



CIVIL SOCIETY AND LANGUAGE POLICY : A ROLE FOR ASSOCIATIONS

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1. Introduction

On September 11 2001, the globe changed irrevocably.

Irrespective of one's race, religion, country, cultural heritage - or whatever else makes us who we are, all different, all individuals, but all sharing similarities despite superficial or deep-rooted diversity - such an act touched all those who "lived" through the initial aftermath and the "War against Terrorism" in the months that followed.

The act of September 11 was, most would agree, totally unnecessary.

Those of us in the business of promoting and defending languages - all languages - across the globe have been aware of this fact for years. Our philosophical, political and personal position pushes for the antithetical result, as it should.

2. Challenge

As the global population moves through 6 billion towards 7 billion - and is expected to increase more rapidly than in the past - the earth is becoming increasingly crowded, placing unprecedented demand on resources.

The special challenge to those of us who are agents of change, promoting linguistic diversity and intercultural harmony, is that many of our global co-inhabitants fail to recognise the role, potential and value of multilingualism in effecting peace in what is - or must be - a multiculturally rich and interdependent globe. What is required is a marked philosophical shift in the attitudes of those who foster monolingualism and linguistic hegemony, of those who place the dollar before the person, of those who promote globalisation at the expense of the individual, of those who carry out economic rationalism in ignorance of humanitarian well-being, of those who would harbour a desire for war-mongering in the denial of peace, of those who underwrite economic conglomerates to the detriment of the environment - our home!

We cannot underestimate the enormity of the challenge, as it is immense.

In this presentation, I would like to focus initially on languages, which stretch along the linguistic continuum of language power from global English at one extreme to language death at the other. From this foundation, I would like to consider areas such as policy, education, and expertise to identify the role that civil society - and especially associations - might have in the design, implementation and review of language policy. For this presentation, "civil society" is defined (by the Congress organisers) as "those independent, non-political, private organisations, groups, associations, institutions, etc, that participate effectively in language policy processes". Of these, I will concentrate largely on associations.



3. Languages

At the end of the twentieth century the globe retained a rich linguistic heritage of an estimated 6000 languages. Others placed the figure as low as 3000 or as high as 10000. The discrepancy may appear extreme, but debate continues on the integrity of languages and the demarcation between language, pidgin, Creole and dialect, among other factors.

With 6000 languages across the globe, we should be happy but, as linguists, we are not.

In an ideal world, 6000 languages spread evenly across 6 billion potential speakers could lead to 1 million speakers of each, possibly ensuring the continuity of all languages . . . but the world is not like that, is it? Not as rich as some earlier periods in history, the current wealth of languages world-wide is threatened - seriously threatened - if projected language loss eventuates.

The reality is very different, with a continuum of language strength stretching between English at one end and, at the other, the next language to disappear from the globe. The vitality of a language depends not only on the number of speakers but on a range of factors that impact on language choice. There are more native speakers of Chinese across the globe, for example, but one still speaks of English as the global language. While the initial inroads historically were military, the emergence of English as the global language in the second half of the twentieth century has been underpinned by more than military might. Other critical factors include: prosperity, commerce, industry, technology, media, (electronic) communication, the Internet, the arts, cinema and popular music - and a seemingly unbridled desire to associate with whatever is American. And with this widespread trend comes the wish to espouse English.

To focus on both ends of the continuum, Crystal tells us that 96 percent of the world's population speak 4 percent of the world's languages. Put another way, 4 percent speak 96 percent of the world's languages (Crystal 2000:14). What of these languages, which constitute the multitude of tongues used by an inordinately small number of speakers? Their future is far from assured.

While acts of imperialistic nations have had a detrimental effect on languages historically - in all areas of the globe - a decided threat to indigenous languages everywhere has been the dominance of the linguistic preference of the conqueror. This has often been underwritten by policy designed to marginalise or eradicate the languages of minority groups. In some cases, genocide has been the order of the day, but government policy to ban the education and usage of minority languages has also been effective. While genocide - and the resultant eradication of hundreds of languages - came about through acts of colonialism, the current threat to linguistic diversity arises from other factors. But the net result, linguistically, will be the same. Between 50% (Crystal 2000:165) and 90% (Crystal 2000:18) of the globe's 6000 languages could disappear during this century.

