

Studying language and translation policies in Belgium: What can we learn from a complexity theory approach?

Reine Meylaerts

KU Leuven and University of the Free State

Abstract

Since the European democratization processes of the long 19th century, the very core of the legal and political potential to act as a citizen was formed by communicative resources. Communication between authorities and citizens through one (or more) national language(s) thus became of the utmost importance. That is why, studying language and translation policies is crucial to understand the role of language and translation in the construction of democratic citizenship. This article analyzes the role of language and translation policies for the construction and evolution of democratic citizenship in multilingual Belgium based on the insights of complexity theory. If we really want to understand if, how, and when authorities and citizens were able to communicate with each other in 19th-century Belgium (and elsewhere), we have to deal with a myriad of sometimes contradictory and unequally applied language and translation rules, practices and beliefs. We therefore need to study processes of interaction that enable us to understand the complex and paradoxical relations between society and individual, between the local and the central/global, between agency and structure, between translation and non-translation, between official and unofficial translation, between translation and other transfer processes. We need to study translation as an emergent phenomenon, constitutive of social reality.

Keywords

Translation policy, language policy, Belgium, 19th century, complexity theory

1. Introduction: language and translation policies

Since the European democratization processes of the long 19th century, the very core of the legal and political potential to act as a citizen was formed by communicative resources. Communication between authorities and citizens through one (or more) national language(s) thus became of the utmost importance. That is why, studying language and translation policies is crucial to understand the role of language and translation in the construction of democratic citizenship. I would like to start by briefly summarizing my research journey of the past few years.

Language policy is a concept that has been defined in many different ways. One definition that is very useful for studying the relation between language and citizenship is the one proposed by Bernard Spolsky. According to Spolsky (2012, p. 5), a language policy encompasses language practices (“the actual language practices of the members of a speech community”), language beliefs or ideology (“the values assigned by members of a speech community to each variety and variant and their beliefs about the importance of these values”) and language management (“efforts by some members of a speech community who have or believe they have authority over other members to modify their language practice”). The interrelationship between the three is stressed by the fact that language management must be consistent with language practice and beliefs in order to have real effects (p. 222). For democratic authorities, making language management consistent with (sometimes conflicting) language practices and beliefs is crucial to ensuring reciprocal communication between the political center and its dependent language communities.

Starting from Spolsky’s three-level definition of language policy, I claimed that there is no language policy without translation policy. Language policies of necessity have to include choices about the use or non-use of mediating procedures such as translation and other modes of interlingual transfer between authorities and citizens. These choices engender policies of their own. In other words, language policies inevitably imply translation policies (Meylaerts & González Núñez, *forthc.*). I defined translation policies (TPs) after Spolsky, as sets of translation management, practices and beliefs or ideology. The term “translation management” refers to legal efforts by the authorities to initiate, impose or refrain from translation practices. “Translation practices” refers to the actual interlingual activity ensuring communication between authorities and citizens. “Translation beliefs or ideology” refers to the values assigned by members of a language group to translation and their beliefs about the importance of these values. The dialectical interrelationship between the three components is stressed by the fact that language and translation management must be consistent with language and translation practices and beliefs in order to have real effects.

In search of generalization, reproducibility, predictability and systematization, I furthermore argued that within a continuum of language and translation policies we can distinguish four prototypical policies which authorities use to communicate with their citizens (Meylaerts, 2011, p. 1): 1) at one end of the continuum, multilingualism with obligatory multidirectional translation in all languages for all; 2) at the other end of the continuum, complete institutional monolingualism with obligatory translation into the official language and non-translation into the minority languages combined; 3) an intermediate prototype of institutional monolingualism combined with occasional (and often temporary) translation in well-defined situations, in anticipation of minorities’ learning of the majority language; 4) in some specific cases, a combination of prototype one and two: institutional monolingualism at the lower level and institutional multilingualism with multidirectional mandatory translation at the superior

(e.g., federal) level or vice versa. The first case applies to Belgium and Canada. The second case applies to the UK, which is largely monolingual at the central level, while e.g., Wales is bilingual.

From a more historical viewpoint, I was interested in the role of language and translation policies for the construction and evolution of democratic citizenship in multilingual Belgium. The history of linguistic legislation or language management is well documented (Popelier & Lemmens, 2015; Van Goethem, 1990; von Busekist, 1998; Weerts, 2015; Witte & Van Velthoven, 2010). The history of translation management, practices and beliefs, on the contrary, remains largely understudied. Starting from a top-down approach, mainly focusing on the evolution of linguistic legislation and its implications for translation, I concluded that in more or less one century, language and translation management in administrative, judicial and legal settings has evolved from a monolingual (French-only) policy based on non-translation into Flemish within a centralized state, via an intermediate policy of restrictive bilingualism with some occasional translation for Flemish people, towards a completely bilingual federal state with obligatory bidirectional translation on the federal level combined with monolingualism and non-translation on the regional level (Meylaerts, 2009a). This legal evolution put the linguistic discrimination of the Flemish citizens gradually to an end and translation played a considerable role in this process.

