

## Presentation of Workshop 1: "Models of languages policy and planning"

J.J. Van Vlasselaer  
Carleton University

### Moderator's report

- a) It is impossible to reduce the richness of information gathered throughout the ten presentations of Workshop Nr 1 if we do not want to do what we want to avoid: simplifying the complex situations in which languages find themselves, viewed from the sometimes contradictory perspectives that are the socio-political and the cognitive ones.
- b) This workshop evidently covered the institutional interventions in language policy and planning of multilingual societies, their successes as well as their failures. Most of language policy and planning are consequent to societies becoming conscious of the linguistic and cultural factors which crystallize societal aspirations, having an impact on society's stability, on social justice, on its expression of democracy, on the evolution of a more egalitarian society on the road towards equity.

These institutional interventions can have all kinds of forms: from top-down initiatives (such as in Erythrea) to grass-root developments (such as in Ireland); coming from official governmental agencies, state language management to pre-school pilot projects or university courses in marginalized languages, firmly tied to communal needs.

- b2) Countries, states are constituted through major different historical backgrounds - Ireland is not Mexico and Papoua New Guinea is not Canada! Not only the diachronic evolution but also the synchronic perspective of governance will direct policies. The forms of power, the degree in which colonial attitudes, past and present..., have exercised and still exercise their pressure on minorized languages - or simply discard them ,will influence the policies and the politics of any given of those countries. Evidently, ideology plays its part and it was unfortunate that no speakers were present to talk about the Chinese version of language planning.
- b3) Some countries have the financial and institutional means to realize the

sometimes heavy commitments to multilingualism, multiple official languages, bi- or trilingual administration. Others have to create means and count on the help of NGOs, the World Bank and other International institutions.

- b4) A multiplicity of reasons for language planning, responding to very specific needs ask for a multitude of solutions. Albert Bastardas reminded us to figure in the "complexity factor". Before him, Edgard Morin insisted that the concepts of complexity and of paradox are essential elements towards the comprehension of human actions and that they are to be fundamental characteristics of all human sciences
- c) Between the lines of most presentations, one could read that:
- c1) As long as it is not a smoke screen or lip-service, language planning and policies bridge the "documentation" and "revitalizing" stage.
- c2) Documentation at this stage is not necessary is still in its infancy as is international collaboration in this field.
- c3) Governmental institutions and the schooling system view language too often as an object and not as the cristalization process of a dynamic structure which is part of a larger gestalt, interrelated a.o. with social justice, ideological processes perceiving the world, as well as with cognitive development...
- c4) There are gaps between the intentions of the policies and their realization: the South African policy is "a failure" until now; the Mexican "Decreto de Lex General de Derechos Linguisticos de los Pueblos Indios" is a "patchy law" and, in fact, paradoxically, institutes unofficially Spanish as the national language.
- c5) Some governments, federal or local, are already at the stage of what David Crystal in his inaugural speech asked to do. The Basque country e.g. is realizing, both through a multilingual schoolsystem and technological instrumentation, several of the goals set forward to de-marginalize the basque language, putting its country on-line.
- c6) The impact of mother tongue in the initial learning process and/or a multilingual approach from the first years of learning on is a very positive one. Other languages than the mother tongue will be, in both cases, solidly integrated.

d) Summaries:

- d1) Anne-Marie Beukes in her speech on language policies in South Africa's post-apartheid era gave an extensive overview of the vast array of policy initiatives taken by the SA government to give to 11 of its 25 historically marginalized languages, equal rights. Because of "political will" results are very disappointing 10 years later. This, notwithstanding a clearly set out structure and right ideas underlying these, such as "national unity and linguistic diversity go together".
- d2) Nadine Dutcher offered a perspective on three "positive" models: Guatemala, Erythrea, Papua New Guinea. All three are cost-effective, relative miracles of bilingual education in countries where the population - through different ways - have accepted its principle. Drop out rates have been cut, more students reach higher level of schooling, both languages are better integrated.
- d3) The Papua New Guinea situation was discussed in detail by a second speaker, David Klaus, who pointed out that the mother tongue teaching in 380 out of the +800 languages of this island allowed for a higher level of literacy in both the local language and English, that school became relevant, kids became self-confident, inquisitive, pro-active. This project, started in 1993, had been preceded by a national debate, was relevant to national means and local, social realities, was fully related also to community participation.
- d4) Two presentations focused on the in-depth work done in and by the Basque province. Felix Etxaberría presented statistical results of the different linguistic working models which are tried out in Basque schools, the evolution of students' choices, the road towards trilingualism and the challenges of contemporary immigration in this context. Aracel Diaz de Lezana gave an overview of the technolinguistic development undertaken by the Basque government, opening its linguistic community to telecommunications, optical character recognition, voice recognition, automatic translation, terminology databases, to - in short - the society of information, optimizing thus language conscience and language planning.
- d5) Two presentations covered linguistic problems in the Maghreb. Abdou Elimam spoke about the Algerian situation, Adil Moustououi on the linguistic conflicts in Morocco. Elimam underlined the failure of standard Arabic in its artificial quest to replace French as first (and dominant language). This is essentially true because the population expresses itself in another Semitic language

(which is also a language inherited from the Punic language of some 3000 years ago...). His point is that this "Maghrebi"(sic) language should be considered as the mother tongue and should be taught in the first grades of schooling.

Adil Moustouai analyzed the Moroccan situation through a "Bourdieuian" discourse, putting in doubt, like his colleague, the arabisation of schooling (again, because of the "artificial" character of coranic Arabic). In Marocco, next to the former colonial languages (spanish and french) and english as global lingua franca, the important role of both "maroccan arabic" and berber Amarzigh is recognized since 2001 in the "multi" perspective of the new legislation and the rule of the new king.

- d6) Uic-Kib Espados Ancona delivered a socio-anthropological perspective on the Mexican linguistic legislation, more geared towards pragmatic reasons of national unity, and although recognizing the importance of Mayan languages in specific regions implying the national role of Spanish - and its role as teaching vehicle. He qualified it as "a patchy law".
- d7) Joe MacDonnacha's talk was on Irish as a teaching vehicle at third level education by the National University of Ireland (Galway) and its role supporting and facilitating the development of linguistic communities since 1997.
- d8) Josep Quer's presentation on Catalan sign language on the linguistic research behind, on the meaning of such work, on its implications for sound impaired persons, for Catalan culture and society, related like many of the other contributions on bilingual models, language skills... learning patterns and, ultimately, on quality of life.

### Conclusion:

Yesterday's and today's "colonialism" have had and have still a major impact on the dominant-dominated relationships which characterize linguistic groups. A majority of these were and still are in many cases marginalized. Models of linguistic planning exist and permit more equitable versions of a societal tissue open to bilingual and multilingual options. These models are variations on the theme of equity, of social justice. Optimal situations are schooling from the mother tongue on, followed by or parallel with a multilingual approach.

Which leads us to the theme of language learning, about which Professor Siquan so pertinently spoke. As long as language is perceived by teachers as a positivist model imposed on learners, based on an object-oriented discourse, on non-contextual, non-situational pattern-driven methodology, Linguapax's goal where dialogue could be defined as the road to "otherness" will never be reached.

Language as a process, differential reality recreates itself within each dialogical situation. Pronouncing new sounds only happens when one learned to listen, to hear; getting to describe a new world through a new vocabulary only will happen when one has perceived the changing values which are carried by this slice of culture; creating sentences in a new language are born from moving contexts and are reflected in them. Thus dialogue, based on a constant listening a constant readjustment of meaning and of our perception of the world; a dia-logos is being in a constant learning situation.

We do carry in us so many "niches", so many possibilities of being, for which dialogue is the key to our individual multiplicity. It also liberates, on the socio-cultural perspective, from lingering nationalistic discourses, from an all-invasive liberal-market oriented ideology, beyond dualism and positivism, opening up towards the intercultural being, who, between his multiple perceptions creates a differential identity. An identity which is the road towards "the other". An "otherness" as the pro-active version of tolerance.

Thus, a country like Canada, through linguistic management, struggled out of its unilingual straightjacket, bypassed today bilingual limitations of a dualistic society, opened up to "the right of being multilingual and multicultural". Call it utopia if you want. But, it does work.