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Edited by Marco Tamburelli and Mauro Tosco.
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CHAPTER 1

What are contested languages and why should linguists care?

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The literature on regional and minority languages has seen strong developments in recent years, and new frontiers have been opened on issues of minority language planning and development as well as on issues of speakers' rights. Nevertheless, there are many varieties that are left in a sort of "linguistic limbo" within both the public and the academic domain. These are varieties that likely qualify as regional languages from an *Abstand* perspective (Kloss 1967), but are typically treated as "dialects" or "patois" by their respective governments, by many of their speakers and often by linguists, who typically cite the low sociolinguistic status for their terminological choice. In this chapter we discuss the characteristics of these "contested languages", what underlies their "contestedness" and how they differ from the more widely accepted regional and minority languages. Specifically, we discuss how the very notion of regional "language" presupposes the notion "language" in opposition to that of regional "dialect", though this supposed distinction is hardly ever tackled in any depth by the mainstream literature on regional and minority languages. Furthermore, we argue that the widespread, purely socio-political view of what qualifies as a "language" is untenable as well as undesirable in a discipline that, like linguistics, is also concerned with the structural and communicative properties of its subject matter as well as with objectivity and scientific inquiry. Throughout the chapter, we bring to the fore the need for a discussion of the notion of "language" with a focus on regional varieties and reject the supposedly sociolinguistic nature of the distinction between regional "languages" and regional "dialects".

1. What are contested languages?

In a nutshell, contested languages are languages that are generally listed in international language catalogues and atlases (e.g., they are duly reported in *Ethnologue*, have an unambiguous ISO 639 code, and many of them are listed in the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger), but that have not attained any reasonable

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degree of official political recognition by the states within which they are spoken. Although contested languages are in some sense minority languages and are generally endangered, they are not coterminous with either minority or endangered languages: minority languages that enjoy some amount of recognition, "protection,"[1] or support escape contestedness by definition. Many endangered languages also benefit from some recognition, and are therefore not contested. While many contested languages are at risk of disappearing and therefore also qualify as endangered languages, their endangered status is perpetuated partly because of their contestedness (see Section 2 of this volume).

As a consequence of the scarce or non-existent interest and recognition from official government bodies, contested languages are often disregarded by the literature on regional and minority languages. This trend is exemplified by the volume "The Other Languages of Europe" (Extra and Gorter 2001): while the authors purport to focus on 'all those languages apart from the eleven official languages that are ignored in public and official activities of the EU' (2001: 1), all of the languages included in the volume enjoy some form of institutional recognition. For instance, the volume lists Friulan – a language that is protected under Italian state law – among the Regional Languages of Italy, but does not list, for example, Piedmontese (ISO 639–3 pms), which is not recognised under the same Italian state law. The exclusion of languages like Piedmontese in the literature on "regional and minority" languages is in keeping with a political and sociolinguistic definition of what qualifies as a "language", a perspective that is pervasive in the literature (see Tamburelli 2014 for an overview). Such tendency is paradoxical if we consider that a principal *raison d'être* for the interest in minority languages is their study, fostering and development.

This tendency to disregard contested languages is often perpetuated by appealing to the genealogic proximity between contested languages and the official languages of the nation-state(s) in which they are spoken (e.g. Benincà and Haiman 2005; see also the concept of "attack" in Trudgill 1992). However, this is potentially misleading, as it is well known that contested languages have a good level of *Abstand* (Kloss 1967) separating them from their respective state language(s) (see for example Ammon 1989). Furthermore, a number of contested languages have a distinct written literary tradition and display some level of standardisation and corpus planning (usually not the product of binding or semi-binding entities such as state-mandated or state-sponsored institutions).

Nevertheless, these languages are regularly referred to as "dialects" or "patois" in everyday discourse as well as in academic contexts, though some authors have

1. Protection is different from recognition or downright support, though it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what a language is protected from and how.

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occasionally used the terms "disputed languages" (Craith 2000) or "debated languages" (Ammon 2006).