This type of analysis is frequent in Translation Studies or Language Policy Studies (see e.g., Meylaerts, 2008, 2009b, 2010) – and in many other disciplines. It decomposes a fuzzy aggregate of complex elements into a number of elementary, simple units. It then shows how these simple units follow a number of general patterns or rules which together form a logical unity. This type of analysis shapes order in the chaos: it makes more or less linear causality claims and it holds the promise of a certain generalization, or even predictability and determinism. Although this type of analysis may be correct, it holds a danger of simplification and of being blinded by the concepts and models used (this danger of course applying to any model). Since the very start of my research, I was indeed struggling with several questions which casted doubts on my insights, and which made me aware of some blind spots in my analysis. Let me give some examples. How to deal with a myriad of sometimes contradictory language and translation rules, practices and beliefs? How to deal with the unequal application of the linguistic laws? How to know if authorities and citizens were really able to communicate with each other? How to combine a top-down approach with a bottom-up one? How to deal with significant levels of uncertainty and ambiguity? With countless contextual factors? How to conceptualize the relation between the local and the central level, between agency and structure? Indeed,

[d]espite the significant influence of the Westphalian tradition of how we think about the polity and its language(s), it is in fact surprisingly hard to identify where, precisely, do they start and end, or predict how exactly they evolve and according to which trajectories. (...) The co-evolution of polities and languages is a lot less mechanistic than several hundreds of years of nation- and language-building heritage would have us believe. Neither the nation state nor standard language models operate in any way along a teleological trajectory. (Peled, 2014, pp. 308-309)

We need, in other words, models that allow a better and more complex understanding of language and translation policies, models that allow to conceptualize exceptions, randomness, complexity, change. We need an epistemology of complexity, based on the insights of

complexity theory which is precisely designed for dealing with the above mentioned issues¹. This is what, from a Translation Studies and Language Policy perspective, scholars like Marais (2015), Bastardas-Boada (2013), Cairney (2012), Morcol (2010) and Peled (2014) are pleading for. Let me try to explain some of complexity theory's key insights and explore what it can bring to Language and Translation Policy Studies in general, and to a better understanding of Belgian language and translation policy history in particular.

2. An epistemology of complexity

The following quotation gives a good synthesis of what complexity theory stands for:

Complexity theory is generally sold as a new approach to science in which we identify (and then explain) systems or processes that lack the order and stability required to produce universal rules about behaviour and outcomes. When applied to the sciences as a whole, it is described as a revolutionary break from the 'reductionist' approach to science and the 'paradigm of order' or as a new 'way of thinking' and 'seeing the world'; as a 'world of instability and fluctuations' when in the past it was seen as 'stable' (Newton's laws are often used as an example of the old way of thinking) (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003, p. 26; Sanderson, 2006, p. 117). (Cairney, 2012, p. 347)

Complexity theory indeed challenges the notions of disjunction, abstraction and reduction which together constitute the "paradigm of simplification" (Morin, 2008, p. 3). Reductionism has been the dominant approach to science since the 16th century (Mitchell, 2009, p. ix) and has been wrongly associated with the only way to do 'good science'. In the words of Edgar Morin, one of the fathers of complexity theory, reduction means "the search for elementary, simple units, the decomposition of a system into its elements, the origination of the complex to the simple." (2008, p. 33) Such a view mutilates reality, which is necessarily complex as complexity scholars' research shows, "by imposing a simple conceptualization on a complex reality" (Marais, 2015, p. 19). This Newtonian paradigm believes in order, determinism and predictability. It started in the natural sciences, and went from there on to the social sciences. It also underlies some of the conceptualizations in Translation Studies – as Marais rightly argues – and Policy Studies (see e.g., Bastardas-Boada, 2013; Cairney, 2012; Morcol, 2010; Peled, 2014). The paradigm of simplicity causes binary thinking which enables us to see the one and the many, but prevents us to see that the one is simultaneously the many, that difference is similarity and that the universal is the particular. The paradigm of simplicity can see parts and wholes but not the interrelationships between parts and parts and parts and wholes. It cannot deal with complexity or paradox. Although reduction will remain an important characteristic of science (Marais, 2015, p. 15; Morin, 2008, p. 33), we need to supplement it with an epistemology of complexity.

A complex system is a "system in which large networks of components with no central control and simple rules of operation give rise to complex collective behavior, sophisticated information processing, and adaptation via learning or evolution." (Mitchell, 2009, p. 13) It applies to bacteria, the brain, political theory, ants, computers, urban life, language policy etc. "Complexity (...) promotes a relational and processual style of thinking, stressing organizational patterns, networked relationships and historical context." (Bousquet & Curtis, 2011, p. 45) Therefore analysis should be focused not on parts but on the relationships and

¹ Of course this is not the only theory that deals with (social) complexity, see e.g. (Latour, 1993, 2007) just to name these two.

connections between parts and between parts and wholes. In other words, the focus should be not on phenomena but on processes, that is, on “the way in which phenomena are the result of the interaction of their constituent parts” (Marais, 2015, p. 18). Indeed, the phenomena of language and translation policy “are not finished, changeless events, but processes of change and re-equilibrium which must be studied dynamically. Especially in democratic systems, the relationships between the political and the social, for example, are never static; they never stand still, but rather undergo continual updating and reformulation.” (Bastardas-Boada, 2013, p. 366) This new kind of science, which is able to study both relationships and things, should thus also be able to synthesize and not only to analyze. In the words of Bastardas-Boada (2013), applied to language policy:

Behind all of these fragmentary conceptions stand decades of preconceptions that have put a priority on the reductionist study of the parts rather than on the study of the totalities made up of those parts. This is the area in which one of the great scientific debates of today is now being waged: We need to find out what is the most appropriate configuration for understanding the relationships between the ‘whole’ and the ‘parts’ of reality. (p. 364)

2.1 Hierarchy and self-organization

In its widest sense, a philosophy of complexity holds a view of reality that is hierarchical, nonlinear, paradoxical, and that sees systems as open. Reality is seen as consisting of levels of existence that emerge from one another: the physical is given, and out of it emerges, in hierarchical order, the chemical, the biological, psychological, and social.

