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Darquennes, Jeroen

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Language conflict research: a synopsis and some ideas on how to advance it

Jeroen Darquennes, University of Namur

1. Introduction

Some 25 years ago, Haarmann (1990: 1–2) stated that the study of language conflict phenomena was in need of a more solid methodological and theoretical framework. Notwithstanding a number of recent valuable contributions to the field (MacGiolla Chríost 2003; Rindler Schjerve 2003, 2007; Conill 2007) that observation still holds today. A factor that considerably stunts the theoretical and methodological advancement of language conflict research is that the overarching domain of which it is part, i.e. conflict research, is a vast domain that is approached from a variety of disciplines including peace studies, (conflict) sociology, political science, (social) psychology, translation studies, communication sciences and sociolinguistics. Quite similar to what Grin (2003: 175) has observed in the case of the study of language diversity, each of those disciplines maintains its own professional culture that crystalizes around its own conference circuits and journals as well as its formal and informal networks in which interactions with researchers from other disciplines are all in all rather limited. On top of that, the information flow within disciplines does not always seem to function properly. Browsing through the edited volume on *Language policy and the promotion of peace. African and European case studies* (Alexander & von Schehila 2014), for example, one quickly notes that the contributors (the majority of which are sociolinguists) did not really make a great effort to consult readily available sociolinguistic literature on language conflict that could have helped them to more solidly frame the rich ideas presented in their papers. In order to contribute in a positive way to the information flow of sociolinguistic ideas on language conflict, this contribution starts with a brief account of the history and the scope of language conflict research. It subsequently homes in on societal language conflict and presents a number of features of societal language conflict that are repeatedly dealt with in language conflict literature. Inspired by recent studies of language conflict in Norway (Jahr 2014) and South Africa (Du Plessis 2013) and a rare case of open language conflict in Friesland, the contribution ends with a tentative exploration of a number of research avenues that could contribute to a further refinement of language conflict theory.

2. Language conflict research: its history and scope in a nutshell

Although language conflict as a topic is dealt with in linguistic literature prior to the second half of the 20th century (Kremnitz 1990), it took until the 1960s before language conflict phenomena started to be more systematically explored. During the 1970s and the 1980s political scientists, sociologists, social psychologists and sociolinguists contributed to the multidisciplinary advancement of language conflict studies. As Vetter (2015: 105–108) notes, language conflict in European sociolinguistics was soon approached from two (slightly) different angles: one that took root in Catalan and Occitan sociolinguistics (Aracil 1966; Lafont 1971; Ninyoles 1969) and one that developed on the basis of the ideas expressed in research on language contact and language planning (Haugen 1953, 1966).

The Catalan and Occitan approach to language conflict is essentially based on a critique of the concept of diglossia as it was presented in literature on societal bilingualism in the 1960s. Catalan and Occitan sociolinguists stress that diglossic situations are not to be seen as situations that are characterized by a more or less stable distribution of language varieties across domains of language use. They emphasize the dynamic and inherently conflictual nature of diglossia in settings like the Catalan and the Occitan ones where one of two co-existing speech communities politically dominates the other. The conflict phenomena described in Catalan and Occitan sociolinguistics predominantly pivot on the concepts of "substitution" (i.e. the fact that the language (variety) of the dominated speech community is replaced by the language (variety) of the dominant speech community), "normalisation" (i.e. the language (variety) of the dominated speech community replaces the language (variety) of the dominant speech community) and "auto-odi" (i.e. the sort of self-hatred that can be observed at the individual level in situations of societal language conflict). Today, the Catalan and Occitan tradition of language conflict research is, for example, present in the work of Boyer (2009) and Conill (2007).

Next to the Catalan and Occitan approach to the study of language conflict, a second approach emerged in the 1970s that does not centre on the concept of diglossia. It rather reflects ideas and concepts used in literature on language contact, language policy and language planning in European and North American (minority) settings (see, for example, McRae 1983). Edited volumes such as Nelde (1980, 1990) and Jahr (1993a) contain a good sample of the three areas of research that are covered by scholars interested in language contact and conflict. Drawing on Nelde (1992) and Clyne (1996) these areas of focus can be defined as "language", "the individual language user(s)" and "society". The next sections aim at briefly illustrating the nature of language conflict research in each of these three areas.

