How to Avoid Language Conflict in Europe after 1994

Peter H. Nelde

KU Brussels

0.   Russia and the European Union*

Two examples of conflicts related to language and culture will show that conflicts do not always originate in historical, political and economical constellations of multilingual settings, but can also be self-generated in a multilingual community like the European, especially created to neutralize causes of conflict.

Example 1: In 1990 an eclectic list on the grievances of former Soviet-Russian "nations", minorities/majorities, language communities led to the following list illustrating the divergent claim of language groups:

1. Political independence   (Azerbeidjan/Armenia)
2. Economic and cultural independence   (Belorussia)
3. A change of status of the Republic   (Tartars)
4. Rehabilitation of oppressed language groups (Greeks, Germans,
                                                Turks)
5. Autonomy   (Moldavia, Poles in
                                                Lithuania)
6. Boundary change   (Armenians in Karabach,
                                                Tadjiks)
7. More autonomous rights within their republic (Jarkutsks)
8. Interethnic exchanges   (Estonians back to
                                                Estonia,
                                       Estonian Russians back to
                                                Russia)

9.   Cultural associations (Koreans, Tartars outside the Republic,

Greeks in Georgia)

Example 2: At present the European Union deals with 72 language combinations–work for almost 3000 translators and interpreters. Sometimes more than 700 interpreters are working the same day. French, English and German are the most important languages. Only tricks and an asymmetrical interpretation structure allow communication: for example, everyone speaks his own language, which will often be interpreted only into the major languages–a well organized tower of Babel.

By the way, is it really true that in the beginning of the EU the Danes regretted the competition of theoretically equal languages and suggested a reduction to English and French, simultaneously renouncing to use their own language? Rumors say that the congratulations sent by Great Britain and France to Copenhagen because of Danish wisdom and insight provoked a vehement Danish reaction. Accordingly, Danes expected the British to use French and the French to use English. No further comments have reached Brussels since.

That attempts have been made to avoid or overcome the resulting conflicts is shown by a series of plans which have been used in multilingual countries like Belgium, since Europe, with its language conflicts often dating from the nineteenth century, has obviously not prepared sufficiently for a multilingual (partial) European Union in the year 1995.

1.   Ethnic Conflicts

Most contacts between ethnic groups do not occur in peaceful, harmoniously coexisting communities, but they are accompanied by varying degrees of tension, resentment and differences of opinion, which are characteristic of every competitive social structure. Under certain conditions, such generally accepted competitive tensions can degenerate into intense conflicts, in the worst case, ending in violence. The assumption of some sociologists that ethnic contact inevitably leads to conflict situations seems to be exaggerated, to say the least, given the fact that some ethnic groups do live peacefully together. The possibility of conflict erupting is, however, always present, since differences between groups create feelings of uncertainty of status. Sociologists who have dealt with contact problems between ethnic groups define conflict as contentions involving real or

apparent scarces, interests, and values, in which the goals of the opposing group must be attacked or at least neutralized to protect one's own interests (prestige, employment, political power, etc.) (Williams 1947). This type of conflict often appears as a conflict of values in which differing behavioral norms collide, since usually only one norm is accepted. Conflicts between ethnic groups, however, occur only very rarely as openly waged violent conflicts, and usually consist of a complex system of threats and sanctions in which threats constitute a key to understanding a conflict, especially if the interests and values of one group are endangered. Conflicts can arise relatively easily if–as is usually the case–interests and values have an emotional basis.

The magnitude and development of a conflict depends on a number of factors which are determined by the number of points of friction between two or more ethnic groups, the presence of equalizing or mitigating elements, and the degree of uncertainty of all the participants. Thus, a one-sided (monofactural) conflict explanation or an explanation based on irrational prejudices will fail. Very different factors which influence each other and can reinforce and "escalate" each other, e.g. feelings of uncertainty and intimidation, and scares in areas of values and interests, can cause group conflict. Consequently, this group conflict is part of the social behavior in which different groups compete with each other, and should not be connoted only negatively, since in this way new–and possibly more peaceful–forms of coexistence can arise. On the other hand, tensions between ethnic groups brought about by feelings of intimidation can give rise to new conflicts at any time, conflicts which can be caused by a minority as well as by a majority group. As long as society continues to create new scares, because of its competitive orientation, the creation of new conflicts appears unavoidable.

