Language diversity and international communication

REINIER SALVERDA

Some reflections on why English is necessary but not enough

[On 11 May 2001, as part of the EU–Japan Friendship Week, and on the occasion of the European Year of Languages, a one-day symposium on 'The Future of Linguistic Diversity' was held at the Japan Foundation in Tokyo: see *ET*67, Jul 01. In his contribution to this symposium, Professor Reinier Salverda of University College London (as the representative of the Netherlands) discussed how it may be possible to work towards successful international communication in a world that is nonetheless marked by great diversity of language. The following adapted and extended version of his EYL presentation discusses both multilingualism today and the view that English, while necessary in global terms, is hardly enough.]

ONE OF the central issues of debate in the European Year of Languages was language diversity, and in particular the question what, if any, future such diversity has in today's globalised world. It is this question that I should like to discuss here, from the perspective of international contact and communication.

But first I would like to step back in history for a moment. Four hundred years ago, in the year 1600, the first Dutch ship ever to reach these parts, *De Liefde* ('Charity'), sailing under an English pilot, Will Adams, arrived in Japan. Since the Portuguese had arrived half a century before them, the language of contact between these Dutch and English sailors and the Japanese then was Portuguese. After the expulsion of the Portuguese in 1641, however, the only contact of Japan with the West for the next two centuries was through the Dutch trading post on the island of Deshima in the harbour of Nagasaki. During this *Sakoku* period (1641–1854) contact was mediated via the Dutch language, and there was in Japan a flourishing discipline of Dutch studies or *Rangaku*, which covered many subjects, such as medicine, science and technology, instruments, map making and printing, all of which came here via the Dutch language. In May 1709, Jonathan Swift's hero, Gulliver, who had studied medicine at Leyden University, is presented as visiting Japan, where he was introduced at the Imperial court, and conversed with the Emperor's translator in Dutch, "which he spoke perfectly well".

Today, however, the language of trade and contact is no longer Dutch, but English. Soon after the turning point of 1854, it was recognised in Japan that one had to look beyond the Dutch for the technical, scientific and economic modernisation of the nation. In 1863, a first group of nineteen Japanese students went abroad, to study at University College London (UCL), where I work today – men such as Hirobumi Ito (1841–1909), the first Prime Minister of Meiji Japan, and other champions of modernisation such as Arinori Mori, who at the time published a call for Japanese to be

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S0266078402003012

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078402003012 Published online by Cambridge University Press

replaced by English as the national language. There is at UCL a monument to these famous pioneers, which has as its central theme the harmony between nations and cultures. It is in this spirit of harmony that I should like to offer the following discussion of linguistic diversity and multilingualism in the world of today.

Before I come to that subject, however, I should like to dwell for a moment longer on the position of the three languages, Japanese, English and Dutch, relative to each other. Today, English is the world language of globalisation and modernisation; Japanese ranks as number 9 in the world; and Dutch, with 21 million speakers, is number 40 in the top hundred languages. The use of English as the language of contact brings great benefits. In English, I can read and enjoy Arthur Waley's beautiful translation of the *Genji Monogatari* by Lady Murasaki, the novels of Yasunari Kawabata and the films of Akira Kurozawa. In English, I can study the recent *Handbook of Japanese Linguistics* (1999) by professor Natsuko Tsujimura, and it is through English that I can come to a deeper understanding of Japanese cultural values, as Professor Anna Wierzbicka has demonstrated in her study of key Japanese words such as *amae* ('to induce and depend on kindness and benevolence in one's superiors'), *enryo* ('reserve, modesty, discretion, indirectness'), *wa* ('harmony, concord, consensus'), *on* ('kindness; debt of gratitude, reciprocal obligation'), *giri* ('justice, propriety, decency, courtesy'), *seishin* ('spiritualism, will, endurance') and *omoiyari* ('empathy, compassion, consideration').

