

Romantic and Rationalist Models of Linguistic Diversity

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Applying the notion of "cultural model" as customary in Cognitive Linguistics to the ideology of language (and specifically, the evaluation of language diversity, both from an intralinguistic and an interlinguistic perspective), the paper argues that four basic ideologies may be identified: a rationalist and a romantic one, and a nationalist and a postmodern one. The two initial ideologies are underlying, antithetically related models. The two final ones are both synthetic models, in the sense that they try to transcend the initial antithesis. The paper explores the internal logic of the models, the discursive rhetoric that accompanies them, and (specifically for the two synthetic models) their internal tensions.

Key words: *cultural model, language variation, romantic, rationalist, nationalism, postmodernism*

1. Introduction

The question I would like to address in this brief, highly synthetic paper involves the social conceptualization of language variation and linguistic uniformity: what are the cultural models that shape our thinking about language variation, what is their internal logic and their mutual relationship, and how did they evolve through time? The points I intend to make are the following; these will also determine the structure of the text:

- there are two basic cultural models of language variation: a rationalist and a romantic one;
- these have an oppositional and to some degree dialectical relationship to each other;
- in two different historical stages in the evolution of the modern world, ideological attempts to reconcile the models have emerged, but these – a nationalist one and a postmodern one – do not entirely resolve the intrinsic tension between both models.

The immediate background of the present paper is my 2003 article “Cultural models of linguistic standardization”, in which I first presented the mirroring rationalist and romantic views of language variation. Geeraerts (2008) contains an abridged version of this model of models, with specific attention for their contemporary, postmodern versions. The present article will give a succinct and schematic introduction to the models that emphasizes their irreducible relationship. The paper will overlap substantially with the 2003 and 2008 papers, but I will add a number of new elements: additional quotations illustrating the various positions, a systematic description of the argumentative relationship between the models, an improved description of their combination in nationalist and postmodern ideologies, and a brief overview of the reception of the 2003 paper.

As a first preliminary remark, let me specify the notion of ‘cultural model’. As used in Cognitive Linguistics, cultural models are cognitive models active within a culture: possibly competing frames of construal used for conceptualizing realities, that have a social presence within a community (see e.g. Lakoff 1996, Dirven, Hawkins and Sandikcioglu 2001, Dirven, Frank and Ilie 2001). This naturally implies that cultural models may be culturally variable. In the present article, this variability takes a historical form, but apart from that, I will not be

looking into the question whether there is cultural variability in the language models. While it is definitely part of the approach to assume that some cultures or communities may lean more towards the romantic or more towards the rationalist viewpoint, a more radical form of variation would be if the twin models in their dialectic relation are themselves culturally specific, i.e. if some linguistic communities confronted with language variation employ radically different models that do not even remotely fall within the romantic-rationalist spectrum. The very fact that I am referring to ‘romantic’ and ‘rationalist’ models that emerged in the 18th century indicates that they have a culture-specific background, and accordingly, it is legitimate to question their universal validity. But an answer to that question clearly lies beyond the scope of the present article.

As a second preliminary remark, I should place the topic in the broader context of my work. Within the multi-faceted framework of Cognitive Linguistics, I have repeatedly argued for the incorporation of a social conception of language – what I have called the ‘sociosemiotic commitment’ of Cognitive Linguistics, as complementary to the ‘cognitive commitment’ (Geeraerts 2016). The implementation of that commitment takes the form of Cognitive Sociolinguistics as the study of ‘variation of meaning and the meaning of variation’ (Kristiansen and Dirven 2008, Geeraerts 2018). The second dimension of the double perspective involves the way in which language users categorise language variation, that is to say, the way in which they perceive, identify, and evaluate different forms of language behaviour. Roughly speaking, we could then say that the cultural models we are discussing here constitute the high end of a schematic cline of language attitudes. When we are looking at implicit linguistic attitudes, we are basically observing how language users evaluate specific speakers in terms of their linguistic habits. One step higher, we can investigate the explicit opinions that speakers have with regard to specific language varieties, like whether a specific dialect is beautiful not, or whether a specific style is appropriate for a given occasion. On the highest level of abstraction, the level where the current argumentation plays out, we consider the categories and evaluations with which people target, not individual language varieties or the speakers producing those varieties, but language variation per se.

2. A conceptual characterization of the models

As a first major step, let us now look at the basics of the two models. I will first present two older quotations that may serve to introduce the two positions. Next, these positions will be presented in detail in analytic fashion, and their philosophical background will be illustrated.

In (1), Henri Baptiste Grégoire addresses the Convention, the revolutionary French parliament, to persuade them to abolish the use of dialects and minority language, and to only accept French as the national language. The argument frames language as an instrument of communication, and linguistic diversity as an impediment to mutual understanding. Such communicative efficiency is not just a goal in itself. As shown in (2), it specifically also serves a sociopolitical purpose: as the language of instruction, it educates the uncultivated, and at the same time contributes to their political emancipation, by ensuring that they can fully participate in the political process.