Further, the stark reality is that some of these languages remain 'alive' only as long as the sole remaining speaker of the language lives. Put another way, in some cases the death of an individual will constitute the death of yet another language. This was the situation for 51 of the world's languages, with 28 being in Australia (Crystal 1999). According to Crystal's data, one language is disappearing on average every two weeks (Crystal 2000:19). This would be catastrophic as we believe that the loss of even one language is tragic.

4. Policy

Immediate action is required at the humanitarian level and this should have ramifications for languages policy in a context of globalisation. All reasonable steps, that could be taken, should be taken to arrest this anticipated deterioration of the linguistic wealth currently enjoyed across the globe. The solutions are many and must be put in place immediately. International federations, such as the Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes (FIPLV), have a pivotal role in the global awareness-raising of the issue at all relevant levels - governmental, political, family community, education, culture, other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's), electronic and digital media, to identify but a few. In passing, I would like to point out that FIPLV is the only international federation which unites (10) international unilingual associations as well as (25) national multilingual associations .



We must mobilise a global conscience to protect and retain the world's languages. To do this, we need to lobby politicians, reach decision-makers, impact on those responsible for developing policy. To promote languages, to retain a firm commitment to multilingualism, to enable those in lesser developed countries to access adequate education and use of technology, we must use any legitimate means to promote our cause: personal, professional, political and in publications on and off the Web.

The most effective means of retaining the existing linguistic wealth globally is to have linguistic diversity, the promotion, teaching and learning of languages, enshrined in government policy and law where there is a priority commitment made to fund the education and support for languages in the wider community. This is an ambitious requirement, especially given the regrettably low number of languages policies in place across the globe - and in the paucity of resources allocated.

Excellent educational policies have existed across the globe and would serve as sound models from which to develop cohesive policies for education by States, regions, unions and globally.

While associations have been at the forefront in discussion and the creation of language policies, we cannot ignore the prominent role of language centres in this objective. Ingram's recent monograph (2001), *Language Centres*, details excellent work of some which, being (relatively) autonomous and non-governmental, would satisfy our definition of "civil society". In this area also, the borders become blurred as we consider Lambert's insightful *Language Planning around the World* (1994), published shortly after he retired as Director of the National Foreign Language Center in Washington.

To assist us further in the realisation of this cause, I exhort all to read and consider the findings and recommendations of the Nuffield Languages Inquiry, published in 2000 as *Languages : the Next Generation*. This thorough study provides excellent, probing targets for action, and should be used for extrapolation internationally, where required.

5. Education

The Director-General of UNESCO correctly identifies "education for all" as "the most crucial challenge of our day", as "knowledge is at the centre of economic development and social transformations" (Matsuura 2000:2). At the same time, we read in the UNESCO Courier (November 2000) of the privatisation of education (pp 16ff).

Clearly, education has a major role to play in the above context, as it is one of the main ways in which abstract policy becomes reality. Where educational policy and practice are excellent, education becomes an effective vehicle to further the cause of languages. Where these essentials of society are less than adequate, NGO's and others must promote the irrevocable message that languages are critical to global society, peace, operations and culture, and must be nurtured, defended and maintained.

The promotion and teaching of languages through State education - whether at the primary, secondary, tertiary or adult level - should be a priority. The identity of languages taught would be a local concern, but one would expect adequate coverage of the first language of the majority of learners, languages of international significance and languages particular to a certain location, region or country. Any of these language categories could find themselves defined alternatively as minority languages within a certain area but the majority of languages used globally are what we would consider collectively as minority languages.

Many of these will be learned at home, at school or elsewhere as a first language, but let us not forget the important perspective of their being accommodated as a second language in education within all sectors (ie government, religious, independent) and across all levels.

