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Publication date

2010

Document Version

Submitted manuscript

Published in

Concepts and Consequences of Multilingualism in Europe

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Kuiken, F., & van der Linden, E. (2010). Multilingualism, language policy and language education in the Netherlands and Romania: a comparison. In J. Róka (Ed.), *Concepts and Consequences of Multilingualism in Europe* (pp. 286-302). BKF Fenntartói Kft..

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Multilingualism, language politics and language education in the Netherlands and Romania: A comparison

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1. Introduction

The European Union encourages all its citizens to be multilingual; specifically, it encourages them to be able to speak two languages in addition to their mother tongue. However, in the European Union, language policy is the responsibility of member states and as a consequence, the EU has limited influence in this area. Moreover, since the content of educational systems is the responsibility of individual member states, promoting multilingualism is the responsibility of each member state.

In this paper, we want to compare the linguistic politics and language education in two EU member states, the Netherlands on the one hand, Romania on the other. This comparison is interesting for several reasons:

Firstly, the situation of the languages of both countries within the European space is comparable because Dutch and Romanian take an intermediate position between the small and the big (large?) languages within the EU (both languages have between 20 and 25 million mother tongue speakers). In the second place, there is a marked contrast between the two countries: the Netherlands being one of the oldest EU states, Romania being a recent member (since January 2007) that still has to adapt to European standards. In the third place, both countries have groups of minority language speakers, but their status is quite different. In Romania, the official language is Romanian and there are a series of minority languages, most of who have been spoken in Romania for centuries. In the Netherlands there are two official languages (Dutch and Frisian) and two officially recognized minority languages, but besides, there is a number of minority languages spoken by immigrants who arrived recently. We will compare the linguistic politics of both countries and the language education in the school systems: what are the linguistic rights of the minority groups, which languages are taught to whom, to which degree is multilingualism an issue in both countries.

2. The Netherlands

For a long time, the Dutch have been in contact with other cultures and their related languages. The Low Countries have successively been invaded by the Romans, the Spanish, the French and the Germans and all these civilizations have left their marks on daily life and language. But particularly in the last fifty years, Dutch society has undergone substantial changes with the arrival of large numbers of citizens coming from the former Dutch colonies, migrant workers from the Mediterranean area, and refugees from all over the world. The Netherlands now count about 16,5 million inhabitants of whom 20% do not have their roots in the country of residence. In total there are about 23 million speakers of Dutch, not only in the Netherlands, but also in the Flemish part of Belgium, the Dutch Antilles and Aruba and in Surinam, a former colony of the Netherlands. There are also considerable communities of Dutch speakers in Germany, France and Indonesia.

2.1 Historical sketch

Whenever two or more languages come into contact with each other, they will influence each other to a more or lesser degree (Appel and Muysken 1987). In the course of time many words have been introduced into Dutch by the invaders of the Low Countries and this is how Latin, Spanish, French and German words have been integrated into Dutch. Some examples are: *muur* ('wall', < Latin: *murus*); *casco* ('body', < Spanish: *casco*); *politie* ('police', < French: *police*); *vuistregel* ('rule of thumb', < German: *Faustregel*).

In the second half of the twentieth century numerous citizens from the former Dutch colonies Indonesia and Surinam came to the Netherlands. After the transfer of Indonesia in 1949, thousands of Moluccan soldiers and *Indische Nederlanders* ('Indonesian Dutchmen') migrated to the Netherlands. Among them were many Chinese who often started a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, and in this way many words from Chinese and Bahasa Indonesia, often referring to food and kitchen utensils have entered the Dutch language, like: *loempia* ('spring roll', < Indonesian); *babi pangang* ('roasted pork', < Indonesian); *mihoen* ('thin Chinese noodles', < Chinese); *tofoe* ('tofu, bean curd', < Chinese).

