

Chapter 2

The Linguistic Heritage

*A un populu
mittitilu a catina
spugghiatillu
attupatici a vucca,
é ancora libiru.*

*Livaticu u travagghiu
u passaportu
a tavula unni mancia
u lettù unni dormi
é ancora riccu.*

*Un populu,
diventa poviru e servu,
quannu ci arrobbanu a
lingua
addudata di patri:
é persu pi sempri.*

IGNAZIO BUTTITTA, *Lingua e Dialettu*, (Sicilian poet)

*Enchain
a people
strip it bare,
cover its mouth,
it is still free.*

*Deprive it of its work
of its passport
of the table where it eats
of the bed where it sleeps
and it is still rich.*

*A people
is poor and enslaved
when it is robbed of the
language
inherited from its parents:
it is lost for ever.*

How many languages are spoken in the world? This is a question we have all asked at one time or another. It is also a question that linguists are often asked and which we have had to answer on numerous occasions. But the answer linguists give to this type of question is usually unsatisfactory, as we can only venture an approximate figure.

The fact is that for various reasons it is not easy to give a straightforward answer to this elementary question. One of the reasons it is difficult to answer is that some parts of our planet have not yet been described linguistically and that even today, from time to time, news reaches us of the discovery of new ethnic groups and languages. This happens, for example, in the islands of Indonesia, in regions of Papua New Guinea and in tropical

regions of South America. In 1998, for example, the *Vahua* and *Aukedate* ethnic groups in Indonesia were "discovered" from the point of view of Western culture.

Another reason why it is difficult to answer is related to the names of languages. Languages, in general, tend to be given more than one name, depending on the neighbouring peoples the speakers have dealings with and the name the speakers themselves give their own language. This multiplicity of denominations complicates the job of identifying the language concealed behind different names. The problem is such that the *Ethnologue* (Grimes 2000), for example, speaks of 6,809 languages and 41,806 names for them and their variants.

But the real problem making it difficult to answer is over who should decide when a variety is a language or a dialect, or, in other words, what concept of language we are working with. As has been pointed out already by Mühlhäusler, until recently the concept of European national languages has been decisive in this issue.

Until very recently, Luxemburgian was considered a dialect or variety of German. Today, though, Luxemburgian, along with German and French, is one of the official languages in Luxemburg. Who should decide if a variety is an independent language or a dialect of another language? This is a crucial issue, since the concept of language varies according to the period, the place, the culture and the society. After all, who can stop a community with political and economic power that is firmly determined to defend the rank of language for its speech?

Such a variety of criteria is used that Grimes (2000), for example, mentions seven different Germanic languages spoken in Germany, while for many these are no more than varieties of German. The same sort of thing happens with other very widespread languages in the world, such as Arabic, English or Chinese.

But this question also affects numerous less widespread languages. Who, for example, should decide whether Achi is a variety of the Maya language K'iche', as the Academy of Maya Languages in Guatemala proclaims, or an independent Maya language, as many of its speakers claim? Who should decide whether the different varieties of Tamazight, Sami or Quechua form a single language or a group of languages?

Mutual understanding as one of the characteristics for defining the autonomy of languages is not a valid criterion or at least does not work infallibly. Otherwise, why are Danish, Swedish and Norwegian considered three separate languages if they have no problem understanding each other? Who decides whether or not the Croatian speaker understands the Serbian speaker, the Catalan speaker understands the Spanish speaker or the Urdu speaker understands the Hindi speaker? Furthermore, mutual understanding is not always symmetrical and depends to a large extent on people's attitudes.

But, returning to the original question regarding the number of languages in existence, most linguists today (Crystal 2000, Nettle 1999, Comrie, Matthews & Polinsky 1996, Wurm 2001, Grenoble & Whaley 1998, Hagège 2000) give global figures between 5,000 and 6,000 languages, which we shall also use. If we start with the premise that some 6,000 languages are spoken in the world, their distribution by continent is approximately as follows: 1,900 in Africa (32%), 900 in America (15%), 1,900 in Asia (32%), 200 in Europe (3%) and 1,100 in the Pacific (18%) (see Diagram 4).

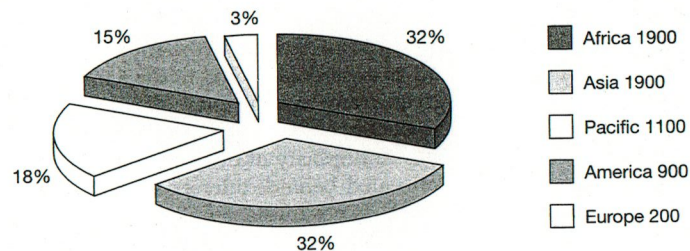


Diagram 4. Distribution of languages by continent
Based on Krauss 1992 and Grimes 2000

But languages are not uniformly distributed over the different continents either. If we look at linguistic diversity by territories or states, we see that in 22 states there are more than 100 languages spoken, or, in other words, that in those 22 states almost 90% of the languages of the world are spoken (Table 2).

Table 2. Number of languages per state

State	Gunnemark (1991)	Krauss (1992)	Grimes (2000)
Papua New Guinea	750	850	823
Indonesia	300	670	726
India	350	380	387
Nigeria	400	410	505
Cameroon	200	270	279
Mexico	–	240	288
Australia	150	250	235
Brazil	150	210	192
Zaire / Congo	200	220–200	218
China	–	160–100	201
United States	150	160–100	176
Philippines	100	160–100	169

Table 2. Continued

State	Gunnemark (1991)	Krauss (1992)	Grimes (2000)
Burma	100	160–100	107
Nepal	–	160–100	120
Russia	100	160–100	100
Malaysia	120	160–100	139
Sudan	100	160–100	134
Tanzania	100	160–100	135
Ethiopia	–	160–100	82
Chad	–	160–100	132
Vanuatu	100	160–100	109
Central African Republic	–	160–100	68

Based on Krauss 1992, Grimes 2000, Gunnemark 1991

If we classify languages according to the number of speakers they have, we see that a few languages, about 80, have more than ten million speakers each – that is, that 1.3% of languages account for about three quarters of the world population. On the other hand, 81.8% of languages do not exceed 100,000 speakers and 55.5% do not exceed 10,000, though on this question the sources differ considerably (Table 3).

