

LANGUAGES AND CULTURE IN HISTORY



Edited by Willem Frijhoff, Marie-Christine Kok Escalle,
and Karène Sanchez-Summerer

Multilingualism, Nationhood, and Cultural Identity

Northern Europe 16th-19th Centuries

Amsterdam
University
Press

Multilingualism, Nationhood, and Cultural Identity

Languages and Culture in History

This series studies the role foreign languages have played in the creation of the linguistic and cultural heritage of Europe, both western and eastern, and at the individual, community, national or transnational level.

At the heart of this series is the historical evolution of linguistic and cultural policies, internal as well as external, and their relationship with linguistic and cultural identities.

The series takes an interdisciplinary approach to a variety of historical issues: the diffusion, the supply and the demand for foreign languages, the history of pedagogical practices, the historical relationship between languages in a given cultural context, the public and private use of foreign languages – in short, every way foreign languages intersect with local languages in the cultural realm.

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Translations into English were made possible by the generous support of the G.Ph. Verhagen Stichting, Rotterdam, Bettina Brandt as translator and Mary Robitaille-Ibbett as translator and corrector.

Cover illustration: *Erasmus en Rumi*, Erasmusstraat 137 in Rotterdam, by Ahmad Reza Haraji, 2008.

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

Amsterdam University Press English-language titles are distributed in the US and Canada by the University of Chicago Press.

ISBN 978 94 6298 061 7

e-ISBN 978 90 4853 000 7

DOI 10.5117/9789462980617

NUR 616 / 695

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Languages and Culture in History

A New Series

Willem Frijhoff, Marie-Christine Kok Escalle, and Karène Sanchez-Summerer

Frijhoff, Willem, Marie-Christine Kok Escalle, and Karène Sanchez-Summerer (eds.), *Multilingualism, Nationhood, and Cultural Identity: Northern Europe 16th-19th Centuries*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017.

DOI: 10.5117/9789462980617/INTRO

Language variety has played an important, even an essential role in the creation of the cultural heritage of Europe, and indeed of the world as a whole. Admittedly, linguistic unity as a basis for universal understanding is one of the oldest dreams of humankind, expressed in the biblical myth of the Tower of Babel, and the repeated attempts throughout the centuries to create a universal language, not to speak of the pretensions of some major languages to embody universal values, from Latin, French and Spanish to (American) English or Mandarin Chinese. Yet linguistic variety is the rule and the background of such dreams. Ever since the actual appropriation of languages by nations, states or political regimes, many centuries ago, languages have been identified as ‘vernacular’, ‘domestic’, ‘regional’ or ‘national’, owned by specific social groups and cultural communities. They distinguish themselves from ‘foreign’ languages or idioms used by speakers who do not belong to the in-group of native speakers and those who have joined them in the course of history. The distinction between ‘own’/‘native’ and ‘foreign’/‘acquired’ has no linguistic foundation, but is of a social and cultural nature. This distinction is at the basis of the series on languages and culture in history inaugurated by this volume.

The scope of this series is to explore the multifarious relations between language and culture in history. Some definitions are required. In this series, we will consider language in its very broad definition as a tool, system and symbolic form of communication among persons, communities and peoples. However, there are hundreds of definitions of culture. Taken broadly, they all amount to one general conception, worded as follows by the cultural historian

Peter Burke in a definition that has acquired authority among historians: culture is ‘a system of shared meanings, attitudes and values, and the symbolic forms (performances, artefacts) in which they are expressed or embodied’¹ In this broad, social and societal sense, recognizing formally its symbolic expressions, culture goes well beyond the traditional normative or aesthetic conception and applies to the larger field of social and cultural anthropology. In a discussion of the role of language in history, Graham Dunstan Martin has called this the *socioculture* as opposed to the *value culture*.² In this series, the perspective on culture is therefore that of a mode of historical discourse rather than that of culture as a product or an object. We understand culture as a universe of social and cultural practices, ideas, symbols and values, and of the forms, ways and moments of their appropriation, that continually develops through agency, negotiation and representation, and may tend either towards unity and unification or towards variety and distinction.³