With the independence of Surinam in 1975 and the later political clashes many Surinamese decided to continue their life in the Netherlands. Most of the Surinamese living in the Netherlands come from a Creole background. Their language is Sranantongo, a Creole language based on English. The Indo-Surinamese community speaks Sarnami, a language close to Hindi, but with influences of Sranan, Dutch and English. During the colonial period, a variety of Dutch was developed, called Surinamese Dutch. Most Surinamese speak Surinamese Dutch; Sranan and Sarnami are used as a means to express identity and mutual solidarity. The inhabitants from the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba speak Papiamentu at home, a Creole language based on Portuguese. Examples of words from Sranan, Suriname Dutch and Papiamentu that have come into use in Dutch are: *bakra* ('white man/woman', < Sranantongo); *hosselen* ('to hustle', < Surinamese Dutch); *carco* ('edible sea slug', < Papiamentu).

In the fifties and sixties large numbers of migrant workers from countries around the Mediterranean arrived in the Netherlands, who were later followed by their wives and children. These communities have also left their traces in Dutch, although it is sometimes hard to tell whether some words are due to immigration, tourism or both. Some examples are: *mozzarella* ('type of cheese' < Italian); *gazpacho* ('cold vegetable soup', < Spanish); *retsina* ('type of white wine', < Greek); *fatwa* ('verdict', < Arabic); *kebab* ('roasted meat', < Turkish).

Official numbers on how many different languages are used in the Netherlands do not exist, but a study carried out in The Hague (Extra, Aarts, van der Avoird, Broeder and Yağmur 2001) gives us some idea of the most used ethnic minority languages: when pupils from primary and secondary school children were asked which language(s) they spoke at home it turned out that 21 languages were mentioned by 97% of the pupils. These languages are: Turkish, Sarnami, Berber, Arabic, English, Sranantongo, Papiamentu, Kurdish, Spanish, Urdu, French, Chinese, German, Somalian/Asharaaf, Javanese, Portuguese, Italian, Akan/Twi/Ghanese, Farsi, Moluccan/Malay, and Servian/Croatian/Bosnian. In fact, by strolling through the four largest towns in the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht), one can easily come across these languages by watching shop windows and by reading the texts in the windows. Some examples are: Coffee Company, My Com

(English); Al Jaberi, Nasafi (Arabic); Dönerland, Anadolu Firini (Turkish); Toko Sentosa (Indonesian).

2.2 Language policy

Due to the relatively large number of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands, information from local authorities about housing, public transport and health care is often announced in various languages. At least, this was the case until recently. Nowadays, this service is under discussion as it would reduce the need to learn Dutch, which is considered to be the crucial aspect of a good integration process. Since the introduction of the 'Wet Inburgering in 2007 (the Citizenship Law, a law for newcomers), migrants have to pass a test of spoken Dutch before they can enter the country and after being admitted to the Netherlands they are obliged to take a citizenship exam. This exam includes a language test, by means of which they have to demonstrate that they are able to speak and understand Dutch at level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference. In this way the Dutch government tries to encourage migrants to integrate into Dutch society and to improve their level of proficiency in Dutch.

Besides the languages spoken in the Netherlands that have come from abroad, there are several varieties of Dutch spoken in the Netherlands. Although standard Dutch is taught at school and understood by everybody, the language used by 'the man in the street' differs from north to south and from east to west. These are 'normal' dialectal differences which can be distinguished in many countries and languages. There is, however, one exception. In the northern part of the Netherlands in the province of Friesland another language is spoken, namely Frisian. There are almost 500.000 speakers of Frisian who, surrounded by Dutch, all are able to use Dutch as well. Dutch and Frisian are both recognized as official languages in the Netherlands. This means that they get support from the government, and that they can be used in court, in official documents and in education. Besides these two officially recognized languages two varieties of Dutch have received the status of regional language, namely Low Saxon and Limburgish. Low Saxon is spoken in the (north) eastern part of the Netherlands, Limburgish in the far south east of the country, in the province of Limburg. The use of these regional languages is encouraged by the government (also financially), but they cannot be used in official documents, in court or as language of instruction at school.