2.1. Conflict at the level of language

A considerable part of language contact research focuses on mechanisms that tend to block or hamper processes by which one language (or, in broader terms: a language variety) borrows morphological, phonological, phonetic, lexical and syntactic features from another language or language variety (Wölck 1997; Görlach 2009). Rather than using a notion such as contact-induced conflict, researchers refer to (morphosyntactic or other) *constraints* on codeswitching (Myers-Scotton 1993) or they discuss the *unborrowability* of linguistic features (Treffers-Daller 2010). Thomason (2001: 63) reminds us, however, that a certain prudence is called for when claiming that certain features would be unborrowable or not transferrable from one language to another. In principle, anything can be borrowed as long as the individual language users – who, following Weinreich (1968 [1953]: 1) are "the locus of language contact" – allow for it. Haarmann (1990: 2–3) describes this as follows:

> Strictly speaking, a language contact is not a contact of two or more abstract systems of linguistic signs, but rather is contact between people who use those languages. [...] [A] language conflict is not a state of affairs where one linguistic system is in conflict with another system. A language conflict results from contact settings whose conditions are controversially evaluated by people who are involved. The evaluation of the surrounding living conditions illustrates the working of the individuals' cultural ability. Without the capacity of evaluating events in his/her environment the individual would not be capable of even identifying a language contact as a conflict. Since the evaluation of a situation in terms of a language conflict is an activity in the individual's mind, the actual language conflict exists in the person's consciousness.

Hence, when studying the constraints that characterize the speech of individual language users in certain contact settings it is important to be aware of the intricate interplay between intra-linguistic phenomena, the psychology of the language users and the social environment in which they are active.

2.2. Language conflict at the level of the language user(s)

A second type of research on language conflict is closely related to the fields of intercultural as well as intracultural communication. Attention is given to conflicts – others use notions such as "Kontaktkonflikte" (Werlen 1997) or "communication disruptions" (Ehlich 1994) – that occur both in situations of interpersonal language contact in which persons use different languages belonging to different diasystems as well as in situations of interpersonal language contact in which persons use varieties belonging to the same diasystem. As illustrated in the work of Janicki (1993, 2015), contact conflicts or communication disruptions arise because of what people do with words and how these words are interpreted. For example: Sometimes a person produces a certain speech act that is misinterpreted by his/her communicative counterpart; sometimes a person (deliberately or not) uses politically incorrect language that upsets other people; sometimes a person is vexed because of the way in which another person pronounces certain words; and sometimes so-called "hotwords" (like the German words "Heimat", "Kopftuch" or "Vergangenheitsbewältigung") create problems for and among language learners (and even native speakers) because they are loaded with cultural content that is controversially evaluated so that it is almost impossible to use them in an appropriate way without having sufficient knowledge of the culture and history of a specific language community (see Heringer & Wimmer 2015: 175–176 for details).

Next to literature on inter- and intracultural communication also some of the language management literature that follows the principles of Neustupný and Jernudd's language management theory tackles phenomena that – at least from the perspective that is adopted here – could be labelled language conflict phenomena at the level of the individual speaker. As explained by Nekvapil (2016: 15), simple language management includes the evaluation (and, in case of a negative evaluation: the adjustment) of derivations from the "norm" or the ruling ideas and beliefs about language that catch the attention in one's own or the interlocutor's utterances. Language management theory (LMT) thus not only concentrates on the possible communicative problems that arise but also on the way in which they are mended. As things stand now, LMT has not yet been explicitly applied in studies on language conflict. However, given the fact that it focuses on the actual discourse of interlocutors and the way in which this reflects certain (possibly) conflicting norms and language ideologies, it might have the potential to contribute to a better understanding of how language conflict at the micro level of individual language use actually functions and is managed. It might also help to show how individual discourses reflect and/or fuel broader social discourses and as such help to illuminate how the micro, the meso and the macro level of language conflict intersect. Following Watts (1988, 2015), a focus on the micro-macro link (something that is at the heart of language management theory) would be most welcome.

