Europe? What role does language play in discourses of citizenship? How do evaluations of particular linguistic practices (such as codeswitching) serve to marginalize and discriminate against migrants? How do individuals and organizations (such as internet users and broadcasters) respond to the increasingly complex demands and opportunities of a multilingual environment and of globalization?

The central topos on which the book is founded is the conflict between the stubborn persistence of the Herderian conception of the axiomatically monoglot nation on the one hand, and the constantly shifting multilingual constellations of European states on the other. The sober-sounding and well-intentioned rhetoric of language policies formulated by the Council of Europe and other supranational bodies is of course in tune with the grand design for the future of Europe envisaged in the proposed EU Constitution. However, it is not so clear how far the largely symbolic promotion of diversity at the supranational level is, or can be, consonant with the robustly centripetal pressures of standardization

and homogenization at the national level. So by asking in what ways language policies emerge from and contribute to the contradictions between monolingual ideologies and multilingual practices the authors here collectively propose the need for a much more rigorous and critical examination of policy formulation than has previously been offered.

In her opening chapter, Susan Gal lays the groundwork for the following discussion by interrogating the key concepts of language, Europe and the future. Questioning the validity of 'languages' as discrete, bounded forms, she proposes instead that analysis should focus on linguistic practices and repertoires and on their deictic, or indexical, functions in relation to time and place. She argues that 'language' is a European invention and that its exportation to other parts of the world is a major aspect of the European legacy (a contention taken up by Gerrit Brand in his chapter). Crucial to Gal's thesis is the resilience of the Herderian ideology, the isomorphism of language, state and nation, shored up by policies that continue to invest 'national' standard language varieties with the authority and legitimation to undermine 'post-national' European credos of pluralism and diversity. In particular, she emphasizes the baleful effects of standardization, which both creates stigmatized (non-standard) speakers and, paradoxically, increases linguistic heterogeneity. And difference is of course not value-free, for minority populations may already satisfy the new European ideal of multilingual competence but their 'own' languages are not valued in the linguistic market, while multilingualism amongst majority populations remains an elite privilege.

Christopher Brumfit shares Gal's scepticism about the terms that none the less continue to form the common currency of debates on language policy. However, while suggesting that for linguists the term language 'may have outlived whatever usefulness it ever had', he concedes that it retains its potency as a political construct. Building on Gal's notion of language as a convenient if dangerous fiction, a fuzzy category in a world demanding sharp definition, he argues that languages should be conceived as 'liminal states', since their speakers are in constant transition, never firmly located in any one homogeneous linguistic space. This clearly has consequences for language policy: policy-makers need to recognize 'liminality and the development of a repertoire for the crossing of thresholds...as central concepts of theory'. What this might mean in practice remains to be explored, but Brumfit presents a challenge to policy-makers by emphasizing the importance of individual linguistic creativity on the one hand and the limits of what policy can achieve on the other.

Such (self-imposed) constraints were not a feature of the language policy-making process that contributed to the formation of American identities as analysed by Thomas Ricento. For here too European traditions of constructing homogenized conceptions of the state-as-nation around supposed common characteristics and properties, with language typically at the forefront, were always part of the American project, as he shows in his discussion of discourses of 'Americanism' articulated in a range of texts published over the last hundred years. While conservative commentators insisted (and continue to insist) on a highly specified prescription of what it means to be – or to become – American, requiring not only proficiency in English but the relinquishment of other languages, liberal and progressive discourses have constructed a more inclusive prospectus of Americanism. In this and other ways, European language ideologies have both fed and been fed by debates on Americanization, and there are clear parallels between the contestation of identities based on tensions between linguistic homogeneity and linguistic pluralism on both sides of the Atlantic.