But cultural contact between the Dutch and the Japanese is by no means restricted to what is available in English. In Japan today, for example, monographs are published on Dutch painters from Bosch and Breughel to Van Gogh and Vermeer; there are Dutch loanwords in Japanese such as *biiru* (<*bier*, 'beer'), *mesu* (<*mes*, 'knife'), *madorosu* (<*matroos*, 'sailor') and *otemba* (<*ontembaar*, 'indomitable young lady'), and there is the great Dutch–Japanese Dictionary of 1994; there are Japanese translations of Dutch literature, such as the children's books of *miffi-chan* by Dick Bruna and Rudy Kousbroek's critical essays on the former Dutch East Indies (present-day Indonesia); and the *Huis ten Bosch*-theme park near Nagasaki holds replicas of the Dutch Royal Palace and other historic Dutch buildings.

Conversely, in the Netherlands today one can find museum collections which testify to 400 years of cultural contact; in the Dutch language we find Japanese loanwords like *kimono*, *judo*, *haiku*, *harakiri* and *geisha*. We know how strongly the Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh was influenced by the japonism of the late 19th century, and today we can trace a similar sort of Japanese influence in the novel *Rituals* (1983) by the leading Dutch author Cees Nooteboom. And when, in June 2001, the new Japanese film *Merdeka* presented the decolonisation of Indonesia from a decidedly Japanese point of view, this attracted considerable interest amongst the Dutch.

The cultural contact situation we have here is triangular. In this triangle, English is necessary and immensely useful as a *lingua franca*. But there has always been, and still is, a lot of direct contact that is not mediated via English. So, beyond English, we will also need Dutch and Japanese; that is, we will need people who learn each others' languages, and who can act as mediators, translators, interpreters and commentators between the two nations. It is through such closer contact that the Dutch and the Japanese can make interesting discoveries about each other, e.g. that there exist, in the northern parts of the two countries, linguistic minorities – in Japan the Ainu in Hokkaido, and in the Netherlands the Frisians in *Fryslân* ('Friesland'). In this connection, I refer to the work of professor Hitoshi Kodama of Dokkyo University in Tokyo, who has published a Japanese grammar of Frisian and is now working on a Japanese–Frisian dictionary.

In this triangular situation, having only one language at our disposal would restrict the scope of our international communication, whereas having and using all three does in fact significantly enhance it. At this point, it is useful to distinguish between *globalisation* and *internationalisation*. Globalisation, as I see it, is crucially linked with the rise of English, whereas internationalisation accepts multilingualism and emphasises the importance of languages and translation. The relevance of this distinction is that, when we are discussing linguistic diversity, we do so in a world that is dominated by English – dominated, yes, but never exclusively so. Conversely, when we are discussing English, we do so in a world that is marked by an all-pervasive multilingualism.

In what follows I will now, first, say something about the value of multilingualism. Then I will discuss why I believe that, although English is necessary, it is not enough. Next, I will

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take a closer look at Europe and the various European positions in current debate about language diversity. Finally, I will consider how we can put the linguistic riches of Europe to work, in particular through foreign language learning and translation.

The value of multilingualism

The many languages in the world today – estimates vary from 4,000 through 6,000 and 7,323 to 10,000 – can be ordered, as the Amsterdam sociologist De Swaan has shown, in what he calls the "global language system", a system with a strongly hierarchical structure (De Swaan 2001). Of the total number of languages in the world, only 140 have one million or more speakers, and at the top end of the scale, just ten languages are spoken as their first or second language by some 3.7 billion people around the world: five European languages (English, Spanish, Russian, Portuguese and French) and five non-European languages (Chinese, Hindi, Bengali, Arabic and Japanese). These languages are widely used not only as the native tongues of very many speakers, and as the national languages of enormous states, but also as (sub)continental or regional *lingua francas* in large areas of the world: Russian throughout the ex-Soviet constellation, Arabic across North Africa and the Middle East, and Spanish in Latin America. These and other languages such as Malay, Swahili and German are all widespread and well-established, and therefore not likely to be replaced by English. At this level of the world language system, although there is a lot of linguistic rivalry and competition, multilingualism is simply a fact of life. It is not under threat, and will continue to exist.

