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NATIONAL LANGUAGE, IDENTITY FORMATION AND BROADCASTING: FLANDERS, THE NETHERLANDS AND GERMAN SPEAKING SWITZERLAND

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This article presents part of the findings that came out of a two year research conducted within the frame of a FKFO-project. The purpose of this project was to show how the study of the evolving language policies of Public Service Broadcasting (PSB), can give a good insight into the (self-) ascribed role of PSB in the nation building project and wider identity formation within communities. In other words, it showed how the evolving language policies of PSB can be explained by looking at their wider socio-economic, political, cultural and sociolinguistic context.

The study was comparative in the sense that the language policy of the Flemish, German-Swiss and Dutch PSB were taken as case studies. As we will show, their seemingly different language policies must be understood as the result of different 'accents' in the process of nation building and in the position of language in this process. The study was also diachronic. Throughout time, the PSB have modified their language policies considerably. These changes must be understood as a symptom of socio-cultural transformations and consequent changes in identity formation within these communities. As such, the language policies of the PSB can be situated within the shift from a modern to a postmodern or postmaterialist society.

In this article we will concentrate on the role of the PSB ('s language policy) in this modernist project of nation building and will use the case of the Flemish, German-Swiss, and Dutch PSB to illustrate this.
BUILDING THE NATION: THE DUTCH, FLEMISH AND GERMAN-SWISS ETHNOLINGUISTIC IDENTITY

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY, NATIONHOOD AND LANGUAGE

Starting point then, is the concept of identity (cf. Van Poecke, 1993; Van Poecke & Van den Bulck, 1993; Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1995). Identity does not express itself as an essence but is rather produced in a socialisation process. This creation is mainly a matter of defining boundaries and a category system. People as well as things do not have an identity or meaning on their own, but obtain these in relation to other people and things, that is in a category system (cf. Morley & Robins, 1989:12). 'Difference is constitutive of identity', or, as Fishman (1972:52-3) puts it, identity is the result of 'contrastive self-identification': us versus them.

The same applies to collectivities. They too, according to Levi-Strauss (Schlesinger, 1991:170), have a need for classification, for the identification of 'us' versus 'them'. This collective identity is a feeling of identification with a community and/or the institutions by which it is represented, expressed or symbolised (Hobsbaum & Ranger, in Schlesinger, 1991:169). A collective identity has many different aspects based on class, gender, ... nation.

Many authors have stressed the importance of the latter form of national identity or nationhood in West-European industrialised countries. On the one hand, the idea of a nation is but an interpretative construct, not an objective structure, making nationhood the result of an ideology. The core argument of nationhood is the underlining of the longevity and antiquity of the collective's ties (Smith, 1983:50). The concept and related ideas of political and cultural sovereignty though, are in fact a late 18th century European invention (Ibid:47), born in an era in which enlightenment and revolution destroyed the legitimacy of a divine order (cf. Bauman, 1992:xi-xvii). The whole debate is further ideologic in that the integrative relations which nationhood is to secure, are seen in a functionalist perspective (Arnason, 1990:223), ignoring for one thing that national culture is a site of contestation on which competition over definitions takes place (Schlesinger, 1991:174). On the other hand, one cannot ignore the fact that, particularly in modern, West-European industrialised societies, nationhood has been a fundamental aspect of an individual's collective identity and of the civic and political home- and global relations. In that way there is something of a 'lived reality' of national identity (Tomlinson, 1991:84).

A nation can best be understood then, firstly as an imagined community, conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail. It is understood, secondly, as limited with finite, if elastic boundaries beyond which lie other nations, and finally, as sovereign, independent from and equal to other nations (Anderson, 1991:6-7). (Note however that a nation is not the equivalent of a state [Krejci, 1978:126-7]).

Many authors underline the importance of language in the process of nationhood. In the mobilisation of ethnic feelings and longings and for the creation of the aforementioned contrastive self-identification, use is made, according to Brass (1991:20-1), of one or other core symbol. That language so commonly becomes such a symbol, is partially a reflexion of the fact that it is the carrier of all other notions or symbols of nationhood, partially a result of the fact that it is made into a prime symbol by intellectuals and other influential figures who more than any others are adept at its use and manipulation, and partially a result of its infinite interpretability as a symbol that stands for the entire nationality (cf. Fishman, 1977).