2.3. Language conflict at the level of society

The bulk of literature on language conflict deals with language conflict at the level of society. Those parts of the world that are associated with "notorious cases" of societal language conflict include, for example, Belgium, Québec, Corsica and Pakistan (see MacGiolla Chriost 2003 and Lo Bianco 2016 for other examples). Most of the documented cases of language conflict address situations of what Nelde (1993: 173) refers to as "natural language conflict", i.e. language conflict that emerges from the (long-standing) co-existence of different speech communities on the same territory. Only recently attention has also been paid to language conflicts in settings where historically grown ethnolinguistic tensions hardly play a role or did not gain momentum. Examples can be found at the level of the European institutions (Ammon 2006) or at the level of other supranational institutions (www.languageandtheun.org) or multinational companies (see some of the contributions in Truchot 2009). Nelde (1997: 294) labels such conflicts as "artificial" or "self-imposed" language conflicts that arise "out of situations of compromise in which one or more language communities are disfavored". He adds that such conflicts especially occur "when, motivated by the need for rapid international communication, politically influential economic powers export their languages (and their resulting socioeconomic influence) to their trading partners". Whether the labels "artificial" or "self-imposed" (rather than, for example, "institutional") are the best possible labels for this type of conflict deserves to be questioned. At any rate, such "artificial" or "institutional" language conflicts will not be dealt with in the remainder of this paper. The focus will be on natural societal language conflict and some of the "aspects" of this type of conflict as they have been previously addressed in literature.

3. Some "aspects" of societal language conflict

Based on a more comprehensive account presented in Darquennes (2015), the following sections briefly cover a number of "aspects" of societal language conflict that are regularly mentioned and commented on in literature and allow for a more or less systematic description of language conflict, namely: the causes, the visibility, the manifestations, the focal points, the management and the outcomes of language conflict. Readers should realize that apart from being concise, the tentative list of aspects as presented below is only based on a part of the available literature and affected by the writer's scholarly focus on the situation of European indigenous minority language communities.

Causes of language conflict: As Haugen (1980) notes, language *conflict* at the societal level comes about in situations of societal language *contact*. Such situations are characterized by asymmetrical rather than symmetrical multilingualism. When a speech community A finds itself in a situation of contact with a speech community B, the differences in prestige, status, power, social organization, values, and beliefs as they exist between a speech community A and a speech community B are reflected in the prestige, status, legitimization and institutionalization of language (or: language variety) A *vis-à-vis* language (variety) B (Nelde, Strubell & Williams 1996). As a consequence of these differences – others refer to them as "divisions" or "cleavages" (McRae 1983: 16–23 and Labrie 2003: 41) – language often develops into a significant symbol of social conflict, even if language itself is not the direct cause of the conflict. Mattheier (1989: 1) characterizes language conflicts as diverted social conflicts. Schmid (2001: 4) notes that language has rarely been the major source of conflict, but instead "has been the proxy for other conditions that have challenged the power relations of the dominant group(s)". Alexander & von

Schehila (2014: X) consider language "always and necessarily one of an ensemble of causal pressures that lead to one or the other outcome".

Visibility of language conflict: When language conflict was debated at the Congrès de Cultura Catalana (1978: 13; quoted in Klug 2000: 2) a distinction was made between "latent" and "acute" conflicts (see also Vetter 2015: 106). Inspired by Krysmanski (1971), Nelde (1987a) reproduced this distinction as a distinction between "latent" (or: subcutaneous) and "manifest" language conflict. This distinction inspired him to claim that "language contact means language conflict" (Nelde 1987b). At first sight, this one-liner might seem far-fetched. However, if one takes into account the asymmetrical nature that – albeit to different degrees – characterizes every situation of language contact, one is forced to conclude that language contact is pre-programmed (Willemyns 2009: 60), yet might not always be visible. A distinction is possible between latent language conflict, manifest language conflict, latent language conflict that is on its way of becoming manifest, and manifest language conflict that is on its way of becoming (more) latent again.

Manifestations of language conflict: How language conflict manifests itself is very much dependent on the context in which it emerges. Laitin (1999: 24) states that in cases of language conflict in the OECD states "none of them was linked in any way to significant guerrilla activity". In democratic societies language conflict rather seems to be battled out on a discursive level (see Rindler Schjerve 2003: 49–50; Chilton 1997). The study of language conflict – most certainly in Europe and North America, yet not necessarily elsewhere (Lo Bianco 2016) – concentrates on the study of differences of opinion or incompatibilities between two or more opinions over language in society and hardly focuses on the relation between language conflict and physical violence. The intensity with which these differences in opinion are voiced varies. In an article entitled "Language conflict and change in language visibility in South Africa's Free State Province number plate case" Du Plessis (2013: 145), for example, mentions "degrees of language conflict, ranging from language discontent to more full-blown language conflict". However, language conflict literature is rather silent on how to determine the degree of discursive language conflict and thus, for example, the difference between "language discontent" and more "full-blown" language conflict.