The key point is that everything has evolved by the same process—component parts interact to form complex systems that display new characteristics as a result of their complex interactions. The new and possibly unique emergent properties define new entities. These new entities may form complex systems performing on the next ‘higher’ evolutionary level. (Chamberlin, 2009, p. 93)

The following two examples, the first from the biological, the second from the social, can illustrate this idea of hierarchy. The complexity of living systems is not due to their individual genes but to the interactions between their genes (Mitchell, 2009, p. 275). We know that humans share 90% of their DNA with mice and 95% with chimps; what makes us so different from these animals is that the sequences between the genes “making up switches have often evolved to be different.” (Mitchell, 2009, pp. 279-280) Similarly, the social is the form the psychological takes through particular new interactions amongst parts of the previous level or through particular new organizations between the parts. The ‘more’ has not been added from the outside. The ‘more’ is the new relationships, the new organization, the new links and connections. In this way, complexity theory, in a complex, paradoxical way, maintains a monist view of reality as well as avoids a reductionist view (Marais, 2015, p. 29). Crucial in this complexity view is the notion of self-organization. Self-organization means that “agents act locally with no view of contributing to the whole. The whole emerges, through self-organization, from the local interactions.” (Marais, 2015, p. 31) “Self-organization, the most commonly cited characteristic of complex systems, has an intuitive appeal: It negates the notion that complex social problems can be solved with linear interventions by hierarchically ordered bureaucratic organizations and thus connotes a democratic image of governance.” (Morcol, 2010, p. 55)

2.2 Nonlinearity and emergence

Two other key notions are nonlinearity and emergence. A “nonlinear system is one in which the whole is different from the sum of the parts.” (Mitchell, 2009, p. 23) Nonlinear change or nonlinear causality means that similar causes need not lead to similar results: small differences in initial conditions may exert major influences on the eventual results. Much comes from little or sometimes nothing comes from very much. The determination of causation is bidirectional or complex: from the local to the global to the local, that is, upward and downward causation. Social structures emerge from bottom-up and the newly emerged configurations have a downward effect on the individuals whose interaction caused the structure. “The age-old tension between society and individual and between structure and action is viewed as a complex paradox that should not be resolved. Both are and both cause the other to be.” (Marais, 2015, p. 37) Individual and society cannot be separated. Complex systems theory thus adds “a perspective on the complex, paradoxical relationship between agent and system, a perspective that contains benefits for translation studies.” (Marais, 2015, p. 27) As a consequence, predictability and simple notions of causality are problematic. Society emerges from a large number of nonlinear processes. This is what language policy specialist Bastardas-Boada refers to when speaking from a complexity viewpoint (notice how he only implicitly takes translation into account):

[T]he determination of linguistic behaviour (and this is even more evident in cases of language contact) is neither a straightforward phenomenon nor one of linear causality. Rather, it is subject to a dynamic and self-organised process that can be grasped only by means of a conception that includes the ecology of contextual pressures and the way in which individuals interpret these pressures and make decisions about their courses of (inter)action. (Bastardas-Boada, 2013, p. 376)

Therefore, authorities are never certain that language or translation laws will reach their goals (Bastardas-Boada, 2013, p. 366) Similarly, according to Marais, we should question “easy lines of causality drawn in many studies of agency in translation.” (Marais, 2015, p. 34) Indicating simple notions of causality between translations or translators and societal change is very problematic according to Marais. Nonlinearity and the emergent nature of social reality challenge Language and Translation Policy Studies to rethink their conceptualization of causality.

Emergent order arises when a novel, more complex system forms itself. In emergent systems, properties cannot be seen as an aggregate. The specific interactions play a role in the result. Emergence represents “an epistemological shift from studying substance or stability to studying relationships, process, or change based on substance or the complex relationship between them.” (Marais, 2015, p. 50) Complex social systems are therefore not decomposable into their components because their nature emerges from the interaction between their components, not from the nature of the individual components. “Emergent phenomena appear at phase transitions occurring at the interface of conditions of extreme stability and conditions of excessive instability. This interface has been colorfully named the ‘edge of chaos’.” (Chamberlin, 2009, p. 94)

2.3 Binary thinking

The paradigm of simplicity is also the cause of the binary thinking that dominates the reductionist paradigm. As already said, it can see the one and the many, but forces us to choose between the one and the many and prevents us to see that the one is simultaneously the

many, that difference is similarity and that the universal is the particular. The paradigm of simplicity can see parts and wholes but not the interrelationships between parts and parts and parts and wholes. Complexity theory claims the refusal to choose between order and chaos, universality and particularity. Source and target both constitute the reality of translation and, from a complexity perspective, are related to one another 'at the edge of chaos'. Stable and unstable, predictable and unpredictable, known and unknown, certain and uncertain: all these hold simultaneously and should not be resolved.

