

**Citizenship Tests as Instruments of Power:
The case of the Dutch integration exams**

Eva-Maria Schneidhofer

5751926

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Durk Gorter, Adviser

Umberto Ansaldo, Second Reader

For much of this century, the general public
has been brain-washed to believe in the
infallibility, fairness and meaningfulness
of the results of tests and examinations.

Bernard Spolsky

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Abstract

For some years now, a shift towards more restrictive integration policies can be observed in a large number of European countries. Migrants who want to enter, settle in or become citizens of one these countries are facing stricter conditions and a growing demand for overt acts of loyalty. One of these requirements is the proof of a certain language proficiency in the national language. By applying Shohamy's (2001a) critical language testing framework to the Dutch integration exams, this thesis shows how citizenship testing regimes are connected to the crisis of the European nation-states, and how citizenship tests and related phenomena are used by those in power to reinforce national identity and exclude those who are not wanted from the imagined community.

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1 Introduction

For some years now, a shift towards more restrictive integration policies can be observed in a large number of European countries. Migrants who want to enter, settle in or become citizens of one these countries are facing stricter conditions and a growing demand for overt acts of loyalty. One of these requirements is passing a language test to prove a certain language proficiency in the national language.

Tests, it has been argued by i.a. Messick (1989), Spolsky (1995), MacNamara (2005) and Shohamy (1997, 1998, 2001a, 2001b), are not neutral and objective means of measuring knowledge, but tools of power that are embedded in political, historical, social and cultural contexts, and caught up ideological struggles.

With special focus on the Netherlands, this thesis will illustrate how language requirements for migrants are connected to monolingual and national ideologies, and how tests are used as powerful tools to reinforce these ideologies in a time when nation-states are in crisis. It will further show how the language testing regimes that maintain to enhance integration and to reduce social differences, in fact contribute to a perpetuation of hegemonic power relations and the exclusion of certain groups of people.

The rest of this thesis is organised as follows. In the next chapter, I will follow Shohamy (2001a) in pointing out the (symbolic) power of tests, and show how their use as instruments for policy making affects test takers and society at large. I will further present Shohamy's framework of critical language testing (CLT). The subsequent chapter analyses the notions of language, national identity and citizenship, as well as their interrelation, which dates back to the very emergence of the European nation-states. I will then go on to discuss more recent developments and show how they challenge prevailing ideologies of 'one language, one nation', and the sovereignty of the nation-state. An overview over language testing for citizenship in the Western world will indicate the connection between these practices and national identity. In the main

chapter, I will describe the legislation and practice of language testing for admission, residency, and citizenship in the Netherlands. Moreover, I will apply Shohamy's CLT framework to show how tests are used as instruments of power to serve the neo-national agendas of those in authority.

2 Language testing and power

‘All language testing is potentially political; it can be associated with, and operate in the service of, power and control’ (McNamara 2005: 368). Messick (1989) acknowledges the political potential of testing in his validity framework, in which he locates all testing practice within the realm of values. He argues that testing can never be understood as a purely technical activity, can never be ‘scientific’ or ‘objective’ in a positivist sense, but necessarily involves ethical and political considerations. Following Messick’s lead, Shohamy (2001a: 131) views tests as ‘powerful tools – embedded in social and political contexts and agendas, related to intentions, effects and consequences and open to interpretations and values’. She argues that tests are not only used in the service of power, but are immensely powerful in their own right (Shohamy 1997, 1998, 2001a, 2001b).

In this chapter, the main notions of Shohamy’s (2001a) influential work on testing and power as well as her critical language testing framework will be presented, as they serve as the basis for the analysis of the Dutch integration tests in chapter 4. First, powerful features of tests will be introduced. Subsequently, it will be shown how these features facilitate the use of tests as tools for policy making. Further, a number of strategies that enhance the symbolic power of tests will be discussed, and the effects and consequences of testing will be shown. Finally, Shohamy’s critical language testing paradigm will be presented and set into relation with the characteristics of critical applied linguistics.

2.1 The power of tests

Shohamy determines two main sources of the power of tests: the detrimental effects they can have on test takers, and their use as disciplinary tools. Tests can have enormous influence on the lives of test takers, as they ‘create winners and losers, successes and failures, rejections and acceptances’ (Shohamy 2001a: 16). One single test has the power to shape the future of test takers, can create opportunities or close doors. Because of these detrimental effects, test takers are often willing to do

almost everything in order to maximise their scores. Consequently, tests can be used as disciplinary tools, i.e. to force test takers to change their behaviour to meet the demands of the test.

Thus, the power of tests originates in their ability to change the behaviour of those who are subject to them. Shohamy argues that those in authority are aware of this power and exercise it by using tests to cause a change in behaviour in accordance with their own priorities.

What is it that enables tests to be used in such powerful ways? Shohamy identifies a number of features of power, some of which will be discussed in the next section.

Powerful features of tests

One set of features that provide tests with power is related to the fact that in traditional testing contexts it is the tester who holds the power, who determines what and how to test, and who decides whether the test taker succeeds or fails. This imbalance is increased by the fact that the testing organisation is usually a powerful institution, e.g. a school, government, or industry, while the test takers are individuals with little power. Furthermore, the knowledge included in tests is determined by the testing organisation, while the test takers have no influence and need to comply with it.

The second set of features that grant power to tests refers to the fact that testing is perceived as a scientific discipline, and thus as objective, fair, true and trustworthy. Tests use what Shohamy calls ‘the language of numbers’. The public often views numbers and statistics as objective ‘true scores’, which are not negotiable or challengeable. The only way to challenge numbers is by using different numbers, yet in testing it is the tester who controls the numbers while the test takers do not. The objective formats in which test questions are posed further contribute to the power of tests. ‘Objective’ items (e.g. true-false, multiple choice) have only one correct answer, i.e. one ‘truth’, which is absolute and predetermined by those who created the test. The test takers’ or any other interpretation of the truth is thereby made invalid, unless it happens to coincide with the testers’ ‘truth’.

Thus, the very way in which tests are constructed grants them power.

Shohamy (2001a) further notes that certain characteristics of tests facilitate their use for policy making and turn them into attractive instruments, as will be seen in the next section.

Using tests for policy making

It has been argued above that those who are affected by tests tend to change their behaviour in accordance with the demands of the tests, as they fear the detrimental effects they can have on their lives. For this reason, using tests for policy making has strong authoritative power, which makes it appealing to decision makers. As Shohamy (2001a: 36) states, ‘once a test becomes a method of control, supported by central bodies, it rarely faces any objection by those who are subjects of the test.’

Another advantage for policy makers is that tests allow for flexible cutting scores that can be set arbitrarily. High cutting scores mean that only few people will pass and they are therefore often used as a gate-keeping mechanism – to keep out those who are not wanted. Further, tests provide the possibility to control and manipulate knowledge by including certain contents according to the perceptions or perspectives of the tester or the testing organisation. In spite of this potential for manipulation, tests enjoy authority and trust among the public, and evidence obtained from them serves as ‘objective’ proof for a whole range of arguments. In addition, the introduction of tests can appeal to the public as it symbolises social order in areas in which the public normally feels a lack of control. It also provides those in authority with visibility and evidence of action, and allows for cost-effective and efficient policy making in comparison to more expensive reforms (e.g. the development of new curricula or textbooks).

In summary, tests are powerful instruments that can be used by those in power to suit their agendas. Shohamy (2001a) argues that such use of tests is unethical and undemocratic, and asks how tests can persist in being so powerful, influential and domineering, and how they can play such enormous roles in our society. One possible answer lies in Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of *symbolic power* which will be discussed in the next section.

The symbolic power of tests

Bourdieu (1991: 192) defines symbolic power as:

a power which the person submitting to grants to the person who exercises it, a credit with which he credits him, a fides, an auctoritas, with which he entrusts him by placing his trust in him. It is a power which exists because the person who submits to it believes that it exists.

With respect to tests this means that the power of those who introduce tests derives from the trust that those who are subjects to testing place in them, in other words, tests have power because those affected by them believe that they do. Hence, the question becomes why test takers and the public as a whole grant this power to tests and those who administer them. Shohamy (2001a: 118) argues that:

as much as those in power want to control and dominate, there is also a strong willingness on the part of the subjects to be dominated and controlled so as to perpetuate their existing social structure.

Thus, tests have become accepted because they serve useful roles for everyone involved in the testing context: they provide those who are tested with constant recognition of how good they are, they grant a means for perpetuating dominance for those in power, and they serve as a vehicle for maintaining social order for both groups.

Shohamy (2001a: 118) argues that a number of strategies are used to enhance and cultivate symbolic power. One factor that raises the symbolic power of tests is that a number of groups work together to maintain social order and to perpetuate existing knowledge, e.g. the acceptance of problematic test scores by bureaucrats to arrive at policy decisions. The cooperation of governments, testing institutions and elites also serves to provide tests with a market value in form of e.g. acceptance to a university or citizenship. Another mechanism is the use of tests as instruments for controlling entry (e.g. to universities or to countries), thereby perpetuating class differences and creating gate-keeping mechanisms that ensure that the in-group consists only of those that the ones in power deem suitable. By including only the knowledge that is socially recognised as legitimate by those in power (Bourdieu 1991), and not validating other forms of knowledge, testing becomes a mechanism to exclude those who do not

‘belong’ from the power group.

Moreover, children learn from a very young age that success in tests is crucial to success in life. Tests become the main authority and symbol of power, turning them into a habit (what Bourdieu refers to as ‘habitus’), and developing a dependence on them. With this socialisation to testing, children also learn a number of rituals and ceremonial features in the forms of rules and behaviours, which only take place during tests:

For kids who have never taken these tests, for young kids, they have to learn that this test will be like nothing they have ever taken before. Their teacher who they love and is so kind and sweet, is going to say, ‘Pencils down!’ and mean it. They are not going to be able to raise their hands and say, ‘Just another minute, I need to finish.’ You have to explain to them what a standardized test is. (Halberstam, quoted in Shohamy 2001a: 125)

Shohamy (2001a: 125) argues that many of these rules have no rational explanation except the need to create symbolic power: ‘the context of tests creates a set of rules that are different from ‘normal life’ so that fear, respect and authority are created by those who dictate the rules.’

In language testing, symbolic power is additionally increased by the combination of two sources of power – tests and language. Shohamy notes how remarkable it is that language tests are so unquestioningly accepted by the public as the correct device for screening people while neither linguists nor testers really know the exact level of language that is needed for e.g. immigrants to function academically.

Lemke (1995) refers to the political power of texts and Shohamy argues that tests are texts, texts with meaning, which can be translated into power. The type of texts used in tests is very different from the typical texts that people read in non-testing situations (Fillmore 1981). Both the discourse of the texts and the instructions that are written in ‘a cold language and in a most authoritative form [...] reduce the test taker to a powerless creature whose role is simply to follow orders’ (Shohamy 2001a: 124), thereby enhancing the symbolic power of tests.

Finally, tests turn from symbols of power into ideologies when authorities spread myths and false assumptions, e.g. that the introduction of tests will raise the achievement of students or facilitate the integration of migrants, to create an even more powerful domination.

A number of studies (Shohamy 2001a) regarding the effects of introducing and using tests provide evidence that tests are, in fact, capable of changing educational behaviour, but the patterns of these effects are complex, indicating that tests are not isolated events and that their effects cannot be controlled easily. The consequences of tests in a broader context are even more difficult to understand. The following section will look at the factors influencing the immediate effect of tests as well as their wider consequences.

Effects and consequences of testing

The effects of tests have been shown to be complicated, and Shohamy argues that there are various factors that contribute the different impact patterns. The main factors influencing the effects of tests are the status of the language being tested and whether it is a high-stake or a low-stake test. With respect to the language status it has been shown that test impact is stronger if the language tested is a high status language. This can be explained by the fact that languages become high status languages because of their association with power, elites, better opportunities, etc. Thus, test takers view high status languages as valued linguistic resources, and consider them a power asset and a boundary marker, the knowledge of which has beneficial effects on employment possibilities, academic achievement or social status. Low status languages on the other hand provide no such benefits and, consequently, the effect of a test in a low status language can be assumed to be lower. A related factor is whether the results of the test lead to detrimental effects for the test taker, as for example not passing a test in a high status language and thereby losing the anticipated beneficial effects. Tests that have significant consequences are referred to as high-stake tests, while those which do not are termed low-stake tests. If the results of a test have no personal or immediate consequences, the effect of the test is expected to be low. If, on the other hand, the results are used for decision-making, or can lead to certain sanctions, the effect of the test will be stronger. Other factors influencing the effects of tests are the purpose of the test, its format, and the skills tested.