Indeed, it is not uncommon for researchers to acknowledge that many so-called "dialects" or "patois" are in fact languages from a purely *Abstand* perspective, while at the same time continuing to reserve the term "language" only for those varieties that happen to enjoy political recognition from governmental institutions (e.g. Benincà and Price 2000; van der Auwera and Baoill 1998, among many others). Reasons for doing so do not necessarily include any ideological commitment on the part of linguists: simple adherence to a local tradition and the supposed need to be "easily understood" can be rightly invoked. Yet, following a tradition for tradition's sake does not seem to be the wisest course of action; it is certainly not the most scientifically minded one. Moreover, in these cases a note stating the reasons behind one's terminological choices would do the job. Sadly, however, this is often not the case. Examples of this tendency can be found in a wide range of linguistic sub-disciplines, including those that are unconcerned with sociolinguistic questions. This potentially perpetuates the issue of "language contestedness" across the broader discipline and depresses the consciousness of language diversity among both linguists and the general public (cf. Tosco 2017).

If the chasm separating the contested and the officially recognised languages is belittled or ignored, it is no wonder that contested languages typically receive little mention in linguistic reports on bi- and multilingualism, with their speakers systematically reported as "monolingual" (in the national language) even though they communicate daily in both the national language and a contested language. Situations of this kind can be found in many Western European countries such as Italy, Germany and France, and present researchers with an ontological as well as a terminological problem whereby the term "dialect" is used to indicate two radically different and irreconcilable concepts. On the one hand, the term "dialect" is widely used to refer to linguistic dialects, namely varieties closely related to, and with a minor degree of linguistic distance from, the national language of which they are dialects. On the other hand, the term may also be found to refer to varieties that are or have been in a diglossic relationship with a national language but that are neither particularly linguistically close to nor necessarily mutually comprehensible with that national language or its linguistic dialects. The recent development of new, local varieties of the national languages of Europe (cf. Auer 2005) adds further layers of complexity to an already sufficiently complicated picture.

These considerations take us all the way to the time-honoured "language v. dialect" debate, which in much current academic literature is approached from an almost exclusively sociolinguistic perspective, and, more specifically, from the perspective of "*Ausbau*-ization" (Fishman 2008; Tosco 2008): any variety which has been "*Ausbau*-ized" becomes a "language," irrespective of its linguistic distance

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from neighbouring varieties in structural and/or communicative terms. As for non-*Ausbau*-ized varieties, they are "languages" in one of two cases: either they have been declared to be so by government authorities, or they are deemed to be so under the tacit proviso that lack of relevant data prevents linguists from being more specific on their structural diversity from neighbouring varieties (this is the situation in most of the world's countries). Examples of these cases abound: alongside others, Francoprovençal has been dubbed a language in Italy despite the fact that no *Ausbau* variety has ever developed. Of course, the legion of "national languages" which are duly acknowledged in many constitutions (especially in non-European countries) alongside generally one single "official language" (usually the former colonial language) are cases in point. This single fact is enough to prevent them from being dubbed "dialects" in official and academic discourse, and notwithstanding their subordinate sociolinguistic status.

In order to sustain the claim that the distinction between dialects and language is fruitless, recourse is often made to the presence of continua and the widespread idea that dialect chains make intelligibility unusable as a criterion for establishing "languageness." As with links in a chain, each linguistic variety is mutually intelligible with the adjoining varieties, but differences accumulate over geographic distance, with intelligibility decreasing as more intervening varieties are considered, until it finally disappears. Consequently, it is usually presumed that any "language" separation in the dialect chain is therefore arbitrary. This view is so popular among linguists that it is invariably repeated in any freshman course in linguistics (e.g. Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams 2013) as well as in any review concerned with the dialect/language distinction. Thus, Edwards (2018: 17) opens a very recent discussion on nonstandard dialects by acknowledging how "difficult definitions and distinctions can be," immediately followed by the issue of dialect continua. Doing so enables him to then mention the case of Chinese dialects/languages (where degrees of *Abstand* are demonstrably very large, e.g. Tang and van Heuven 2009) in an article devoted essentially to the nonstandard dialects of English (where *Abstand* is rather limited): once again, the substantial *Abstand* differences are ignored and the matter is assumed to be entirely the domain of sociolinguistics. As a result of this position, Edwards' definition that '[n]onstandard dialects, in a word, are those that have not received the social imprimatur given to standard forms' (Edwards 2018: 19) can be easily construed to unite African American English with Cantonese and, perhaps unwittingly, the great majority of the world's languages.