3. Understanding Belgian language and translation policy: nonlinearity, complex causation, self-organization, emergence

What insights would we gain if we would supplement the paradigm of simplicity with an epistemology of complexity when analyzing Belgian language and translation policy in the 19th century? Let me try to illustrate this by taking some of the insights discussed above as a starting point.

Soon after its creation in 1830, following the model of the 19th century democratic nation-state, Belgian authorities realized the importance of a shared language. Although article 23 of the Belgian Constitution stipulated that language use was free, it also specified that it could be regulated by law for acts of public and judicial authorities: "L'emploi des langues usitées en Belgique est facultatif; il ne peut être réglé que par la loi, et seulement pour les actes de l'autorité publique et pour les affaires judiciaires." (Maury, 1998) The first government indeed rapidly regulated language use in legal, judicial and administrative matters. A decree from November 1830 made French *de facto* the only official language of Belgium and, consequently, both Flemish (spoken by more than 50% of the Belgians) and German (less than 1%) were degraded to second-rate languages. Moreover, the first government was firmly committed to gradually extinguishing Flemish in Belgium. To that end, according to Charles Rogier, one of the founders of the Belgian State, all civil and military jobs were to be given to French speakers so that Flemish speakers would be obliged to learn French.

Les premiers principes d'une bonne administration sont basés sur l'emploi exclusif d'une seule langue et il est évident que la seule langue des Belges doit être le français. Pour arriver à ce résultat, il est nécessaire que toutes les fonctions, civiles et militaires, soient confiées à des Wallons et des Luxembourgeois ; de cette manière, les Flamands, privés temporairement des avantages attachés à ces emplois, seront contraint d'apprendre le français et l'on détruira ainsi peu à peu l'élément germanique en Belgique. » (Charles Rogier in a letter to Raikem (minister of Internal Affairs) in 1832) (quoted in Peeters, 1930, p. xiv)²

In other words, notwithstanding the fact that linguistic freedom was a constitutional right, Belgian authorities realized the importance of designing dedicated language rules to regulate communication with the new Belgian citizens. Surely, this French-only policy had its effect as can be inferred from numerous complaints made by Flemish citizens in 19th-century Flemish newspapers, referring to the fact that "the French centralization that the government pushes so hard, is impossible" (s.a., 30/8/1859; my translation from Flemish). So, e.g., in 1860, a reader's letter in the Antwerp Catholic newspaper *Het Handelsblad* (founded in 1846) protested that a Walloon counter clerk to the Antwerp railway station refused to give him a

² This letter has however never been confirmed as truthful (see Stengers & Gubin, 2002, p. 53).

ticket to “Geraerdsbergen”: the traveler should have said “Grammont” (the French name). The traveler gave in because he didn’t want to miss his train (X, 1860).

The kind of predictive thinking that was criticized in the introduction assumes that things happen as the laws predict: there was a central drive to francization, so there was no (or very limited) translation into Flemish and everyone was in on the act. A complexity view holds that individual agents (like the author from the above-quoted reader’s letter) and lower levels of governance may have acted in some local/personal interest, which then might have had an effect (or not) on the systemic level which was not necessarily what they were agents for or intended. As already indicated, linguistic behavior doesn’t follow linear causality patterns but is a dynamic and self-organized process of interaction in which contextual pressures and individuals’ reactions to these pressures play an important role (see Bastardas-Boada, 2013, p. 376) So if we follow the traces of language and translation processes, if we study the dynamic and self-organized processes between local and central levels and between agency and structure, if we supplement a top-down approach with a bottom-up approach, we are able to discover the many blind spots left by the so-called paradigm of simplicity. Indeed, the official and centrally organized French-only, non-translation policy went together with several interrelated but sometimes contradicting translation beliefs, rules and practices right from the start. In what follows, I will give some examples related to two different but interrelated contexts: the domain of central linguistic legislation and the domain of local administration.

3.1 Bringing the law to the citizen?

At the central legislative level, laws and decrees were published between 1831 and 1845 in the law gazette, the *Bulletin officiel*, not only in French but also in a centrally made Flemish translation. The French text remained however the only official version. In 1845 this *Bulletin officiel* was discontinued and replaced by the *Moniteur belge* which then became and remained a monolingual French publication until 1895.³ So, against the background of dominant non-translation management and beliefs, centrally organized translation practices were omnipresent for more than one decade before being replaced by non-translation. Contrary to Charles Rogier’s wish, however, Flemish was never extinguished. In 1846, 57 percent of Belgians spoke Flemish dialects as their primary language while 42 percent spoke dialects of French, such as Walloon, Picard or Gaumais. Less than one percent of the population spoke German (Zolberg, 1974, pp. 181-183). Flemish speakers lived mainly in the North (Flanders) and there was a huge variation in accents, spelling and grammar between the Flemish dialects. Flemings living in the East were often not capable of understanding Flemings living in the West. French dialect speakers lived in the South (Wallonia). The aristocracy and middle classes all over the country spoke standard French, often as a second language. In other words, in 19th-century Belgium a big gap existed between the authorities’ monolingual ideal and the multilingual realities in the field. Flemish speakers therefore soon demanded that language management would be adjusted to their specific practices and beliefs in order to ensure their linguistic rights and democratic citizenship. Hence Flemish claims for more translation were gradually increasing, and the need for translation did not regress throughout the 19th century. In newspapers e.g., we find constant references to Flemish deputies and Flemish citizens stressing the need for an immediate official Flemish translation of the *Moniteur* and of all governmental documents because the “laws and royal decrees remained

³ From 1878 onwards translations into Flemish can be very sporadically found.

a dead letter for most of the civil servants and judges” (s.a., 30/04/1873; my translation from Flemish). This official translation would only be voted in 1898 when all laws and decrees were promulgated in both French and Flemish in a bilingual version of the *Moniteur*.

