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Language and motility of migrant communities in Europe

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Chapter 8

LANGUAGE POLICY AND MOTILITY: COMPARING COUNTRIES AND MIGRANTS

Selma Sonntag and Linda Cardinal (2015) outlined three relevant questions in studying language policies from a historical-institutionalist perspective, that have also guided the policy document analyses in this research:

> What are the principles that inform state actions on language matters? What are the institutional and administrative parameters of how the state governs languages? How and why does the state intervene in language choice and language use? (Sonntag and Cardinal 2015: 5).

The concept of 'path dependency' is essential for the historical-institutionalist approach, in the sense that policies of the present can and should be understood within the context of their respective state traditions. The analyses presented here on the Netherlands, France and Sweden were intended to formulate an answer to these questions. In this section a comparison will be drawn between the three countries, and will build on the following questions:

1. *How did the state traditions concerning language policy vis-à-vis immigrants develop from the post-war period until the present day?* The previous chapters answered this question; in this chapter the differences and similarities between the three traditions will be spelled out.
2. *To what extent do these language policy ideologies influence the motility of the immigrants residing in these countries?* Given the three-factored nature of motility (access, competence and appropriation), this second question can be split again into three sub-questions. The questions of 'appropriation' and 'competence' will be mainly addressed when discussing the interviews.
3. *How important is the role of 'path dependency' specifically in the domain of migrant languages?* It is imperative to realise that the document analysis in this research is not sufficient to prove or disprove completely the value of the national model and state tradition approach in general integration and language policy research. Our study focussed exclusively on the linguistic aspect of integration policies, even though that is inevitably embedded in the integration policies as a whole.

The expectation, based on previous theoretical work, was that France, Sweden and the Netherlands would fall more or less into three separate categories, namely

'assimilationist' (France), 'multicultural' (Sweden), and from previously 'multicultural' to 'assimilationist' (the Netherlands). The 'model thinking' tradition of integration scholars, or the idea of categorising countries based on presumed policy ideologies, bears some crucial similarities with the historical-institutionalist approach of Sonntag and Cardinal regarding language policy, especially where it concerns the importance of path dependency. Model thinking also attempts to understand present day integration policy based on the presumed governance tradition of each country. Model thinking has an extensive tradition in the literature. Brubaker (1992) compared the citizenship models of France and Germany, and explained their different approaches ('differentialist' in Germany and 'assimilitationist' in France) based on the institutional traditions of those countries. Joppke (1999) assumed the existence of these models when comparing the United States, France and Germany, although he acknowledged in a later article (2007) that national models in Europe are converging. Bourhis et al. (1997) argued in favour of the existence of four state ideologies (pluralism, civic, assimilation and ethnist) and made them an essential part of their acculturation model. In other words: they claimed that a state's policy ideology has a profound effect on the integration of immigrants. As a final example, Koopmans, Michalowski and Waibel (2012) argued based on statistical data from 1980 to 2008 that West European states were 'path dependent' concerning their integration policies, thus reaffirming the importance of national models. However, the national model approach has been criticised extensively by other scholars. Either its relevance is deemed diminished on empirical grounds (e.g. Joppke 2007, Green 2007), or the notion of national models itself has been called into question (e.g. Bertossi, Duyvendak and Scholten 2015).

These 'national models' are mostly ideal-types, and are mainly treated as such by scholars. They also provide potentially useful tools to clarify certain differences between countries. However, when specifically analysing certain aspects of states' linguistic integration policy for immigrants, it is questionable whether the national model approach and the state tradition approach offer the most useful lens to understand why and how these policies have been put in place.

It was concluded in the chapter on the Netherlands that the Dutch approach could be best characterised as one of 'pragmatic multiculturalism', and not as one that has ever been fully committed to a multicultural approach. Multiculturalism as a policy ideology assumes that all cultures, thus including minority cultures, have intrinsic value and that citizens have the fundamental right to maintain their 'own' cultural identity (Taylor 1994). The Dutch government has never expressed these ideas in official documentation. Language policy towards immigrants has always been inspired by pragmatism. In the guest worker period migrants did not receive Dutch language training and their children received a limited form of mother-tongue education, since it was assumed that these families would return to their countries of origin once their labour contracts ran out. Then in the 1980s, mother-tongue education was introduced, primarily to function as a