In other words, language often constitutes the most important embodiment of ethnicity and the means for distinguishing 'us' from 'them'. Here language fulfills what is called the shibboleth function (Fishman, 1972:52-55). In this way, language as a symbol can fulfill a double function. On the one hand it serves as a means of affirming oneself as a group in respect to others, becoming the distinctive characteristic which marks of the community from other groups. Via language one tries to distance oneself from and protect against the other communities. On the other hand language is used to strengthen the unity and bridge the differences within the community.
THE DUTCH, FLEMISH AND GERMAN-SWISS CONTRASTIVE SELF-IDENTIFICATION

As said, on the one hand nation building is a typical modernist project. In this respect the three cases under study are similar. On the other hand, there are different ways of accomplishing such a nation, which also has its effect on the way that language is brought in. A distinction must be made between on the one hand 'the originals': a nation developing on the basis of an already existing state (e.g. The Netherlands) and, on the other hand communities which, on the basis of ethnic longings, develop into a nation and sometimes even strive to become a nation state (e.g. the Flemish and German-Swiss communities).

The Dutch Community

As is known, from the 17th century onwards, the Low Countries were divided into two separate parts, each with its specific political, cultural, religious and social development (Van de Craen & Willemsyns, 1988:46), impinging on the development of Netherlandic 1, and so on the linguistic situation of both communities.

The North (from now on 'the Netherlands') retained its independence almost continuously, making it one of the oldest countries in Europe. The consecutive political constellations guaranteed an increasingly centralised organisation. There was from the 17th century onwards a certain feeling of national identity, at least with the upper classes and for its citizens as well as foreigners there was no doubt as to the existence of the Dutch nation (Goudsblom, 1988:36). This situation allowed for a standard language to develop and spread throughout the country. As Holland was the dominant part of the country, Netherlandic developed chiefly on a Holland base and the rest of the Netherlands was ever more confronted with a 'Holländische expansion' (Deprez, 1986:133; Brachin, 1985:81). This spread was strongly enhanced by the development of a bourgeois society throughout the 18th century (marked by an increasing social interwoveness) and the development of a centralist state which created ever more national institutions (te Velde, 1991:174-5; Righart, 1992:91).

The continuing independence of the Netherlands and the fact that its language was never under threat, made that nationhood never turned into nationalism and that it was not primarily based on ethnolinguistic identity. Throughout time, the elites, via the contemporary cultural apparatus, tried to create a feeling of political-national uniqueness referring to 'national' symbols and institutions (e.g. royalty) and 'typical' values and virtues (cf. te Velde, 1991, 1992; Righart, 1992; Couwenberg, 1981; Kossmann, 1992). The existing strong ideological and religious cleavages were praised as a national virtue of pluralism and diversity and the possible threat this embodied to national unity was solved in a system of pillarisation, a typical modernist, nation-affirming project, uniting people across regional boundaries (Crook et al., 1992; Ellemers, 1984; Hellemans, 1990; see also Hellemans, 1988; Huyse & Berling, 1983; Righart, 1992).

The Flemish Community

Whereas the North became independent early-on, the South remained under foreign rule for over two centuries. These political circumstances caused the linguistic development of the North to stop at the 'Belgian' border, as the foreign reign secured French the position of cultural language. When the Belgian state was created in 1830, the Flemings constituted the majority of the population (and have ever since). But the rapid industrialisation which Belgium underwent in the 19th century developed chiefly in Wallonia and the Flemish community declined 4. This strengthened a French speaking dominance in economy and politics, followed by a French linguistic and cultural hegemony (Donaldson, 1983:26).

In consequence, the Flemish national identity was formed on the basis of ethnic or ethnolinguistic nationhood. The Flemish nation being formed in a federalising Belgium, needed the creation of a national language and culture. Language particularly was put forward as the core element in the contrastive self-identification: on the one hand as a full-fledged symbol and means of identification and on the other hand as a counterpole and replacement of French language and culture. Due to the historical circumstances, a standard language was not available within the community. That one therefore turned to a standard language that was crafted outside the community, i.e. the standard Dutch (or Netherlandic) of the Netherlands, can be
explained by the fact that the Flemish movement started off as an elite culture movement (Donaldson, 1983:26) backed up, as Jaspaert and Van Belle (1989) have shown, by a growing economic middle class.

