Prologue: communities and domains

The principal aim of this book is to reflect on the changing relations between language and community, or, more exactly, between languages and communities in the plural, in Europe and other areas in which European languages were spoken, from the invention of printing to the French Revolution. This is not a general survey of the history of the languages of Europe in the early modern period so much as a series of linked essays (originally lectures) on a few major strands in that history.

Today, language is a topical subject. Indeed, the year 2001 was officially declared the 'European Year of Language'. There should be little need to remind anyone of the links between language and politics, or, better, the entanglement of language with politics at a time when phrases such as 'language rights' and 'identity politics' have recently entered our everyday speech. At a time of involvement, this book makes an attempt at detachment or distanciation, *reculer pour mieux sauter*.

Why should a cultural historian write about language? Why not leave the topic to the linguists? For one thing, because language is always a sensitive indicator – though not a simple reflection – of cultural change. In this respect, the history of linguistic borrowings (below, pp. 111ff.) is suggestive. What English borrowed from Italian in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially artistic terms such as *aria*, *chiaroscuro*, *fresco* and *piazza*, tells us something about both cultures, about Italian leadership in the arts and about English interest in catching up. In similar fashion, eighteenth-century French borrowings from English, notably political terms such as 'budget', 'club', 'jury', 'pamphlet' and 'vote', point to differences between the two political cultures and also to a movement of Anglophilia in France.

This book might be described as an essay in the 'cultural history of language', at a time when all history seems to be becoming cultural history. Some linguists speak of 'language culture' (especially in German,

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Sprachkultur), to refer to a complex or system of attitudes to language and images of languages to be found in a given place and time.[1]

THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF LANGUAGE

The question a sociologist or a social historian wants to ask at this point is, of course, whose culture? A similar point may be made about studies of language consciousness, *Sprachbewusstsein*. Whose consciousness?

To sum up the last two hundred years of language studies in a simple formula, the famous historical turn of the nineteenth century has been followed by the structural and social turns of the mid-twentieth century, and more recently by the socio-historical turn of the 1980s and 1990s.

Nineteenth-century historians tended to focus on national unity and to write about the 'evolution' or the 'growth' of a given language as if it were a plant or animal, without concerning themselves over-much with social variation. By contrast, the advances in the social analysis of language made in the 1950s and 1960s were accompanied by a turning away from history. Individual sociolinguists or sociologists of language, including Robert Hall, Dell Hymes and Joshua Fishman, retained an interest in history. Fishman, for instance, was trained as a historian and has continued to draw on historical material.[2] Perhaps the best example to date of a serious attempt to combine a linguistic, a social and a historical analysis dates from this time, the Neapolitan Tullio De Mauro's *Linguistic History of United Italy*.[3] All the same, the thrust of the sociolinguistic approach was away from history, a trend that was due in part to the influence of structuralism and in part to the ethnographic emphasis on fieldwork in small communities.

More recently, a return to history has become visible, notably in studies of pidgins, creoles and mixed languages (p. 111).[4] More generally, one might even speak of the emergence, or invention, of a new field, which linguists have variously christened 'socio-historical linguistics', 'historical sociolinguistics' – something of a mouthful – or, more simply, 'historical

[1] Richard W. Bailey, *Images of English: a Cultural History of the Language* (Ann Arbor, 1991); Harald Weinrich, *Wege der Sprachkultur* (Stuttgart, 1985); Erich Strassner, *Deutsche Sprachkultur* (Tübingen, 1995). The term goes back to the linguists of the Prague Circle in the early 1930s.
[2] Joshua A. Fishman, *Language in Sociocultural Change* (New York, 1972), pp. xi–xii.
[3] Tullio De Mauro, *Storia linguistica dell'Italia unita* (1963: revised ed., Rome, 1991).
[4] Michael Richter, 'Towards a Methodology of Historical Sociolinguistics' (1985: repr. Richter, *Studies in Medieval Language and Culture*, Dublin, 1995), pp. 132–47; Peter Bakker and Maarten Mous (eds.), *Mixed Languages* (Amsterdam, 1994).

pragmatics' (a *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* was founded in the year 2000).[5]

My own preference, like that of some other historians and linguists, is for the 'social history of language'.[6] This phrase has the advantage of bringing the social functions of language into the open, leading on to a discussion of the place of language in expressing or constructing a variety of social relationships – dominance and subordination, friendship and fraternity, tolerance and prejudice, the maintenance and the subversion of a social order, and so on.