Along with linguists and sociologists, political scientists also assume that language contact can cause political conflict. Language conflicts can be brought about by changes in the expansion of the social system when there is language contact between different languages groups (Inglehart/ Woodward 1967). Belgium and French Canada are examples of this. The reasons for this are the following: a dominant language group (French in Belgium, English in Canada) controls the crucial authority in the areas of administration, politics, and economy, and gives employment preference to those applicants who have command of the dominant language. The

disadvantaged language group is then left with the choice of renouncing social ambition, assimilating, or resisting. While numerically weak or psychologically weakened language groups tend towards assimilation, in modern societies numerically stronger, more homogeneous language groups having traditional values, such as their own history and culture, prefer political resistance, the usual form of organized language conflict in this century. This type of conflict becomes especially clear when it occurs between population groups of differing socioeconomic structures (urban/rural, poor/wealthy, indigenous/ immigrant) and the dominant group requires its own language as a condition for the integration of the rest of the population. Although in the case of French Canada, English appeared absolutely necessary as the means of communication in trade and business, nearly 80% of the francophone population spoke only French and thus was excluded from social elevation in the political/economic sector. The formation of a small French-speaking elite, whose only goal was political opposition to the dominant English, precipitated the latent, socially incited language conflict.

Most current language conflicts are the result of language separation accompanied by differing social status and one-sided preferential treatment of the dominant language on the part of the government: in these cases religious, social, economic or psychological scares and frustrations of the weaker group may be responsible for the language conflict. However, a critical factor in the expansion and intensification of such a conflict remains the impeding of social elevation to the point of blocking any social mobility of a disadvantaged or suppressed ethnic group (cf. the numerous language conflicts in multiethnic Austria-Hungary).

The climax of a political language conflict is reached when all conflict factors are combined in a single symbol or language, and quarrels and struggles in very different areas (politics, economics, administration, education) appear under the heading of language conflict. In such cases, politicians and economic leaders also operate on the assumption of language conflict, disregarding the actual underlying causes, and thereby inflame "from above" the conflict that arose "from below", with the result that language assumes much more importance than it had at the outset of the conflict. This language-oriented "surface structure" then obscures the more deeply rooted, suppressed "deep structure"(social and economic problems).

2.   Conflicts in Multilingual Nations

Latent and manifest language conflicts can be described from different standpoints. Europe comprises about 70 to 80 languages, of which approximately 35 are spoken in the area of the European Union. In addition to a division into traditionally multilingual countries (those that are "administratively" multilingual), smaller divisions can be made according to language groups with a high predisposition to conflict because of their mobility or immobility, or according to the degree of heterogeneous population composition in densely populated urban areas that are highly industrialized.

2.1.   Officially   Multilingual Countries

The language conflicts of multilingual countries that developed historically are better known. These countries definitely include Great Britain, Ireland, Belgium, Luxemburg, Switzerland, Ex-Yugoslavia and since the late 1980's also the European part of the former Soviet Union. However, the conflict structures in these administratively   multilingual countries are of completely different kinds . The Irish language conflict is closely linked to the inherent ideology of Irish which expressly restricts the spread of Irish as a native language. Irish, the mother tongue of a rural Catholic minority in a region (Konamara) with a high rate of unemployment, can only assert itself with great difficulty in urban centers where social advancement is important.

In the case of Belgium, whose language conflicts can also be explained as socioeconomic, the usual conflict description of a repressed minority is even less true. The oppression of the Flemish, which can be interpreted historically and which the respective literature always portrays as the oppression of a minority, in fact concerns a majority population so that the Flemish should actually be regarded as Europe's only repressed majority. In the case of Luxemburg, the explanation of the conflict is even more paradoxical than in Belgium. The trilingualism of the country can be regarded – in terms of language pedagogy – as a model for multilingualism in the Europe of the future. The dialect-like Luxemburg language of kindergarten is harmoniously succeeded by standard German taught from the first year of primary school on, and French not appearing as native tongue until the second year of primary school. But the multilingualism of

Luxemburg's schools can also be explained as an accumulation of deficits: The Luxemburgish language plays only a subordinate role as a written language; standard German is supplanted by French after only a few years of school; and French, only in rare cases the mother tongue of the student, is taught for reasons of language politics as a native and not as a foreign language from the second school year on, without students having the necessary prerequisites (Robert Bruch: "les classes des muets" = "classes of mutes"). For these reasons it can be presumed that most pupils have a triglossic deficit.