The fact that languages can still be counted even in situations of dialect continua – as mathematically demonstrated by Hammarström (2008) – does not seem to register in a science like linguistics, which has so desperately fallen in love with variation that it apparently forgot that, in order to discuss change, we must first identify the subjects of change. In order to talk about X and Y changing, veering

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towards each other or giving way to Z, we must first identify X, Y and Z. In line with this, it may be worth noting that the problem of continua is by no means unique to linguistics: it is also well-known, for example, in biology (e.g. Nicholson and Wilson 2003). However, it is linguists who often seem particularly zealous in throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

The fallacious idea of the impossibility of language identification (and, by extension, language counting) goes hand in hand with, or perhaps is actually based upon, the commonly held view that all borders are alike. Since one cannot conceive of political borders without taking into account sovereignty, itself one of the cornerstones of the nation-state and therefore a relatively recent political and ideological phenomenon, linguistic borders must necessarily be a construct of linguistics, itself a product of the 19th century and its hubris of imposing categories, names and labels. Reality, especially social reality, we are told, is by necessity fuzzy (a view that has been strongly held among many dialectologists, e.g. Chambers and Trudgill 1998). Languages do not exist: they are a figment of our imagination (e.g. Makoni 2005); or they do exist, but only as a result of a political act (e.g. Pennycook 2007): ways of speech, writing and style are made into a language by power holders and court intellectuals. As scientists – so the story goes – we should rather be content with recording endless variation and continuous change, and use the names of specific languages as nothing more than convenient tags, or maybe as attractors around which reality permanently fluctuates (e.g. Reagan 2004). Credit must be given to Pennycook (2006: 67) for following this line of reasoning to its logical consequences: after having defined language as 'a pernicious myth,' he goes on to question the "grand narratives:" in the absence of languages, it does not actually make much sense to talk of "language" rights or "language" policy.

In such an approach, the word "language" is therefore not applied as a result of a conscious, data-driven attempt to measure "languageness" on its own terms and without resorting to external factors. Quite the contrary, the general consensus is that 'languages' and 'dialects' are basically social constructs and as such they are definable only in terms of socio-political status and breadth of use (e.g. Chambers and Trudgill 1998; Görlach 1985; Janson 2002; Lepschy 2002; Pennycook 2007; among many others). This view, which effectively puts *Ausbau* considerations at the centre of the entity "language," is essentially an implementation of the well-known statement that 'a language is a dialect with an army' (Weinreich 1954: 13).[2] However, as Nunberg (1997: 675) puts it:

2. Although often credited to Max Weinreich, who would have heard it (not come up with it himself) in the Second World War years and then published it first in an article in Yiddish in 1945, the quip has a long and disputed history. Other possible authors include linguist Antoine Meillet, literary theorist Viktor Shklovsky and even the French general Hubert Lyautey.

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> That's the trouble with that "dialect with an army" joke: what it comes down to is simply saying that the question is not our pigeon. [...] But if linguists don't speak to that question, who will?

Indeed, by focussing almost entirely on *Ausbau* considerations, linguists have given up their role in defining their object of investigation and delegated it to the communities of speakers and, more often than not, to politicians (see Tamburelli, this volume, for a more detailed discussion). As both groups have basically no interest in the structural diversity of human languages (perhaps rightly so),[3] the result is a hodgepodge of criteria (see also Brasca, this volume).

As Tamburelli (2014) reminds us, this has not always been the case: there was a time in language studies when the assessment and measurement of the structural, inherent diversity between different "ways of speaking" was at least attempted. In relation to this, it is quite telling that languages such as Francoprovençal and the Rhaeto Romance languages, which historically score very low on *Ausbau*-ization, are sometimes called "linguist's languages" (e.g. Benincà and Haiman 2005) in opposition to just (normal? politician's?) "languages". This peculiar terminological distinction arises from two important points:

- there is a strong tendency to identify languages on the basis of socio-political considerations (i.e. *Ausbau*) rather than on linguistic criteria (i.e. *Abstand*), to the extent that examples of the latter case are taken as "marked";
- linguists have indeed been able to identify languages without relying on socio-political criteria, and have done so successfully on various occasions, Francoprovençal and Rhaeto Romance being just two examples.