A Flemish translation of laws and decrees of general interest for those municipalities where Flemish was spoken, was provided in the so-called *Recueil des lois et arrêtés royaux de Belgique – Verzameling der Wetten en Koninklijke Besluiten* created in 1845.

Le gouvernement fera réimprimer, dans un recueil spécial, les lois et arrêtés, avec une traduction flamande, pour les communes où l'on parle cette langue. Néanmoins, ne seront pas réimprimés dans ce recueil, les lois et arrêtés dont l'objet est purement individuel au local. Ce recueil sera adressé directement aux communes, immédiatement après l'insertion des lois et arrêtés au *Moniteur*. (Ranwet, 1845, p. 32)

This bilingual volume was available shortly after the publication of the officially monolingual law gazette *Moniteur* but had no force of law. How these laws were translated, who were the translators, by whom were these laws used: these are important questions which remain to be studied following a patient reconstruction of the translation processes and the complex interaction processes with and between the individual agents and local levels of governance (upward and downward causation). In any case, while Flemish claims for translation of all legislation were increasing, Flemish legal translation was pushed back to a later, less official and summarized version. The inferior status of the Flemish version also transpires through the attitude of individual agents for the job of legal translator. When e.g., in 1861 the ministry of Internal Affairs was looking for a successor to the translator of the laws in Flemish, a lawyer from Ghent, “Fleming in the soul” (s.a., 26/04/1861; my translation from Flemish), put himself for the job. But, according to *Het Handelsblad*, this lawyer was amazed to see that the so-called official translator was actually also a regular copyist, copying e.g., the tables of contents of the *Moniteur*, and that he only earned 1600fr a year. So, as stated by the newspaper, the government did not attach great value to a Flemish civil servant. Moreover, the reporter continued, in the past the translator earned 2000fr and did not have to copy the tables of contents; so at the expense of the new Flemish civil servant, the Ministry saved 400fr, gave more work and less dignity. That is why the Flemish lawyer withdrew his candidacy (s.a., 26/04/1861). So even if this individual agent was sympathetic to empowerment of the Flemings through translation in Flemish, he acted in his personal interest, which then had no effect on the systemic level which was not necessarily what he first intended. As already indicated, linguistic behavior does not follow linear causality patterns but is a dynamic and self-organized process of interaction in which contextual pressures and individuals’ reactions to these pressures play an important role.

Finally, the *Annales Parlementaires*, the publication of the parliamentary deliberations, remained non-translated until 1932 when an officially bilingual edition was published. From the late 19th century onwards, Flemish translations were sometimes inserted, according to a completely random principle and ignoring the many bills and claims for translation which are traceable in the parliamentary debates and in the press. So e.g., the “inhabitants of Schaerbeek ask the Chamber to vote the proposal of law concerning the translation of the *Annales Parlementaires*” (s.a., 30/5/1873; my translation from Flemish).

With some groups of Flemish people continuously pushing to adapt legislation in order to give equal rights to Flemish, partly through translation (s.a., 02/09/1859, 8/5/1872, 15/11/1872, 16/04/1872, 19/2/1872), one would expect increasing translation into Flemish in the second half of the 19th century. This was not the case, at least not in the official domain. It led to

numerous and continuous Flemish complaints which however often did not have the expected effect. Again, newspapers give ample evidence of these processes. In 1885 for example, a brewer from Puurs, a small town in the north of Flanders, complained in *Het Handelsblad* that the circular letters concerning the new law on breweries were drafted only in French, while it also applied to Flemish citizens. In the district of Puurs there were several brewers who only knew Flemish and who thus had to find a translator. This, according to him, was unjust, failed to recognize the most sacred rights of the Flemings, and made them outcasts in their own homeland. One should have more respect for the majority of the Belgians. (Abonnet, 1885)

What was absent in the official domain was taken over by the informal domain: unofficial translations of laws, decrees, regulations, circulars etc. were published by private persons in volumes or periodicals to serve Flemish city councils, judges, lawyers, etc. In 1841 the first translation of the Civil Code was published by the Ghent poet-lawyer Karel Lodewijk Ledeganck (Ledeganck, 1845). *Het Vlaamsch bestuur: maandelijksch tijdschrift voor gemeente-, kerk- en armbesturen* and the *Bestuurlijk Tijdschrift voor Vlaamsch-België*, the first administrative legal periodicals in Flemish were founded in 1889 (Vandenbogaerde, 2015, p. 102). Next to unofficial translations of laws etc., they contained commentaries and annotations of these laws. Both disappeared before long: the *Bestuurlijk Tijdschrift voor Vlaamsch-België* after ten years and *Het Vlaamsch bestuur* in 1909. Moreover, many 19th-century newspapers like *L'Echo du Parlement* or *Het Handelsblad* published legal chronicles, reproducing (i.e., translating, summarizing, commenting, paraphrasing) Parliamentary debates. All these forms of unofficial translations were often criticized as unreliable. So we read in *Het Handelsblad* "often their [the deputies] words and acts are altered" (s.a., 2/9/1859).

