

TOWARDS A GLOBAL MODEL OF LINGUISTIC ECOLOGY

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Introduction

The current collection of processes we call 'globalisation' present us with a new sociolinguistic situation that needs to be thoroughly explored and understood if we wish to control its effects and intervene in its evolution. We are witnessing a significant growth in the traditional areas of communication and human interrelations, which historically have maintained a certain status quo that has allowed individuals and societies to ensure a certain functional monolingualism, at least for those groups that have been able to retain their political self-control.

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AND PROBLEMS**

In many individuals this extension of the areas of human relations results in the key phenomenon of bilingualism or functional 'polyglotisation'. These are a result of the linguistic necessities of the new situation and the advantages (whether real or imaginary) that individuals increasingly feel stems from

having multiple linguistic competencies. Originally, the ability to speak more than one language and be able to use it for various interlocutors and functions was a practice largely peculiar to the elites, minoritized linguistic groups, or those with few speakers. A new factor is that this has now become an everyday occurrence for a large number of individuals from larger linguistic groups and/or those that constitute the majority language in their respective states

A vitally important question arising from the current situation of an increase in relations and contact, is what we humans should do in order to understand each other, whichever linguistic group we come from. At the same time there is the question of how we should organise ourselves so we can maintain and develop the language of each group within normal limits.

Furthermore, one effect of the current process of globalisation, economic desperation and the desire for progress, is increasing levels of displacement of groups of people from one linguistic area to another. This has the potential to make a serious impact, depending on the circumstances, both for the migrants and the host societies. This is more the



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case when these groups are politically in the minority or speak languages that are not widely spoken. The phenomenon of migration can also cause the abandonment and the significant loss of linguistic diversity in those cases in which the vast majority of its speakers leave their historic home and disperse themselves throughout other societies, with few possibilities of continuing to sustain there the use of their original language.

There is a clear need, therefore, for the attention of public bodies at all levels, from the global to the local, to be brought to bear on humanity's contem-

porary linguistic needs and problems. It is not only a question of undervalued 'minorities', but rather a culturally diverse species that wishes to live in harmony and solidarity while facing up to the problematic situations that can potentially occur¹.

Diversity and intercommunication: managing linguistic contact with complex ecology

I believe there must be something approaching a solution to these current

¹ Bastardas, A., *Les polítiques de la llengua i la identitat a l'era 'glocal'* (The Politics of Language and Identity in the 'Glocal' Age). Barcelona: *Institut d'Estudis Autònoms*, 2007.

problems if we explore the ideas from a perspective of 'ecological complexity', which includes the basic contributions arising from cognitive, systemic, ecological, and/or holistic perspectives. The representations that have hitherto dominated Western thought and continue to do so, subsequently spreading to many parts of the world, are based on the properties of material, physical elements. They follow Aristotelian logic, based on the principle of identity and the exclusion of the other². If, for example, an object occupies a space, no other object can occupy that space. Transposed to the world of human relations, as it often is, it supposes that if there is already one language in a state or group, no others can be introduced. If an individual is considered to belong to a particular 'identity', they cannot be considered as belonging to another. In the mental, sociocognitive world, however, this is not necessarily the case. Two languages can coexist in an individual and in human societies. Individuals can distribute the uses of the languages they speak and can identify themselves with different categories.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISMS CLEARLY PROMOTE HUMAN LINGUISTIC ORGANISATION BASED ON A NEW ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

One of the first aspects in which it is necessary to work is that of overcoming the dichotomies that imprison us in order to promote new principles and visions for the contexts of linguistic contact. For example, in the field of traditional criteria for the organisation of plurilingualism, it will be necessary to go further, in those situations that demand it, away from more traditional principles of 'territoriality' or 'personality' in the organisation of linguistic rights. In spite of their obvious advantages, both

principles tend to presuppose individuals that are largely monolingual and communities that are mostly homogeneous and may fail to solve the problem of intercommunication.

I therefore propose that investigation focuses more on the study of the application of the principle known as 'subsidiarity' (a term already in use in Europe) in the field of linguistic communication. We could translate this politico-administrative principle into a gloto-political one that, in a general manner, would establish the criteria that 'a more 'global' language should not do anything a 'local' language can do'. This is to say that we would allow and promote an effective, massive understanding of other languages, while always accepting whenever possible the functional pre-eminence of the language of every historically constructed linguistic group. The languages known as 'foreign' would be used for exterior contacts (which they are increasingly having to do) but everyday local functions would be clearly assigned to each group's own language.

