

Aspects of the Romance-Germanic Language Border: An Introduction

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In one of Belgium's leading newspapers *De Standaard* of 16 October 2000 a Flemish government official is quoted to be saying 'since we are understaffed we have no means of preventing illegal crossing of our borders at night'. Yet, this newspaper article is not about people trying to enter Belgium illegally; the border the official is referring to is ... the language border. Flanders and Wallonia appear to have a different legislation on the treatment of manure and apparently some Flemish farmers are transporting their excess manure to Wallonia. Although language is not involved at all, it is very significant that the term 'language border' is used in the title of the article: 'Mest steekt 's nachts illegaal de taalgrens over' [Manure is illegally crossing the language border at night]. This is one striking example of how very real the notion of 'language border' can become.

In connection with the *Sociolinguistics Symposium*, which took place at the University of the West of England (UWE) in Bristol (27–29 April 2000) the two conveners of its workshop on Language Contact, Jeanine Treffers-Daller and Roland Willemyns, decided to edit a volume on *Language Contact at the Romance-Germanic Language Border*. From the onset we decided to try to cover the whole geographical length of the border, from French Flanders in the North-West through South Tyrol in the South-East. For each and every part of it we were lucky enough to find outstanding experts in the field willing to contribute to our volume, which includes the following case studies:

- Genesis and Evolution of the Romance-Germanic Language Border in Europe (Luc van Durme).
- Dutch/Flemish in the North of France (Hugo Ryckeboer).
- Dutch-French language border in Belgium (Roland Willemyns).
- Language use and language contact in Brussels (Jeanine Treffers-Daller).
- German in Belgium: Linguistic variation from a contact linguistic point of view (Peter Nelde and Jeroen Darquennes).
- Luxembourg, a multilingual society at the Romance/Germanic language border (Fernand Fehlen).
- Alsace (Helga Bister-Broosen).
- The German-Romance Language Borders in Switzerland (Felicity Rash).
- South Tyrol: German and Italian in a changing world. (Ludwig Eichinger).

Although we provided the authors with a general framework for their article we took good care of not forcing them into a prearranged corset. Within that framework they were free to stress those aspects they consider to be the most relevant for the type of language contact occurring in 'their' portion of the border. It was formulated the following way:

Describe the current state of the art on Romance-Germanic language border research in your region (what has been done, what hasn't and what should be done without delay).

Apart from including information on language and dialect borrowing phenomena, we would like to encourage you to also include at least some of the following topics:

- the legal and/or practical status of the language border (geographic vs. sociolinguistic factors), including the historical perspective; official status of the languages concerned: official language, regionally official language, minority language etc.;
- status and function of the 'other' language(s) on both sides of the border;
- attitudinal and language planning initiatives as well as institutional support to promote or discourage the use of the other language(s);
- standardisation status of the regionally official and minority languages as well as language planning initiatives taken locally, nationally or internationally (e.g. support from the 'mother' country);
- a short overview of work done on borrowing/code switching or other language contact phenomena.

Our point of departure, which has afterwards been confirmed by the various contributors, was that the status and function of the Romance-Germanic language border are very different indeed. It has the least prominence in France, a country harbouring many other languages than French which are all reduced to the status of minority languages, enjoying practically no rights whatsoever. Since those minority languages do not 'officially' exist, the same *a fortiori* applies to the 'language borders' delimiting or surrounding the areas in which they are in use. At the other end of the spectrum we find Belgium and Switzerland, countries divided into language territories on the basis of the territoriality principle. As a consequence of this principle the language border is a very real device in those countries, since it is the legal means *par excellence* of delimiting the areas in which a particular language is the official one. In Belgium, moreover, the legislator has tried to and succeeded in rearranging all domestic administrative divisions (from regions over provinces to communes) into monolingual entities. With the sole exception of Brussels, where the principle was not workable, the result has been that each and every administrative entity functions in a strictly monolingual way. Both the language border and the territoriality principle are defined in the constitution. Although in Switzerland the territoriality principle is unofficial it is very real as well, since it secures the right of each canton to regulate language use in its own territory. This also means that each canton can expect migrants from other language communities to adopt the language of the territory, thus reinforcing the monolingual status of most regions. As far as the administrative division is concerned, though, we see that nevertheless four of Switzerland's cantons are multilingual. Yet, here too, it is the language border

which serves as a demarcation line for the language status of the various administrative entities.