We face a very different situation, however, when we look at the many linguistic minorities at the bottom end of the world language system. At this level, as we must acknowledge at the outset, multilingualism is an extremely variable phenomenon, where a host of difficult social, geographical, economic, legal, historical, educational, psychological, political, religious and ideological factors may play a role. This makes it very hard to generalise about different cases (Edwards 1994:9), and sometimes it does not "make sense to group all these very various kinds of minority together" (Thomas 2001:47). Nevertheless, we can observe that, in most states around the world, multilingualism is a living reality: Indonesia has 694 languages, India 337, Australia 226, the USA 165, China 186, Brazil 150 and Russia 90 (cf. the Endangered Language Repository website). These data clearly illustrate the great linguistic complexity of the world. In fact, as David Dalby put it, "multilingualism is a normal and healthy part of the way human society is organized", adding "Monolingualism is a disadvantage like illiteracy.… Bilingualism should be regarded as an educational norm" (*The Guardian* 22 July 1997, cf. Dalby 1999).

But the problem is that bi- and multilingualism are often seen as an obstacle. In the majority of states, unifying tendencies tend to reduce linguistic diversity and foster attitudes opposed to cultural diversity and linguistic pluralism. Today, this trend is reinforced by the rise of the worldwide economy and information market, and by market forces that generate increasing economic, social, cultural and linguistic inequality. And, as a consequence, there is a growing threat of language death. According to Nettle and Romaine's book Vanishing Voices (2000), ninety percent of the world's 6,000 languages face extinction in the course of the 21st century. The clearest measure of this language endangerment crisis is that at the moment some 20–50% of the world's languages are no longer learnt or used by children. For example, out of the 136 indigenous languages of Europe only 40 are not endangered – but of the other 96, 13 are already extinct, 9 are nearly extinct (i.e. a maximum of ten speakers), 26 seriously endangered (a sizeable number of speakers, but exclusively elderly), 38 endangered (a large number of adult speakers, but a decreasing number of child speakers), and 10 potentially endangered (a large number of adult and child speakers, but no official status) (cf. the *UNESCO Redbook for Europe* 1993).

When we notice this ongoing loss of linguistic diversity in the world, we may well ask ourselves the key question: What is the value of maintaining language diversity in the future? My answer starts from a counter-question: "Why should we take the diversity of human cultures less seriously than the diversity of animal or plant species?" (Maalouf 2000:107). Over the past ten years, this issue has been put on the agenda by linguists (cf. Robins & Uhlenbeck 1991), and what is needed now is a concerted UNESCO effort, with the support of all rich nations, to invest in ethnolinguistic

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research, in order to record and describe those vanishing languages. A good model for such research is provided by the programme 'The Study of Minority Languages and Cultures in Japan, Europe and Russia', a cooperative project of linguists from the Netherlands and Japan: Dr Tjeerd de Graaf of Groningen University and Professor Hiroshi Nakagawa of Chiba University. In September 2000, they led a joint ethnolinguistic expedition to the island of Sakhalin, to study the Nivkh language and its relation to the Ainu language in Hokkaido. I note in passing that their cooperation – as in the field of Asian Studies more generally – was facilitated by the use of English as the common language of contact and scholarship.

But, urgent and important as it may be, ethnolinguistic research on its own is not enough. At the very least, we need what the Declaration of Oegstgeest (2000) calls "a non-exclusive acknowledgement of the existence of all these languages as sources of linguistic diversity and cultural enrichment" (Extra & Gorter 2001:447), which would provide a good starting point for an international campaign for linguistic human rights (cf. Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). Beyond this, there will have to be a concerted programme of social action along the lines of Fishman's path-breaking *Reversing Language Shift* (1991). For, as we can see in the cases of Welsh, Basque and Hebrew, language death is not inevitable, and very often, as for example with the Ainu Special Law of 1997 in Japan, something positive can be done for the sociocultural well-being of a particular language community.

English: necessary but not enough

Moving now from the bottom to the pinnacle of the world language system, we find that it is English that allows "an Arab and a Chinese, a Russian and a Spaniard, or a Japanese and a German" to communicate with each other (De Swaan 2001:6). Over the last quarter century, English has become the internationally acknowledged *lingua franca,* in a linguistic revolution linked with the rise of the United States to superpower predominance. English today is the language of world politics, international trade and finance, of the internet, global communications, infotainment and the media, of the world's tourist, sports and leisure industry, and of the international scientific community – more than half the world's science journals are in English today. English is therefore seen by an ever-growing number of people as the essential medium for putting their message across internationally. It is also the most commonly taught foreign language all over the world; and this English-language business is worth an estimated $7.8 billion a year, more than three times the comparable figure for German, and almost four times that for Spanish (McCrum 2001).