Tests do not only have immediate effects for those who are subjects to them, Shohamy argues that they also have far-reaching, negative consequences for education and society as a whole. Tests often lead to a narrowing of knowledge, as those affected by them do not want to ‘lose’ time studying something that will not be part of the test. The ‘test-knowledge’, often referred to as ‘institutionalised knowledge’ narrows the scope of the topic being taught. As Shohamy (2001a: 112) states:

Its [institutionalised knowledge’s] main characteristics are that it is narrow, simplistic and often in contradiction to expert knowledge. After all, the information included on tests is only a representation of real knowledge; it is monological, based on one instrument (a test), on one occasion, detached from meaningful context and usually with no feedback for improvement.

Thus, while tests are often introduced under the pretext of improving education and increasing academic achievement, they provide nothing but a quick fix, ‘an instant solution that overlooks the complexities of subject matter and is not meaningful for improvement’ (Shohamy 2001a: 112).

Tests have the power to redefine knowledge, for example by introducing a test to ensure that a previously untaught subject will be taught and mastered. Tests are also capable of upgrading certain languages and downgrading others: the mere fact that a language is being tested (or not being tested) grants (or reduces) the power of that language. The decision as to which language is tested usually lies with policy makers that have the authority to grant power to what they perceive as important. The redefined knowledge is often contrary to existing knowledge, for example when a country declares a multilingual policy but only one language (usually the one that is most powerful, i.e. the official/national language) is tested. As the power of tests has become so strong that it is now commonly believed that what is tested is important, all other languages become unimportant, as they are not tested, and the multilingual country becomes a *de facto* monolingual country. In this way, tests are used to manipulate and control, a procedure that can be seen as undemocratic and unethical.

By following Shohamy’s (2001a) analysis of the features and characteristics of tests as well as her examination of the uses of tests it has been shown that tests are powerful instruments, often introduced in

undemocratic and unethical ways for disciplinary purposes and for carrying out various policy agendas. It has become evident that tests can indeed never be 'objective' or 'scientific', and that they have to be understood in a cultural, social, political, educational and ideological context. Shohamy's notion of *critical (language) testing* refers to the activity of embedding tests in these contexts. The testing framework she developed (and partly adapted from Pennycook 1994 and Kramersch 1993) aims to limit and control the powerful uses of tests, and implies the need to minimise their detrimental force, reveal the misuses, and empower the test takers. In the following section the principles of critical language testing will be presented.

2.2 Critical language testing

Critical language testing can be assigned to the field of critical applied linguistics, for which the work of Alastair Pennycook has been seminal (but see also i.a. Tollefson 1991, 2002; Fairclough 1989, 1995; Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999; Phillipson 1992; Auerbach 1993, 1995; Wodak 1989, 1996; Wodak & Chilton 2005; Morgan 1998). Drawing upon the work of Pennycook (1999, 2001), Lynch (2001: 357) suggests the following characteristics for a critical approach to applied linguistics:

1. an interest in particular domains such as gender, class, ethnicity, and the ways in which language and language-related issues are interconnected with them;
2. the notion that our research needs to consider paradigms beyond the dominant, postpositivist-influenced one;
3. a concern for changing the human and social world, not just describing it; and
4. the requirement that critical applied linguistics be self-reflexive.

The principles of critical language testing (CLT) relate to these characteristics.

Shohamy (2001a) emphasises the fact that tests cannot be understood as impartial mechanisms of assessment but have to be viewed as tools within a wider context, which can be related to the first of Lynch's (2001)

variables:

CLT claims that the act of language testing is not neutral, but a product and agent of cultural, social, political, educational and ideological agendas that shape the lives of individual participants.

CLT views test takers as political subjects in a political context.

CLT views tests as tools within a context of ideological and social struggle.

CLT perceives testing as being caught up in an array of questions concerning education and social system.

Another set of CLT principles refers to alternative testing paradigms and the need for test scores to be negotiable and challengeable. This can be linked to both the second and the fourth of Lynch's variables:

CLT challenges psychometric traditions and considers interpretive ones that allow for different meanings and interpretations rather than a single absolute truth.

CLT considers the meaning of test scores: are they prescriptive, final or absolute or can they be discussed, negotiated and interpreted in multiple ways.

CLT challenges the uses of 'the test' as the only instrument to assess knowledge and considers multiple procedures for interpreting the knowledge of individuals.

A number of Shohamy's principles are concerned with the various stakeholders of tests (e.g. test takers, testers, testing institutes, parents, governmental and educational institutions) and their relationship to tests, which can be understood as being connected to Lynch's third variable:

CLT encourages test takers to develop a critical view of tests as well as to act on it by questioning tests and critiquing the value which is inherent in them.

CLT asks questions about what sort of agendas are delivered through tests and whom they serve.

CLT claims that testers need to ask themselves what sort of vision of society tests create and what vision of society tests are used for.

CLT examines tests in terms of their measurement and assessment of

knowledge versus their definition and dictation of knowledge.

CLT examines the involvement and influence of the range of stakeholders of tests.

Finally, a range of CLT principles challenge the knowledge involved in testing, which can be related to all of the variables of critical applied linguistics:

CLT asks whose knowledge tests are based on and whether this knowledge is treated as independent 'truth' or as something negotiable and challengeable.

CLT admits to the limited knowledge of any tester and the need for multiple sources of knowledge.

CLT challenges the knowledge that test are based upon and advocates a democratic representation of the multiple groups of society.

Thus, Shohamy's CLT framework draws from her own critique on the powerful uses of tests, but can also be set in relation with the more general principles of critical applied linguistics.

In chapter three, Shohamy's principles will be applied to the case of citizenship testing in the Netherlands. The following chapter discusses the phenomenon of citizenship testing in Western countries, and examines the interrelation between citizenship, national identity and language.

3 Language testing for citizenship

Citizenship tests are high-stake tests that have serious consequences for the future of the test-takers, as non-citizens are excluded from many forms of social welfare, civil rights and political representation in most countries. Yet, as Piller (2001) notes, the naturalisation applicant's agency is only involved to the degree that s/he decides to apply for citizenship. The 'decision' to submit an application, however, can only be made after fulfilling the criteria set by the naturalisation legislation of the relevant nation. These criteria usually include length of residence, absence of a criminal record, economic and educational standards, and some level of proficiency in the official and/or majority language. It is the latter criterion, and the testing of this proficiency, that form the focus of this paper.

Over the last years, language testing for citizenship has become more and more common in Western European countries, and consequently a number of researchers from the fields of sociolinguistics and language testing have become interested in the topic (see Extra, Spotti & Van Avermaet 2008, Hogan-Brun, Mar-Molinero & Stevenson forthcoming, and Shohamy & McNamara forthcoming for reviews). Many scholars argue that naturalisation language testing has its basis in ideologies of national identity and citizenship (i. a. Hansen-Thomas 2007, Piller 2001, Milani 2008, Stevenson 2006, Blackledge 2004).

This chapters looks at the interrelationship between national identity, citizenship and language. The first section discusses the link between citizenship and national identity, and the second section examines the interdependency between nation-state and national language. The third section considers the emergence of postnational citizenship and its impact on national identity. Finally, citizenship testing practices in the Western world will be presented.

3.1 Citizenship and national identity

In order to understand the motivation behind citizenship testing and the link between citizenship and language, the concept of citizenship needs to be explained. In ancient republics a citizen was:

[A] person with political right to participate in processes of popular self-governance. These include rights to vote; to hold elective and appointive governmental offices; to serve on various sorts of juries; and generally to participate in political debates as equal community members (Smith 2002: 105).

This meaning of citizenship prevails in modern republics and democracies.

In addition, it has come to be a legal status:

‘Citizens’ are people who are legally recognized as members of a particular, officially sovereign political community. They therefore possess some basic rights to be protected by that community’s government [...]. In this meaning, possessing ‘citizenship’ is understood to be effectively equivalent to possessing ‘nationality’ under a particular modern state (Smith 2002: 105).

The concept of citizenship thus emphasises a reciprocal political relationship between individual and state and ‘is intimately related to the question of belonging to a nation’ (Rex 1991: 5). This link between citizenship and national identity can be traced back to the very emergence of nation-states, which will be shown here through the examples of France and Germany, but has taken place in a similar way in most other European countries.

The Reformation and the Wars of Religion in the sixteenth century had led to the agreement that there should be national homogeneity, and the belief in the divine right of kings was being challenged. A new conception of the state appeared, in which legitimacy derived from the people. Montesquieu and Voltaire, Rousseau, and Locke developed ideas that contested the claim that a government had the right to rule independent of the will of the people, and the English, American and French revolutions embodied these ideas in action (Wright 2004). In theory, these new nations emphasised civic rather than cultural values and were culturally neutral. However, as Nic Craith (2006: 24) argues, ‘in the French example of ‘civic’ nationalism, there was (and is) an inextricable link between language, culture and imagined community.’ The French Revolution did not only introduce the notion of citizenship, it also provided a strong impetus for cultural and linguistic unification. When people moved from being subjects to being citizens, it became important that the population be linguistically cohesive:

In a democracy each citizen must keep a watch on the government. To carry out such a role one must know one's government and above all one must understand the language it uses (Barère 1972, quoted in Wright 2004: 32).

Although a language census in 1790 revealed that only six million people had French as their first language or at least some competence in it while the rest of the 25 million population spoke some other language and had minimal or no competence in French, the revolution was carried in French, and the acquisition and use of French became a patriotic and revolutionary duty for citizens (Wright 2004). French became the sole medium of communication in public life. Other languages and cultures (e.g. Breton, Basque or Occitan) were regarded as divisive and a danger to the territorial unity of the nation-state (Nic Craith 2006: 24). History texts in French schools from 1860 focused on eras when Frenchmen shared a common destiny, and neglected other actors in the national space, which allowed French history 'to be presented as if it were the story of one group' (Wright 2000: 38).

In the German speaking world, Herder and his followers developed the theory of ethnic nationalism, which held that nations are a natural phenomenon whose linguistic and cultural cohesion derive from a common past, and whose destiny is to be a single political unit (Wright 2004: 33). German-speaking intellectuals claimed a common German history and descent, a common language and culture as evidence for a German nation, and German politicians created the German nation-state on this rationale. Just like in the French example, however, there was little common history or culture from which to draw. Prior to the nineteenth century, the area which was to become Germany consisted of over 350 small states and cities, which were divided in the economic as well as in the political sphere, shared no agricultural practices and were split by religious difference (Wright 2004). The German language was of primary significance for the national consciousness, despite the fact that there was hardly a single recognisable 'German' language. Instead there were several often mutually unintelligible dialects, none of which had established its own legitimacy as the standard form of an overall German language (Nic Craith 2006).

Thus, the nations of the 19th century were by no means natural phenomena, but the ‘ideologized products of educated elites who moulded their populations to fit the criteria for national self-determination’ (Wright 2004: 35).

As the respect for state sovereignty grew, the contact across boundaries became politically more difficult, and the growth of nationalist ideology made contact psychologically complex because the citizens of the adjacent state(s) had become ‘the Other’. Citizens were bound to their nations by the essentialist belief that one is part of a community dating from time immemorial and stretching into the future, and by the order, justice, social welfare, and defence provided by the state.

It is thus clear that, although ‘national identity and citizenship are two distinct categories’, as Piller (2001: 263) convincingly argues, they are inextricably intertwined and cannot be understood independently of each other. Yet, not only national belonging and citizenship are interrelated, language has always played an essential role as well. So much so, in fact, that Piller (2001: 260) states that ‘the interrelationship between national identity, citizenship and language is so complex and ideologically fraught that it seems impossible to disentangle the various strands.’ While the importance of language for the nation building has already been indicated above, it is in the next section that the interdependency between nation-state and language will be discussed in detail.

