

Bryn Mawr College

Scholarship, Research, and Creative Work at Bryn Mawr College

German Faculty Research and Scholarship

German

6-1996

Review of *Language Conflict and Language Planning*, edited by Ernst Håkon Jahr

Nancy C. Dorian
Bryn Mawr College

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.brynmawr.edu/german_pubs



Part of the [Linguistics Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

Citation

Dorian, Nancy C. Review of *Language Conflict and Language Planning*, edited by Ernst Håkon Jahr. *Language in Society* 25, no. 2 (1996): 290-294.

This paper is posted at Scholarship, Research, and Creative Work at Bryn Mawr College.
https://repository.brynmawr.edu/german_pubs/8

For more information, please contact repository@brynmawr.edu.

NANCY C. DORIAN

exertions abroad and find an awkward absence of semiotic order at home, is altogether lacking. This ethnographer did not tread homeward on foot; apparently, he uses a sign-vehicle.

(Received 26 May 1995)

ERNST HÅKON JAHR (ed.), *Language conflict and language planning*. (Trends in linguistics: Studies and monographs, 72.) Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993. Pp. viii, 320. Hb DM 178.00.

Reviewed by NANCY C. DORIAN
German & Anthropology, Bryn Mawr College
Bryn Mawr, PA 19010

Thirteen of the 16 papers in this collection were originally presented at the Sixth International Tromsø Symposium on Language in November 1990. The overall focus is on three issues – language contact, language conflict, and language planning – but with an emphasis on the second of these. There is no internal ordering to the collection; papers stand in alphabetical order by author's name. With neither geographical region nor type of language held constant, the volume suffers somewhat from a lack of thematic cohesion, but many papers hold considerable interest.

I found it helpful to approach the papers via the best represented group of languages, namely those of northern Europe. Four papers deal with Norway in particular. One discusses the position of Sami in a Norwegian-dominated state, while three deal with the rival Norwegian standard languages; each paper highlights somewhat different features of the competition. Tove Bull, "Conflicting ideologies in contemporary Norwegian language planning," emphasizes the degree to which language planning (including attempts to determine orthographic and morphological norms) became a political undertaking in Norway after the Norwegian Parliament began debating language matters at the beginning of the 1860s; she also links an increasing preference for Bokmål, long favored by the urban bourgeoisie, to the change from a rural to a more nearly industrial and urbanized society after World War II. Kjell Venås, "On the choice between two written standards in Norway," agrees strongly with this linkage, and he details the post-war weaknesses of Nynorsk in the prestige competition: Nynorsk was not favored in towns, nor (despite supposedly equal footing) was it used to an equal degree administratively; it was not adopted in the press, and "practically none of the well-dressed men of private industry and commerce spoke or wrote this standard" (268). Ernst Håkon Jahr & Peter Trudgill, "Parallels and differences in the linguistic development of modern Greece and modern Norway," note also that, prior to WWII, the more distinctively Norwegian character of Nynorsk permitted its supporters a claim to superior patriotism. Once the years of German occupation had offered more compel-

REVIEWS

ling measures of Norwegian patriotism, Nynorsk promoters were no longer able to make such an argument convincingly.

Venås also stresses economic and administrative factors favoring Bokmål. Thus school text editions and government documents (postal forms, drivers' licenses, marriage certificates etc.) are not always readily available in Nynorsk, in spite of theoretically parallel availability; under these conditions, Nynorsk speakers grow accustomed to Bokmål materials and may simply accept the situation. If they continue using Bokmål materials, statistics for Bokmål selection naturally rise, while those for Nynorsk fall. Thus the standard language question is still unresolved in Norway. Nynorsk has suffered setbacks in the post-WWII years; but Venås points to fluctuations in popular language sympathies, and considers that the 1980s again showed gains for Nynorsk in western Norway, its original stronghold.