- (1) On peut assurer sans exagération qu'au moins 6 millions de Français, surtout dans les campagnes, ignorent la langue nationale ; qu'un nombre égal est à peu près incapable de soutenir une conversation suivie ; qu'en dernier résultat, le nombre de ceux qui la parlent purement n'excède pas 3 millions, et probablement le nombre de ceux qui l'écrivent correctement est encore moindre. Ainsi, avec 30 patois différents, nous sommes encore pour le langage à la Tour de Babel, tandis que pour la liberté, nous formons l'avant-garde des nations.

(...) Mais au moins on peut uniformer le langage d'une grande Nation de manière que tous les citoyens qui la composent puissent sans obstacle se communiquer leurs pensées. Cette entreprise, qui ne fut pleinement exécutée chez aucun peuple, est digne du peuple français, qui centralise toutes les branches de l'organisation sociale, et qui doit être jaloux de consacrer au plus tôt, dans une République une et indivisible, l'usage unique et invariable de la langue de la liberté.

[We can affirm without exaggeration that at least 6 million French, specifically in the countryside, ignore the national language; and that more or less the same number is not capable of entertaining a longer conversation; as a result, that the number of those who speak it properly does not exceed 3 million, and that the number of those who write it correctly is even smaller. Thus, with 30 different dialects, we are linguistically still at the Tower of Babel, whereas with regard to liberty, we form the avant-garde of the nations . (...) But we can uniformize the language of a great Nation in such a way that all the citizens that constitute it can communicate their thoughts among each other without problems. The French people must take care, in a Republic that is one and indivisible, to consecrate the unique and invariable usage of the language of freedom.]

L'abbé Grégoire, *L'unité de langue* 4 juin 1794

- (2) Tous les membres du souverain sont admissibles à toutes les places; il est à désirer que tous puissent successivement les remplir, et retourner à leurs professions agricoles ou mécaniques. Cet état de choses nous présente l'alternative suivante: si ces places sont occupées par des hommes incapables de s'énoncer, d'écrire dans la langue nationale, les droits des citoyens seront-ils bien garantis par des actes dont la rédaction présentera l'impropriété des termes, l'imprécision des idées, en un mot tous les symptômes de l'ignorance? (...) Ainsi l'ignorance de la langue compromettrait le bonheur social ou détruirait l'égalité.

[All members of the sovereign people are eligible for all positions. It is desirable that all may successively fill these positions, and afterwards return to their agricultural or industrial professions. This state of affairs yields the following alternative. If the positions are taken up by men incapable of expressing themselves or of writing in the national language, will the rights of the citizens be safeguarded by laws that are characterized by improper choice of words, by imprecise ideas, in short by all symptoms of ignorance? (...) Thus, ignorance of the language either compromises social happiness or destroys equality.]

L'abbé Grégoire, *L'unité de langue* 4 juin 1794

In (3) and (4), by contrast, language is not framed as an instrument of mutual understanding, but primarily as expressing an identity. It embodies the common customs, the

look on life, the shared history of a people. As such, language in Herder's conception is just as much a sociopolitical factor as in Grégoire's, but crucially, the causality goes in the opposite direction. In Grégoire's rationalist view, the community results from the use of a common language. People become a body politic because they use a mutually understandable language to decide on their common fate; by using the common language, individuals may become a fully fledged member of the democratic community (even though language will not be the only relevant factor, to be sure). In Herder's romantic view, community membership precedes language choice: people opt for a specific language because they already belong to the people that finds its identity embodied in the language. Simplistically, in one case, community membership follows from language use, in the other, language use follows from community membership.

- (3) Der schönste Versuch über die Geschichte und mannigfaltige Charakteristik des menschlichen Verstandes und Herzens wäre also eine philosophische Vergleichung der Sprachen; denn in jede derselben ist der Verstand eines Volks und sein Charakter geprägt

[The most beautiful investigation into the history and the manifold nature of the human mind and heart would then be a philosophical comparison of languages, because in each of them the mind of a people and its character are expressed]

Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* 9.II 1784-1791

- (4) Hat wohl, zumal ein unkultiviertes Volk, ein Volk etwas Lieberes als die Sprache seiner Väter? In ihr wohnt sein ganzer Gedankenreichtum an Tradition, Geschichte, Religion und Grundsätzen des Lebens, alles, sein Herz und seine Seele. Einem solchen Volk seine Sprache nehmen oder herabwürdigen, heißt, ihm sein einzig, unsterbliches Eigentum nehmen, das von Eltern auf Kinder fortgeht

[Does a people, especially an uncultivated people, cherish anything more than the language of their fathers? In it lives its whole wealth of ideas about tradition, history, religion and principles of life, everything, its heart and soul. To deprive such a people of its language, or to disparage it, means to take away its only, immortal property, which goes from parents to children]

Johann Gottfried Herder, *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität* II.10 1793.

Given this initial acquaintance with the two perspectives, they can now be systematically characterized along three dimensions: a semiotic dimension involving the nature of language; a social dimension involving the role of language in society; and an ethical dimension, involving the contribution of language to empowerment and social emancipation. Importantly, the two perspectives are straightforwardly antithetical with regard to each of the three dimensions.

