

# World Language Policy in the Era of Globalization: Diversity and Intercommunication from the Perspective of 'Complexity'

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## Abstract

*The great difficulty is thus considering the unity of the many and the multiplicity of the unity. Those who see the diversity of cultures tend to overlook the unity of mankind; those who see the unity of mankind tend to dismiss the diversity of cultures.*

Edgar Morin, *L'identité humaine*.

## Summary

1. Introduction
2. Diversity and intercommunication: addressing language contact using the 'complexity' perspective
3. Language contact, equilibrium and shift
4. New principles for a new historical era
5. Immediate priorities for the general maintenance of linguistic diversity
6. Synthesis and conclusion: some principles and values for peace and linguistic justice throughout the planet

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The group of processes referred to as 'globalization' or 'internationalization', are constructing a new sociolinguistic situation, at least for the most economically - and technologically - advanced areas of the planet, that we need to explore and understand fully if we want to be able to control its effects and shape its development.

The linguistic consequences of this phenomenon are caused mainly by the sharp increase in the transnationalization of economies (with a trend towards global free trade and the foundation of large corporations through mergers and take-overs), and by developments in communication technologies.

In the first instance, we see how extending traditional market boundaries produces the need to learn new languages to enable negotiations with new suppliers and potential buyers. Furthermore, as national firms are taken over by multi-national corporations and factories belonging to the latter are set up in new territories, the need arises for staff (especially highly-qualified staff and those holding intermediate and management positions) to know and possess everyday usage of languages other than those of their traditional communities. This series of economic factors then, tends to produce changes in the linguistic competences required professionally and, hence, in the 'language of work' factor which can, as we know, have a profound influence, in specific contexts, on the stability or abandonment of the languages of human groups.

In the second instance - developments in communication technologies - the Internet phenomenon, particularly in the 'First World', has enabled people to access to web contents and contact with each other on a daily basis over long distances, thus breaking the limits of physical proximity. Nowadays, large numbers of people communicate electronically with others who live many kilometres away and whose first language can be one of a range of different codes. Moreover, communication satellites make it increasingly possible to receive

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<sup>1</sup> Text of the plenary speech given at the World Congress on Language Policies (Barcelona, 16-20 April, 2002). In part, it is a re-working of ideas and perspectives I have been writing about in recent years.

broadcasts produced at great distances from the point of reception and, hence, in languages other than those of the traditional community.

We are also seeing a number of actions, largely in response to these changes, in the political organization of significant parts of mankind, particularly on a continental level. In Europe then, a process of financial, political and cultural integration is underway. This process requires solutions to problems caused by the creation of a large area of fluid interrelation between a large number of human groups that speak different languages.

The traditional areas of human communication and interrelations are therefore undergoing a substantial growth. Up until now, these areas had guaranteed the preservation of a certain historical *status quo* which, at least for those groups able to retain their political autonomy, had been able to keep individuals and societies in a certain functional monolingualism.

The expansion in areas of human interrelation (mainly economic and technological), is giving rise to an important phenomenon of the bilingualization or functional polyglottization of many individuals. This is due to the linguistic demands of the new situation and the fact that more and more people see advantages in possessing multiple linguistic competences. A novelty of this process is that the knowledge of more than one language or having to use these with different interlocutors or for different functions (an issue previously affecting only elite groups or minoritized or small linguistic groups) is now an increasingly everyday phenomenon for many individuals from larger and/or majority linguistic groups within their states.

This extended language contact and the polyglottal needs of more and more members of human groups that were, up until now, non-minority (in the traditional sense of the word), are generating feelings of cultural threat and defensive reactions, previously only experienced by groups habitually minoritized through political integration without official and public recognition. Although these feelings of linguistic insecurity and threat may be exaggerated in most cases, this effect of globalization could be a good starting point for a serious review of the foundations of the linguistic organization of mankind as a whole. Now that this sense of feeling threatened is not exclusive to politically-subordinated groups, now that it encompasses those that are beginning to suffer from the (inter)dependence of economies, technology and the mass media, it should be used to increase understanding of the classical situation of minoritization by larger, minoritizing groups. We may well be on the threshold of a new era in history where linguistic fraternity and intercomprehension between the different human groups can progress and give rise to new, fairer principles of political and linguistic organisation than those in place previously.

One extremely important issue that arises from increased contact and interrelations is how we humans can come to understand each other, regardless of the linguistic group that we come from. Since the scale of normal communication is expanding from being merely state and regional to become continental and even planetwide, is it not about time that mankind started to think about how to resolve the issue of communication between the species as a whole?

In practice, because there are no effective structures for planetwide political organization to discuss this general problem, each individual and organization resolves its communicative needs with the outside world in the manner most convenient to them. Due to the economic and technological importance of English-speaking countries and to their political supremacy over the last two centuries, this language is considered to be capable of resolving the present and future intercommunication needs of contemporary societies most adequately. It is thus being gradually adopted by more and more people and organizations. English is, without a doubt, the most frequently-learned second language at the moment. It is the language used most often as a code for relations between different linguistic groups and the most habitual in international, scientific and commercial communication.

