

Forum 2004 - Dialogue on Linguistic diversity, sustainability and peace

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**TOWARDS A ‘LINGUISTIC SUSTAINABILITY’:  
CONCEPTS, PRINCIPLES, AND PROBLEMS OF HUMAN  
COMMUNICATIVE ORGANISATION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST  
CENTURY<sup>1</sup>**

I. FROM ‘SUSTAINABILITY’ TO ‘LINGUISTIC SUSTAINABILITY’

In the framework of the Universal Forum of Cultures Barcelona 2004, dedicated, as indicated by the main title, to ‘diversity’, ‘sustainability’ and ‘peace’, we are asked today to reflect on the linguistic aspects of these themes and, specifically, on ‘sustainability’ in terms of just and equitable planetary linguistic peace.

We should thus begin by establishing the meaning of the term. ‘Sustainability’ clearly comes from the tradition of thinking that criticises a perspective of economic development that overlooks almost totally the natural environment --the precise context where this development takes place-- and which thus leads it to a final end devoid of resources and clearly harmful for the life of human beings. To an end, that is to say, which is clearly unsustainable. To this view, certain academic and activist enclaves have opposed the perspective of ‘sustainable development’ or ‘lasting development’. In other

words, they have theorised, constructed, and begun to practice an economic and urbanistic development respectful of, integrated into, and in keeping with the dynamics of nature. Such action provides a way of improving some of the material aspects of human life while at the same time not damaging other environmental aspects still more necessary and fundamental for the quality—and even for the simple possibility—of human existence. In fact, this is a synthesis of possible opposed patterns. It does not renounce material and economic improvement, but nor does it exclude a fully healthy environment that is appropriate for the continuation of the species.

1.

As a concept, ‘sustainability’ was born at the end of the 1980s. It found world-wide resonance at the conference of the United Nations in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The document known as the ‘Brundtland report’ defines the term as a form of sustainable development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Today the term ‘sustainability’ is already being used in many not exactly equivalent senses and by many highly distinct—and even opposed—social actors, a situation which makes it necessary to go to the root of the problem and attempt to conceptualise it more basically and in greater depth. Therefore, it seems to me that from a general perspective the sustainability philosophy would seek the integral development of the human being, with a humanist approach and not a purely economic social ‘progress’. The aim would not be to have more but to live better. By way of example, Ramon Folch—one of the most representative promoters of sustainability philosophy in Catalonia—supports an ability to imagine an ‘economy without growth’.<sup>2</sup> Other thinkers in the movement also explicitly claim to be against what they call ‘the disease of growth’. From this take on reality, sustainability sets itself the

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<sup>1</sup> Text of the plenary conference for the X Linguapax Congress on ‘Linguistic diversity, sustainability and peace’, Forum 2004, Barcelona.

<sup>2</sup> The thought of Ramon Folch can be further examined in *Idees 2* (1999), Lluís Reales, ‘Una conversa amb Ramon Folch’ (Talking to Ramon Folch). [http://www.idees.net/idees\\_numero.asp?IdIDEES=2](http://www.idees.net/idees_numero.asp?IdIDEES=2)

task of in-depth re-thinking of society and gradual transformation of the current paradigm of production and consumption. This view postulates a nonaggressive economic model towards an 'ecological' economy. The aim, thus, is a mobilizing utopia that presents itself as a new way of hierarchising values, in contrast to politico-ideological conservatism.

Opposed in the same sense to growth for its own sake, the sustainability philosophy is also against expansive and dominating societies and also offers itself as the mainstay of postcolonial and postnational thought, with a planetary and universal outlook. The movement, then, aims for the formulation of utopias for the twenty-first century and the building of a sustainability International. In this regard, sustainability thought recognises the wisdom of many societies that are still undeveloped economically and hence can, as Folch says, consider the so-called 'developed' societies as 'very large barbarians simply provided with powerful machinery or with decisive financial means'.

2.

One of the fundamental characteristics of the sustainability argument is its emphasis on the safeguarding of the natural environment, from an ecological perspective. This philosophy posits a way of overcoming the environmental crisis and safeguarding biodiversity and—why not?—linguodiversity. It postulates an environmental morality,<sup>3</sup> because the basis of the problem lies, more than in legal dispositions, in the scales of value shared by society and shaped by juridical codification. Therefore, a training process for a new collective consciousness is needed, a process of reflection and socioecological debate so that the ethics of sustainability can be acquired as a proper value of the moral identity of the contemporary and future individual, all in order to enable 'sustainability ecologism' to pervade the general socioeconomic reality.

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<sup>3</sup> Jacobs, Jane *The nature of economies*. Toronto: Random House, 2000, p. 67.

This, in fact, is what the aforementioned Brundtland Report was already saying when it stated that a strict minimum of sustainable development means not endangering the natural systems that keep us alive, that is, the air, water, and soils as well as living beings. Hence, the great challenge will be to find a way to harmonise economic and social progress without endangering the planet's natural balance.

3.

If we now try to apply this way of thinking to the linguistic reality, what do we see? Are there analogies to be made? I believe there are, and ones that can be used to good advantage, and linked, moreover, to the traditions of thought that have always been present but perhaps even more so these last years with the drive to develop the thinking we are calling 'eco-linguistic'. From the outset, I would underscore the will to connect apparent 'opposites' in an integrative conceptualisation, such as the very syntagm 'sustainable development'. On the sociolinguistic plane, our debate should probably be about our 'opposites', which could be on the one hand the glottophagic expansion of the dominant languages and, on the other hand, the maintenance and development of human linguistic diversity.

Let us note that the existing positions tend to polarise on these two aspects. For some, it is necessary for peoples to abandon their original languages and adopt only the great state or global codes of communication in order to be able to advance in their economic and cultural development. For others, the struggle is clearly in favour of the preservation of linguistic diversity and the maintenance of distinct collective identities as a way of avoiding the poverty and anonymity that are the destination of disorganisation of the traditional subsistence ecosystem, and of the continuance of the knowledge and wisdom each culture has produced. These perspectives may seem, at first, to be irreconcilable and antagonistic, wholly impossible to integrate and assemble.

Would there be some way of translating the procedures and the conciliating conceptualisation of 'sustainability', of combining the competence and use both of

languages of greater communicative scope and of maintaining and promoting group languages? Certainly, it is not necessary for us, as supporters of the preservation, safeguard, and development of linguistic diversity, to say that we can identify with the most general and comprehensive postulates of the philosophy of sustainability. From the perspective of human plurality, we might postulate convincingly the necessary fraternity that should exist among members of a single, culturally diverse species, ending, perhaps, with the relations of domination and subordination found in the relationships between different linguistic groups.