Table 3. Languages and number of speakers

Number of speakers	Number of languages	Percentage of total number of languages	Ascendant accumulated percentage	Descending accumulated percentage
More than 100 million	8	0.1	0.1	100
10 – 99.9 million	72	1.2	1.3	99.9
1 – 9.9 million	239	3.9	5.2	98.7
100,000 – 999,999	795	13.0	18.2	94.8
10,000 – 99,999	1,605	26.3	44.5	81.8
1,000 – 9,999	1,782	29.2	73.7	55.5
100 – 999	1,075	17.6	91.3	26.3
10 – 99	302	4.9	96.2	8.7
1 – 9	181	3.0	99.2	3.8
1	51	0.8	100	0.8

Based on Crystal 2000

THE LANGUAGES OF NIGERIA

Nigeria, with a population of about 100 million, has a little over 400 languages, most of which belong to two large families: Niger-Congo (whose largest sub-family is Benue-Congo), and Afro-Asiatic (whose largest sub-family is Chadic). These two sub-families between them account for most of the country's languages. In fact, Hausa, one of the country's three major languages, is Chadic, while the other two, Yoruba and Igbo, are Benue-Congo. Another interesting thing about these sub-families is that Chadic is found mainly in the northern, and northeastern areas, while Benue-Congo spreads across the southern and central parts of the country. The third family, Nilo-Saharan, is represented mainly by Kanuri in the northeastern tip of the country. In addition to languages

that are indigenous to the country, English is the official language, Nigerian (English-based) Pidgin is an informal medium, and Arabic is used mainly in connection with Islam.

It should be clear from the foregoing that Nigeria is typically multilingual with all the challenges that characterise multilingualism. The fact that there are 400 languages to 100 million people does not imply that each language is spoken by $\frac{1}{4}$ million persons. The three major languages account for about 55 million native speakers, while another 10 million speak one or more of them as an additional language. If a language is not regarded as major, it does not mean it is minor. In practically every State, there is a main language which can be promoted and there are hundreds of smaller languages at the local level.

Ideally, all Nigerian languages should find a role at the national, State or local level. The ideal is however often different from reality. In spite of policies purporting to enhance the status and role of Nigerian languages, implementation is generally ineffective. The result is that Nigerian languages are constantly being bombarded by the dominance of English as the language of government and administration, education at almost all levels, most of the media, science and technology and most creative writing. In recent years, international attention has been focused on endangered languages and the need to safeguard them. This effort must not be limited to smaller languages alone but should rightly extend to the dominance of English and the deprivation arising from lack of use of Nigerian languages in prestigious domains. A major constraint in this regard is the lack of political will by policy-makers and unfavorable attitudes to indigenous languages engendered by the colonial experience. If Nigerian languages and cultures are to survive, basic education must be given in a child's language and efforts must be made to take measures to enhance the value and status of indigenous languages. As long as being proficient in Nigerian languages is not seen as conferring any special rewards or advantages, so long will their use and preservation be hampered.

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Although the number of speakers is often considered decisive for the preservation and future of languages, we would like at this point to stress the relative nature of this question.

At first sight it seems to be the case, as Nettle (1999), for example, points out, that below a certain number of speakers a language can have problems surviving. This author indicates the figure of 10,000 speakers as a crucial threshold. But this issue has a lot to do with the type of society and culture.

Languages with less than 10,000 or even 1,000 speakers can form highly viable communities in which the only language used for all internal purposes is their own. We find situations of this type, for example, in the communities using the Gumawana language in Papua New Guinea, which has 367 speakers according to the 1996 census, Nambikwara in Brazil, with almost 1,000 speakers of which 95% are monolingual, Ka'apor in Brazil, with less than 500 speakers of which 90% are monolingual, Onobasulu in Papua New Guinea, with some 500 speakers, or Secoya in Ecuador, with a similar number of speakers. Similar situations have been described on numerous occasions and in a variety of places, such as the Caucasian language Hinukh in Dagestan (Kibrik 1991) or the Baiso language of Ethiopia (Hagège 2000).

The community's cohesion and its wish to maintain its language and culture can decide their future and so it has been for centuries, as in the case of Baiso in Ethiopia, mentioned above, which for more than a millennium has resisted competition from more widespread languages around it. In other words, as well as the number of speakers, the vitality shown by the language is fundamental.

On the other hand, there are languages with more than 10,000 speakers in situations of extreme danger. This is the case, for example, of Breton in France. According to figures by Broudic (1999), although Breton has more than 250,000 speakers, due to the percentage of speakers in the total population (Diagram 5) and their distribution by generation (Diagram 6), the situation seems highly delicate.

Global figures for Breton for 1997 (Diagram 6) seem to indicate a rapid reduction in the number of speakers in the coming years, although at the end of the nineteenth century it had almost one and a half million speakers.

The number of speakers of a language therefore seems to be a relative aspect. However, a decrease in the number of speakers is an important indicator, as all the experts agree.

It is a known fact, for example, that in many parts of the planet aboriginal languages are seeing an alarming decrease in numbers of speakers in a trend that leads to extinction. By way of example, let us look at the extremely disturbing figures for the percentage of speakers of aboriginal languages in Canada and Australia (Diagrams 7 and 8) based on recent censuses.

