

Book Review

Rjéoutski, Vladislav, Gesine Argent & Derek Offord (eds.). 2014. *European Francophonie. The Social, Political and Cultural History of an International Prestige Language* (Historical Sociolinguistics 1). Oxford, etc.: Peter Lang. ISBN 9783034317830 (paperback), viii, 498 pp. €82.50

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The echo of Joshua Fishman's (1965) basic question "who speaks what language to whom and when?" sounds everywhere in this fine collection of twelve case studies on the use of the French language in a range of European countries outside France from the Middle Ages to the contemporary era, with an emphasis on the early modern period and the nineteenth century. Those countries are medieval England (explored by Marianne Ailes and Ad Putter), Piedmont (Alda Rossebastiano), Italy (Nadia Minerva), the Dutch Republic (Madeleine van Strien-Chardonneau), Prussia (Manuela Böhm), Bohemia (Ivo Cerman), Spain (Amelia Sanz-Cabrerizo et al.), Sweden (Margareta Östman), Poland (Maciej Serwański and Katarzyna Napierała), Romania (Ileana Mihaila), imperial Russia (Derek Offord), and Ottoman Turkey (Laurent Mignon). The essays are preceded by an overview of early modern European diglossias by Peter Burke, the historian who was the first to put the cultural history of language in Europe on the research agenda. The essays, each by one or more authors from the respective country under investigation, are based on a series of seminars organized at the University of Bristol in 2012 on the use of French in single-language communities. This particular focus justifies the omission of multiple-language nations such as Belgium and Switzerland, and, more regrettably, of the Austrian Empire (with the exception of a regional study on Bohemia). It explains also the narrowing of some geographical areas to a single-language playing field, such as Spain, where Castilian is enhanced as the national language 'Spanish', and regional languages like Basque or Catalan are left out of the investigation, although both overlap the French-Spanish border and therefore are intriguing cases for everyday Francophonie, its challenges and its limits. Since the focus is on clear-cut language communities, we may expect that the developments in multiple-language communities with huge French-speaking minorities, majorities or elites will be explored later. The very fine index of the book, a research tool in itself, permits to discover recurrent themes throughout the essays, such as the role of academies, aristocracies, the courts, dictionaries, tutors, etc., and

to go into a very detailed approach of all the aspects, roles and meanings of the French language and of language attitude in European Francophonie. It shows also that bilingualism and multilingualism, though essential dimensions of Francophonie outside the French-speaking countries, were not really a central theme of most of the authors: it is French outside of France that is tackled here.

The approach used is that of historical sociolinguistics. 'Historical sociolinguistics' is also the name of the book series of which this collection of papers is the first volume, and it is probably meant to set its agenda. In the opening chapter on the framework for the study of European Francophonie, the editors explain their own research agenda with respect to the topic of Francophonie. At present, historical linguistics is taken in a wider sense than was usual formerly in the linguistic research community, because it involves now not only linguistics in historical context, but also the socio-historical and the socio-cultural approach to language use. Yet, the authors identify their own approach in historical sociolinguistics as more limited, essentially as the sociology of language. Another variant of sociolinguistics, the historical ethnography of communication, would have been applicable too, and several articles bear elements of such an approach. Incidentally, some of the contributions go into an analysis of linguistic elements as such. But, in general, the sociological or socio-historical approach dominates the volume, corresponding to the research agenda on language spread and language use of the editors, in a more macro-linguistic than microlinguistic sense. There are, however, some restrictions. Globally taken, French is considered here under the angle of a language of civilization, fashionable at the royal courts or among the urban elites, the use of which was enhanced in specific historical periods and among particular social groups, such as the Huguenots, the European Enlightenment intellectuals, or the Napoleonic experience. In theory, French as a language of science and scholarship is included, but in reality most authors remain closer to education, schooling and literature. The concept of Republic of Letters is only present in the contribution on early modern Prussia, the Huguenot exodus and the Academy of Berlin. Overarching questions of this volume involve plurilingualism, in the context of an ever more competitive language market both within and between the European countries; the power of attraction of French culture in a pan-European society marked by growing cultural positioning; processes of acculturation in the European nations, old as well as emerging, or of transculturation – a word that occurs only once (p. 270), in the Spanish context, but may be applicable to more situations described in the book.