An 'ecological' and 'egalitarian' perspective on linguistic diversity should aim to stop and reverse expansionist and dominating ideologies. To put an end to the value hierarchy implied by the belief in linguistic superiority/inferiority is equally urgent and just. Passing into another historical phase of humankind where the predominant vision would be one of recognising the equal dignity of all languages and linguistic groups is, clearly, an aim that cannot be put off. To paraphrase Ramon Folch in an interview on sustainability in general, we could say that *'linguistic sustainability should be a process of gradual transformation from the current model of the linguistic organisation of the human species, a transformation whose objective would be to avoid that collective bilingualism or polyglottism of human beings must require the abandonment by different cultural groups of their own languages.'* Basically, the ideology opposed to this would come from the negative human tendency for dichotomous thinking: black or white, one language or the other. Today, however, from the paradigm of complexity to which I referred in the congress two years ago,<sup>4</sup> we know that there are other possibilities.

Why, then, can we not forcefully postulate a morality of maintenance and development of multilingualism similar to that of the maintenance of species and of the natural environment? Why must human groups leave completely off speaking their original languages in favour of those that are larger? Why, in so far as it is possible, can't weak

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<sup>4</sup> See Bastardas i Boada, Albert, 'Política lingüística mundial a l'era de la globalització: diversitat i intercomunicació des de la perspectiva de la "complexitat"', *Noves SL. Revista de Sociolingüística / Journal on Sociolinguistics* (on-line journal), 2002, [http://www6.gencat.net/lengcat/noves/hm02estiu/metodologia/bastardas1\\_9.htm](http://www6.gencat.net/lengcat/noves/hm02estiu/metodologia/bastardas1_9.htm) (English version: 'World language policy in the era of globalization: Diversity and intercommunication from the perspective of "complexity"'), [http://www6.gencat.net/lengcat/noves/hm02estiu/metodologia/a\\_bastardas1\\_9.htm](http://www6.gencat.net/lengcat/noves/hm02estiu/metodologia/a_bastardas1_9.htm)

languages be functionally prioritised? Why can we not safeguard our linguistic environment, since we are a species conscious of the problem?

It is then necessary to maintain a vigil over the sustainability of linguistic groups and the safeguarding of these languages for our descendants. The personal and groupal benefits of preserving languages (greater self-esteem, greater positive self-image of the group, no shame in origins, etc.), while not easily quantifiable, are important to the happiness of people, as many contemporary cases show us. Large majority groups must generate a sociolinguistic ethics, a system which will guide them in ways of acting that are respectful of linguistic sustainability.

4.

Just as sustainable development does not negate the development and the desire for material improvement of human societies but at one and the same time wants to maintain ecosystemic balance with nature, so 'linguistic sustainability' accepts polyglottisation and intercommunication among groups and persons yet still calls for the continuity and full development of human linguistic groups. Just as in the general sustainability framework we think and act in ways intended not to destroy our very biospheric context and intended to save the natural resources we depend on, in linguistic sustainability we want to develop ourselves and intercommunicate with each other without destroying the linguistic and cultural resources that identify us. From a sustainability ethics, the diversity of the ways different groups of the species communicate is clearly a value to protect, and not as an 'anthropological' curio but because of the intrinsic and inalienable dignity of human persons and societies.

5.

Another facet of the tenets of sustainability, which we consider important, is naturally its ecosystemic conception of phenomena. As the facts have shown a great many times, we

humans do not live independently of our natural environment; hence, our actions and productions have a clear interdependent effect, and vice-versa. The conception that overlooked the settings and contexts of things has inevitably entered into crisis, and today we see clearly how intervening in a fact or an element means intervening simultaneously—and above all—in the environment and the context of a fact or an element. What this signifies is that getting right our actions in the framework of linguistic sustainability requires our in-depth knowledge of the fundamental evolutionary dynamics and factors of sociolinguistic ecosystems, both on the local and the global scale. To study the ‘linguosphere’, the ecology of languages should be an ecology based on ecosystems and the relations among these ecosystems, because the basic unit is not language but always *the-language-in-its-context*. Making a language sustainable in a sociocultural ecosystem will mean balancing a complex organisation in the framework of which the corresponding code can be provided with a functional niche that is sufficient to guarantee an adequate homeostasis. Sustainability is clearly ecosystemic and dynamic.<sup>5</sup>

From this perspective, it should be clear that languages are thus not simple objects but rather complex ones, emergences produced and maintained at the meeting point of different dimensions. A real language is not only its grammar or its lexis but also living human cognition, interaction, and identification, in the simultaneous intersection of, as Edgar Morin states, the noosphere, the psychosphere and the sociosphere.<sup>6</sup> The linguistic code, therefore, will register the events of these planes, and will evolve in accordance with them, naming things that we want to name, and being used or not in the circumstances which we desire. In this sense, languages are in our hands and we are in the hands of our own vital circumstances. The ecosystemic approach is, then, indispensable and essential.

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<sup>5</sup> See Bastardas-Boada, Albert, ‘Ecology and diversity: A comparative trip from Biology to Linguistics’, in: Boudreau, Annette et al. (eds.), *Colloque international sur l'Écologie des langues*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003, pp. 33-43; also: Bastardas i Boada, Albert, ‘La metàfora ecològica: possibilitats i límits per a l'aproximació sociolingüística’ (The ecological metaphor: Possibilities and limits for a sociolinguistic approach), in: Pradilla Cardona, Miquel-Àngel (ed.), *Calidoscopi lingüístic. Un debat entorn de les llengües de l'Estat*. Barcelona: Octaedro/EUB, 2004, pp. 13-24.

<sup>6</sup> See Bastardas Boada, Albert, ‘Lingüística general: elementos para un paradigma integrador desde la perspectiva de complejidad’ (General linguistics: Elements for an integrative paradigm from the perspective of complexity), *LinRed* (on-line journal)

6.

Sustainability is aware of avoiding a break in the dynamic balance of the different elements that participate in the ecosystem. For example, Jacobs observes that “sustainable” commonly applies to the practice of drawing on renewable resources at a rate no speedier or greedier than the rate at which the resources can renew themselves’.<sup>7</sup> Folch states that it is necessary to ‘produce only what is reasonably held to be needed and with the least number possible of distorting external factors.’ Thus, the aim is always to conserve/preserve the fundamental balance that makes possible the very maintenance of the ecosystem and of its components. If we now translate this to linguistic sustainability, we could clearly establish principles such as that of *using only the allochthonous languages for that which is reasonably necessary and with the least cost of functions (or with the least distortion of functions) for the autochthonous languages*. Then, *sustainable linguistic contact will be that which does not produce linguistic exposure or linguistic use in allochthonous language at a speed and/or pressure—to a degree—so high as to make impossible the stable continuity of the autochthonous languages of human groups*. We can, then, state that *the sustainable character of a massive bilingualisation comes from the comparison between the degree of valuation and functions of the language that is not originally that of the group (L2) and that of the language that is originally that of the group (L1)*. *If the first is lower, the contact massive and the bilingualisation are sustainable. If it is greater, the bilingualisation is not sustainable and the language original to the group will degrade and disappear in a few decades*.