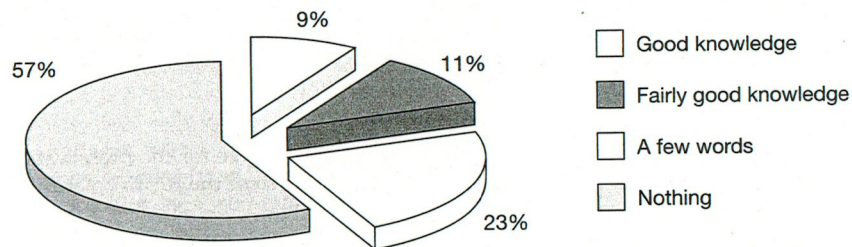


Diagram 5. Knowledge of Breton in 1997
Based on Broudic 1999

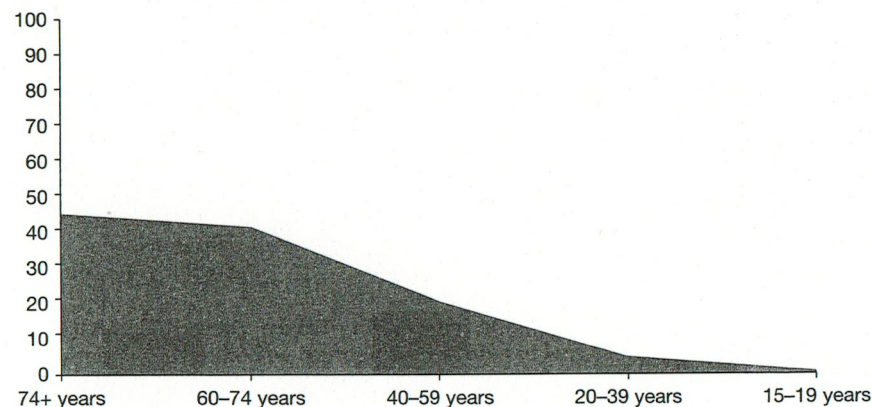


Diagram 6. Percentage of speakers of Breton by age group in 1997
Based on Broudic 1999

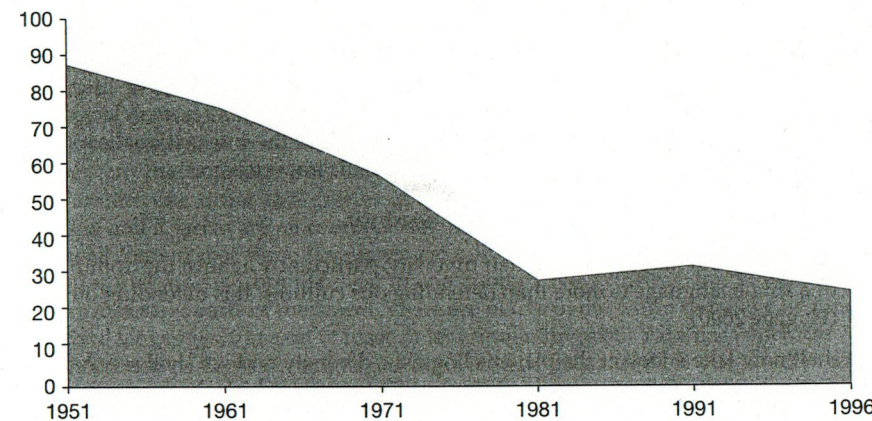


Diagram 7. Evolution of the percentage of the indigenous population speaking an aboriginal language in Canada
Based on Norris 1998

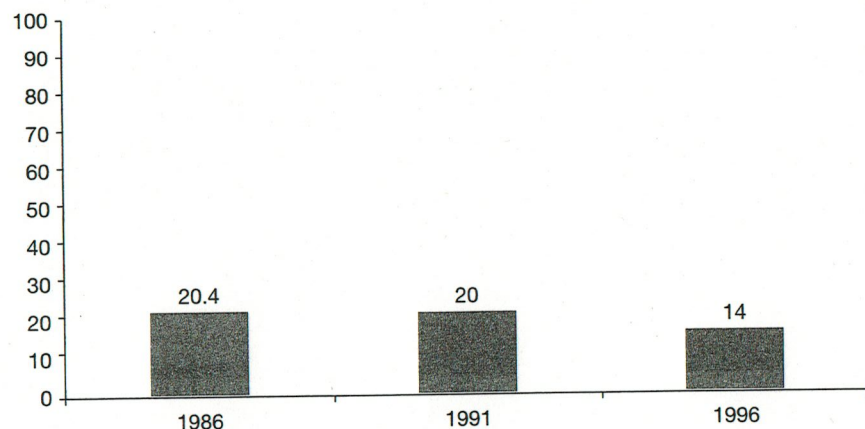


Diagram 8. Evolution of the percentage of the indigenous population speaking an aboriginal language in Australia
Based on McConvell and Thieberger 2001

There now follows the contribution by Professor Moreno Cabrera (Autonomous University of Madrid) on linguistic diversity (pp. 54–90). The subjects presented are, first of all, linguistic diversity on the individual, genetic and structural or typological planes, secondly, the location of linguistic diversity in the different parts of the world with particular reference to endangered languages, thirdly, the loss of linguistic heritage and the need to understand the equality and dignity of all human languages and cultures, and finally, the alarming consequences of the internationalisation of English, which the author calls Anglo-Saxon linguistic imperialism.

Linguistic diversity in the twenty-first century

Defending our languages and their diversity, particularly against the domination of a single language is more than defending our cultures. It is defending our life. (Hagège 2000)

We shall now take a look at the planet's linguistic diversity and we shall see that this linguistic diversity is in very serious danger. The rate at which the languages and cultures of the less favoured communities are disappearing is increasing steadily and the numerous warnings that have been issued do not seem to have been able to halt the phenomenon in any significant way. It is impossible to discuss the planet's present linguistic diversity without referring to this circumstance. For this reason, in the last section of this contribution the causes for this dramatic situation are analysed briefly

and it is argued that the acceleration in the loss of the world's linguistic wealth has a lot to do with the steady internationalisation of English, which is not based on a spontaneous or natural phenomenon but on certain monolingual models of acculturation that are becoming more and more widespread over the length and breadth of the planet.

Linguistic diversity

In this section we shall establish the theoretical bases of linguistic diversity so as to make empirical considerations on this aspect in subsequent sections.