bridge to learning Dutch. The Dutch government at most expressed that 'integration is a reciprocal process', but never stated that the immigrant languages have intrinsic value. Mother-tongue education should thus not be seen as full support for the immigrant languages, but as an indirect way to hasten the integration process of immigrant children. The fact that the policy was set up in a laissez-faire way (i.e. immigrants were mainly themselves responsible for the organisation) and only provided for a limited amount of teaching hours per week does not seem to indicate a full commitment to the 'multicultural' and 'multilingual' cause. The policy was slowly dismantled and eventually abolished, for pragmatic reasons: the 'bridge function' was not empirically confirmed by researchers, thus the policy ceased to have a purpose. At the same time, Dutch language acquisition took an ever more prominent place on the political agenda, ending with the current state of affairs where migrants should 'take responsibility' and fund their own Dutch language acquisition classes. This short summary of the policy's history indicates that regarding language policy vis-à-vis migrants, the Netherlands could at no point in history be categorised as a country with a true 'multicultural' policy tradition. Dutch policy is furthermore not conducive to enhancing the motility of its citizens with a migrant background, with regard to the three factors access, competence and appropriation. The linguistic infrastructure (access) is, especially in the present day, not very well developed, whether regarding Dutch language acquisition, or mother-tongue education.

The Dutch experience becomes even more interesting when comparing it to France, a country usually firmly classified in either the 'republican' or 'assimilationist' policy tradition. It could thus be expected that France would solely focus on French language acquisition. After all, assimilation in its classical meaning requires immigrants' full adaptation to the host society culture, whilst virtually abandoning their heritage culture. The works of Georges Mauco seemed to indicate a move in this direction. He claimed for example that migrants' mother tongue, and thus by extension mother-tongue education, is one of the greatest threats to their 'assimilability'. It became clear however that the influence of his work should not be overstated. The French government's idea of assimilation from a linguistic point of view has remained relatively constant since the post-war period. Assimilation meant simply being able to speak French. There is no mention of requiring migrants to abandon heritage cultures or languages, which means that the French notion of assimilation departs from the scholarly version as expressed for example by Gordon (1964) or Berry (1980). However, with the introduction of ELCO in 1973 and the extension of languages taught within this programme in later years, French governments have arguably even stimulated linguistic diversity to a certain extent (despite being primarily focussed on the French language), by granting certain immigrant languages a place in the official school system. Currently it is even possible to follow a wide array of languages, including many major immigrant languages, as fully fledged courses in secondary education, and even to choose them as a subject for the final exam. At the same time, for new immigrants free or at least affordable French

language acquisition classes are widely available. When compared to the Netherlands, France thus has a much more widely developed linguistic infrastructure, that does not seem to fit at all within an assimilationist framework. Ironically, French policy practice concerning language policy is more multilingual than its Dutch counterpart.

Sweden, lauded as the most liberal and multilingual country of the three states in this study, had a peculiar history. It started in a mainly assimilationist tradition, which had been turned around as a response to its guest worker immigration flows in the 1960s and 1970s, and the advocacy of national minorities around the same time period. Sweden is on paper still the most multilingual-friendly country in this study: any minority language is supposed to have a place in the school system, if certain conditions are met. The motivation to set up the policy was both pragmatic, similar to the Dutch situation, but also contained a certain degree of multicultural ideology. Pragmatically, Swedish politicians wished to avoid accusations of being 'assimilatory'. Ideologically however, the Swedish government stated in 1975 that migrants should have a 'freedom of choice'. whether they wish to adopt a Swedish cultural identity, or retain their own cultural heritage. Even though this statement does not prove that Sweden was a fully fledged multicultural country, which would actively and financially support the preservation of its minority cultures, it does indicate a remarkably high acceptance of cultural diversity in the country, that is rooted in the ideology of 'freedom of choice'. Certain remarks on Swedish multiculturalism need to be made however. The country has been primarily focussed on its existing national minorities, rather than its immigrants. This is not illogical, given that the language rights for minorities seem to be largely the result of the advocacy of national minority groups. Furthermore, the language policy has been slowly dismantled, to the point where well organised minority groups set up their own mother-tongue education institutions. This potentially creates similar issues as in the Dutch case, as immigrants themselves will de facto be primarily responsible for mother-tongue classes, which inevitably leads to differences in content and quality. Concerning Swedish language acquisition however, the SFI system is both competently organised and freely available for every immigrant. Sweden is thus in terms of its tradition a peculiar case: it switched from assimilation to high degrees of multilingualism on paper, to a more hollow form of multilingualism in the present day. Its linguistic infrastructure is still comparatively robust: the facilities for mother-tongue education are still in place, and the SFI system is accessible to all.