Also applying the terminology of sustainability to the current crisis of many of the linguistic ecosystems of humanity, we may be able to begin to speak of assuring the *ecological (ecolinguistic) viability* of linguistic groups via a *socioenvironmental (sociolinguistic) management* that is made adequate to assure avoidance of an excessive disorganisation that could be lethal for many of the linguistic codes which the different

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[http://www2.uah.es/linred/articulos\\_pdf/LR\\_articulo\\_111120032.pdf](http://www2.uah.es/linred/articulos_pdf/LR_articulo_111120032.pdf), 11-11-2003, pp. 1-23.

<sup>7</sup> Jacobs, p. 67.



human subgroups have built up throughout their existence. The first task is to avoid abuses against the systems. One should not exceed their ‘charge capacity’. Therefore, as there are toxic and nontoxic doses, we should attempt to see *what degrees of linguistic contact prove sustainable in each typology of the different ones that exist, what functions prove to be the fundamental ones to be reserved for the autochthonous linguistic codes, and how the changes introduced work in interaction with other changes that could be taken place at the same time in the situation*. This forces us to go into still greater depth than is possible at present in our knowledge of the ecodynamics of linguistic contacts.

7.

Linguistic sustainability, however, is not a purely linguistic fact, as we have seen, since languages depend on their ecosystem, and that ecosystem may be in a continual state of change, receiving the introduction of new factors. Hence, just as studies are carried out on environmental or ecological impact, we also should be able to be up to studying the *sociolinguistic impact* of economic, political, educative measures, of migrations, of technological innovations, etc. We need quickly to reach clear and functional models of sociolinguistic ecosystems, to know of the interactions of their different elements, of how to quantify them and, in so far as it is possible, to be able to make predictions on their evolution and hence be able to propose measures that are adequate from the perspective of a sustainable management of plurilingualism.

There is no reason to conceal that being able to reach this state of practical awareness of public administrations regarding linguistic diversity implies even today a constant and conscientious task on the political and governmental domains. In many cases, these studies would lead us to having to recommend important alterations in the distribution of power in many states, until now little sensitive to their internal national and cultural diversity. This would be necessary in order to give to different historical linguistic groups an important degree of control over their own collective life, something at present unavailable. For example, the generalisation of the principle of what is now known as ‘political subsidiarity’—enabling decisions to be taken on the maximum number of topics in politically administrative instances close to the citizens—would undoubtedly benefit

the possibility of such linguistic self-government. Applying another version of subsidiarity, in a linguistic sense, we could say, as I have already often done, that ‘everything that a local language can do need not be done by a more global language’, that is to say that, by default, the language of pre-eminent use should be that of the group, the weaker, except for those cases of external communications when the situation so requires.

8.

I am aware that even though the aims and principles of the philosophy of sustainability are by nature universal, their application must be differentiated according to given situations, their particular constrictions, and their evolutionary moments. Certainly, linguistic sustainability will require different actions according to the degree of, for example, the group’s techno-industrial development, its political organisation, the composition of its populations, collective self-images, the general force of the languages present, etc. But for each case I’m sure that we can go forward towards creating good practices—as the current phrase has it—that will lead us to the application of a sustainable multilingualism. Probably the priorities will be different: in economically underdeveloped groups, for example, swift action would be necessary to keep their own languages from falling into discredit with their own speakers. But in groups with greater economic development but with an already important loss of their language it might be necessary to intervene in the intergenerational transmission still capable of being saved. And in other small countries with a strong presence of an international language, it may turn out to be necessary to replace the functions of the latter in order to halt its abusive and unbalancing uses, etc. Much work still remains to be done to be able to reach a clear assessment of the models, their phases, the different situations to which they correspond, the priorities and interventions, and the most adequate action and evaluation strategies.

## II. THE IMBALANCE AND MAINTENANCE OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC ECOSYSTEMS

9.

It is not improbable that our advance in the design of sustainability principles and interventions will move more slowly if we don't equip ourselves with a conceptualisation powerful enough to account for the fundamental factors and interrelationships of such interventions, which are responsible for the existence or nonexistence of human languages. The sustainability or unsustainability of a language, as I've indicated, obviously does not depend on that language itself but on the general sociocultural ecosystem in which it finds itself inscribed and in which the other elements of reality interrelate. Clearly, humanity's linguistic continuity—wherever it has occurred—has existed due to the fact that its speakers were living in a given system of (inter)relations that caused them to use that code and regularly to transmit it to new and successive generations, even though structural changes were progressively taking place. Contrariwise, the phenomena of language shift and abandonment have come about clearly because of the introduction of new elements in the traditional ecosystem and which have ended up dis-re-organising it and thus taking it into another phase.

Hence, we can conceive of the 'linguosphere' as a set of sociolinguistic ecosystems in continual internal and external equilibrium inside which the individuals use or avoid to use the codes in their unceasing communication. These ecosystems made up of elements such as the human brain/mind, their behavioural competences and habits, their cognitive-emotional representations of reality, the sub-groups they constitute sociologically, the enterprises, the commerce and other social organisations, the means of communication, the educational institutions, and the governments and public administrations, for example, sustain—permitting, in the process, as we have seen, internal change—the mutual communication systems that are languages.

These, as complex objects, will simultaneously live in the minds, in the social interaction, and in the general communication of a given community, which will make use of them

for purposes of social relations, categorisation of reality and, when necessary, to identify themselves in relation to other humans speaking other languages. Historically, if this ecosystem suffers no fundamental disturbances, it will tend to reproduce itself intergenerationally, even though with internal change, via self-co-construction of the codes by the new individuals. If, however, as we have already stated, the ecosystem registers a large and powerful enough entry of exogenous linguistic elements, then there could occur a reorganisation of competencies and norms of linguistic usage, and this could lead to important evolutionary repercussions.<sup>8</sup> There have been basically two main causes of the historical disruption of linguistic ecosystems: migratory irruptions and politico-economic integrations.

10.