We can distinguish three types of linguistic diversity (Nettle 1999): individual, genetic and typological.

- Individual diversity refers to the number of languages spoken in the world; it is therefore determined by counting the number of languages spoken in each area of the planet.
- Genetic diversity is determined by the number of linguistic families that exist in today's world. Here, therefore, we count the number of genetically related language groups, called families, that there are in the world.
- Structural diversity refers to the degree of variability in the grammatical structures of the world's languages. We shall examine these three types of diversity in the following sections.

We shall examine these three approaches to the concept of linguistic diversity in turn, since all three have important aspects for evaluating and understanding it.

Individual diversity

As has been pointed out above, it is quite difficult to count the number of languages spoken in the world, as the criteria applied in different parts of the world are not the same. In countries where one or more standard languages have been officially adopted by the state, that language is usually counted as a single individual, even though there are varieties that differ to a greater or lesser degree. For example, English, German, Chinese and Russian are all counted as four single languages in most accounts, when it is well known that these languages include a large number of different linguistic varieties that are far from identical to one another. Nevertheless, this situation only occurs in certain parts of the world. There are places in the world that have no official standard languages, but a set of more or less similar linguistic varieties which are very often counted as separate languages, even though they resemble one another more than some of the varieties included in the languages mentioned above.

Calculations of individual linguistic diversity on a world level are therefore biased, as they reduce linguistic diversity in the industrialised societies and increase linguistic diversity in the other societies. This creates the false impression that the so-called backward societies of the third world show a great linguistic diversity and that that diversity is one of the factors contributing to their so-called

backwardness, stagnation or isolation. As we shall see in chapter four, these are racist ideas, despite attempts to back them up with seemingly objective facts and figures. The fact is that in Western industrialised societies linguistic variety is similar to that in third world countries, but this variety is disguised and hidden by the existence of standard languages. It is well known that in that part of Europe going from Vienna to Amsterdam there is a chain of Germanic varieties which are locally mutually intelligible and which are disguised behind generic terms like German or Dutch. There is no doubt that the countries making up this part of Europe (Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Holland, Luxembourg, Belgium) are amongst the most advanced, civilised and developed in the world. The same sort of thing goes for France, Great Britain, Italy and Spain. No correlation can therefore be established between a high level of linguistic diversity and social, political or economic underdevelopment, isolation or stagnation. In addition, in many Western societies, as a result of immigration, there is a very appreciable number of speakers of non-European languages which should be counted as European languages of non-European origin. Something similar can be said of the United States and Canada. According to Grimes (1996), for example, in Great Britain there are thought to be at least 140,000 speakers of Gujarati, an Indo-Arian language from India; in France, there are more than 600,000 speakers of Algerian Arabic, more than 500,000 speakers of Kabyle, a language of the Algerian Berber family, and more than 200,000 speakers of Tunisian Arabic.

In the thirteenth edition of the catalogue of languages *Ethnologue* (Grimes 1996), a total of 6,703 languages are listed. However, this figure is biased by the considerations we have just made. Even so, the increase as a result of splitting up languages like German or Italian could be compensated by the reduction in the number as a result of merging many varieties of indigenous languages which are given as separate languages. For example, the *Ethnologue* lists more than thirty-five Quechua languages, which could be reduced to just one or two if we used criteria like those applied, for example, in Europe, even though there is no official unified Quechua adopted as a standard language.

The problem is much more difficult in the case of areas like Papua New Guinea, where most of the indigenous languages (871, according to this catalogue) are known only poorly or not at all, so that in many cases their degree of similarity cannot be assessed.

Even so, a figure of around 6,000 could be taken as the approximate number of languages spoken in the world today.

Where languages do show considerable variation is in the number of speakers. The imbalances on a world level are very big and to some extent reflect other imbalances in the world economic and political structure. The following table (Table 4) is sufficiently illustrative.

Table 4. Percentages of languages with less speakers than the figure indicated

Continent	<150	<1,000	<10,000	<100,000	<1,000,000
Africa	1.7	7.5	32.6	72.5	94.2
Asia	5.5	21.4	52.8	81	93.8
Europe	1.9	9.9	30.2	46.9	71.6
North America	22.6	41.6	77.8	96.3	100
Central America	6.1	12.1	36.4	89.4	100
South America	27.8	51.8	76.5	89.1	94.1
Pacific / Australia	22.9	60.4	92.8	99.5	100
World	11.5	30.1	59.4	83.8	95.2

Source: Nettle 1999

Although the number of speakers is only one of the factors influencing the preservation and survival of a language, the fact is that the smaller this number is the more weight this factor carries in the risk situation facing a particular language.

If we take the figure of 10,000 speakers (Nettle 1999) as the threshold below which the factor of the number of speakers can be considered decisive for the survival of a language, then of the approximately 6,000 languages in the world 59.4% of languages have fewer than 10,000 speakers, which amounts to 3,564 languages. In other words, in the course of the twenty-first century, in view of their endangered situation, it is very possible that half of the languages spoken today could disappear. Amongst them, 30.1% – that is, 1,806 languages – have less than 1,000 speakers. It is possible that most, if not all, of these languages are doomed to extinction in a question of decades.

If we take into account languages with fewer than 100,000 speakers, which Nettle himself (1999) defines as languages whose future is seriously endangered this century, then we get 83.8% of 6,000 languages, which means rather more than 5,000 languages. On this basis, only about 1,000 languages can be considered strong languages from the demographic point of view.

The simple fact that there are almost 3,500 – or, perhaps more realistically, 5,000 – languages in danger (almost 2,000 of them very seriously), along with the cultures for which they are a vehicle, is a cultural catastrophe of a truly overwhelming magnitude. As Nettle says, "Most of our human heritage is disappearing before our eyes" (1999).