From a Translation Studies perspective, these examples teach us two things. First, we should shift the attention to include translation phenomena in the informal domain into the purview of translation studies (Marais, 2015, p. 7). If we want to know if authorities and citizens were really able to communicate with each other, we should study official and non-official translation processes at the local and central levels of governance and their complex and self-organized interaction processes. Second, especially in multilingual contexts, translation is part of a broad variety of transfer processes which imply a plurality of directions and a multiplicity of effects. Translation, non-translation, summary, commentary, annotation, paraphrase are all related to each other at the edge of chaos. These insights are not really new, but take on new relevance in the light of complexity theory. Complexity theory sees society as an emergent phenomenon which means that societal processes (like translation) do not have fixed boundaries and that therefore boundaries should be explained, not assumed (Marais, 2015, p. 50). In other words, the boundaries between translation and non-translation, between translation and other transfer processes are complex, fuzzy and unstable, unpredictable. We should therefore be aware of the danger of conceptual blindness. If our concepts do not fit reality, we should not adapt reality but rather our concepts. We should also better articulate between them, redefine them.

3.2 The citizen at/and the town hall

A similarly complex picture transpires if we consider the local administration in its interactions with the citizen and with the central administration. In the administration as well there was a central drive to francization until at least 1878. The 1878 law on language use in administration in Flanders and Brussels stipulated that announcements to the public by government officials had to be in Dutch or in both languages – hence an increased need of translation, which was

however not regulated by this law. Correspondence with municipalities or persons would be in Dutch, except if a person wished to be engaged in French – again need of translation, again not regulated by the law. Moreover, these legal outcomes embody only one aspect of a dynamic that includes the processes of interaction with lower levels of governance and individual agents. These processes can again best be grasped as dynamic and self-organized processes that include the ecology of contextual pressures and the way in which individuals interpret these pressures and make decisions about their courses of (inter)action.

Indeed, language and translation practices in the town and village chanceries of 19th-century Flanders varied considerably among each other, did comply quite erratically both with the central, French-only language management of the first half of the century and with a restrained legal evolution towards more Dutch after 1878⁴.

Some chanceries like the one in Turnhout (a small town in the north of Flanders) never switched to French and continuously kept Flemish as their sole language of governance. This implied that they normally had to translate into French all correspondence with and documents for the central administration. How systematically (or not) this was done, how, why, and by whom remains to be studied. Nor do we know what the consequences were of this policy for the citizens, for the civil servants, for the members of the chancery and the central administration. But as can be expected, at least it was related to some resistance to the central monolingual, French-only policy. As yet, we can only indirectly infer some local, individual traces of these resistances as they are present in newspapers. So e.g., in 1875 a member of Parliament complained that all customs declarations had to be written in French or that they were otherwise sent back to the municipality (s.a., 31/01/1871). This is a good example of how a monolingual policy obliges the lower level minority to translate and how translation and non-translation are related to each other at the edge of chaos and should be studied together. The local translations were made by the Mayor, or by the town clerk if the mayor did not know French. In the latter case, too much power was in the hands of the town clerk according to some members of Parliament (Chambre, 1866). So again we see that linguistic behavior is a dynamic and self-organized process with complex causation: local agents may act in their personal interest which is not necessarily in line with systemic interest. The particular interactions play a role in the outcome and translation is both positively and negatively valued.

Other chanceries, like Landen (a small town in the province of Brabant) continuously operated in French, whereas still others, like Oudenaarde (in East-Flanders) only added Flemish around 1900, long after the 1878 law. Communication with their Flemish inhabitants was made possible through a fuzzy aggregate of informal translations, going from circulars, posters, bills, to oral summaries during the Sunday sermon in Church for the illiterates. Again, all these formal and informal, self-organized practices (or the absence thereof) were of crucial importance for creating democratic citizenship but have so far not been the object of study. They point again to the need to study processes of translation in which the boundaries between translation and non-translation, between translation and interpreting, summary, commentary etc. are complex, fuzzy and unstable, unpredictable. They should therefore not be assumed but explained. Yet again, newspapers allow us to infer some local, individual traces

⁴ Data are scarce and spread throughout sometimes poorly organized local archives. (Vandenbussche, Vanhecke, Willemyns, & De Groof, 2006, p. 12) gives a schematic overview of language use in some 40 Flemish town and village chanceries at five moments: September 1830, November 1830, 1840, 1880 and 1900. But it does not provide any information about translation. My observations are based on this scheme.

of resistance to the French-only policy. Let me give one example. According to *Het Handelsblad*, around 1870 the city of Ghent counted 94,600 monolingual Flemish inhabitants (versus 2,500 monolingual French and 17,600 bilinguals) but all public regulations and local acts were in French only. Police officers took down French notes of Flemish testimonies and afterwards their French reports had again to be translated into Flemish for the parties concerned. “Thus one moves from one translation to another, which constitutes a danger for the accused” according to a contemporary (s.a., 13/04/1870; my translation from Flemish). In other words, at the local level also, the French-only, non-translation policy heavily relied on a variety of unofficial, complex and self-organized transfer practices in which translation and non-translation were related to each other and in which agents acted locally in a variety of directions and interests. Complex social problems cannot be solved by linear interventions.

Whereas a number of chanceries like Diest (a small town in Limburg) went against legal evolution and evolved towards more French, others on the contrary evolved towards more Flemish in line with or ahead of the legal evolution. Let me end with two examples of chanceries that were ahead of legal evolution: Veurne, a small town in South-West-Flanders (near France), and Antwerp, a centuries-old cosmopolitan port and Flanders’ main city (North Flanders).

