

**Marc van Oostendorp** ([marc.van.oostendorp@meertens.knaw.nl](mailto:marc.van.oostendorp@meertens.knaw.nl),  
[Marc@vanOostendorp.nl](mailto:Marc@vanOostendorp.nl))

**National Identity and International Language  
France, Belgium and the Netherlands**

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The relation between national language and national identity has been an intimate one all over Europe for the past few hundred years. Furthermore it still plays a strong role in the current thinking of most Europeans about language and society, for example in discussions about the integration of immigrants, or, in particular, in thinking about what constitutes an 'international' language and the role such a language has to play in the international arena.

Yet there are also clear differences between European countries in the way they perceive this relation between language and national identity, and in consequence the possible roles of an international language. For instance, in French thinking speaking French is an important marker of national identity (Oakes 2001); furthermore French has played the role of an international language, and even continues to do within certain arenas. On the other hand, Dutch language policy has never been seriously aimed at making the national language international (e.g. Groeneboer 1999, Van Oostendorp 2002). One might expect such differences to have an effect on differences in the way the rise of English as an international language is perceived in the Netherlands and France. Belgium is also interesting, because it is a bilingual country where both Dutch and French are spoken.

These observations warrant a comparative approach to the issue, and this is what we will attempt to provide in this contribution. In particular, we will compare the way the role of English as an international language is referred to in highbrow newspapers in three EU countries, France (*Le Monde*), Belgium (Flanders: *De Standaard*) and the Netherlands (*NRC Handelsblad*). We have built a corpus of texts from these three journals in which this issue is discussed or at least mentioned. From this we try to derive the background assumptions that underly these discussions, and we show how they are different, and how these differences can be related to differences in point of view regarding language in these three countries.

*References*

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