

Dutch Overseas. Studies in Maintenance and Loss of Dutch as an Immigrant Language

Jetske Klatter-Folmer and Sjaak Kroon (eds). Tilburg: Tilburg University Press, 1997. Pp. 272. ISBN 90-361-9508-X (pbk): Hfl 32.50.

After the 'Introductory Remarks' by J. Klatter-Folmer and S. Kroon (pp. 1–20) and a general overview on 'Post-War Migration from the Netherlands' by J-W Elferink and M. Smits (pp. 21–32) three papers treat aspects of Dutch in Australia — 'Use, Maintenance, Structures, and Future of Dutch in Australia' (M. Clyne and A. Pauwels, pp. 33–50), 'Attitudes of the Second Generation to Dutch Language Maintenance and Ethnic Identity in Australia' (J. Bennett, 51–68) and "'Corrosion" and "Loss" of Immigrant Dutch in Australia: An experiment on First Language Attrition' (T. Ammerlaan, pp. 69–98). J. Klatter-Folmer (pp. 195–214) describes 'Language Shift and Loss in a Three-Generation Dutch Family' in neighbouring New-Zealand. Aspects of the fate of Dutch in North-America are treated in papers by J. de Vries and G. de Vries ('Demolinguistic Aspects of Language Maintenance and Shift among Dutch Immigrants in Canada', pp. 121–138), A. Vermeer ('Language Maintenance and the Dutch Heritage Language School in Ottawa', pp. 139–152), J. Daan ('Dutch in the United States of America', pp. 237–254) and J. van Marle and C. Smits ('Deviant patterns of Lexical Transfer: English-origin Words in American Dutch', pp. 255–272). H. Giesbers ('Dutch in Indonesia: Language Attrition or Language Contact', pp. 163–180) and E.H. Raidt ('Interference, Shift, and Loss of Dutch in South Africa', pp. 215–236) report on two former strongholds of Dutch presence overseas. Finally, the situation in three unrelated and less-traditional immigrant countries is analysed by M. Schoenmakers-Klein Gunnewiek ('Dutch Language Loss in Brazil and the Conceptual Hypothesis', pp. 99–120); K. de Bot, P. Gommans and C. Rossing ('First Language Loss in a Second Language Environment: Dutch Immigrants in France, pp. 153–162); and A. Soesman ('An Experimental Study on Native Language Attrition in Dutch Adult Immigrants in Israel', pp. 181–194).

Although this collection of papers is on 'language maintenance, shift and loss' (p. 4)

it appears that, in the opinion of most authors, the most important factor is how individuals are gradually losing their proficiency in Dutch. Consequently, this book is almost exclusively on (personal) language loss or attrition, much more than on (sociolinguistically determined) language shift. The choice of the papers, the editors say, was mainly determined by 'the availability of research results in the field' (p. 4). This has to be considered the main reason for the disparity of the settings, which is mirrored or even surpassed by that of the methodology. Although, as stated before, many papers are on the language proficiency of migrant populations, the focus and the ways of data gathering are so divergent that the findings of the papers cannot possibly be really compared. In the article on Indonesia there is *one* informant (p. 163), whereas for Canada the language proficiency of some 40 pupils of the Dutch 'Heritage language school in Ottawa' (p. 139) is described, and for New Zealand '8 members of a three generation Dutch family' (p. 196) provide the data required. In the paper on France 'the general proficiency in Dutch' (p. 154) of 30 subjects was tested whereas in that on Israel an enquiry among adult immigrants was carried out to 'determine whether frequent and infrequent vocabulary have a different effect on attrition' (p. 181–182). In Australia, 'a picture-naming and recognition experiment with 76 Dutch–Australian immigrants' (p. 75) was carried out and in the paper on 'American–Dutch' the use of 'English-origin words' was researched in order to find possible patterns of lexical transfer (p. 264). The paper on Brazil, finally, is based on a 'corpus of 176 Dutch letters written by two female first generation immigrants' (p. 102) between 1974 and 1992.