In the rationalist view,

- the proper essence of language is communicative, as a medium of interaction;
- specifically, it is a neutral medium for communicating in a (political) community – neutral in the sense that differences among interlocutors are neutralized;

- as such, it is an instrument of participation and emancipation in a democratic society
- accordingly, any citizen has the right to gain access to that instrument through education.

In the romantic view,

- the proper essence of language is cognitive, as a medium of expression;
- specifically, it expresses an individual or collective identity – identity in the sense of a particular way of seeing the world;
- as such, linguistic variation stands for authenticity and freedom of expression;
- accordingly, any citizen or group has the right to claim respect for their language.

If we delve a little bit deeper into the philosophical background of the basic 18th century perspectives, it can be seen that they are associated with different views on the emergence of language. In a rationalist perspective, language originates as an interpersonal communicative gesture, while in a romantic perspective, language originates as the expression of a world view or a specific experience of the world. The latter may be illustrated by (5), in which Herder describes the birth of language: the passage explains how man, in giving names to the animals (in this case, a sheep) identifies and expresses a specific salient feature (in this case, the sheep's bleating). Language, in other words, involves an experientially grounded cognitive act of categorization.

Herder's story may be contrasted with Condillac's view about the origins of language in (6). Whereas Herder looks for the origins of language in a cognitive, epistemological urge to identify things (and more specifically, to identify them in a specific way that reflects man's understanding of the things in question), Condillac points to a communicative situation. In his story about two children, he describes how a cry for help by one is recognized by the other, and is gradually conventionalized as a specific sign.

- (5) Weiss, sanft, wollicht – seine besonnen sich übende Seele sucht ein Merkmal, – das Schaaf blöcket! sie hat Merkmal gefunden. Der innere Sinn würket. Dies Blöcken, das ihr am stärksten Eindruck macht, das sich von allen andern Eigenschaften des Beschauens und Betastens losriss, hervorsprang, am tiefsten eindrang, bleibt ihr. Das Schaaf kommt wieder. Weiss, sanft, wollicht – sie sieht, tastet, besinnet sich, sucht Merkmal – es blöcket, und nun erkennt sies wieder! 'Ha! du bist das Blöckende!' fühlt sie innerlich, sie hat es Menschlich erkannt, da sies deutlich, das ist, mit einem Merkmal, erkennt und nennet.

[White, gentle, woolly – its calmly searching soul is looking for a characteristic, – the sheep is bleating! It has found a characteristic. The inner sense works. This bleating, which make the strongest impression on it, which broke away from all other qualities of observation and touch, emerged, penetrated most deeply, remains with it. The sheep comes again. White, gentle, woolly – it sees, gropes, reflects, looks for a feature – it bleats, and now the soul recognizes it again! 'Ha! it is the bleating one!' it feels inwardly, it has recognized it humanly, since it clearly, that is, with a characteristic, recognizes and names it]

Johann Gottfried Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* 1772

- (6) Celui qui souffroit parce qu'il étoit privé d'un objet que ses passions lui rendoient nécessaire, ne s'en tenoit pas à pousser des cris: il faisoit des efforts pour l'obtenir, il agitoit sa tête, ses bras, et toutes les parties de son corps. L'autre, ému à ce spectacle, fixoit les yeux sur le même objet; et (...) il souffroit de voir souffrir ce misérable. Dès ce moment il se sent intéressé à le soulager, et il obéit à cette impression, autant qu'il est en son pouvoir. Ainsi, par le seul instinct, ces hommes se demandoient et se prêtoient de secours (...). Cependant les mêmes circonstances ne purent se répéter souvent, qu'ils n'accoutumassent enfin à attacher aux cris des passions et aux différentes actions du corps, des perceptions qui y étoient exprimées d'une manière si sensibles.

[He who suffered because he was deprived of an object his passions rendered necessary for him, did not just send out cries: he tried to get hold of it, shook his head, his arms, and all the parts of his body. The other person, moved by this spectacle, fixed his eyes on the same object, and suffered from seeing the other suffer. From that moment on, he feels inclined to help him and gives in to this feeling to the best of his possibilities. But the same circumstances would not occur regularly, or they got used to associate the passionate cries and the bodily gestures with the views and perceptions they so sensitively expressed]

Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* 1746

The characterization that I have given of Herder's position suggests a certain affinity between a Herder-like focus on language as experience-based cognition, and the cognitive linguistic attention for language as embodied categorization. At the same time, the converse perspective in which language is seen as a common communicative tool links up with a more socially oriented view of the language – what I referred to earlier as ‘the sociosemiotic commitment’. In this sense, my insistence on the importance of a sociosemiotic perspective complementing a more narrowly ‘cognitive’ one doubles the point I am trying to make about the joint relevance of a rationalist alongside a romantic model in the debate about language diversity.

3. A rhetorical characterization of the models

Now that the two basic models have been conceptually pitted against each other, a second major step can be taken: how do they relate rhetorically to each other? What types of argumentation are invoked for or against one or the other position? To bring some structure into the overview, it is useful to distinguish three kinds of argumentation: straightforward arguments in favor of one of views, dialectic counterarguments, in which the models are turned against themselves, and inverted arguments, in which the motivating perspective of one model is used to argue in favor of the other. The direct arguments for or against a rationalist and romantic model of language diversity follow fairly straightforwardly from the initial description in the previous section.

