

# Plurilingualism in Europe (XIII<sup>th</sup>-XV<sup>th</sup> centuries): The Poetic of a Political Choice

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## Keynote Speaker: Pr. Ardis Butterfield

According to the latest estimates, there would be around 7 000 languages, and thousands of dialectical variations, spoken in the 197 countries recognized by the U.N. There are, as a result, many plurilingual spaces around the globe, whether it is in a country using only one national language or in others in which plurilingualism has been institutionalized: Switzerland possesses, for instance, four national languages, Belgium has three, and Canada, two. Plurilingualism is, in other words, a norm contributing to the development of cultural and territorial spaces.

This dynamic is however far from being specific to the modern world: throughout the Middle Ages, and in particular, during the XII<sup>th</sup>, XIV<sup>th</sup>, and XV<sup>th</sup> centuries, choosing the right language was of crucial necessity. Which language should one use to write the Sacred, science, literature? Or to communicate during commercial exchanges? In a plurilingual context, using one language instead of another betrays a linguistic hierarchy: Latin was thus usually used in the religious, scientific, and literary spheres and progressively started to give way to less prestigious vernaculars. But such a gradual erosion of Latin's dominion was bound to create conflicts, especially when the *Bible* started to be translated to make it more widely available to the masses between the end of the XV<sup>th</sup> and XVI<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In some instances, moreover, the choice of a national language became synonymous with political power: imposing a unique language means a more efficient way of controlling a government. The English court, for instance, started to use a variety of Old French after the arrival of William the Conqueror in 1066, while the rest of the country continued to speak various Old English dialects. But when the crown of England freed itself from continental dominion and started to build an autonomous kingdom capable of competing with its French neighbour during the XIII<sup>th</sup> century, clerics and poets seized their vernacular and slowly started turning it into a language of culture, and thus of prestige, contributing to the creation of a cultural and linguistic unity.

The choice of a dialect, its accession to the rank of national or administrative language, its use in literature or science, is a set of European preoccupations: all political constructions (of a kingdom

or confederation) or cultural constructions (merry assemblies, places of production and sale of codexes...) are necessarily confronted with different imperatives. Not only is it necessary to be understood by one's audience, but it is also necessary to vehicle voluntarily or indirectly the political and cultural values attached to one's language.

This call for papers invites you, as a result, to question the geographical and textual interfaces where plurilingualism can be found; the rapport de force and complementarity between the various languages; the role of citations, and of translations.

Proposals (300 to 400 words) in French or in English, with a short biblio-biography, are to be sent to the following addresses [marielle.devlaeminck@gmail.com](mailto:marielle.devlaeminck@gmail.com) and [jonathan.fruoco@gmail.com](mailto:jonathan.fruoco@gmail.com) for January 30th 2019.