An estimated two billion people, about a third of the world's population, know some form of English today, and it is predicted that by 2050 half of the world's population will be competent in English. It is this phenomenal rise of English that now influences everything in the field of languages. This holds in particular for the European Union (EU), where English is now the lingua franca and dominates the "de facto language hierarchy in Brussels and Strasbourg" (Phillipson 2001). Already, English is no longer a foreign language in several member states (McArthur 1998). 41% of the EU population can speak English after their mother tongue, and 75% of EU school children are now learning English in school (McCrum 2001). A recent Eurobarometer put the statement "Everyone should speak English" to the public in the various member states of the EU: 62% of the Irish and 70% of the British agreed, but so did 66% of the French, 76% of the Italians and 82% of the Dutch.

In this way, "English will become the language for international communication in almost all domains and all regions of Europe" (De Swaan 1995:10). And the outcome of this sociolinguistic process will be that "Within each member-country of the EC, diglossia will prevail: English will serve the needs of international communication and will be used in the domains of science, high technology, transnational commerce and industry, long-distance transport, and mass entertainment. In all other domains the national languages will prevail and English will not easily make inroads there." (De Swaan 1995). The same political logic informs the proposal of the British Member of the European Parliament, Charles Tannuck: "If we want a really successful single market, all road signs, every piece of official information should be in English as well as in the national language." And: "If you believe in a strong European identity, English is vital." For it is English that enables people from many very different backgrounds to come together,

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discuss and perhaps agree a common framework of European rights, principles and policies.

However, for all the importance, the growing dominance and great usefulness of English in the world of today, there are also a number of reasons why English is not enough. The first domain I will consider here is that of the internet, in particular the question: What will be the effect of the internet and global communications on the world's languages?

Ten years ago, who could have foreseen the impact the internet is having? It has led to the worldwide dissemination of information at the click of a mouse, and the creation of a virtual world that seems to have done away with differences of time and place. The internet is "like a huge arena, open on all sides, in which a thousand jousts and combats are taking place at the same time, making an indescribable and shattering din" – and "... the new means of communication offer very many of our contemporaries, people in every country, custodians of every cultural tradition, the opportunity to take part in the forging of a culture that will soon be common to us all." (Maalouf 2000:104).

Over the past ten years, English has been the medium of this development, and the internet has given a very strong boost to the English language, as the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, acknowledged when he stated: "We have the language of the e-economy". But one of the countries that has benefitted most from this is India, which has mounted a strong economic challenge to the so-called first world. Officially, India is multilingual, and last year's national census was conducted in 18 different languages (*The Observer*, 8 April 2001). But in reality there are strong pressures towards English, and as Professor Shreesh Chaudhary has reported, there are today 300 English-speaking universities in India. This investment is paying off, as there is an endless supply of highly qualified, English speaking IT-workers in India, who can do the same jobs as people in the first world – but a lot cheaper. In this respect, it would seem that India is well positioned for mass production in the knowledge industry and economy that is emerging with the internet.

But as the internet develops further, its language will not necessarily remain English only. Today, more than 70 per cent of internet content is in English; but actually, the English language is in decline on the internet. There is a strong rise in the number of other languages, with some 60 languages now in regular use, and there are surging non-English markets that are being ignored (*UK Newsletter of the European Year of Languages* No. 3, Oct 2000, p. 6). Currently half the population of the internet is American, but more than 80% of the world's population are not native English speakers, and by 2004 Americans will only be a third of the web population. India, China and other countries with massive populations have been slow to come on to the internet, but usage is growing steadily. This raises significant issues of language rivalry – for example, with Chinese, which some believe will become the dominant language on the web by 2005, but also with other languages such as Japanese, Spanish, Russian and Arabic (*The Guardian*, 29 Jun 2000).

At the same time, this development makes it possible to ask whether the internet and e-mail are perhaps not so very different from other technologies such as the telephone – where one doesn't need to speak English in order to use it. Be that as it may, the fact is that a lot of the information on the internet is now in languages that we may not know. There can be very good reasons for this. For example, the Dutch Foreign Office website offers information about euthanasia in nine different languages: Dutch and English, plus German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Russian and Polish. Such customer-friendly multilingualism is especially important when one wants to get one's message across in a sensitive case like this, where matters of value and culture are concerned.