The need to objectively assess language diversity through the application of *Abstand* criteria is explicitly advocated in Tamburelli (2014) and Tosco (2011, 2017). Specifically, it is our contention that

- one may define dialects and languages on purely structural and communicative terms, irrespective of the use of these and similar terms ("vernaculars," "patois," etc.) in sociolinguistics and other disciplines;
- the opposition between dialects and languages is scalar rather than discrete, and
- this scalar opposition can be measured by taking into account *Abstand* considerations, such as the degree of mutual comprehensibility and/or the degree of linguistic distance (e.g. lexical, phonological, morphological etc.) between varieties.

3. The lack of interest in structural diversity by speakers and the general public is explicitly advocated as a reason for neglecting matters of language death by Joseph (2004). Cf. Tosco (2017) for a rebuttal.

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For example, Tamburelli (2014) measured the distance between Italian (ita) and Lombard (lmo) using a sentence comprehension test and validated the linguistic status of Lombard as a (contested) *Abstand* language, despite its sociolinguistic subordination to Italian. Similar work has been carried out on the so-called Chinese "dialects" (Tang and van Heuven 2009) while Gooskens and Heeringa (2004) have used phonetic distance measurements to consolidate the linguistic status of Frisian as a separate *Abstand* language from Dutch, despite the fact that Frisian is both related and sociolinguistically subordinate to Dutch.

Tosco (2017) has stressed the link between a "language-internal" definition of language and a full realisation of the extent of language diversity (and the threats it faces) around the globe.

The next section will explore in fuller detail this schism in linguistics, where on the one hand there seems to be a belief that *Ausbau* is the only viable dimension along which "languages" can be defined, and on the other hand important sub-disciplines rely specifically (though not always overtly) on the concept of linguistic distance (i.e., *Abstand*).

2. *Ausbau*-centrism

Ausbau-centrism is the widespread mainstream view that – when dealing with linguistic continua – 'languages' and 'dialects' cannot be identified through linguistic means; they are social constructs definable only in terms of socio-political status and breadth of use. This essentially equates 'language' with '*Ausbau* language' (Kloss 1967), giving a central role to social construction (Blommaert 2005) or *Ausbau*-ization (Fishman 2008; Tosco 2008): the process through which a specific variety within a continuum is socially elevated through systematic status, corpus, and acquisition planning and subsequently becomes a 'standardised tool of literary expression' (Kloss 1967: 69) within a polity (which more often than not is a nation-state). This leads to a schism within linguistics, where two opposing and potentially irreconcilable positions emerge. On the one hand, the mainstream position in general linguistics is that *Ausbau* is the only viable dimension along which "languages" can be defined. Hence Lombard or Platt are typically referred to as "dialect clusters" due to their relatively low level of *Ausbau* compared to their national counterparts, Italian and German respectively, despite the fact that they are linguistically rather distant from the languages they are supposedly dialects of. This view percolates down to the press and is largely taught in schools (and more often than not in undergraduate linguistics courses). In the press and in layman views it is often associated with notions of "grammar" (i.e., prescriptive grammar,

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primarily orthography) and, even more fundamentally, to writing as the core criterion of languageness.

On the other hand, however, there are important sub-disciplines that rely specifically (though not always overtly) on the concept of linguistic distance (i.e. *Abstand*). For example, language surveying / enumeration and linguistic classification (see for example Li 2004; McMahon & McMahon 2005). It is this schism, together with the shortcomings of *Ausbau*-centric linguistics, that lead to the concept of Contested Languages and that this volume aims to bring to the fore.

3. What is the contribution of this volume?

This volume aims to analyse a number of cases of language contestedness as well as potential paths towards full recognition of contested languages in both the public and academic sphere. It consists mainly of a selection of papers from the conference "Contested Languages in the Old World-2 (CLOW2)" which was organised by the editors and held at the University of Turin on 5th and 6th May 2016. The volume addresses cases of contested languages with a focus on Italy, while also discussing Poland, France, and Latvia. The focus on Italy is not accidental: Italy has a relatively large number of regional languages (32 according to the UNESCO Atlas) paired with a tradition of monolingual policy, linguistic discrimination, and continuous failure to ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (as well as, in academia, the general misuse of *Ausbau* criteria; see Brasca, this volume), all of which leads to numerous cases of language contestedness.