- The rationalist tendency to minimize linguistic diversity (or at least, to overarch it by a common language) invokes the usefulness of a shared language, the neutrality of a common language that belongs to all and does not betray a specific geographic or social identity, its

importance as a medium of social, political, economic participation, and its value for education and cultural emancipation.

- The romantic inclination to celebrate and protect linguistic diversity refers to the close link between language, culture, and identity, to the authenticity and naturalness of the identitarian language, to the importance of being respected in one's identity, and to the relevance of maintaining diversity.

The following contemporary quotations may illustrate some of these arguments. At the same time, they demonstrate that the two models are still alive in current debates, i.e. even if they find their origins in the 18th century, they still have current relevance. Both quotations are taken from interviews in quality newspapers.

- (7) El español no es seña de identidad ni emblema ni bandera ... La vieja lengua de mil años y miles de caminos no es vernácula ya en ninguna parte, ni siquiera en la vieja Castilla donde nació ... [ha] devenido en pura esencia lingüística, es decir, en un valiosísimo instrumento de comunicación entre
[Spanish is not a sign of identity, not an emblem or a banner... The old language of a thousand years and a thousand roads is nowhere a vernacular (a local language), not even in Castille where it was born. It has become a pure linguistic essence, that is to say, a most worthy instrument of communication between peoples and communities, a plurinational and multi-ethnic language]
Gregorio S. Caja, *El País* 1995
- (8) Because of colonisation, globalisation and the worldwide move to cities in the last 30 years, a handful of global languages increasingly dominates: (...) 40% of us speak one of just eight languages: Mandarin, Spanish, English, Hindi, Portuguese, Bengali, Russian and Japanese.
"We are losing the richness of human diversity, becoming more and more similar. The languages we speak define how we think and understand the world," says Mandana Seyfeddinipur, director of the endangered languages archive at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
"The loss of human culture is frightening," says Loh. "Nearly all the threatened languages are spoken by indigenous peoples and, along with the languages, the traditional knowledge of these cultures is being forgotten."
Jonathan Loh, *The Guardian* 2014

The basic argumentative opposition between the two models is enriched by counterarguments dialectically subverting the main arguments or assumptions associated with a given position. This is most commonly the case with the rationalist position, which champions of diversity may expose as an ideology, i.e. as a conceptual cover-up of what is actually a mechanism of oppression and exclusion. Linguistic standardization and the propagation of a common language, it is argued, do not achieve the enlightened ideals they aim at but rather realize the reverse. Philosophically speaking, a critical stance of this type boils down to a demonstration that linguistic standardization exemplifies what Horkheimer and Adorno (1947) called the 'Dialektik der Aufklärung' – the (negative) dialectic of

Enlightenment. Horkheimer and Adorno argue that rationalist positions have a tendency to lead to their own dialectical counterpart, in the sense for instance in which a growing technical mastery of man over nature may lead to the destruction of the natural world. So how would this work in the case of language?

As an example, we may have a look at the alleged neutrality of standard languages. Standard languages, in contrast with dialects, are general in three different ways: geographically, in the sense that they overarch the more restricted areas of application of dialects; socially, because they constitute a common language that is not the property of a single social group but that is available to all; thematically, in the sense that they are not restricted in terms of the semantic domains they cover. But that is an ideal situation, and the actual realization of the ideal may contradict the ideal.

First, standard languages are supposed to be geographically neutral, but in actual practice, processes of standardization often have their starting-point in a specific region that is economically, culturally, and/or politically dominant. For people in the other, outer provinces, then, the standard language is not an impartial medium, but it rather affirms the dominance of the leading province.

Second, standard languages are supposed to be functionally general, but to the extent that a language community is not entirely standardized, they are typically used in cultural, educational, scientific, administrative, and political contexts. Thus, if the standard language is the language of public life, the non-standard varieties will be appreciated as the language associated with intimacy, familiarity, the personal rather than the public sphere. Or again, if the standard language functions in typically intellectual contexts like education and science, non-standard varieties will be invested with emotional values. Ironically, the functional generality of standard languages engenders a functional specialization, separating the public sphere from the personal, and the emotional sphere from the intellectual.

Third, standard languages are supposed to be socially neutral, but in actual practice, they are typically the language of an elite. If standard languages are typically used in cultural, educational, scientific, administrative, and political contexts, then those speakers of the language that act in these contexts will more easily learn the standard language or adopt it as their first language than speakers who remain foreign to these functions. While knowledge of the standard language contributes to social mobility, the real social distribution of standard language functions may turn the standard language into an instrument of discrimination. This may specifically affect the educational system. If the standard language is recognized as an instrument of oppression, discrimination, social exclusion, the educational system will likewise be rejected as contributing to such processes of social exclusion. Rather than seeing the school as an institution that spreads knowledge of the common language (and knowledge in general), creating possibilities for social mobility, it will be suggested that the educational system favors language users whose background makes them more familiar with the standard language, and thus reproduces rather than neutralizes social inequality.