2.3 Language in education

At school the language of instruction is Dutch. In Friesland Frisian may be used instead of Dutch, at least in preschool education and at primary school. At primary school all pupils receive lessons in English for a total of 80 to 100 hours in grade 5 to 6 (ten to twelve-years old). A small number of schools start with English as a foreign language at an earlier age, that is from four years on, and their number is rising: 174 schools in 2008 versus 100 schools in 2007 (out of a total of 6913 schools). Bilingual education in primary schools is still under discussion, as results have shown that the proficiency of Dutch in primary schools leaves to be desired. In Friesland 17 schools offer bilingual (Frisian-Dutch) or trilingual (Frisian-Dutch-English) education.

In secondary education, the dominant language of instruction is still Dutch, although the number of schools which offer bilingual education (Dutch-English) is rapidly increasing: 26 schools in 2000, over 100 in 2008 (out of a total number of 532

schools). In secondary education, the study of two foreign languages is compulsory. The languages which are elected most are English (almost 100%), German (86%) and French (almost 70%). Other languages may be chosen as well: Spanish, Italian, Russian, Arabic, Turkish, Frisian and recently also Chinese. Compared to other European countries the Netherlands contain – after Luxemburg – the highest percentage of pupils in upper secondary level general education who are learning English, French or German as a foreign language (European Communities 2007).

In higher education Dutch is also dominant, but the promotion of English goes on. With the implementation of the bachelor/master system in Dutch universities in 2003 the language spoken at bachelor level is Dutch, but at the master level English is recommended. The *Koninklijke Nederlandse Academie voor Wetenschappen* (KNAW, ‘Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences’) supports this development. The committee which has studied the use of Dutch in science writes that ‘The rise of one worldwide lingua franca has enormous advantages, especially in science. Not only in the beta sciences, but also in the humanities and in the social sciences. Therefore the use of English needs to be stimulated with no hard feelings and with elan.’ (Commissie Nederlands als wetenschapstaal 2003).

Lately the general language proficiency in Dutch of pupils and students in all forms and at all levels of education has come under fire. From the late seventies on teachers encountered problems in teaching adequately children from minority groups who showed a general delay in their vocabulary knowledge and reading proficiency, and had problems with subject matters like history, physics, biology and maths, because they were unfamiliar with words which frequently occur in text books, like *assumption, to involve, to address, to refer to, resources* et cetera. At high school children from ethnic minorities are overrepresented in lower forms of secondary education and underrepresented in the higher forms. And in higher education more and more schools for higher vocational education and universities submit first year students to a language test in order to assess their proficiency of Dutch. It must be remarked, however, that not only students from ethnic minority groups are struggling with Dutch, as research has shown that this holds for children with Dutch parents as well, especially when they belong to a lower social-economic group.

For these reasons, recently, the need for an ongoing curriculum with smooth transitions from pre-school activities to primary school and from then on to secondary school and further on to higher education has been advocated (Expertgroep Doorlopende Leerlijnen 2008). For pre-schoolers, programs have been introduced which try to stimulate the development of children in different domains at an early age, among which language development is one of them. At the same time, the Minister of Education has launched plans for both primary and secondary education in order to tackle the declining level of language proficiency of the pupils.

When we say language proficiency, we mean the proficiency level of Dutch, as the proficiency level of children of ethnic minorities in their home language is not part of these plans. We think, however, that the teaching of minority languages deserves special mentioning here. Since the time that primary schools were faced with the arrival of large groups of children from ethnic minorities, there has been an animated discussion whether their home language should be taught or not (Turkenburg 2001). An argument often heard against this position is that the time spent on minority language teaching cannot be devoted to the teaching of the second language which, most of the time, is not yet sufficiently mastered. And then there are practical problems: which language should be taught to Moroccan pupils for instance, whose mother tongue may be Moroccan Arabic or a Berber language like Tarifit,

Tashelhit or Tamazight? Besides that, it is often hard to find good language materials and qualified teachers. For these (and other mainly political and financial) reasons, facilities for teaching minority languages in primary school have been abolished in 2004 by the then Minister of Education. From a linguistic point of view, however, there was no reason to stop the financing of these facilities as research has shown that the teaching of minority languages may stimulate the emotional well-being of the child and that a good base in the home language may facilitate the acquisition of a second language (a.o. Appel 1984). From the perspective of multilingualism and promoting a multilingual society, the decision that was taken in 2004 cannot be explained either.