3.2 National identity, language and citizenship

Nic Craith (2006: 20) rightfully states that ‘language as a concept appears perfectly obvious.’ Like nations, languages give the impression of having existed from time immemorial. Yet languages, like nations, are a constructed concept:

The concept of “a language” – at least in the sense which appears so banally obvious to “us” – may itself be an invented permanency, developed during the age of the nation-state. (Billig 1995: 30)

Billig’s point becomes clear when we follow Wright (2004) as she looks at the linguistic situation in Europe before the emergence of the nation-state.

In the Medieval period, the vast majority of Europeans were settled peasants, who lived in small groups and travelled little. Even though there are no records of them or their lives, it is feasible to presume that the majority of the agriculturalists was monodialectal, or at the most bidialectal, as networks were restricted and would not have required a larger language repertoire. Wright notes that there was hardly any need for a medium of intergroup communication, as groups tended to be turned in on themselves and to consider everyone outside the village as a stranger and outsider. However, if wanted, the communication with most immediate neighbours was possible. Most Europeans spoke a dialect from one of the major Indo-European phyla (Romance, Germanic, Celtic, Slavic, Baltic), or dialects of Arabic and Turkish in the south of Europe, and adjacent dialects along these continua were mutually comprehensible:

A traveller disembarking in Portugal and trekking across the Iberian peninsula to the Mediterranean coast, then eastward to the Alps, down into the Italian peninsula to the island of Sicily would have found as a general rule that the inhabitants of each village could understand the inhabitants of the next. There were no major breaks in the Romance language continuum although minor changes added up so that groups at a distance could not easily understand each other, and those at the end of the continua were unlikely to recognise the relationship of their two languages at all. (Wright 2004: 21)

Thus, the dialect continua were not yet restricted by the political allegiances of speakers, as they would become in later centuries.

While the feudal ruling class was multilingual due to marriages between the royal dynasties across Europe, they were also used to govern multidialectal and/or multilingual populations. Nobility of a lower rank loyal to the great dynasties ensured the communication from the centre to the periphery. There was no need for communication from the peripheries to the centre, as the king's subjects were not citizens who needed to be consulted. Any tendency towards convergence of the vernaculars among the intelligentsia was blocked due to the existence of a scholarly *lingua franca*. Thus, there was no pressure for linguistic homogenisation from above and few societal forces that encouraged linguistic convergence.

With the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) and the mutual recognition of integrity and autonomy among states that followed from it, the links along the dialect continua were severed, as groups were split by borders and

discouraged from maintaining contact in the interest of building national solidarity. The translation of key religious texts – Martin Luther’s theses into German and Jean Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536) into French – coincided with the advent of print capitalism, and both were mayor forces in the standardisation of the vernacular languages. By spreading the language of the capital, print capitalism was also crucial to the development of national identity: Anderson (1991) argues that with its emergence people came to imagine themselves as members of a particular group who could all read the same texts. He sees a common language as the most central constituent in the formation of a nation and national identity.

However, the relationship between nation-state and national language is not unidirectional. Just as a common language was essential for the formation of a national identity, the promotion of one variety above all others was immensely favoured by the political situation. Never before had it been necessary for such large groups of people to have a common language. Now, a separate medium of communication was needed to identify a distinct nation that was entitled to self-government. Consequently, specific vernaculars – those of the capitals – were taken from linguistic communities – the leading classes – to serve as symbols of clearly defined national boundaries. As Nic Craith (2006: 20) states: ‘all national languages are in some sense artificial and allied with the construction of nation-states.’ Thus, while we are accustomed to thinking of e.g. Spanish and Portuguese as two separate languages, this may simply be a consequence of the former geopolitical dominance of these nation-states rather than the result of any linguistic factors. If the political boundaries had been drawn differently, we might consider both forms of communication as dialects of the ‘Iberian’ language instead of separate speech forms (McWhorter 2002). The same holds for Norwegian and Swedish, as well as for many other national languages.

However, even though national languages can be seen as constructed, they have nevertheless been used (and are still used) to cultivate a sense of national belonging:

To know and to use the national language is part of the definition of belonging to the nation; to speak the language is a badge of inclusion; to refuse to know the language is to refuse the community and is seen as schismatic and unpatriotic. (Wright 2004: 42)

In summary, the national languages took on a number of important roles in the nation building process and continue to serve those functions: they fulfil the utilitarian role of providing a medium of communication, which permits the nation to function efficiently in its political and economic life, especially as democracy develops. Further, a common language allows the nation to develop a shared culture, and promotes cohesion. Apart from this inner cohesion, a national language can be used to set one group apart from another and aids the imagined community in being conceived as a separate nation (Wright 2004).

It has been shown how the concepts of citizenship, national language and national identity are interconnected, and how national languages have been used to create imagined communities and to remain them united, despite the fact that no European country naturally matches the nationalist ideal of congruence between territory and people or the 'one language, one nation' ideology. However contingent the ontological reality of nationhood, and however imagined national communities may ultimately be, nationalism has proved an extraordinarily successful recipe for holding together enormous, and in some cases extremely disparate, groups of people (Glaser 2007).

However, because of the mismatch between reality and national ideology, the success of the nation-state has depended on assimilatory practices and the negation of groups and languages that would have disrupted the cohesion of the imagined community. Consequently, the processes of state-formation in the 19th century equalled an exclusion from the state level for most European regional languages, and therewith posed a threat to their continued existence. Only recently have they become legally protected on the national level as well as on the level of the European Union (EU) (Extra & Gorter 2007). Yet, it has not been regional languages and groups but postmodernisation and globalisation that have challenged the nation-state as the sole source of authority of citizenship and

democracy, as will be shown in the next section.

3.3 Beyond modern citizenship

During the last decades of the twentieth century, certain dimensions of sovereignty have been redistributed from the level of the state to transnational and international bodies, and globalisation has to some extent contributed to a weakening of national loyalties from below. As theories about multiple identities and cultural hybridity have entered into the political mainstream, myths about nations as culturally homogeneous collectivities and language-derived maps of cultural diversity have grown increasingly implausible (Glaser 2007).

The European project, which has been trying to create a ‘European Union identity’ (García 1997), is a multilingual one. Language as such does not have any leading role in the creation of a European identity, certainly not a single language. As the European Commissioner of Social Affairs, Pdraig Flynn (1993: 14), stated: ‘Europe’s strength lies in its ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity.’ Piller (2001: 261) suggests that the example of the European Union might indicate ‘a real change to overcome the “one language, one nation” myth in the 21 century’, as monolingual policies give way to multilingual ones, and nation-states yield to supranational forms of political and economic organisation. However, the official multilingualism policy of the European Union does not preclude a ‘one nation, one language’ ideology, as it is the acquisition of official languages of other European member states that is encouraged, and all other languages and varieties, be it regional minority languages, ‘immigrant languages’ or dialects, are marginalised. In addition, Van Avermaet (forthcoming) points out that, while most European politicians advocate a process of economical, social and cultural integration, (often the same) politicians tend to manifest a more nation centred discourse in their own countries. It is not only politicians who show this paradoxical approach, society at large too argues in favour of multilingualism while at the same time demanding the use of one language. Furthermore, even though ‘the emergence of an EU citizenship might appear to herald the development of a post-national form of citizenship’ (Nic Craith 2006: 16), it effectively

reinforces the traditional construction of citizenship, as nationality of a EU member state is a precondition of EU citizenship. Article 8 of the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) establishes that ‘every person holding the nationality of a Member State shall be citizen of the Union’, and affirms that ‘citizenship of the Union shall complement and not replace national citizenship.’ Thus, European citizenship does not include migrants who are not already citizens of member states. Consequently, European citizenship becomes a mechanism which ‘includes some of the populations historically present in the space of the community while rejecting others, most of which are long established and contribute equally to the development of the civil society of the organism (Balibar 2004: 171). Immigrant groups are usually regarded as foreigners, no matter how long they have resided in Europe, and even children whose parents were already born in their country of residence are still referred to as ‘third generation immigrants’. The distinction between ‘self’ and ‘others’, between ‘citizens’ and ‘aliens’ has been a central component of the process of national self-determination, and the boundaries separating members of the EU from their non-European counterparts have strengthened as the EU has consolidated (Nic Craith 2006: 150).

As for the languages of these groups, terms like ‘non-indigenous’, ‘non-European’, ‘non-territorial’, or ‘non-regional’ are applied. Nic Craith (2006: 150) argues that this terminology reflects the general assumption that these languages and the people who speak them have no roots in Europe and cannot acquire them either, despite the fact that they live, work and raise their families in Europe:

Although it is now accepted that non-European immigrants may settle in Europe in the long term, this has not yet translated into recognition that the language of such immigrants will be spoken in Europe on a more permanent basis and represent what is effectively the ‘new’ languages of Europe.

In the light of this, it should not come as a surprise that the main documents and organisations of the European Union that protect ‘regional minority languages’ do not mention immigrant languages. The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities offers, as the name indicates, protection for ‘national minorities’, not non-national ones. The

European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (EBLUL) does not advocate any rights for speakers of non-European languages, and neither does the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML). There have been some improvements in recent years (e.g. the *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights*, which explicitly includes immigrant languages within its terms of reference), but it is still apparent that ‘non-national’ minority languages and groups are treated differently from ‘national’ ones. While ‘it is generally accepted that it would prove impossible to offer parity of esteem evenly to every group that asserts its difference’ (Nic Craith 2006: 159), it seems equally difficult to see how the allocation of special rights to one group of minorities and the denial of the same rights to other groups can be reconciled with the principle of equal human rights for everyone (Extra and Yagmur 2002). One often mentioned criterion for recognition is that of indigeneity. However, as many immigrant groups have resided in European countries and spoken their languages for generations, the question becomes: at what point do migrants become indigenous? In recent years more and more ‘migrants’ have become naturalised or have acquired citizenship through birth (*ius solis*). This change in status makes the non-recognition of their languages increasingly unsustainable (Nic Craith 2006).

Isin and Turner (2002) argue that, as the globalisation process produces multiple diasporas, very complex relationships between homeland and host societies emerge, which make the traditional idea of national citizenship increasingly problematic. Labour and other migratory movements have produced and will continue to produce a variety of social changes that are connected to multiculturalism in terms of marriage, family structures, pluralism and multiplicity. Thus, societies are forced to manage cultural difference and associated tensions and conflict, which will bring about significant changes in the processes by which states allocate citizenship and a differentiation of the category of citizen. The augmented introduction of language tests for acquiring citizenship can be seen as one of those changes. In the following section language testing practices for citizenship in a number of Western countries will be described.

3.4 Citizenship testing in the Western world

Different countries place considerably different language requirements on persons who want to acquire citizenship. Piller (2001) argues that language testing as part of the naturalisation process is minimal in the traditional 'immigration countries', Australia, Canada and the United States, as they define citizenship as based on rights and obligations:

The language testing serves to show that the applicant has enough knowledge of the official language(s) to be able to understand and carry out the rights and duties conferred through citizenship. [...] In order to carry out these privileges and responsibilities, applicants have to demonstrate that they "are able to speak and understand basic English" (Piller 2001: 266, quote in original, taken from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1998).

In both Canada and Australia¹, there are no separate language tests:

There will not be a separate English language test, your English language skills will be measured by your ability to pass the test which is available in English only (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Australia 2008).

The test and your interaction with Citizenship and Immigration Canada staff will show if you can speak either English or French well enough to communicate with people. You must be able to understand simple spoken statements and questions. You must also be able to communicate simple information. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2008)

While these requirements might appear to be rather low, they are very vague in their formulation, thereby concealing the fact that the language skills needed may *de facto* not be as 'basic' as one is led to believe. The following excerpt is taken from '*A look at Canada*'², a booklet provided by the Canadian government to prepare for the citizenship test, and illustrates the language level that applicants need to master at least passively:

Economic growth is crucial for the future prosperity of Canada, but growth must be managed carefully so that it does not harm the environment. The Canadian government is committed to the goal of sustainable development, which means economic growth that is environmentally sound.