As editors, we tried to locate language contestedness within the broader concerns around the study of language: Marco Tamburelli links it squarely to linguistic rights, their definition and denial. He argues that reliance on *Ausbau* criteria and on speakers' perception as the arbiters of "languageness" unwittingly turns language policy into a tool for the perpetuation of the *status quo* (i.e. the politician's languages), making many regional languages invisible (i.e. turning them into Contested Languages), thus strengthening hegemonic discourse and practices and ultimately hindering linguistic emancipation.

Mauro Tosco addresses the question of whether democracy accommodates minorities more easily than other forms of government and other political ideologies. The answer is generally negative, and it is built upon, on the one hand, the linguistic consequences that civic bonds and shared economic interests have on local differences; and, on the other hand, on the very egalitarian and redistributive ethos of democracy, which stigmatises any symbol of separatedness and diversity and works towards their demise. The question remains, of course, open.

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The chapters in Section 2 discuss the identification and perception of contestedness in greater detail.

In 'Mixing methods in linguistic classification,' Lissander Brasca delves into what may at first seem a purely terminological and classificatory debate: where do Gallo-Italic languages of Northern Italy stand in a genealogical tree of Romance? While the traits which distinguish these languages from the rest of Romance are well-known and unanimously recognised, they are classified by different authors as 'Gallo-Romance' – i.e., as a part of Western Romance (alongside the Romance varieties of France and the Iberian peninsula) – or as 'Italo-Romance', which entails an Eastern Romance classification. The second solution is favoured, and it is actually standard practice, in Italy. In his contribution, Brasca successfully shows how the Italian dialectological tradition has misused the Klossean distinction of *Abstand* vs. *Ausbau* for classificatory purposes. According to Brasca, this is a classic example of nationalistic drives engendering dangerous biases in science, with the added result of "changing" bona-fide languages into dialects and further muddling the research on the complex linguistic landscape of Italy.

In 'The cost of ignoring degrees of Abstand in defining a regional language: evidence from South Tyrol', Mara Leonardi and co-editor Marco Tamburelli offer empirical evidence that highlights the importance of recognising contestedness. While the language rights of the Germanic-speaking population of South Tyrol are recognised by the Italian government, is the ensuing Italian-German bilingualism – as maintained by the government and according to *Ausbau*-centric classifications – grounded in the linguistic reality of South Tyrol? Or is the local Bavarian variety, commonly referred to as a 'dialect,' so distant from Standard German that speaking of trilingualism would be more empirically accurate? The authors use an implementation of the intelligibility criterion to demonstrate that the degree of *Abstand* between Standard German and South Tyrolean Bavarian leads to noticeable effects in the linguistic performance of South Tyrolean children, a result which they suggest is both avoidable and unnecessary if we move away from *Ausbau*-centric views of language.

In the third instalment of this section, 'Deconstructing the idea of language: the effects of the *patoisation* of Occitan in France,' Aurélie Joubert traces the history, meanings and uses of the word *patois*. Ubiquitous in the French (and francophone) linguistic discourse, the success of this word goes hand in hand with the implementation of a language policy promoting French not only as the sole language, but also as the very embodiment of a nation-state. Slowly percolating from official ideologies to the everyday speech of the speakers (even of Occitan and other minority languages) and their attitudes towards their own forms of speech, *patoisation* remains a prime example of the destructive force of nation-states and

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their ideologies, highlighting, in the author's words, 'the connection between macro language policies and socio-psychological self-evaluation of speakers.'