In principle, the approach implies a strong accent on language knowledge and language use in everyday life and in particular circumstances or positions.

There are few, but interesting passages about French as a lingua franca, a domestic language or a language of intimacy, and even as a culinary language, but surprisingly very few on French as a language of religion, in spite of the importance of French for international Calvinism as well as for European Jansenism (absent from this volume). In fact, most articles focus on one or more symbolic, mass or political aspects of language use rather than on everyday practice. Central items are in particular language ideology, the rhetoric about the French language and its prestige, French as a language of culture and literature, and more generally, the symbolic position of French in the cultural world of the countries under review, a fair sample of the European nations. It is indeed as nations that these countries mostly are viewed, much more than as communities. This makes it understandable that forms of language use which are more typical for smaller groups or for individual contact remain a bit in the background. Bi- and multilingualism, diglossia and code-switching are duly mentioned in the introduction, but diglossia, taken as a personal form of language proficiency and an individual condition of language contact, is, after Burke's general essay, barely present in the contributions. Burke himself states, probably correctly, that diglossia as a personalized form of language use is typical for older periods in which social identity and individual decisions about linguistic capital prevailed over national identities and community routines.

This brings us, of course, to a more general question: was the rise of Francophonie as a European phenomenon essentially a matter, or a consequence, of individual decisions about language use? Or was it, on the contrary, the result of concerted group actions, community culture, or national policies, including a grand design such as the universal value and mission of the French language as worded by Rivarol just before the French Revolution that would make French for a short moment the language of all-embracing revolutionary change? We may detect a community culture behind the role of the French merchant groups in many of the major European cities. France had the advantage on the two other expanding countries of Europe, England and Germany, that it was not only a huge continental power but also an equally important maritime nation, moreover the most populous of Europe in the early modern period. As several of the essays show, French merchant communities loomed large in the spread of the French language, but even so, their influence upon the surrounding communities must quite often have been the result of individual decisions, because such communities tend to act as in-groups, to jealously guard their foreign identity and to limit their activity outward. Moreover, although merchants are professionals accustomed to writing, they barely or never testify consciously to their language use, contrary to the intellectual elites

and members of the court. Although merchant communities are present in several contributions, their composition and disposition remains a bit vague, whereas the Frenchified segments of the nobility and of the courts, and French-language forms of cultural life (theatre, literature, schooling and correspondence) figure in virtually all the articles.

Although this volume was not conceived as a synthesis in the field of French language use, much studied in the last decades, a general conclusion springs to the fore: the rise of European Francophonie, prepared by the importance of France in several sectors of the economy and the arts during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, was largely the result of the expansionist character of French politics and cultural life ever since Louis XIV, at least until the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, in some domains even during the nineteenth century. This unrelenting positioning of French language and culture on the agenda of international civilization has made French before long a privileged instrument (in some countries or periods, in some professions, and in some social circles or domains of social life even *the* privileged instrument) of transnational European communication. This holds in any case for diplomacy, court life, and the arts, and wherever the French themselves were active, including warfare and commerce. Yet, in spite of some demonstrable tendencies to transculturation, French virtually never took over national culture as such. It remained a cultural addition to global, regional or national cultures that kept their own consistency, and it never became a pan-European value: every region or country has to tell its own story of Frenchness. This explains why, after several centuries of flourishing, European Francophonie, once apparently so powerful in the top sectors of Europe's society, could disappear so quickly and leave barely any traces in quite a lot of European countries.

Reference

Fishman, Joshua A. 1965. Who speaks what language to whom and when? *La Linguistique* 2. 67–88.