Summarizing the linguistic situation in the Netherlands, we can conclude that Dutch society is open for other languages, that the number of inhabitants mastering two or more languages next to their mother tongue (the aim of the European Community) is relatively high and that the linguistic landscape in the Netherlands is rather multilingual as can be observed in the public space. The learning of languages is integrated in the educational system and language learners and users have many opportunities to learn and to be in contact with other languages. There are, however, some challenges too. Multilingualism is largely biased versus English and there is a strong selective interest in multilingualism: English and Chinese are considered okay, but the prestige of for instance Turkish and Arabic is low. The Dutch educational system offers few possibilities for the teaching of ethnic minority languages. At the same time the general proficiency in Dutch of mother-tongue speakers seems to decrease, and especially the proficiency of children from a lower socio-economic background leaves to be desired.

3. Romania

Romania has been a multilingual country for many centuries. In the following paragraphs, we will first give a short historical sketch of the development of multilingualism in the country. We then give a survey of the numbers of linguistic minorities in Romania and their linguistic rights. Finally, we discuss the linguistic and educational politics in the country and we give an appreciation of possible future developments.

3.1 Historical sketch

The main language of Romania, and the only official one, is Romanian, a Romance language descending from Latin. Romanian is spoken in Romania and in the Republic of Moldavia. It is also spoken in border regions in Serbia and Hungary. Dialectal varieties of Romanian are also spoken by small groups of people in Macedonia, Bulgaria and Greece. In the course of the last millennium, Romanian has been heavily influenced, especially in its lexicon, by other languages such as Hungarian, Turkish, French, Italian and the Slavic languages and to a lesser extent by Greek and German. It is surprising that there are only a few traces of German in Romanian, despite the fact that large groups of German speaking minorities have been living in Transylvania since the twelfth century. The three main languages spoken traditionally in Romania are Hungarian, German and Romanian. In the eastern and southern part of the country, Romanian is by far the dominant language, the majority of inhabitants are virtually monolingual; in the western regions of Transylvania and the Banat, Hungarian and German take a prominent place besides Romanian. Latin, the source language of

Romanian, was brought to Romania by the Romans, who Romanised Dacia in the 170 years of its occupation (106-275 a.d.). The Hungarians came in the tenth century and settled in the Pannonian basin (nowadays Transylvania and Hungary) and took over political power. In order to fortify their reign, they settled the so-called 'Sékler'-population on the eastern Carpathians and they also brought in German speaking immigrants from the Rhineland and Luxemburg, who settled in Transylvania in the twelfth and thirteenth century and constructed a series of fortified towns. By the end of the fifteenth century, the numerical relation between Hungarians, Romanians and Germans (improperly called Saxons) in historical Transylvania is estimated to have amounted to 60%, 25% and 14%; by the second half of the eighteenth century, these numbers were 56%, 30% and 10% (Kocsis 1990, in Jordan 1998). From the end of the 16th century, each group had its own religion (the Saxons being Lutherans, the Romanians Greek-orthodox, the Hungarians Calvinists) and professional occupations (the Germans were mainly traders, the Romanians peasants; the Hungarian elite lived in the towns but there were also Hungarian peasants living in the countryside). The churches were responsible for the educational system. This made it simple to maintain language and culture. It explains that the German speaking population of Transylvania maintained their language, culture, traditional clothing during eight hundred years, from the twelfth to the twentieth century, despite the fact that their numbers never exceeded 15% of the population.

From 1541 to 1688, Transylvania and the Banat (the south-west part of Romania, close to the borders of contemporary Serbia and Hungary) fell under Ottoman suzerainty. This did not influence much their cultural / linguistic situation, since the Turks respected the religion, culture and language of each group. In the 18th century large numbers of German speaking Swabs were brought by the Austrian imperial authorities to colonize the Banat region, along with smaller groups of Slovaks, Ukrainians, Bulgarians and Czechs. All these ethno-linguistic groups founded their own communities contributing to the still existing mosaic-like ethno-linguistic structure of the Banat.