The German-Swiss Community

Switzerland was created as a self-continuing political act in the sense that it developed mainly by a gradual accretion around the mountain cantons of central Switzerland (McRae, 1983:39). Consequently, linguistic diversity was never really an issue within the confederation which has always underlined plurality and decentralisation (Ibid:41). The German-Swiss community has always had the dominant position within the country numerically as well as socio-economically, politically, etc. Nevertheless, German-Switzerland too has developed an ethnolinguistic identity but different from the Flemish case - this was also in contrast with the neighbouring country Germany.

A Swiss-German standard language never developed due to the lack of an Eigenkultur (an own culture) of an urban middle class (Kuhn, 1980:532-3): the decentralised and ever shifting political centre never allowed for an intellectual centre to develop of which the local dialect could become the standard language (Pap, 1990:112). Instead, the standard language of Germany (Hochdeutsch) was taken as written language. This was mainly due to the economic interests of the book publishers and to the contacts between German and German-Swiss literati (Kuhn, 1980:533). However, while in Germany the bourgeoisie took up Hochdeutsch as main oral language, this was unacceptable to their German-Swiss counterparts (Haas, 1990:319). The German-Swiss middle class did accept Hochdeutsch as a supra-regional vehicle for communication and as the language for science, art, etc., but not in the ideological function it occupied in Germany as a national language. Conversely, it is exactly in the refusal to accept the standard variety as a daily language and in the retaining of the dialects (Mundart) for that purpose, that the Swiss saw the possibility of a national boundary. In this way, Mundart use became a national symbol (Haas, 1990:319).

The result was that, sociolinguistically speaking, German-Switzerland developed into a diglossic speech community (Ferguson, 1959). In a diglossic language situation, there is a sharp and stable distinction between two languages or two varieties of a language according to function and domain. The L(ow)-variety (in this case, Mundart) is used in informal, intimate and relational domains and is the mother tongue. The H(igh)-variety (Hochdeutsch) is reserved for writing and for formal, institutional and transitional domains and is only learned later on in life (in school) 7.

NATION BUILDING AND THE LANGUAGE POLICY OF PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

THE (SELF-) ASCRIBED ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTERS

In the establishment and maintenance of such a national identity, the cultural apparatus assigns itself or is assigned a vital role. In that way, virtually all PSB in modern industrialised countries have contributed substantially to the creation of the aforementioned 'imagined community' for the modern nation state, that is 'an image of the national "we", an "us"' (Morley & Robins, 1989:32). In other words, the community (or parts thereof) attached great importance to its own 'audiovisual space', i.e. its own autonomous broadcasting system that integrates internally and draws the imaginary line between 'us' and 'them', the latter being those to whom the broadcasts are not aimed (regardless of whether 'them' could actually receive the broadcast) (Van den Bulck, 1995). The PSB, according to McQuail et al. (1992:9), were designed to serve the audience and social institutions within the national territory, centre-peripheral in form of organisation, expected to protect national language and culture and (however implicitly) to represent the national interest. As an aspect of their national character, broadcasting institutions were also usually monopolistic or quasi-monopolistic in their form of control.

In this respect broadcasting fulfilled a function which was also fulfilled by other mass media, namely the transformation of the masses into a people, a nation (Martin-Barbero, 1993:163 e.v.). So, the viewer was addressed as a citizen of a nation-state rather than as a consumer or market that had to be won (Blumler, 1992a).
So, television was given the task of contributing to the creation and development of a national identity and culture, whereby a threefold responsibility was imposed upon it: education (as a continuation of the national education system), information (in order to create a political consciousness), and entertainment (in order to articulate a national culture) (Desaulnier, 1985:113-4).