We may wonder what the cause of this situation is. There are undoubtedly multiple causes of a historical, economic, political and cultural nature which ought to be studied at length. What we can say is that at the heart of this situation and of its steady acceleration at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first can be found, amongst other things, an efficient policy of discrimination, marginalisation and assimilation that has been and is still being applied on a global scale, as I shall explain later.

Genetic diversity

Since the beginning of historical-comparative linguistics in the nineteenth century it has been known that many languages can be classified into larger units called linguistic families, which contain all those languages that have arisen as a result of the process of differentiation of a particular ancestral language, known as the parent language. One historically recent case is the Romance family, which includes languages like Spanish, French, Italian, Romansh, Sardinian, Catalan, Galician, Friulan, Ladino, Occitan, whose parent language is vulgar Latin. Although no written testimonies of them have survived, the Germanic languages – German, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, for example – and the Slavic languages – Russian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Serbian, Croatian, Bulgarian, for example – are also each descended from their own parent languages and therefore form two distinct linguistic families. Outside Europe we find a similar situation. The more than 1,000 Austronesian languages, which cover most of the Pacific Islands, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, seem to be descended from an ancestral language for which there is no written evidence, which is known as Proto-Austronesian and could be about 6,000 years old. Similarly, the Bantu languages of Central and Southern Africa arose from an ancestral language called Proto-Bantu which must have been located somewhere in today's Cameroon and whose speakers expanded towards the equatorial forests of the Congo about 5,000 years ago.

Several linguistic families have in turn been shown to be genetically related. For example, the Romance, Germanic and Slavic families (along with other families and languages) are demonstrably related to one another and it is therefore postulated that they are descended from one ancestral language usually called Indo-European. A set of related families, taking a term from biology, is called a phylum. So we have the Indo-European phylum, to which languages like Sardinian, Dutch, Greek, Armenian, Belarusian, Breton and Lithuanian belong, languages which at first sight have nothing to do with one another. Similarly, the Bantu, Iyoid, Atlantic, Mande and Kordofanian linguistic families of western and central Sub-Saharan Africa seem to be genetically related and an ancestral language called Proto-Niger-Congo has also been postulated with an age of about 15,000 years.

Unfortunately, it has not always been possible to determine how the various linguistic families discovered in the world are linked genetically, although there are proposals – some riskier or bolder than others – which at all events should be seen as

speculations for research rather than reliable results. The American continent provides an illustrative case. The approximately 900 languages of America can be grouped in the following linguistic families:

Linguistic families of America

- Na-Dené (North America, 41 languages)
- Eskimo Aleut (North America, 9 languages)
- Hokan (North America, 43 languages)
- Penutian (North America, 92 languages)
- Almosan (North America, 62 languages)
- Keres (North America, 35 languages)
- Oto-Manguean (Central America, 19 languages)
- Uto-Aztecan (Central America, 33 languages)
- Tanoan (Central America, 8 languages)
- Ge-Pano-Carib (Central and South America, 193 languages)
- Tucanoan (South America, 59 languages)
- Equatorial (South America, 209 languages)
- Chibchan-Páez (Central and South America, 71 languages)
- Andean (South America, 30 languages)

Although not all these linguistic families are felt to have been convincingly demonstrated, since some are based solely on a few clues which do not necessarily prove their genetic relation (Campbell 1997), we can nevertheless say that the 900 languages belong to just fourteen linguistic families. One author, Joseph Greenberg, a pioneer in the classification of the linguistic families of Africa, has proposed a macro-phylum called Amerindian (Greenberg 1987), which would contain all the families listed except Eskimo-Aleut and Na-Dené in a single phylum. In that way, America would have just three native language groups, although, as I say, this proposal is considered too uncertain.

All together, and with the exception of a few dozen languages that are considered genetic isolates – that is, lone remnants of possible extinct families or phyla – we can say that 90% of human languages belong to one of the following phyla or families. (see also Map 1.)

symptomatic of an unconscious desire of self-destruction, and a mute protest against the collapse of the old values. For Pygmy, San, Negrito, Inuit and other economically marginal groups, ways of life have already changed or will soon do so, with modifications of the environment, such as game depletion and competition from other types of economies. (Froment 2001)

Ever since the colonial period, sometimes openly and sometimes covertly, the large Western political and economic powers have applied an absolutely scandalous policy of cultural genocide.

There is no natural process of progress that leads inevitably to marginalisation followed by the disappearance of the greater part of the planet's small local languages and cultures, so much as a policy directed at those ends which has had unquestionable success during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

There are a series of suppositions which, though not explicitly acknowledged, shape this policy of cultural marginalisation and destruction.

First, the racism which, in spite of all the formal declarations against it, still exists in every corner of the world. The concepts of primitive society or savage, backward or tribal community are clearly racist. The communities these pejorative labels are applied to are made up of people with exactly the same abilities and the same needs as people in Western societies, neither more nor less. There is no backwardness, either physical or mental, that can be considered characteristic of these communities. It must be stated that any idea of this sort is declaredly racist.

These prejudices give rise to the belief that these savage communities need to be educated according to Western models. This presupposes another racist idea, namely that these communities are ignorant and backward and are therefore incapable by themselves of assimilating contacts with others in their own way, following their own behaviour patterns, their own culture and their own language. Here it is the industrialised Western societies who are ignorant, as they know nothing or almost nothing about the language, culture and customs of these communities and simply assume that they are primitive and inferior and must therefore be assimilated as soon as possible to Western models and must be guided and controlled by them to ensure their survival, showing a paternalism based on the racist and discriminatory idea that these communities are not of legal age or are primitive.

From the general racism which predominates today in the modern world, and which demonstrates its radically conservative and retrograde nature, is derived linguistic racism or linguisticism – the term used by Phillipson (1992) to refer to discrimination on the basis of linguistic differences – according to which some languages are more developed or more suitable for modern life than others. Languages are classified as modern languages of communication and indigenous languages serving only to express a people's identity but not having any communicative or cultural value. As Phillipson has remarked:

The labels currently used in political and academic discourse to describe English are almost invariably positive ascriptions. By implication other languages lack these properties or are inferior.