Already in 1857, some two decades before the 1878 law, the town of Veurne decided at the request of a “pro-Flemish high-ranking person” that the annual administrative report of the city would be translated in “Flemish, the people’s language”; from then on, the reports of the various boards would also be drawn up in Flemish and therefore the deliberations would take place in Flemish (s.a., 17/04/1857; my translation from Flemish).

In 1866, more than one decade before the 1878 law was voted, the Antwerp city council decided to switch from French to Flemish as the official language of the city. This decision implied increased translation from French into Flemish for documents coming from and sent to the French central administration. Moreover, at the city level, city regulations and decisions were drafted in Flemish and translated in French, and the Flemish (not the French!) text was the official version. The mayor used only Flemish at official public occasions (non-translation) even if some people were unable to understand Flemish. However, according to the newspaper *Het Handelsblad* some civil servants would have liked to thwart the decision of the city council to draft all letters, reports, and official documents in Flemish, because they were accustomed from childhood to do it in French (s.a., 12/09/1866). In 1872, the new city council went back to the situation before 1866 and redressed the position of French.

In sum, the rationale of language and translation practices in Flanders’ villages and cities in the 19th century followed a complex, fuzzy and unstable, unpredictable logic. A correct understanding of language and translation policies in 19th century Belgium, and elsewhere for that matter, should deal with the complex interactions of all these processes.

4. Conclusion

Of course we could understand Belgian language and translation policy in the 19th century as a linear evolution towards a more equal representation of the Flemish language and people in the public domain thanks to the linguistic struggle of the promoters of Flemish emancipation. But as hopefully has become clear, we could supplement this type of analysis with a complexity approach. If we really want to understand if, how, and when authorities and citizens were able to communicate with each other in 19th-century Belgium (and elsewhere), we have to deal

with a myriad of sometimes contradictory and unequally applied language and translation rules, practices and beliefs. We therefore need to study processes of interaction that enable us to understand the complex and paradoxical relations between society and individual, between the local and the central/global, between agency and structure, between translation and non-translation, between official and unofficial translation, between translation and other transfer processes. We need to study translation as an emergent phenomenon, constitutive of social reality. In terms of methodology, everything needs yet to be done, and the challenges are quite important. But in any case, we should be aware of the fact that order, generalization, reproducibility, predictability come at a price, and that this price may be too high. Scholarly thought needs to be able to live with disorder, complexity, paradox. Or as Prigogine said: “the new rationality looks at fluctuations, instability, multiple choices and limited predictability” (quoted in Marais, 2015, p. 21).

5. References

- Abbonent, U. (17/11/1885). Men schrijft uit Puurs aan het Handelsblad, *Het Handelsblad*, p. 2.
- Bastardas-Boada, A. (2013). Language policy and planning as an interdisciplinary field: Towards a complexity approach. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 14(3-4), 363-381. doi: 10.1080/14664208.2013.829276
- Bousquet, A., & Curtis, S. (2011). Beyond models and metaphors: Complexity theory, systems thinking and international relations. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 24(1), 43-62. doi: 10.1080/09557571.2011.558054
- Cairney, P. (2012). Complexity theory in political science and public policy. *Political Studies Review*, 10(3), 346-358. doi: 10.1111/j.1478-9302.2012.00270.x
- Chamberlin, W. (2009). Networks, emergence, iteration and evolution. *Emergence: Complexity and organization*, 11(4), 91-98.
- Chambre, L. (1866). *Annales parlementaires. Séances plénières*. Brussels. <http://www3.dekamer.be/digidocanha/K0007/K00074391/K00074391.PDF>.
- Latour, B. (1993). *We have never been modern*. London: Prentice Hall.
- Latour, B. (2007). *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*. Oxford University Press.
- Ledeganck, C. (1845). *Het burgerlijk wetboek uit het Fransch vertaald en beknoptelijk uitgelegd, met bijvoeging der aan hetzelfde toegebrachte wijzigingen voor België* (3e uitg. ed.). Ghent: Hoste en Annoot-Braeckman.
- Marais, K. (2015). *Translation theory and development studies: A complexity theory approach*. New York: Routledge.
- Mauray, J.-P. (1998). Belgique. Constitution du 7 février 1831. <http://mjp.univ-perp.fr/constit/be1831.htm>
- Meylaerts, R. (2008). Translators and (their) norms: Towards a sociological construction of the individual. In A. Pym, M. Shlesinger, & D. Simeoni (Eds.), *Beyond descriptive translation studies: Investigations in homage to Gideon Toury* (pp. 91-102). Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Meylaerts, R. (2009a). Et pour les Flamands, la même chose: Quelle politique de traduction pour quelles minorités linguistiques ? *Meta*, 54(1), 7-21.
- Meylaerts, R. (2009b). Au-delà des oppositions binaires national/international, traduit/non traduit: Les relations littéraires hier, aujourd'hui et demain. *TTR*, XXII(2), 93-117.
- Meylaerts, R. (2010). Habitus and self-image of native literary authors-translators in diglossic societies. *Translation and Interpreting Studies*, 5(1), 1-19.
- Meylaerts, R. (2011). Translational justice in a multilingual world. An overview of translational regimes. *Meta*, 56(4), 743-757.
- Meylaerts, R., & González Núñez, G. (forthc.). No language policy without translation policy: A comparison of Flanders and Wales. *Language Problems and Language Planning*.
- Mitchell, M. (2009). *Complexity: A guided tour*. New York: Oxford university press.
- Mitleton-Kelly, E. (2003). Ten principles of complexity & enabling infrastructures. In E. Mitleton-Kelly (Ed.), *Complex systems and evolutionary perspectives of organisations: The application of complexity theory to organisations* (pp. 23-50). Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Morcol, G. (2010). Issues in reconceptualizing public policy from the perspective of complexity theory. (Theoretical report). *Emergence: Complexity and organization*, 12(1), 52-60
- Morin, E. (2008). *On complexity* (R. Postel, Trans.). Cresskill: Hampton Press.