We move to quantitative sociological analysis with Nicole Dołowy-Rybińska and Claudia Soria in 'Surveying the ethnolinguistic vitality of two regional collateral languages: the case of Kashubian and Piedmontese.' The chapter discusses the results of a joint Polish-Italian research project aiming at assessing the vitality of two regional languages: Kashubian in Poland and Piedmontese in Italy. Ethnolinguistic vitality is measured by the authors through a questionnaire evaluating 1. *self-assessment* of language competences (oral and written production, understanding and comprehension); 2. language *use*, both actual and perceived, in different contexts and with different interlocutors; 3. *intergenerational transmission;* 4. *desire and language attitudes*, assessing the relation between language and identity, perceived attitudes of non-speakers and usefulness of the language; 5. *awareness* of the language's status and its effectiveness; and 6. *stigma*, i.e., awareness of discrimination. Although Kashubian is presently recognised while Piedmontese is not, the research shows that, when speakers have their say, they essentially regard their own speech as a dialect, and the index of ethnolinguistic vitality is low in both cases, and even consciousness about the maintenance of the language is weak. In short, according to the authors, current accounts of language vitality for Kashubian and Piedmontese overestimate the importance of the number of speakers over speakers' attitudes, and the lack of awareness of their language contestedness.

Emanuele Miola takes a closer look at the writing behaviour of users of a partially *Ausbau*-ized contested language in 'Contested orthographies: taking a closer look at spontaneous writing in Piedmontese.' Although it can boast a relatively standardised orthography (at least as far as contested languages go), Piedmontese writing never went beyond a restricted circle of artists and activists. Laypeople trying to write it, as is increasingly the case on the internet, are prone to following the orthographic norms of the language of schooling, namely Italian. In order to accommodate this usage, orthographic reforms and revisions were proposed in the early 2000s, albeit unsuccessfully. The author, in his thorough analysis of spontaneous writing, shows how naïve writers tend to adhere closely to Standard Italian orthographic choices when writing Piedmontese. In so doing, they make use of only a restricted number of allographic choices and do not adhere to a strictly phonemic writing nor to any planned orthography. Their behaviour, far from unique, is consistent with what writers of other contested languages of Italy do when trying to graphically represent phonemes that are not part of the Italian inventory.

The last chapter in this section is 'Revitalising contested languages: the case of Lombard,' where Paolo Coluzzi, Lissander Brasca and Simona Scuri discuss the ongoing standardisation of Lombard, a contested language that has recently been the object of a Regional law aimed at its protection. A good deal of attention is

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devoted to the issue of creating a polynomic writing system able to suit the speakers of different dialects and aimed at achieving a written standard while avoiding the pitfalls or raising a "single dialect" to *Ausbau* status in the standardisation process.

Section 3 shifts the focus to a variegated picture of grassroots experiences and projects. The authors are in a few cases not academic scholars but people from various backgrounds brought together by their involvement in language maintenance and revitalisation. Their experiences, problems and suggestions must be listened to attentively by any linguist who cares for language revitalisation and, to repeat Fishman's felicitous catchphrase, about "reversing language shift."

Language and community strengthening lie at the core of Musumeci's 'Community-based language strengthening: bringing Sicilian folk-tales back to life,' where the author presents a blueprint for an interdisciplinary, community based project aimed at the valorisation of Sicilian, a contested language that is still actively spoken but utterly neglected in the socio-political domains. Musumeci's plan starts from current local social activities and revolves around theatre, local resources, and participatory community involvement.

In 'Teaching Piedmontese: a Challenge?' Nicola Duberti and co-editor Mauro Tosco report on a teaching experience of a contested language, Piedmontese, at university level. A 36-hours-long introduction to the language and its writing has been active at the University of Turin since the academic year 2015–16. Elsewhere, expatriate linguist and Piedmontese activist Gianrenzo Clivio (Turin, 1942 – Toronto, 2006) was assigned in 1964 to teach Piedmontese at Brandeis University (Waltham, Massachusetts). Much later, around ten years ago, extracurricular courses were inaugurated at the Faculty of Languages of the University of Córdoba (Argentina), where a large community of Piedmontese speakers emigrated and, to a certain extent, the language is still spoken. As is typical of contested languages in general, the situation is worse *in situ*, and in Turin Piedmontese has been and still is the object of many university classes, especially in Romance Philology and Italian Dialectology (sic!), but never under the label "Piedmontese," let alone "Piedmontese language." The authors argue that teaching a "dialect" *per se*, and even more so under the label of "language," borders on *lèse-majesté*, as shown by the fact that in Turin the classes go under the name of "Piedmontese Laboratory," politely avoiding any reference to the language/dialect issue.