Consequently, the study of languages and culture in history must be distinguished from historical linguistics, considered as a scholarly discipline in its own right with its own object, theoretical foundations, methods and discourse.⁴ In our view, historical sociolinguistics is a neighbouring and sometimes overlapping field that has developed during the last two decades as a branch of general sociolinguistics, which is some decades older.⁵ However, our purpose is wider ranging. Our field of enquiry encompasses not only the literary studies that have been its privileged object ever since the rise of historical sociolinguistics, but culture in the broadest possible sense. It is true that, in recent decades, historians and historical sociolinguists have started to speak to each other. Predecessors in linguistics, such as the late Joshua A. Fishman (1926–2015) or Richard W. Bailey (1939–2011),

1 Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Temple Smith, 1978; 3rd ed. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), xi; see the variants in Peter Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997).

2 Graham Dunstan Martin, *The Architecture of Experience: A Discussion of the Role of Language and Literature in the Construction of the World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 135–166.

3 This definition has been at the basis of the research initiative Cultural Dynamics, conducted by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, ongoing since 2007. Accessible at the Cultural Dynamics website, <<http://www.nwo.nl/en/research-and-results/programmes/gw/cultural-dynamics/index.html>>. See also Willem Frijhoff, *Dynamisch erfgoed* (Amsterdam: SUN, 2007).

4 For the different approaches taken by historical sociolinguistics, see Terttu Nevalainen, ‘What Are Historical Sociolinguistics?’, *Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics*, 1/2 (2015), 243–269.

5 Juan Manuel Hernández-Campoy & Juan Camilo Conde-Silvestre (eds.), *The Handbook of Historical Sociolinguistics* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

and present-day cultural historians such as Peter Burke have made seminal contributions to the development of these interdisciplinary encounters.⁶

However, despite the repeatedly sung praise of their works, they have in fact generated few followers. In past and current historiography, the social history of language is mostly either 'social' in the strong sense of the word, which is an easier option than the sociocultural approach, or focused on literary sources, thus benefiting from a long tradition of textual scholarship. Much has already been written about language policy in the past, about the codes and rules of social groups, much less about the penetration of language into the very way of dealing with life and reality in history. Therefore, the object of this series concerns essentially language as a tool of the cultural universe, high and low, native and foreign, elitist and everyday taken together, used by individuals, groups or communities. This includes, of course, the fields of study mentioned above, but its purpose is to go beyond whenever possible. The volumes we welcome in this series should not simply use sociolinguistic paradigms and their application to historical contexts, or only those of linguistics itself, of dialectology and pragmatics. They should also focus on linguistic import and export, on the impacts and spread of language, on the historical reconstruction of past language use and valuation, not to mention multilingualism in history which, as a substantial dimension of past cultures, is one of the topics of this first volume.

We must avoid still another misunderstanding. Indeed, the so-called 'linguistic turn' in the historical discipline itself – inaugurated by theoretical historians such as Hayden White, and involving for instance linguistic change (Reinhart Koselleck) or linguistic contextualism (Quentin Skinner) – is much more about discourse on history than about the use and perception of language.⁷ Of course, all historical writing involves language as a social and cultural tool and expression. However, it is normally concerned more

6 See, for instance: Joshua A. Fishman, *Language in Sociocultural Change* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972); Richard W. Bailey, *Images of English: A Cultural History of the English Language* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991); Peter Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, 2002 Wiles Lectures (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), particularly the 'Prologue: Communities and Domains', 1–14; Peter Burke & Ronnie Po-chia Hsia (eds.), *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). As a theme of European cultural history, language was put on the agenda as early as 1988: Willem Frijhoff, 'Langues nationales, langues de contact, langues de culture', in *Europe sans rivage: Symposium international sur l'identité culturelle européenne, Paris, janvier 1988* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1988), 76–83. See also the essays in this volume.

7 See Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (London: Wesleyan University, 1997); Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Kaya

with language as a cognitive dimension of historical writing than as a wider cultural phenomenon. It is more about ideology *in* language than *about* language. Yet, language is always closely linked to culture. It expresses culture, and is generated by culture. Such links are at the heart of our concern.

