Losing cultural diversity in Europe?

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The paper deals with the evolution and present situation of some European languages, whose speakers have become minorities in their own homeland, and are threatened with extinction. The factors that have led these languages to their present status are explored. Special attention is paid to the role school systems have played and still play to replace those indigenous or historical languages with State official languages. New issues like immigration and globalisation are considered in order to discover their effects, positive or negative, in the conservation of those languages and the cultures related to them. These European experiences could be compared with those from other regions around the world and be used as a warning of the danger of losing cultural diversity through the extinction of indigenous or historical languages.

Language, language extinction, transmission, education, globalisation

INTRODUCTION: DOES GLOBALISATION INCREASE CULTURAL DIVERSITY?

The word ‘multiculturalism’ may come from the experience of the coexistence in the same territory of different cultures, some of them having their origin far away. Both negative and positive sides, conflict or mutual enrichment emerging from that coexistence, are important subjects of theory and research. In developed countries the presence of an increasing number of immigrants may, on one hand, displease part of the indigenous population, which then develops xenophobic and even racist attitudes, but on the other, as a reaction, some other people may see natural and cultural interbreeding as a positive evolution. In genetics the advantages of hybrids are well known. In some cases, tolerance, as a positive attitude towards alien people and cultures, may have been surpassed by a true interest in the discovery and the enjoyment of what is different. The interests in exotic food or in world music are good examples of the assimilation of alien cultural values. From this point of view it might be easy to think that, just as genetic exchange between individuals from different populations is not only possible, but also advantageous, when dealing with cultures everything likewise can be mixed. The vision of a world where populations have lived and still live apart, separated by geographical distances and all sort of barriers, natural and cultural (economic, social, political, religious, linguistic) is replaced by the image of the ‘global village’.

It looks as though, after centuries and millennia where the forces of genetic and cultural fission haven been predominant, there has been a change now in the opposite direction and we are going towards genetic and cultural fusion, hybridisation and interbreeding. This is a very simple image indeed, but we will try to analyse it, instead of just putting it aside.
GENES AND LANGUAGES

A Sequence of Fissions

The departing point is the awareness of the natural and cultural differences among the populations in the world. Our first question is whether those differences are the result of differentiation processes from a common origin. Nobody will discuss that a general process of differentiation has taken place, nevertheless, on the issue about the origin of modern humans, controversy is guaranteed. Some anthropologists support the ‘multi-regional or polycentric model’; others prefer the ‘rapid-replacement’ model. According to the former, the modern Africans, Europeans, Asians and Australians have come from the respective African, European, Asian and Australian *homo erectus*; for the latter, all modern humans have come from the African *homo erectus* and rapidly replaced the descendants of the others.1

On the question of place of origin, the archaeological field is divided. A number of paleoanthropologists believe that modern humans originated in Africa, from which they spread to the rest of the world beginning about kya. This is in agreement with the genetic data.2

The second question concerns the factors of differentiation that may have been operating since that common origin. Mutation, by the production of new alleles and even new genes, gives the raw material for changes, but the persistence of those changes depends on the natural selection and the random genetic drift. Useful mutations are transmitted to the next generation throughout natural selection, whereas the dysfunctional are eliminated. Whereas natural selection operates for the adaptation of the individual to his or her environment, genetic drift has no direction as it operates at random: the genes received by the new generation are a random sample of the old generation genes. Its consequences are a differentiation between the sub-populations, a trend towards an inner homogeneity in each of them and an augmentation of homozygots. Those consequences increase with time and the degree of isolation of each population: the small and the endogamic a population is, the more powerful and noticeable are the effects of genetic drift.

Therefore, small and isolated populations become more and more genetically distinct from one another.3 Populations, nevertheless, as distinct as they may have become, can be linked by migrations, meaning, on one side, the import of new genes and, therefore, a possible neutralisation of genetic drift consequences; on the other side, through the colonisation of new territories, the chance to start a new population that may over time become distinct from the originating one, not only as a consequence of genetic drift, but also through the natural selection of those genes being better adapted to the new environment.