In short, when maintaining the notion of national models and policy traditions, the three countries fall mainly into different categories from those envisioned in the literature. The Netherlands is currently in a state of laissez-faire assimilation, or as Van Houdt, Suvavierol and Schinkel (2011) put it, a state of 'neo-liberal communitarianism', where immigrants have very few linguistic rights and are for the most part responsible for their own Dutch language acquisition. The French model offers language rights for immigrants, on the condition that they learn French to a high standard. France is thus

from a language policy perspective not as assimilationist as might be expected based on previous scholarly work, and is in fact pursuing a relatively diversity-friendly linguistic policy, that steers closer towards the multicultural end of the spectrum. Lastly, Sweden is still a country that offers extensive rights to its minority language communities, but the practical organisation of the policy and its under-funding make it questionable exactly how multicultural the country still is in practice.

Table 8.1:

Summary of interview results[21]

Groups / Themes	Turks in NL	Poles in NL	Turks in FR	Poles in FR	Turks in SWE	Poles in SWE
Connection host language & socio-economic integration	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
Host language & socio-cultural integration	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Mixed	Positive
Mother tongue & socio-economic integration	Mixed	Negative	Positive	Negative/mixed	Positive	Positive
Mother tongue & socio-cultural integration	Mixed	Negative	Negative/ mixed	Positive	Positive	Positive
Solid quality host- language education facilities	Negative/ mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Positive	Negative/ mixed	Positive/ mixed
Solid quality mother-tongue education facilities	Negative	Negative	Negative/ mixed	Positive (private institutions)	Negative/ mixed	Negative/ mixed
Transnationalism	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
Does government policy vis-à-vis migrant languages influence respondents' attitude towards their mother tongue?	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	Positive	Positive
Does English improve motility?	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
Does mother tongue improve motility?	Negative	Negative	Positive	Positive	Positive	Negative
Does socio-economic status influence attitude towards mother tongue?	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive

Source: interview data Appendix II.

[21] **Table 8.1.** summarises the interview results by categorising the main interview themes. It shows the general sentiment of the interviewees regarding each topic. For example: the data show that the Turks interviewed in the Netherlands generally agreed there is a connection between mastery of the host language and socio-economic integration, hence that cell states 'positive'.

For all the differences between the three countries however, there are also several similarities. First of all, all three countries responded in a similar way to their stream of guest workers in the 1970s: they all set up limited provisions for mother-tongue education to anticipate the return of the guest workers. All three states went through a state of diversity-friendly policy (regardless of motivations) in the 1980s. Starting in the 1990s all three shifted their focus even more to their national (i.e. French, Dutch and Swedish) language, at least rhetorically. These fundamental similarities beg the question how relevant the theoretical classification in national models of integration is in practice, at least concerning language policy vis-à-vis immigrants. This question will partially be answered in a later section of this chapter.

Migrants

The main reason for interviewing both Turks and Poles within the three countries mentioned was to compare an EU migrant group with a non-EU one, to see if some group-based differences could be found. In addition, both groups have a sizeable presence in all three countries studied, and also in other EU countries that are outside the scope of this research, which allows us to study whether processes of 'transnationalism' take place within these communities. In this section the main similarities and differences within and between groups will be listed.

The first, perhaps obvious, similarity between all groups is the importance they attach to learning the host language (i.e. Dutch, Swedish or French) for their socio-economic opportunities within their countries of residence. Virtually all interviewees deemed this of the utmost importance. The ones that had a poor understanding of the host language regretted that this was the case and pointed usually to external circumstances, such as a very busy job, that forced them to neglect their language studies. A similar trend could be seen for socio-cultural opportunities, which in practice means the ability to connect to 'natives' in the country of residents. However, a notable exception in this case are the Turks in Sweden. Speculatively, the Turks in Sweden interviewed were part of a largely self-sufficient community, that experienced little need to connect to native Swedes.

The second similarity concerns the extensive discontent about the practical organisation of linguistic facilities in the countries of residence, both concerning mother-tongue education and host-language acquisition. Usually the courses were deemed too theoretical with little emphasis on practical conversation, the teaching quality was poor, or there was too little time for the courses to be effective. France is a remarkably positive exception, with the Poles in France being very positive, and the Turks in France moderately so, especially about the facilities in the past.

Thirdly, it is obvious that there is a high degree of transnationalism among Turkish and Polish immigrants and their descendants in all three countries. They are often in contact with friends and relatives in their country of origin, or ethnic peers in other EU

countries. This means obviously that they all use their mother tongues on a frequent basis. These extensive transnational contacts do not lead all groups to believe that their mother tongues improve their motility within Europe. It could be argued that, especially given the major presence of Turks and Poles in many European countries, that the mastery of their mother tongue is an asset in connecting with their co-ethnics when migrating. Only the Turks in France, Poles in France and Turks in Sweden seem to identify this mechanism as such. At the same time however, and perhaps unsurprisingly, English is universally valued as a very significant tool for motility.

