Chapter 7
Special cases of pluricentric languages
An overview

1. Introduction

This chapter deals with a selected number of pluricentric languages and NVs that are special cases of pluricentricity.

2. Special cases of PCLs – Two national varieties of the same language within the same nation or a composite nation consisting of multilingual constituent political entities

The languages discussed in this section are not languages in which there are conflicts or strong effects of intensive contact with other languages. Rather, they are special cases of pluricentricity, which are dealt with here for the sake of the completeness and for the integration into the scheme outlined in chapter (6). There are four cases in this category: *Norwegian, Danish, British English, and Basque*. In *Armenian and Turkish* the pluricentricity is based on unrecognised territories:.

3. Norwegian: Pluricentricity based on several internal national varieties – Type (1)

This language is the first of two cases that have several national varieties within one and the same nation: *Nynorsk and Bokmål (Høgnorsk)*[1]with substantial linguistic differences. Both varieties are taught in schools and have the same rights. Both can therefore be considered as *national varieties of the same national language that exist within the same nation* making Norwegian a special case of a PCL.

The development of this dual standard followed the usual pattern of the "building away"[2] from a previously dominant language/variety (in this case Danish) by establishing a new norm. This process went alongside the foundation of Norway as a separate nation that in 1814 first seceded from Denmark (in a union with Sweden) and 1905 from Sweden to become a fully independent nation. Two approaches in the establishment of Norwegian developed in the course of the 19th century.[3] The writer Knud Knudsen argued in favour of adopting the spoken language of the "towns people", which was close to Danish and suggested that it should be "*Norweganised*" by changing spelling and inflection in accordance with the Dano-Norwegian *koiné*, known as "cultivated everyday speech." He suggested the term "*rigsmål*" (derived from German term

"Reichssprache") as name for the national language. The author Ivar Asen proposed instead that Norwegian should be based on the rural varieties of the region around Bergen, which he belieed to be untouched by Danish influence. He suggested the term "*landsmål*", as this variety was closer to the local language. This term alluded both to the rural origin of the variety and to the "*land*" as synonym for the nation. The names for the two varieties changed several times up to 1938 until the terminological pair *bookmål/nynorsk* was finally established. Both approaches were also linked to political camps, "which could be crudely described as right-wing and left-wing approaches to nationalism"[4]. The German invasion in 1941 repealed the orthographic reform of 1938, which was accused of having been under the influence of the Communists, who at this time were well represented in Parliament. The reform was reintroduced after the liberation in 1945 and the teaching of both varieties in school and the use of both NVs continues to this day.

4. Danish: Pluricentricity based on several internal national varieties – Type (2)

The situation is similar to Danish, which is an official language in Denmark and in the *Faroe Islands*. The Faroe Islands are an autonomous country within the Kingdom of Denmark. Danish is taught in the Faroe schools and spoken by most inhabitants alongside Faroese, although there seem to be differences in fluency among some speakers, as Faroese is the first language on the islands.[5]

Greenland is also a self-governing part of the Kingdom of Denmark. Before 1979, *Danish* was the second official language there alongside *Greenlandic*. Since the introduction of self-government in 2009, Greenlandic has become the sole national language and Danish a minority language and unofficial second language, spoken by most inhabitants. Danish can therefore also be considered a PCL but it is a second special type of PLC, which is due to the fact that the Faroe Islands and Greenland are constituent parts of the Danish Kingdom. The situation is in many ways similar to that of British English.

5. British English: Pluricentricity based on several internal national varieties – Type (3)

British English is conventionally regarded as a single NV and the mother-variety of all other NVs of English around the world. In the light of the specifications for the determination of PCLs and NVs that were outlined in chapter 4 of this book, this view is to be questioned and British English should be considered a PCL with four NVs (and not as "dialects" as is the case in a well-known

introduction (Hughes/Trudgill/Watt, 2012). The reason for this lies in the constitutional construction of the United Kingdom, which itself consists of four constituent states: *England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.* It is a similar legal construction to that of Denmark.

Apart from England, the other three constituent countries have their own devolved parliaments and local governments that have the right to decide on matters like healthcare, education, justice, environment, policing, rural affairs, and housing while defence, foreign policy, and most taxation stay with the government in London. Furthermore, in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland other languages alongside English are recognised as national languages, which influence the NVs of British English.