In short, the alleged generality of standard languages actually takes the form of a series of specializations, and this may subvert the very ideal that standardization was supposed to serve. When that happens, the original ideal may be critically unmasked as an ideological pretence. In (socio)linguistic circles, this debunking of the rationalist project crystallizes round two notions: Standard Language Ideology, and linguistic ecology. The first primarily takes aim

at ideologies surrounding national, standard languages, while the second predominantly relates to the global landscape of dominant and minority languages. The notion of Standard Language Ideology (Milroy 2000) captures the idea that linguistic attitudes and language policies are often based on a misguided (and actually discriminatory) conception of standard languages as neutral and homogeneous. Lippi-Green (1997: 64) defines it as “a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous, spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class”. Linguistic ecology (Mühlhäusler 1995) investigates how languages interact in given places, and specifically also compete with each other, given that the interaction may involve global languages and local languages. Linguistic ecology may analyse the threat that globalisation poses to endangered languages as analogous to the threat posed by economic globalisation to biodiversity (Skutnabb-Kangas and Harmon 2018).

The popularity in sociolinguistic circles of such an ideological critique of the rationalist stance tends to obliterate the view on the romantic counterpart of the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* – the recognition that a romantic position may just as well turn into its own opposite. The critical logic takes into account that identities are not immutable, and that mere acceptance of diversity and freedom of choice is no empowerment if the choices for the individual are limited. Claiming that all language varieties are in principle equal ignores their real functional and attitudinal differences. In terms of their actual use in given social, cultural, economic domains, language varieties are not equal: the standard register is de facto required in many areas of public life. As such, taking away the normative incentive for non-standard language speakers to acquire the standard variety effectively locks those speakers into a disadvantageous position. Similarly, loosening the educational effort to teach the standard register to children who may be less familiar with it discriminates those children.

A characteristic formulation of this anti-romantic point of view is found in the following quotation, which comes from an op-ed in the Belgian newspaper *De Standaard*. The commentary takes issue with the negative sentiment w.r.t. the standard variety of Dutch.

- (9) Pseudo-progressieve volwassenen gaan tekeer alsof ze een freak show zien wanneer iemand nog mooi Nederlands spreekt. (...) Dat heeft niets met tolerantie en democratie te maken, het is integendeel het meest ondemocratische wat er bestaat. Je laat de cultuurtaal, en het zelfbewustzijn dat daarmee gepaard gaat, aan de elite. En je sluit „gewone” mensen, immigranten inclusief, op in een koeterwaals waarmee ze zich maar in een straal van een dertigtal kilometer begrijpelijk kunnen maken. Als je naar de culturele en intellectuele elite van Frankrijk kijkt, sta je vaak versteld hoeveel van die leidende schrijvers, acteurs, cineasten, filosofen enzovoort de kinderen van vaak doodarme immigranten zijn. Wat ze thuis niet konden krijgen, ontvingen ze echter wel van de ‘*école républicaine*’: een mooie taal, respect voor onderwijs en cultuur. Wat een verschil met onze profeten van het alleenzalgmakend dialect of van het verkavelingsvlaams. (...) Dat is pas een aanslag op de minderbedeelden.
- [Pseudo-progressive adults rage as if they come across a freakshow when someone speaks standard Dutch. (...) That has nothing to do with tolerance and democracy. On the contrary, it is the most undemocratic thing imaginable. You leave the standard

language and the confident attitude that comes with it to the elite. And you lock up ordinary people, including migrants, in a gobbledigook that will serve them in a radius of 30 kms at most. If you look at the cultural and intellectual elite of France, it is a surprise how many of the leading writers, actors, directors, philosophers etc. are the children of poor immigrants. What they did not receive at home, they got from the 'école républicaine': a cultivated language, respect for education and culture. What a difference with our prophets celebrating the use of dialects or intermediate colloquial varieties (...) That is a real attack on minorities.]

Mia Doornaert, *De Standaard* 2003

A third type of rhetorical strategy (next to straightforward argumentation and dialectic ideological criticism) consists of inverted arguments, in which the underlying principle of each of the models is employed to argue for the other. This means, on the one hand, that a rationalist defense of a uniform common language is strengthened by an argument based on identity. Embracing the language or language variety that diminishes or overarches the linguistic diversity is then seen as the adoption of a new identity. The language that transcends the diversity embodies a superior identity, one that benefits the individual by broadening his horizon and opening his perspectives towards all those domains that are typical for standard language use. An example can be taken from John Stuart Mill's often quoted essay on nationalism. The first sentence in (10) specifies the rationalist communicative perspective: a united nation needs a common language. The second part of the quotation translates that idea in identitarian terms: with the new language comes a new identity.