One crucial aspect that is derived from a sustainability approach to linguistic diversity is the distinction between the causes of bilingualisation and those of the intergenerational abandonment of one of the codes which, as the Canadian sociologist Stanley Lieberman already observed some years ago, probably are not exactly the same ones.<sup>9</sup> It is also pertinent here to question—in order to attempt to understand more completely the exact mechanisms—the widespread belief that, ineluctably, ‘bilingualism leads to language shift’. And I would here cite another sociologist—for sociologists are basically the ecologists of sociocultural phenomena, at least the good ones—Norbert Elias, who also informed us that when it comes to dealing with the problem of the need for social changes we must clearly distinguish the affirmation that a ‘figuration B’ will necessarily follow a ‘figuration A’ from the affirmation that a ‘figuration A’ must necessarily precede a ‘figuration B’.<sup>10</sup> All of which is to say that what is a fact is that bilingualisation

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<sup>8</sup> See Bastardas i Boada, Albert, *Ecologia de les llengües. Medi, contactes i dinàmica sociolingüística*. Barcelona: Proa, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Lieberman, Stanley, *Language Diversity and Language Contact* (Anwar S. Dil, ed.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1981, p. 130.

<sup>10</sup> Elias, Norbert, *Sociología fundamental*. Barcelona: Gedisa, 1982. (Spanish translation of *Was ist Soziologie?* Juventa Verlag München, 1970.)

must have been there before if any abandonment of an original code was to have taken place. However, what may be less clear is that by the mere fact of this bilingualisation, individuals have necessarily to abandon their first language as they bring up their children, for example. That is, that bilingualisation is perhaps a condition that is *necessary* but *not sufficient* to explain the evolution towards the intergenerational disuse of the local varieties. The exact answer therefore remains open in regard to this evolution which is, as we know, unfortunately not at all infrequent in many cases.

Sustainability, because it proposes conciliation of two apparent antinomies—to develop oneself economically and not damage the natural environment, or else to know/use more than one language and not abandon any of those known/used—again places the subject on the table for discussion and therefore insists that we sociolinguists detail our answer so as to refine our theorising and our research. Hence, when and why does a situation of bilingualism or polyglottism in a society evolve towards the abandonment of the weaker code by its speakers and when not? To be able to answer these questions, we need obviously to refer to the sociocognitive representations of speakers in regard to the linguistic varieties that are present and, finally, in regard to the contexts in which these are formed and maintained. I will cite, in a fragmentary way, from my own article of 1997,<sup>11</sup> where I referred to this process on the basis of the most typical cases. I said, in that article, that “the first [thing] that needs to be said, obviously, is that, in regard to the political context ... the political powers in charge have desired precisely the existence of this result of linguistic abandonment. Already, in no small number of cases, from the very beginning of the process of massive diffusion of the state standard—which, for the great majority of the population, first coincides with learning to read—the explicit aim was not only that of spreading an interlanguage of general communication but of doing away with

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<sup>11</sup> «Contextos i representacions en els contactes lingüístics per decisió política : substitució *versus* diglòssia des de la perspectiva de la planetarització», *Diversité langues* (on-line), vol. II, 1997. [http://www.telug.quebec.ca/diverscite/SecArtic/Arts/97/0997ab0/esp/0997ab0e\\_ftxt.htm](http://www.telug.quebec.ca/diverscite/SecArtic/Arts/97/0997ab0/esp/0997ab0e_ftxt.htm) . There is a French version in the same number of the electronic journal ([http://www.telug.quebec.ca/diverscite/SecArtic/Arts/97/0997ab0/Fr/0997ab0f\\_ftxt.htm](http://www.telug.quebec.ca/diverscite/SecArtic/Arts/97/0997ab0/Fr/0997ab0f_ftxt.htm)) and also in a paper edition, in: Bouchard, G., & Y. Lamonde (eds.), *La nation dans tous ses états*. Montréal/Paris: Harmattan, 1997, ('Substitution linguistique *versus* diglossie dans la perspective de la planétarisation', pp. 111-129).

the existence of other systems of linguistic communication that differ from the model adopted by the central and sovereign political power. The scholastic diffusion of the official standard will, then, be accompanied by a clearly disparaging and stigmatising discourse on the vernacular varieties (*'soyez propre, parlez Français'*), or, in Spain, 'speak Christian', 'speak the language of the empire') while, at the same time, in many of these cases, there will even be a decree to prohibit the use of the other different varieties in public communication."

"It is in this framework of subordination and dependency that people, as they progressively become competent in the newly acquired official standard, will opt to transmit it to their children as the basic variety of socialisation, that is, as the native variety, thus interrupting the intergenerational transmission of the group's own vernacular. As it is a question of a behaviour that will obviously be evaluated by the community, the change in the habitual norms will require a clear ideological and/or practical justification and legitimation. This, however, will be brought about by the discourse of the 'national language' which will favour the idea of the single and general language for all citizens, argued on the basis of images such as 'children of the same family' or 'ties that bind siblings'.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in the case of France, renouncing the continuity of one's own language will officially be interpreted as an act of patriotism at the service of freedom. From the practical point of view, the legal imposition of the standard known as "French" as the only code for official and public use in parallel with the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation that will favour the social and geographical mobility of the population(s) will increase the perception of the need and essentiality of the standard for survival and, especially, for economic ascent. Gradually, then, and in a process of asymmetric diffusion according to the social and geographic groups, the standard—in the form of *'langue nationale'*—will be adopted first as a variety for institutionalised communications and later transferred to the individualised communications by a generation already competent which, at the same time, will transmit it as native speech to the following generation. This latter generation will rarely know the

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<sup>12</sup> Balibar, Renée, & D. Laporte, *Burguesía y lengua nacional*. Barcelona: Avance, 1976, p. 184. (Spanish translation of *Le Français national*. Paris: Hachette, 1974).

old vernaculars and will make the standard—conveniently adapted to the colloquial functions—their only first and habitual language.”

If we compare it, however, with the cases of stable balance, such as for example the diglossia typical of German Switzerland—and here I cite myself again—we find that “very probably, in this stabilisation of the local varieties there must intervene the fact of ... the existence of a highly positive groupal image—Switzerland is not a poor country that is little developed economically—and the fact that the adoption of the general German standard is not in any way a foreign imposition or the fruit of a situation of political minoritisation but rather a decision of the language group itself—and, if they wish, a revocable one freely taken”. I then concluded: “fundamentally, then, the reason for the relative stability of these cases of diglossic distribution must be sought in the politico-cognitive dimension: none of the cases habitually analysed are situations of political subordination like those of the minoritised European communities. The perception of dependence and, in consequence, of self-deprecation, taking a group or foreign cultural elements as a main referent of behaviour and of values, simply doesn’t need to take place. It seems clear, therefore, that it must not be the simple fact of bilingualisation and asymmetric distribution of functions which can lead to intergenerational language shift, but rather the politico-economic *context* in which this bilingualisation takes place and the *meanings and representations* that its protagonists associate with it”.