Australia - with its declining wealth of indigenous languages and co-existing surge in the number of languages brought to the continent by more recently arrived groups - provides an excellent model of a multicultural society, strongly underpinned by rich multilingualism.



CONGRÉS MUNDIAL SOBRE POLÍTICAS LINGÜÍSTICAS
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In school, it is not only those students of certain ethnic groups who are offered the language(s) of their community. Schools make choices to teach languages, often the languages of minority groups significant to an area, and expect all students enrolled to undertake the study of these languages across a range of year levels. This practice takes on board the reasons for learning languages within the dichotomy articulated by Crystal: identity or intelligibility. To elucidate, we learn languages either as a key element of the heritage and culture with which we identify, or for such reasons as communication, enjoyment, career perspectives or some other instrumental purpose. The self-esteem of the speakers of these languages (as an L1) elevates predictably and considerably; those learning the language as an L2, develop a healthy perspective of another culture, another element of their community by learning the language of some of their classmates. An acceptance of difference and a discovery of the touchstones of humanity - similar across all cultures - often lead to a growing respect for others.

Another focus for civil society in the context of education is the profession itself, the profession of language teaching. I am the average age of not only language teachers but all teachers in Australia. At 50, the tragedy of this is not that I have aged, but that I am too old to be the average age of teachers. This situation is reflected elsewhere. What we need is the youth - and the enthusiasm, refreshing ideas and new attitudes to current theory and practice in language teaching - coming into the profession to counterbalance the experience and expertise of those nearing the end of their careers. We need the balance, the blend, the beauty of what the combination can provide for our students.

In some countries, this is not happening for languages. Those of us of my age will soon be gone - retired or resigned, promoted or packaged, or dead! In some areas of the globe, the situation is approaching a crisis.

FIPLV is currently developing a discussion paper to identify solutions and strategies to rejuvenate the profession, integral to retaining linguistic diversity through education. Key areas of coverage include: (1) teachers; (2) students; (3) teacher training; (4) curriculum; (5) policy; (6) programs; (7) practice; (8) perceptions; and (9) language trends. Let us consider a few aspects of this work here!

Teachers

We can be negative and pessimistic about the age and shortage of teachers, but that does not help. Let's be positive and creative! There is both the need and the opportunity to replace many aging educators, such as myself, who would be facing retirement over the next decade or so.

The sufficient supply of excellent teachers is pivotal to the future of the profession. Associations have a role to play in:

- renewed optimism in the profession
- mandatory quality assurance, quality of teaching and professionalism
- professional development for teachers in the areas of proficiency and pedagogy

Students

The most important element in teaching languages is the student. While I believe that the most effective means of getting students in language classes is government policy which underwrites and resources language study, the most effective means of keeping students in classes is the personal challenge of the teacher. The objective, clearly, is to motivate students to want to study languages. Associations have the challenge of promoting and facilitating:

- an early start to language learning, notably in the primary sector and in immersion programs
- compulsory language study for a significant period of schooling
- transparent and cohesive strategies for continuity between levels of schooling
- teaching strategies to invoke elements pertinent to modern media and technological developments

- a focus on areas of interest and evolving (preferred) learning styles of students
- a consideration of multiple intelligences theory and practice
- increased retention rates in language classes at all levels

Teacher Training

The future of the profession depends upon its rejuvenation. The solutions are evident where languages have status, strong policy is in place, sufficient resources are allocated, quality assurance is mandatory and there is united support of government, the community, parents, teachers and students of languages.