The second (and much smaller) set of papers focuses on the sociolinguistic situation of Dutch in specific countries or parts thereof, although in all but one language proficiency tests are carried out as well. Here too, the data on which the articles are based are gathered in very different ways. They may be from census figures (Canada, Australia) or from enquiries on attitudes (USA, Australia). The paper on South Africa is a pilot study in which, on the basis of 300 questionnaires filled out and sent back by Dutch and Belgian immigrants, possible interference between Dutch and Afrikaans or English is analysed.

A similar disparity calls for a structured (and structuring) intervention on the part of the editors in order to help readers discern patterns among differences in setting and (socio)linguistic situation. However, the 'Introduction' by the editors is a mere theoretical overview of various possibilities as far as studies on language maintenance and loss are concerned and it does not even try to point out which of the theoretical cases might be relevant in which settings in the book. One can readily agree with the editors that 'from a sociolinguistic point of view, it is interesting to compare the different demographic, socioeconomic and socio-cultural circumstances in which Dutch immigrants found themselves in the various countries they went to and the influence of these circumstances on processes of language maintenance, shift, and loss' (p. 14) and it is really a shame that they didn't! As for the authors, they apparently didn't consider it to be their job either: there are hardly any cross-references and authors treating various aspects of the situation in one country do not only not refer to each other, they even constantly repeat the same basics on Dutch immigration and linguistic behaviour in that particular country. Some editing by the editors (what's in a name?) could have prevented this. The publisher's statement in the leaflet on the book, that 'it provides an empirical basis for answers to questions regarding the linguistic behaviour of Dutch immigrants in varying linguistics contexts and environments' may certainly be true, but only in so far as every single paper is concerned. It takes a considerable effort on the part of the reader to find such answers as far as the various countries is concerned and it is next to impossible to find them for the totality of the settings treated in the book. Together with the absence of an index, this makes the use of the book extremely uncomfortable and time-consuming.

I will refrain from analysing single papers and make one more general remark: the title of the book is somewhat misleading in that it is not so much on the Dutch language but rather on the language of the Dutch. The linguistic situation of Dutch-speaking Belgian immigrants is not taken into consideration, although Belgian immigration has been considerable in at least

some of the settings treated (Canada, the American Midwest, etc.). Although it is, by all means, the right of the editors to delimit the scope of their book, this omission leads to confusion and even inaccurate research. One example: demolinguistic data are collected on the basis of census figures in which, obviously, the group of 'speakers of Dutch' also comprises the Belgians. The group of 'Dutch citizens', though, does not. By not taking this into account the view of both the authors and the readers has been obscured on such important subjects as (for example), language shift and language loss. Comparing the number of immigrants of Dutch descent (citizenship) with the number of those who are still using the Dutch language is erroneous, since the figures on the speakers of Dutch do include the Belgians, whereas the figures on the Dutch citizens don't. It is unclear (and impossible to find out) to what extent this has influenced the views on language loss and shift among the Dutch-speaking population. Only two authors constitute an exception to this general rule and, unfortunately, they are not those using census figures. Daan mentions the fact that there are Belgians among her Dutch-speaking informants in the American Midwest and occasionally points out some differences between the behaviour of the Dutch and the Belgian communities. Raidt tells us that some (how many?) of her respondents are Belgians but she does not distinguish between both groups as far as the analysis of the findings is concerned.

Probably the main reason why this book has been published is, as mentioned in the publisher's leaflet: 'to lay the foundation for the comparative work that is eventually envisaged'. Although it is questionable whether these foundations are sound, we do hope that this comparative work will eventually be undertaken. The fact that the words 'language loss' or 'language attrition' or 'language death' appear in almost every title is probably significant for the fate of Dutch as an 'immigrant language'. For the time being, the book under review confirms that the present research on 'Dutch as an immigrant language' at least mirrors its sad fate.

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