Whatever one calls this field, there is little doubt that it is growing fast. That the Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Oxford should have devoted his inaugural lecture to the subject, in 1998, is an indicator of change.[7] Research groups in the field include one at the University College of Aberystwyth studying the social history of Welsh, another at the University of Helsinki working on 'Sociolinguistics and Language History', a third at the Free University of Berlin concerned with the 'Historical Anthropology of Language', and a fourth at the University of Lund focused on the 'History of the Modern Swedish Language in the Light of Social Change'. Work on the social history of language is also going on at the Vrije Universiteit in Brussels, at the Meertens Institute in Amsterdam, at the University of Campinas in Brazil, and doubtless in other countries as well.

The 'social history of language' may be a relatively new programme but, as is usually the case, the programme does not so much initiate the practice as follow it. An important contribution was made by an international community of linguists in classic studies published in the first half of the twentieth century, including Ferdinand Brunot on French, Christine Mohrmann and Josef Schrijnen on the Latin of the early Church, Peter Skautrup on Danish, Vladimir Vinogradov on Russian, and a French scholar who died young, Antoine Martel, on the conflict of languages in Ruthenia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[8]

[5] Suzanne Romaine, *Socio-historical Linguistics* (Cambridge, 1982); Klaus J. Mattheier, 'National-sprachentwicklung, Sprachenstandardisierung und historische Soziolinguistik', *Sociolinguistica* 2 (1988), pp. 1–9; Ernst H. Jahr (ed.), *Language Change: Advances in Historical Sociolinguistics* (Berlin, 1999).

[6] David Leith, *A Social History of English* (1983: second ed., London, 1997); Joey L. Dillard, *Toward a Social History of American English* (Berlin, 1985); Peter Burke and Roy Porter (eds.), *The Social History of Language* (Cambridge, 1987).

[7] Robert J. W. Evans, *The Language of History and the History of Language* (Oxford, 1998).

[8] Ferdinand Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française*, 12 vols. (Paris, 1905); Christine Mohrmann, *Die altchristliche Sondersprache in den Sermones des hl. Augustin* (Nijmegen, 1932); Josef Schrijnen,

Literary scholars have also been writing about the history of language for generations. Among them, the outstanding figure is surely the Russian Mikhail Bakhtin, whose study of Rabelais, begun in the 1930s but published only in 1965, led him to the study of what he called 'polyglossia' (the interaction between languages, such as Latin and Italian), and 'heteroglossia' (the interaction between different forms of the same language). Bakhtin criticized the linguists of his time for paying insufficient attention to social factors.[9]

Historians too have been making occasional contributions to language studies for some time. A major study published in 1975 by the French polymath Michel de Certeau, together with two historians, under the arresting and topical title, *Une politique de la langue*, was concerned with the relation between the French Revolution and the dialects of France, *les patois*.[10] This 'politics of language' approach has inspired a long series of later studies of the relations between the French language and the French Revolution (below, p. 165), revealing an interest that was doubtless inspired by contemporary language conflicts in France, Canada and elsewhere.[11]

Earlier studies by historians are not numerous but they include the work of some distinguished scholars, from Lucien Febvre to Américo Castro and Vivian Galbraith, and they deal with a range of topics, such as the language of the law, language and nationality, language and empire, and the language of diplomacy (the subject of two early articles, both in Swedish).[12]

Charakteristik des altchristlichen Latein (Nijmegen, 1932); Peter Skautrup, *Det danske sprogs historie*, 5 vols. (Copenhagen, 1944–70); Vladimir V. Vinogradov, *The History of the Russian Literary Language from the Seventeenth Century to the Nineteenth* (1949: condensed adaptation, Madison, 1969); Antoine Martel, *La langue polonaise dans les pays Ruthènes: Ukraine et Russie-Blanche, 1569–1667* (Lille, 1938).