With all the populations coming from a common origin, no matter how far it can be, and looking at the impressive diversity among them at present, it is not surprising that the image of the tree is a favourite metaphor to show the genetic evolution of humankind.

The belief in some common ancestors of humankind is a very old one, perhaps not as old as those hypothetical ancestors. Side by side, there is another belief, at least in the Biblical tradition, in a common primitive language, which had been fragmented as a consequence of God’s punishment. How many languages are there in the world? In a recent classification4 4,736 different languages are listed. Diversity seems to be guaranteed!

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2 Cavalli-Sforza et al., 1994, p. 155.
3 “Throughout the Paleolithic, population numbers remained small, leaving greater chance for random genetic drift to produce considerable diversification.” (Idem p. 156).
The nineteenth century produced not only the theory of the evolution of species, but also research into the evolution of languages: from a ‘backwards’ process starting with the study of present similarities between languages and groups of languages, ancient common proto-languages were suggested. The generation of romance languages from Latin has been a quite recent process: the language spoken in Italy in the Quattrocento was simply called volgare, i.e., the language spoken by normal people, as opposed to Latin, the language of culture, being taught at schools and used at universities. Every other language having evolved from Latin was given the same name in each of those new vulgair languages. Using the example of Latin and the new romance languages, similar relationships were established between groups of modern languages and their respective proto-languages: proto-germanic, proto-slavic and so on, the difference with Latin being that those new proto-languages were not so well known because they had never been written.

At a higher level, new relationships were suggested among those groups of languages and the existence was suggested of an older proto-proto-language, Indo-European, being the ancestor of most groups of languages from India to Western Europe. The place where the Indo-European was born is still a matter of controversy. Following similar methods, almost all languages of the world have been classified into 17 families, Indo-European being just one of those. Pushing the research a little further, the existence of superfamilies has been suggested, but no single common origin of languages has been deduced yet:

> The real difficulty is that human language evolves so fast that the differentiation between presently extant languages is extreme, and it is difficult to establish similarities between them.6

Nevertheless, Greenberg, in a lecture given in 1976 at Stanford University, was the first to suggest one universal root: ‘tik’, meaning ‘one’, ‘finger’ (index finger, usually) or ‘hand’. The research for new universal roots was launched and has never stopped.7

With major difficulties and even more controversies than those in the field of paleoanthropological research, the classifications of languages are adopting the tree shape. They may not reach a common trunk, but they are able to show consecutive levels of ramification, showing the common origins of languages and groups of languages and the distances having appeared among them. So we have genetic trees of human populations and trees of human languages, but even more striking than the existence of both trees is the correlation between them.8 9

### Correspondence between trees

The hypothesis of a strong correlation between peoples and languages helped to select the sample of populations around the world to classify the genetic material for the study of the

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5 Idem.
6 Cavalli-Sforza et al., 1994, 96.
7 Bengston & Ruhlen 1993.
8 “The central question is, why should there be any congruence between genetic and linguistic evolution? The main reason is that the two evolutions, in principle, follow the same history, which can be represented, in a simplified or sometimes oversimplified way, as a sequence of fissions. In two or more populations that have separated, there begins a process of differentiation of both genes and languages (...) The average rates and modes of change can be quite different for genes and languages (and indeed they are). Of course, it is reasonable to expect that later events, like language replacements and/or gene substitutions, may blur the picture; but our conclusion was that they do not blur it entirely. (Cavalli-Sforza et al., 1994, 380-381).
9 “There are in fact good a priori reasons why cultural and genetic pools have close similarities: both genetic and cultural contacts take place by the same routes; they respond to the same geographic and ecological barriers; and they also can influence each other, in the sense of mutual reinforcement. (...) Important correlations are thus created between genetic pools on one side and sociocultural pools on the other.” (Idem, 23-24).
history and geography of human genes. If both trees, the genetic and the linguistic, come from the same process of fissions, what should strike us is not the correspondence between them, but the fact that the correspondence is not perfect.