This exponential extension of competence in and use of English, sometimes used unnecessarily through snobbery or as a sign of 'modernity', is causing an equally dangerous polarisation in many areas. On the one hand, groups are rallying against the learning and use of this language due to its condition as an 'imperialist language' (particularly associating it with current North-American hegemony) while, on the other, elites are adopting it as their

habitual language and/or passing it on to their children, thinking of the financial and symbolic advantages that will benefit them. This may spark processes of language shift within certain social layers, whose behaviour could then be copied by larger groups of society. As we know, this could lead to the progressive general abandonment of use of the community's own language.

However, new language contact may extend beyond English (clearly, the language with the widest L2 extension) particularly in non-Western areas, to languages of regional hegemony, within the context of processes of economic integration on this level. In Africa, for example, languages such as Swahili are extending beyond their traditional borders while, in Latin America, Spanish is putting the finishing touches to its penetration into indigenous linguistic groups. Arabic is also consolidating itself over a vast area and similar phenomena could also take place in Asia. Language contact, therefore, is clearly on the increase for more and more human groups. The great challenge is how to control this contact and how to organise state, regional and planetwide intercommunication harmoniously on the basis of existing linguistic diversity.

On top of all these changes, the current globalization process is also party to economic desperation and a quest for progress. These latter are causing an increase in the movement of significant groups of people from one linguistic area to another. The potential consequences of such a movement are significant, depending on the circumstances, for both the migrants and the receiving societies, particularly if the latter are politically-minoritized groups or use languages in a small demographic area. Some sociocultural ecosystems that were already unstable and had a poor equilibrium before the arrival of new groups of immigrants may be affected by the linguistic evolution of the displaced individuals. New immigrants may think that they should gear their linguistic behaviour towards the dominant, majority language, rather than towards the code of the subordinated receiver group or the group with minority status in that state. It goes without saying that this behaviour can help increase the demolinguistic minoritization of this group and cause intergroup tension<sup>2</sup>.

However, migration can also cause the abandonment and loss of a significant degree of linguistic diversity in cases where the vast majority of its members leave the historical territory and integrate themselves individually into other societies where they have few possibilities of continuing to use their code of origin.

There is, therefore, a clear need for all levels of public authorities, from planetwide to local, to address the contemporary needs and linguistic problems of mankind. The issue is no longer one of scorned 'minorities', but rather of a culturally-diverse species that wants to live in harmony and solidarity, dealing with any potential problematic situations that could arise.

## **2. Diversity and intercommunication: addressing language contact using the 'complexity' perspective**

In all likelihood, the most problematic issue raised in the above introduction is how to make two seemingly contradictory facts compatible: continuity of the linguistic diversity created by humanity through its diaspora all over the world, and the need for intercommunication between these groups of linguistically-diverse individuals in the new – 'glocal' – era of positive re-unification of the species. It seems clear that we should shy away from a dichotomous view that would force us to resolve the antinomy by opting for one side or the other of the balance. Mankind *is* linguistically diverse, and human groups understand this and support the continuity of this diversity. These same human groups also realise that they are destined to live together in solidarity on this planet called 'Earth'. The problem may be the way that we perceive reality, rather than in reality itself. The difficulty lies in thought and conceptual change, rather than in the notion that it would be impossible to carry out.

The extraordinary tendency of human beings to think in terms of dichotomies could be the root of the problem. In the past, and even nowadays, this tendency to think in terms of

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<sup>2</sup> See Bastardas Boada, Albert: "Llengua i noves migracions. Les experiències canadenques i la situació a Catalunya", *Revista de Llengua i dret* 2002 (in press).

dichotomies seems to have dominated the view of language contact, thus making it impossible for all groups concerned to live in more harmonious contentment. The vast majority of States seem to find it impossible or very difficult to structure themselves politically in a way that would permit *both* the continuity of the linguistic life of their constituent groups *and* the intercommunication necessary for common living between these groups. The great majority seem to choose one over the other: they either impose a single official language for all groups, without recognizing the diversity (and often explicitly against this), or the existing linguistic groups are recognised but the matter of intercommunication is not resolved satisfactorily. It is hard to believe that either option can have a future in the current era of mankind: against the background of positive growth of the democratic and egalitarian conscience of human groups and the dignity of each and every one of these, historical groups that have been thus far subordinated will not sit back and allow the introduction of solutions condemning them to a reduced linguistic existence when this could be full and normal. Moreover, a political and linguistic organization that does not consider the forms of intercommunication between its components in the best possible way is not sustainable.

Thus, there is no alternative but to explore imaginatively other forms of political and linguistic organisation that could make the two objectives above compatible: preserving the linguistic diversity and dignity of all historical linguistic groups, while ensuring fluent intercommunication and a feeling of solidarity among our species.

I believe that we might be able to reach some sort of solution if we explore the ideas that arise from the perspective of 'complexity', which uses the basic contributions of cognitive, systemic, ecological, chaological, and/or holistic approximations. In a name, the author I consider best suited to conceptualizing 'complexity' as applied to human affairs, is French anthropologist, sociologist and thinker, Edgar Morin. It is through this paradigm that we learn to recognise the limits of our representations of reality and to become aware of the revision of the categories through which we see the world and our existence<sup>3</sup>. Our representations are dominated by conceptualizations that tend to come basically from the material world and not from our own mental world. Representations lie and are produced in the brain/mind, but this does not mean that these representations are automatically conscious and aware of *where* they are produced and *how*.