More and more information, in more and more languages, is appearing on the net – and by no means all of it comes with a language switch. The economic momentum of this development is significant. There is work here in translation, language management, learning and teaching foreign languages. But in the United Kingdom there is also the warning of the Nuffield Inquiry: "The UK workforce suffers from a chronic shortage of people at all levels with useable language skills. Companies increasingly need personnel with technical or professional skills plus another language, and often their only option is to recruit native speakers of other languages" (*The Independent*, 6 March 2001).

Just as internet multilingualism is on the increase, so also is the level of technological sophistication with which the problems this

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can bring along are tackled, among others by the (now defunct) Flemish machine translation and speech technology company Lernaut & Hauspie, which stated in 2000: "Our first priority is really delivering three languages – Japanese, Korean and Mandarin Chinese – with Tamil, Hindi, Malay and Thai to follow" (*Community Languages Bulletin* No. 7, Autumn 2000: 2).

This interesting development is turning the internet into an enormous language laboratory. The internet today is a great linguistic resource, with databases and websites on and in many languages. There are a growing number of websites for learning languages such as Turkish, Swahili, Latvian, Finnish, Swedish, and Dutch. The <.yourdictionary.com> website has 1500 online dictionaries, not just for the top ten languages (English, Spanish, French, German, Japanese, Chinese, Hindi, Arabic, Russian and Thai), but also for a staggering further 230 languages (from Afrikaans and Aklanon to Yiddish and Zoque). On the web, according to David Crystal's latest book, *Language and the Internet* (2001), about a quarter of the world's languages – 1,500 in all – have some form of presence today. In addition, many search engines are beginning to offer multilingual help. Altavista promises a search engine in Chinese, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish. It also offers machine translations back and forth between English and at least 8 other languages: French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese.

My answer to the first question is therefore: the future of the internet will be multilingual. And the future has already started.

This brings me immediately to the next question: What does the knowledge-based society mean for language diversity? Knowledge and the production of knowledge are essential for a knowledge-based society. And here I would say: so much knowledge has been and continues to be accumulated, in so many different languages, that we simply cannot afford to let it all go to waste. The way forward is to invest in IT for languages, in automatic translation, interactive and distance learning, and more sophisticated web-dictionaries and language technologies. The EU and within it the Low Countries are well placed for this, as the Dutch Language Union, the Dutch National Science Organisation and Dutch industry are investing in the development of Dutch speech technology.

From here, it is only a small step to the realisation of the ultimate dream of language technology. Is it really science fiction to ask: If we build on what is already available in multilingual speech and translation technology, how long will it be before we can construct an intelligent robot or cyborg with a multilingual chip in its brain? How long before such a chip can handle all the languages of the world and thus facilitate the flow of information on the internet? And how long before we can implant such a language chip into human brains in order to improve their limited linguistic abilities, especially perhaps those of English speakers and other monolinguals?

So my answer to this second question is: If the knowledge society is wise, it will invest heavily in the study of language and languages, in order to contribute to making the knowledge contained in all the languages of the world transparent. But if it is unwise, it will believe, erroneously, that having one language and eliminating all others is the only way to achieve such transparency.

A closer look at the situation in Europe

The many languages discussed in Glanville Price's *Encyclopedia of the languages of Europe* (1998) reflect the history of the continent. For European multilingualism is not a new thing. As Gibbon tells us, Timisoara was a linguistic flashpoint under the Roman Empire just as much as it is in Rumania today. From Charlemagne to Charles V, the emperors of Europe have recognised the need for a multilingual language policy. And in the twentieth century, linguists like Antoine Meillet in 1918 after the First World War and Stanley Rundle in 1946 after the Second have demonstrated how crucial the matter of language is to Europe. Europe has always been multilingual, and it would be simplistic to believe that the EU could now suddenly make *tabula rasa* here and instigate one single language for the Union as a whole. This point was emphasised during the European Year of Languages 2001, which was celebrated in 45 countries and considerably raised awareness of the continent's rich diversity of languages.