Like Ricento, Gerrit Brand considers the European legacy in relation to language policy making in a specific historical and geo-political context, in his case South Africa. However, while 'Europe' is rarely invoked in contemporary discourses on language (or, some would say, on most other political issues) in the US, Brand shows that it continues to figure in public debates about language in South Africa. Not surprisingly, the image that emerges is ambivalent but one that cannot be ignored. Memories of the colonial past are, of course, imbued with a deep and abiding sense of injustice and discrimination, and this unequal distribution of power was both institutionalized and symbolized through the imposition of a linguistic regime privileging standard European languages at the expense of indigenous modes of expression. The benefits that accompanied the repression, such as the introduction of print technology and the promotion of linguistic scholarship, were a delayed good as far as their impact on the majority indigenous population is concerned and have to be seen in the longer term perspective of post-colonial renewal. Brand traces the ambiguous history of European influence as 'destroyer' and 'developer' of indigenous linguistic and cultural practices through to the present contribution of European ideas to the development of the South African constitution and to the reshaping of South African society, and argues that 'the demystification of linguistic identities – which is not the same as misrecognition of them – is probably one of the most important intellectual tasks facing the South African pro-multilingualism movement', a task to which European intellectuals can make an important contribution.

While Ricento's focus is on debates around the role of English as *the* American language, and Brand concentrates on the specific consequences of the European colonial legacy in southern Africa, Clare Mar-Molinero both widens the discussion by shifting the emphasis to the global plane and re-focuses it by invoking the challenge presented to the global supremacy of English by the continuing rise of Spanish across the world. She argues that an adequate account of contemporary processes of language spread should not rely exclusively on apparently undirected forces of globalization and the market but should rather acknowledge the agency of governmental organizations acting in support of vested national interests. By analyzing the standard language ideology promoted by the Spanish Royal Language Academy and above all by the Instituto Cervantes (the Spanish state-funded organization charged with the worldwide dissemination of Spanish language and culture), which constructs standard peninsular Castilian as the bedrock of *Hispanidad*, she shows how global cultural trends can be harnessed to serve the purposes of an international language policy in the interest of reinforcing Spain's status as a global player.

Anna Duszak returns the discussion to fundamentals in her consideration of key concepts, but she does so from the perspective of an active participant in a double process of transition: as a Polish citizen experiencing the radical social transformation of central and eastern Europe in daily life, and as a linguist witnessing the concomitant changing linguistic/communicative practices as well as changing academic preoccupations and models of analysis. How do these two conditions relate to and interact with each other? She argues that Poland's emergence from the former Soviet bloc and more recently its accession to the EU have resulted – albeit not for the first time in the country's complex history – in a recontextualization of its relationship with 'Europe' in terms of a renewed if problematic and contentious western orientation. Together with the heightened influence of English and the spread of other global cultural influences, this has led amongst other things to the development of new communicative genres and to the penetration of new linguistic practices into existing, traditional genres, combining to form 'an intertextual flow of discourses – a connected network of dependencies, ideologies and practices'. This more variegated blend of public discourses, and its impact on communicative conventions, is currently a highly controversial issue in Poland, as elsewhere in eastern Europe, and it has important implications for the development of the new European public space as a whole.

Duszak's chapter, focusing on the liminal condition of a society that finds itself both temporally and spatially on the threshold of this new

European space, is itself located at the interface between the two parts of the book. Its theoretical and conceptual discussion contributes to the evaluation of what we are calling the European legacy in Part I, and its exploration of linguistic and social change in a specific European context opens up the investigation in Part II of new sociolinguistic formations. Tommaso Milani begins this investigation with a critical study of language planning and national identity in Sweden. Starting from the position that national identity is a 'dynamic reality' which is in part an ongoing product of language (planning) debates and which emerges from specific historical, ideological and social conditions, Milani demonstrates how performativity theory (Butler 1990, 1993, 1997) can provide a framework for explaining how fundamental categories (such as language, nation and identity) are construed in multiple and ambiguous ways. He draws on a range of policy documents from the last 30–40 years, culminating in the publication in 2002 of *Mål i Mun*, the report of the Committee for Swedish Language, to show how the salience of language issues in political debates in Sweden has increased during this period and how through the complex interplay of different discursive processes they have contributed to a more explicit definition of Swedishness.