The two eastern principalities of Walachia and Moldavia fell under Ottoman suzerainty for much longer, from the second half of the fifteenth century to the second half of the nineteenth century. Here again, the Turks did not impose their language, religion or culture. Building mosks was even forbidden, so that the two principalities remained orthodox and Romanian. The fact that they were dominated in the 18th and 19th century by Greek rulers influenced the urban culture and brought lots of Greek terms into Romanian, which however diminished and mostly disappeared after the end of Greek supremacy (1821).

The only part of Romania where Turkish and Islam played a role was (and is the Dobruja), on the Black Sea coast, which was part of first the Byzantine, then the Bulgarian Empire and which fell under Turkish rule since the fourteenth century. Nowadays, there is still a part of the population of the Dobruja which is Muslim and speaks Turkish. The presence of Roma and Jews in Romania has been attested from respectively the thirteenth and the fourteenth century.

The fall of the communist regime in 1989 led to a massive exodus of the German speaking population of Romania, who returned to Germany after centuries, facilitated by the generous politics of Germany with regard to these so-called Spätaussiedler. As a consequence, the German speaking population, which amounted to 400.000 in the 1956 census, fell to 120.000 in the census of 1992 and to 42.000 in 2002. To a lesser degree, the same holds for the Hungarian and the Jewish populations.

Between 1992 and 2002, the whole population of Rumania diminished from 22½ million to 21½ million.

3.2 Linguistic minorities in Romania in the 21st century

The last census took place in Romania in 2002. In such a census, people are asked to state the “etnie” (ethnic group) they belong to, as well as their mother tongue.

According to the 2002 census, the linguistic situation in Romania is as given in table 2 (number of mother tongue speakers per language).

Romanian	19 million		
Hungarian	1,4 million	Slowak	15.000
Rromani	250.000	Bulgarian	8.000
German	45.000	Greek	6.000
Ucrainain	56.000	Czech	4.000
Polish	36.000	Italian	3.000
Russian-L.	28.000	Chinese	2.000
Turkish	28.000	Armenian	1.700
Tartar	21.000	Jiddisch	900
Serbian	20.000	others	17.000

Table 2: number of mother tongue speakers per language in Romania according to the 2002 census (numbers rounded off to thousands). Source: http://www.dri.gov.ro/documents/ds_etniesilbmaternamedii.pdf

It is clear that Romanian is the mother tongue for the vast majority of the population of Romania. Nevertheless, there is a whole series of traditional minority languages, spoken by smaller or larger groups of speakers. Figure 2 gives an image of the distribution of these linguistic groups in the country.



Figure 2: Most important traditional minorities in Romania. /// -Hungarian; \\\) - Serbian; ooo – Ukrainian; xxx – Turkish/Tatar

The blank areas in figure 2 are parts of Romania where the number of minority language speakers is so negligible that these regions are considered monolingual. Two exceptions have to be mentioned here. In the first place, this concerns the romani

speaking population of Romania. Gypsies are found in the whole country. It is hard to tell however how many of them keep up their language. Figure 3 gives an idea how this population is distributed in Romania.

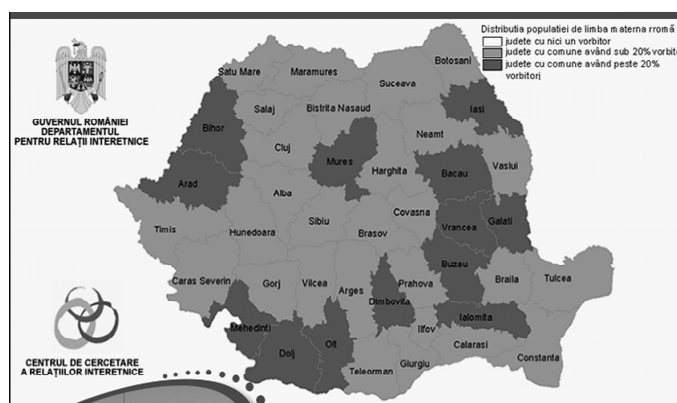


Figure 3: distribution of Rroma in Romania.