Of the large number of languages in Europe, the EU has recognised eleven as its official

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languages, and uses two of these – English and French – as its working languages. Of all EU texts, 45% are drafted in English today, and no more than 30% in French. And English is now the *lingua franca* of the continent. At the same time, the EU is proclaiming a commitment to diversity, and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (1998) has given recognition to some 40 'lesser used languages' – although, as Helena Drysdale recounts in her recent travel book, *Mother Tongues* (2001), quite a few of these linguistic minorities are now seriously at risk. Beyond this, there are the many recent immigrant languages, which however have no official status or rights in the EU (cf. Extra & Gorter 2001).

An important new development is that the Declaration of Nice in December 2000 has given essential guarantees for languages in two articles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights: discrimination in matters of language is forbidden (Article 21), and 'The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity' (Article 22). It will be interesting to see what European jurisprudence will develop here over the coming years. When cases of language discrimination are heard by EU judges, how much force will minority language legislation turn out to have (cf. Dunbar 2001)? Will sentences passed with regard, say, to Hungarian in Rumania or Basque in Spain be directly applicable to the situation of Frisian in the Netherlands? What will happen when the national language legislation of Belgium is challenged by companies which see it as an impediment to international free trade? And what force will the basic rights formulated in Nice have against established principles of EU law? At the same time, the Declaration of Nice does open up an interesting space for the development of effective, fair and democratic linguistic policies for the Europe of citizens, that can help to counter the ongoing unequal competition between languages. Again, it will be interesting to watch what comes out of this.

The complexity of these various arrangements demonstrates that in Europe language is a "sensitive political issue" (Phillipson 2001), a fact well captured by the magic formula 'Unity in Diversity'. It is interesting to see that the Netherlands are a typical example of this European formula: the Dutch are staunch Europeans, but also proud to be different from all the other Europeans.

They have their own national language, Dutch, which is also one of the official languages of neighbouring Belgium, and of the EU. Dutch is not a small language – with 21 million speakers it ranks sixth in Europe. But quite unlike the situation in France, where the French language has been enshrined in the constitution as a symbol of national identity, Dutch has no constitutional status in the Netherlands. But it is the official language of education, law and administration, and is the common language of the media and politics. The language enjoys the effective support of the joint Dutch-Flemish Language Union, which is preparing effective and attractive language policies aimed at investing both in Dutch language technology and in high-quality teaching of Dutch as a second language for the many recent immigrants, who speak an estimated one hundred languages. In addition to Dutch, five indigenous minority languages, including Frisian, have now been officially recognised in the Netherlands. This situation is totally unlike that of, for example, Greece, which despite the presence of speakers of Arvanitika/Albanian, Vlach (Aroumanian), Slav/Macedonian, Tcham, Turkish, Pomak, Roma and Armenian recognises no linguistic minorities, and is openly hostile to the European Charter of Minority and Regional Languages (Baltsiotis & Embiricos 2001).

At the same time, English today is no longer a foreign language in the Low Countries (cf. McArthur 1998). But – again, unlike the French – the Dutch have not adopted purification laws to counter the advance of English. On the other hand, the strong trend towards English in the Netherlands goes hand in hand with a worrying decline in foreign-language learning, especially of German and French, even though these are the languages of the nearest and most important neighbours of the Dutch in Europe. And where the French put up a strong and principled fight for the *exception culturelle* in world trade negotiations, recent plans to switch the Dutch higher education system into English within the next ten years have not caused much public debate, as everybody seems to accept this – like the Italians – as an economic imperative.

The case for English as the single language of the EU has recently been made by a leading Dutch linguist, Van Els. And the Dutch Language Union has now also decided not to fight for Dutch, but to adopt the much weaker position of *laissez-faire*, a policy of not having a policy. This is in line with a very Dutch perspective on

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the logic of European progress – first monetary union and one single currency; then working towards one single law and constitution; and after that a linguistic unification, possibly by 2006, when the EU celebrates its 50th anniversary. But this ignores the fact that many of the other European countries will not agree. France will not accept English as the only official EU language, and it has strong European arguments for its position. Likewise, Germany, Spain and Italy are lobbying for a stronger position for their respective national languages. In this poker game it is quite possible that the European Convention under Valéry Giscard d'Estaing will recommend that the magic formula of Unity in Diversity be maintained in matters of language policy. But it could equally recommend that the EU adopt a restricted five-language regime like that of the European Patent Office, where only English, French, German, Spanish and Italian have official status. In such a two-speed Europe, the net result would then be a considerable demotion of the Dutch language, at a time when it is already going to be replaced by Polish as No. 6 in the EU language hierarchy.