This reservation of functions for the 'local' language of each group needs to be clear and broad in order that the existent polyglotisation does not lead to the abandonment of the code with the least communicative breadth. In order to achieve this, alongside the principles of polyglotisation and subsidiarity, there is the need to introduce that of 'specific' and 'exclusive' functions for 'local' languages, which are those that may be sidelined by larger languages. In this way there would be a solid, important nucleus of functions to be carried out exclusively and habitually in the language of the group. These exclusive functions of the group's code should obviously not be limited to informal oral communication, but rather should encompass the maximum number of

² Morin, Edgar. *Science avec conscience*. Paris: Fayard, 1982, p. 282. See also: de Bono, E., *Edward de Bono's Textbook of Wisdom*. New York: Penguin, 1996, and, *New Thinking for the New Millennium*, by the same author. London: Penguin, 2000, as to our need to change our way of thinking.

formal and written functions with the aim that the individual representations and valuations were not seen to be diverted towards other languages that are external to the group. The possibility of the success of this type of organisation is not only limited to those such as Ferguson's 'diglossia' or other multilingual African situations, but also instances such as Luxembourg. In this small European state, languages are organised in terms of a specific functional distribution that allows for the continuous polyglotisation of individuals and the clear conservation of the group language³.

Alongside polyglotisation, subsidiarity and exclusive functions, public bodies on all levels should guard against the tendency that can easily occur of abusive usage by the largest languages. In order to achieve the success of this ecological equilibrium that we need to construct, it is fundamental that the large languages do not occupy more space than they are due, thus taking advantage of the massive polyglotisation of individuals. They should not abusively invade local spaces, thus leaving the group languages without possibilities, or much-reduced ones, in key domains that give value to languages. This is often where the major languages tend to dominate. Some form of regulation needs to be established on a general level, based on the principle of subsidiarity and a respect for the ecological dignity of all linguistic groups that humanity has produced. Without the existence of organisms on an international scale that

can have authority over these aspects it may be very difficult to maintain an adequate, just equilibrium. The existing organisms on a global scale, and those that we must urgently create, have a high level of decisive responsibility.

It is important that international organisms clearly promote human linguistic organisation based on the perspective of subsidiarity and linguistic sustainability, within a new ethical framework. This new form of ethics should be based on an ecological vision⁴ of the socio-linguistic situation and not limit itself to the official, normative plan. It should involve the whole of the factors involved in the situation and its evolution, thereby ensuring public authorities act in a compensatory, stabilising manner, favourable to the linguistic groups that are proportionally weaker. In keeping with the complexity perspective, every human individual, every element needs to be taken in context and seen dynamically as part of an ecosystem from the point of view of eco-self-causality and self-eco-organisation⁵. This is a viewpoint that will allow us to create the right conditions for the sustainability of every linguistic group. More than merely seeking equality, we should seek fairness, in order to ensure a sociocultural ecosystem that favours stability and linguistic diversity. As Edward O. Wilson said, 'soon, we must look deep within ourselves and decide what we wish to become'⁶, both biologically and linguistically.

3 The possibility of a non-hierarchical functional distribution of languages may also produce an interesting, pertinent solution in those cases characterised by the more or less equal presence of two (or more?) linguistic groups, where it may be difficult to agree as to which of the languages needs to benefit from the principle of subsidiarity in favour of the local language. The non-asymmetric, functional specialisation may mean each group has to know and use the other's language, something which could contribute to a balanced situation and the resolution of potential conflict that may result from these kinds of situations.

4 Bastardas, A., 'Linguistic sustainability for a multilingual humanity', *Glossa. An Ambilingual Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. II, n. 1 & 2, 2007, (June), pp. 180-202. Text based on the talk for the conference organised by *Linguapax* as part of the Universal Forum of Cultures (Barcelona, 2004).

5 Morin, E., *Science avec conscience*. Paris: Fayard, 1982, p. 114, 186 and 296. See also: Bastardas, A., *Ecologia de les llengües. Medi, contacte, i dinàmica sociolingüística* (Ecology of Languages. Sociolinguistic Means, Contact and Dynamics). Barcelona: Proa, 1996.

6 Wilson, Edward O., *Consilience. The Unity of Knowledge*. London: Abacus, 1999:309.

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