



CLIOH *net*

*Clio's Workshop III*

Coordinated by  
*Ann Katherine Isaacs*

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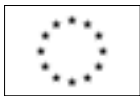
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# Languages and Identities in Historical Perspective

*edited by*  
*Ann Katherine Isaacs*

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*Manager*

Claudia Napolitano

*Editing*

Francesca Petrucci

*Informatic assistance*

Michele Gasparello

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# Introduction

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Language is one of the first and the most important ways in which each one of us comes into contact with others. Our very early linguistic experiences shape our perceptions throughout our life. Even if we acquire and use several languages, each is indelibly associated with our personal memories, as well as with the growth of our knowledge, understanding and ability to communicate. Language is a private matter. At the same time, it is also a very public matter, not only because it serves to express, to represent, to measure, to discuss, with others, but also because governments, universities, schools and the media intervene, often intentionally, in language usage and language policy.

For European citizens at the beginning of the 21st century language is an especially complex issue. The explosion of opportunities for communication on a world scale encourages such seemingly contradictory developments as the extension of the use of English in its various international forms (including Euroenglish, Brusselese, Globish and Internetian) and the defence, promotion and development of national or regional languages. We all contribute to disciplinary or professional jargons. We normally acquire and use at least one international languages (commonly English today, in future perhaps Spanish or Chinese). At the same time we preserve and encourage the use of many other languages: all member states' languages as a matter of policy and conviction, and because each language is a precious part of our common human patrimony.

“Languages and Identities in Historical Perspective” is the tenth volume in a series entitled ‘Clio’s Notebooks’, with which CLIOHnet wishes to bring a new level of historical awareness to students and general readers alike. CLIOHnet is a Thematic Network for History, supported by the Socrates programme of the European Commission, now including as official partners more than 70 universities in 30 countries and counting associate members in south-eastern Europe, Russia and in other continents. Information on the History Network and its activities is available on its website ([www.clioh.net](http://www.clioh.net)).

The first nine “Clio’s Notebooks” were published in series entitled “Clio’s Workshop I” and “Clio’s Workshop II” thanks to the support of the Culture 2000 programme of the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission. The present volume inaugurates “Clio’s Workshop III”, as part of the activities of the Thematic Network itself. The publication of this volume is possible thanks to a special pilot action developed during the year 2004-5. This pilot action allowed us to hold a first CLIOHnet Student Conference, in Pisa in June 2005. Its aim was to bring together student representatives from the many Universities and countries that participate in the Network in a context in which discussion, debate and planning could take place.

The pan-European gathering of history students “under the aegis of Clio” first constituted an attentive and provocative group of learners about the issue of “Languages and Identities”. Soon the “learners” took the initiative and became organisers in their turn. In the end they participated in the CLIOHnet Plenary meeting, presenting their plans and participating fully in the Network activities. The Student Conference on Languages and Identities turned into the founding conference of the CLIOHnet Student Network. We hope that this important result can be consolidated in the future. It was not the only result however.

The presentations and discussions which took place at the Conference have given rise to the present volume and to the accompanying three DVDs. These are not the Network's first publications on the theme of language. In every one of the first nine "Clioh's Notebook" aspects of this vital topic are explored. As a reader for the student conference, we prepared an 'instant book' of the same title reprinting seventeen of the chapters already published. This material is available on our website for reference and for free download.

Like all our volumes, "Languages and Identities in Historical Perspective" has certain characteristics: it deals with problems relevant for European citizens today; it brings together a variety of methodologies and viewpoints; it utilises insights from ancient as well as more recent times; it is the fruit of actual discussion and debate in the multi-national context of the History Network. Each chapter has a summary in the language of the author, and when possible is accompanied by one or more relevant sources or documents, in the original language and in translation. This format has been developed to emphasize the importance of diversity both as part of the European heritage and as a heuristic tool. Historical analysis is based on documentation; access to it requires linguistic knowledge and awareness of different categories and frames of reference. Like the volumes already printed, "Languages and Identities in Historical Perspective" is available for use and testing in teaching and in other contexts; full information, complete indices and the chapters themselves are available for free download on the CLIOHnet website ([www.clioh.net](http://www.clioh.net)).

In the chapters that follow the reader will see a variety of cases where specific policies have been designed in order to promote or prohibit, encourage or discourage the use of certain languages or scripts; in which existing languages have been 'cleansed'; in which linguistic habits have been used to create political consensus or divisiveness. The book should remind us that the national languages as we know them today were defined in precise cultural and political contexts. The fact that we accept their existence as 'natural' is a sign of the success of the rather recent political creation that goes under the name of nation-state. Language practice and policy mirror the tension between national governments and aspirations and broader concerns and allegiances, including the integration and the expansion of the European Union.

The volume is divided into three thematic sections. The first is entitled *Language, Script and Linguistic Genealogies*. Its aim is to introduce at the outset a general framework for considering language and its role, while documenting and contextualising some of the less obvious aspects of the link between language and identity. Fabio Dei shows how ethnographical and anthropological approaches and concepts have evolved during the past century. He provides and historicises a kind of conceptual map to help clarify the background and the consequences of considering language and the relations of languages to one another in different frameworks. Pier Giorgio Borbone examines the political social and religious significance of choosing one system of writing rather than another to represent language. His case studies are drawn from widely different times and geographical areas: first from Biblical times, in the Mediterranean and Near East; second in medieval and modern Central Asia. The importance of script for fixing the conventions of written language and hence preserving cultural and linguistic cohesion is further explored by Alessandro Orenco. Orenco shows how in the context of 4th and 5th century Armenia the technical, religious and political requirements of an ethnic and political group led to the conscious and successful search for an alphabet, still in use today. Pietro U. Dini introduces us to the world of historical linguistics. His interest is the Baltic languages and how, during the Renaissance, they were considered and explained. Dini traces the development of linguistic knowledge and theories on the

nature of specific languages and on the origins of peoples in the late Medieval and early modern age; he shows how critical linguistic research and the search for connections with mythical events were intertwined in the mapping of Baltic languages and the creation of Lithuanian and Latvian identities.