Note that in the text I have just cited, I mention fundamentally two different but fully interrelated planes of reality, the macro and the micro, the large factors and events, and, at the same time, the sociosignifications that are produced by the individuals that live in these circumstances. And this is important to bear in mind because, in spite of the fact that humans can be influenced to a high degree by the events and elements of their sociocultural environment, in the final analysis it is their brain/mind that creates the representations of reality and decides, consciously or otherwise, their courses of action. Those who move more towards the abandonment of their own codes are those human groups that have no control of their collective life —and hence of their public linguistic functions—, that are little developed economically but integrated into supraeconomic and

perhaps more advanced areas, that experience geographic and social mobility, --even if this is internal as, for example, from rural areas to cities— and that maintain a non-favourable self-image while on the other hand tending to follow another group of reference, whose language they attempt to adopt and, when possible, use to speak to their children. On the other hand, the abandonment of their code is much less frequent in those groups that in some important degree control their collective life, their code having enough public linguistic functions and their group a very high or medium degree of economic development, and a feeling and self-image of positive identity. In between, we find all sorts of other cases, with a gradation in which, as Bourdieu would say, we see clearly how social positions and dispositions highly correspond.

11.

If we look more closely at how bilingualised people and groups come to abandon their first languages, we discover a whole series of dynamic characteristics in which often the protagonists of the very phenomenon may not be very aware of the historical process in which they are participating. For many, consciousness of the problem comes when it may already be too late, as has been seen in many cases we know of. What happens, however, is that a series of behaviours is set in motion with important historical consequences which too often are little understood by their very agents.

The key point of breaking the balance may be in the moment when an important number of individuals of the same group accept the use of the language that was initially allochthonous to use among themselves in a habitual manner. While there is a functional distribution that makes the outside language basically used to speak with individuals of other groups or to carry out determined public functions, there may be a more or less unstable balance, but the continuity of the linguistic collective appears assured, even though it is in a context that is perhaps little favourable. If, however, they begin to use it among themselves, and above all this takes place in a general way, even in the level of individualised communications—those of private and domestic types—then the system can begin a crisis dynamics. If among the members of the group, for example, the young people speak in the other code in important numbers, this will mean that pairs will begin to be formed in that code who will eventually have children, to whom they will also



probably tend to speak in that language. We would then have the first members of the group that have the allochthonous language as an L1 that is not the original one of the group. If the behaviour is widely imitated and extended progressively, the group will progressively be emptied of people who have the original code as an L1 and its use will continually decrease.

A group can inexorably empty itself in this way, although the functional endo/exogroupal distribution is not broken, due to the fact of mixed marriage, especially if it is a question of a demolinguistic situation where the volumes are equalled or, even more, if the other collective is the majority. Even if the habit or norm of speaking together as a group continues to be preserved in the original language, in a mixed ethnolinguistic couple, there will be a strong tendency to use a single code between conjugal pairs, which will tend to be the best positioned in the social distribution of linguistic competences. That is, it will become customary to use the language more developed by both participants and/or more felt 'appropriate' for inter-group relations, a fact that often will depend on the language policies being applied in the situation, or on the social context in which the individuals live. In the mixed marriage there is customarily an important tendency to speak to children in only one of the languages, even though it is also possible for each parent to speak to the children in a different language, something which is not, however, as common.

In fact, in order for one partner in a mixed matrimony to be able to use a language with the child which is different from that used by the other partner, an important condition seems to be the fact that, at least, the other member of the couple must understand this language. Otherwise, they would not be able to understand a good part of the linguistic input available in the domestic setting. This, of course, would limit the possibility of maintaining the transmission of the codes, although it certainly doesn't make it impossible if the conjugal partner willingly accepts the situation. We would then have an individual with, we could say, two L1's, so long as both languages were spoken to the child with more or less the same intensity. The strategy of bilingual growth in the family is an opportunity that too often goes unused for linguistic maintenance, one which I think should be favoured and promoted in those cases that are suitable.

It is clear, then, that in situations of politico-economic and/or demographic subordination it will be more difficult to succeed in creating sustainable dynamics of linguistic maintenance because the context will hardly be favourable and the speakers can abandon the use of their L1 due to negative or at least not very positive social meanings that can be associated with them in regard to the other language that is present, or else for practical reasons of communication in everyday relations among individuals. Hence, it will not be easy to assure sustainability in all the different sociolinguistic situations that exist today on our planet.

### III. WHAT SHOULD A SUSTAINABLE MULTILINGUALISM BE LIKE?

12.

What we now wish to posit is how to avoid situations whereby people who have been bilingualised or polyglottised have to abandon the fundamental uses of their group's L1 in their daily life. That is, how to make it possible for these people to continue using their habitual code and using it for the maximum number of functions. Let us distinguish, in our analysis, between two large situation types, which, however, can also exist together: vertical contact and horizontal contact.<sup>13</sup> What we should consider then is whether bilingualisation is the fruit of a territorial and group integration inside wider political and socioeconomic structures, or whether the situation has basically come about because of face-to-face contact with other people with whom one coexists on a daily basis.

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<sup>13</sup> See Barreto, Amílcar A., 'Nationalism and linguistic security in contemporary Puerto Rico', *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* XXII, 1-2, 1995, pp. 67-74.

Prior to beginning to analyse in more detail each major typology, let us be clear about the fact that in order to be able to act on the abandonment of languages by its bilingual or polyglot speakers, the main need will be to achieve an impact on their representations of reality. This is true for two main reasons. First, in cases where the speakers have arrived at an interiorising of negative evaluations regarding their L1, they will need to be exposed to a discourse—and also, hopefully, a situation—that presents alternatives which promote and dignify their language and their group to keep them from abandoning the use of that language and, instead, recovering it and making it grow. The second reason is to do with cases where there is no formal negative discourse but there are demociolinguistic conditions which spontaneously and in a self-organised way cause the speakers, for very practical reasons, to progressively stop using their own L1 almost without realising it so that they will need to be made aware and convinced of the need to change their behaviour as effective self-destroyers in the long term.

13.