The representations that have dominated – and still dominate – Western thinking (which later spread to many other parts of the world) are based on the properties of material, physical elements using Aristotelian logic, which is founded on the principle of identity and exclusion of the third<sup>4</sup>. For example, if a place is taken by something, it cannot be occupied by anything else. This view, when automatically applied to the field of human relations (as is often the case), means that if a state or group already has a language, it cannot have another. Secondly, if individuals see themselves as belonging to an 'identity', they cannot consider themselves to be members of any other. This is not necessarily the case in the sociocognitive, mental world. An individual can know several languages and distribute uses of the languages that they know, and form part of different categories of identity, within human societies. The logic of complexity, therefore, "escapes, in its most fundamental points, from the binary logic of 'all or nothing'"<sup>5</sup>. This vision of things, with more 'water-type' or flexible instead of 'rock-type' or rigid categories<sup>6</sup>, can therefore encourage a reformulation of situations, resulting in new possibilities that need to be explored – along with the difficulties that this will no doubt entail – with imagination, creativity and rigour.

In all probability, the world and societies would be much simpler if there were only one language or identity. This would no doubt please the supporters of simplist and simplifying thought – whom we would all probably be if we could. However, the fact is that our world,

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<sup>3</sup> "Our ideas are not reflections of what is real, but rather translations of what is real", Morin, Edgar (1992): *Science avec conscience*. Paris: Fayard, p. 242.

<sup>4</sup> Morin, Edgar. *op. cit.* p. 282. See also: De Bono, Edward (1998): *Manual de la sabiduría*. Barcelona (Spanish translation of *Edward de Bono's Textbook of Wisdom*. New York: Penguin, 1996), Sp. pp. 146-157, and, by the same author, *New Thinking for the New Millenium*. London: Penguin, 2000, on the need to change our way of thinking.

<sup>5</sup> Morin, E., *op. cit.*, p. 282.

<sup>6</sup> See De Bono, Edward (1994): *Water logic*. London: Penguin Books.

our societies, and our individuals are not simple; on the contrary, we can actually be highly complex. To aid understanding of these non-simple phenomena, Morin attempts to develop the paradigm of complexity. Complex thought is understood to be "the union of simplicity and complexity; it is the union of the simplification processes which are selection, hierarchization, separation, and reduction, with other contra-processes of communication and articulation of whatever is dissociated and distinguished; and it shies away from having to choose the alternative between either reductionist thought, which sees only elements, or globalist thought, which sees only the whole"<sup>7</sup>. I believe that these postulates for the reform of thought should form the basis of attempts to think of principles of the linguistic organisation of mankind that go beyond traditional dichotomies. We must now think in terms of 'and', instead of 'or'. After years of thinking in terms of 'or', we now need to explore the linguistic organization of mankind in terms of 'and', i.e. from the point of view of complexity – without excluding either objective. We must ask ourselves about *how* precisely we can make *both* possible: the maintenance and development of the various languages and, at the same time, the necessary intercommunication.

However, as Morin himself says, 'complexity' is a problem word, not a solution word: "complexity for me is the challenge, not the answer. I am searching for a way of thinking through complication (that is, through the countless inter-retroactions), through uncertainty and through contradictions"<sup>8</sup>. Given that "any objectives we reach will take us down a new path, and that any solution will give rise to a new problem"<sup>9</sup>, we now need to put our critical imagination and intellectual creativity into action, using this new perspective, to design the future, accepting initially contradictory positions and working out *how* we can fit them all together in the best and most practical way. The challenge, therefore, lies in making the effort "not to sacrifice the whole for a single part, or a single part for the whole, but rather to understand the difficult problem of organization"<sup>10</sup>.

### 3. Language contact, equilibrium and shift

When looking at the issue of language, it would seem much simpler to think in terms of 'and' (and not 'or') in individual competence. Many of us have the experience of knowing – and using – more than one language. We are therefore aware that the phenomenon is possible, with certain costs such as borrowings or mixtures between the codes we dominate; these are, in any case, not very important and do not challenge the possibility of personal polyglottism. The perspective of complexity does become problematic, as we know, at group and sociopolitical levels. There is a widely-held belief in certain geocultural areas that generalised social bilingualism usually – or even inevitably – leads to a process of language shift, i.e. the 'weaker' language gradually loses functions whereas the 'stronger' language gains functions, and the process ends with the abandonment of the group's own code, i. e. language death.

Although history reveals a number of cases of this nature that seem to corroborate the above statement, the evolution is not always as above. As Norbert Elias says, what we may need to do is at the same time "investigate the nature of this range of possible transformations and the configuration of factors responsible for the fact that, of all of the possibilities, only this one is materialized"<sup>11</sup>. In other words, we need to know more precisely why the situation evolves in this way and not in any other (such as maintenance of the language, for example). Once we have a clear idea of the factors and mechanisms, we then need to find out whether we can intervene in these cases to prevent them from being affected by shift, ensuring that the recessive languages are maintained and that they progress. We urgently need to identify the variables and dynamics of processes of shift, and to create models that will enable us to design effective possibilities for intervening in

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<sup>7</sup> Morin, E. (1990): *Introduction à la pensée complexe*. Paris: ESF éditeur, p. 135.