Discursive focal points of societal language conflict: In cases where language conflict is battled out on a discursive level, the differences of opinion usually primarily pertain to either what a language *is* or to what a language *has* (Dua 1996: 8–9). In the latter sense (what a language *has*), the distribution of a language (variety) A and a language (variety) B in so-called private, semi-public or public domains or contexts of language use is at the centre of interest. In the former sense (what a language *is*), the structural properties of a language (variety) are addressed. Language conflicts that primarily (yet not necessarily exclusively) center around *structural language features* seems to prevail in the case of contact between speech communities using a language variety that belongs to the same diasystem. Examples can be found in literature on linguistic nationalism or on the standardization of majority and minority languages (e.g. Baggioni 1997; Darquennes & Vandenbussche 2015). Discussions on *language use* seem to be more typical of language contact involving speech communities that use a language (variety) belonging to a different diasystem. The question is to what extent the use of language (variety) A versus language (variety) B is institutionalized (i.e. taken for granted or not in particular contexts) and the way in which the use of A versus B is legitimized by means of laws or (in)formal language policies that support the use of a language in a specific context or not. The degree of institutionalization and legitimization of a language mirrors its status and prestige in society and is obviously also linked to the status, prestige, social power, and balance of the group that uses the language. Discussions about the use of certain languages in a particular context are thus not to be seen as discussions about the languages themselves but about the weight that these languages have in society, about the relationship between language and social mobility, and about the social pressure exerted by one speech community on another speech community (Gasquet-Cyrus & Petitjean 2009; Janssens 2015; Levine 1990; Witte & Van Velthoven 2011). Sometimes conflicts over language use also occur in "monolingual" communities, i.e. in communities in which different varieties of the same diasystem are used by different groups (Mattheier 1984; Kachru & Bhati 1978; Gasquet-Cyrus 2015).

The management of language conflict and its outcomes: Given the particularity of each language conflict, it is difficult to give a precise description of the mechanisms that are or can be used to provide solutions to language conflict as a societal language problem. In more general terms, one can claim that language policy and planning come into play when attempts are made to tone down or neutralize language conflict. Language policy and planning activities that aim at the status, the prestige and the acquisition of a language or a language variety (for example: the introduction of inclusive bilingual education, measures aiming at the positive discrimination of a certain language group, the introduction of territorial language rights, etc.) might help to settle language conflict over the use of languages (Labrie, Nelde & Williams 1993; Wolff 2014; Sadembouo & Tadadjeu 2014). Language policy and planning activities that aim at the "corpus" of a language (variety) can help to provide solutions to language conflicts with language features as a focal point. A rather well-known approach to settle conflicts over the selection of a variety of a language (or to avoid them from the onset) is to resort to the method of "dialect synthesis" (Wölck 2006: 322). This basically means that a standard variety is developed based on common characteristics of all the available varieties of the language. However, quite some institutional support and a positive political and social climate is needed for such an initiative to be accepted at the level of the language community. If the necessary support and a positive climate are lacking, then corpus planning efforts meant to settle conflict over language matters might very well intensify existing conflicts and/or create new ones. The same holds true for measures aiming at – depending on one's point of view: positively or negatively – correcting the asymmetry as far as the status, the prestige and/or the acquisition of languages in a contact setting are concerned. As Jahr (1993b: 1) observes, language policy and planning activities may themselves "ultimately be the cause of serious problems as well as major conflicts". Or, in the words of Du Plessis (2013: 129):

> It [...] appears that language conflict can arise from either too little or too much language policy, aimed at correcting a situation of asymmetrical multilingualism. Language legitimisation as an instrument for institutionalising a designated language (whether active, as in the case of the titular languages in the post-Soviet states, or non-active, as in the case of the autochthonous minority languages of Europe), and language delegitimisation as an instrument for de-institutionalising a former imperial or "established" language (Edwards 2004, 173–181), both play a central role in provoking language discontent.

4. Which way forward for language conflict research?

It cannot be stressed enough that the paragraphs above only offer a partial account of certain aspects of language conflict. In order to further develop the theoretical foundations of research on societal language conflict, the already available knowledge on the causes, the visibility, the manifestations, the focal points, the management and the outcomes of such conflict has to be elaborated in a constructive critical way. In the following sections a modest attempt is made to contribute to the advancement of research on societal language conflict. Above all inspired by recent studies that address issues of language conflict in Norway (Jahr 2014) and South Africa (Du Plessis 2013) and a rare case of open language conflict in Friesland in the 1950s, it tries to identify a number of potential intersecting avenues of future research.