In the first type of situation, that of ‘vertical contact’, we are referring, as mentioned, to linguistic groups which, without having been displaced from their territory, habitually become bilingual due to the fact of being politically integrated into a higher structure which decides to adopt, in the simplest typologies, a language with an official character, one which is not that of the affected group. Since there are far fewer states that there are languages, this is a case that is far from infrequent. In extreme cases, the state, which often consciously desires to build a homogeneous ‘nation’, will tend to put into practice a policy in which exalt the values of the official language, presenting it as the guarantee of national unity and the symbol of the new nation one wants to build. Reciprocally, in many cases, the discourse will be one of disparagement or at least of public oblivion of the other languages existing in the perimeter of sovereignty. Moreover, if this political subordination occurs, as is often the case, in the framework of acute technoeconomical change, which often leads to the destruction of the culture’s traditional economic

organisation, then the new language will progressively be seen as the language of the new situation, in turn seen as 'modern and of material progress'. The new language will then need to be not only known well but even adopted if one wishes to become integrated in the new ruling class or, simply, to improve one's social status. If this process becomes generalised gradually among the population, there may follow cases of group self-abandonment of the original language and thus an initiation of the process of linguistic extinction.

In these situations, action should be fundamentally political to reorient the predominant discourses in the directions of self-esteem and, at the same time, if possible, to provide the peoples with a sufficient degree of political and economic selfhood in their collective life. This should permit sociolinguistic self-determination and provide the freedom necessary to distribute communicative functions between both languages. In so far as it is possible for the hegemonic powers to see their way to adopt this point of view and put it into practice, halting the abusive uses of the large interlanguage, these situations, if well balanced and if the peoples in question recover their cultural self-esteem, can be sustainable in the long run so long as other types of factors are not added to them. There are organisational principles and techniques, as we know, which can organise the corresponding distributions of functions and linguistic rights<sup>14</sup>. Depending on the territorial distributions of the peoples in question and on their volume, we can guide ourselves by the by now classic criteria of 'personality' or 'territoriality', to which I would suggest adding, as I did two years ago, those of 'functionality' and 'subsidiarity', for those cases in which the other two terms cannot be applied with their optimum force. If the political power involves itself in this in a sincere way and the group's demographic volumes are not too low, they are cases that can be solved and lead to long continuity.

These cases, however, may present more sustainability difficulties if, in a comparative sense, their demolinguistic effects are proportionally lower and, even more, if they are territorially dispersed. Here, the compaction of the collective plays an important role. If

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Bastardas, Albert, & Emili Boix (eds.), *¿Un estado, una lengua? La organización política de la diversidad lingüística*. Barcelona: Octaedro, 1994.

the members are few but compacted, if they live in a single territorial base that clearly enables them to have public use of their L1 and an easy and continual linguistic interaction, then sustainability will be higher. On the other hand, if the group has been progressively dispersed and has mixed with other groups, even if the state in question recognises their rights and has positive official ideologies, they won't be able easily to use their code in daily communication, and that could play against its preservation. In such cases, the acting mechanisms in the mixture situation can gradually lead to disuse of the L1, in favour of the more general one employed in the community.

Most probably, the key to the question of linguistic sustainability is to be found in the states and in their linguistic policies, which of course cannot be divorced from their responsibility to embrace a sociolinguistic ethic, respectful of linguistic diversity. Hegemonic groups must especially bear in mind that a language today requires much more than in the past simply to exist. In past societies the functions of a language were based in those of local quotidian life. Today, the functions which, for the psyche, can be seen as most important, often depend not on the local universes but on supralocal organisations that are not at all infrequently international. The language of work, of the 'media/cinema/music', of 'progress' and of technological advances, exercises an important influence on people, who can come to interiorise, as we've seen, a negative vision of their own L1's. In order to compensate for this—since often it won't be possible for a language to serve all the functions of a contemporary developed society—we should assign the maximum number of important 'local' functions to the original languages of the human groups in question, assuring them exclusive functions that makes them useful and profitable in the eyes of their speakers. In ecological terms, we could say that the states should aid the languages in being able to find (and occupy) functional niches that are sufficiently important to invite their maintenance and their intergenerational transmission.

One of the points which states—and populations—have to keep extremely clear is that techno-economic development does not necessarily require the abandoning of group languages, just as economic development need not bring the destruction and degradation

of the environment and/or of natural resources. The decisive fact here is that 'modernisation' be controlled by the different society itself, made by it, without having to be politically or linguistically subordinated to the others. We can make it possible for those countries where very important techno-economical changes are occurring at present to achieve 'development' without unnecessarily destroying linguistic ecosystems. The challenge is to discover what must be accommodated, what must be adapted, but by designing an environmentally and culturally sustainable development. Progress need not mean destroy and build back but rather it can mean build while conserving and rehabilitating, modernising but maintaining. And this will always be a vision that is far more civilised than the reverse, the one often adopted by subordinated and provincial communities.

14

If we now move toward the type of contact we've called 'horizontal', that is, the type in which bilingualism is basically produced by direct relations and face-to-face exposure, the factors and the dynamics can be different and, it should be noted, a good deal more difficult to make it sustainable. As we know, even though linguistic diversity, in order to be generated, needed isolation and uncommunication between the different human groups, these have always tended to move from their territories, in search of survival, greater well-being, or even colonising adventures. This means, and we are at present living in a critical moment, that the encounter and the physical contact between different populations is an old phenomenon and at one and the same time extremely contemporary.

Here also we would find different typologies. From population displacements from contiguous linguistic areas, one in the direction of the territory of the other, to migrations in the direction of very faraway lands which, today, with our transport technologies, are becoming progressively closer. This brings with it a type of linguistic contact in which, momentarily bracketing the variables involved in officially controlled public communication, a set of specific dynamics is generated in which other factors will also

play an important role. In this type of encounter, the demographic aspects will have a very decisive weight. The situation could evolve in a different way if the volumes are clearly unequal or even approximately the same. If the contact, now leaving aside other factors, is weighted between, for example, 15% and 85% for each group, then we could predict that the smaller group will tend more than the larger to abandon its original code, above all if the people in question are moreover little concentrated and compacted. Naturally, the pressure to use the codes present will be more favourable to the L1 of the larger group than that of the smaller. It is also clear that if there is no prohibition on exogamy for some reason, then 15% has more possibilities of mixed pairing than the reverse, a situation which will create the typology of linguistic behaviour in pairing of which we spoke above, with negative consequences for the L1 of the smaller group. Certainly, other variables could here come into play. For example, it won't be the same if the demographically smaller group is an economically—or culturally or technically—superior community, but everything indicates that the displacements in unequal volume will tend to evolve towards the loss of the smaller group.