In this way, descriptions such as international or global language, auxiliary language, link language, neutral language, encounter language, language of culture or language of science, applied to English, French and Spanish, have as their complement the characterisation of other languages as local languages, tribal languages, regional languages, local or tribal dialects or speeches, exclusion languages, nationalist languages, uncultured languages, languages of poverty, languages of non-communication, languages of superstition, etc. These implications manifest linguistic racism or linguisticism, because all the languages of the world are languages of communication, of culture, of understanding, of knowledge and of excellence. If some languages are more advantageous or more widespread than others, this is due to circumstances outside them, such as the social, political or economic conditioning that makes some communities appear more highly favoured than others in one or more spheres.

The identification of culture with written culture is another of the racist ideas dominating many areas of today's Western world. It is felt that written culture and literature, which are typical of the dominant powers in the Western and Oriental worlds, are superior to cultures with an oral tradition, which are typical of smaller communities, who do not make use of writing.

But it is quite clear that oral cultures and literatures are much richer and more varied than written cultures. First of all, let me say that all communities have oral culture and literature, even those considered more advanced. What is more, written culture and literature arise from oral culture and literature and hardly ever the other way round. Therefore, written culture and literature arise from a transposition of oral culture and literature to a written medium. Indeed, any language that is written has previously been spoken and, what is more important, is in most cases still spoken today. It is not true that literature arises with writing. Literature has arisen in and from orality in all cases, including those of the major Western societies. Anyone who says that there is no oral literature in Western societies is wrong. Written literature and culture have not supplanted oral literature and culture in any of the Western societies. In those societies in which there is a written press, there are also oral means of diffusion, which always have larger audiences and more influence.

In all spheres of industrialised societies, orality is used as an essential element: from work interviews to court hearings, from political meetings to scientific congresses, from primary education to further education, from café gossip to parliamentary debates. Writing has not managed to supplant orality in the industrialised countries. In fact, amongst the most representative inventions of these post-modern societies are radio, television and the mobile telephone, which have given a new dimension to orality. We have no right to despise languages and cultures with an exclusively oral tradition, because orality is also fundamental in our advanced industrialised societies. To think otherwise is to lapse once again into cultural and linguistic racism.

On equality and dignity in all human languages and cultures

Human languages are diverse by nature. Each community tends to develop its own way of speaking that identifies it as a community and distinguishes it from other communities. This is even possible in several communities that speak what is identified as the same language. It is a perfectly documented fact that languages develop distinctive idiosyncratic forms that identify a specific linguistic community. The English of Seattle is not the same as the English of Houston, the Spanish of Oviedo is not the same as that of Seville, the German of Hamburg is not exactly the same as the German of Munich. The standard languages adopted by today's national states are more or less artificial conventions adopted in the basic institutions of these states. This is the case of standard English or Englishes, standard German, standard Spanish or Spanishes and many other languages. These standard languages, furthermore, are not entirely neutral, but are based on a certain variety associated with some centre with social, political or economic prestige. For example, standard French is based on the Francian variety, standard Peninsular Spanish is based on the Castilian variety, standard Italian is based on the Tuscan variety.

There is therefore no standard language that is entirely and politically neutral:

Ethnicity and nationalism...inhabit the very structures of the civic societies in which we live. In effect, both the political and administrative structure of the state and its civil society are *ethnicised*. This is achieved principally via the artificial establishment of a 'common' civic language and culture. This supposedly common language and culture in fact represents and is reflective of the *particular* cultural and linguistic habitus of the dominant ethnies, or *Staatsvolk*. It is a majoritarian particularism masquerading as universalism. (May 2001)

Standard language is based on a conventional concoction of the basic varieties resulting in a more or less prefabricated language which, when spoken in the different linguistic communities, takes on special distinguishing features. This is so because real linguistic activity works through variation and differentiation, which are at the root of two essential elements of languages: their constant adaptation to social dynamics and their use as an indicator of identity. These two examples are what allow languages to persist over time and survive the multitude of social upheavals a community is inexorably exposed to. They also make it possible for language to be a sign of cohesion and identification for communities. A specific way of speaking constitutes a sign of intragroup cohesion and a sign of intergroup identification.

Just as the human being is equipped to deal with linguistic diversity, since according to what I am saying languages themselves keep adapting dynamically to social changes, they are also equally capable of understanding related linguistic varieties from other linguistic communities. In none of these aspects do standard languages occupy a significant place. Standard languages do not provide any further essential range in the cohesive and communicative aspects that are not present in the varieties.

The process of standardisation of a language or groups of linguistic varieties does not introduce elements that fundamentally modify the quality of that language and make it superior to the varieties. The value of a standard language is the value given to it by the community that adopts it freely or by obligation. It is not, however, an intrinsically superior language but, at most, the outline for a language, an unfinished language which needs to be constantly remade and recreated through whatever use is made of it, as happens with non-standard languages. All of this means that those communities that do not have a standard language of their own (most of the world's communities), which is a Western phenomenon associated with a specific type of politico-social organisation, are communities as perfect or imperfect linguistically speaking as those that do have a standard language. The differences arise from the structure according to a particular model, but the languages of the former communities have exactly the same cohesive, communicative and identificative possibilities as these. Linguistic communities without a standard language must not therefore be looked on as inferior, backward or less evolved in comparison with those with a standard language. These communities, like any human community, have one or more developed languages and a literary tradition that is transmitted orally. Oral transmission of a language is also characteristic of Western societies, where written language is acquired once the language spoken has been acquired orally. We cannot therefore look down on a language for not being standardised or written.

English as the natural language of globalisation

English is far from being a neutral language that can be associated with a progressive internationalisation of Humanity. English, whether we like it or not, is associated with a certain specific type of culture, as worthy and valuable as any other, of course, but never superior.