<sup>8</sup> Morin, E., *op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>9</sup> Morin, E. (1993): *Terre-Patrie*. Paris: Éds. du Seuil, p. 201.

<sup>10</sup> Morin, E. (1982): *Science avec conscience*. Paris: Fayard, p. 43.

<sup>11</sup> Elias, Norbert (1970): *Sociología fundamental*. Barcelona: Gedisa, p. 197. (Spanish translation of *Was ist Soziologie?* Juventa Verlag Munchen).

different types of situation, different stages of development, and the unequal contexts in which these can occur.

One of the possible paths for exploring processes whereby shift evolves from mass bilingualism might be to explore the cases where this is not so. The situations that Ferguson termed 'diglossia' can be used initially to try and shed some light on the problem. How is it that, despite considerable interlinguistic distances (as with the Swiss-German or Greek cases) and a clear distribution of 'high' and 'low' functions, these latter are not abandoned from generation to generation in favour of the 'high' functions? Is this not precisely what happens in many cases of language shift? How can situations that are so superficially similar from the point of view of language shift evolve in such crucially different ways? What if mass bilingualism was a *necessary* but *not a sufficient* condition to explain the evolution towards the intergenerational abandonment of own varieties? What if, as Norbert Elias said, "when we are dealing the problem of the need for social evolutions, we have to distinguish clearly and concisely between the statement that B has to necessarily follow A and the statement that A necessarily has to precede B"?<sup>12</sup>

What then makes situations with a hierarchized distribution of functions between linguistic varieties that are structurally distant, appear as stable in some cases whereas, in others, the varieties used in individualised communications tend to be abandoned and replaced by institutionalised communications<sup>13</sup>? Which factors would eventually determine these outcomes – diglossia with varying stability (using Ferguson's concept) *versus* shift? Rather than looking at strictly language-based structural divergences, we will probably need to focus on the socio-cognitive representations of speakers on the linguistic varieties at issue and, secondly, on the contexts in which these latter are produced and maintained. Let us clarify that, here, we are not discussing why a given variety is *adopted*, but rather why the other is *abandoned*.

Firstly, unlike the situations described by Ferguson, as regards the political context of language shift phenomena, the political powers in question very often hope for the result of language abandonment. In many cases, since the very launch of the process of mass dissemination of the state language (which, for the vast majority of the population, is often first experienced when learning to read and write), the explicit aim is not only to transmit a general language of intercommunication, but also to eliminate any other systems of linguistic communication that differ from the model used by the central, supreme political power. Against this background of subordination and dependence, the population (as it becomes more and more competent in the newly-acquired State language) may choose to transfer this language to their children as a basic variety of socialisation, i. e. as a native variety, thus ending the intergenerational transfer of the group's own vernacular. The change in habitual guidelines will need a clear, ideological and/or practical justification and legitimation, since we are addressing a behaviour that the community clearly values forming part of. Here, the patriotic discourse of a 'national language', which promotes the notion of a single, general language for all citizens, can be used. Gradually, therefore, as part of a process of asymmetrical dissemination among social and geographic groups, this 'national language' will be adopted as a variety of institutionalized communications; it will then be transferred to individualized communications by a generation that is already competent in the language. This generation will transfer the language as native-speakers to the next, which will now be somewhat unfamiliar with the old vernaculars and will make this variety, received as the formal standard (conveniently adapted to colloquial functions), their own habitual language.

On the contrary, the diglossic distribution of functions usually involves the coexistence of varieties that are *perceived* as being part of the same 'language'. This is particularly clear with the historical Greek and Arabic cases. Whichever is used, the two varieties have always been seen as undeniably 'Arabic' or 'Greek'. The standard does not tend to cause issues of ethnic identity.

As we said earlier, the varieties are in complementary distribution: the standard variety is never used in informal oral, individualized communication and the vernaculars are never

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<sup>12</sup> Elias, N., *op.cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>13</sup> Using the terminology of J. C. Corbeil.

used in written form and rarely in very formal speech. The official standard is consciously learned by generation after generation at schools, whereas vernacular varieties are used in everyday and domestic environments and are the first varieties acquired by individuals. In theory therefore, there does not seem to be room for ethnolinguistic conflict, since the varieties do not symbolize this type of opposition. Therefore, the contrast between varieties does not seem to offer speakers a negative representation leading them to abandon the vernaculars in favour of the standard in informal, everyday communication. In fact, the opposite appears to take place.

Basically, then, the reason for the relative stability in these cases of diglossic distribution lies in the political and cognitive dimension: none of the cases usually analysed are situations of political subordination, such as minoritized communities. The perception of dependence, with its negative undertones, and as a result, self-denigration with the adoption of foreign cultural elements as the main reference for behaviour and values, do not need to occur. It therefore seems obvious that intergenerational shift is not caused by the simple facts of bilingualization and the asymmetrical distribution of functions, but rather by the political and economic *context* in which the bilingualization occurs and the *meanings and representations* associated with it by its protagonists.<sup>14</sup>

In many cases, the root of the problem lies in these significant representations of the situation and, specifically, in the evaluations and expectations for each linguistic variety at issue. The functional equilibrium that would allow intergenerational reproduction of the situation collapses if individuals arrive at the conclusion that, all in all, their children would benefit more from the transfer of their L2, rather than their L1, because they see more advantages in the L2 (often linked to socioeconomic aspects and political and cultural prestige). When overt, formal prestige has greater importance than 'covert' prestige – as it has termed by some authors – individuals may decide to change their child's language. We therefore need to look at the *context* - the sociopolitical and economic *ecosystem* - for the factors that may have led to this decision to abandon the intergenerational transfer of the group's historical language.