If, on the other hand, the volumes are more equal, the perspectives for continuity are clearer since, if there are no other decisive asymmetries, the effectives can tend to remain very much the same because the statistical opportunities for mixed matrimony will be the same for both. Other factors, certainly, can contribute to causing the evolutionary balance to shift, such as the linguistic policies under which this encounter takes place and whom it tends, overall, to favour. In these situations, all the factors—economic, ideological, residential, media factors, etc—can become relevant, and in each case specific dynamics can be produced.

There are also special situations in the current great urbanisation processes in Africa or, to a less extent, in Latin America. The encounter of populations of different origins in cities in process of formation, with little presence of state action and, at times, without a clear predominance of one of the groups, can provoke a situation in which it is difficult to maintain clearly any language, since a tendency can arise to create mixed varieties or else to adopt general interlanguages that did not originate in any of the groups in contact. In

these cases, in which at times the migration to the city of part of or the great majority of a linguistic group comes about, and there a mixing with others takes place, attempting to create situations of linguistic sustainability can be really difficult, more so when the priorities of the groups and the governments are not centred on these aspects but on others that are much more important and urgent for the respective people themselves.

In the more or less developed societies, with functionally effective states, one can certainly attempt to arbitrate support policies for the linguistic sustainability of displaced groups, even, if, at times, they themselves consider that they are not interested, if they have already clearly chosen the option of installing themselves in the new country. Often, when a person in such a situation is reminded that they are different, the fact is not what they most like to hear, since what preoccupies them, and above all in terms of their children, is making their adaptation complete, obviating the children to have to go through the difficult situations their parents had to experience. Very often, then, if the parents have become pretty competent linguistically in the language of the receiving country, they themselves will be the ones who chose to abandon their groupal code to bring up their children in a way that they feel most benefits them. Here, governmental actions should aim at making people aware of the fact that, if it is a question of a host society that is linguistically normal and developed, the host country's language will also be learned and that if they transmit their original L1 then their children will have greater linguistic competence that can benefit them in future. On the other hand, this could save the parents the inconvenience of seeing how their children are unable to speak their own original language, a situation probably both personally and collectively regrettable. Here also there would be room for action, especially in dignifying the original languages and informing the populations of the security of their effective bilingualisation at an early age.



One of the conflictive aspects that can be placed on the table with the new facts of migration is the destabilisation of the receiving groups by the displaced groups, especially in those cases in which the receiving society is one that is not politically independent and is disequibrated already due to previous migratory movements, or due to an important presence of part of the dominant group in its own territory. Again we can find here (with evolutionary effects of which the actors are unaware) something which makes these cases into situations difficult to organise satisfactorily and open to intergroupal misunderstanding and uncertain outcome.

One of the new phenomena that these last movements are provoking in this age of globalisation is the use of the major interlanguages instead of the languages of the receiving country for the purposes of relations between immigrants and receivers, provoked by greater linguistic knowledge—by polyglottisation—of the people themselves, both those who move in and those who are already established. And this can be seen as an unwanted consequence of the massive polyglottisation of societies. Imagine how these societies could evolve if, simultaneously with their bi- or multi-lingualisation, there should come about important migratory movements, also of multilingual persons, and that they implant their interrelation in the L2 that is most shared by the two groups—quite logical, of course, from the operative point of view. This means that the habit would be implanted whereby in their relations they used not the language of the country, which was habitually the solution that was traditional—even though certainly gradual and imperfect but still enabling linguistic sustainability—but instead one of the major interlanguages. If the volumes of the displaced are very high and the societies progressively become mixed, we might have here, in the long run, a dangerous situation for the linguistic continuity of the receiving community, since it would be impossible to linguistically integrate the displaced. Therefore, it would be the receiving community itself the one that would be pulled towards new linguistic behaviour led by the immigrants, whether in their L2 or their L1, if this L1 is also one of the great interlanguages.

This situation is not fantasy but something that can happen even in contemporary Catalonia, for example, a situation where it is not Catalan, the L1 of the receiving group, historically attacked by the governments of the Spanish state, the most habitual intergroup language, but Spanish, that of thousands of speech-area migrants from the south of Spain over the course of the twentieth century, and now from Latin America. And the same thing is happening with the migrations whose provenance is the north and the center of Africa or the east of Europe, which tend to establish relations with the autochthonous people and the other groups more in Spanish than in Catalan. Certainly, in a meeting of humans, the most logical way of acting would seem to be to use the optimal communicative instrument for mutual understanding. But if this behaviour becomes consolidated, and it is not only transitory, then the great interlanguages will always win. We should thus look at ways of creating the conditions—among people who live in a stable way in a territory—by which they also can know and use the less communicatively powerful languages when these are the historical and first languages of the receiving societies.

So, the Catalan situation is one in a state of disequilibrium and which could be typical of other similar cases that could come about in future. Bilingualisation or polyglottisation of compacted and communicating human groups, with exclusive and secure spaces for their language, can be sustainable; however, it is not so certain that the language ecosystems will last if the current migratory volumes into societies that are not fully independent does not stop or even increases.

But it is also certain that, right now, we need to await the outcomes of these cases since, as is happening in Quebec, it could also occur that the first generation, which does not know the language of the receiving country, might tend to use one of the major interlanguages (for example, English) while, for the second generation, it might turn out to be more general to adopt the original language of the receiving society—French, in this case—as the language of interrelationship. This, however, certainly requires good and effective scholastic institutions and, above all, a very clear vision of what must be the

language of earning a living and of habitual social relations in society. In the case of Catalonia, the volumes are different from those of Quebec, as are the historical facts and the ideologies involved.<sup>15</sup> The future, then, is very much open.

This *globalisation of the migratory movements*—unlike what one might initially have expected to result from globalisation per se—may cause ‘*ethnic conscience*’ where there previously was none, or where there was very little. A large, stable receiving group, with little ‘ethnic conscience’—regardless of the ‘state/national’—can increase greatly its sense of ‘inter-ethnic personal’ difference if it comes into habitual contact with people from other groups that moved to its territory. Certain groups of medium-large languages may not accept the fact of having to speak in one of the ‘large interlanguages’ in their own country (e.g., the Dutch or the Danish in English). Obviously, they know them for ‘exterior’ communication, but not for ‘interior’ communication. For quotidian use, they will probably clearly prefer to use their own language, and they may consider the other person’s persistence in using the interlanguage as offensive and, if that person indeed resides there habitually, as a demonstration of their desire not to adapt. Certainly, this could grow in the case of migrations of some importance in numerical terms, more so than in the case of the isolated ‘visitor’ to whom one feels more predisposed to adapt linguistically.