As mentioned above (section 3), a lot of research on societal language conflict starts from the assumption that language contact settings are asymmetrical settings in the sense that socio-political differences exist between the language groups that are in contact. Those differences are reflected in the languages (or: language varieties) used by the members of these language groups. The societal multilingualism in situations of language contact can be characterized as asymmetrical. In some language contact settings, the situation of asymmetrical multilingualism is experienced as unproblematic. People live with the language differences and the socio-political differences that they reflect. Pre-programmed language conflict does not materialize and is considered to be only latent. In other cases, the situation of asymmetrical multilingualism is experienced as being problematic. Certain actors start to openly question (some aspects of) the language differences and the social differences that they reflect which turns the pre-programmed latent language conflict into a case of open, manifest language conflict. As illustrated by the following examples of language conflict in Norway, Friesland and the Free State province in South Africa, the events that trigger (or at least in retrospect and at first sight seem to have triggered) the process of turning a latent language conflict into a (more) manifest one are – at surface level – quite different in nature.

Norway: In his account of 200 years of language policy and planning in Norway, Jahr (2014) presents a rich analysis of three subsequent periods of language policy and planning in which different solutions to the main societal language problem (the development of Standard Norwegian) have been proposed, debated, put into practice and revised. The first phase starts in 1814, the year in which Norway and Sweden entered into a bilateral union. Earlier the same year, a Norwegian constitution had been adopted, which in the Swedish-Norwegian negotiations later on included – upon insistence of the Norwegians – a clause "stating that the business of the state should be conducted 'in Norwegian'" (Jahr 2014: 17). Although "the Norwegian language" is mentioned in the new constitution, it was not entirely clear what "the Norwegian language" – with the exception of the intended meaning "not Swedish" – was supposed to refer to. In 1814 "the Norwegian language" was not used to name one of the varieties used on Norwegian territory. At the beginning of the 19th century the upper-middle class throughout the country used a spoken, high-status variety that was closely connected to the Danish written standard and is considered to be a creoloid (a mixed language that is used as a mother tongue but unlike a creole has no prior history as a pidgin; Trudgill 1986 and Jahr 2014: 21). The lower classes (peasants and fishermen) used low-status vernacular dialects. Since that situation seems to have worked fairly well, the decision could have been made to use "Norwegian" as a name for the written standard inherited from the Dano-Norwegian Union when used in Norway (Jahr 2014: 25). Yet, in an age of nationalism it was deemed important for every separate and independent nation (or a nation that apart from king, defence arrangements and foreign policy was as good as fully independent) to have its own distinctive language. In the case of Norway this meant that "Norwegian" should be clearly distinguishable not only from Swedish (the language of the country with which Norway would build a rather loose union until 1905) but also from Danish (the language of a country with which it had built a union from 1380 until 1814). So, as Jahr (2014: 24) explains, "[t]he question of a Norwegian language surfaced and needed to be addressed. How could, or should, the new nation develop a language standard of its own, with national characteristics which made it worthy of the name 'Norwegian'?" At the onset, the discussion was to a large extent a philological discussion that, however, also had a public dimension since philologists spread their converging and/or diverging beliefs and ideas about what "Norwegian" was or ought to be in books and journals. The discussions on the nature of "the Norwegian language" gained momentum when the language question was put on the political agenda in the second half of the 19th century. The written standard proposed by Ivar Aasen and called Landsmaal (i.e. "the language of the country"; it could also be interpreted as "the language in the countryside") was not only promoted by several Landsmaal organisations but also "became part of a national political programme adopted by the peasant opposition and the Liberal Party" (Jahr 2014: 59). It was seen "as the written manifestation of the peasant dialects" (Jahr 2014: 58) and as a tool that could both help the rural population to develop "a new cultural sense of self-esteem" (Jahr 2014: 59) and allow political forces to attack the ruling classes whose upper-middle-class speech was not considered to be "Norwegian". The proponents of the Dano-Norwegian upper-middle-class speech and the related written standard also got better organized and decided to transform (one could also say: Norwegianize) the Dano-Norwegian standard (based, i.a. on the literary works of Ibsen and Bjørnson) into Riksmaal. Until the early years of the 20th century the Norwegian language conflict continued to be a Landsmaal vs. Dano-Norwegian/Riksmaal conflict and, as Jahr (2014: 75) notes, "was a question of either/or". Soon, however, a third option – Samnorsk (a pan-Norwegian single-standard) – would enter the scene and would cause sometimes heated debates among proponents of both Landsmaal and Riksmaal throughout the 20th century (see Jahr 2014 for details).