Up to a certain point, this is also the case in countries where a language has the status of a regionally official one. Although such a language enjoys considerably fewer rights than the official languages in the Belgian and Swiss case, and although the territories they are used in are not (officially) monolingual, it is the language border which delimits the territory where the language at stake enjoys its (partially) official status. Along the Romance-Germanic border this applies to South Tyrol in Italy.

In one case the language border is hardly a geographical frontier at all but rather a social one. Strictly speaking, therefore, there is no language border in Luxembourg and this country features more than one unusual and atypical characteristic. For one, it is not very common for two related language varieties – Lëtzbürgesch and German – to be official, administrative languages in the same country. In addition, the use and the official status of French, mother tongue to no one, is the consequence of language planning measures. At any rate, the language border in Luxembourg is a device completely different from what it is in the other portions discussed in the present volume.

It was the editors' wish to open this volume with an article on the origins of the Romance-Germanic language border, which would also give an overview of the main results and objectives of language border research so far. Luc van Durme obliged us by writing his paper entitled 'Genesis and Evolution of the Romance-Germanic Language Border in Europe'. Since the end of the 19th century, he observes, the Romance-Germanic language border, 'which extends from the North Sea to the place southwest of Villach where three countries meet and where the Slavonic-Germanic language border takes over', has been the object of very intense investigation and discussion. In the first part of his contribution he discusses the various language border theories devised for the Belgian-Northern French part of the border and demonstrates in which ways they are interconnected. This is the more important since many scientists have taken this particular portion as a *pars pro toto* for the whole border and have used it to try out their theories and hypotheses. In the second part van Durme summarises the results of historical research into the development of the Romance-Germanic language border at large. In a concluding section, some remaining problems and desiderata for future research are discussed. In the author's view this further investigation will concentrate increasingly on microtoponymy, since this approach has been responsible for the breakthrough in language border research over the last decades and is generally considered to be the most promising one for future research as well. Yet, to profit fully from the advantages of that approach, Van Durme warns, new systematic corpora of reliable data from language border areas will have to be created.

Since the succession of articles in this volume follows the geographical order, the first contributions deal with the French-Dutch portion of the Romance-Germanic language border. Political change is a well documented initiator of language shift and is responsible for shift occurring along the western section of the French-Dutch language border in what is now known as French-Flanders ['Frans-Vlaanderen'; 'la Flandre française']. Part of what is now the north of France used to be an integrate part of the County of Flanders,

including such major cities as Lille, Douai, Cambrai, Arras, Calais, and Dunkirk. A centuries-long tug-of-war resulted in a frequent shifting back and forth of parts of this territory between France and the Low Countries. From the 13th century onwards major parts of it were gradually integrated within France and eventually within the French language territory.

It is Hugo Ryckeboer who analyses the situation in this westernmost part of the Romance-Germanic language border. After a short discussion of the historical evolution in Pas-de-Calais, he gives his main attention to the 'département du Nord', i.e. the part of the former county of Flanders which was annexed by France in the course of the 18th century and where Flemish dialects have led an ever dwindling existence ever since.

Until the French Revolution in 1789, he points out, the linguistic situation did not change fundamentally, and Dutch continued to fulfil the main functions of a cultural language. After the Revolution the new political ideology in France condemned all minority languages and in the course of the 19th century educational legislation banned Dutch from all levels of education. As a result Dutch gradually lost most of its functions.

In an attempt to analyse the reactions to the official language policy and language loss, Ryckeboer points out that the Flemish minority is one of the smallest linguistic minorities in France and also the minority that enjoyed the least attention both politically and scientifically.

Yet, during recent decades, there has been extensive research on the linguistic situation as well as on the characteristics of the Flemish dialects still in use. The Flemish dialect spoken in French Flanders, Ryckeboer tells us, does structurally belong to the West Flemish dialect group. Most dialect maps do not show a break along the state border between Belgium and France. Most isoglosses, on the contrary, cross the state border and it is clear that this state border does not correspond to any old dividing line in human communication. Only the political separation of the last 300 years has caused this border to become a 'secondary dialect boundary' and Ryckeboer then lists some examples of linguistic features caused by communicative isolation from the rest of the Dutch language territory as well as of linguistic innovations brought about by language contact with French.

Summarising, Ryckeboer says, the combination of all the factors discussed, was responsible for the Dutch minority language to become structurally and functionally impoverished. Since it is no longer supported by innovating 'injections' from a genetically related standard language, it stands no chance against the domestic majority language and, thus, gradually vanishes. The story of Flemish in France, therefore, he says, is a case of language death.