- (10) Among a people without fellow-feeling, if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government, cannot exist. (...) Experience proves that it is possible for one nationality to merge and be absorbed in another: and when it was originally an inferior and more backward portion of the human race, the absorption is greatly to its advantage. Nobody can suppose that it is not more beneficial to a Breton, or a Basque of French Navare, to be brought into the current of the ideas and feelings of a highly civilised and cultivated people - to be a member of the French nationality, admitted on equal terms to all the privileges of French citizenship, sharing the advantages of French protection, and the dignity and prestige of French power - than to sulk on his own rocks, the half-savage relic of past times, revolving in his own little mental orbit, without participation or interest in the general movement of the world.

John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* 1861

On the other hand, inverted arguments pro diversity take over the instrumental perspective of the rationalist model, and typically argue that respect for the mother tongue is effectively helpful from an acquisitional point of view. In an educational context, an attitude that is too negative with regard to the non-standard mother tongue is considered detrimental for the acquisition of the standard variety: treating the language of the children without respect is taking away their self-respect, and will not help them to acquire the standard language. An example is the quotation in (11), coming from a language teaching specialist.

- (11) Omdat we er ondertussen zijn achtergekomen dat als je kinderen eerst deftig hun moedertaal leert spreken, ze daarna des te sneller een andere taal zullen oppikken. Hoe beter je je eerste taal kent, hoe sneller je cognitieve verbanden zal leggen met andere talen. (...) Ongestoord je moedertaal mogen spreken, zorgt er ook voor dat kinderen zich beter voelen in de klas. Ze krijgen meer zelfvertrouwen omdat ze niet steeds op hun hoede moeten zijn dat ze de foute taal spreken.

[Because by now we have found out that if you teach children first to properly speak their mother tongue, they will then pick up more easily another language. The better you know your first language, the faster you will develop cognitive links with other languages. To speak the mother tongue freely in class also means that children will feel better at school. They acquire more confidence because they do not have to be on their guard that they might be speaking the wrong language]

Piet van Avermaet, *De Standaard* 2014

All in all, this survey of the rhetorical strategies associated with the two models illustrates the difficulty of deciding between them. Not only do arguments and counterarguments balance each other out, but it also appears to be possible to combine aspects of one model with the other. This leads to the broader question whether a synthesis of the models can be envisaged.

4. A historical characterization of the models

Two modes of synthesis need to be distinguished: one based on a disjunctive, exclusive logic, in which one language or language variety combines the communicative and the identitarian role, and one based on a conjunctive, inclusive logic, in which different languages or language varieties exist next to each other, embodying various functions and identities. In terms of historically salient ideologies, the first type of synthesis takes shape in the context of nationalism, the second in the context of a contemporary postmodern way of thinking. In both cases, though, the synthesis of the antithetical models is not entirely successful.

Conceptually speaking, nationalism can act as a point of convergence for the communicative and the identitarian models. On the one hand, rationalism has a universalist tendency: a maximally participatory, fully open society involves a universal nation and a world language. But for practical reasons, this is an ideal that is difficult to realize. For instance, the passage from Grégoire that I omitted from (1) reads as follows.

- (12) Quoiqu'il y ait possibilité et même probabilité de voir diminuer le nombre des idiomes reçus en Europe, l'état politique du globe bannit à jamais l'espérance de ramener les peuples à une langue commune. Cette conception formée par quelques écrivains est également hardie et chimérique. Une langue universelle est dans son genre ce que la pierre philosophale est en chimie

[Although it is possible and even probable that the number of languages in Europe may be reduced, the global political situation forever discards the hope of bringing all peoples together to a single language. Such an idea, suggested by a few authors, is at the same time brave and ephemeral. A universal language is in its genre what the philosopher's stone is for chemistry]

Accordingly, the practical realization of the rationalist programme requires a restriction of the universalist drive, a narrowing down of the community of practice within which the common language operates. By definition, that is the nation, if a nation is a community of people who share not only a given territory but also the institutions that organize society in that territory. Those institutions are not merely political or educational or cultural; in the rationalist view, the common language is one of them.

On the other hand, a similar reasoning applies to a romantic conception of language, though not surprisingly in the opposite direction. Romanticism in general has an individualist tendency: the ultimate identity is that of the individual person, and maximal diversity involves individualism. But a purely individual language – a language that is not shared and hence not understood – would fall short of its expressive intentions, and accordingly, to have a functioning expressive language to begin with, the scope of the language is enlarged to an ethnic or cultural group as the bearer of an identity, to a people or a nation, if nation is defined not in terms of sovereign political organization but as a group of people having common origins and traditions (and then of course, language). The link between the two basic models and nation building is in fact already present in the authors that we took as a starting-point for the discussion: Grégoire is arguing for a common language as an instrument for building France as a revolutionary nation, and Herder does not so much argue in favor of individual divergences than argue for the right of linguistically specific ethnic groups to build their own – internally monolingual – nation. (In the original 2003 article, I did not represent this link between nationalism and the initial formulations of the models with sufficient clarity. The paper suggested that the late 18th century formulations preceded the nationalist interpretation of the two perspectives, while voices like Grégoire's and Herder's actually already had nation building in mind.)