Language is able to cross borders of all kinds. The interplay between vernacular and foreign language has determined not only the linguistic reality of virtually every country in world history; it has also been and still is a major source of cultural dynamics. The transnational history of language use, as well as the comparative approach, is central to our series. Foreign languages may be borrowed from neighbouring countries or remote continents, but also from a distant past. Think of Latin in the western European tradition, of old forms or varieties of native languages in other regions or continents, or of the language of the original population whenever new rulers from outside gain political power. In all these situations, foreign languages have enriched the receiving countries and their vernaculars with new forms of expression, new vocabularies, new concepts, new ideas and new visions of reality. They have made it possible to cross boundaries, physical as well as mental, and widened the horizon of the host communities, sometimes compelling them to reflect on their own heritage, identity and future.

Foreign languages may be old, and yet not perceived as 'foreign', as for example scholastic Latin in western European history. They may dominate whole domains of cultural perception and transmission, and interfere with the linguistic structure, vocabulary and social position of the vernacular languages without substantially affecting their development. However, even within traditional linguistic unities, such as the national languages, language variety plays an essential role in the cultural organization of the community or the nation. Language variety is expressed in dialects, regiolects, ethnolects, sociolects and, when spoken, in local accents, colloquial idiom and other forms of variation from the standard language as perceived by the community or imposed by political or cultural authorities.

Language has played a groundbreaking role in the development of scholarship, as an instrument of perception, analysis and understanding, of course, but also as a subject itself. Remember that philology, the science of the relation between language and literature – at first limited to the Holy Scriptures, then gradually extended to all forms of literary expression – is the cultural origin of linguistics, and continues to be its privileged variant in the realm of the humanities. Language is not only an instrument of expression but also a social,

political and indeed a cultural tool in its own right. Political frontiers and territorial limits tend to create linguistic borders. Language policy has been developed and used as a way of imposing another culture, a different ideology, a new world view. As a means of discovering and dealing with other cultures and new policies, as ethnocultural markers, native and foreign languages may also be in competition with each other. Language teaching and didactics have strong cultural features. Almost insensibly, they insert themselves into structures of political domination and influence social behaviour.

Therefore, language conflict has a long history worldwide. Language policy is often perceived as a way of imposing one's world view, cultural discourse and social order and, on the side of the receivers, either as a chance to achieve acceptance by rulers or as an intolerable infringement upon one's own sacrosanct identity. Conversely, the perception and use of language may have a major political function for the underdog. Everywhere within and outside Europe, political resistance has adopted and still adopts the linguistic method to express itself, by promoting the use of native languages or those of the oppressed, as a privileged way of liberating themselves from cultural, social and political domination, often interpreted and understood as an assault on the community's soul, history and identity. For the observer, many forms of cultural riches stem from the rejection of linguistic uniformity or homogeneity.

Yet, throughout the centuries, the cultural enrichment realized by language variety has often been either forgotten or obscured on purpose. From the early modern period to the twentieth century, nationalism, for instance, has promoted throughout Europe the exaltation of a single national language as a guarantee of the unity and indeed the identity of a people, the language often being interpreted and praised as the purest expression of a nation's soul. Many countries have invested heavily and deliberately in the standardization and codification of a national language, by normative prescriptions, appropriate actions for identity formation, sociocultural policies and educational policy, even measures for the unification of religious idiom by imposing specific translations of the Bible or prayer books. Language policy has therefore quite often taken on the colour of a political ideology and the taste of a cultural conquest. The same holds, of course, for variations of 'standard' language, and dialects. Besides their linguistic properties, they refer also to cultural interpretations and forms of perception, and occupy their own place in the wide range of cultural and political classifications of the available means of expression. As a consequence of deliberate language policies, the cultivating, speaking, even reading of other languages, though being of native origin or concerning older layers of the population, have often been forbidden and attacked, sometimes harshly. Indeed, rulers have

realized quite well the disruptive force of the use of a forbidden tongue for the unity of culture or of the nation as such.