Conflicts in Switzerland, in contrast to Belgium, often have an indirect character and are frequently dealt with more academically than in other countries, although local newspapers by no means evade conflicts. Here, too, numerous oppositions and confrontations can be explained socio-economically, although a real portrayal of the conflicts would have to be based on much more complex relationships. The "Röstigraben" (the so-called "French Fries trench") between French- and German-speaking Swiss, the conflicts in bilingual cities like Freiburg and Biel, isolation from West Germans because of the increased use of spoken dialect (cf. the so-called "Basel-Lörrach effect"), and the Germanization of the last Rhaeto-Romance pockets in southeastern Switzerland show that even federated states cannot avoid language conflicts. Finally, the Balkan countries have shown once again how unresolved language conflicts and those that have seemingly quieted down can break out again because of the extreme socio-economic difference between north and south. A comparison of the official multilingual countries of Europe shows, in spite of a few common denominators, the broad span of characteristic conflicts among ethno-linguistic groups.

2.2.   Autochthonous Minorities versus Allochthonous Minorities

Forms of multilingualism have been more diversified during the decades since World War II, or they have at least come to be evaluated differently. Originally the autochthonous minorities ("ethnic groups", "nationalities") who were residents of most European nations were the center of interest. But since the 1960s new, often socially defined minorities like migrants, guest workers, returning settlers from former colonies, refugees,

emigrants, and transmigrants have moved into the foreground of the European context. All of these groups have brought about a new awareness among the majority population and by no means has this resulted in the native minorities being pushed into the background. Instead, they have been carried along by new currents like the so-called "renaissance of dialects and less common languages". A new regional consciousness oriented toward smaller units ("small is beautiful") has increasingly shifted the view of research, politics, culture and the public to minorities, whose significance in a culturally viable Europe, east and west, has been stressed.

The pressure from majority groups to standardize language, and the cultural and socioeconomic influences of the super-powers, which in turn threaten the majority groups themselves with loss of cultural independence, all put pressure on the smaller ethnic groups. These groups have no legal protection at all and are faced with the question whether or not it is desirable and possible to take measures to ensure the survival of their minority. For most of the smaller ethnic groups of Europe, this results in the usually undesirable and difficult choice of either conforming to the often economically stronger majority group and being further assimilated, or facing a conflict, the solution or outcome of which is completely unknown. In present-day Europe, with its increased tendency toward unification and international involvements, any language or culture contact between different ethnic-cultural groups seems to imply conflict. Since majority groups in their attitude toward linguistic or cultural minorities usually react considerably more negatively to allochthonous than to autochthonous minorities, the conflicts can be described without overlapping. The confrontations between the majority group or dominant groups and the autochthonous or allochthonous minority groups, i.e. the indigenous or the migrant groups, take place on different levels (social, political, economic, cultural), although the forms of discrimination are often similar.

In the Netherlands, Switzerland, and France, 'autochthonous' and 'allochthonous' are described and analyzed quite differently for methodological reasons. In Great Britain, however, sociolinguistic contacts are lacking between London linguists, examining the so-called "decolonized" languages, and the minority researchers in Scotland and Wales because of completely different conflict situations. No wonder there have been hardly any suggestions for solutions of the conflict which would try to neutralize the quite comparable language conflicts of the two groups.