The first reason for this partial lack of correspondence is that the linguistic tree is not as complete as the genetic one, because languages evolve very fast, as compared to genetic evolution, and they do not leave fossil vestiges behind them, but for a few cases where it is possible to go back to ancient writings. In a short period of time the changes brought about by language evolution may cause serious troubles of intercommunication between old and modern versions of the same language, and modern languages generated from the same old language. Similarities fade out and it becomes more and more difficult to find out the common origin. Cavalli-Sforza compares the processes of creating new languages and new species:

Languages evolve much faster than genes; two languages may become mutually unintelligible in a thousand years or less because of progressive differentiation. Formally, this is similar to the origin of two different species in biology. Speciation involves the loss of interfertility, in some measure the genetic equivalent of the loss of communication, but speciation takes on the order of a million years.

The second reason is that the present populations whose genes have been used to study the genetic tree are not just the result of a pure fission process; all through the history and the prehistory there have been important interactions between populations. Those interactions have brought about their own genetic and linguistic consequences: gene replacement and language replacement.

On the genetic side, neighbouring populations may have substantially changed their genetic maps by interbreeding. This interrelationship might be compared to a fusion process, as the opposite to a fission process. Nevertheless, on the linguistic side, language replacement can hardly mean any kind of fusion, but simply replacement of one language by another:

Languages tend to behave more like a unit, and be replaced as a whole, if at all. One can, and usually does, notice contributions to the lexicon from neighbours, but the structure of language is more stable, and certain specific groups of words are more highly conserved.

It is also possible that extensive gene replacement has occurred through prolonged contact and gene flow from neighbours, without language change.

**Relationship between gene replacement and language replacement**

A population can interrelate with others in many different ways, from individual migration to collective expansion. It is useful to establish a difference between the expansion of nomads and farmers. The former, due to their essential mobility, can travel easily; their way of life gives them clear advantages in case of a violent confrontation with farmers, but the demographic and cultural effects of their interrelation tend to be quite superficial and

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11. “The real difficulty is that human language evolves so fast that the differentiation between presently extant languages is extreme, and it is difficult to establish similarities between them.” (Cavalli-Sforza et al., 1994, p. 96).
13. “In general, the gene pool tends to reflect rather faithfully the numerical contribution from the two parental groups. Thus genetically intermediate populations can be generated, with all possible degrees of admixture.” Idem, p. 99.
transitional.\textsuperscript{15} The latter, when they increase in their homeland, must expand to the nearer cultivable lands in order to increase the production; their expansion often takes the shape of a series of waves and its effects, both demographic and cultural, are usually more permanent.

The genetic effect of a demic expansion depends above all on the numerical relationship between immigrants and natives. The expanding population may replace totally or partially the genoma of the native population and may spread its language, replacing eventually the indigenous one, especially when demographic and cultural advantages are clear. Greenberg\textsuperscript{16} showed that Bantu languages expanded alongside agriculture from a nucleus between Cameroon and Nigeria, and Renfrew\textsuperscript{17} suggested the hypothesis that neolithic farmers expanding from present day Turkey spread Indoeuropean languages.

The expansion of genes and languages together, being very natural, is not the only kind of expansion. There can be language replacement without gene replacement and vice versa. At present, Hungarians have less than 10\% of genes of Uralic origin, but Hungarian is an Uralic language: Magyar invaders might be a minority (20\%) as compared to the indigenous population (80\%), but being stronger and better organised, they managed to impose their language.\textsuperscript{18}

One more example is that the genetic effect brought about by Turkish conquerors might not have been very important, but Greek was totally replaced by Turkish, an Altaic language, as a consequence of the fall of Constantinople.\textsuperscript{19}

In both cases of language replacement without a parallel gene replacement, it seems that the genetic changes accompanying the replacement of a language, usually by invasion followed by imposition of the language of the new masters may be difficult to detect genetically because the new masters are often numerically a small fraction of the whole population they dominate (...)

Moreover, a language can be replaced by an entirely different one in as little as three generations as a result of political events leading to domination by a new people.\textsuperscript{20}

It becomes clear, then, that languages can be replaced through processes neither demographic nor democratic.

**Gene transmission and language transmission**

Genetic transmission proceeds from parents to offspring always; cultural transmission, instead, may use many different ways.

