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Editor's introduction

It is an inevitable happenstance that languages will come into contact with one another—or, to put it more realistically, that there will be contact between speakers of different languages—and it seems indisputable that when contact situations occur, conflict and competition among languages can often arise. In such cases, many outcomes are possible: when there is conflict, there can be resolution, adaptation, accommodation, peaceful coexistence, or even further provocation; when there is competition, there can be winners but also losers.

The papers in this special issue of *Language & Communication* treat various aspects of language coexistence, language conflict, and language competition. While language conflict and competition can have an individual and psychological dimension, as realized for instance in the minds of bilingual speakers, equally critical are the social, political, and cultural dimensions to these general topics. It is these latter perspectives, the socio-cultural and/or socio-political, that inform the papers collected here. They explore such specific issues as language endangerment and potential language loss, shifts in the functional status of languages in a given region, overt governmental policies on minority languages, clashes of culture played out on linguistic battlefields, the relationship between language and group identity and the consequences for political identities, the decision-making process in the establishment of literary and corresponding orthographic forms of a language, among others. The geographic coverage of these studies extends to several continents (North America, including Central America, Europe, Asia, and Africa), and their chronological focus, while generally the late 20th century, reaches into the 19th century in the case of debates over Bulgarian orthography but also looks forward into the 21st century with regard to what lies ahead for French language policy.

These papers were among many presented at a conference on the topic of “When Languages Collide: Sociocultural and Geopolitical Implications of Language Conflict and Language Coexistence” that was held in Columbus, OH at the Ohio State University on 13–15 November 1998, under the auspices of various area studies centers at Ohio State, most notably the African Studies Center, the Center for Slavic and East European Studies, the East Asian Studies Center, and the Middle East Studies Center, together with the Office of International Studies.

The examination of matters of language conflict and language competition is particularly appropriate now, for it seems that language is playing an increasingly evident role in numerous cases around the world where cultures are clashing and where groups are vying for power and a piece of the action, so to speak. At the same time, though, the involvement of language in such struggles is not restricted to the

present day—similar issues have arisen in the past and in some instances are merely being revisited and revived today; moreover, they are likely to arise again and again, as long as speakers of different languages, and the cultures that are encoded in and through these languages, come to coexist in shared space. These papers offer valuable perspectives on these issues and afford the opportunity to learn from the past and from present circumstances.

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