In certain lights, it may appear that this abandonment is strongly influenced by socioeconomic factors, particularly with regard to expectations of usefulness as a language of work and, overall, to the positive nature of the language entering the general process of 'modernization'. These contrast with negative factors associated with the traditional language, regarded as a variety linked to the past - a pre-modern period that needs to be transcended. However, there are also important examples of communities from underdeveloped economies that have been modernized entirely, without losing their language; quite the opposite, their language has been promoted, encoded and extended as one that is appropriate and functionally present in all the communications of an advanced, contemporary society. Therefore, economic aspects alone can sometimes explain the desire and concern of individuals for knowing the most useful languages in these cases, but it is more difficult for them to explain the abandonment of the group language. At any rate, this phenomenon must occur in a more general context of minoritization (specially at the political level), leading the community to lose its own structures which could guide the process of modernisation from its own points of view and favour its interests instead of those of the politically-dominant group. (The other important variable to explain abandonment is demolinguistic mixing, whereby significant migratory movements, particularly from the politically-dominant group/s, cause the alloctonous variety to gain ground, even in everyday interpersonal communication, while the native language loses speakers and functions).

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<sup>14</sup> See Bastardas Boada, Albert (1997): "Substitution linguistique versus diglossie dans la perspective de la planétarisation", in: Bouchard, G. & Y. Lamonde (dir.): *La nation dans tous ses états. Le Québec en comparaison*. Montreal/Paris: Harmattan, pp. 111-129. See in Catalan, "Manteniment diglòssic i substitució lingüística: notes per a una continuïtat de la linguodiversitat", in: *Homenatge a Jesús Tuson*. Barcelona: Empúries, 1999, pp. 26-32. On-line versions are also available in French and Catalan at *DiversCité Langues* <http://www.telug.quebec.ca/diverscite>, vol. II (1997).

#### 4. New principles for a new historical era

Political action and representations and discourses on language diversity, political integration and intercommunication are therefore primordial. One of the first aspects we need to study with world authorities is how to overcome, through discourse, the dichotomies that restrict us, and as we said earlier, promote the search for new principles and ways of looking at situations of language contact. As regards the traditional criteria for the organisation of plurilingualism, for example, I believe that we may need to look beyond the principles of 'territoriality' and 'personality' for the more complex situations that so require. Despite their obvious advantages, both principles tend to presuppose that individuals are monolingual and cannot, in principle, resolve the problem of intercommunication. How then can principles such as these resolve the construction of a European sociocultural space in practice? How are we to understand each other, setting aside simple, formal institutions with multiple translation systems, if we all want to remain functionally monolingual? How would the application of a principle of 'personality' be possible for so many languages in such a wide space? We may well have to look elsewhere for the answer.

I suggest, therefore, that the search focuses on the study of the application of the principle called 'subsidiarity' (already present in European nomenclature) in the field of linguistic communication. We could adapt this political and administrative principle into a language policy principle that, generally-speaking, establishes the criteria that 'whatever a 'local' language can do, a 'global' language should not'. That is to say, we would allow – and promote – the effective, mass knowledge of other languages, giving *functional pre-eminence* where possible to the language of each historically-constructed linguistic group. So-called 'foreign' languages would be used for external contact (which would occur increasingly more often) but local, everyday functions would be clearly allocated to the own languages of each linguistic group.

This reserve of functions for the 'local' languages of each group must be clear and transparent to prevent the existing polyglottization from leading to the abandonment of the code with less communicative scope. Thus, in addition to the principles of polyglottization and subsidiarity, we need to incorporate the principle of '*specific*' or '*exclusive*' functions for 'local' languages, which could be overpowered by the bigger languages. Clearly, there would be a strong, important nucleus of reserved functions to be performed habitually in the group language and not in any other. The exclusive functions of the group code must not be limited to informal, oral communication; rather, they would have to incorporate the maximum possible formal, written functions to ensure that the representations and evaluations of individuals did not favour the other extragroup languages. This would involve the creation, in the words of the Quebecois linguist, Angéline Martel, of a type of 'positive diglossia'. I am led to believe that this type of success is possible, not only by cases such as Ferguson's aforementioned diglossias or by other African multilingual situations, but also by situations such as that of Luxembourg. The languages of this small European State are organised around a certain type of functional distribution enabling the continued polyglottization of individuals and the clear maintenance of the group language<sup>15</sup>.