As we see, different European nation states have different ways of looking at and handling the language issues mentioned above. In this situation, it is understandable that the EU hangs on to its formula of Unity in Diversity. And so, for the foreseeable future, the EU is likely to remain multilingual, at least officially. In my own view, this makes a crucial contribution to the well-being of the increasingly multicultural European society we live in today. For it would seem that although very many people – and especially policy makers – may dream of one single universal language, in actual reality nobody wants just one and only one language for the whole continent, just as people would never be satisfied with just one make of car or only one form of dress. Diversity after all is the spice of life.

Making it work for Europe: teaching and learning foreign languages

My point so far has been that English is a dominant, pervasive and growing presence in the world today. It is necessary, useful and beneficial – but it is not enough. This holds for Europe too, for "whatever the future of Europe, whatever form the Union adopts and whatever countries are included among its members, one question presents itself now and will still present itself to future generations: how are all the scores of human languages to be managed?" (Maalouf 2000:115).

Again and again, the problem seems to be how to find workable models of handling the realities of multilingualism, both inside and between states. Here, the Paris-based, French-Lebanese novelist Amin Maalouf has made an important suggestion. In his prize-winning essay *On Identity* (2000), he proposes a three-pronged language strategy for Europe: first, "to preserve the language of one's own identity, and never let it be so neglected that those who speak it have to turn elsewhere for access to what is offered them by the civilization of today"; second, "to make the teaching of English as a third language a matter of course everywhere, and without repining, but explaining to the younger generation that while it is necessary it is not sufficient"; and third, "to encourage linguistic diversity so that there are many people in every country familiar not only with Spanish, French, Portuguese, German but also with Arabic, Chinese, Japanese and a hundred other languages that are more rarely studied."

If we adopt this strategy, then the practical question is: How to make it work? How can we stimulate the learning of languages? How can we achieve successful and effective mass learning of foreign languages across the continent?

A good start was made in the European Year of Languages, with its key message that we should foster respect for language diversity and stimulate the learning and teaching of languages. Building on this, I believe we should develop a Europe-wide strategy and action plan which aims to improve resources, research and training in the field of language learning. We should invest in speech technology and in a European Virtual Department of Languages, to ensure that high-quality internet resources and learning facilities will be available for all the many languages used in Europe. We will also need to develop policies and models for best practice across the continent, promoting customer-friendly multilingualism wherever possible. And we need European criteria and standards for language qualifications, at all levels of educational attainment. To support all this, we should develop a proper infrastructure, with adequate rewards for language qualifications and for the many new language jobs that are emerging. And the most basic requirement here is that we need far better data and information than we have at present.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078402003012 Published online by Cambridge University Press

But the key focus of our European Language Strategy should be on developing and disseminating the basic skills involved in successful and effective foreign-language learning. There are no miracle cures in this field, and so we must look at what works, and investigate how we can improve language- learning techniques. In my view, many obstacles to effective foreign language learning can already be overcome by looking at the success of TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and what it has done for English. Many languages would benefit immediately from adapting the effective teaching and learning practices and resources developed in the field of TEFL, from its practical and attractive learning materials, which are often taken from contemporary popular culture, and from its communicative approach to language learning. Making it fun and sexy will encourage foreign language learning. So will starting at an early age. In this way (and this is essential), the European citizens of the future can grow up learning how to communicate with their fellow Europeans, when these do not speak the same language.

At the beginning of this discussion, I referred to the Japan Monument at UCL in London and its spirit of harmony between nations and cultures. In closing, I quote a *haiku* inscription on this same monument, which embodies harmony as the resolution of conflict and the unity to which diversity contributes:

Harubaru to kokoro tsudoite hana sakaru	When distant minds come together cherries blossom. ■

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