9 Mikhail M. Bakhtin ['V. S. Voloshinov'] *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929: English trans. New York, 1973); Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (1965: English translation, Cambridge, MA, 1971); Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language and its Public* (1958: English translation, London, 1965); Paul Teyssier, *La langue de Gil Vicente* (Paris, 1959).

10 Michel de Certeau, Jacques Revel and Dominique Julia, *Une Politique de la langue: la Révolution Française et les patois* (Paris, 1975).

11 Jean-Yves Lartichaux, 'Linguistic Politics during the French Revolution', *Diogenes* 97 (1977), pp. 65–84; Patrice Higonnet, 'The Politics of Linguistic Terrorism', *Social History* 5 (1980), pp. 41–69; Martyn Lyons, 'Politics and Patois: the Linguistic Policy of the French Revolution', *Australian Journal of French Studies* (1981), pp. 264–81; Lorenzo Renzi, *La politica linguistica della rivoluzione francese* (Naples, 1981); Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 19–51; Henri Boyer and Philippe Gardy (eds.), *La question linguistique au sud au moment de la Révolution Française* (Montpellier, 1985) [special issue, no. 17, of *Lengas*]; Peter Flaherty, 'The Politics of Linguistic Uniformity during the French Revolution', *Historical Reflections* 14 (1987), pp. 311–28; David A. Bell, 'Lingua Populi, Lingua Dei: Language, Religion and the Origins of French Revolutionary Nationalism', *American Historical Review* 100 (1995), pp. 1403–37.

12 T. Westrin, 'Några iakttagelser angående franskan såsom diplomatiens språk', *Historisk Tidskrift* 20 (1900), pp. 329–40; Lucien Febvre, 'Politique royale ou civilisation française? Remarques sur un

THE PROBLEM OF COMMUNITY

As the general title of the book suggests, the following pages will focus on the relation between languages and communities. 'Community' is at once an indispensable term and a dangerous one, whether we are practising history or sociology or simply living our everyday lives. In this respect, it is rather like the term 'identity', or indeed the word 'culture'. Sociolinguists would certainly find it difficult to do without the phrase 'speech community', or *Sprachgemeinschaft*, a term which came into use in German in the 1920s before spreading to English and other languages. The term is used to refer to the group – which may be as large as France or as small as a family – in which a particular language or variety of language is understood, a 'community of interpretation' as some literary critics call it.[13] The use of a particular variety of language expresses, maintains and even helps to create solidarity between the members of the group.

The danger of using the term 'community', again like 'culture', is that it seems to imply a homogeneity, a boundary and a consensus that are simply not to be found when one engages in research at ground level, whether this 'fieldwork' is historical, sociological or anthropological. So far as homogeneity is concerned, one of the main points to be made in this book concerns the variety of ways in which different social groups used the 'same' language. Again, the term 'community' seems to imply a sharp boundary between insiders and outsiders, whereas in practice the frontiers between languages are often vague, not so much lines as zones of bilingualism and language mixing. As for consensus, linguistic norms not infrequently hide conflicts and the dominance of one group over others.[14]

All the same, the term 'community' will recur again and again in this book. The point is not to deny linguistic, cultural or social conflicts, which will also recur in these pages, but to note that collective solidarities and identities are also a part of everyday life. To make the point in a linguistic

problème d'histoire linguistique', *Revue de synthèse historique* 38 (1924), pp. 37–53; Febvre, 'Langue et nationalité en France au 18e siècle', *Revue de synthèse historique* 42 (1926), pp. 19–40; Américo Castro, *La peculiaridad lingüística rioplatense y su sentido histórico* (Buenos Aires, 1941); Vivian H. Galbraith, 'Language and Nationality in Medieval England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 23 (1941), pp. 113–28; Nils Ahnlund, 'Diplomatiens språk i Sverige', in his *Svenskt och Nordiskt* (Stockholm, 1943), pp. 114–22; George. E. Woodbine, 'The Language of English Law', *Speculum* 18 (1943), pp. 395–436.