Language and culture are closely connected by three aspects (Fishman 1991): the indicial, the symbolic and the constituent. English is the language of Shakespeare and Spanish is the language of Cervantes, classical Arabic is the language of the Koran. It is something that cannot be avoided in any way; when we use a certain language there is an indicial reference, deliberate or not, to certain cultural referents and patterns. In its symbolic aspect, language works as a symbol of a certain culture; English is a symbol of Anglo-Saxon culture and Spanish is a symbol of Hispanic culture. We cannot strip English or Spanish of this symbolic aspect, in the same way as it is very difficult to eliminate the connotations of a swear word. As regards the constituent aspect, language forms a constituent part of a certain culture. English is a constituent part of Anglo-Saxon, for example. It is very difficult to imagine the association of the Anglo-Saxon culture with Chinese or Russian. It is very difficult to express oneself in English and set oneself outside Anglo-Saxon culture or the Anglo-Saxon colonial sphere.

The neutral image of English (and of other languages) is used for imperialist purposes, as explicitly stated by Phillipson:

Claiming that English is neutral (a tool, an instrument) involves a disconnection between what English *is* ('culture') from its structural basis (from what it *has* and *does*). It disconnects the *means* from *ends* or *purposes*, from what English is being used for. The type of reasoning we are dealing with here is part of the nationalization process whereby the unequal power relations between English and other languages are explained and legitimated. It fits into the familiar linguisticist pattern of the dominant language creating an exalted image of itself, other languages being devaluated, and the relationship between the two rationalized in favour of the dominant language. This applies to each type of argument, whether persuasion, bargaining, or threats are used, all of which serve to reproduce English linguistic hegemony. (Phillipson 1992)

From Anglo-Saxon imperialist standpoints it is preached that international English makes us more cosmopolitan and makes us feel like citizens of the world, free from sentimental and exclusive nationalisms.

Some linguists have realised that the spread of English is resulting in the domination and even disappearance of other languages and cultures:

American English cannot be a real international language, i.e. a neutral instrument for everyone to communicate everywhere. It is the vehicle of a culture that may well swallow up all the others and convert them in negotiable products. (Hagège 2000)

This French linguist draws a direct connection between the lightning spread of English and the speeding up of massive language extinction on a world level:

All factors of language death, whether political, economical or social, can act to the detriment of any language except English, and in favour of the latter. The strength and rapidity characterising the current dissemination of English worldwide are by far surpassing those that in the past allowed other languages – such as Latin two thousand years ago – to lead a great number of languages to total extinction. (Hagège 2000)

Other students of the relations between languages and nations take the same approach:

Globalisation has clearly played an important part in the rise of English as the current world language... But this is not the whole story, since the current ascendancy of English also clearly has longer historical antecedents. Indeed, the rise of English to be the pre-eminent international language has had much to do with the role of Great Britain the dominant colonial power over the last three centuries... The increasing sociopolitical and socioeconomic dominance of the USA, and its pre-eminent position in cutting-edge media and telecommunication, has ensured that English remains at the forefront of the world's languages. (May 2001)

The spread of English is far from being a natural or spontaneous phenomenon. There are institutions funded by Great Britain and the United States whose object is to make English an international language. Phillipson (1992) mentions the British Council and

the United States Information Agency as agents of Anglo-Saxon linguistic imperialism whose object is the recognition of Anglo-American cultural values. This, of course, may be legitimate, but in no way does it make English a culturally neutral language, as it is sometimes said.

The teaching of English, monolingualism and cultural assimilation

Phillipson (1992) shows how the basic premises of the teaching of English as a foreign language, as laid down at the Commonwealth Congress on teaching English as a second language, which took place in Makerer (Uganda) in 1961 (Phillipson 1992), have been decisive in creating or favouring the necessary conditions for increasing the hegemony of English, especially in areas outside Europe. These premises, according to Phillipson (1992), are as follows:

- Monolingualism in the teaching of English. English should normally be taught exclusively in English, without resort to another auxiliary language.
- Ideally the English teacher should be a native speaker. The native speaker and, even more important, the way he or she speaks English, are considered the basic model for the teaching of this language.
- English should be taught as early as possible. The younger the learner of English, the better the results obtained.
- The more English is taught, the better. Teaching of English should embrace the largest possible number of spheres.
- The quality of the results of English teaching is inversely proportional to the use of other languages. The more other languages different from English are used, the less successful its teaching will be.

This is not the place for an examination of the efficacy of these points of view mentioned by Phillipson for the teaching of a second language, but let us look at the ideological aspects concealed behind these postulates and their relation with a monolingualist ideology that sees cases of bilingualism or plurilingualism as no more than stages in the transition to monolingualism in the dominant language.

The idea that only English and no other language should be used when teaching English is clearly aimed at linguistic substitution rather than at the coexistence of languages. This is even more obvious bearing in mind the third supposition, that English teaching should be introduced as soon as possible. This allows for the possibility that English could eventually replace the student's native language. The idea that the use of other languages can have harmful effects on the teaching of English, the fifth supposition, once again shows that this proposal is based on a monolingual ideology. The first, third and fifth suppositions, therefore, regardless of whether or not they are considered effective or suitable in the teaching of a foreign language, are signs of a clearly monolingual mentality tending towards the replacement of our various languages by one single language.

The second and fourth suppositions reveal another of the basic pillars of linguistic imperialism: induced assimilation and acculturation.

First, to say that the best teachers must be native speakers implies two concealed ideas: the English of native speakers (British or United States) is the best and most correct English and, secondly, by suggesting this type of teacher as a model, someone is being proposed who has normally been educated according to an Anglo-Saxon educational model which thereby becomes a universal model for all parts of the world (educational imperialism).