Friesland:[1] In the collective memory of the (older) population of the Dutch province of Friesland, language conflict is inextricably bound up with a riot that took place on 16 November 1951 and is known as Kneppelfreed (i.e. "truncheon Friday"). Truncheon Friday was the outcome of an all in all rather trivial incident that had happened a month before. On 17 October 1951 Sjirk van der Burg, a Frisian vet, had to appear before court in Leeuwarden because of a traffic offense. Since the case took place in Friesland, Mr. van der Burg wanted to conduct his defence in Frisian. The judge (Mr. Wolthers), however, did not allow him to do so. Mr. Wolthers kept Mr. van der Burg waiting for hours for an interpreter and then informed him that interpretation was only available for persons speaking a *foreign* language. Eventually the judge allowed Mr. van der Burg to speak Frisian but immediately added that he officially did not understand Frisian. Mr. van der Burg nevertheless conducted his defence in Frisian, was fined and immediately settled his debts. The judge based his refusal to hear Mr. van der Burg in Frisian on a language policy that had been issued at the court in the 1930s and that strongly discouraged (or even prohibited) the use of Frisian. It only allowed the use of Frisian before court as a sort of last resort (when suspects really did not master Dutch). The incident at the court was soon

[1] The account is based on information available on the following websites: http://www.kneppelfreed.nl/ (last access on 8 September 2017), https://anderetijden.nl/ (special item on ‚Kneppelfreed', last access on 8 September 2017) and https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kneppelfreed (last access on 8 September 2017).

picked up by the Frisian press. On 18 October an article appeared in the *Heerenveensche Koerier* that criticized the judge and stressed that his way of behaviour was in flat contradiction to a directive of the Dutch government that called on public servants active in Friesland to respect and give their full attention to the Frisian language. On 19 October the editor in chief of the Heerenveensche Koerier, Fedde Schurer, accused the judge of childlike, insulting and provocative behaviour. A member of the Provincial States, Tjebbe de Jong, also criticized the judge in a column that was published in the *Bolswarder Nieuwsblad.* Both were summoned for having insulted the court and had to appear before court on 16 November. There was quite some interest in the case that was perceived as a sort of clash between the Dutch-speaking elite and the Frisian-speaking population, among which Frisian students took a prominent place. Since the case was handled in a very small courtroom, most of the sympathizers were forced to wait outside. They started to demonstrate and because of that the local police tried to restore order with the help of the water cannon. In the meantime, Schurer – who defended himself in Frisian and refused to plead guilty – was sentenced to 14 days in prison. Tjebbe de Jong pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 7 days in prison. After the court session, the defendants had to leave the court building through the backdoor. Once outside, Schurer was welcomed as a hero. The police made a charge and people – including Schurer – were wounded. The whole case was followed by a wave of indignation in Friesland and the rest of the Netherlands. Two ministers were sent to the province for a period of two weeks to investigate the incident and to pour oil on troubled Frisian waters. The Dutch government soon decided to meet certain demands of the Frisian Movement. In 1955 the use of Frisian at the level of primary education was allowed, in 1956 the right to use Frisian in court was officially confirmed. These Frisian language rights would later be extended.

