The relation between language and identity has been thoroughly studied in linguistics, sociology and philosophy. At the same time, identity has also become a fundamental element in International Relations. The importance of language in shaping identities in IR has nonetheless been neglected, let alone its use to project power. This research line had seemed rather promising after the seminal works of Gramsci, Foucault or Bourdieu but not thoroughly explored. It has not been totally forgotten either with authors like David Crystal and Robert Phillipson in the anglophone world or Claude Hagège or Jean-Louis Calvet in French, Umberto Eco in Italian as well as Abraam de Zwaan or Philippe Parijs in the Low Countries.

*Negotiating Linguistic Identity* edited by Virve-Anneli Vihman and Kristiina Praakli is thus a welcome contribution to the debate on identity in International Relations. Moreover it focuses on two original lines of argument. The first one is the stress on the Baltic area and some languages that have drawn little attention in the mainstream European debate on language and identity. If Catalan and Irish have featured on a regular basis in that debate, the Baltic languages (or Sorbian) have figured much less, at least in the debate on European identity.

The stress on the Baltic languages also allows for an implicit reasoning not only about the language and identity debate but on language and power even within Europe. This second issue definitely constitutes the main interest of this collection of essays.

The eleven essays of the book have been distributed between three big sections: ‘multilingualism’, ‘self-representation and belonging’ (i.e. language and identity) and finally ‘language and policy’.

All the chapters are detailed and thought-provoking contributions that make this book useful especially for persons that are seldom exposed to the type of debates which privilege identity and soft power in order better to understand international relations. European Integration surely is the best laboratory for these currents of thought, given the less ‘realist’ nature of the relations between its members and the importance of language in defining the identity of its people. This is after all the continent where not only the nation state was developed and exported but also the
first continent to set up a clear relationship between nation and language, hence the difficulty to set up a coherent linguistic policy on the scale of the whole continent.

Some chapters, such as the unavoidable mention of ‘Languages and Identities in Catalonia’ by E. Boix-Fuster or ‘Scripts and Politics in Modern Central Europe’ by Tomasz Kamusella, hardly develop new ideas for those attracted by the topic but they are clear and informative for a broader audience of readers that should become more aware of the political importance of the linguistic debates.

All the chapters in the book reflect the contradiction between the two main functions of language. It is first a marker and an expression of the national (or regional) identity and in today’s Europe that is its main and more visible role. A national language is the main instrument to keep the historical and cultural heritage alive for the coming generations. At the same time, in order for the new generation’s talents to blossom, it needs Europe to be connected and effective for a double role, in relation to the other EU Member States and outwardly against the rest of the world. To maintain its cutting edge, it needs to avoid internal divisions and be open to competition. The EU institutions, even more than the European States, are torn between those two imperatives. Although they maintain the fiction of multiculturalism and multilingualism, they have long opted for an ‘English (almost) only’ policy in their day to day functioning, without saying or even accepting it, officially and also financially, as demonstrated in the support for the publication of this work, promoting diversity. But the debate, and the hope, is still alive for national languages, from the biggest, German, to one of the smallest, Estonian, as reflected in the book.

The focus on the Baltics is present in four of the eleven chapters, and is newer. Most of the European Studies scholars are aware of the struggle for survival led by the Central European and Baltic States against Russia and Germany. Few realise the importance of language in this struggle both as a marker and a tool for independence. The mention of German in two chapters is also welcome as German was the other hegemonic Power, and language, in the region.

The survival of the Baltic language over Russian now seems secured but a new fight is arising, namely that of survival regarding English which is quickly becoming not only the main but rather the only language used in scientific productions in hard as well as social sciences. In this fight, the Irish experience is both useful and ominous if one reads the chapter on the language policy in an Irish university. ‘Pushing an Open Door’ by John Walsh, is undoubtedly one of the most original and worrying chapters in the collection. Focusing on the linguistic policy of a particular Irish university, Galway, the contribution gives rise to fundamental debates about the future of multilingualism and linguistic diversity in Europe. English is not only on the rise, as warned by the author, but actually enjoying a near monopoly in areas like mathematics, technology, engineering and business which are precisely the sectors in which all European countries build their future. At the university level, which is the main object of the analysis, it is used across all fields of research. All the European institutions need to internationalise their curricula, student bodies and faculties and for this they need to use English. Even countries like France or Germany with both a strong identity and a long successful academic tradition are giving in to teaching in English even at the lower levels of university education. It has become the implicitly compulsory language for publication as it allows for both peer review and international repute. So the question of spoken Irish, which is not dead but has been moribund for decades, is now valid for all the other European languages: how
broad a range of subjects is it possible to study in languages other than English. More worrying, although not exposed as such in the chapter, is the question to know what the odds are for survival of a language that is not broadly used at the University level or for research? Will all the European languages (and for that matter the Americas are also directly concerned by this debate) meet the fate of Irish?

The parallel made by Konstanze MacLeod between Sorbian and (Scottish) Gaelic as identity markers are equally original and ominous for the future of the smaller languages and thus identities in Europe. These two contributions summarise all the ambiguities of the language and identity relationship, as well as the ambiguities of the linguistic ideas of these minorities that echoes almost literally the dominant discourses of Herder or Humboldt in German on language and culture.

As often in compiled books, the main hurdle is the homogeneity and classification of the chapters. This was unfortunately not overcome by the editors. Culture and Europe are open to such diverse focuses that it is almost impossible to find a common ground for all the contributors. The geographic diversity is not in the least the problem, and conversely is one of the assets of this valuable publication. It could even have been broadened. For the rest, it is a mix of socio-linguistics, political sciences and sociology. A multidisciplinary approach is always welcome but with a certain convergence in the object of study. If you already speak of region, nation and Europe on one hand, countries like Estonia, Germany, Ireland and Spain on the other hand, the multidisciplinary approach may be more confusing than enlightening.

Moreover, the definition of the three parts of the book and the distribution of the individual contributions in them almost seems to be random since almost all speak of identity and policy. A division by theoretical considerations, case comparison and individual case analysis for instance might have been a better idea. The question of coherence is however the main fault of the book and it is a minor one. Although it sometimes makes it resemble more a Journal than a book, the depth and pedagogics in the articles compensate for it and make of it a useful book for any European scholar or internationalist interested in soft power or more generally in the culture and identity aspect of International Relations.