¹ The Australian citizenship test commenced on 1 October 2007 and is being reviewed by an independent committee as of 28 April 2008. This review has been commissioned to examine the operation of the citizenship test since its introduction on 1 October 2007 and whether there are ways to improve its operation and effectiveness as the pathway for residents to become Australian citizens. The review will consider all aspects of the content and operation of the citizenship test, the experiences of applicants, the impact on citizenship applications and any other related issues. For additional information see: www.citizenshiptestreview.gov.au (accessed 15 August 2008).

² A comparable booklet, '*Becoming an Australian citizen*' is provided by the Australian government.

The questions in the citizenship test in both countries include the rights and responsibilities of a citizen, social and cultural history, politics, values, and physical and political geography. Both tests are usually administered in written form, although there is a possibility of answering the questions orally under certain conditions. Together with the test, the interaction with the staff of the respective department determines whether or not an applicant has sufficient knowledge of English (or French). While these interactions might only require basic oral skills, advanced reading (and writing) skills are certainly needed in the written part of the test. Furthermore, as the formulations are kept so vague, it is entirely up to the respective officer (and there is no indication that they have any kind of linguistic training) to determine whether or not the applicant's skills are sufficient.

The requirements for the redesigned citizenship test that will be introduced in the United States from 1 October 2008, the requirements are stated more clearly:

SPEAKING: An applicant's verbal skills are determined by the applicant's answers to questions normally asked by USCIS [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, note by author] Officers during the naturalization eligibility interview. USCIS Officers are required to repeat and rephrase questions until the Officer is satisfied that the applicant either fully understands the question or does not understand English. If the applicant generally understands and can respond meaningfully to questions relevant to the determination of eligibility, the applicant has demonstrated the ability to speak English.

READING: To sufficiently demonstrate the ability to read in English, applicants must read one sentence, out of three sentences, in a manner suggesting to the USCIS Officer that the applicant appears to understand the meaning of the sentence. Applicants shall not be failed because of their accent when speaking English.

WRITING: To sufficiently demonstrate the ability to write in English, the applicant must write one sentence, out of three [dictated, note by author] sentences, in a manner that would be understandable as written to the USCIS Officer. An applicant shall not be failed because of spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors unless the errors would prevent understanding the meaning of the sentence. (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service 2008)

Also, a description of how the various parts of the language test are scored is given. While it can (and should) be questioned how meaningful this testing practice is, it gives less leeway to the USCIS officers (who are conceivably equally untrained in linguistics) than their Canadian and

Australian counterparts have. In addition to the language test, the applicants for the U.S citizenship must also pass a knowledge test, that is similar to the ones administered in the two other countries, and can be thus seen as a *de facto* language test as well.

Piller (2001) argues that the language requirements for naturalisation in the U.S., Canada and Australia are minimal because they define citizenship as based on civic rights and obligations. I have tried to show that the language requirements are in fact not as minimal, and while the three countries do emphasise the importance of rights and obligations for citizens, a common history and shared values of the imagined community (Anderson 1991) also play a large role:

Australian citizenship is a common bond, involving reciprocal rights and obligations, uniting all Australians. Choosing to become an Australian citizen involves a formal commitment to Australia and its people, the values we share and our common future. (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008)

While large-scale immigration has a long tradition in Australia, the United States and Canada, it is a fairly recent phenomenon in European countries. Despite the fact that different ‘indigenous minority groups’ and their languages have always lived together with the majority population in all European countries, most European nation-states have been considered monolingual. Due to socio-political and socioeconomic changes, such as globalisation processes, the extension of the European Union, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the sustaining poverty in mainly African countries, migration into Western European countries has augmented, and societies have become increasingly multicultural and multilingual. At the same time, conditions for people wanting to enter, integrate or apply for citizenship have become stricter, with many European countries introducing a (national) language test as a requirement for naturalisation.

While no single European pattern for language requirements exist, there is an evident trend towards more restrictive legislation. In 2002, only 4 out of 14 (29%) countries had language conditions for citizenship, as a survey by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) revealed. In a study conducted by Van Avermaet in co-operation with ALTE at the beginning of 2007, 11 of 19 countries (58%) had some form of language

requirement to grant citizenship. Four more countries did not have a language test for citizenship, but required proficiency in their national and/or official language from newly arrived migrants (i.e. either before entering the host country, upon arrival or shortly thereafter) and/or ‘oldcomers’ (i.e. people that have already lived in the host country for some time), either for permanent residency or independently of it. Only four countries (in table 1 in italics) did not have any language requirements for migrants. 8 out of the 19 countries also required what Van Avermaet calls a ‘knowledge of society’ (KOS) test, which is similar to the knowledge tests described for Australia, Canada and the U.S., and usually contains questions about the (majority) culture, and the history and political system of the respective country (Van Avermaet forthcoming). Table 1 gives an overview of the countries involved in Van Avermaet’s study, and their respective language conditions for ‘newcomers’, ‘oldcomers’ and citizenship.³ Furthermore, it shows which countries require a KOS-test for granting citizenship.

Belgium, Greece, Ireland and Italy have no language conditions for migrants. France, Norway, Spain and Sweden do not require language proficiency for citizenship. However, as Avermaet (forthcoming) notes, societal and political debates in all of these countries evolve into the direction of installing language and civic conditions.

Eleven of the nineteen surveyed countries have language conditions for citizenship, and in nine out of these eleven countries citizenship candidates are obliged to take a language test. In six of the nine countries that have a compulsory language test, taking the test involves expenses (ranging from 6€ in Lithuania to 255€ in Germany) that are to be borne by the applicants. Candidates who do not take a language course⁴ or the test, or fail the test can be sanctioned in Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Slovenia and the UK.

³ Information about conditions for ‘newcomers’ and ‘oldcomers’ is included in the table, but will not be discussed any further. For detailed information about the linguistic requirements for these groups as well as for more detailed information about the language conditions for citizenship see Van Avermaet (forthcoming).

⁴ Compulsory language courses exist in Bulgaria, Italy, Lithuania, Norway and the UK (Van Avermaet forthcoming).

In seven of the countries applicants also have to take a KOS test, which has to be paid for (6€-80€) in four countries (DK, LT, NL, UK).

Table 1: Language requirements for ‘newcomers’, ‘oldcomers’ and citizenship, knowledge of society (KOS) test for citizenship in 19 European countries⁵

Country	Language requirement (level ⁶ /none)			KOS for citizenship
	‘newcomers’	‘oldcomers’	citizenship	
Austria	A1	-	-	no
Belgium	<i>none</i>	<i>none</i>	<i>none</i>	<i>no</i>
Bulgaria	none	none	B1+	yes
Denmark	none	A2-B1	B2	yes
Estonia	none	A2	A2	yes
France	A1-	none	none	no
Germany	B1 ⁷	B1 ⁴	A2+/B1 ⁴	in some Länder
Greece	<i>none</i>	<i>none</i>	<i>none</i>	<i>no</i>
Ireland	<i>none</i>	<i>none</i>	<i>none</i>	<i>no</i>
Italy	<i>none</i>	<i>none</i>	<i>none</i>	<i>no</i>
Latvia	B1	none	B1	yes
Lithuania	A2	A2	A2	yes
Netherlands	A1-	A1-A2	A2	yes
Norway	A2-B1	A2-B1 ⁸	no	no
Poland	-	B1, B2, C2 ⁵	B1, B2, C2 ⁵	no
Slovenia	none	none	A2-B1	no
Spain	B1+	none	none	no
Sweden	none	B1+	none	no
UK	-	-	B1	yes

⁵ As noted by Van Avermaet (forthcoming), these data have only a limited period of validity, since policies across different European countries change rapidly. They have to be read as a ‘status questionis’ at the beginning of 2007.

⁶ According to the European Council’s Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

⁷ Depends on Länder, varies from test to interview.

⁸ Test is voluntary.

From the results of Van Avermaet's study a clear shift to stricter conditions for people wanting to obtain citizenship can be observed. More than half of the European countries require a certain proficiency in the national language(s), and a large number of countries oblige citizenship applicants to prove their knowledge about the host society. The question that arises concerns the reasoning for these conditions. The rationale behind the citizenship test as given by the Australian government is as follows:

The test is an important part of ensuring that migrants have the capacity to **fully participate in the Australian community** as citizens and **maximise the opportunities available** to them in Australia. It promotes **social cohesion** and **successful integration** into the community. (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008, my emphasis)

The European discourse runs much along the same lines. It is implied that participation in the national community requires knowledge of the standard language, that 'knowing the language increases someone's opportunities for work, education and upward social mobility' (Van Avermaet forthcoming), and that knowledge of the national language and the national values is a prerequisite for social cohesion. The central argument, however, is that knowing the standard language facilitates the integration of migrants into the host society.

In the following chapter, the motivation behind citizenship tests will be questioned. It will be shown that the arguments, while seemingly reasonable, are based on underlying assumptions that reproduce hegemonic practices and national ideologies, and fail to recognise the multilingual and multicultural reality of Europe and its countries. It will be argued that citizenship tests function as a mechanism of exclusion and an instrument of power. For this purpose, citizenship testing in the Netherlands will serve as an example, and will be analysed using the framework of CLT (Shohamy 2001a).

4 The case of the Dutch integration exams

Like a number of other European countries (e.g. France, Germany), the Netherlands do not only require a certain language proficiency in order to grant citizenship, but candidates have to prove Dutch language skills in their home country, even before entering the Netherlands. After successful admission, newcomers have to pass another test to show that they have been integrated into Dutch society. Finally, applicants have to meet a number of criteria in order to obtain Dutch citizenship.

The first part of this chapter presents the different tests immigrants have to take in order to enter the Netherlands and to become ‘integrated citizens’. The second part analyses the tests according to the criteria of CLT.

4.1 Testing regimes for newcomers to the Netherlands

Foreign nationals who want to enter the Netherlands and eventually become Dutch citizens have to go through a testing regime of three stages, as illustrated below.

Table 2: The three stages of the Dutch testing regime for newcomers and some oldcomers

Stage	Knowledge of society	Language skills
Admission (<i>Toelating</i>) resp: CINOP	Audiovisual phone test on the Netherlands	Computerised phone test on oral skills CEFR level A1 minus
Integration (<i>Inburgering</i>) resp: Bureau ICE/CITO	Multiple-choice test in 7 domains	Newcomers: CEFR level A2 for oral and written skills Low-educated oldcomers: A2 for oral skills, A1 for written skills
Citizenship (<i>Naturalisatie</i>) resp: IND, municipality of residence	Multiple-choice test in 7 domains (as in stage 2) Additional requirements	CEFR level A2 for oral and written skills

At all stages, the language requirements are based on the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR), a Council of Europe instrument intended to set up systems of validation of language competences and to function as a European standard for six levels of language skills, ranging from A1 to C2 (see appendix for a description of the different levels and www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp for specifications).

The responsibilities for each of the testing regimes lie with different agencies, i.e., *CINOP*, *Bureau Interculturele Evaluatie* (ICE, ‘Bureau Intercultural Evaluation’) plus the *Centraal Instituut voor Toetsontwikkeling* (CITO, ‘Central Institute for Test Development’), and the *Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst* (IND, ‘Immigration and Naturalisation Service’). CINOP, ICE, and CITO are (semi-)private institutions in the Netherlands, whereas the IND is a division of the Dutch Ministry of Justice. No specific rationale is given for this division of tasks, and no mutual fine-tuning among these agencies is demanded by law (Extra & Spotti 2008).

Basisexamen Inburgering

The first stage of testing regimes for newcomers in the Netherlands is the *Basisexamen Inburgering* (‘Basic Civic Integration Exam’, BI), which is spelled out in the Integration Abroad Act (*Wet Inburgering in het Buitenland*) that was passed on 22 December 2005 and entered into force on 15 March 2006. According to the act’s preparatory documents, its declared objective is to stimulate the integration of migrant communities.⁹

It applies to persons between the age of 16 and 65, who:

1. need an authorisation for temporary residence (*Machtiging tot voorlopig verblijf*) to enter the Netherlands, and
2. are obligated by the *Wet inburgering* (‘Integration Act’) to fulfil the requirements for civic integration after arrival in the Netherlands.