[13] Karl Vossler, *Sprachgemeinschaft und Interessengemeinschaft* (Munich, 1924); Leonard Bloomfield, *Language* (New York, 1933), pp. 42–56; Joshua Fishman, *Sociolinguistics* (Rowley, MA, 1970), pp. 28–35.

[14] Louis-Jean Calvet, *Linguistique et colonialisme* (Paris, 1974); Calvet, *Language Wars and Linguistic Politics* (1987: English translation, Oxford, 1998); Ralph Grillo, *Dominant Languages: Language and Hierarchy in Britain and France* (Cambridge, 1989).

way, whenever we say 'we', we are expressing a sense of solidarity with some others, a sense of belonging to a community, whether it is small or large, temporary or permanent, harmonious or discordant. It might also be argued that solidarity and conflict are two sides of the same coin, and that conflicts between vernaculars encourage language loyalty and language consciousness.

If real communities are messy affairs, ideal ones – 'imagined communities', as Benedict Anderson has called them – have clear boundaries. Imagined communities, like other figments of the imagination, have real effects, and attempts to create communities by imposing a particular language or variety of language have important consequences, even if they are not always the consequences intended by the planners. Hence we have to examine the role of languages not only as expressions or reflections of a sense of community cohesion, but also as one of the means by which communities are constructed or reconstructed.[15]

The more distinctive the language, the more cohesive the community is likely to be, and vice versa. To speak of the English speech community in the singular has come to sound rather odd, and it is more useful to distinguish different communities and their 'Englishes'.[16]

It is also necessary to bear in mind the fact that individuals can and usually do belong to a number of different communities: local and national, religious, occupational and so on. Some of these communities are in competition, or even in conflict, for the loyalty of individual speakers – region versus nation, for instance. As socio-linguists have often pointed out, people use different forms or varieties of language, whether consciously or unconsciously, to express their solidarity with these different communities. This is a major reason for what is sometimes described as 'code-switching', the practice of shifting between languages or varieties of language.

Individual speakers may therefore be regarded as performing different 'acts of identity' according to the situation in which they find themselves.[17] In other words, a record of the language used by an individual on a particular occasion does not reveal his or her identity, let alone his or her national identity. It is no more than the record of the identity that came to the fore on that occasion.

[15] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983: revised ed., 1991); Robert Le Page and Andrée Tabouret-Keller, *Acts of Identity* (Cambridge, 1985); Deborah Cameron, 'Demystifying Sociolinguistics: or why language does not reflect society', in John E. Joseph and Talbot J. Taylor (eds.), *Ideologies of Language* (London, 1990); Glyn Williams, *Sociolinguistics: a Sociological Critique* (London, 1992).
[16] Tom McArthur, *The English Languages* (Cambridge, 1998).
[17] Le Page and Tabourot-Keller, *Acts*.

Linguists often use the term 'diglossia' to describe the situation in which two or more languages or varieties of language are used by the same speakers in different 'speech domains', addressing different people or introducing different topics. One variety is typically more prestigious than the other, as in the case of classical and colloquial Arabic, with the high variety used for example to speak about religion, the lower about more mundane topics.[18] In the case of early modern Europe, examples include the use of French as a high variety by speakers of Occitan; Spanish by speakers of Catalan; German by speakers of Danish, and the general use of Latin for the discussion of scholarly topics. It is important to remember that the balance between languages or varieties is not a stable one and that it sometimes shifted in the course of the three centuries discussed below.

This pair of concepts, 'diglossia' and 'speech domain', will recur in the following pages. They are essential concepts in the approach followed here, concerned as it is with languages in the plural, with communities in the plural, and finally with a plurality of relations between the two.

THE COMPARATIVE APPROACH

The question, how many languages existed in early modern Europe, is at once obvious and deceptive. When is a language a language, and when is it a dialect? The classic answer takes the form of the epigram attributed to more than one famous linguist to the effect that a language is a dialect with an army, navy and air force. The political criterion is indeed an appropriate one in the case of the last two hundred or two hundred and fifty years, the age of what has been called the 'politicization of language', its increasingly close association with nations and nationalism (below, p. 166). It is much less applicable to early modern times.