In the darker areas of the map in figure 3, more than 20% of the population has declared itself to be Rroma in the 2002 census, in the rest of the country this number is lower.

In the second place, another exception that has to be mentioned here is the capital town of Bucharest, where a relatively large number of Hungarian speaking persons are living, although this does not show in the figure. The number of Hungarians in Bucharest is diminishing: in 1930, they were 24.000, in 2002, there were some 6000 left.

3.3 Linguistic rights of minority language speakers

The Romanian law guarantees a series of rights to the minority language speakers. Article 6 of the Romanian Constitution says that the state recognizes and guarantees for members of a recognized minority the right to maintain, develop and express their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity without any form of discrimination compared to the other Romanian citizens. Article 32 states that the members of the minority groups have the right to acquire their mother tongue and to be instructed in that language. Article 62 says that those minority groups which are too small to be elected and represented in parliament will have the right to elect one delegate representing them in parliament. It is also stipulated that in municipalities where a minority group exceed 20% of the population, the members of this minority have the right to address the authorities – and be addressed by them – in their mother tongue. In the next paragraph, we will discuss what this means for the educational system.

3.4 Educational politics and multilingualism

When discussing educational politics and multilingualism, there are two different groups of learners and languages to be considered. In the first place, there is the position of the minority languages in the educational system; in the second place, there are other foreign language which are taught within the educational system.

3.4.1 Minority languages in the educational system

As shown above, the Romanian state recognizes and guarantees for members of a recognized minority the right to maintain, develop and express their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity without any form of discrimination and that the members of the minority groups have the right to acquire their mother tongue and to be instructed in that language. A recognized minority is a minority with more than 1000 members. Not all minorities have the right to be taught the whole school curriculum in the mother tongue. The number of hours of teaching in the mother tongue is related to the number of speakers of the minority concerned. In 2002, the following numbers of minority children were enrolled in programs where teaching took place entirely in their mother tongue.

	Kindergarten	Primary (cl. 1-4)	Secondary (cl 5-8)	Secondary (cl 9-12)
Hungarian	41207	50192	48581	31013
German	5542	5425	4491	4112
Ukrainian	224	95	129	204
Serbian	329	194	103	154
Slovak	237	355	327	185
Czech	36	52	-	-
Croatian	32	56	-	-
Bulgarian	22	-	-	-
<i>Total</i>	47.629	56.369	53.631	35.668

Table 3: Number of children enrolled in minority language programs.

Source: http://www.old.edu.ro/download/statistici_mino_05.doc

The numbers in this figure suggest that not all children from a minority background go to a school where the curriculum is taught in their minority language.

Apart from the children who receive their schooling exclusively in their mother tongue (and who are taught Romanian as a compulsory second language), there are a series of primary schools where the curriculum is taught in Romanian but where minority children are taught their mother tongue for some hours a week. This concerns 1031 schools and 41.468 pupils, all languages taken together. In this way, the above mentioned law article 32 is obeyed, which says that the members of minority groups have the right to acquire their mother tongue and to be instructed in that language. Most of these children are of a Hungarian speaking background, but all the small minority languages, like Turkish, Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Polish, Russian, are represented. The rromani-language is found in this category as well. Despite the fact that the Rrom are an important minority, they have no schools where the whole curriculum is taught in the minority language. Schooling is generally problematic for this group. According to the 2002 census, about 25% of the rrom population are analphabets.

At university level, only the Hungarian minority has the possibility to follow a study in their mother tongue, at the Hungarian speaking sections of the Babes-Bolyai University of the town of Cluj.

3.4.2 Foreign languages

A considerable number of schools offer foreign language teaching from very early ages. At kindergarten level, immersion programmes are offered in such different languages as French, German, Italian, and Chinese. These do not all have a follow up at the level of primary school however. At secondary school level, almost all pupils learn two foreign languages (mostly French, English, Spanish, German) and there are a few schools with immersion programmes in French, German, English and Spanish. Note that in these schools, there is no possibility to learn a minority language as a foreign language for pupils who are not member of a minority.