Cultural transmission from parents to children is, certainly, a process very close to genetic transmission. Some people call this kind of process ‘vertical’. The traditional way of language transmission goes from parents to children, from mother to children mostly, hence ‘the mother tongue’. No wonder that language transmission proceeds alongside genetic transmission: not only the language, but also any other cultural feature being transmitted

\textsuperscript{15} “In a Europe weakened by the crisis of the Roman Empire, the Visigots rapidly moved from the Ukraine to Rumania and then to France, Spain and Africa, but their kingdoms left few genetic or linguistic traces. The barbarian invasions that were responsible for the end of the Western Roman Empire probably had little genetic effect on the genetic structure of the European populations.” (Idem, p. 110-111).

\textsuperscript{16} Greenberg (1955, 1963)

\textsuperscript{17} Renfrew (1987)

\textsuperscript{18} Vid. Cavalli-Sforza et al., 1994, p. 119-120.

\textsuperscript{19} “en Turquía (el lugar más alejado conquistado de forma duradera por los nómadas del este asiático) no se encuentra huellas genéticas claras de los conquistadores de origen mongol, pero los análisis realizados hasta ahora no son suficientes.” (p. 128).

\textsuperscript{20} Cavalli-Sforza et al., 1994  p. 23-24.
basically from parents to children, as happens in non-proselytising religions. The transmission of cultural traits seems to mimic the pattern of historical variation of genes.

The intervention of ‘non vertical’ mechanisms of cultural transmission may decrease the correlation between cultural and genetic features. In every process of language replacement we can always find the powerful intervention of some ‘non vertical’ mechanisms which may eventually cause a ‘mutation’ in the ‘vertical’ transmission, as happens when the language a generation pass on to their children is not the one they received from their parents.

It is quite obvious that one cannot transmit a language he or she does not speak. A monolingual can only transmit one language, the one he or she speaks. Therefore in an isolated monolingual population, with no interrelationship with any other population, its language can evolve, but it can never be replaced by a foreign language. Any process of language replacement requires consequently the dissolution of the monolingualism of the people whose language is about to be replaced.

We have seen that immigration is perhaps the most natural way to put in contact two populations and two languages; but, whereas genes mix easily, languages are not so easy to mix into a new language. It is fairly easy to borrow words and sounds, but almost impossible to fuse two different linguistic systems into a new one. Whereas genetic mix tends to reproduce exactly the proportions of ancestral populations, languages do not mix themselves as easy as genes. Instead, genetically mixed populations tend to keep only one of the two languages of the ancestral populations.

When parents speak different languages, the children can easily learn both, if each of them speak his or her own language; but it is not as easy for those children, becoming parents, to pass on both languages to their own offspring. We know that the proportion of speakers of each language in a generation has a very important role in the transmission of each language, but this role may be not the decisive one. The chance a language has to be transmitted into the next generation does not depend only on the number or the proportion of speakers of the former generation. Non demographic factors may start or accelerate processes of language replacement. I would like now to pay specific attention to those factors and their incidence.

**LANGUAGE REPLACEMENT**

**Non demographic factors in language replacement**

When two speakers (A and B), each with a different language (LA and LB), want to communicate verbally, they have the following alternatives:

1. Using (speaking/writing and understanding/reading) the same language:
   - being the language of only one of them (LA, for example);
   - being the language of neither of them (LC, for example).

2. Using different languages.

In the first situation, at least one of the speakers must be able to use the other’s language; in the second, the speaker does not need to use the other’s language, but both must be able to use a third language which is not theirs; finally, in the third situation, each speaker needs only a passive knowledge of the other’s language. Among these three situations, only the first allows one, and only one, of them to be completely monolingual; the other speaker must have learnt to use, actively and passively, the other’s language. This is the most unbalanced

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21 Vid Cavalli-Sforza et al., 1994, p. 148-149.
relationship between speakers with different languages: the most unbalanced yet the most common. The point is: who must learn the other’s language?