Language, as Christian Voss demonstrates in his chapter, has always been inextricably bound up in the highly intricate web of discourses surrounding questions of local, ethnic and national identity in the Balkans. Focusing on Macedonia, both before and after the establishment of the independent republic in 1991, he shows how the name itself gives rise to multiple ambiguities and provides an excellent example of the historical constructedness of 'national' 'standard' languages and of the coincidence of time and place in the formulation of language ideologies to which Gal refers in her chapter. His analysis charts a way through the negotiation of identities (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004) in this region that straddles past and present national boundaries, exploring in particular the role of the standardization of Macedonian in this process and the problematic relationship between individual linguistic affiliation and the ethnification of Macedonian national identity.

Language loyalty and its political consequences are explored further in the chapters by Rémy Rouillard and Patrick Stevenson. Ethnic and national conflicts may have had less catastrophic outcomes in the Baltic states than in the Balkans, but as Rouillard shows the legacy of the Soviet empire has left deep traces in the public consciousness of the people in this region. The large Russian(-speaking) minority in Estonia,

many of whom are effectively monolingual, now finds itself under pressure to commit itself to a conception of citizenship based on proficiency in Estonian as the sole national language or else to retain the status of outsider. Rouillard's interviews with Russian artists and writers living in Estonia reveal a wide variety of responses to this challenge and differing attitudes towards the relationship between attachments to particular languages and Russian, Estonian, European and hybrid patterns of identification. In particular, they show how individual biographies, as well as public discourses, condition the longer term outcome of social transformation processes.

Public discourses are the focus of Stevenson's chapter, in which he too analyzes political contexts in which proficiency in a 'national' language has assumed a salient position in relation to definitions of citizenship, but in this case the emphasis is on the ideological sources and effects of such discourses rather than individual responses to them. While the new arrangements in Estonia have their roots in specific historical circumstances resulting from Soviet imperialism, new policies on language and citizenship in Germany and Austria (as in other western European countries) are part of a broader institutional reaction by national governments to what they perceive as threats to national integrity posed by large-scale migration. Stevenson characterizes the debates on the (im)migration legislation recently introduced in these countries in terms of their orientation towards competing language ideologies: on the one hand, the post-national conception of the European citizen, with its emphasis on multilingual repertoires facilitating social mobility and inclusion, and on the other hand, the anachronistic conception of the citizen of the nation-state, with its insistence on commitment to a single legitimate 'national' language.

Migration is also an increasingly contentious issue in Swiss political discourse and there are many similarities between the current debates in the non-EU member state Switzerland and many of its EU neighbours. Robert Gould's discussion complements the two previous chapters by analyzing representative texts from mainstream public discourse on migration in terms of the ways in which they manifest signs of interdiscursivity: his analysis of migration discourses shows how they have been 'invaded' by discourses of (post-Cold War) security on the one hand and of globalization and business competition on the other. In the common European and North American security discourse, he argues, foreigners are positioned as potentially dangerous elements and population movements as threats to stability, while globalization discourses subsume the concept of competition between

states-as-businesses, as articulated in common collocations such as 'la place industrielle et économique suisse' or 'Wirtschaftsstandort Schweiz' (Switzerland as business location). In this way Gould accounts for the apparent discursive paradox – by no means unique to Switzerland, as he points out – according to which foreigners are simultaneously desired and mistrusted.