2.3.   Urbanization

Areas of linguistic concentration, like large cities, open another conflict perspective. The population explosion and increasing mobility in the 1980s have led to the disappearance of monolingual world cities in the last decade of this century. Much less obvious than in international metropolises is the conflict-laden multilingualism in European capitals. Here, too, the causes and occasions of conflict vary considerably, although many have their origin in the insufficient importance placed on minority languages. The following are a few random examples of such conflicts are the following:

Dublin/Baile Atha Cliath: Irish as administrative language with a relatively small area of use is spoken almost exclusively as a second language, often learned with great effort;

Helsinki/Helsingfors: The economically strong Swedish minority is bilingual, the Finnish majority mainly monolingual;

Leeuwarden/Ljouwert: The Frisian minority, which has already weakened in terms of numbers compared to Dutch, is endangered more by a Frisian city dialect ("city Frisian") which is similar to Dutch, than by outside factors;

Bruxelles/Brussel: First, the favoring of, or just the awarding of equal rights to, the numerical Flemish minority (smaller school classes, the same rights as the majority) has led to tensions. In addition, the threat of becoming an even smaller minority because of the presence of migrants provides more fuel for the conflict;

Bratislava/Pressburg: In spite of successful Slovakification of a partly Hungarian, partly German population over the course of history, the introduction of the territorial principle finally slowed down the threatening Czechification in the 1970s. Now Slovakian independence and growing nationalism bring new pressures to bear on the minorities;

Fribourg/Freiburg: The German minority, most of whom speak a local dialect, by doing so raise the threshold of language acquisition for majority speakers, whose learning motivation diminishes as a result;

Bozen/Bolzano: The initial challenge to the Italians to further bilingualism, send more of their children to German schools and thereby emancipate the German minority, has now given way to the fear that too many bilingual Italians could harm the work market of the German minority;

Pécs/Fünfkirchen: Repressive political measures so menaced the substance of the small German minority that the minority language has largely disappeared from public life.

These different situations of conflict, to which numerous other examples could easily be added, show that a single plan for solving such language problems would only   meet with failure.

3.   Language Conflict in Contact Linguistics

In contact linguistics, the term conflict remains ambiguous, at least when it is described generally as social conflict which can arise on the basis of a multilingual situation (Hartig 1980: 182). If we assume that conflict represents a counterpart to language contact and is interdependently connected with it, then both concepts can apply to individuals and to language communities. The notion appears to us essential here that neither contact nor conflict can occur between languages. They are conceivable only between speakers of languages. Oksaar (1980) correctly points out the ambiguity of the term language conflict in the sense of conflict between languages with reference to the personality of the speaker, as well as conflict by means of language(s), including processes external to the individual. Similarly, Haarmann (1980 II: 191) distinguishes between interlingual and interethnic language conflicts. Because of their conceptual interdependence, the paucity of research on language conflict equals that on the methodology of language contact research. Even among the founders of modern research in language contact, who publish simultaneously to those in the rapidly developing disciplines of sociolinguistics and language sociology, e.g. Weinreich and Fishman, the term conflict rarely appears. While Weinreich views multilingualism (bilingualism) and the accompanying interference phenomena as the most important form of language contact, without including the conflicts between language communities on the basic of ethnic, religious, or cultural incompatibilities, Fishman (1972: 14) grants language conflict greater importance in connection with language planning. Haugen (1966) was the first to make conflict presentable in language contact research with his detailed analysis of Norwegian language development. Indeed, even linguists in officially multilingual countries (Switzerland, Belgium) resisted until the end of the 1970s treating conflict methodically as part of language contact research, since such an "ideologicalization" of language

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contact appeared to them as "too touchy" (Fishman 1980: XI). One reason for the late discovery of a term indispensable in today's contact research is to be found in the history of contact linguistics itself: in traditional language contact research (as well as in dialectology and research on linguistic change) the emphasis was always on closed groups, which were usually geographically homogeneous and could be described with relative ease socioeconomically, rather than on urban industrial societies. However, it is exactly in modern, urban society that conflicts result due to normative requirements of the more powerful, majority, group, which demands linguistic   adaptation as a language contact alternative, and thus preprograms conflict with those speakers who are unwilling to adapt.

Despite the unsatisfactory research situation, which is essentially limited to empirical case studies in the area of research on language conflict, the following statements can be made about language conflict: (1) language conflict can occur wherever there is language contact, chiefly in multilingual communities, although Mattheier (1984: 200) has demonstrated that language conflicts can and do exist in so-called monolingual local communities; and (2) language conflicts arise from the confrontation of differing standards, values, and attitude structures, and strongly influence identity image, upbringing, education and group consciousness. Thus, conflict can be viewed as a form of contact, or, in terms of a model, as a complementary   model to the language contact model.