This kind of radio and television was marked by a 'cultural-educational logic' (Brants & Siune, 1992:110). As such both, policy makers and actual broadcasters were strongly influenced by the idea that broadcasting was one of the most powerful weapons in, as Bauman puts it (1992:97), the 'cultural crusade of the modern intellectual': the people had to be educated, emancipated, and to be liberated from their backwardness, their vulgar pleasures and, indeed, their linguistic poverty. It should come as no surprise than that the PSB were 'colonized by the intellectuals of the professional middle class' (Elliot, 1982:250), who considered themselves as the 'viewers guide to whatever was culturally worthwhile' (Blumler, 1992a:11). They were the propagators of what has been called a Reithian ethos, a benign patronizing set out to 'give the public a little more than it wants' (cited in Leitner, 1983:58). This conception of television gave PSB the explicit task to contribute to the creation and spread of a common culture and in that way, to contribute to national integration, 'making the nation as one man' (Reith, cited in Scannell, 1990:23). By means of high quality programming (and, as will be shown, high quality language), the people had to be brought into contact with 'high' culture, so that the latter could be democratised. An illustrative quote from Lord Reith (cited in Murdock, 1992:28):

we are apparently setting out to give the public what they think they need - and not what they want but few know what they want, and very few what they need.

This does not mean that PSB did not provide diversity. PSB set itself the goal to make programmes which responded to the different needs and interests of the different categories of its community but offered this to its general public. In this way it tried to introduce the different segments of society with each other so that this would lead to wider integration and social cohesion. In other words, the principle behind this was unity in diversity. In this respect one can refer to Blumler:

there was the idea of television as a centripetal, societally integrative force. In Katz' words, it offered 'the opportunity of shared experience [...] Contributing to authenticity by connecting the society to its cultural centre and acquainting the segments of society with each other'. (Blumler, 1992a:11)

Individual audience members, differing in taste and concerns, should also have a wide range of selection and choice, while the chance of coming into contact with the interests and ways of life of others should encourage the understanding and tolerance on which democracy depends. (Blumler, 1992b:32)

THE DUTCH, FLEMISH AND GERMAN-SWISS PSB'S LANGUAGE POLICY

We can now see how the different PSB under study - populated by the intellectual and cultural middle class - took up their 'task' in this identity formation.

As the only (public) medium that reached the entire community, these PSB - like every West-European PSB (Blumler, 1992a:11) - were conceived and saw themselves to a large extent as the mass medium and virtually as the official mouthpiece of their community. The language of broadcasting therefore was considered to be the 'expression of an official, a "model" institute' (Bal, 1985:26). As the first director-general of the Flemish PSB put it, as the 'only institution where Flemings manage to be Flemish without a trace of submissiveness', its intention was to propagate the Flemish cultural heritage (Boon, 1962:129). Similarly, the German-Swiss PSB wanted to provide 'programmes of which the content, worldview, format and atmosphere' were those the German-Swiss audience could easily identify with (Fricker, 1988:30). In any case, 'the impression had to be avoided that a German take-over was taking place' (Camartin, 1992).

The PSB thus had to orient themselves to the language that was also used in other public institutions (such as education) and that signified the specificness of the community. Due to the specific context of the respective PSB (and the position of the intellectual middle class), this resulted in the Flemish case in opting for the prestige variety that transcended regional differences, i.e. standard Netherlandic whereas in the German-Swiss case it implied that, next to a Swiss-oriented standard German, the Swiss-German dialect in all its varieties had to be used.

In the Dutch case, as a service to the community, PSB was set up to reflect the 'demo-
cratic pluralism' of pillarisation (cf. Schaalma, 1970; Van Pelt, 1973; Peelen, 1976; Van den Heuvel, 1976; Van der Haak, 1977; Bardoe & Bierhoff, 1981, 1991). As a result, there was less specific emphasis on and seemingly less concern about the matter of the service to 'one national language and culture' (McQuail, 1992a:103-4). Instead, it was the allocation of time to associations that were themselves embedded in the national culture which was the best guarantee of safety in this respect. Radio thus served as a protector of the pillar's own world against influences from 'outside' (Van den Heuvel, 1976:9). And so, each association tried to be the voice of its pillar (Khargi & Huizing, 1992), and broadcasting language had to reflect this. As a pillar unites people across regional boundaries, it had to be a language which on the one hand could be considered 'national', but on the other hand could provide a special marker to each pillar. The different associations therefore opted for the use of standard Netherlandic, from which each drew its own styles and registers.