The second section is dedicated to *National Languages and Language Policies from the Middle Ages to Recent Times*. It deals with general questions and issues -- from the time of the definition of national languages to the present -- by examining single cases. Guðmundur Hálfðanarson shows how Iceland's ancient language became a fundamental factor in defining the role of a people, strengthening its status even in the eyes of its overseas Danish rulers. We see how the genealogy of language is not only a scientific matter, but also a powerful factor in politics. Hálfðanarson faces squarely the question of how a language whose allure lies in its archaism can evolve today. The answer is optimistic. In Hálfðanarson's view Icelandic is in good health, and restrictive linguistic policies are neither right nor necessary. Steven Ellis comes to somewhat different conclusions about the current state of Gaelic in Ireland, although the revival of this ancient language was one of most important tools for building Irish independence. Mirko Tavoni provides a comparative view of the very different political and cultural conditions that led to the definition of Italian, French, Spanish and German as 'national languages', with or without a 'nation-state'. The different political contexts affect the perceived link with ancient languages and the way that grammar and lexicon are codified. Iakovos Michailidis' study brings us to the dramatic events at the end of the first World War. Then linguistic allegiance was used to divide and distribute nations and national groups in South Eastern Europe. Michailidis' work traces some aspects of policy towards minorities in Greece and in Bulgaria, emphasizing the role of the "Abecedar" (a school book produced by Greece), of grammars and choice of script. In the final chapter of the section, Matjaž. Klemenčič deals with the Slovenian language, considering it a constant identity marker from when it is first documented in the 11th century. He traces the fate of the Slovenian language from 1500 to 1991 and sees it as a unifying factor, not only in Yugoslavia but also in the Slovenian diaspora.

The last section deals directly with an overarching theme, present in one way or another in all the chapters of the book: Entitled *International Languages. From Communication to Power* it explores the role of Latin and English in their interactions with national languages and societies – interactions which oscillate between competition and synergy. Cecilia Asso illustrates Erasmus' view of Latin as a communication language in the Europe of his day, using passages from the *Adagia*; she then shows us how in Italy the knowledge of Latin became a sign of distinction and a tool of power. Judith Munat has the task of concluding the volume and looking towards the future. Munat examines the implications of the current rapid extension of English as a nearly obligatory tool for international communication. Her chapter ends with an informal survey made during the Student Conference on the linguistic competences and attitudes of a very select and internationally minded group of young Europeans, the members of the nascent CLIOHnet Student Network.

Thanks are due to many. First, to the authors, partners and friends of CLIOHnet who gave generously of their knowledge, prepared their presentations at the Student Conference, entered into lively and interesting debate, and subsequently, and very swiftly, produced the written texts which form the chapters of this volume. Second, to the students: students of all three cycles, coming from nearly 30 countries, each of whom contributed personal and often scholarly knowledge of the linguistic history and policies in his or her country. The University of Pisa and its rector, Marco

Pasquali and his Office gave full and efficacious support to the project, as did the Dr Manuela Marini of the Communications Office, and her collaborator Federica Fruzzetti. Thanks are due to Roberta Filidei and to Elena Tonsini for indispensable help with logistic arrangements. Maurizio Arfaioi placed his knowledge of the world of Renaissance warfare at the service of CLIOHnet and courageously coordinated the Student Conference while the conveners were engaged in the Cliohnet Coordinating Committee and Plenary meetings. Very special thanks are due to ESIB and to Angele Attard who participated in the Student Conference and advised the students on how to set up their Network. The University of Pisa provided part-time student helpers – Romy Choueri, Lorenzo Gatti and Andrea Verdigi – whose work has been indispensable in different phases of the organisation of the Conference and the publication of this book. Francesco Andreotti and his collaborators recorded the proceedings and created the three DVDs which accompany the volume. Patrizia Pacini, Claudia Napolitano, Francesca Petrucci, Stefano Fabbri, Michele Gasparello and Ambra Seymons have once again dealt effectively and imaginatively with the variety of challenges that attend the production of our multi-national, multilingual volumes. The CLIOHnet team, Laura Burgisano, Pasquale Cuomo and Adrian Marinescu have given generously – beyond the call of duty – to make everything function properly. We express gratitude to all.

For the cover of the volume we have chosen a work by the Italian Futurist artist Giacomo Balla, entitled *Espansione di primavera* [Expansion of Spring] and dated 1918. The Futurists hoped to bring a new sense of energy and rapid movement, consonant with the times, to the fine arts. They thought that painting should and could be renovated by representing the technological and existential conquests and myths of the new century. After the shots fired in Sarajevo, spring could hardly be considered a happy and untroubled time. In the course of war and upheaval, millions were killed or forced to flee their countries, empires shattered, nations created or redrawn, often on the basis of linguistic identity. The consequences, positive and negative, of the first decades of the 20th century are still being played out.

We have chosen Balla's disquieting vision to symbolise the darker valences of a potentially dangerous mixture: language, identity and power. Unending attention to building understanding, tolerance and historical perspective are necessary antidotes.



Ann Katherine Isaacs was born in Astoria, Oregon, in 1943. She studied at the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Milan where she received her Laurea degree in Modern History in 1967. She has taught Renaissance History at the University of Pisa since 1975. Her research has concentrated on various themes of social and political history, particularly cities, state formation and justice. She is active in experimentation and innovation in European higher education; she coordinates the Thematic Network for History, CLIOHnet, and Clieh's Workshop.