Jahr & Trudgill usefully contrast the Norwegian standard language rivalry with the rivalry in Greece between the grammatically and lexically simpler Dimotiki and the conservative, archaizing Katharevousa. As in Norway, the government has played an active role in language policy, but not in adjusting grammatical or orthographic forms; instead, it determined what form of Greek should be used in the schools and in official spheres. Throughout the first three-quarters of the 20th century, oscillations in language policy tended to occur in rapid succession in Greece, and to swing to greater extremes than in Norway. Thus, during four interludes (totaling 20 years), only Katharevousa was permitted in schools; Dimotiki alone was designated for school use only once, for a mere three years. Nonetheless, the rivalry has been resolved in Dimotiki's favor. This is not because of any linguistic or ideological superiority of Dimotiki, but because the detested government of the military junta (1967-76) imposed Katharevousa, vigorously opposing Dimotiki. At the re-introduction of democracy in 1976, Katharevousa was firmly rejected and Dimotiki was accepted, even by many former supporters of Katharevousa. Jahr & Trudgill point out that, although Nynorsk and Dimotiki were both designed to represent the speech of the common people, and to oppose a conservative standard favored by elites, both contain a degree of artificiality: neither is anyone's actual daily language. But Katharevousa is not fully intelligible to all Greeks, whereas Bokmål is generally intelligible in Norway, and not so radically different from its rival as Katharevousa is from Dimotiki.

According to Nils Jernsletten, "Sami language communities and the conflict between Sami and Norwegian," the postwar period in Norway brought an improvement in the environment for the Sami language. The Sami had by then endured more than a hundred years of strong assimilative pressures from Norwegian society. During this period the coastal Sami, in direct contact with non-Sami Norwegians who were also fishers and farmers, suffered discrimination and other social pressures; little Sami survives today in such

communities. The Sami of inner Finnmark – the largest group within Norway, and the most removed from outside contacts – more easily preserved their traditional way of life, including language. The third and smallest Sami population, the Southern Sami, followed a traditional reindeer-herding economy which favored dispersed small-group living patterns. They experienced some conflict with Norwegian farmers over grazing rights, were conscious of their occupational and ethnic distinctiveness, and were more aware than the inner Finnmark Sami of potential threats to their tradition and way of life. As a consequence, the relatively small population of Southern Sami have produced a disproportionate number of leaders in the growing Sami interest organizations of the postwar years. Jernsletten foresees long-term Sami maintenance only in the Finnmark core cultural area. His exposition of the likely reasons for differential survival of Sami in the three populations will be of interest to students of minority language prospects in other locations.

Anders Ahlqvist, "Language conflict and language planning in Ireland," provides an overview of the historical and political context of efforts to preserve Irish as a spoken language. He contrasts, without dwelling on it, the vital role played in the survival of Welsh by early provision of a Welsh-language Bible, and by active literacy in Protestant Wales, with the lack of an Irish Bible for Roman Catholics until 1981. He offers some rich examples of the problematics of normalizing and "upgrading," for contemporary society-wide use, a language with marked dialects and little technological lexicon. He takes a distanced view of small-language prospects generally, and of Irish-language prospects in particular, suggesting at the close of his paper that the welfare of individuals and the welfare of small minority languages may not be fully compatible.

P. Sture Ureland, "Conflict between Irish and English in the secondary schools of the Connemara Gaeltacht, 1986–88," represents part of a larger study of standard-language penetration in three bilingual areas: Connemara in Ireland, the Grisons in Switzerland, and the South Tyrol in northern Italy. On the basis of an assessment of cross-language influences in parallel Irish and English written texts from Connemara schoolchildren, he concludes that the children's written Irish is not drastically inferior to their written English, despite the lesser reinforcement for Irish in the general social environment. It's not necessarily easy to pinpoint cross-linguistic influences, and I was not always comfortable with Ureland's classifications; but his general conclusion seemed reasonable. Whether it offers the significant counterevidence that he would like to the negative assessment by Hindley 1990 of actual language use, and of survival prospects for naturally spoken Irish in the Gaeltacht, is quite a different question, unfortunately.

Peter Hans Nelde, "Contact or conflict? Observations on the dynamics and vitality of European languages," offers a highly useful overview of contact

REVIEWS

linguistics as a field of study, and of factors that affect language dynamics, negatively or positively. His guidelines are workable and persuasive in the European framework. It should simply be noted that they would not be adequate for the analysis of language contact situations in many other parts of the world.