In all probability, then, to the extent that globalisation also increases personal interethnic contact, it could tend to increase the ‘ethnic conscience’ of human individuals or groups. The challenge is to organise and manage this: How are we to avoid conflicts, how inform the population of the fact that this can be happening? How are we to make known the need for transition phases in linguistic adaptation, etc? We have to find a way of establishing a set of negotiated principles of coexistence that save: 1) *the principle of linguistic stability and continuity of the receiver group*, 2) in consequence, *the principle of intergroupal and social adaptation of the immigrant group*, and, 3) *the principle of personal freedom of the displaced in regard to the continuity of their cultural elements*, at

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<sup>15</sup> See ‘Llengua i noves migracions: les experiències canadenques i la situació a Catalunya’, *Revista de llengua i dret* 37 (2002), pp. 153-190.

*the intragroupal level.* On this point, many questions remain open and much work remains to be done.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

16

We must of course be realistic and thus start from the fact that there is still much terrain to be covered in the creation of a sustainable linguistic development. At the same time, we should also be aware that we are acting in a different and rather peculiar time in the human adventure, one that could create obstacles in the full attainment of the aims being proposed by those of us in favour of sustainability. Our times are characterised, as we've seen, by an exponential increase in contact among peoples and languages and, hence, by the end—or in all events the considerable reduction—of the traditional isolation that favoured linguistic differences within the same species.<sup>16</sup> But simultaneous with this, the creation of new identities of suprastate origin, the selection of only a few languages to be denominated official and public, and the growing role of the large languages of intercommunication, are facts that tend to work not in favour of maintaining the traditional codes but of the often abusive and unimpeded extension of these state and international languages. Moreover, human populations, seeking to survive and to materially improve their lot, are leaving their historical territories and going to other linguistic areas, with the consequent disorganisation and, in any case, reorganisation of

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<sup>16</sup> See Bastardas-Boada, Albert, '[Biological and linguistic diversity: Transdisciplinary explorations for a socioecology of languages](http://www.telug.quebec.ca/diverscite/SecArtic/Arts/2002/reflexions2002.htm)', *Diversité langues*, (on-line), 2002, vol. VII, Analyses et réflexions (<http://www.telug.quebec.ca/diverscite/SecArtic/Arts/2002/reflexions2002.htm>), and also on paper edition, 'Diversitat lingüística i diversitat biològica. Algunes pistes transdisciplinàries per a una socioecologia de les llengües', in: Bastardas, Albert (ed.), *Diversitats. Llengües, espècies i ecologies*. Barcelona: Empúries, 2004, pp. 13-53.

the ecosystems that until the present moment had assured the existence both of the linguistic groups that are moving and many of those that are receiving them.

On the other hand, now more than ever, awareness of linguistic diversity is advancing, and high levels of international and governmental organisations are operating in an ethics of protection and of solidarity in regard to politically subordinate linguistic and, above all, economically less developed groups. The complex political structuring of states, with power sharing in different territorial organisations, is also advancing, and making available more opportunities for political self-government by linguistically differentiated populations. This makes it possible for such groups to take decisions autonomously in regard to the linguistic aspects of their life. It is true that much more still needs to be done and that there are languages in great danger of extinction, but there is clearly a general advance—too slow, certainly, even badly understood by the hegemonic groups, but an advance nevertheless. The sustainability model thus offers itself as a horizon and a process on the path to improving the linguistic life of humans, through the development of interlinguistic equity and justice. Because the linguistic claims of the so-called ‘minorities’ are not ‘something from the past’ but clearly for the future, since they are looking for its sustainable equilibrium and maximum development secured.

In order to be successful in this universal undertaking, we’ll need to combat the causes more than simply providing palliative remedies. Clearly, we should overcome the mentality of conservative political positions that hold that the solution is basically to subsidise the languages, and pass over to a view that adopts more progressive and egalitarian positions based on the adequate distribution of the functions of the languages, in the aim of achieving their sustainability. A lasting compromise must be sought among linguistic groups—and this is the special responsibility of the large groups, more than of the medium-size and small ones—in order to efficaciously influence the causes that make people abandon their own languages, taking as a centre and motivation of our action the *people* and not a purely ‘anthropological’ perspective of the museum or the ‘reservation’. If the territorial distribution of the groups allows this, the ideal horizon is for each linguistic group to tend to maintain control of their own sociolinguistic space, enabling

intervention according to the general evolution of the sociocultural ecosystem. It should be recalled that, in the present technoeconomic situation, contact and exposition—even if by electronic means—to other, different languages, will grow and not many populations will remain marginal. Therefore, only those languages that can initiate compensatory and rebalancing actions in their ecosystem will be able to keep sustainably reproducing. Given the degree of intensity of contemporary changes, there exists the risk that populations that are in a situation of high subordination will not be able to undertake actions that are compensatory or that reroute their evolution. These will be condemned, very probably, to a slow and gradual abandonment of the use of their language. Our great challenge, then, will be, as in other sciences and fields of life, to know how to find the ‘exact conditions of nonequilibrium that can be stable’<sup>17</sup>, from a fluent conception of the reality.

One special responsibility in this whole state of things falls on the international cultural institutions, which must effectively compromise themselves to adopt the sustainability philosophy and promote research on practical and valid organisational principles, for example, based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or of the more specifically related ‘Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights’ created in Barcelona in 1996. Linguistic sustainability clearly seeks the concerted world action of all the peoples of the planet, which must agree and decide how they desire to organise themselves communicatively in this new century.

Let me finish by simply enumerating five points, which seem to me crucial to recall and which can guide our actions and interventions in favour of linguistic sustainability. We should, I think, act by:

1. Stopping the abusive uses of the large interlanguages and extending the ideology of linguistic equality and solidarity;
2. Dignify the self-image of subordinated, nonmajority language groups;

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<sup>17</sup> See Capra, Fritjof, *La trama de la vida*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 1998, p. 104. (Spanish translation of *The web of life. A new synthesis of mind and matter*. Hammersmith, London: Flamingo, 1997).

3. Allow these linguistic groups to be able to control their own communicative space, autonomously regulating their public linguistic uses;
4. Distribute communicative functions, providing exclusive and effective functions to the codes of linguistic groups currently in a situation of subordination; and,
5. Create awareness in governments, commercial firms, and societies in general, on the importance of attaining linguistic sustainability, urging them to habitually incorporate necessary studies on sociolinguistic impact in their decision-making processes.

The aims are important ones and the path may be long, but what is fundamental, as John Rawls tells us, is to recall that “...the limits of the possible are not given by the actual, for we can to a greater or lesser extent change political and social institutions and much else<sup>18</sup>.”

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<sup>18</sup> *The Law of Peoples*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.