A powerful reason to have to learn a foreign language is being oneself a foreigner in a foreign territory whose population speaks that language, especially when one is alone and cannot communicate with anybody else. The traveller, and especially the immigrant, would benefit from learning the language spoken by the naturals. At the end of the day, this situation would correspond to an extremely unbalanced demographic relationship, which could become less unbalanced as more immigrants come with the same language. When those immigrant pools get stronger and maybe self-sufficient, the need to use the language of the naturals decreases. It may happen that the immigrants outnumber natives.

There may be chain reaction immigrations: people leaving their territory under the pressure of a foreign population, may themselves press on the population of the territory they reach. Just to give an example,

the conquest by the Norman William the Conqueror in 1066 (...) was to be significant, though the conventional Scottish view of Scottish history has paid little attention to it. For one thing, it sent hordes of English, and English-speaking refugees fleeing from the North of England into Scotland. With them they brought their language, their particular local version of English. All languages vary from region to region, and theirs was much different from that of London and the South. It was an older form of English, and it established itself in the Lowlands of Scotland.22

It was this development that produced, eventually, the Highland-Lowland divide in Scotland. By the late 14th century, John of Fordoun was writing of the “two languages spoken among the Scots, the Scottish and the Teutonic (i.e. Gaelic and Scots)”. The last King of Scots to speak Gaelic was probably James IV (1488-1513).23

In order to prove that population figures are not the most important factor in language replacement, it is necessary to make the difference between immigrants and conquerors. We have already seen that some conqueror peoples (Magyars, Turks), even if there were outnumbered by the indigenous population, imposed their languages. What it is more important here is the relation of power, of dominance. When the conquerors become the rulers, the dominated population do learn their language, sooner or later. The establishment of the foreign power can stimulate the immigration of more people from the same origin and with the same language, which will diminish, even more, the native language.

The panorama of languages around the world is very complex indeed, not because of languages themselves, but for the intrusion of others factors being alien to the original realities of peoples and their languages. If linguistic reality is complex, that is because of peoples overrunning others, of conquests and colonisations. The linguistic reality is but the consequence of domination relationships; just to show that the history of mankind is, unfortunately, a history of inequalities and humiliations.24

Emigration means displacement to an outer territory; conquest means converting an outer territory into an inner one. That former foreign territory becomes part of the conqueror’s ownership. Some European Union member states include territories that were conquered or annexed not so long time ago. We are not interested in politics itself, but on the effects of domination on language replacement.

Non demographic language replacement

Very often domination comes from victory at war. We would like to mention but a few cases related to countries of Western Europe. The county of Toulouse was annexed by the French

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crown after the ‘crusade’ against the Cathars (1209-1244); Avignon was given to the papacy at the same time, but after several attempts (1663, 1668, 1768, 1774) it was eventually (1790) annexed by the French crown. After the War of Hundred Years (1337-1453), the French crown annexed Guyenne (1453). The southern part of the kingdom of Navarre was conquered (1512) and annexed (1515) by the kingdom of Castille. Rosselló, Conflent and Upper Cerdanya (i.e., the part of Catalonia at the northern side of the Pyrenees) were given to France (1659) after a long war between Castille and France in which Catalonia was involved. The kingdom of France, again after several attempts, annexed the principality of Orange (1713) and the county of Nice. At the end of the international war for the succession to the last Spanish Habsburg (1702-1714), the kingdoms of Aragon, Valencia, Mallorca and the principality of Catalonia were annexed by the kingdom of Castille. That annexation was justified in a royal decree (1707) for

the crime of rebellion (...) of the population, (...) the fair right of conquest, the attributes of royal sovereignty and (...) and the usefulness of reducing all the kingdoms of Spain under the uniformity of the same laws, usages, customs, courts (...) which must be those of Castille, so universally praised.25

Sometimes territories were exchanged more or less peacefully between monarchs: Charles V gave Bourgogne to the crown of France, when François I gave up his claims in Italy (1529).