These approaches to cultural specifity and unity were accompanied by the above mentioned 'Reithian ethos'. Such an attempt to 'elevate the people', to 'educate' the community was very prominent in the Flemish case where the PSB intended to 'elevate the Flemish people to an international level' (Peeters, 1962:127). This was seen in terms of providing not only 'high' culture and education but also linguistic programmes. The Flemings still had to learn their language and the PSB assumed a major role in this. As the former head of television Nic Bal (1989) stated:

the propagation of standard Netherlandic was seen in large measure in the light of public education. To us, this was an important task. Some call this pedantic, but we thought that a PSB had the duty to educate its people, certainly as regards the language, in view of the large disadvantages of the Flemings in this area.

A striking illustration hereof are the language programmes of the 1960s and 1970s on both radio and television.

The German-Swiss PSB too was marked by this cultural-educational logic. As Fricker (1993) states:

broadcasting (first radio, but also television set off like that) was seen as a means to inform and entertain but first and foremost as an instrument for the education and cultivation (in terms of 'high' culture) of the public. People also had to be given ample possibilities for cultural experiences.

In terms of language this had two implications: first, it meant that, despite the assumed importance of dialect as a language of broadcasting, all 'serious' (economic, political, religious) and 'high' culture programmes were broadcasted in standard German, be it a clear German-Swiss standard (Camarin, 1992). Second, even in the use of dialect it was important that the 'official dialects' were used (Fricker, 1993). A good example of the pedagogic logic were the serials on the different Swiss-German dialects (Fricker, 1988:30).

In the Dutch case, attempts were made not only to reflect 'cultural life in general' but also to promote cultural matters (lectures, courses, cultural music) (Blom, 1986:93). As Schaalma states, part of the elite (which provided an important group of broadcasters [Suasso, 1992; Buddingh & Bos, 1992]) wanted to use broadcasting explicitly as 'a way to elevate the people, taking the line of a patronising concept of culture as a factor of "elevation"' (Schaalma, 1970:8). This pedagogic logic resulted in an attitude of showing the public 'that the world would be a better place if you do it like this' (Postema, 1992). As far as language was concerned, there was no specific need felt for explicit education (Serre, 1992; Tenuyt, 1992) but, as a show window of Dutch culture, broadcasting had to provide the best language possible. Dialect was considered inferior: 'if you said "but an accent is more fun", they replied, "for a radio play, maybe, not for serious radio"' (Postema, 1992).

These normative attitudes were clearly reflected in the actual language policies of the respective PSB.

The language policy of the Flemish PSB can best be described then as a striving for an exclusive and uniform use of standard language, based on the norm formulated in the Netherlands.

This was expressed, as regards the broadcasting personnel, in the organising of very language oriented recruitment examinations and the gradual development of repressive controls. The latter was done initially by external authorities and, from 1961 onwards, by the secretary of the director-general K. Hemmerechts, who exercised a very normative control. In 1971, this task was taken over by a full time language advisor (E. Berode).
Because the free-lance and casual contributors did not come under this regime but were nevertheless identified by the public with the institution, measures were also taken in their regard. Thus, in the 1940s and 1950s, one sought out as much as possible people who were not only experts in a particular area but who also had polished speech. In certain cases, these 'outsiders' were even replaced by elocutionists. According to Bal (1989), this was done primarily in the so-called 'radio chronicals':

when an expert was not satisfactory in his command of the language or when he spoke a dialect, his text was not only corrected in advance but also read by elocutionists. On the one hand, one could then be assured of a 'professional' reading, but on the other hand, the exaggerated, grandiloquent style gave it all an unauthentic character.

In this way, within the broadcasting organisation, every nerve was strained to assure a uniform standard language presentation. Of course, it was well the case that, in time, almost all successful amusement series were in dialect. However, it is important to note that these and other examples of the use of non-standard language were clearly considered tolerated deviations from the norm, resulting from the strategy that, in this way, one could win over the public to the better programmes.

The German-Swiss PSB's language policy can be defined as a diglossic use of standard German and Swiss-German dialects with the 'two purities' as the norm.