The Free State: When a new government took power in 1994, South Africa faced a number of changes, including a new territorial division of the country into 9 provinces instead of 4 provinces and 10 so-called homelands. That new territorial arrangement had consequences for the shape of and the text used on South African number plates. As Du Plessis (2013: 132) explains, number plates were among the first public signs to be changed after 1994. Prior to 1994, 14 different systems existed, one system in each of the 4 provinces and the 10 "homelands". A common feature of all the number plates was "the conventional number plate mark (either at the beginning or end of the plate) denoting the province (or homeland), namely 'O' for Orange Free State, 'X' for Transkei, and so on". When 9 new provinces were established and new names for those provinces were proclaimed, each province introduced new number plates that also featured a new number plate mark. The big challenge was to find a way to meet "the constitutional requirement of using at least two official languages and elevating a language that was previously used as an official language only in the homelands" (Du Plessis 2013: 136). In the case of the Free State (a province with a majority of L1 speakers of Bantu languages and a relatively high proportion of L1 speakers of Afrikaans who clearly outnumber the L1 speakers of English), proposals to use the letters "FV" (reflecting Free State/Freistata/Vrystaat) or to opt for a double system ("FS" alongside "VS" based on the choice of the vehicle owner) were rejected. In 1997 the decision was made to adopt the "FS" licence mark, thus reflecting the Bantu name ("Freistata") and the English name ("Free State"), not however the Afrikaans name ("Vrystaat") of the province. The provincial government claimed that the letters "FS" did "not represent a linguistic item" (Du Plessis 2013: 140). According to the government, they rather fulfilled a purely administrative function and were meant to help to cultivate a new provincial identity. It did not take political actors long to react. Already in 1997 the Freedom Front (a national South African political party protecting the interests of Afrikaners) launched an anti-FS campaign marked by threats about courts cases, protest actions and a complaint lodged with PanSALB (the Pan South African Language Board). Concerned citizens started sending letters to the press. Prominent Afrikaans organisations got involved and made appeals to reconsider the possibility of using "VS" as an alternative for "FS". Newspaper editorials were published on the matter while political parties did not cease to bicker and the Freedom Front worked round to a confrontation with the provincial authorities about "FS". When a new illustrated number plate was introduced in April 2002, the number plate "saga" (Du Plessis 2013: 140) was brought to a close. Hardly any fuss at all was made over the fact that an English phrase ("Free State Province") was added to the number plate. It seems that the illustrations that were chosen for the number plate (rolling hills and grassland, the running Cheetah that is also the symbol of the Free State rugby team, and the "Brandwag" rock at the Golden Gate National Park) contributed to neutralizing the language conflict and indeed contributed to the creation of a "new" provincial identity. The fact that citizens were given the opportunity to put personalized number plates on their vehicles might also have contributed to the neutralization of language conflict.

On the one hand, the cases above are – as already mentioned – indeed quite different. The presented case of Norwegian language conflict (1814–1917) was triggered by a phrase in the constitution, fuelled by national romanticism, and centred around the options related to the creation of one or more written standard varieties of Norwegian. The case of Frisian language conflict was triggered by a court case on a traffic offence involving a Frisian-speaking vet and developed into a discussion over the rights of Frisians to use their own language in education and public domains of language use. The case of language conflict in the Free State was triggered by a change of the design of the provincial number plates. On the other hand, the three cases presented also have some points in common.

If one is willing to accept a broad definition of language policy as "the whole body of oral and/or written (in)formal texts that aim at (re)affirming or changing the language dynamics in (a part or different parts of) society" (Darquennes 2013: 12 based on Kaplan & Baldauf 1997: xi; Ricento 2000: 23, 2010: 212; Schiffman 2013: 3087), then one could claim that it was a language policy act that triggered each of the language conflicts to develop from a state of latent into a state of manifest language conflict.[2] In the Norwegian case, a formal written text (the new constitution) that failed to clearly define "the Norwegian language" left open the possibility of being interpreted as a text that aimed at affirming or changing the corpus, status, prestige and acquisition of the varieties in use at the beginning of the 19th century. In Friesland the judge's deliberate act of affirming a language policy that had been issued at his court in the 1930s, yet ran counter to much more Frisian-friendly governmental directives, provoked a conflict that surpassed the use of language before court. In the Free State, the decision of the provincial government not to include a reference to the Afrikaans name of the province on the number plates on the basis of the argument that the use of letters would not have a linguistic but a purely administrative function and was meant to contribute to the creation of a new provincial identity clearly upset Afrikaans-speakers. They were forced to accept that their language (which is more prominent than English in the Free State) was all of a sudden rendered invisible.

Apart from being sparked off by a language policy act, the three cases also have in common that they are marked by the conditions that, broadly relying on Giegel's model of conflict generation (Giegel 1998: 17), turn latent into manifest conflicts: language conflict is communicated and defined (see also Bonacker 2008: 14) by one or more types of actors who are willing to invest a certain amount of energy and resources in spreading the conflict. The way in which the conflict (discursively) manifests itself and is filled with content is strongly dependent on the beliefs and ideas about language of all the actors involved and, in sociological terms, the "institutional arrangements" ("institutionelle Regelungen", Giegel 1998: 16–18) that surround them.