⁹ *Wet inburgering in het buitenland* (29.700), website *Eerste Kamer* (Upper House), <http://www.eerstekamer.nl/9324000/1f/j9vvgh5ihkk7kof/vgxun70y4d51> (accessed 30 July 2008), and Parliamentary Document, Second Chamber, *Wet inburgering in het buitenland*, KST 2003-2004, 29700, no. 3, (*memorie van toelichting*), http://www.justitie.nl/images/VvW%20Wet%20inburgering%20in%20het%20buitenland_2312_tcm34-73905.pdf?cp=34&cs=580 (accessed 30 July 2008).

The law is primarily concerned with foreign nationals seeking to form a family with someone in the Netherlands or want to reunite with a family already living in the Netherlands, and religious leaders coming to the Netherlands for employment, such as imams. Thus, not everyone is subject to the test. The following groups are exempt from the BI:

- EU citizens, and citizens of Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, the U.S. and Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan;
- Surinamese nationals who can prove that they have completed at least primary education in the Dutch language in Suriname or the Netherlands;
- people who come to the Netherlands for a temporary reason, such as study, au pair, exchange or medical treatment;
- people who hold permanent residency in a third country, if they have fulfilled the integration conditions in the member state that has granted them their residency status;
- people with a work permit, self-employed workers and ‘knowledge’ migrants (i.e. highly skilled workers), and the family members of these three groups; and
- family members of a person in possession of an asylum-seeker’s residence permit.

Those who have to take the BI can do so at about 140 Dutch embassies or consulates. Information on the test is available on a number of websites in Dutch and English (e.g. www.naarnederland.nl). Costs for the test itself amount to € 350, which have to be paid every time the test is taken. Further costs incurred may include an optional examination package for independent preparation, which can be purchased for about € 64, and transportation costs to the Dutch embassy (in some cases located in a neighbouring country).

The test is computerised and consists of two parts: knowledge of Dutch society and language skills. The person taking the exam talks by telephone to a computer that automatically calculates the score. During the first part on knowledge of Dutch society, candidates have to answer 30 questions on

photos, which are based on the film *Naar Nederland* ('Coming to the Netherlands'). The film is available in 15 different languages¹⁰ as a preparatory tool for the test, and deals with living in the Netherlands, Dutch geography and politics, work, education, health care and history. There is an uncensored version and a censored one, in which pictures of homosexual couples and sunbathing women have been left out. Candidates can prepare for this part of the test with a photo album and an audio CD, which contains 100 questions, each of which refers to one of the pictures in the photo album. The 30 questions in the exam are selected from the set of questions on the CD. All questions are posed in Dutch and have to be answered in Dutch, thus constituting a *de facto* language test. 21 of the 30 questions (70%) have to be answered correctly in order to pass this part of the test.

The second part of the admission test is a computerised phone test that requires both listening and speaking skills at the CEFR A1 minus level (see table 1). The test consists of five parts, each containing four exercises. Participants have to repeat sentences, answer short questions, indicate opposites and repeat two short stories. They hear and answer all questions over the telephone. A speech computer automatically assesses the answers, including the quality of the speaker's Dutch pronunciation. The maximum score is 80 points and until recently, the pass norm was 16. On 15 March 2008, the pass norm for the language test was raised, as Ella Vogelaar, the Minister of 'Integration, Housing and Communities', found it 'irresponsible to keep the current pass norm, as several researchers have declared it too low' (press release March 2008, my translation). However, no new pass norm has been determined yet. Until further research has been conducted, cutting scores are raised so that they are 'somewhat higher than the current pass norm, but not too high' (press release March 2008, my translation).

The computerised phone test, which was originally developed by *Ordinate Company* in California as a L2 English test, was adapted for L2 Dutch by *Language Testing Services* in Velp in cooperation with CINOP in

¹⁰ Dutch, French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish, Kurdish, Standard Arabic, Moroccan Arabic, Tarifit/Rif, Berber, Chinese, Russian, Indonesian and Thai.

Den Bosch. The Dutch Ministry of Integration obtained two external opinions on the test. The first group, which consisted of four experts in linguistics, testing, and speech technology (see report Verdonk 2005 to Parliament), came to the conclusion that there was not enough evidence that the proposed phone test would be valid and reliable as pilot testing was done with too highly skilled respondents, test norms for passing/failing were too arbitrary, and current speech technology was considered too under-developed for the proposed type of testing (see also Strik 2005). It was suggested that more pilot research be carried out before implementing the test. The second group, consisting of TNO (*Nederlandse Organisatie voor toegepast-natuurwetenschappelijk onderzoek*, ‘Applied Science Research’) experts, came to similar conclusions but was less reluctant with respect to implementing the test (see Van Peperstraten 2007).

This testing regime in particular was met with harsh criticism from a number of researchers (e.g. Groenendijk 2006, Extra & Spotti 2008) and human rights organisations (e.g. Human Rights Watch), which will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

Inburgeringsexamen

The second step on the way to become *ingeburgerd* (‘integrated’) is to take the *inburgeringsexamen* (‘Integration Exam’, IE), which is spelled out in the *Wet Inburgering* (‘Integration Act’) and applies to both newcomers (*nieuwkomers*) and long-term residents (*oudkomers*). Every person between the age of 16 and 65 who

1. resides in the Netherlands on a non-temporary basis, or
2. is a religious minister.

has to take the exam, with the exception of the following groups:

- Those who have resided in the Netherlands for a minimum of 8 years during their school age (*leerplichtige leeftijd*), or are following compulsory education;
- Those who can prove sufficient oral and written skills in the Dutch language and evident knowledge of the Dutch society;
- EU/EEA nationals and their family members;

- Other persons who cannot be obligated to integrate under international law.

The former Minister of Integration Rita Verdonk's original proposal included *oudkomers* who were already citizens of the Netherlands under the obligation to integrate (see Extra & Spotti 2008 for a detailed review of the development of the integration regime). This was discarded as it violated the non-discrimination principle (i.e. the legal principle of equal treatment in equal cases), and the new *Wet Inburgering* (2007) does not apply to Dutch nationals, irrespective of whether they obtained citizenship through birth or naturalisation. The law does, however, include a voluntary integration arrangement, which is meant for those residents in the Netherlands for whom no obligations can be enforced, in particular Dutch nationals from former Dutch colonies (Antilleans), naturalised Dutchmen, and EU/EEA citizens.

Participants have to apply for the *Inburgeringsexamen* through registered regional examination offices (www.inburgeren.nl) and through the national *Informatie Beheer Groep*¹¹ (www.ib-groep.nl). The costs for the IE amount to € 230, parts of which can be covered by the municipality. The exam has to be passed within 5 years of residence in the Netherlands, and within 3.5 years if the admission test abroad has been passed. Failure to obtain the integration certificate (*inburgeringsdiploma*) within the required period will lead to financial (€ 250 to € 1000) or even residential sanctions, and reductions as regards welfare benefits may be imposed.¹²

The new IE consists of four different exams, one 'practical exam' and three 'central exams', all of which have to be passed in order to receive the integration certificate. The practical exam serves to prove that the applicant has sufficient language skills to be able to function in Dutch society. There are three ways to pass this part of the IE: to collect evidence (referred to as

¹¹ The *Informatie Beheer Groep (IB-Groep)* is a Dutch governmental organisation, responsible for the execution of several acts and regulations, such as student grants and information management. These acts are commissioned by the Minister of Education, Culture, and Science. See http://www.ib-groep.nl/International_visitors/Welcome.asp (accessed 15 August 2008) for more information.

¹² See Minister of Housing, Communities and Integration, <http://www2.vrom.nl/pagina.html?id=10696> (accessed 31 July 2008).

portfolio¹³), to re-enact real-life situations (called assessment), or to combine the two. The portfolio refers to the collection of 30 pieces of evidence of oral or written skills. Two different portfolio profiles are available, one is termed ‘work’, the other ‘upbringing, health care and education’. In the former, evidence about *burgerschap* (‘citizenship’) (12)¹⁴, seeking work (6) and having work (12) has to be collected. In the latter, the topics *burgerschap* (12), upbringing, health care and education (12), and seeking work (6) have to be covered. Proof of written skills can be provided in the form of e.g. copies of letters or forms. Evidence of oral skills has to be obtained from interlocutors (e.g. teachers of the children of the applicant, neighbours), who fill in a form affirming adequate oral skills of the applicant. The complete portfolio has to be sent to the *IB-Groep* or an assigned testing institution for assessment. In a panel discussion, the applicant has to explain how the evidence was collected and that it was collected in an honest way.

Another way to pass the practical part of the IE is by taking part in six separately assessed modules that are embedded in a role play, where the candidate has to show sufficient knowledge of Dutch to cope in a situation that might occur in daily life. A third option is to take part in three assessed modules and to collect 15 pieces of evidence.

The three ‘central exams’ refer to an exam on knowledge of the Dutch society, a test spoken Dutch and an electronic practice exam. All three parts are computerised. The first exam on knowledge of Dutch society contains questions on how things work in the Netherlands, e.g. what the government does or how people interact with each other. All questions are posed and have to be answered in Dutch, thus this part of the ‘central exams’ is a *de facto* language test as well. The second part is an oral language test in which the candidate telephones a computerised system that asks questions and gives assignments. The third part examines whether a candidate has enough knowledge of the Dutch language to get by in everyday situation,

¹³ See http://www.inburgeren.nl/Images/portfolio-werka_tcm12-10515.pdf (accessed 15 August 2008) for a model portfolio.

¹⁴ The numbers in brackets refer to the number of pieces of evidence that have to be collected for each topic.

and includes questions on e.g. how to take out an assurance policy in the Netherlands.

All four parts of the exam have to be passed at CEFR level A2, with the exception of *oudkomers*, who can pass the exam at CEFR level A1. The content of the new integration test is largely kept secret and continuously modified on the basis of a databank of questions that the computer system selects at random when the candidate starts the test.

Naturalisation

Once participants have passed the *Inburgeringsexamen* at CEFR level A2 and have therewith acquired the integration certificate, they can apply for naturalisation. In addition to competence in Dutch, conditions for the granting of Dutch citizenship are:

- legal and uninterrupted residence in the Netherlands on the basis of a non-temporary residence permit for at least 5 years (3 years if married to a Dutch national);
- renunciation of the previous nationality (unless this is not permitted in the source country, as, e.g., for Greek or Moroccan citizens);
- absence of a criminal record.

The *Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst* (IND) of the Ministry of Justice grants Dutch citizenship. Verification of all conditions by the IND and by municipal authorities may take up to one year.

Successful naturalisation is celebrated in a ‘naturalisation ceremony’, a special gathering focusing on the meaning of the Dutch nationality. On 24 August 2005 (the day on which the first Dutch Constitution was passed in Parliament in 1815), the first municipal ceremonies took place. The officially prescribed ceremony for this so called *Naturalisatiedag* (‘naturalisation day’) includes the Dutch national anthem and flag. However, in many municipalities both were considered too ‘patriotic’ or ‘nationalistic’. The turnout of new Dutch citizens was rather low (in The Hague, for instance, only 215 out of 900 invited) (Extra & Spotti 2008). From 1 January 2006 it became obligatory for municipalities to hold at least one naturalisation ceremony each year. Attendance for *naturalsalisandi* was made compulsory from 1 October 2006 on. A ceremony has to be

attended within one year of the naturalisation decision being made, otherwise the Dutch nationality will not be granted and a new naturalisation procedure has to be started. From 2008 on, the yearly date is fixed on 15 December (the day on which in 1954 the Kingdom's Statute was signed), as many municipalities had difficulties in organising such a day during the summer holidays. On 27 June 2008 legislation¹⁵ was passed as a result of which new Dutch citizens will be obligated to declare their solidarity as part of the naturalisation ceremony. At the time of writing, it was not known when the law would be enforced.