Correlatively to polyglottization, subsidiarity and exclusive functions, all levels of political authorities should supervise the prevention of a trend that could well take place - *abusive use* by bigger languages. If this *ecological* equilibrium that we need to construct is to be successful, the big languages must not want to occupy more space and functions than is their right, by taking advantage of the mass polyglottization of individuals. They cannot abusively invade local areas and leave the use of group languages with no possibilities, or at a severe disadvantage, in functions that are very important for evaluating languages, such as those usually dominated by these great codes. Some type of general regulation must be established; this should be based on the principle of subsidiarity and respect for the dignity

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<sup>15</sup>The possibility of non-hierarchized, functional language distribution could also be an interesting and fitting solution for cases with two (or more?) linguistic groups that are more or less equal in numbers where it is difficult to agree which language should benefit from the principle of subsidiarity in favour of the local language. Non-asymmetrical, functional specialisation can involve each group knowing and using the language of the other, which can help balance the situation and resolve the potential conflict of this type of context.



and stability of all linguistic groups produced throughout history. Without international organisations with authority over these aspects, it could be very difficult to maintain a fair and adequate equilibrium. The responsibility of current, planet-wide organisations – and those in urgent need of creation – is extremely important and decisive.

Promoting the effective polyglottization of individuals also involves taking new decisions that must be studied and debated, as well as the need for research and effective imagination in methods and strategies for learning second languages. One of the first decisions that must be taken is which second language or languages need/s to be learnt; such a decision obviously depends on the language/s we adopt at the various levels of communication – general or planet-wide, regional or continental, and local. As we are all aware, many international organisations and countries have already taken decisions on this aspect that clearly tend to favour the adoption of English, as we pointed out earlier, although often in conjunction with other codes. I do not believe that this aspect should not go unquestioned, simply to become an inevitable and irreversible fact that irrationally feeds off contemporary North-American hegemony. Mankind as a whole needs to ask itself what it wants to do, communicatively-speaking. What is best for us? To continue spreading the knowledge of a language of a specific human group (which clearly asymmetrically favours those with this language as their L1), or to focus on a language of intercommunication that is not the L1 of any human group? What is best for the continuity of linguistic diversity? To continue learning the language of a group or series of groups that are hegemonic at this point in time, or to think about adopting a new language that belongs to nobody, for all of mankind? Many people may think that these questions have already been answered *de facto* by reality. However, I sincerely believe that our species cannot adopt decision of this importance unless the organisations that represent us and the citizens themselves debate, deliberate, evaluate and finally give their verdict on the issue.

English-speaking countries and individuals clearly benefit from the current situation and, depending on the conditions, social development can lead to increasingly more individuals imitating native English-speakers and, as we said earlier, adopting English as their habitual language and as the L1 of their children. At the moment, a product in English – even if it is not only local, but also localist – is immediately an 'international' product, whereas the same product in another language has a restricted circulation. Clearly, if a neutral code that is not the L1 of any group was adopted, people would be less likely to see a code of intercommunication as an L1, thus guaranteeing further the level of conservation of historical linguistic diversity. This would also make humans more equal in terms of their initial language competencies, since everybody would have to learn the language. Moreover, as we saw in Ferguson's diglossias, complementary distribution contributes to maintenance: the formal variety is not habitually used in everyday communication and therefore rarely becomes an L1.

However, here we may face problems such as the linguistic distance between the languages of each group and the structure of the language of intercommunication that is finally adopted. How can we create a neutral code that will be equal for everybody? Perhaps the issue is not that easy to solve (as we have seen in India, for example), and the debates between the different linguistic groups may make it impossible to ever reach the point of adopting this neutral code. In that case, the continuity and expansion of English would be guaranteed, at least until some other power in the future decided to challenge that language and try to impose its own.

If the prevailing solution was continuity of the international use of a language belonging to a pre-existing human group, I think that we would then need to think about introducing some clear counterweights, not only as regards clear regulation and the establishment of an authority to supervise abusive usage, but even 'taxes' for usage; the resources obtained in this way could then be used to benefit languages with more difficulties. The exportation of English knowledge and the fact that products written in that language can encompass a significant part of the world market provides an enormous amount of financial benefit for this group of countries, particularly for Great Britain and the United States. The sharing of these benefits and returning them to other linguistic groups is not too far-fetched an idea to imagine it becoming a reality in the immediate future as planetwide integration advances.

## 5. Immediate priorities for the general maintenance of linguistic diversity

Without setting aside the reflection and action required to shape the future of the linguistic communication of humanity, we need to concentrate on more immediate problems and try to act in coordination on smaller scales, which are, for the moment, more often decisive. International group action is required both by the organisations common to humanity at this moment in time and by the most local of public authorities. These must make people fully aware of the linguistic diversity crisis and undertake action at every level of government to change the current, inadequate conditions. However, although we can conceptualize the phenomenon of language contact as a unit, the situations and stages of development of the various cases can be very different, and thus require very different types of action. Currently, we find contact ranging from that of the language of an important group (i.e. with solid demographic expansion, economically-developed, with full political sovereignty) that uses English as a technical and scientific interlanguage, to that of a group with few individuals that is economically and politically minoritized, in constant contact with the language of the dominant group in all of these aspects. It is evident that the problem of diversity is aggravated as we near the lower end of this continuum of situations, i. e. cases with maximum political, economic, demographic, educational, mass media and even ideological subordination. One of the most urgent aspects that needs to be studied and solved, therefore, is knowing exactly which policies to apply in the diverse situations all over the planet.

By way of example and for provisional study, we need to at least distinguish between these different situations (by combining variables such as group demographic volume, level of political subordination, level of economic development, everyday contact with other groups, and representations of the situation<sup>16</sup>):

Demographically smaller groups that are politically subordinated, economically underdeveloped, with somewhat negative self-representations and that are socially-mixed with other group/s with greater relative power or that are higher in numbers.