Several other papers also offer overview approaches to the study of language contact. Don Cartwright's immediate focus in "Sociolinguistic events in an intranational borderland: A nudge to a diverging nation" is on French-English conflict in Canada; but his emphasis on the potential for tension and misunderstanding in borderland regions generally, and the exploitability of that potential by zealous language lobbies (such as U.S. English, and the Alliance for the Preservation of English in Canada), is important in the contemporary context. Joshua A. Fishman, "Reversing language shift: Successes, failures, doubts, and dilemmas," points again to the crucial nature of intergenerational language transmission for small-language maintenance; he warns that, while this is necessary, it may still not be sufficient. Karol Janicki, "From small to large-scale language conflicts: A philosophical perspective," locates the source of most language conflict problems in conceptual essentialism – a viewpoint he sees as giving rise to the beliefs that language-related concepts are fully definable, and that some universally valid notions of "correct," "proper," and "best" can ultimately be identified.

Among the remaining papers, Robert B. Le Page, "Conflicts of metaphor in the discussion of language and race," and Werner Winter, "Some conditions for the survival of small languages," have a larger autobiographical element than is common in scholarly writing, but to good purpose in each case. Le Page brings a creolist's perspective to the study of contact, finding a frequently unwarranted preference for findings of linguistic and genetic discreteness among students of contact. Winter uses his own extended family's language history, as well as his research experiences, to illuminate the dynamics of small-language survival. Both lead him to emphasize, with Fishman, the importance of intergenerational transmission of language within the home. Winter points also to important economic and psychological factors; and he urges, as the only useful intervention outsiders can offer, efforts to strengthen speakers' motivation for maintaining their language. He offers no suggestions as to how this might be done, however. In general it seems to me that he underplays the coercive power of negative stereotyping of small and low-prestige languages, despite his recognition that his own immediate family's maintenance of Low German was the product of unusual psychological and historical circumstances.

Overall, this is a volume to which the reader will need to bring his or her own focus – and from which, correspondingly, s/he will want to select the nuggets of greatest interest. I found the papers focusing on the Norwegian

JAMES PAUL GEE

language situation so rich, in and of themselves, that I would welcome a collection devoted entirely to the various facets of language contact, planning, and conflict in Norway.

REFERENCE

Hindley, Reg (1990). *The death of the Irish language: A qualified obituary*. London: Routledge.

(Received 5 May 1995)

VERA JOHN-STEINER, CAROLYN P. PANOFKY, & LARRY W. SMITH (eds.), *Sociocultural approaches to language and literacy: An interactionist perspective*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pp. vii, 402. Hb \$59.95.

Reviewed by JAMES PAUL GEE
Hiatt Center, Clark University
Worcester, Mass. 01610

This book takes on a huge task. The fact that it cannot fully deliver is more an indication of the current limitations of the field than of the individual authors. The word *interactionist* in the title carries a heavy burden, bringing forward at least two important dimensions. First, it is meant to refer to the role of sociocultural interaction in the development of language. It is here that the book makes contact with the well-known Vygotskian point that, in development, the functions of language (and higher-order thinking) are socially distributed in interaction before they are well represented mentally in the individual (before they are, in Vygotsky's term, "internalized"). Indeed, like much neo-Vygotskian work, the papers in this volume suggest that meaning is, in fact, never primarily about mental representations directly. Rather, they stress the ways in which meaning in all communication is mutual, collaborative, distributed, negotiated, and reciprocal – an emergent property of social interactions and social histories, based on shared or negotiated cultures.

The second dimension of the word *interactionist* is meant to refer to the dynamic and dialectic interactions in development among biological, psychological, socio-historical and socio-cultural levels – that is, among the body, the mind, history, and society. It is, after all, interactions and interrelationships among history, development, and social interaction that ultimately make human communication and culture possible and characteristically human (and not, for example, ant-like, since ants have different bodies, different histories, and different societies).