In Wales, the Welsh language was granted official status in 2011 and is used by around 20% of the population. Welsh English is marked by a number of specific features (especially in pronunciation and in the lexicon).[6]

In Northern Ireland, in addition to Hiberno-English – the Northern Irish variety of English - there is also Irish (Gaelic) and Ulster Scots, which is also marked by distinctive features of its own.[7]

In Scotland, the other languages spoken alongside English are *Scots* (spoken by about 30% of the population) and *Scots Gaelic*. *Scottish English* itself is also has a number of marked features in terms of pronunciation and in the lexicon. Standard Scottish English is heavily influenced by Scots,[8] which has been recognised by the Scottish parliament as a "traditional language" of Scotland and is a protected as a regional or minority language by the Charter of European Regional or Minority Languages. Scots is also known as "Lowland Scots" or "Doric".[9] Over 1.5 out of 5.2 million people reported that they could speak Scots (Scottish census of 2011). It is also a recognised language in Northern Ireland (Ulster Scots) and therefore a PCL. The "conflict" about the status of Scots has recently been resolved as "the Scottish Executive recognises and respects Scots (in all its forms) as a distinct language, and does not consider the use of Scots to be an indication of poor competence in English."[10] This led to a rise in status in 2016 when it was included in the curriculum for schools. Nevertheless, there is no standard written form of Scots. The website on Scots language education notes that "learning that Scots is a language in its own right gives many young people a renewed sense of self-respect. When children realise the literary and historical value of the language they speak, they have a greater belief in themselves as individuals."[11] This can only be underlined and shows the close connection between positive attitudes on the native language and per-

sonal self-esteem. Scots is also used in Northern Ireland (Ulster Scots) where it is recognised as a regional or minority language and regulated by the cross-border Ulster-Scots Agency (*Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch*)[12]. Its status is still disputed. [13]

6. Catalan: Pluricentricity based on several internal national varieties – Type (4)

Catalan is not an endangered language but a language that shows some internal fragmentation which has led to two centres and two language names, which some activists consider to be separate languages. Alongside Spanish, Catalan is a co-official language in Catalonia, on the Balearic Islands and Valencia, it is the only official language in Andorra and a minority language in France and Italy. Due to its status and distribution, Catalan clearly is a PCL. Catalan has two main varieties – the Eastern and Western variety with relatively few linguistic differences. However, Catalan has two linguistic centres: *Central Catalonian* and *Valencian* and two language names: *Catalan* and *Valencian*.[14] The internal variation of Catalan is even more complex as schoolbooks are printed in three versions that are characterised by a small number of differences and are easily mutual intelligible – the *Central Catalan, the Valencian and the Balearic*.[15]

The two main varieties have their own codification institutions (Institut d'Estudis Catalans (IEC) in Barcelona and Acadèmia Valenciana de la Llengua (AVL) in Valencia.)[16] This particular feature makes Catalan a special case among the PCLs, which is similar to Norwegian. As the Valencian variety has a name of its own, it could be assumed that it is perceived as a language of its own, which is denied or confirmed depending on the political position. Mas (2012: 292) describes in detail four models that are used by different political protagonists around Valencian: *"secessionist, particularistic, convergent, and uniformist*". They "represent the gradation from the maximum extent of purely Valencian variants to the minimum, with the corresponding and symmetrical presence of variants from the other varieties"[17]. The author shows that most working in the field of the Valencian language follow the particularistic/convergent model. Since the foundation of the Valencian academy, the IEC in Barcelona has increased the number of Valencian experts and has turned to the inclusion of expressions from non-dominant varieties of Catalan and practising a "compositional and polymorphic" model of codification[18].

The case of Valencian versus Central Catalan shows a well-known pattern in the controversies between dominant and non-dominant varieties of PCLs:

While the Valencian academy tries to preserve the specific features of Valencian, there are many (supporting the unity of the language) who think that there is no need for a separate codification and advocate the dominant form. Here too, the aim is to ensure that a non-dominant variety remains visible. On the other hand, there is also convergence between the two varieties, especially in spelling, in order to preserve the linguistic unity of the language. Language plays an important role in the ongoing efforts of the Catalonians to gain independence from Spain. A detailed account of the current situation of this language – also with regard to Catalonia's independence efforts – can be found in Mas (2019).