To ensure a sufficient number of excellent language teachers, teacher pre-service and in-service is critical. Associations must take action on:

- the provision of free (or heavily subsidised) tertiary education and professional development at minimal or no cost
- the existence of advanced education and training, standards of practice and certification (Nunan 1999a/b:1), sound pedagogy, effective teaching tools, excellent curriculum, appropriate assessment and reporting practices
- a "high-profile campaign to attract more language teachers to all sectors of education by implementing a series of short- and long-term measures" (Nuffield 2000:95)
- effective planning and the training of a new cohort of teachers skilled not only in their chosen curricular areas, but also in the uses of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), where possible, to enhance their pedagogical skills
- strict codes of practice in the teaching profession and in the use of ICT
- enhanced sharing of multilingual information, resources, etc, on the Web and through other means

Curriculum

The curriculum content is also very important for the retention of students as they proceed through the various levels of education and for the longevity of the profession. The content of language courses offers a key ingredient in attracting and retaining student participation, interest and learning. Associations such as FIPLV and its affiliates have a duty to provide input to the essentials of:

- a relevant and motivating curriculum
- an informed and flexible rationale
- what is taught and how it is taught
- meaningful and transparent assessment
- informative and forward-looking reporting
- effective strategies to ensure curricular coherence and continuous learning from primary through secondary to tertiary programs
- the expansion of immersion programs to use the language as a means of delivering the curriculum

While empirical data is still scant on the effectiveness of using modern technologies for language teaching, we have a gut feeling that not only motivation but also competence in learning would be enhanced by linguistic and cultural reading and research, for example, which calls upon the resources of the Web and encourages email exchange with learners and speakers of the language elsewhere across the globe.

6. Expertise

International NGO federations such as FIPLV and its affiliates bring a wealth of expertise and experience to the area of language policy, practice and programs. Whether action is initiated by representatives of civil



society or whether other governmental or institutional bodies identify areas of activity, FIPLV and other organisations have an important role to play, either as a leader or as a collaborator.

As indicated previously, there are very few languages policies in place across the globe. But, where these exist or did exist, I am unaware of any significant development of languages policies where national or international associations or organisations did not play a critical part. One thinks back to Australia in the 1980s, where the best languages policy across the globe at that time was implemented as the National Policy on Languages in 1987, or to the recently published Nuffield Report, Languages : the Next Generation (2000). One only needs to browse through the names of the members of the steering committees or the acknowledgements of these and similar documents elsewhere to verify this fact. One could also identify the coordinating role of Lambert (1994) in collating details of activity on language policy across the globe and the recent coverage of language centres by Ingram (2001).

For these and other policies, agents of civil society have been prominent in providing advice, expert in lobbying and active in advocacy and consultation, often formalised through representation on committees, working parties or other groups integral to the development, adoption and implementation of language policies.

Members of international federations have a further challenge in at least two elements of policy implementation: practice and programs. At the supranational and international levels, FIPLV has been active in its representation on such key bodies as the International Linguapax Committee and the Scientific Committee of the World Languages Report, not to mention the (scientific) role in the realisation of this World Congress. Such scientific roles have also been metamorphosed into concrete organisation of global workshops such as Linguapax V and the UNESCO International Conference in Melbourne in 1995 and 2001 respectively.

Representation and organisation complement the active role that international federations and their national affiliates undertake in their own global and/or local conferences, workshops, seminars and other events. At these and other activities, keynote addresses, papers and other sessions are conducted by representatives of such associations, promoting policy and best practice. Furthermore, articles, reviews and other contributions often appear in the publications of such associations and those of others. The Web has also afforded associations (and others) considerable potential in ready communication and information dissemination through email, chat sessions and dedicated websites.

Programs of international relevance and impact - such as UNESCO's Linguapax and World Languages Report and the European Year of Languages-2001 - have also witnessed active participation by members of international federations and national associations, as these projects have benefited from the wider publicity, activity and networking through the communication channels of FIPLV and others.

I would also like to focus on an educational example here, where the model described could be exported internationally, either within State education or adopted by organisations defined by the parameters of civil society.