A good marriage has proven to be as effective as a war: some pretty large territories have been given as dowries, like Provence. When its count Raymond Berenguer V died without a male heir, his daughter Beatrice brought the county as a dowry when she married Charles d’Anjou (1246). From then, through the Anjou family, the kings of France became also counts of Provence. Claude de Bretagne, heiress of the duchy of Brittany, married the king of France (1514), François I, who a few years later persuaded her and the États de Bretagne to accept the Act of Union (1532), according to which the duchy of Brittany was annexed ‘perpetually’ by the French crown.

Another way for a territory to lose independence is when its leader or its king becomes the king of another kingdom. This is the ‘united kingdom’ way. When a Welsh nobleman called Henry Tudor, after defeating Richard III at Bosworth Field, was crowned king of England (1485), it looked as though Wales, after a long history of hostility with England since the Norman conquest (1066), might improve its political status; it went the other way round actually. The Act of Union (1536) meant for Wales the total loss of independence: Welsh representatives joined the English parliament.

In 1603 James VI of Scotland, as the heir of his Aunt Elizabeth I, was crowned king of England. Instead of ruling his two kingdoms from Edinburgh he moved south to London. One century later (1707) the Treaty of Union incorporated the Scottish parliament into the Westminster parliament.

When Henry III of France died (1584), Henry III of Navarre, king of the last independent Occitan kingdom and head of Huguenots, became the heir of the French crown. He was recognised by the États généraux (1589) when he was converted to Catholicism. Then Henry, III of Navarre and IV of France decreed the union of both crowns. The compilation of Navarre laws was passed in 1608 and was ratified by Louis XIII in 1611, but the population complained against a reduction of their freedom. Nevertheless the compilation was written in Bearnais, which stood as official language until the French revolution (1789).

25 “delicte de rebel.lió i la manca al jurament de llurs habitants (...) el just dret de conquesta, l’atribut de la sobirania règia i (...) la conveniència de reduir tots els regnes d’Espanya a la uniformitat d’unes mateixes lleis, usos, costums, tribunals (...) que hauran de ser els de Castella, tan lloables en tot l’univers.” (Primer Decret de Nova Planta, 1707).
Conquests, dowries, acts of union: there is still another way of annexing a territory: just buying it! We can give one example at least: Humbert II, before dying with an heir, sold the Dauphiné (1339) to Charles V, king of France.

Once different territories and their inhabitants have passed under the ownership of a single monarch, the attempts of centralisation and ‘uniformisation’ would start immediately. In a few cases, the reaction brought about by those attempts succeeded in recovering independence, as in the case of Portugal, after a long war with Castille (1640-1668). All those annexations, no matter which way, were brought about without asking at all the populations living in those territories. They were just subjects.

**Becoming a minority in the own homeland**

Those annexations, besides being non democratic, share one more feature: the annexed territories and their populations become smaller, in relation to the others, not only in size and number, but also in political and cultural status. The main factor of that cultural ‘minoritisation’ was the imposition of the conqueror’s language.

The advent of a foreign dynasty may introduce or push forward the use of its own language. That is exactly what happened in Catalonia with the Castilian dynasty of Trastamara. In some cases, a queen speaking a foreign language has proved to be very instrumental to put aside the use of the naturals language:

> It took Malcolm III (Canmore or Big-head) three years to get himself elected High-King. (...) he later married Margaret of England, who had fled to Scotland after the Norman Conquest. It was to be a fateful step. It was under her influence that Norman French began to replace Gaelic at Court and English and Norman clerics were brought in to high office in the Church, which was induced to change from the Celtic to the Roman rite. Malcolm’s sons continued this policy after his death, after a brief Celtic reaction under his brother Domhnall Bàn (Shakespeare’s Donalbain).26

Most times, especially as a consequence of a war, it is not enough to make a foreign language more fashionable and spread it from the court, but to make the language of the winners the official one for every public use. The victory of Isabella at the Castilian civil war started the ‘taming and castration of Galicia’27 in retaliation for the opposition of Galician church and nobility. Many of its members fled to Portugal; those who stayed were sent to fight the Moors in Granada; their castles were demolished and the abbeys were put under the rule of their Castilian counterparts; Castilian Inquisition was introduced and the clerks were enforced to write everything in Castilian. Galician language was relegated to the family use in the countryside.