7. Basque:

The case of this language is a bit different from the previous ones as it is a recognised regional language and not a national language. Alongside *Spanish*, *Basque* is one of two recognized languages in the Basque Autonomous Community in the north of Spain with full rights at the level of this region, and therefore it has the status of a regional language. The same is the case with *Galician*. The pluricentricity of this language is derived from the fact that the language area extends into France where it is recognized as a minority language. Basque can therefore also be considered a PCL as it has a Spanish centre and a French one[19]. The language also played a symbolic role in the decades long war that raged in the Basque area for independence, which finally ended in 2011.

8. PCLs where pluricentricity is (partly) based on unrecognised political entities with invisible varieties

8.1. Armenian:

Armenian is a PCL with a kind of dual pluricentricity. On the one hand there is a large Armenian diaspora especially in the US and France (but also in many other countries), which uses "*West-Armenian*" which is an older variety of Armenian. The strong ethno-linguistic awareness of the West-Armenian community compensates the fact that West-Armenian is nowhere recognised and officially does not "exist" with an official status in any political entity. Even though there is some convergence going on between East- and West-Armenian,[20] Armenian is considered a PCL based on the existence of the two varieties.[21] Armenian was also a PCL because of the existence of the breakaway territory "*Republic of Artsakh*" (Nagorno-Karabakh) that seceded from Azerbaijan in the early 1990s and was formally an independent country but not recognised internationally. It was dissolved in 2023 following an attack by Azerbai-

jan military forces. Most inhabitants fled the area and settled in mainland Armenia. The standard variety of Artsakh Armenian showed little difference to Armenian Armenian but there were major differences in the spoken variety[22].

8.2. Turkish:

Turkish has not been considered a PCL until now. However, the constitution of Cyprus clearly states in Art. 3.1 that "The official languages of the Republic are Greek and Turkish" with the provision in clause 2 that "Legislative, executive and administrative acts and documents shall be drawn up in both official languages..."[23] This makes *Cyprus Turkish* a NV of Turkish. However, due to the occupation of Northern Cyprus by Turkey the territory is an internationally unrecognized breakaway territory – *Northern Cyprus* - that currently constitutes its pluricentricity. Turkish on Cyprus is the strange case of an official and quasi-unofficial language at the same time. There is scientific literature[24] about Cyprus Turkish under the term "Cypriot dialects"[25] and a dictionary which was issued in 1992[26], which shows that there is some language planning. A change in status in the direction of full recognition according to the Cyprus constitution will only occur if the Cyprus dispute is resolved.

Footnotes:

[1] *Høgnorsk is a conservative variety of Bokmål that rejects the language reforms after 1939 and is used by a small minority.*
[2] Fishman (2006)
[3] See Calvet (1998:137ff) and especially Haugen (1966)
[4] Calvet (1998:139).
[5] https://www.quora.com/How-well-can-most-Faroese-people-speak-Danish [acc. 27.2.2025]
[6] Trudgill / Hannah (2017)
[7] See in detail Hickey (2019) and (2012).
[8] Hughes et. al. (2012)
[9] For its history see Jones (2002) and for its linguistic features Corbett et. al. (2006).
[10] https://www.gov.scot/publications/scots-language-policy-english/ [acc. 20.03.2025].
[11] http://www.scotseducation.co.uk/fourcapacities.html [acc. 20.03.2025]
[12] Wikipedia "https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulster_Scots_dialects" [acc. 15.02.2025]
[13] For details see Hickey (2019).
[14] See Edelmann (2019) and Mas (2019) for the details of the complex language situation.
[15] Edelmann (2016: 149).
[16] For a comprehensive overview about Catalan as a PCL see Mas (2012), (2019) and Edelmann (2015), (2019).
[17] Mas (2012: 292).
[18] Mas (2012: 296).
[19] See Edelmann (2016) for an introduction to the situation of this language.
[20] Thanks for the information to Jasmin Dum-Tragutt (Salzburg, Austria) (personal communication). For the ongoing changes in the use of East- and West-Armenian see Dum-Tragut (2012).
[21] Cowe (1992).
[22] Thanks again to Jasmin Dum-Tragut for the information.
[23] http://www.cyprus.gov.cy/portal/portal.nsf/0/302578ad62e1ea3ac2256fd5003b61d4?OpenDocument&ExpandSection=3&Click= [acc. 05.03.2019]
[24] See Yükselen (2012) and Taşçı (1986)
[25] Demir (1992): Kıbrıs Ağızları Üzerine Notlar [Notes on Cypriot dialects"]
[26] Erdogan (1992).