Complementing the language curricula of mainstream schools in Victoria (Australia), is the Victorian School of Languages (VSL), which teaches over 40 languages (excluding English) to 13000 students in 660 classes across 34 metropolitan and rural centres. Six of these languages, plus Latin, are taught to another 1300 students via distance mode throughout the state. The students are generally of school age, but there are some adults enrolled. In 2002, the languages offered are :

Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Bengali, Bosnian, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Dari, Dutch, Filipino, French, German, Greek, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Latvian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Maltese, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Pushtu, Russian, Serbian, Sinhala, Slovenian, Spanish, Tamil, Telegu, Tigrinya, Turkish, Ukrainian, Vietnamese (and Latin by distance mode).



As a result, the VSL may well be "the largest language school in the world" (Merlino 1988: 5). The school would like to expand this range in response to demand, as the existing courses continue to undergo significant revision - and conversion for online delivery.

The school, in the presence or absence of formal policies, has had a major role in meeting the language needs of many elements of Victoria's linguistically diverse and multiculturally rich community. With the fluctuation of demand for specific languages, the VSL constitutes a significant provider of languages, one of five in Victoria with mainstream Government schools, those of the independent and Catholic sectors, and ethnic schools.

Irrespective of the emphases of previous policies and the languages prioritised for certain periods - or in the absence of formal policy - the VSL has remained an excellent option for thousands of students unable to access a language of choice within their own home or school environment. In most cases, languages identified for priority or especial status were and are taught in the VSL. At the same time, the VSL has not sided in the various debates over which languages should have priority. For us, our 100 classes of Chinese, Turkish or Vietnamese are just as important as our one class of either Amharic, Czech, Hungarian or Pushtu.

As intercultural understanding, tolerance and acceptance of the differences of others must begin with the individual, the multilingual and multicultural environment provided by the Victorian School of Languages offers an excellent model of inter-racial harmony. Consequently, languages of communities in conflict or tension abroad are sometimes taught alongside each other in the same centres. It could be faculties of Croatian and Serbian, Greek and Turkish, Greek and Macedonian, who work collaboratively at times, despite the political situations in the countries of origin.

The environment of tolerance, harmony and unity within the VSL often serves to confront, attenuate or eradicate such tension in the individual students who have recently arrived, or whose parents immigrated some years ago from less harmonious situations across the globe.

Such a model epitomises what is possible in the policy and desire to promote mutual respect, harmony and peace in a multilingual and multicultural society, a microcosm of our global community.

Conclusion

While global multilingualism is a reality, it is under siege. On the one hand, languages are disappearing rapidly from the face of the globe; on the other, the emergence of English as the international lingua franca is having a negative impact on language choice, planning and policy.

We need to be aware of these threats and tensions, as we are, to fight them - not alone, but by enlisting the support of the cohorts across the globe who have a vested interest in their languages being retained and even expanding on a globe with diminishing resources, challenged by increasing overpopulation. Elements of civil society have a leading role to play.

As we face conflicting advice, juxtaposing trends and guaranteed uncertainty, the message is clear: we must retain the balance, the diversity of languages, the multilingual cornerstone of this new millennium founded not only on economic objectives but also on international, intercultural harmony. Predicting the future, as we know, is fraught with minefields, subject to the vagaries of change, preference, conflict, civil insurrection and converse emergence of new, unified states" (Cunningham 2000b:6).

We in international federations must make a decided effort to retain the linguistic wealth currently enjoyed by the globe, by impacting on the issues of policy and planning, teacher training and development, and student learning. This presupposes a concerted move towards linguistic diversity, language retention and retrieval, and policy practice favourable to these objectives.

In this period of the consolidating global metropolis, of more effective intercontinental travel, of globalised markets and international conglomerates, travel is likely to be commonplace for many of the future



computerised world. The young learner must be given the wherewithal to compete, despite protestations of irrelevance to a personal future. Again, languages have an integral place in the future of the globe.

What we, as leaders, as policy-makers and as language educators, can do is to take all reasonable steps to ensure that the linguistic diversity of our multilingual globe is ensured and enhanced for future generations.

We cannot be complacent nor can we act alone. We must unite or join all those of similar philosophy who support our cause to bring pressure to bear on those whose views and actions are inimical to the globe and its people.

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