Considering native English as correct English and the remaining forms of English speech as incorrect or defective has the following consequence: since the number of people who learn a foreign language and get to speak it like a native is very low, there is an extremely high number of speakers of English who speak it badly or incorrectly, with the discrimination that this involves. The worldwide spread of English is creating a kind of cultural proletariat characterised by its incorrect, defective use of English, which brands them as second-class cultural citizens compared with the natives, who are first-class. To reach a level in one's use of English close to that of the natives it is often necessary to spend a long time intensively involved in Anglo-Saxon teaching institutions, which ensures they are assimilated in depth, as speaking English correctly means neither more nor less than speaking according to the canons of the British or United States educated norm. Only those prepared to undergo all this will be able to shake off the cultural undervaluation involved in using English incorrectly.

The fourth supposition lies at the root of one of the basic postulates of the teaching of English: it is not enough just to learn to understand English, one must also learn to use it actively, to speak it fluently. Linguistic imperialism considers that just learning to understand a language is imperfect and faulty learning. Someone who says they understand English but can't speak it is not normally valued as highly as someone who says they can do both. It is obvious that the passive teaching of languages favours plurilingualism, since it is much easier to learn to understand several languages competently than it is to learn to speak them competently.

It is well known that learning to use a language actively involves much greater effort and dedication than learning it simply for passive use, that is, for understanding. This clearly favours monolingualism: the time spent learning to speak one language is time taken away from the passive learning of others.

Furthermore, the predominance of passive language learning does not favour speakers of the dominant language, as they have to make an effort to understand the language of the dominated, if they really want to understand them. But people who speak a dominant language, such as English, are rarely prepared to make this effort.

Therefore, the model of monolingual and assimilatory imposition, which to a large extent is the model used in the teaching of English (and of other European languages like French and Spanish), not only facilitates the spread of the language and creates the conditions for it to replace other languages, it also creates a large number of second-class citizens who use English (or French or Spanish) not entirely correctly, at

the same time as it means that native speakers of English (or French or Spanish) do not need to make any effort to understand, let alone to speak, the language of others.

With a model of this sort it is difficult to be optimistic regarding the future of linguistic diversity on our planet.

Conclusion

We have seen the immense linguistic and cultural wealth our planet still treasures, but we have also seen the trends on a world level, left over from the colonial period, towards the implantation of a model based on monoculturalism and monolingualism. This model places no value on the mutual understanding of languages and cultures as the basis for the cementing of harmonious relations between the peoples of the world, but considers that there are modern cultures and languages and backward cultures and languages and that the backward communities must assimilate this model as soon as possible and that it does not in the least matter if their cultural and linguistic idiosyncracies are partly or totally lost in the process of assimilation.

The policy of imposing ideas, cultures or languages has often been the origin of conflicts between the world's communities and peoples and will continue to be so. Western models of economic, political or social organisation demand that the agents intervening in them adopt a very limited number of languages, normally those of the dominant layers of society, and therefore force many of those agents to abandon their own language in favour of one that is strange to them and in which they will probably feel less sure of themselves than native users of that language. On this sort of basis, mutual understanding between the world's communities becomes submission and cultural and political dominance. In this way it will never be possible to build a world in peace and harmony.

As Froment points out in referring to the future of hunter-gatherer communities, this can only take place on the basis of respect for all facets of the life of small communities and their way of assimilating the changes brought about by relations with other communities:

In the end, the biological consequences of modernity for hunter-gatherer groups will be dictated by the evolution of social prejudice against them, their access to school, affluence and health facilities, the acknowledgement of traditional rights to land, as well as their own choices in the matter of development. (Froment 2001)

Although at this moment English is the imperialist language *par excellence*, the problem does not lie in English as such, since it is as respectable as a language as any other, so much as in the monolingual assimilation models linguistic imperialism is based on.

This does *not* imply that if English were to vanish (a highly improbable hypothesis in the present world), other languages would live in equality. Dominant languages in multilingual communities and in a multilingual world

are dominant because their speakers have the power to secure advantages for their own group, among them linguistic advantages. Thus linguistic serves to maintain the dominant position of French in a substantial number of countries which are linked to France in an imperialist structure in much the same way as English linguistic imperialism operates. (Phillipson 1992)

Linguistic diversity, like cultural diversity, is something that enriches Humanity and which we ought to care for between us all. What is needed is a radical change in mentality. If we really want to understand each other we ought to take an interest in understanding each other's language and culture, but the effort needed to do this will only be made on the basis of mutual respect. If we think that the other person's culture and language are inferior to our own – that is, if we take a racist attitude – we shall never make the effort needed to understand the other person, who is as human as we are.

The monolingual attitude being imposed on a global level is intrinsically counter to peace and harmony and furthermore is lacking in legitimacy:

I have argued that this assertion of continued monolingualism has no real or legitimated basis – certainly, at least, not under the auspices of individual rights – since the opportunity and right to continue to speak the dominant language is in no way threatened by minority-language recognition. (May 2001)

Nothing can change if we are not prepared to change this mentality and, far more serious, if we are not even aware of it. Since it seems difficult to change the mentality of those who are already educated, then perhaps education for tolerance, the valuation of other cultural and linguistic communities and mutual understanding, and against racism, is the only basis on which we might, in the future, build a truly fairer and more human world.

Recommendations on linguistic heritage

In view of the imminent danger of loss of our linguistic diversity, we recommend

- Spreading the idea amongst international bodies and the general public that linguistic and cultural diversity is a heritage that must be preserved as actively as possible.
- Publicly proclaiming and defending that endangered languages, like all languages, contain enormous wealth and interest for humanity, and drawing attention to the falsity and the danger of placing languages in a hierarchy.
- Transmitting and popularising the feeling that all languages and cultures form part of the common heritage of humanity and that as such they must not only be preserved but developed and encouraged.

- Spreading, especially amongst speakers of widespread languages, the importance of preserving and furthering the less widespread languages, especially those around them, and making speakers of the less widespread languages aware of their role in this task.
- Spreading the idea that multilingualism does not refer only to the knowledge and use of the more widespread languages. The study of less widespread languages, especially those surrounding each community, should be encouraged and helped.
- Spreading the importance of respecting and protecting the rights of speakers of all languages to use them and cultivate them.
- Declaring each and every language the heritage of humanity.