The largest part of the Dutch-French language border lies in Belgium. Aspects of this type of language contact are treated in the following two articles. After a brief description of the so-called 'language question in Belgium' Roland Willemys discusses the notion of language border in general and then gives an overview of the changes in status and function of the language border in Belgium and of the actual language border fluctuations as they have occurred up to the present day. Two essentially different types are discussed in this paper, namely language shift resulting in a change of the location of the border on the one hand, and language shift resulting in 'erosion' on the other. The latter means that the contact situation has decisively been changed in the course of history although

the 'language border' (in the traditional sense) has not changed its course. Two problem areas: the 'Voerstreek' and the Brussels suburban region are discussed in more detail. In all cases the part played by linguistic legislation, language planning and sociolinguistic developments is considered and analysed. Finally, Willemyns draws up a typology of language border change and he identifies various patterns of change in order to explain and account for the almost unique nature of the Belgian portion of the Romance-Germanic language border.

The portrait of Belgium's capital – Brussels – is one of immense complexity involving not only linguistic background and competence but also attitudes, social status, job conditions, circumstances of discourse, feelings towards the interlocutor etc.; in a word all of the sociolinguistic variables which are known to determine linguistic interaction in multilingual settings. Jeanine Treffers-Daller has written an article exclusively devoted to language use and language contact in Brussels. Brussels, she explains, occupies a very special, if not unique, position on the linguistic border; also because the 19 municipalities which form the Brussels metropolis are an autonomous region in what is now the federal state of Belgium. Language shift in Brussels is to be seen as erosion within the Dutch linguistic territory eventually rendering a city that used to be part of Flanders 'à part entière' into a multilingual city with Francophone dominance. From a judicial point of view a shift did occur, since Brussels changed its status from (*de facto*) monolingual Dutch into (*de jure*) bilingual. Treffers-Daller gives a description of the historical background, the educational system, the language varieties used, the attitudes of the speakers towards these language varieties and internal linguistic aspects of language contact in Brussels.

Belgium is not a bilingual but a trilingual country, comprising both an officially German speaking part as well as a small territory where German is used as a dwindling minority language. In their article on 'German in Belgium: Linguistic Variation from a Contact Linguistic Point of View' Peter Nelde and Jeroen Darquennes use the terms New Belgium for the former and Old Belgium for the latter. Both are part of the old territory of Overmaas, a linguistically very scattered region with a centuries old tradition of language contact between Dutch, German and French. The present article particularly concentrates on the situation of the German speakers in Old and New Belgium. After a geographical and historical outline the process of Belgium's federalisation and its repercussions for East Belgium are briefly discussed. The central part of the article deals with external and internal linguistic factors having affected the linguistic habits of these Belgian German speakers. Finally, the article analyses some issues that are prominent in recent research on New and Old Belgium.

Trilingual contact is what characterises also the following region under investigation, namely Luxembourg. In 1839 the current borders of Luxembourg were drawn approximately along the Romance-Germanic language border. From that moment on, Fernand Fehlen says in his article 'Luxembourg, a Multilingual Society at the Romance/Germanic Language Border', the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg was inhabited by a population speaking a German dialect, while by historic tradition and political opportunity, the administrative and juridical language continued to be French. His paper focuses mainly on two aspects, namely the study of the interference between Lëtzeburgesch on the one hand and French, German and English on the other, and the description of the present

linguistic situation based on a sociolinguistic survey done in 1997. Bourdieu's concept of the legitimate language competence has been modified here in order to better describe the Luxembourg situation of 'triglossia with trilingualism' and the ensuing multilingual language competence. Such an analysis requires – as Fehlen reminds us – a subtle understanding of the combination of different varieties of the three languages officially in use in Luxembourg.

The discussion on Luxembourg has brought us definitively to the German portion of the Romance-Germanic language border, which now continues with a discussion of a not less scattered region in Helga Bister-Broosen's article on 'Alsace'; this is the border region between Germany and France which changed its political affiliation four times during the past century. The former linguistic unity of the Upper Rhine region, she says, no longer exists in that form. Alsace, to the west of the state border, is characterised by the use of German dialects combined with the use of the French standard language. It is on the western side of this bilingual territory that we find the 'language border', i.e. the border that sets Alsace apart from the territories to its west, characterised by the sole use of French. After a historical overview the author discusses various geopolitical aspects of the language border as well as 'Contacts across the state border' and also the new education policy, namely the *enseignement bilingue paritaire* in which German and French each are the medium of instruction for half of the week. The current experiments with early bilingual instruction are in line with the wishes of the Alsatian population and of the regional political leadership. Yet, although the revival of Standard German in and through the educational system will certainly increase bilingual competence in general, it is not to be expected, Bister-Broosen says, that this will fundamentally change the linguistic habits of the Alsaticans. Alsatian dialects do not enjoy any official support, have no official functions, and are hardly used by the younger generations any more. As far as daily language practice is concerned, the author concludes, the language border and the state border are doomed to coincide within the lapse of only a few generations.