In the early Middle Ages, the frontiers between Latin and the romance languages, or between different romance or Germanic or Slav languages, were still indefinite. Even in the early modern period, when print and other factors were contributing to the process of standardization, the frontiers between languages, like the frontiers between states, were less clear-cut than they became in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[19]

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[18] Charles Ferguson, 'Diglossia', *Word* 15 (1959), pp. 325–40.
[19] Vaughan Cornish, *Borderlands of Language in Europe and their Relation to the Historic Frontiers of Christendom* (London, 1936); Michel Banniard, *Viva voce: communication écrite et communication orale du IVe au IXe siècle en occident latin* (Paris, 1992); Michael Richter, *Studies in Medieval Language and Culture* (Dublin, 1995).

Slovaks, for example, wrote in what we call 'Czech' and Norwegians wrote in what we call 'Danish'. It has been suggested that it might be more appropriate to refer to early modern 'Scandinavian' rather than to Danish, Swedish and Norwegian as separate languages.[20] A similar point might be made about the South Slav languages before the creation of 'Serbo-Croat' in the middle of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the sixteenth-century Polish chronicler Marcin Bielski treated all the Slavic languages as dialects of a single language.

It is hard to disagree with the French linguist Antoine Meillet when he declared it 'impossible' to say how many languages exist, or with the Norwegian linguist Einar Haugen when he admitted, in a classic essay on language and dialect, that 'there is no answer to these questions'.[21] If there is no precise or objective answer to the question, how many languages, it is surely better to offer a rough estimate than none at all. Five hundred years ago, from forty to seventy languages were spoken in Europe, forty according to a narrow definition and seventy according to a wider one (Appendix). It is worth noting that linguists today claim that there are from three thousand to five thousand languages in the world – a considerable margin of error or vagueness.

However counter-intuitive this may seem to Europeans, and in particular to anglophones, even seventy languages is a very small number compared to the eighty million people living in Europe in 1500 or the one hundred and eighty million living there in 1789. Today, the languages of Europe account for a mere 4 per cent of the world total, compared to 15 per cent in the Americas, 31 per cent in Africa and 50 per cent in Asia and the Pacific.[22] From the point of view of humanity, every language may be regarded a treasure, contributing something to the common stock of culture.[23] For a given region, however, this treasure is not necessarily an advantage, economically at any rate. Indeed, a case might be made for the existence of an inverse relationship in which poor regions are rich in languages and vice versa.

The historians who study the rise of the early modern West and, increasingly, of early modern China as well, might therefore be well advised to pay more attention to language. A relative lack of languages meant a relative

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[20] Jahr, *Language Change*, p. 128.
[21] P. J. Antoine Meillet (1914) 'Le problème de la parenté des langues', repr. his *Linguistique historique et linguistique générale* (2 vols., Paris, 1921–38), vol. 1, pp. 76–101, at 76; cf. Einar Haugen, 'Dialect, Language, and Nation' (1966: repr. *The Ecology of Language*, Stanford, 1972), pp. 237–54.
[22] David Crystal, *Language Death* (Cambridge, 2000).
[23] George Steiner, *After Babel* (Oxford, 1975).

lack of obstacles to communication. In 1600, China had a population of some one hundred and fifty million, larger than that of Europe at the time, but only one main written and spoken language, despite the presence of Cantonese and other languages in the South.

The overview presented here takes the form of an essay in comparative history. There is something of a paradox in offering a comparative history of language as a novelty, since pioneers in comparative history, notably Marc Bloch, learned this approach from linguists such as Antoine Meillet, who themselves stood in a tradition going back to the late eighteenth century, if not further.[24] Again, two Italian scholars, Riccardo Picchio and Aldo Scaglione, one of them a specialist on Slav languages and the other on German, have fruitfully extended the traditional Italian concept of language debate, *La questione della lingua*, to other parts of Europe.[25] More recently, the French linguist Daniel Baggioni, inspired by the historian Fernand Braudel to study change over the long term, has produced a comparative survey of European languages and nations over the last five hundred years.[26] All the same, a survey of the secondary literature reveals that studies of single languages predominate.