Smaller, politically-subordinated groups that are not or very scarcely mixed in their everyday social territory.

Smaller groups that are not or very scarcely mixed, with a certain level of political autonomy and official and public recognition of their language.

Small to medium-sized groups with a certain level of political autonomy and official and public recognition of their language but which have an intense, daily social coexistence with another group or other groups that also have official recognition.

Medium-sized, politically-independent groups.

Semi-large, politically-independent groups.

Large, politically-independent groups on a continental or supracontinental scale.

These 'structural' situations can also be found in diverse stages of development, characterised by the various levels of the population that uses and/or is competent in the language within the group itself, and by different representations of the value and usefulness of this code. Given the dynamic nature of the situations, different political action is required depending on the phase of each group, particularly in clear cases of language shift in movement. Intervention in a case where only a quarter of the population habitually uses the code will differ from that used in a situation whereby three quarters habitually use the language. Similarly, an attempt to change the linguistic behaviour of groups with positive representations about their language will, at least initially, require a different type of action than a situation of a group in which the majority have negative associations about their own language.

Ideally, we should have already arrived to a theoretical agreement about the most effective action for each type of situation. To leave behind the study of the discussion and theorisation of the values of diversity and to put these into practice, we would need to be able to make a

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<sup>16</sup> Rigorous combination of variables would produce more categories, enabling us to widen the categorisation.

clear decision about *which policies are required in which type of situation at which stage of development and in which historical contexts*. I believe that this is the important issue that will guide our research, creative activity and scientific talks over the coming years. We urgently need to fully understand the mechanisms of the processes and to construct models of action for each type of problem.

It is of the utmost importance that organisations such as UNESCO (or even the UN) increase their awareness of current linguistic diversity problems, particularly for the impact that their decisions could have on continental and, particularly, state public authorities. In fact, without a clear world policy (which includes the acceptance and dissemination of the appropriate ideological perspectives and the provision of necessary financial aid), it will be very difficult in the current state of affairs for the governments of many of the countries undergoing linguistic crises to see the need or opportunity to intervene. As their elite groups have been educated with European-style ideology, they tend to apply in their own countries schemes that history has proven to be wrong and that are now being revised in Europe. Moreover, due to a lack of resources for carrying out policies of asymmetrical bilingualization in a European language, these countries create a galloping language shift between the elites in favour of the foreign language (often that of the ex-coloniser). Moreover, they also impede the democratic participation of most of the population because it never reaches a competent level in the official language, and this causes an extremely high level of legal defencelessness.

Against this backdrop, it is not at all strange that parents that are able to, decide to abandon their own language and communicate with their children in the official language. Therefore, instead of promoting the codification of native languages, immediate literacy of populations and use of these codes by civil servants and state organisations (leaving the bi- or multilingualization of individuals for a later date), these governments reproduce an outdated nation-state view and, in doing so, perpetuate state-control by the leading classes, since a lack of knowledge of the official language prohibits the majority of the population access to the most important positions of government and the civil service. The mechanism is therefore perverse and can cause an image of rejection of one's own code and an exaggerated evaluation of the official language in question. An inverse policy of official multilingualism would allow different linguistic groups to take part in democratic life and the dignification, usefulness and, hence, maintenance of their own codes, besides to the bilingualization or polyglottization of the population in the languages of intercommunication that are required. The ideological line presented is, however, prevalent for the time-being in most African states and Pacific territories and, albeit with significant differences, in certain areas of South America and in other parts of the world.

International organizations must inform these and other countries of the need and justice of basing their linguistic organisation on the perspective of complexity and subsidiarity, within the framework of a new type of ethics. This *new type of ethics* must be based on an *ecological*<sup>17</sup> vision of sociolinguistic situations in that they should not only focus on the official and standard level, but also on the series of factors that determine the situation and its evolution. Thus, we can search for a balancing, compensatory action that favours the proportionally-weaker linguistic groups. As complex thought postulates, each living being and each element must be inserted into its context, seen dynamically and in terms of its ecosystem, from the point of view of eco-self-causality and self-eco-organisation<sup>18</sup>. Rather than searching for *equality*, therefore, we will need to search for *fairness*, in order to guarantee a sociocultural ecosystem that favours the stability of linguistic diversity. Alongside the traditional conceptualization in terms of 'rights', *compensatory functions* will need to be introduced into cases that so require; this conceptualization is much wider and more appropriate for solving language contact problems, particularly where there is a great deal of asymmetry between groups.

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<sup>17</sup> See Bastardas Boada, Albert (ed.): *Diversitat/s. Llengües, espècies i ecologies*. Barcelona: Empúries, 2002 (in press), and also "Transdisciplinary explorations for a socioecology of languages: From biological to linguistic diversity", *Estudios de sociolingüística* 3:1 (June 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Morin, E. (1982): *Science avec conscience*. Paris: Fayard, pp. 114, 186 and 296. See also: Bastardas, Albert (1996): *Ecologia de les llengües. Medi, contacte, i dinàmica sociolingüística*. Barcelona: Proa.