Andrea F. D. Di Stefano's 'Publishing a grammar and literature anthology of a contested language: an experience of crowdfunding' also deals with Piedmontese, but from an entirely novel perspective, namely the involvement of the public at large in language matters, asking how contested languages fare when big projects, recognition and law are set aside and laypeople are directly asked to fund initiatives out of their own pocket. Not bad at all, answers Di Stefano, who raised enough money to publish a grammar and a literary anthology of Piedmontese. The author concludes

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that social networking and crowd funding are able to reach the potential users of endangered language material in many unexpected ways. This is particularly important in the case of contested languages where, by definition, no government support is available.

In 'Which Sardinian for education? The chance of CLIL-based laboratories: a case study,' Federico Gobbo and Laura Vardeu comment on the ongoing and difficult standardisation of Sardinian, a language whose vitality, as is so often the case, seems to be inversely proportional to recognition by law and efforts at standardisation. Trying to cope with an early demise of the language among schoolchildren, the regional government "issued" in 2006 a common written standard, the *Limba Sarda Comuna* ("Common Sardinian Language," LSC). Although LSC remains highly contested, the chapter reports on a successful pilot experiment in which Sardinian was used at school both orally (in the local variety) and in written form (LSC, for the didactic material).

In the fourth and last Section, 'Beyond contested languages: when contestedness creeps in,' Christopher Moseley, in his short but informative contribution 'Citizenship and nationality: the situation of the users of revived Livonian in Latvia,' takes us on a fascinating journey through the end and the possible new life of Livonian: through its difficult existence under different political regimes up to modern times when, with the death of the last speaker in 2012, self-identification as Livonian is nowadays encouraged in Latvia, and a new generation of heritage speakers are learning the language.

Finally: can a planned, stateless and borderless language also be contested? According to Federico Gobbo in 'The language ideology of Esperanto: from the world language problem to balanced multilingualism,' the answer is a resounding yes. In fact, the author argues that it has been so since the very birth of Esperanto in the late 19th century. As a planned language, Esperanto was born with an ideology which has undergone change and adaptation in order to accommodate and reduce the level of contestation of the language. In its turn, this adaptation re-framed the perception of the language by its speakers and their very attitudes toward Esperanto. The author follows the link between Esperanto and pacifism in the First World War years, its connections to anarchism and communism in Asia, and its association with linguistic rights in more recent times, up to an ideological convergence with other contested languages, in particular regional and minority languages.

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4. The conclusion of an introduction

It is our contention that a full acceptance of language-internal considerations in the definition of what counts as a "language" will also help disciplines working on the social dimensions of language – from sociolinguistics to language policy and planning – to overcome what May (2006: 256) has called their "presentist" approach. May ascribes it to early stages of language policy studies, preoccupied more with nation-building processes centred around an official (often European) language than with the status, rights and fate of minority languages. Early students in language planning embraced and openly encouraged the adoption of a unifying, national language which carried the extra advantage of being ready for use in administration and modern domains. There was another bonus for its proponents in such an approach: to curb the potentially separatist tendencies of parochial languages and put citizens in closer contact with the power holders. Laitin's (1992) work remains a favourite example of this tendency (see also Tosco's contribution, this volume).

Are these views the province of bygone stages in language policy? After all, the preoccupation with linguicide correlates of nation-building is nowadays widely held, and linguistic rights have been a respectable and burgeoning area of research for many years now.

Still, the chapters in this volume bear witness to the ongoing strength of the nation-states and their linguistic – but most of all ideological – corollaries. If political unity (and ever-wider and overarching unification processes) is still almost universally seen as good (or necessary, or even inevitable), and, conversely, secession is bad (and/or anti-historical, maybe even discriminatory), it is difficult to escape the conclusion that, rather than 'the need to rethink nation-states in more linguistically plural and inclusive ways' (May 2006: 267), what needs rethinking is the nation-state *per se*.

More importantly, unless we address the *Ausbau*-centric bias in linguistic research and rediscover the importance of *Abstand* relations in defining "languages", we will continue to delegate definitions to the acts of politicians and political entities that are frequently hostile towards linguistic and cultural diversity, and whose historical and ideological stances are often the very root cause of language endangerment.

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