Introduction: Bilingualism, Multilingualism and the Formation of Europe

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If we were to exaggerate slightly, we might state that the formation of European national cultures starts and ends with a treatise in Latin in praise of the vernacular, viz. Dante’s *De vulgari eloquentia* (‘On the Vernacular’, ca. 1300), the first manifest example of a work about the use of the vernacular, and Jacob Grimm’s inaugural lecture at Göttingen, *De desiderio patriae* (‘On the Longing for the Homeland’, 1830).1 Both treatises advocated a new ideology of national identity based on the mother tongue, expressed in Latin. Within the polyglot world of Europe the international Latin was not merely a language, but the carrier of European culture par excellence, conveying common values and beliefs. If research into the *questione della lingua* (a dispute in the *Cinquecento* on the language to be used in Italy, viz. Latin or the vernacular) has treated Latin and the vernacular languages as conflicting opposites representing a world in transition from a culture based mainly on Latin to a culture expressed mainly in the vernacular languages, the examples of Dante and Grimm qualify this, as well as the vast number of Latin poems, for instance, written after the battle of Jena and Auerstedt as late as 1806.2 In the Hungarian Parliament Latin was used from 1825 when it first reconvened until the year of revolution 1848 in order to avoid affording linguistic hegemony to one of the languages in the nation. Latin is the official language of the Roman Catholic Church even to the present day. When Pope Benedict XVI announced his abdication on 11 February 2013, he did so in a Latin ‘tweet’ of 140 characters. The only Vatican journalist who knew Latin, Giovanna Chirri, had the scoop.3 His official speech of abdication was also in this language.

The traditional account of history fixed the downfall of Latin as a world language (presumed ‘elitist’) in the seventeenth century, with the demotic idioms (presumed ‘egalitarian’) taking over as part of what is usually described

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2 Presented by Hermann Krüssel at the 15th congress of the International Association for Neo-Latin Studies, Münster 2012.
as the emergence of the nation states. However, there is a growing awareness that Latin and the vernacular did not take turns representing an old and new Europe, but rather coexisted together for centuries in overlapping and mutually influential communities. Interest in the intersection between Latin and the vernaculars and its dynamics has increased during the last decade, witness, for instance, some issues of the journal *Renaissanceforum*, the study by Nikolaus Thurn on 'Neo-Latin and the Vernaculars', the work of the Centre for Renaissance Studies in Warwick and the project *Dynamics of Latin and the Vernacular* at the Huygens Institute in The Hague, and Amsterdam and Nijmegen. In particular, the cultures of translation have been studied and reflected upon. Whereas previous investigations were carried out in a more comparative way, nowadays a more dynamic view of Latin and vernacular cultures prevails.

One study deserves special mention. In chapters two and three of his informative study on languages and communities in early modern Europe, Peter Burke discusses the place of Latin in Europe's linguistic spectre. Chapter two, ‘Latin: A Language in Search of a Community’, states that by the ninth century no native speakers of Latin existed any more. Latin ‘sought’ speech communities and found them in the Roman Catholic Church, where it was the liturgical language for ages, and in the international *respublica literaria* and other inter- or supra-national communities, where it became the lingua franca of literates, lawyers, diplomats, scientists and many more. Latin and the vernaculars coexisted and provided an example of ‘diglossia’, ‘in the sense that it was considered appropriate to use in some situations and domains’. In the next chapter, ‘Vernaculars in Competition’, Burke discusses the emancipation of the vernacular languages at the expense of Latin. This is only partly true, he states, viz. for the increase of vernacular printing. However, for a long time Latin kept its position as international language. Burke suggests a comparative approach, which is highly informative. The present volume, however, takes a further step in its approach in terms of dynamics of languages and mutual exchange, although both studies resemble one another in their sociolinguistic approach.


5 See, for instance, Burke, *Lost (and Found) in Translation* and Burke and Po-chia Hsia, *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*.

6 Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, p. 43.

7 See also Deneire, ‘Chapter 22: ‘Neo-Latin and the Vernacular: Methodological Issues’.