In 1539 François I of France issued the edict of Villers-Cotterêts banning the public use of any language but *vulgaire françois*. People still discuss whether his aim was to put an end to Latin or to prevent the use of the other languages spoken in the different territories own by the French crown: Occitan, Breton, Basque. The aim can be discussed, but the effects are absolutely clear: the decadence of those languages and their reduction to rural and oral *patois*.

Back to Spain, almost two centuries later, when the Bourbon pretender, with the support of the kingdom of Castille, won the Succession war (1702-1714) he suppressed the regimes of the kingdoms of Aragon, Mallorca, Valencia and the principality of Catalonia, supporters of the Habsburg pretender. Consequently the Catalan language, which had never ceased to be

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27 “la doma y castración de Galicia” (Jerónimo de Zurita).
the official language of Catalan speaking countries institutions, was replaced by Castilian language. It may have been some kind of a reaction against that imposition, as years later (1768), Charles III issued a new royal decree enforcing the use of Castilian as the only official language in public administration and school education.

It was not enough to humiliate those old European native languages by preventing them from improving their situation or by getting them back to the status of oral, familiar and rural languages. The next step would be to prevent their speakers from being monolingual. Just to give an example, let us see what happened in Scotland:

The highland clans, many of them remained Catholic, were regarded as disaffected in politics and religion, and their whole way of life, language included, as a threat to the stability of the state. The language was increasingly referred to as 'Irish' (...). This may have been an attempt to define Gaelic as an alien language (...). It is at this point that we find the Scottish state taking active measures against Scotland’s oldest language, and using education as one of its main instruments. An act of Privy Council of James VI (1616) concerning the establishment everywhere of the "trew religiou[n]” declares that “the vulgar Inglishe toung shall be universallie plantit, and the Irishe language, which is one of the cheif and principall causis of the continewance of barbaritie and incivilitie amongst the inhabitants of the Heylandis and Islandis, shall be abolisheit and removit". Since, the Act went on, there was no means so powerful as schools for this "princille porpois", a school should be established in every parish "where convenient means may be found for enterteyning a schoole."

From a majority point of view, ‘minority’ languages were associated with barbarity, incivility and even heresy.

In Protestant countries the main aim of basic education was twofold: teaching people to read the Bible and to learn the dominant language, the one into which the Bible had been conveniently translated. In protestant countries there were translations into German (Luther 1522), English (Tyndale 1523, Coverdale 1535 and ‘King James’ 1611), Danish (Vinter & Mikkelsen 1524, ‘Christian III’ 1550), Swedish (1526, ‘Gustav Vasa’ 1541), Dutch (van Liesveldt 1526), Swyzerdeutsch (1530), French (Olivetan 1535, Calvin 1546), Icelandic (Thorlaksson 1584), but there were no translations into Gaelic, Frisian, Norwegian, as these territories were under foreign rule. There was no Scots translation:

There was no Scots version (of the English Bible); there was no need, since the two languages were mutually comprehensible to a large extent, rather like the modern Scandinavian languages. But this began to reinforce the tendency, begun by the removal of the Court, to regard English as the language of power, authority and culture.

What makes an astonishing exception to the rule is the translation into Welsh by Bishop William Morgan (1588), which certainly helped to improve the status of Welsh as a written language.

In the Catholic countries there were versions into their dominant languages only to counteract a former Protestant translation, but there was no any interest at all to encourage people to read the Bible. In fact it was forbidden. Catholic ‘religious instruction’ was mostly based on sermons, very often in the mother tongue of the congregation, together with paintings, images and processions. This was ‘audio-visual’ teaching based on ‘baroque technologies’ as opposed to the literacy strategies of the Reformation.

28 Grant & Docherty, 1992, p 149.
29 Grant & Docherty, 1992, pp 153-154
Losing cultural diversity in Europe?

Language replacement and school

Public schools systems only started in the nineteenth century in most Western European countries. Only their dominant languages were compulsory as a subject and as the medium of instruction. Minority languages were forgotten or forbidden. Many minority languages speakers can tell stories about being punished or humiliated for speaking their mother tongue. New generations from minority backgrounds learned not only to speak, but also to write, the dominant language. Many parents decided not to pass their mother tongue on to their children, but rather the dominant language they themselves had learnt at school, being persuaded that this would offer better chances to their children. Compulsory education, conscription in the state army, and emigration from rural and peripheral homelands, also decreased the number of minority languages speakers.