In order to advance the study of language conflict, it would not only be worthwhile to further investigate the kind of language policy acts that trigger off societal language conflict and to see in how far they match current subdivisions used in language policy literature ranging from overt/covert and formal/informal language policy to language policy actions aiming at the corpus, status, prestige and/or acquisition of a certain language (variety). It would also be worthwhile to try and find out if the three conditions as they feature in Giegel's model of conflict generation apply in other cases of societal language conflict. With the help of discourse analysis and possibly also Janicki's ideas on the role of "conceptual essentialism" in the discursive elaboration of language conflict

[2] This seems to be at least partly in line with Du Plessis (2013: 126) according to whom "l]anguage conflict often starts out as discontent arising from changes in a language regime".

(Janicki 1993), it could also be worthwhile to more closely investigate with what sort of linguistic and stylistic means language conflict is communicated and defined by the different parties involved (see also below). Apart from that, a fine-grained analysis of the "institutional arrangements" that surround or "frame" societal language conflict could, for example, help to shed some light on how societal language conflicts gain or lose momentum.

That societal language conflicts are not stable but rather subject to unpredictable context-dependent changes has been repeatedly put forward in the literature. However, ideas on how to advance the more systematic study of the dynamics of language conflict (including the different degrees of visibility that such a conflict might have over a longer period of time, the different – discursive and/or other – ways in which conflict manifests itself, the different parties and coalitions involved, etc.) are few and far between. The previous section already stressed that in order for a language conflict to turn from a latent into a manifest one certain (groups of) actors (individuals, philologists, journalists, politicians, etc.) have to be willing to invest energy and resources in defining and communicating the conflict. Once they do so, one could argue that they start to develop activities that can be considered as different sorts or types of "language activism". In a report for PanSALB and taking a language rights perspective, Lubbe et al. (2012) developed a language activist typology the core of which is summarized by Du Plessis (2013: 131) in the following way:

> The typology suggests a language-activist sliding scale, ranging from relatively more moderate to relatively more confrontational types of language-activist instruments. More moderate action would include activist research, activist media coverage, language complaints and lobbying. More confrontational action would include the mobilisation of a discontented group of people (which in turn entails petitioning, boycotting, demonstrations, protest, etc.), litigation and violence (which might involve vandalism).

The tentative typology summarized by Du Plessis aims at classifying the actions of language activists by trying to identify *how* (i.e. with what means) they spread their take on a perceived language problem, *what kind* of coalitions they try to build, and *to which degree* their actions are violent. The typology would deserve to be further elaborated and refined. At first glance (and based on an all too superficial reading of Lubbe et al. 2012), the concept of "agenda setting" could be used to enrich the typology. The above cases of language conflict suggest that a language conflict gains momentum considerably once it is put on the political agenda. It then either gets "inflamed from above" or is debated in such a way that it (temporarily) tones down or is neutralized. Next to the political agenda, also the journalistic agenda seems rather strongly to impact on the definition, the scope, the intensity and the "life cycle" of language conflicts. As Bonacker (2008: 12) notes, media rather strongly live on different sorts of conflicts and – through using a certain language and/or certain images – have a strong impact on the way in which conflicts (including language conflicts) are staged. The role of different sorts of media as well as politicians and

political parties as "messengers" in cases of language conflict would deserve to be more carefully analyzed especially with regard to the sort of (metaphorical) language that is used by the messenger(s), the potential connections between language use and the provocation of physical violence and, more generally, the way in which language conflict is (re)defined over longer periods of time. That (language) conflicts are redefined is beyond questioning. Next to the fact that socio-political changes at large have an impact on the way in which language conflicts are defined, different sorts of actors pursuing different sorts of goals cover language conflicts with different layers of meaning (Giegel 1998: 20). One should therefore be careful to pay due attention to the way in which language conflicts "change face" over longer or shorter periods of time and make sure to embed the description of language conflicts in the broader ecology of a certain language contact situation. Jahr (2014), Lubbe et al. (2012) and McRae (1983) but most certainly also MacGiolla Chriost's elaboration of Haarmanns's language-ecological variables (see Haarmann 1986, 1990) could serve as a guide post for accomplishing that goal (MacGiolla Chriost 2003).

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