4.   Plans for Handling Conflict

4.1.   The Territorial Principle and the Example of Belgium

In Europe, two principles of multilingualism were originally in opposition to each other: the individualist principle, mainly supported by the Romance side, by which every speaker is free to use his mother tongue or another language in all official and private domains, regardless of his place of residence; and the territorial principle, defended more by the Germanic side, which obliges the resident of a region, declared administratively to be monolingual, to use the respective territory-bound state language in official domains. Although the individualist principle prevailed up to the 1960s and led to extensive Frenchification of the country, today this principle can only be found in bilingual Brussels. In fact, the famous-notorious "liberté du père

(!) de famille" ("liberty of the father of the family": free choice of one of the two national languages by the head of the family) was only abandoned in Brussels in the 1970s. Instead of a bilingual structure, Brussels today maintains two parallel, chiefly   monolingual networks in official domains. The two largest sections of the country are either monolingual French or Dutch, in accordance with the territorial principle, except for a few communities on language borders and the German minority in eastern Belgium.

This application of the territorial principle met simultaneously with rejection and admiration in the world, since apparently the viability of a small multilingual nation was thereby maintained. No wonder the Canadian language legislation of Quebec (the so-called Law 101) was influenced by that of Belgium! The consequences for the individual speaker are considerable: whereas the chances of social advancement before introduction of this plan were unavoidably linked to the mastery of two languages (at least in the case of the Flemish and German populations), now life in many spheres can proceed mainly in one language, namely, the language of the respective territory.

4.2.   De-emotionalization

With the introduction of the territorial principle, the Belgian lawmakers acted on the assumption that strict regulation in a few essential areas would leave room for the greatest possible freedom of language use in the unregulated areas. While in most multilingual countries the monolingualism required by the territorial principle applies to at least two domains (the educational system and public administration), Belgium adds the business domain with monolingualism in companies (language between employees and employers). Social tensions which result from language use according to social class (e.g., when managers use another language than union representatives) are thereby to be reduced. Parallel to language legislation, a plan for federalization and regionalization was developed that would prevent centralized language planning such as that practiced in France. Since such regionalized language planning was applied to only a few, albeit decisive, realms of life of the different language groups, liberality and tolerance are shown in the remaining domains as compensation, so to speak. Above all, in the area of quantitative evaluation of minorities, one of the

most disputed and most often misused arguments of the respective opposition, Belgium has gone its own way and not followed the North American or Russian examples. The rights and duties of a majority or minority are thereby no longer dependent solely on the strength of numbers. On the contrary, if the relative size of an ethno-linguistic group is no longer the sole determining factor in language planning, the protection of a language community can proceed from the assumption that a numerical minority needs more help than the majority. The Belgian state has accordingly done away with language counts in the census and thereby surely contributed to considerable de-emotionalization.

5.   Hypotheses on the Acquisition of Several Languages

In spite of many disadvantages, the Belgian model has proven itself in certain aspects. As an outgrowth of a conflict situation that has continued for decades, measures to avoid and neutralize conflict have been developed. The resulting de-emotionalization of the language dispute has led to individual language behavior that permits the acquisition of two additional languages corresponding to a free market economy. In this way, the multilingualism market, freed from numerous historical and social prejudices, stereotypes and emotions, has been able to adapt to levels of supply and demand. Today the Belgian multilingual situation can be characterized as especially liberal in relation to the three national languages (e.g. Dutch, French and German), as well as the most important foreign and neighboring languages (e.g. English, Spanish, Italian). To this must be added a purely economical argument: the function of the capital city as an international meeting place has furthered the willingness to learn other languages, insofar as the mastery of languages that meet demand obviously pays. Thus, the Belgian example shows that economically motivated language planning according to need is more successful in encouraging multilingual acquisition than a centralized language policy, which can seldom adjust to constantly changing language needs in a flexible way. In the interest of avoiding language conflicts in the context of multilingual acquisition, some results of West European experiences will now be presented as theses for discussion.