The restrictive movement of linguistic rationalism and the expansive movement of linguistic romanticism may so to speak meet in the middle, when the two meanings of 'nation' coincide. This is the essence of nationalism as a historical movement: nation states are the political organization of a people with a shared identity. The common language plays a double role in this nationalist ideal type: as a tool for mutual coordination, it is instrumental in the efficient working of state and society, and at the same time, it embodies the presupposed particularity of the community.

But the nationalist synthesis is obviously not without problems. In light of the foregoing, two problem types may be highlighted. On the one hand, there may be tensions between the rationalist and the romantic side of the synthesis. On the other hand, there is the dialectic danger of achieving the opposite effect from what is intended: of falling in the trap, so to speak, of the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* or its mirror image, the *Dialektik der Romantik* (if we may call it that way). I will illustrate these problems by focusing specifically on the role of identity within the nationalist synthesis.

First, the happy combination of functional and expressive roles only works properly if 'people' and 'state' coincide. As witnessed over and over again in the political history of the past two centuries, a romantic sense of group identity (and the accompanying claim for sovereignty) may be at odds with the existing state. We can see then that the nationalist

synthesis may in fact rely on two different conceptions of identity: the primary romantic one, which is based on a pre-existing ethnic, cultural, religious etc. group identity and which is evoked by Herder under (3) and (4), or the secondary enlightened one, which we encountered in Mill's statement under (10). In the latter case, the identity is an adopted one: membership of the nation implies a deliberate, voluntary adherence to its values. This perspective did not come to the fore quite explicitly in the passages from Grégoire that we cited, but it is present in the background: the specific identity of the French citizen is a revolutionary one. The same idea is expressed in Barère's speech to the revolutionary Convention that is often cited alongside Grégoire's:

- (13) Citoyens, la langue d'un peuple libre doit être une et la même pour tous. (...) Laisser les citoyens dans l'ignorance de la langue nationale, c'est trahir la patrie; c'est laisser le torrent des lumières empoisonné ou obstrué dans son cours; c'est méconnaître les bienfaits de l'imprimerie, car chaque imprimeur est un instituteur public de langue et de législation.

[Citizens, the language of a free people has to be one and the same for all. (...) To maintain the citizens in their ignorance of the national language is to betray the country. It permits the torrent of the enlightenment to be poisoned or obstructed in its course. It means disavowing the blessings of the printing press, because all publishers are public teachers of the language and the legislation.]

Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac, *Rapport du Comité de salut public sur les idiomes* 27 janvier 1794

The distinction between the two kinds of identity underlying the nationalist synthesis corresponds to the distinction that is made in political theory between 'civic nationalism' and 'ethnic nationalism'. On the one hand, civic nationalism is the conception of nationalism in which the nation derives its legitimacy from the active participation of its citizens, through a system of political representation. This is the liberal, rationalist conception of nationalism. On the other hand, ethnic nationalism is the conception of nationalism in which the nation derives its political legitimacy from the cultural identity of the people. This is the romantic conception of nationalism. And both conceptions, needless to say, may clash.

Second, the identity policy under nationalism tends to be homogenizing and oppressive. This occurs both in ethnic and civic nationalisms, with ethnic cleansing on one side and purges of dissident opinions on the other as painful historical examples of how wrong a focus on pure identities can go. Again, our initial examples can serve as an illustration. On the one hand, the impulse to homogenize public opinion in the revolutionary republic led to *la Terreur*; the same Barère who argued for a common language also welcomed revolutionary violence and called to 'put terror on the agenda'. On the other hand, Herder's view of language as essential for the natural character comprised a highly homogenizing conception of the nation (see Bauman and Briggs 2003). Diversity in the nationalist framework is inter-national, not intra-national. So, could there be a synthesis of the models that safeguards the latter?

In the postmodern synthesis of the basic models, the problematic choice for a single or dominant identity is avoided by accepting multiplicity as a point of convergence. From a romantic, identitarian perspective, people may entertain various identities, like feeling both Breton and French, or Scottish and British, or Flemish and Belgian. From a rationalist,

functional perspective, people may master different languages and language varieties, each with their own domain of practical relevance. Both interpretations of postmodern multiplicity come with their own rhetoric: a rhetoric of shifting, fragmented, flexible identities and the absence of a uniform perspective on the romantic side, and a rhetoric of functional differentiation and linguistic repertoires (either intralinguistically, in terms registers, or interlinguistically, in terms of multilingualism) on the rationalist side.

As an example, consider the *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe* issued by the Council of Europe in 2003. The document defines and defends individual plurilingualism as an educational goal within Europe. Plurilingualism is introduced as in (14).

(14) Plurilingualism should be understood as:

- the intrinsic capacity of all speakers to use and learn, alone or through teaching, more than one language. (...) This ability is concretised in a repertoire of languages a speaker can use. The goal of teaching is to develop this competence (hence the expression: plurilingualism as a competence).

- an educational value that is the basis of linguistic tolerance: speakers' awareness of their plurilingualism may lead them to give equal value to each of the varieties they themselves and other speakers use, even if they do not have the same functions (private, professional or official communication, language of affiliation, etc). But this awareness should be assisted and structured by schools since it is no sense automatic (hence the expression: plurilingualism as a value).