4.2 A critical approach to the Dutch testing regime

One of the main principles of critical language testing is that tests are not neutral, but embedded in cultural, social, political and ideological contexts. In order to understand the Dutch testing regime as a product of and an agent in these contexts, it is necessary to shortly summarise the historical progression of migratory processes, and to show how Dutch integration policies reacted to these developments. Subsequently, I will discuss the official rationale for the introduction of the testing regime and identify the hidden agendas behind it. The third section shows how the exams are used to reassert national identity. Finally, I will point out a number of powerful features of language testing for entrance, residency and citizenship and show how they are used to perpetuate hegemonic ideologies.

Migration, the crisis of the nation-state & citizenship testing

In the aftermath of the Great Depression of the 1930s and the devastation of the war, Europe experienced large-scale migratory movements, mostly consisting of people seeking to emigrate and ethnic minorities returning to their so called ancestral homelands. In addition, the independence of former colonies led to the migration of large number of former colonists through the 1950s and 1960s.

¹⁵ *Wijzigingswet Rijkswet op het Nederlanderschap (invoering verklaring verbondenheid en aanpassing regeling verkrijging Nederlanderschap na erkenning)*. See also, <http://www.eerstekamer.nl/9324000/1f/j9vvgh5ihkk7kof/vhk69b8vfzo8> (accessed 15 August 2008).

By the 1950s, labour shortages started to emerge, and virtually all West European countries responded by employing foreign workers, some of which came of their own accord, but the majority of which was recruited as ‘guest workers’. While most West European countries recruited temporary labour from Southern Europe (mainly Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece), North Africa, Turkey, Finland, and Ireland, certain countries used labour from (former) colonies, such as the Caribbean and Indonesia in the case of the Netherlands. ‘Colonial workers’ had mostly been granted citizenship during the colonial period, and thus their entry was facilitated. As citizens, they could also bring dependents and settle. By the 1960s, in the light of economic and political decline, the authorities of the three former colonial powers France, the UK and the Netherlands introduced restrictive laws to stop immigration from former colonies.

By the 1970s there were over 12 million migrants in Western Europe, and the process of ethnic minority formation had become irreversible. The 1973 oil crisis caused a reorientation of migration policies. All the old labour-importing countries stopped recruitment, and governments expected guest workers to depart. However, instead of going back to their countries of origin, many migrants stayed and were joined by their spouses and children. Consequently, ‘European policymakers reluctantly had to accept the unplanned emergence of the need to permanently incorporate millions of migrants into their social, political, and cultural institutions’ (Schierup et al 2006: 28). At the same time, larger groups of refugees entered Western Europe during the 1970s and early 1980s.

After the fall of the Soviet Union and the political changes it caused, migration to Western Europe accelerated once more. The largest new influxes were of undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, and ethnic minority ‘returnees’ from the former Soviet Union, while family reunion remained significant. In the early 1990s, new extreme-right and populist-nationalist mobilization created a focus on the ‘problem of immigration’ and alleged ‘Islamic fundamentalism’, which led to a climate in which ‘foreigners’ could be blamed for a range of economic and social problems. Moreover, growing political and media panics about population flows in

Europe led to a criminalisation of undocumented migration and to a strengthening of border controls. Most such measures were taken at the national level, but EU cooperation became increasingly significant. The most important measure in this respect was the Schengen Agreement (1995). Schierup et al (2006) argue that Schengen is emblematic of a general trend towards tighter control of entry to highly developed countries, and that it effectively created a new class of ‘Schengen citizens’, to be added to the existing hierarchy of EU citizens, legal ‘third country’ residents, and undocumented immigrants.

In the mid-1990s, migration movements steadied for a while as a result of a general tightening of rules on asylum and migration, but also of economic and political stabilisation in Eastern Europe. At the beginning of the new millennium, however, asylum and migration movements increased again. Moreover, they became much more prominent in the public consciousness in the context of 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’. At the same time, Western European elites became conscious of trends towards declining fertility and population ageing combined with a growing demand for both highly skilled personnel and low-skilled workers. Thus, the current period, starting about 2000, is characterised by a ‘hesitant admission that Europe needs immigrants for both demographic and economic reasons, by a growing realization that border control alone cannot achieve effective migration, and by new (and often emotionally charged) discourses on security and [national] identity’ (Schierup et al 2006: 24).

Despite these common trends in migration, the European immigrant countries adopted widely different approaches to managing the growing and long-term presence of immigrants and new ethnic minorities. Integration policies in the Netherlands will be shortly summarised here (for a more extensive review see e.g., Entzinger 2003, Spijkerboer 2007, Penninx 2006).

In the literature on Dutch integration policy, the *Nota Buitenlandse werknemers* (‘Nota Foreign Workers’, Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Volksgezondheid 1970) is generally named as the first relevant document. The keynote of the document was that immigrants had to be integrated into

Dutch society to a certain extent, but that their residence would only be temporary. In 1974, the government reduced the exclusive focus on the immigrants' return to their countries of origin, and began to put a stronger emphasis on their functioning in society. However, increasing family reunions were perceived as threatening the government's control of immigration (Spijkerboer 2007).

The late 1970s marked a drastic change in the Dutch integration policies. A report on ethnic minority groups by the Scientific Council for Government Policy (*Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid*, WRR, 1979) emphasised the untenable divide between the assumption of temporary stay by the government and the practice of long-term residence of most immigrants, and led to the formulation of the Ethnic Minorities Policy at the beginning of the 1980s (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken 1983). The policy had three main objectives, which met with varying degrees of success. In the political and legal domain, the Ethnic Minorities Policy focused on inclusion and participation of migrant groups in mainstream society. The whole Dutch legislation was scrutinised, and any clause that discriminated on the bases of nationality, race, or religion was removed (Beune & Hessels 1983). Active and passive voting rights for foreign residents were introduced in 1985, which led to direct political participation at the local level. In 1986, the Dutch nationality law was changed to include more elements of *ius soli*, thus making it much easier for migrants to become Dutch citizens. The practice of condoning dual nationality was introduced in 1992¹⁶, as a result of which naturalisation peaked in the 1990s.

The socioeconomic objective aimed at achieving equality in the labour market, education, and housing. Measurements concerning the labour market remained symbolic, but housing policies have been among the most successful socioeconomic policies (Penninx 2006). Most of the specific

¹⁶ This policy was reversed in 1997 when a proposal to anchor it in the law on naturalisation was rejected. Legal provisions remained as before (dual nationality as an exception), but the lenient practice of application changed (Penninx 2006). Under the current law, only recognised refugees and persons who are legally not allowed to give up their nationality in their country of origin (e.g. Greeks or Moroccans) are permitted to hold dual citizenship. All other foreign nationals have to give up their original citizenship in order to acquire the Dutch one.

financial resources allocated to the Ethnic Minority Policy were spent in the education domain, predominantly on measures to compensate for immigrant children's disadvantages in the mainstream education system. Additionally, education in students' native languages was created, but was increasingly considered problematic, ineffective and even counter-productive. Consequently, it was first removed from the regular program, and then abolished altogether (Penninx 2006).

A third objective was equity in the cultural domain. Migrant and ethnic minority groups were allowed to develop their own culture within the limits of general Dutch laws. The role of the government was defined as 'facilitating'. Incoming religions quickly became institutionalised and could legally claim facilities under the same conditions as established religions (Penninx 2006).

The Ethnic Minority Policy, which can be characterised as an 'integration policy associated with a welfare state model' (Penninx 2006: 247), had its peak effect in the 1980s, but came under strong criticism in 1989 in a report by the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR 1989). The report pinpointed the lack of sufficient progress in the crucial domains labour and education, and was followed by a change of policy, which was formulated in the *Contourennota* (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken 1994). This document adopted a new Integration Policy that emphasised that migrants were responsible for their own integration, and that newcomers and ethnic minorities had to be loyal to the basic principles of the Dutch *Rechtsstaat*, i.e. democratic norms, freedom of speech, the individual right to self-determination, the equality of men and women, and the division of state and church. The immigrants' right to their own culture was deferred to the private domain. Thus, while the Netherlands were considered a geographically defined but pluriforme society in the Ethnic Minority Policy, they were conceived as a normative unit in the *Contourennota*.

In 1998, the Civic Integration for Newcomers Act (*Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers*) came into force and foreign nationals that were not work

migrants and did not originate from a EU country became obliged to follow a civic integration course.¹⁷

After the millennium, Dutch integration policy continued to increase the emphasis on community values, and migrants were expected to adapt more and more to Dutch norms and values. The recent changes, i.e. the implementation of the *Wet Inburgering Buitenland* and the *Wet Inburgering* can be seen as a turn toward assimilationism.

How can it be explained that such assimilatory policies re-emerge in

countries like the Netherlands, the UK, and Sweden, where policies of ‘multiculturalism’ or ‘diversity’ have for decades been more consistently promoted than in other parts of the EU, and which have been distinguished by legislation, national institutions, and actual practices targeted at combating racism and discrimination? (Schierup et al 2006: 4)

On a national level, various factors that are seen to have led to this development have been pointed out (see e.g., Spijkerboer 2007, Entzinger 2003, Penninx 2006, Roggeband & Vliegenthart 2007). Generally, Paul Scheffer’s essay titled *Het multiculturele drama* (‘The multicultural drama’, 2000) is viewed to express the discontent of a silent majority that was weary of multiculturalism but had not had the courage to speak until then (Entzinger 2003). The essay and the subsequent official parliamentary inquiry into the failure of integration policies (*Tijdelijke Commissie* 2004) gave rise to the emergence of a new and different dominant discourse that dismissed the former depoliticisation strategy and led to political polarisation. Pim Fortuyn in particular introduced strong statements about the failure of integration and ‘Islam’s backward culture’, and other political parties soon adopted populist thinking on immigration and integration in their political programmes (Penninx 2006). The murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004, which was interpreted as a threat to democracy and as ultimate evidence for the failure of integration policies, led to further polarisation. New restrictive integration measures, like the different language testing regimes, are often perceived as a result of these and similar factors.

¹⁷ Before 1998, civic integration courses had already been offered on a voluntary basis. Notwithstanding the fact that the demand exceeded the supply by far (the number of people on waiting-lists peaked in 1993-94 with 15.000, and was still at 10.000 in the period of 2000-03), courses were made compulsory (Spijkerboer 2006).

However, it can be argued that these developments did not cause the ‘strong move away from liberal tolerance and cultural relativism and toward a neoconservatism with certain nationalist traits’ (Entzinger 2004: 291), especially as this is not unique to the Netherlands, but a common European phenomenon. Consequently, it is conceivable that more universal factors caused both the political climate that enabled the policy change, as well as the change itself. As Kofman (2005: 461) notes:

Emphasis on cultural unity as the guarantor of security and a recent shift from cultural diversity represent an attempt to return to an earlier period of ‘innocence’ when the state was dominant and untroubled by globalising processes, and when migrants were expected to assimilate.

Heightened mobility and international migration have turned the EU member states into a novel type of multi-ethnic society, which has made ideologies of ethnically homogeneous national populations and mono-cultural identities increasingly unsustainable. At the same time, globalisation and new local and supra-national modes of governance challenge the sovereignty of the nation-state. These developments have led to a ‘political and cultural *crisis and transformation of the nation and established national identities*’ (Schierup et al 2006: 3, italics in original). As a reaction to this crisis, the European nation-state has reaffirmed its position through the development of managed migration systems, retreat from multiculturalism and revival of neo-assimilationist agendas (Kofman 2005). In the light of the events of 9/11 and other terrorist attacks around the world, the state asserts its role as protector of national identity and social cohesion. Migrants are thereby often depicted as the ‘Other’ that threaten national harmony and peace and disturb pre-existing national consensus and culture, as becomes evident in the Dutch discourse on citizenship and integration. Roggeband and Vliegthart (2007), for example, reconstruct how the issues of migration and integration have been framed in the Dutch public debate over the last decade (1995-2004). They conclude that the attention to these issues in parliament has gradually risen throughout the whole period, while the attention in the media has increased enormously since 2001. In both domains there has been an emphasis on immigrant religious culture, equated with Islam, that is perceived as a

threat to Dutch culture and values, and is seen as a principal obstacle to the integration of Muslim migrants (2007: 543).