The marginalization of foreigners through textual practices is further demonstrated by Katrijn Maryns and Jan Blommaert, whose close scrutiny of transcripts of interviews with asylum-seekers in Belgium reveals the pitfalls inherent in such institutional procedures where participants have unequal access to linguistic resources. Asylum-seekers' ability to give an 'adequate' account of their origins and the circumstances of their departure plays a critical role in their chances of satisfying the criteria for the granting of asylum, but this is frequently constrained by the limits on their ability to operate confidently in the authoritative language of the country in which they are seeking asylum or by their reliance on the mediation of an interpreter. Under these conditions, they are unable to retain control over the all-important stories they try to relate: their stories pass through 'a sequence of different entextualizations' as they are retold and reformulated, and they have no means of knowing how complete or how accurate the interpreters' representations of their stories are. For people quite literally on the threshold between languages and between places of danger and safety, therefore, multilingual repertoires and codeswitching skills are more than an accomplishment or a useful asset, they can have a major impact on people's life chances.

The same may apply even to those who do succeed in making the move from one country to another, as Massimiliano Spotti shows in his study of multilingual children in monolingual Flemish classrooms. In this case, too, the members of the non-indigenous group are evaluated according to their linguistic performance, but here it is less a question of the perceived credibility of what they say than of their teachers' assessment of their proficiency in the institutionally privileged standard language. Through detailed observations of classroom interactions, Spotti investigates the challenge posed to the knowledge of monolingual teachers by the presence of children with a home language other than Dutch. In particular, he argues that the categorization process through which monolingual teachers construct the social identities of children from minority groups relies on generalized and essentialist conceptions of ethnicity that are tied to degrees of proficiency in the majority language. Furthermore, such children are often doubly disadvantaged

in the formal school context through their acquisition of socially dispreferred local varieties of Dutch.

To offset the many problems and challenges associated with multilingual encounters in many European situations, the final two chapters illustrate the opportunities for radical and often anti-hegemonic practices afforded by multilingual repertoires in conjunction with both established and new technologies. Brigitta Busch shows how the conventional medium of radio is increasingly being used to reach more diverse audiences and to develop hybrid or 'heteroglossic' linguistic practices. She detects a growing contrast between national broadcasters, who maintain the tradition of monolingual programming to an audience imagined as linguistically homogeneous, and transnational and translocal broadcasters, who have identified and seek to cater for audiences that are more fragmented and more eclectic in their practices and their patterns of consumption. Focusing on private radio stations in Berlin and Vienna, she demonstrates how flexible scheduling and creative multilingual performance in a range of genres from popular music programmes to sports commentaries have transformed the European 'media space'.

No medium has transformed the European – or indeed the global – media space more fundamentally than the internet, and Lukas Bleichenbacher's chapter concludes the book with evidence of its possibilities and its implications for the future of transnational communication. By analysing contributions to the official online guest-book of the city of Kosice in Slovakia, he identifies emerging patterns of language choice that point towards the development of the internet as an increasingly multilingual medium and the growing self-confidence of internet-users to express themselves in a range of languages. At the same time, he sounds a warning note in contrasting the practices of contributors from inside and from outside Slovakia: while codeswitching and metalinguistic comments are common features of the latter, the former are striking for their conformity to the monolingual norm of the official 'Slovak-only' ideology. Here in the very centre of Europe, therefore, tensions between ideologies, policies and practices persist.

This book does not attempt the impossible task of offering a comprehensive survey of language political issues in contemporary Europe. Its aim is rather to propose the possible scope of sociolinguistic explorations in this context and to stimulate further research. It therefore seeks to strike a balance between the theoretical, the descriptive and the analytical, and the various chapters represent a wide range of theoretical influences, draw on different types of data (from official

policy papers through internet guestbooks to transcripts of spoken interaction) and relate both to general issues involving language in an era of globalization and to particular case-studies in all parts of Europe. In these ways the book aims to provide a coherent discussion of the diversity and complexity of language questions that characterize the current social and political development of Europe. At the same time, by situating these questions in a broader context that acknowledges the increasing interconnectedness of national economies and cultural practices both within and beyond Europe, it aims to make a contribution – in response to the challenge laid down by Jan Blommaert (2003) – to the project of developing a ‘sociolinguistics of globalization’.

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