One of the specifics of the Swiss situation is that, as a consequence of the country harbouring four language communities (German, French, Italian and Romansh), we are confronted here with one Germanic language being in contact and interfering with three different Romance languages. In her article 'The German-Romance Language Borders in Switzerland' Felicity Rash is concerned with language-contact phenomena at the borders of Switzerland's four language communities, the legal status of the four Swiss national languages, and the language policies of individual bilingual and trilingual cantons. After an introductory discussion of the historical movements of the language boundaries, linguistic interference resulting from direct language contact at each of the language boundaries is analysed in detail. Subsequently recent research into linguistic cleavage and language attitudes are summarised and the author discusses the revised language law of 1996, which legislates for special assistance for the two minority languages, Italian and Romansh, and which was designed to promote improvements in relations between these and the two majority language communities.

The final stop of our journey along the Romance-Germanic language border is South Tyrol, the German speaking autonomous region in Italy, where language contact, consequently, involves German and Italian. Ludwig Eichinger starts his

exposé on the situation in 'South Tyrol. German and Italian in a Changing World' by stressing that in this southernmost part of the language border area Romance and Germanic languages have coexisted for centuries. Yet, for a very long time the language groups used to live side by side with only a limited amount of out-group communication and individual bilingualism. The first changes in this situation started at the beginning of the 19th century, when the vernaculars were used in all official contexts and group identities developed, based on shared languages. Consequently language planning measures were taken immediately when South Tyrol became a part of Italy after World War I. They intensified further after the fascists came to power in the early 1920s: they banned the use of German in all public domains. Simultaneously, they started a campaign bringing a large number of Italian speaking people into the area. In 1939, the so-called 'Option' agreement between Mussolini and Hitler forced that part of the population who decided to keep up with the German language to leave Italy.

After World War II the situation had become so tense that it ultimately led to a political clash, culminating in bomb attacks and other acts of violence in the early 1960s. This may be the only part of our border region area where violence has ever been used to come to terms with linguistic diversity. From then onwards attempts were made to solve the problems by means of linguistic legislation, resulting in the so-called 'Paket'-solution in 1969, meant to protect the German-speaking minority. By the same token the agreement initiated a considerable degree of individual bilingualism, especially with the speakers of German.

As far as language development itself is concerned, Eichinger reminds us that German in South Tyrol took part in the developments and standardisation processes of German overall until 1871, since up to then it was part of the German-speaking Habsburg empire. From a dialectological viewpoint there is a continuity between the regional dialects spoken in the neighbouring parts of Austria and in South Tyrol and the main isoglosses intersecting South Tyrol from north to south.

The minority status of German in the overall Italian context is weighing increasingly on the standardisation debate. For a long time the mainstream argumentation held that only the standard of Germany was an acceptable norm. As was the case in Flanders during the same period, language identity with the 'other' country was used as an important argument in the domestic debate in that it tried to profit from the prestige of the language on the other side of the border. Yet, the growing integration into the Italian legal and administrative system led to an increasing amount of Italian terminology being translated into German and, consequently, differing from the appropriate terminology in Germany and Austria. As a consequence of these and similar developments we witness an increasing degree of linguistic variation in South Tyrol society. Finally, Eichinger remarks, the developments of the recent decades have led to an intensified contact between the languages, and there is a growing awareness of the advantages of speaking more than one language.

In our view, the importance of the current volume resides in the fact that it brings together sociolinguistic analyses of language contact in a range of situations along the Romance-Germanic Language Border. While all areas have been subject to in-depth separate studies, to our knowledge they have never been

brought together in one volume. This seems important, as together with the volume edited by Kremer and Niebaum (1990), entitled *Grenzdialekte*, which focuses on dialectological issues, it will ultimately create a basis for collaborative and comparative work among European researchers with an interest in language contact. And this in turn will make it possible to shed more light on the variable and the universal elements in language contact along the Romance-Germanic Language Border.

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