Official discourse vs. hidden agendas

What is the official rationale behind the Dutch testing regime for newcomers? One reason given by the government is that a more compulsory and result-oriented policy is necessary, as the integration of large groups of migrants into mainstream society has failed, which is evidenced by the prevailing disadvantages on the labour market and in education.¹⁸ Thus, it is presumed that 1. disadvantages are caused by the migrants' deficient knowledge of Dutch language and society, and 2. knowledge of the Dutch language leads to equality on the labour market and in education.

It is not within the scope of this work to analyse the causes of the disadvantages of migrants in areas like work and education, but I have argued elsewhere (Schneidhofer 2007), that this is due to, among other factors, structural and institutional discrimination, rather than to a lack of language proficiency. Van Avermaet (forthcoming) brings forward a similar argumentation with respect to the second assumption. He argues that knowing the national language does not automatically increase someone's opportunity for work, education and upward social mobility. In his view, deficient knowledge of the standard language is not a cause but an effect of socioeconomic marginalisation and structural discrimination.

Another erroneous belief that underlies the second assumption is that only the standard language guarantees equal opportunities and serves as the single efficient and necessary means of communication. However, all European countries are multilingual, and while the national standard language(s) are used as language(s) of instruction in most countries, teachers often use a more local variant outside of the classroom. English is also being in used in an increasing amount of domains, like e.g. at universities, a substantial number of work places and on the Internet. In fact, plurilingualism has become a precondition for increased social upward

¹⁸ Tweede Kamer 2005-2006, 30308, nr. 3.

mobility and participation in almost any society (Van Avermaet forthcoming). Yet, it is often assumed that immigrants have no or unsuitable language tools to function successfully in a country or region. This assumption ignores that most immigrants are plurilingual, mastering many languages and language varieties, often including the standard language. Van Avermaet argues that the ‘functional plurilingualism’ of most migrants enables them to ‘integrate’ more easily into their neighbourhoods. They might speak one language with family and friends, a bit of the standard language to function at work, some of the local dialect when they go shopping, etc. They might also be fluent in some variety of the national language or a regional minority language, which permits them to function perfectly in the area they live, yet would not allow them to pass a language test that assess proficiency in the standard variety only. In short, this assumption is based on a monolingual ideology that presupposes the use of one language in all areas of life, and ignores that most migrants use different languages or varieties in different areas.

Another explanation authorities give for the introduction of the testing regimes is that integration problems can lead to marginalisation and segregation, which in turn might result in a rejection of society, a return to archaic norms and values, and a susceptibility to the influence of extremism and terrorism. It is further argued that ongoing radicalisation contains the risk that non-integrated ‘aliens’ will act in an ‘antiwestern’ way and attack commonly accepted basic values of Western society, such as the equity of man and woman, the non-discrimination of homosexuals and freedom of expression.¹⁹ It is argued that the integration policy has benefited the acceptance of differences over the collective, and the risks of cultivating the own identity for the social cohesion have been underestimated. Hence, ‘the emphasis has to be on what unites *us*. This is the Dutch language and the basic values that *we* share and the norms that *we* consider compulsory for everyone’ (my emphasis).²⁰

¹⁹ Tweede Kamer 2004-05, 29700 nr. 6.

²⁰ Tweede Kamer 2004-05, 29700 nr. 6. p. 3 (my translation).

The parallels between this argumentation and the national ideology of the 19th century, when other languages and cultures were regarded as divisive and a danger to the unity of the nation-state are conspicuous. ‘Us’ and ‘we’ seem to refer to an imagined community that excludes migrant groups, regardless of the fact that many of them have lived in the Netherlands for generations, hold Dutch passports, and have contributed considerably to Dutch economy as well as society. Extra and Spotti (2008) argue that this exclusion of migrant groups from the ‘we’ of mainstream society is also illustrated by the distinction between *autochtonen* versus *allochtonen*. By definition, autochthonous means originating at the place of reference, whereas allochthonous means originating at a different place. At a local level, this reference has been strong in the Dutch language for a longer time and has been used to refer to people coming from a different province or city (Gorter, personal communication). In the migration context, *autochtonen* refers to Dutch native people, whereas *allochtoon* refers to a person born abroad and/or someone whose parents (or one of them) were born abroad. The concept was officially introduced in the *Allochtonenbeleid* (‘*Allochtonen* Policy’) of the Scientific Council for Government Policies (WWR 1989). The Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) further distinguishes between Western and non-Western *allochtonen*, where the former includes Indonesians and Japanese and the latter includes people originating from Turkey, Morocco, Surinam, and the Dutch Antilles. In the public discourse, *allochtonen* has come to be used as a term to describe those who are not considered to belong to the ‘we’ of the in-group, i.e. migrants (including third-generation groups who, like their parents were born in the Netherlands and are in fact Dutch nationals), and is often used by Dutch people to contrast with the self-reference term *autochtonen* or Dutch. Notably, it is mainly used to refer to non-Western *allochtonen* and not migrants from Western countries – a differentiation that is clearly reflected in the *Wet Inburgering Buitenland*.

The distinction between ‘real Dutch’ people, who are characterised by a shared language, common values and norms, a collective history and culture, and ‘the Others’ has made its way into Dutch legislation. As

multicultural policies are left behind, the imagined community has once again become homogeneous, and those who want to enter or reside in the Netherlands are obliged to become part of it, by acquiring the hegemonic language and by abiding by prevailing norms and values. The testing regime is thereby used as authoritative tool to change the behaviour of certain groups of society to comply with the priorities of those in power.

Moreover, the tests are used as gate-keeping mechanisms that target specific groups of migrants. Not all migrant groups are perceived as equally threatening to this neo-national ideology. According to the Dutch government, it can be predicted for some groups that their ‘integration in the Netherlands will fall short’²¹, because they possess ‘characteristics which are unfavourable for a good integration into the Dutch society’²². Thus, people are selected as being suitable and adaptable for membership of Dutch society and right to citizenship on the basis of a ‘new or differentialist racism which postulates the inability of certain groups to fit in or adapt to a society as a result of their inherent cultural traits,’ (Kofman 2005: 461) and which is reminiscent of Herder’s theory of ethnic nationalism. In accordance with these principles, the fact that EU citizens cannot be obliged to follow the testing regime is not seen as a problem, as ‘it can be expected that this predominantly concerns persons who were born and brought up in the Western democratic societies of other European member states.’²³ The same seems to apply, at least to some extent, to nationals from Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States, as they are exempt from the first stage of the Dutch testing regime, the ‘Basic Civic Integration Exam’, which has been fiercely criticised. Groenendijk (2006) considers the introduction of the test unlawful because it has led to the selective exemptions for citizens of particular countries and to barriers for family reunion. Similarly, Human Rights Watch (HRW 2008: 2) deems it ‘discriminatory because it explicitly applies to family migrants from certain nationalities, namely predominantly “non-western” countries,’ and for infringing the human right to marry and

²¹ Tweede Kamer 2003-2004, 29700, nr. 3. 6 (my translation).

²² Tweede Kamer 2005-2006, 30 308, nr. 3. 4 (my translation).

²³ Tweede Kamer 2005-2006, 30 308, nr. 3. 39 (my translation).

found a family as well as the right to family life, disproportionately affecting Turkish and Moroccan migrants. The Monitoring Report on integration (*Monitors Inburgering*, Significant 2007) commissioned by the Minister for 'Integration, Housing and Communities' shows that the number of Turkish and Moroccan migrants has indeed decreased from 22.503 in 2003 to 15.343 in 2006, and Extra and Spotti (2008) note that more than half of the Turkish and Moroccan adults in the Netherlands married a partner from/in the respective source countries in 2001, while in 2006 this was less than a fourth.

The integration exams do not only function as mechanisms for excluding migrants from particular countries, they also target migrants with low education. According to the Monitoring Report regarding the Integration Examination Administered Abroad (*Monitor Inburgeringsexamen Buitenland*, INDIAC 2006), 1436 examinations were taken in the period between 15 March and 30 September 2006, and 90 % of those taking the exam succeeded at their first attempt. Most of the candidates were of Turkish (20 %), Moroccan (19 %) or Chinese (10 %) nationality and between 25 and 36 years old. No exact information is available on their socio-biographical backgrounds, but most of them were highly educated. The Integration Report for 2007 (*Jaarrapport Integratie 2007*) examined the period between 15 March 2006 and 15 March 2007, and states that 96% of highly educated applicants, 90% of participants with 'average' education, and 83% of low educated test takers pass. The report notes that while it cannot be concluded from these results that the BI forms an insurmountable barrier for people with low education, it is conceivable that a substantial number of migrants does not apply for a temporary residence permit because they expect not to be able to pass the exam. This assumption is supported by the fact that the number of applications has gone back significantly since the introduction of the Integration Abroad Act (from around 2000 per month before March 2006 to around 1000 per month after that). In spite of this decline, cutting scores have been raised, and the minister indicated in a letter to Human Rights Watch that she expects the failure rate to be 14 percent under the new pass norm (HRW

2007). Thus, the testing regime is used as a mechanism of exclusion, which is further illustrated by the following statement by spokesperson of the VVD: '[we do not find it negative] if a side effect of the law is that a part of the people does not pass because they have difficulties in developing the language.'²⁴

Another examples of how the integration exams are used to serve policy agendas is the arbitrary setting of cutting scores as has been seen for the 'Basic Civic Integration Exam'. The raising of the cutting scores further increases the gate-keeping mechanism.

Furthermore, the introduction of the testing regimes allows for a 'quick solution' to the 'integration crisis', that is far less complicated than a real examination of the problem and its causes. It also provides the Dutch authorities with visibility and evidence of action with respect to the alleged failure of multiculturalism.

It has become evident that the Dutch testing regimes cannot be seen as neutral tests that are aimed at facilitating the integration of newcomers (and some *oudkomers*), but that they have to be viewed as powerful tools within a context of ideological and social struggle. In the next section, it will be discussed how tests are used as powerful instruments to reinforce the neo-national agendas of those in power.

Citizenship tests and the reassertion of national identity

As has been shown in the first chapter, the potential detrimental effects of tests turn them into powerful tools that can be used by those in authority to cause a change in behaviour. Failure at one of the stages of the Dutch citizenship testing regime has enormous consequences on the (future) migrants' lives, ranging from monetary sanctions to denial of entry or residency.

As the language to be tested is the national language, i.e. a high status language, the effect of the test can be expected to be strong, although it is too early to anticipate any distinct impact patterns. In the light of what has

²⁴ The original quote (cited in Spijkerboer 2007) goes as follows: 'als het neveneffect van de wet is dat een deel van de mensen niet slaagt omdat ze moeite hebben met het ontwikkelen van de taal, wij dat niet negatief vinden.' Handelingen Tweede Kamer 16 maart 2005.

been said above, it is questionable whether the tests will contribute to integration or rather lead to the alienation of certain groups of society, but it can be assumed that they will reinforce the dominant language and culture, not only within the migrant groups but within society at large.

The institutionalised knowledge used in the ‘knowledge of society’ exam perpetuates the dominant view of a homogeneous society with a common history and culture. It does not include or validate other forms of knowledge, thus the only way to pass the exam is by complying with the predetermined ‘truth’ of the test creators. By including certain elements in the tests and excluding others, those who create the tests have the power to imagine their own version of Dutch society. The fact that this ‘truth’ is tested grants it validation, not only among those who are subject to the test, but also among mainstream society.