4. A comparison between the situation in the Netherlands and in Romania

When we compare the multilingual situation of the Netherlands with that in Romania, we see that at first sight there are a series of important differences between the two languages. While Romania has a longstanding multilingual tradition, The Netherlands have been a monolingual country for centuries, with the exception of the small bilingual province of Frisia. Around 10% of Romania's population has another mother tongue than Romanian, while the Frisians make up something like 5% of the population in the Netherlands. Nowadays, however, 20% of the population in the Low Countries has roots outside the Netherlands and often has another mother tongue than Dutch. Language policy in Romania has been tolerant. Under Ottoman rule as well as under the Habsburgs, all minority languages were tolerated, so that a language like German went on being spoken in some parts of Romania for more than eight centuries. Nothing comparable happened in The Netherlands.

At the same time however, we can see that nowadays, both countries are confronted with the same problems and dilemmas when it comes to multilingualism. This holds for language policy as well as for the educational system of both countries.

As for language policy, in the Netherlands, the official attitude towards the traditional minority language Frisian is positive: Frisian is supported and taught obligatorily in the Frisian province at primary school level, and within the province of Frisia, people are entitled to interact with the authorities in Frisian. On the other hand, no effort is made to maintain knowledge of immigrant languages and cultures among their native speakers. This is evident from a number of facts. For example, instruction in minority languages in public schools has been abolished. Moreover, leaflets from the authorities are more and more only in Dutch. Finally, we see that the monolingual majority does not sympathize very much with the language / culture of the minority groups. One minister even proposed to bilge people to speak only Dutch in the streets.

In Romania, officially, the attitude towards the traditional minority languages is positive. Efforts are made to maintain knowledge of minority languages among their native speakers. There are schools for ethnic minority children of the larger minorities; there is some instruction for ethnic minority children of the smaller minorities. But in the same time, we see that, like in the Netherlands, the monolingual majority does not sympathize very much with the language / culture of the minority groups. We also see that young minority speakers identify themselves more and more with the majority, especially in the case of children of mixed marriages. So in both countries, there seems to be a tendency towards strengthening the role of the majority language.

When it comes to language in education, we find that in the two countries concerned, there are differences but also comparable problems and tendencies. Both in the Netherlands and in Romania, education in the traditional minority languages is

offered to minority children. In Romania, this holds even to tertiary level for the largest minority, the Hungarians. This does not hold for the new minority languages which are present in the Netherlands – and to a lesser extent in Romania. In both countries, we see that foreign language teaching takes an important place in secondary education and also to some extent in primary education. This teaching is however strongly biased towards English: according to the European Language Monitor, 100% of the pupils in the Netherlands and 94% of the pupils in Romania learn English in school. For French, these numbers are 69% and 84% respectively, for German 86% and 12%. We also find in both countries a growing interest in bilingual education, schools offering are two languages of instruction, the mother tongue and another, foreign language. There again, we see a strong bias towards English as the second language besides the mother tongue.

5. Conclusion

A comparison between the language situation in two countries which seem so different as the Netherlands and Romania shows that, apart from the existing differences, there are some striking similarities in these situations.

In the first place, despite efforts to maintain knowledge of the traditional minority languages and regardless of the language policy in these two countries in the past centuries, in both countries there is a centrifugal tendency towards a monopoly position of the majority language. This language (Romanian in Romania, Dutch in the Netherlands) has undoubtedly the strongest economical power and offers most opportunities for its speakers.

In the second place, the English language seems to play a comparable role in both countries. Virtually all pupils learn English in school and more and more bilingual education is offered with English as the second language besides the mother tongue. It is certainly the case that at a supranational level, English plays the role that the majority language plays within the country. It is the language that offers most economical benefits to its speakers. This finding confirms Abram de Swaan's (2001) thesis that English has become the 'super-central' language in our part of the world.

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