Precisely this cultural dimension of language use in history is at the heart of our interrogations. On the background of a nationalistic view of monolingualism, we perceive and want to emphasize the cultural importance of linguistic variety, and indeed its cultural impact in history. This may take the form of an interrogation of the national, dominant or standard language as an element and instrument of culture in history. It may be an enquiry into the historical forms of multilingualism or plurilingualism. We understand by multilingualism the simultaneous presence, availability or use of several languages in a given place, territory or nation; by plurilingualism, the simultaneous knowledge of, and acquaintance with, several languages by a given person or a given community, and the use of, or competence in, more than one language in thinking, speaking, writing and/or reading. This may take the form of diglossia or polyglossia, i.e. the use of two or more distinct languages by individuals, groups or communities for distinct domains in a given unity of time and place. Some examples are the difference between scholastic Latin and the vulgar languages in the early modern period; or, more simply, forms of code-switching within a particular act of speech. Another distinction may stem from cognitive motives: a plurality of languages may be conceived as a range of vehicles for discourse, rhetoric and scholarship. Finally, still other classifications invoke aims more pragmatic, and purely down-to-earth objectives for contact or understanding. It is true that monolingualism or, at best, bilingualism is the current option of many nations of Europe and the Americas, thus leaving aside the impact of dialects, both social and regional, in cultural history; they ignore the historically legitimated sociocultural claims to the linguistic identity of whole population groups today. However, outside the continents of Western civilization, multilingualism is most often the rule. Native European citizens do not always realize that immigrants or refugees are as a rule multilingual, not only because of the need to conform to the standard language of their new homeland, but quite often because of their earlier life in a multi-ethnic and/or multilingual home country. In any case, the study of language variety involves a wide variety of forms and techniques of communication, of symbolic positions and meanings; in other words: of culture.

A final word must be said on the temporal dimension of studies in this series. The historical dimension, understood as development in time or as a process of change between two or more instants or stages, is immanent in every study of languages, their use, impact, symbolic position and representation. However, we want to take 'history' here in its strong sense, not simply as a brief developmental moment, or as a short-term explanation of

the present, but as a temporal domain involving broad cultural movements with historical depth and geographical visibility. As instruments of collective activities, expressions and concerns, languages evolve slowly over a long time, despite rapid changes of vocabulary or the quick impact of political measures. This complex temporal regime must be the focus of our work.

Therefore, the studies we wish to welcome in this new series must privilege the links between languages and culture. Not culture or historical linguistics as such, taken for their own sake, but precisely the way in which culture shapes or transforms the use and perception of languages, and vice versa, the impacts language use and perception have on culture. The focus will be on an interdisciplinary approach to the historical evolution of linguistic and cultural facts, movements and policies, internal as well as external, and their relationship with linguistic and cultural identities. The symbolic, cultural, social, political, even economic dimensions of languages may be as important as linguistic features, lexical-statistical research, the structure of a language or linguistic heritage. Culture has a community dimension and plays a leading role in the social processes of identification. Yet, culture is also expressed and appropriated as an individual asset of persons or groups of persons in history. Therefore, micro levels of analysis may be as important as macro studies; we welcome them both. Volumes or monographs in this series may therefore address any form of relation, use or perception of such elements, approaches and study of languages and culture in history, including language contact, historical semantics and attitudes towards languages, provided that the focus is on such relations in a clearly discernible temporal depth, and not only on language, culture or history as such. The essays brought together in this first volume show the way we want to develop the series.

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Willem Frijhoff (b. 1942) studied philosophy and theology in the Netherlands, and history and social sciences in Paris. He obtained his PhD (social sciences) in 1981 at Tilburg University, and received an honorary doctorate (history of education) at the University of Mons-Hainaut (Belgium) in 1998. Between 1983 and 1997 he was professor of cultural history and history of mentalities of pre-industrial societies at the Erasmus University, Rotterdam, and from 1997 to 2007 of early modern history at the Free University (VU-University), Amsterdam. From 2003 to 2014 he chaired the research program 'Cultural Dynamics' of the Dutch National Research Organization (about 50 projects). After retiring (2007) he was visiting professor at

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