The developments described earlier have challenged monolingual ideologies. The power of tests, which grants importance to what is tested, is used to reinstall the national language as a salient characteristic of national belonging. By making proficiency in the standard language a condition for entrance, residency and citizenship, ‘a process of normalization occurs, in which it comes to appear natural that one language [...] dominates others, is more legitimate, and provides greater access to symbolic resources’ (Blackledge & Pavlenko 2001: 254). Thus, the tests perpetuate the belief that a common Dutch language that is shared by everyone exists, and reassert the dominance of the standard over other varieties, i.e. other Dutch varieties as well as mixed or hybrid varieties that are known to be used in many migrant communities (see e.g., Aasheim 1997, Appel & Schoonen 2005, Bijvoet 2002, Doran 2006, Fraurud & Bijvoet 2004, Quist 2000, Rampton 2005, Schneidhofer 2007). Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Frisian and other regional minority languages in the Netherlands are largely ignored in the testing context. It can be argued that they are not mentioned in order to uphold the image that all Dutch nationals are united through one common language and one language only. This disregard communicates to the public that it is Dutch which is really important, thereby lowering the status of Frisian and other regional minority

languages. While national minority languages are protected by a number of documents and organisations on the national as well as supranational level, ‘immigrant languages’ enjoy hardly any protection. Consequently, as the testing regimes perpetuate the dominance of the standard language, they become marginalised. It is known from language loss situations all over the world that such marginalisation can lead to the disruption of inter-generational language transmission, as parents perceive that there is no social or economical value in being able to speak their (minority) language (see i.a. Hyltenstam & Stroud 1991, Fishman 2001, Grenoble & Whaley 2006). Together with the lack of support migrant languages receive from the government (e.g. abolition of ‘native language education’) this might lead to language shift among the minority population. While the languages themselves are probably in no danger of being lost, as migrant languages are usually spoken in or even constitute the national and/or official language of another country, language shift can have a large impact on a personal level. Moreover, it infringes the linguistic human right to one’s own language (Benson, Grundy & Skutnabb-Kangas 1998; Kontra, Phillipson, Skutnabb-Kangas & Várady 1999).

In summary it can be said that tests are used for the ‘revival of the nation-state, with one language, one identity, and one uniform set of shared norms and values’ (Van Avermaet forthcoming), and contribute to the normalisation of the dominance of the standard language and the marginalisation of other varieties and languages. This practice can be seen as unethical and undemocratic, as it infringes the (linguistic) human rights of certain groups of society. A number of features that enhance the power of the integration exams will be discussed in the next section.

Powerful features of the integration exams

The Dutch integration exams are administered by powerful institutions, namely the test developing companies CINOP, Bureau ICE and CITO, the *IB-Groep*, local authorities, and the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) of the Dutch Ministry of Justice. These groups co-operate with one another to arrive at policy decisions, i.e. granting entrance, residency and citizenship to migrants. The power that derives from these institutions is

further enhanced by withholding information, e.g. that no specific rationale is given for the division of tasks between the test developing companies, which makes it difficult to challenge the decisions that are made by these authorities.

The tests also use ‘the language of numbers’ (Shohamy 2001a), not only with respect to test scores, but already in the preparation phase. In the ‘frequently asked questions’ section on the website about the ‘Basic Civic Integration Test’,²⁵ for example, it says that the *slaagpercentage*, i.e. the probability of passing the test, can never be higher than 95% in the preparation, because there cannot be 100% security of passing the real exam. This reference to statistical probability makes the test appear trustworthy and legitimate. However, it can be argued that it is in fact a mechanism to maintain the power in the hands of the testers. No matter how much applicants practice, they can never be completely sure that they will pass the tests, thus the final power of decision remains with the testers. This seems especially plausible because, although it is indeed impossible to achieve a 100% statistical security of passing, there is in fact a possibility of achieving a statistical probability of 99%.

The use of computerised exams for all stages of the testing regime but the practice test of the ‘Integration Exam’, grants the tests the prestige of science, i.e. makes them appear objective, fair, true and trustworthy. This applies also to the assessment of the answers, which is controlled by a computer programme. The fact that it is questionable whether speech technology is actually sufficiently developed to be used in a test like e.g. the computerised phone test, and other objections to the tests’ validity and reliability raised by scientists do not seem to have an influence on the belief of the public that the tests provide scientifically derived knowledge. Policy makers actively support this common belief. Minister Vogelaar, for example, justified the raising of the pass norm for the Basic Civic ‘Integration Exam’ by referring to ‘several researchers’, who have allegedly declared the former pass norm too low (press release March 2008). She does, however, not refer to any specific sources – a rather

²⁵ See <http://www.naarnederland.nl/documentenservice/pagina.asp?pagkey=52183> (accessed 15 August 2008).

unscientific course of action. The quite opaque information about the new pass norm, which is described as ‘somewhat higher than the current pass norm, but not too high’ (press release March 2008, my translation), can be identified as another mechanism to enhance the power of the integration tests, namely the creation of secrecy and mystery that surround the test. This secrecy leads to insecurity on the side of the test takers. Moreover, if only the testers know the cutting scores, test takers have no means of challenging the results. While it is conceivable that the new pass norm will eventually be disclosed, the content of the ‘Integration Exam’ is largely kept secret and continuously modified, which contributes to the mystery that surrounds it.

Furthermore, the context of tests creates certain rules, which only apply during the test, and are different from real life. The most salient ones are that it is not allowed to ask questions once the tests have started, and that the tests have to be performed within very rigid time constraints. Further, test takers are not allowed to bring pens or paper with them into the examination room, and have to ask permission to leave the room while the exam is still ongoing. If test takers have to leave the room, a staff member of the *IB-Groep* will accompany them. While not being part of the actual tests, the regulations for the *Naturalisatiedag* can only be understood as a mechanism to enhance the symbolic power of the naturalisation procedure. There is no rational explanation why citizenship applicants that have successfully completed the integration exam(s), i.e. have shown that they possess the necessary language skills and knowledge of society as defined by the testing institutions, should have to repeat the whole process just because they did not attend a naturalisation ceremony within one year of the naturalisation decision being made.

Another mechanism that augments the power of the integration exams is their use of psychometric traditions, i.e. multiple choice format, that establish one single truth, which is controlled by the test creators. Answers are either correct or false, and do not allow for different meanings or interpretations, which means that test takers need to comply with the test developers truth in order to pass. Test scores are computed automatically

by a programme and are thus final and absolute, and cannot be discussed, negotiated or interpreted in multiple ways. The only exception to this is the practical part of the 'Integration Exam', which can be passed by means of a portfolio or by re-enacting real life situations (termed assessment). With respect to the assessments, it is the testers who decide if the test takers have shown sufficient language skills to be able to deal with situations that might occur in real life. The fact that they have functioned in Dutch society for up to five years (or even more in the case of *oudkomers*) prior to the exam, though maybe not in the way determined by the testers, is disregarded. The portfolio seems to constitute a more interpretive way of assessment. However, the composition of the portfolio is strictly regulated and defined by the developers. In a panel discussion, applicants have to explain how the evidence was collected, and show that it was collected in an honest way. Conversely, no such explanatory demands exist towards testers and the way they arrived at their results. Test takers have to submit to the testers' judgements and have no means of participating or challenging the decision making process.

All of these mechanisms create very definite differences between the testers and the test takers, in which the testers, with the help of sophisticated testing technology, control the situation, the knowledge and the scores, while test takers are in a powerless position.

Shohamy (2001: 125) argues that tests are at their most powerful when their symbolic power turns into ideologies through the spreading of myths and false information. In the Dutch discourse, it is claimed that the compulsory tests will lead to integration. Yet, with the exception of the portfolio in the 'Integration Exam', the tests are completely detached from real life situations, and it is difficult to see how they could – in their current form – contribute to any form of integration, even if testing was a valid means of accomplishing this goal. In order to achieve real integration, i.e. the mutual process of forming one whole out of various parts, more democratic forms of assessment – if any – are needed. The current testing regimes can only lead to a perpetuation of hegemonic power relations.

5 Discussion and conclusion

On the example of the Dutch integration exams, I have tried to show how citizenship testing regimes are connected to the crisis of the European nation-states, and how citizenship tests and related phenomena are used by those in power to reinforce national identity and exclude those who are not wanted from the imagined community.

By making knowledge of the standard language and the dominant culture as imagined by those in power a condition of belonging to the Dutch nation-state, it becomes normal that one language and one culture dominate over others. Migrants are forced to assimilate, and their languages and cultures become marginalised, while the national ideology of 'one language, one nation' is reinforced.

The new Dutch integration policy implies that the disadvantages of migrants in areas like the labour market and education are due to their failure to learn the standard language, and their inherent cultural 'otherness', instead of caused by functional discrimination. Instead of dealing with the very real integration problem, tests are introduced that provide a 'quick fix' and give the public the impression that something is being done. However, as I have argued, the integration exams are neither meant to nor are they very likely to contribute to any real form of integration. It is far more probable that they will lead to exclusion of certain groups of society, thereby perpetuating social differences and hegemonic power relations.

In the discourse of the integration exams, general liberal values such as human rights, the rule of law, and tolerance for others are reinvented as 'basic values of Western society', which are not shared by certain groups of migrants. This assumption sustains stereotypical pictures of both Western societies and non-western migrants and creates an in-group that contains of 'us' who share common values, and an out-group of 'them' who do not, and from whom 'we' need to protect 'our' values. At the same time, the implementation of the integration exams infringes the very values that it claims to want to protect. The 'Basic Civic Integration

Exam' in particular infracts the basic human right of non-discrimination, the right to marry and build a family, and the right to family life, disproportionately effecting particular migrant groups. Both tests are used for selecting only those that fit best and denying ,others' the right to citizenship of, residency in, and even admission to the Netherlands in the name of legality and objectivity, thus providing covert mechanisms to justify this discrimination (Shohamy forthcoming).

In order to limit the power of nations to determine membership, which brings about discrimination and violation of human rights, postnational universal citizenship that will be based on 'personhood' rather than on 'nationhood' is needed (Soysal 1994). In this way, immigrants would not be dependent on the state for their rights and could not be forced to give up their culture and basic identities in order to become citizens. However, ,whilst discourses of hybridity, diasporas, multiple belongings and cosmopolitanism circulate freely within intellectual writings on globalization and weakening of the nation-state, and mobile non-migration citizens are encouraged to consume places and other cultures, [migrants face] increasingly vociferous demands for undivided loyalty and affiliation to national cultures and polities' (Kofman 2005: 464) as the nation-state is reasserting its role.

Thus, in the light of the current, neo-national developments, it seems very unlikely that language testing regimes for integration and citizenship will be abolished in the near future. Consequently, the interim goal has to be to make the policies at least slightly more equal and inclusive.

With respect to language, this means a move away from monolingual ideologies, i.e. an incorporation of other varieties but the standard one, including local varieties of the standard language, regional minority languages, as well as bilingual, multilingual and hybrid forms of language.

Concerning citizenship, the focus should lie on civic rights and obligations, rather than on the common history, values and culture of the imagined community of the nation-state.

With regard to testing, more democratic, interpretive forms of assessment are needed. This includes the usage of assessment forms that are more closely connected to actual language use than dominant psychometric ones, and thus allow for a fairer judgment about proficiency, the consideration of multiple sources of evidence that together give a more complete picture of language proficiency²⁶, as well as the involvement of test takers at the various stages of the testing process (i.e. form of assessment, content, decision making process). The assessment procedures should be adapted to the contexts and interests of migrants beyond the superficial and limiting categories of ‚work‘ and ‚upbringing, health care and education‘ that the portfolio offers. Furthermore, the different situation of migrants in reference to i.a. age, conditions, occupations, literacy level and workplace tasks should be considered. Proficiency should only be assessed after a certain period of time in the host country, to allow familiarity with the language. Most importantly, assessment procedures should not be used for high stake decisions about entrance, residency or citizenship, but rather as learning tools, i.e. the information attained through them should serve as feedback for the test takers and as basis to design teaching programmes. Shohamy (forthcoming) makes an additional argument for ‚native speakers who are engaged with immigrants on a daily basis to acquire skills on ways of interacting with immigrants in efficient ways.’

By incorporating some of these issues, the unidirectional, *de facto* assimilatory practices of the current testing regime would become more democratic, and integration would turn into a rather more mutual and inclusive process.

²⁶ The various parts of the ‚Integration Exam‘ do not represent multiple sources in the intended sense, as they all use the same way of measurement. The only exception to this is the practical part, which is a step in the right direction, but needs to be less restrictive and normative.

Appendix A: CEFR language levels

	Understanding		Speaking		Writing
	Listening	Reading	Spoken interaction	Spoken production	Writing
C2	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialized articles and literary works.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades or meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.	I can present a clear, smoothly flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.	I can write clear, smoothly flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with a effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.
C1	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialized articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skillfully to those of other speakers.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select style appropriate to the reader in mind.
B2	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue, giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.
B1	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst traveling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.
A2	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables, and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.
A1	I can recognize familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.

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