Still alive!

In fact, what is really amazing is that minority languages like (more or less from North to South of Western Europe) Saami, Gaelic, Irish, Welsh, Breton, Frisian, Basque, Galician, Retoromanic, Occitan and Catalan, can still be alive. Until when?

The Enlightenment tolerated religious denominations other than the established one in most European countries. Minority languages did not benefit from the same tolerance. Citizens might adopt different religious denominations, but they must all speak the same language, the official language of the state. No wonder we ended up with the naive vision of those simple associations between states and languages: France – French, Spain – Spanish (it used to be called ‘Castilian’), England (meaning Britain or U.K.) – English, and so on. These dominant languages are exactly the official languages at the European Union level in our days. This means, in fact, that the European Union accepts the loss of cultural or, at least, linguistic diversity operated across the centuries by its member states.

It is true that the European Union funds the European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages, meaning all the European languages which do not have the status of being the only official language in any member state. Nevertheless it must be said that some mainly oral dialects of state official languages are placed just at the same level of the old languages which were replaced centuries ago.

It is also true that more recently a new category of languages, called Less Widely Taught Languages, has been created by the European institutions. These are all the official languages of member states, except English, German and French. The former are supposed to be less widely taught abroad, than the latter. It is clear, therefore, that some governments of European States are far more concerned with the teaching of their official language abroad, than with the survival of the other languages historically spoken in the territories presently under their rule, which sometimes can only be taught at primary and secondary school as optional subjects. 2001 is the European Year of Languages, but looking at the list of projects funded by the European Union, it has proved to be very difficult to find any ‘minority languages’ in it.

Nevertheless, in the last decades the awareness of the threat of extinction has helped the present speakers of languages subject to replacement to become more active in order to avoid being the last speakers of their own language. In some countries ‘minority languages’ are still only offered as optional subjects (France), but bilingual education and immersion programs, are a reality in other countries, especially those where some devolution started in the last quarter of the twentieth century: Spain (Basque Country, Catalonia, Galicia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands), in the United Kingdom (Wales, Scotland). Belgium is probably in advance having created new federal structures based on linguistic communities
(Flemish, French and German-speaking), each of those communities having its own Ministry of Education with full powers over its school system.

In Spain, since the restitution of a democratic parliament and the passing of a new constitution (1978), there is a language (according to the Spanish Constitution its name should be Castilian) being the official one at state level and other languages (Basque, Catalan, Galician) being co-official in their own territories. Castilian language is compulsory in all Spanish schools; Catalan, Basque or Galician are also compulsory in the schools of their respective territories. The experience of the last twenty years proves that the knowledge of these three languages has improved, especially when they are used as medium of instruction, but their social use has not, at least significantly. Learning a language at school does not mean necessarily its use in the local context. The present situation of Irish in Ireland is there to prove it.

The last big issue is emigration from other countries, both from inside and outside Europe. Which language do immigrants learn when they are faced with two co-official languages? The answer is very simple: the dominant one. What happens is that more foreign languages are heard down the street in our cities, but it becomes more and more difficult to hear the historical language of that place. It may be that some languages are spoken in more different places around the world, but some other languages are threatened with extinction in their own homelands, even in the European Union. Is it possible to recover democratically what was lost non-democratically?

CONCLUSION: A UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF LINGUISTIC RIGHTS

If the present situation in the European Union is mostly the consequence of non-democratic domination mechanisms having operated at the country level, what will happen when they operate at a global level? Is it naïve to ask for linguistic rights, for any kind of rights, in a world driven by market forces? Populations should have the right to keep their historical or pre-historical languages. Individuals should have the same right to stay monolingual in their linguistic community as well as many chances to become multilingual, in order both to protect and to be open to cultural diversity.

REFERENCES