A fourth similarity is how the interviewees view 'integration'. They mainly identify it in the 'Berryan sense', namely as a reciprocal process where there should be room for their heritage language and culture and the host society language and culture simultaneously. None of the interviewees expressed a desire to assimilate. This result confirms earlier studies, where it was found that in general migrants prefer the 'integration' acculturation strategy (Arends-Tóth and Van de Vijver 2003, Hehman et al. 2011, Rojas et al. 2014).
The main differences between the groups lie mainly in the values they attach to mother-tongue education, and the way government policy influences their attitudes towards the mother tongue. Only the Turks in Sweden and Poles and Turks in France see a positive effect of their mother tongues on their socio-economic and socio-cultural integration. It can be speculated that Swedish policy in practice is more positive towards bilingualism and mother tongues than in the other countries. However, that does not explain why the Turks in France and not the Poles in France value their mother tongues in a similar fashion.

A final difference that emerged is the importance of socio-economic status (SES) for the attitudes of the interviewees towards language in general. Low SES interviewees in general placed a much higher emphasis on the economic aspects of language, which in general made them value the host language over their mother tongue. Sometimes they either opposed mother-tongue education, or even transmitting their language to their children at all for this reason. High SES interviewees placed more emphasis on the cultural aspects of language, alongside the economic ones. They were usually also well informed on the advantages of bilingualism and raised their children bilingually, regardless of the policy of their country of residence.

Documents and interviews: how do 'national models' affect migrants' appropriation and competence?

The study of national models led to two provisional conclusions. Firstly, assuming the national model approach is valid, the categories that are often attributed to France, Sweden and the Netherlands are disputable. Secondly, given some fundamental similarities between the countries, it could be questioned whether in the case of language policy vis à vis migrants, the national model approach is valid at all.

However, after examining the theoretical discussions on national models, several possible hypotheses can be formulated based on the policy practices observed in this research, regarding the effects of the respective policies on migrants' motility. In the Netherlands immigrants would score relatively low on both host-language acquisition and mother-tongue education, given the state of the linguistic infrastructure (access) and the low support for multilingualism amongst policy makers. This might be slightly different for older migrants, who mainly experienced the Dutch system in the 1980s. For France and Sweden, the evaluation should be markedly more positive, since both countries on paper value multilingualism more than the Netherlands and have a more developed linguistic infrastructure. When analysing the interviews in this research these hypotheses are only partially confirmed. Swedish language policy for instance seems to have had a significant trickle-down effect on individual migrant families. It was often mentioned that teachers played a significant role when migrant families decided whether to enrol their children for mother-tongue education classes and whether they should raise them bilingually. For the Poles in France the situation is similar, however not so for the Turks in France. This difference could perhaps be explained due to differences in language hierarchy (Polish as a European language is perhaps easier to promote than Turkish), or a difference in region (most Poles were interviewed in the Paris region, a significant number of Turks in the Alsace around Mulhouse). These are just examples of the positive effects policy may have, but it is just as interesting that the policy climate does not have any negative effects. Even though in the Dutch case, for instance, the migrants reported very little support for their mother tongues, this barely influenced their view on their mother tongues in a negative way. Similar to other countries, support for bilingualism was dependent on socio-economic status, with the only difference being that there was no teacher to raise support for mother-tongue transmission amongst low SES parents, as there was in Sweden.

This also leads to one of the most important trends observed when comparing the documents with the interview data: the effects of language policy on competence and appropriation should not be overestimated. The economic and cultural capital of the family in which one is born is much more relevant than a country's language policy. The former determines whether a child is raised bilingually at all, and if it is raised bilingually, the quality of the education. Perhaps unsurprisingly, high SES families have a better command of the language compared to low SES families, have more access to information and have the resources to supplement sparse government provision and find extra-curricular education. Especially if these high SES families are supported by a relatively powerful kin-state (i.e. Poland and Turkey) that is willing to set up facilities in the country of residence, the governmental language policy of their country of residence declines in relevance. This development however serves to widen the rift that exists between high and low SES families. Since high SES families have better access to good linguistic facilities, their children will have a better command of the mother tongue, which increases their linguistic competence. Their increased linguistic competence means they possess a higher amount of human capital, and thus also a much higher degree

of motility. Government policy that guarantees at least a minimum standard of competence in the mother tongue could perhaps somewhat mitigate these differences.