- Peeters, C.H. (1930). *Nederlandsche taalgids. Woordenboek van Belgicismen met verklaring en opgave van de overeenkomstige woorden en uitdrukkingen in het algemeen Nederlandsch*. Antwerp: De Sikkels.
- Peled, Y. (2014). Normative language policy: Interface and interferences. *Language Policy*, 13(4), 301-315. doi: 10.1007/s10993-014-9325-z
- Popelier, P., & Lemmens, K. (2015). *The Constitution of Belgium: A contextual analysis*. Oxford: Hart.
- Ranwet, M. (1845). *Pasinomie. Collection complète des lois, décrets, arrêtés, règlements généraux qui peuvent être invoqués en Belgique. Troisième série*. Brussels: Société typographique belge. Ad. Wahlen et compagnie
- s.a. (2/9/1859). Aenmaning, *Het Handelsblad*.
- s.a. (12/09/1866). Willen is Kunnen, *Het Handelsblad*, p. 2.
- s.a. (13/04/1870). In den Raad te Gent, *Het Handelsblad*, p. 2.
- s.a. (15/11/1872). Binnenland, *Het Handelsblad*, p. 1.
- s.a. (16/04/1872). Binnenland, *Het Handelsblad*, p. 1.
- s.a. (17/04/1857). Ter Navolging, *Het Handelsblad*, p. 2.
- s.a. (19/2/1872). Intérieur, *Echo du Parlement*, p. 1.
- s.a. (26/04/1861). Eene Wets-vertaler, *Het Handelsblad*.
- s.a. (30/04/1873). Binnenland, *het Handelsblad*, p. 1.
- s.a. (30/5/1873). Chambre des Représentants. Séance du 29 mai, *L'Echo du Parlement*.
- s.a. (30/8/1859). Vlaamsch in de Kamer, *Het Handelsblad*, p. 1.
- s.a. (31/01/1871). Vlaamsche Belangen, *Het Handelsblad*, p. 2.
- Sanderson, I. (2006). Complexity, practical rationality and evidence-based policy making. *Policy and Politics*, 34(1), 115-132.
- Spolsky, B. (2012). *The Cambridge handbook of language policy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Stengers, J. & Gubin, E. (2002). *Le grand siècle de la nationalité belge: De 1830 à 1918*. Brussels: Racine.
- Van Goethem, H. (1990). *De taaltoestanden in het Vlaams-Belgisch gerecht, 1795-1935*. Brussels: Koninklijke academie voor wetenschappen, letteren en schone kunsten van België.
- Vandenbogaerde, S. (2015). Juridische tijdschriften in België: Instrumenten van de praktijk en taalconflicten. In M. De Koster, D. Heirbaut, & X. Rousseau (Eds.), *Tweehonderd jaar justitie. Historische encyclopedie van de Belgische justitie/Deux siècles de justice. Encyclopédie historique de la justice belge* (pp. 96-109). Bruges: Die Keure.
- Vandenbussche, W., Vanhecke, E., Willemyns, R., & De Groof, J. (2006). Language policy and language practice in official administrations in 19th century Flanders. In E. Miyares Bermúdez & L. Ruiz Miyares (Eds.), *Linguistics in the twenty first century* (pp. 3-12). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press.
- von Busekist, A. (1998). *La Belgique: Politique des langues et construction de l'État de 1780 à nos jours*. Paris: Duculot.
- Weerts, S. (2015). *La langue de l'État: Proposition d'un modèle de pluralisme linguistique à partir de l'étude comparée des droits belge et suisse*. Bruxelles: Bruylant.
- Witte, E., & Van Velthoven, H. (2010). *Strijden om taal: de Belgische taalkwestie in historisch perspectief*. Kapellen: Pelckmans.
- X. (1860, 27/04/1860). Eene Walen-historie, *Het Handelsblad*, p. 2.
- Zolberg, Aristide R. (1974). The making of Flemings and Walloons: Belgium: 1830-1914. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 5(2), 179-235. doi: 10.2307/202507
-



Reine Meylaerts

KU Leuven and University of the Free State

Reine.meylaerts@kuleuven.be

Biography: Reine Meylaerts is Professor of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies at KU Leuven where she teaches courses on European Literature, Comparative Literature and Translation and Plurilingualism in Literature. Her current research interests concern translation policy, intercultural mediation and transfer in multilingual cultures, past and present. She is the author of numerous articles and chapters on these topics (<https://lirias.kuleuven.be/items-by-author?author=Meylaerts%2C+Reinhilde%3B+U0031976>). She is also review editor of *Target. International Journal of Translation Studies*.