5.1.   Multilingualism   for affluent groups only

There is no generally valid model of multilingualism that can be applied to all cultures, countries and circumstances. Situational and contextual elements are decisive for each respective multilingual acquisition plan. Proponents of bilingualism often stress too hastily the temporary successes of multilingual education in so-called bilingual secondary schools. These are frequently elite schools (the European schools in Brussels, Kennedy High School in Berlin) at which the children of "privileged guest workers" (diplomats and representatives of multilingual corporations) or of the native upper class (affluent minorities) learn several languages. Because of repeated changes of location, these students recognize the uses of multilingualism more readily than their counterparts in monolingual secondary schools, where the same multilingual curriculum would probably meet with little success. In addition, in most cases there is the considerable higher expense of bilingual education, which not every school system and department of education are willing to finance. This serves as a warning against all forms of elite multilingualism, which would result if a "Eurocratic upper class" gains control of foreign language acquisition. Academics and the wealthy automatically have easier access to multilingualism for their children.

5.2.   "Natural" Multilingualism

The trend toward artificial (guided) multilingualism corresponds to notions of fashion and prestige for many Europeans and North Americans, i.e., language communities of relatively high mobility. But this artificial multilingualism ignores the structural aid to learning, provided by the languages of the environment.

In secondary schools in eastern France, where many children understand and/or speak a German dialect at home, English since the beginning of the 1990s has become the first foreign language after the language of instruction (i.e., French). So the dialectal language structures for German that are already present remain unused, with the result that natively acquired proficiency goes to waste and is hardly used didactically in school. Luxemburg with its flexible translation solution ("from kindergarten dialect to standard language in school") provides a better example. It should be pointed out, however, that in European countries, with few exceptions (e.g. Hungary), the high prestige value of English endangers

all multilingualism planning in schools. As is well-known, learning motivation in adolescents declines significantly in the acquisition of third and fourth languages. In the interest of avoiding conflict, the natural multilingualism that exists in all of the countries of Europe, except for Iceland and Portugal, rules out overly simplistic solutions for the future, such as   multilingualism = mother tongue + English.

5.3.   Monolingualism can be cured

Motivation and support for the acquisition of several languages is inadequate in most European nations. More than half of the world's population is already multilingual, and the trend is a growing one. That is why multilingual education portrays the norm and not the exception. In the spirit of the foregoing, every case of multilingualism should be tailor made for its language community. It should correspond to real economic need, and its strength should not be diluted with fashionable airs and ambitious but futile language planning.

6.   The Prospects for 1995 and later

Since all European nations with few exceptions are indeed multilingual in an autochthonous as well as an allochthonous sense, it is regrettable that this enormous reservoir of potential facility for language acquisition has hardly been tapped.

Language is regarded as a symbol of conflict per se in many multilingual nations. A simple intensification of second language and multilingual instruction in schools in such conflict situations seems to me to be a waste of time and money. It did not work with the six-year minimum of obligatory Russian instruction in most former East Bloc countries, nor with the previously required six years of Dutch instruction in the Walloon part of Belgium. Language conflicts will stand a better chance of being neutralized by means of such measures as a de-emotionalizing of language, a kind of "symmetrical bilingualism" in the numerous language border areas of Europe, a decrease in prejudices and stereotypes effected by immersion in neighboring languages and cultures, and above all, increased attention to local and regional peculiarities (ecolinguistic factors) of the languages to be

learned, than by state-wide educational language planning policies, curriculum regulations, the use of standard teaching textbooks that are distributed world-wide (e.g. Deutsch für alle), and teachers who lack motivation because they are insufficiently trained.

Past conflicts and possible new ones should in no case be suppressed or denied. Instead, they should be the starting point for a new approach, which would ready the linguistically unprepared Europe of 1994 or a conflict-conscious and linguistically more open, i.e. multilingual Europe of the future. Countries like Switzerland, as a non EU-country, and Belgium, as the probable EU center, play a pioneer role that should not be underestimated. If these officially multilingual countries are not able to transform language conflict and multilingual deficits into multilingualism that is marketable, tension- and conflict-free, and based on the educational system of the respective country, then to whom can this responsibility be entrusted? Preferably not to a "Eurocratic" administrative authority of some West European capital!

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