Plurilingualism should be understood in this dual sense: it constitutes a conception of the speaker as fundamentally plural and a value in that it is the basis of linguistic tolerance, an essential element of intercultural education.

The two forms of the postmodern model are conspicuously present in the text. The romantic interpretation of postmodernism emphasizes the heterogeneity of identities, even for a single individual: speakers are 'fundamentally plural', and this plurality of identities is described as a value that needs to be recognized. The rationalist strand in the postmodern model reveals itself in the emphasis on the functional differentiation that may exist between languages or language varieties. We find, in other words, a double logic of multiplicity: from the romantic angle, the choice is not for one identity rather than the other, but for both (or more); and from the rationalist angle, the choice is not for one language or language variety rather than the other, but for both (or more).

The postmodern synthesis is far from removing all problems, though. Both problem types that we identified in the context of nationalism are now also present. First, the basic tensions between a rationalist and a romantic perspective may still appear. An acceptance of diversity will only work well if communicative functions and linguistic varieties are neatly demarcated. But that is far from being the case. Even if we accept that there is a plurality of languages and language varieties, there is no natural and undisputed way to determine the territory of each of them. What for instance should be the exact position of Global English in higher education in the European educational area? How far can the spread of English go? Is it okay for certain universities to use only English as a language of instruction and administration as is the case in some institutions in The Netherlands? Or should an effort be made to maintain

the traditional status of the national languages? A rationalist maximization of worldwide communication might favor the spread of English, but it clashes with an identitarian loyalty with regard to the national language.

Second, there is the danger of dialectic backfiring of positions and policies. For instance, romantically arguing for plurilingualism as a recognition of different identities should reckon with the fact that the opportunity to acquire a plurilinguistic repertoire is not the same for all. This is a variation on the point made by Doornaert in (9): non-standard languages may be incorporated in a linguistic repertoire, but the incorporation should not prevent the non-standard speaker from adding the standard to their repertoire, which could for instance be the case if educational opportunities are insufficient. As soon as this recognition prevails, the romantic attitude will have to be complemented by such a rationalist concept as a deliberate educational policy (for instance, as recommended in the *Guidelines* of the Council of Europe). Without such a conscious attempt to ensure equal plurilinguistic opportunities, the plurilinguistic stance may lead to the further discrimination of the monolingual speaker rather than to the recognition of their identity.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, there appear to be two basic cultural models of language diversity: a rationalist and a romantic one – language as communication and language as identity. These models have a consistent internal logic, and a mutually oppositional relationship that takes shape in various dimensions. Historical attempts to reconcile the models do not entirely resolve the intrinsic tension between them. The latter point in particular is important for the overall message I would like to convey: when discussing language policies and linguistic norms, it is crucial to keep both basic perspectives on language diversity in mind. This point has been taken up well in the reception of the original 2003 paper; see e.g. Edwards (2011: 127) and Berthele (2020), whose work on language policy and planning discourse in Switzerland reveals telling examples of “the tensions that systematically emerge when a positive-celebrationalist stance on linguistic diversity is taken”. By and large, the distinction between the two cultural models has been picked up in three lines of linguistic research.

First, diachronically oriented studies into standardization movements have discerned features of the rationalist and romantic points of view in the linguistic histories of a.o. Ukraine (Yavorska 2010), Luxemburg (Beyer et al. 2014), Chile (Rojas 2015), Portugal and Brasil (Soares da Silva 2015), Switzerland (Berthele 2010a, 2015), The Netherlands (Rutten 2019).

Second, whereas the Dutch case study that I included in the 2003 paper is concerned with the language-internal debate about the relationship between dialects, colloquial registers, and standard varieties, other scholars have applied the model to the linguistic effects of globalization, i.e. to multilingualism in its various guises: the spread of English (Polzenhagen and Dirven 2007, Sing 2007), language conflicts between international and minority languages (Dirven and Pütz 2007), and the linguistic situation of migrant ‘newcomers’ (Cornips 2020).

Third, while I have concentrated my analysis of the models on explicitly articulated opinions and high-level ideological reflections, a number of studies have used the framework to study linguistic attitudes in ordinary language users, distinguishing between attributes like

familiarity, emotionality, intimacy, authenticity on the one hand, and usefulness, clarity, formality, artificiality on the other. Examples are Mar-Molinero (2008), Lagos, Espinoza and Rojas (2013), and specifically Berthele (2008, 2010b), who goes into great empirical depth exploring the model-specific associative and metaphorical values of language varieties.

These references suggest that distinguishing between identitarian and communicative models yields an insightful perspective on linguistic diversity. The two models keep each other at bay, in conceptual and rhetorical terms: there is no obvious winner and no easy choice between preferring the identitarian drive towards variation and the functional propagation of uniformization and standardization. Accepting that uneasy balance may act as a corrective with regard to trends like the critical Standard Language Ideology discourse, which in itself is a corrective with regard to a rigid and coercive standardizing policy. In an era dominated by identity thinking and praise of diversity, it is relevant to be reminded of the rationalist position as a legitimate alternative in the debate.

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