To achieve this goal, several steps were taken. First, in recruitment, a clear distinction was made between the 'experts', i.e. people preparing the programmes and the actual broadcasting voices (Fricker, 1993). The latter were language specialists: actors, performers, elocutionists who had had a training for speaking properly. It was important that candidates did not sound too German though. As Camartin (1992) puts it:

a candidate who spoke German in a Germanic, teutonic fashion, who did not have enough Swiss elements in his speech, was not considered a good speaker. It is interesting to see how the PSB tried to avoid people with a Buhneideutsch. It might do for say a Goethe-radio play but not for the Swiss programming in general.

Second there was a strict hierarchical, internal control. Every studio had people who checked what was being broadcasted before and during the broadcast (Schmid-Cadalbert, 1992). Free-lance workers for instance, had to hand in their texts beforehand for corrections. This was the case for both standard and dialect.

Finally, this control was very purist as it was based on the doctrine of the 'two purities'.

So, not only the standard but also the dialects had to be pure. Fricker (1993): 'it could be Zurich, Bern, Basel or any Mundart as long as it was pure. One was supposed to speak an officially existing dialect. The standard too had to be correct'.

The language policy within the Dutch broadcasting system can best be described then as a striving for a 'pillarised use of standard Netherlandic', based on the endonormative standard.

As a result, every pillar on the one hand recruited its personnel to fit and to address that specific segment of the people that had designed and sustained the broadcaster (Khargi & Huizing, 1992), but on the other hand had a general requirement of standard language knowledge (Serre, 1992; Tenuyl, 1992). Even though there were no formal language exams, there was serious pressure from the broadcasters to standard language use which resulted in several informal control mechanisms. First, even though there was no official body of control, there were always people specialised in language matters, both from within and outside the system, advising on language issues (Buddingh & Bos, 1992; Khargi & Huizing, 1992). Second, there was informal but regular contact between the pillar organisations: members of different associations met regularly and discussed language issues, resulting in statements about how to bring a uniform standard Netherlandic' (Serre, 1992). Finally, there was a lot of self-sensorship within the associations: colleagues advised and corrected each other regularly with regards to language matters' (Serre, 1992).

For non-professionals (e.g. eye-witnesses) too, one looked for people with a good pronunciation rather than someone who had something really interesting to say: language was almost more important than content.

The result was a standard language use, 'coloured' by styles and registers that were typical for the pillar the associations stood for. Each pillar thus did have its own sound.

The minute you switched on the receiver, you knew which pillar was talking to you. (Suasso, 1992; Brans, 1992)

It is important to note though that these differences came under 'representative diversity' (McQuail, 1992b:153) and had to be distinguished from e.g. foreign or regional accents or dialects which were considered quite unacceptable (Serre, 1992).
So, as the case studies illustrate, the traditional PSB, through their language policies, tried to contribute to the different nation building projects of their communities. It must be noted though that this has changed in recent decades. The move from a modern to a postmodern organisation of society (in which national identity has lost a lot of its relevance), combined with the growth of a new broadcasting market place which has undermined the concept of a community’s ‘own audiovisual space’, has been at the expense of the original nation building project (of which language policy was a core aspect) of the PSB.

NOTES

1. The project Taal en Omroep was sponsored by the Belgian research fund F.K.F.O. (Fundamentele Menswetenschappen nr 2.0070.92).

2. The 'language policy of a broadcasting organisation' refers to the fact that the institution chooses a particular variety of language as the broadcasting language (standard language, standard language and regional dialect(s), regional dialect(())).

3. The research of the actual language policies is based on the analysis of existing documents (history of the PSB, internal reports, publications of broadcasting personnel, ...) but mainly on interviews with privileged witnesses ('oral history') and experts.

4. Nationhood must be distinguished from nationalism which is a doctrine.

5. The official name of the language is 'Nederlands' which is best rendered in English by 'Netherlandic' as the term 'Dutch' is too restricted to the Netherlands to use it in a wider context (Deprez, 1989:8).

6. A situation lasting until the 1950s when the Flemish Community started to flourish economically and the Walloon heavy industry died out.

7. Note that the Flemish Community cannot be considered a diglossic community: (more and more) segments of the community have the H-variety as mother-tongue and the strict functional distribution between the two languages is absent (Deprez, 1981:158).

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