What follows is, I hope, a small step towards future surveys of the different tongues of Europe in interaction over the centuries, in other words (relatively new words) an 'ecology of language', placing language in its cultural and social environment, studying Latin in relation to the vernaculars, the vernaculars in relation to one another and the dialects of a given vernacular in relation to the standard language.[27] It is a reconnaissance of a large terrain, an attempt to produce a provisional map – including blank spaces where necessary – in the hope of encouraging further exploration.

THREE PROBLEMS

Such a history faces three major problems, which should be borne in mind throughout by the reader of this book, just as the author has tried to bear them in mind in the course of research and writing. They are the problem of periodization, the problem of evidence and the problem of explanation.

[24] L. Walker, 'A Note on Historical Linguistics and Marc Bloch's Comparative Method', *History and Theory* 19 (1980), pp. 154–64.

[25] Riccardo Picchio, 'Guidelines for a Comparative Study of the Language Question among the Slavs', in Picchio and Harvey Goldblatt (eds.), *Aspects of the Slavic Language Question*, 2 vols. (New Haven, 1984), vol. I, pp. 1–42; Aldo Scaglione, 'The Rise of National Languages: East and West', in Scaglione (ed.), *The Emergence of National Languages* (Ravenna, 1984), pp. 9–49.

[26] Daniel Baggioni, *Langues et nations en Europe* (Paris, 1997).

[27] Einar Haugen, 'The Ecology of Language', repr. *Ecology*, pp. 325–39.

Every language has its own chronology. The use of Old Church Slavonic, for example, was at its height between 1100 and 1700. The Celtic languages went through their 'dark age' from around 1550 to around 1700. Norwegian scholars treat the years 1530–1814 as a discrete period in the history of their language, the time when it was dominated by Danish. In similar fashion, what is known as 'old Finnish' lasted from 1540 to 1820.[28] The problem then is to choose beginning and end dates for a book that attempts to deal with Europe as a whole.

In his recent study of languages and nations, Daniel Baggioni distinguished what he called three 'ecolinguistic' revolutions in European history, around the years 1500, 1800, and 2000.[29] My decision, not very different from his, is to begin in the middle of the fifteenth century with the printing press, since print had important consequences for written and even, in the long term, for spoken languages. The book ends in the later eighteenth century with the rise of national consciousness and language planning. In France, for instance, at the time of the Revolution, Henri Grégoire, a priest and a deputy to the National Assembly, advocated the teaching of French everywhere in France in order 'to melt the citizens into a national mass' (*fondre tous les citoyens dans une masse nationale*).[30]

Needless to say, a case might be made for other dates. For instance, 1492 is a date of obvious importance in the history of the languages of Europe as well as the New World. In the history of American English, 1776 is a significant date, like 1788 in that of the language of Australia, which has been described as 'English transported'.[31]

It is also important to note that major trends in the history of European languages had begun before Johann Gutenberg set up his press in Mainz, around the year 1450. For example, in some domains, such as the administration, Latin was being replaced by some vernaculars in the early fifteenth century (in the English chancery), in the fourteenth century, or even, in the case of the chancery of Castille, in the thirteenth century. In cases like these, the best thing is to transgress one's own boundaries.

The second major problem to be faced is the problem of evidence. This book is concerned with both written and spoken language. The evidence for the domain of writing and also for that of print is abundant enough. On the other hand, the problem of reconstructing the spoken language is

[28] Banfi, Emanuele (ed.), *La formazione dell' Europa linguistica* (Florence, 1993), pp. 164, 354; Didrik A. Seip, *Norwegische Sprachgeschichte* (Berlin, 1971); Aurélien Sauvageot, 'Le finnois de Finlande', in István Fodor and Claude Hagège (eds.), *Language Reform*, vol. III (Hamburg, 1984), pp. 173–90.
[29] Baggioni, *Langues*, pp. 47–50.   [30] Certeau, *Politique*.
[31] William S. Ramson (ed.), *English Transported* (Canberra, 1970).