## **7. Synthesis and conclusion: some principles and values for peace and linguistic justice throughout the planet**

To sum up, and to help to round off the discussion and reflection, I will repeat some of the principles on the linguistic organisation of mankind, developed throughout the essay and dealt with in earlier research<sup>19</sup>:

One. The ideologies and conceptual landscapes we need to think the problem must take into consideration the so far existing sociolinguistic experience if we are to avoid a linguistic organisation of the planet based on a hierarchical and asymmetrical structure between the language or languages of intercommunication and the remaining codes. Equalitarian coexistence must be based on the correct distribution of functions, using the principle of 'subsidiarity', which would introduce the norm that everything that can be done by local languages, does not need to be performed by a more general code of intercommunication. The main idea would be adequate protection of the own ecosystemic spaces of each language.

Two. One of the guides for applying the first principle must be that being sufficiently competent in a code of intercommunication does not do away with the right or need of human linguistic communities to use their codes fully and in the maximum possible local functions. The indiscriminate application of the 'principle of competence' will always favour the code that is most generally shared (that of intercommunication), which could take functions from other languages, endangering their existence and, hence, activating unnecessary conflicts that are hard to resolve.

Three. Since human beings can represent reality arriving at conclusions that do not depend directly on reality, but rather on narrative and interpretative configurations created by humans themselves, in addition to the practical instructions for organising linguistic communication, public authorities must disseminate an ideology that clearly favours diversity and linguistic equality. Therefore, they need to promote the self-dignity of marginalized linguistic groups and offset wide-spread popular representations such as the ideology of 'linguistic superiority' or phenomena such as the self-perception of inferiority to external 'reference groups or languages' considered as models to be assimilated.

Four. Preference should be given to methodologies for developing communicative competence in the code of intercommunication to ensure a sufficiently high level for the diverse generations of individuals that will acquire this language. We should also ensure that inadequate results do not lead to parents (able to do so) using the code of intercommunication as their child's L1, instead of the native variety of the group. Clearly, this development of practical knowledge of the language or languages of interrelations should not prejudice the development and use of local languages.

Five. Equal attention should be paid to the study of cases whereby a linguistic group has frequent social contact with a considerable number of individuals whose L1 is a code of intercommunication, as it is highly likely that the predominant trend will be to use the latter as a habitual norm; this would have potential repercussions on the intergenerational reproduction of the other language if the populations integrated socially. In these cases, the mechanism of mixed marriage can unintentionally reduce the index of generational transfer of local codes considerably if the population is not made aware and if linguistic diversity is not fostered within the family unit itself through the principle of 'one parent = one language', in cases where this is possible and necessary.

We are, therefore, faced with a fascinating task of research and organisation, requiring considerable imagination. We urgently need to organise ourselves to inform, persuade and convince the heads of world organisations, state governments and other public organisations to study *how* these principles can be applied and to put them into practice. Furthermore, it is

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<sup>19</sup> See Note n. 14, and: Bastardas Boada, Albert (2000): "De la 'normalització' a la 'diversitat' lingüística: cap a un enfocament global del contacte de llengües", *Revista de llengua i dret*, 34, pp. 151-168.

both urgent and necessary to carry out in-depth research on the various aspects concerned (politics, law, pedagogy, philosophy, socio-economics, etc.), from the point of view of ecological complexity, bearing in mind that, as Morin says, "political action itself, more so than complex knowledge, depends on the strategy, on the art"<sup>20</sup>.

The extension of perspectives of complexity and their application to very diverse fields is one of the current needs of the entire planet. It may be necessary to relocate this reconstructed thinking in the widest context of a crisis of civilisation leading us to re-think fragmentary and reductionist views of the world in favour of representations that are closer to the reality of human facts and values based on ecological vision, sustainability and universal fraternity. The physicist, Fritjof Capra, maintains that a change in thinking is not enough: our values must change too. Both ways of thinking and values must combine in equal measures the trends of *self-assertion* and *integration*, which are, as Capra says, basic in all living systems. "Neither of them is intrinsically good or bad. What is good, or healthy, is a *dynamic balance*; what is bad, or unhealthy, is imbalance – over-emphasis of one tendency and neglect of the other"<sup>21</sup>. Capra therefore suggests dealing with the columns of the table below *complementarily*, in order to rectify, particularly in Western culture, the predominance of assertive thought and values at the expense of integrative ones:

<b>Thinking</b>		<b>Values</b>	
<i>Self-assertive</i>	<i>Integrative</i>	<i>Self-assertive</i>	<i>Integrative</i>
Rational	Intuitive	Expansion	Conservation
Analysis	Synthesis	Competition	Cooperation
Reductionist	Holistic	Quantity	Quality
Linear	Nonlinear	Domination	Partnership

This change in paradigm does seem urgent because it is clearly coherent with the main problems of modern societies. Now that we are getting to know ourselves better genetically too and that we are sure (if we still weren't convinced) that humans are a unique species and that the genome of other species is not so different, perhaps we can enter another planetary era with more solidarity between the diverse cultural groups and the other species with which we share the biosphere. Biologically and linguistically, as Edward O. Wilson says, "soon we must look deep within ourselves and decide what we wish to become"<sup>22</sup>.

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20 Morin, E., op. cit., p. 307.

21 Capra, Fritjof (1997): The web of life. Hammersmith, London: HarperCollins Publ., pp. 9-10.

22 Wilson, Edward O. (1999): Consilience. The unity of knowledge. London: Abacus, p. 309.