

**THE SITUATION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS OF
MULTILINGUAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION SOURCES**

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1 Background

As the global population moves through 6 billion towards 7 billion - and is expected to increase more rapidly than in the past - the earth is becoming increasingly crowded, placing unprecedented demand on resources. In many poorer countries, population growth is the norm. In other countries, zero population growth is the target. In other countries, such as China, population decrease is driven by state policy.

As the global population increases - unless the world suffers some cataclysm - galaxial, geological, medical or man-made - this emphasises the need for communication, equity, access and peace. Languages have a key role to play in this process of harmonisation and promotion of cultural diversity.

On a globe experiencing increased birth rates, advancing age expectancy, poverty and famine on unheralded scales and disease aggravated by co-existential proximity, customs and lack of education, advances in medicine and science were unable to prevent 16.3 million dying from AIDS to the end of 1999 (J Bartheolet 2000:13).

Education, communication and languages have never been more important, despite the explosion of knowledge in science, medicine and technology.

2 Context

In this presentation, I would like to offer some ideas on meeting the challenge of global multilingualism in an age of technological evolution, with specific reference to linguistic diversity through and in the use of electronic networks. The ideas presented must be in the context of the global situation given briefly above, and will relate to the priorities of FIPLV, the Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes.

Firstly, however, I would like to further define the context in which we act to retain and promote linguistic diversity in the access and use of humanity's most recent challenge: technology, which is evolving at an exponential rate . . . and not only for those who can use it. In so doing, I intend to identify programs and projects, providing details of some initiatives which could serve as examples. These, obviously, are merely a starting point.

2.1 Linguistic Diversity

The globe is a linguistically rich and complex home for over 6 billion inhabitants. It may not be as linguistically rich as it was in the past. There were around 6000 languages in 2000 (Crystal 2000:11). Others place the figure as low as 3000 or as high as 10000. The discrepancy may appear extreme, but debate continues on the integrity of languages and the demarcation between language, pidgin, Creole and dialect, among other factors.

With 6000 languages across the globe, we should be happy but, as a linguist, I am not.

2.2 The 'Big' Languages

Holding firm to the adage that there is strength in numbers, the continuity and potential growth of several languages appear assured.

David Graddol, in a project commissioned by the British Council, makes some salient predictions about future growth - while acknowledging fully the dangers of crystal-ball gazing. He identifies English and French as the major world languages in 1997 (Graddol 1997a:13). He goes on to foreshadow future trends, somewhat tentatively to 2050. His assessment of the dominance of world languages in 2050 reveals the following as the 'big languages': Chinese, Hindi/Urdu, English, Spanish and Arabic (Graddol 1997a:59).

2.3 English as the International *Lingua Franca*

Arguably, the biggest current threat to linguistic wealth globally is English, but it is not alone. In the centuries of European colonialism, England fared as well as any other. In the last 50 years, it is the Stars and Stripes rather than the Union Jack, that has led to English emerging from the pack to take it to the forefront of languages spoken, taught and learned across the globe. While the initial inroads historically were military, the emergence of English as the global language in the second half of the twentieth century has been underpinned by more than military might. Other critical factors include: prosperity, commerce, industry, technology, media, (electronic) communication, the Internet, the arts, cinema and popular music - and a seemingly unbridled desire to associate with whatever is American. And with this widespread trend comes the wish to espouse English.

The current, undeniable status of English poses a challenge to us. While we may have mixed feelings about the international perception that English is the current *lingua franca* and will increase as such (Graddol 1997a: 58), one can predict a consolidation of English as the first choice as the second language - and the reinforcement of the view, where it is a first language, that learning another is less important. There is a risk in English-speaking countries that literacy (in English) could become the sole focus, supported politically and financially, ignoring the benefits of bilingualism, the strength of multiculturalism and the wealth of multilingualism. The further danger is the reinforcement of the view that English is spoken by all, with the resultant demotivation of students learning a language other than English and a regrettable return to monolingualism which marginalises and devalues the learning and speaking of other languages.

In some countries, the value of languages and the belief in multilingualism are integral to the ethos of the nation. This is less evident in some Anglophone countries where the promotion of linguistic diversity has been countered by retorts like "why should I learn another language (in Australia) as I'm never going to travel anywhere else?" and "the whole world speaks English!" We know, however, that everyone does not speak English. Crystal places the figure at one quarter (Crystal 1999).

Furthermore, the place of English internationally is attracting discussion of a different nature: a backlash. While Graddol (1997a: 39) argues that it is rarely the direct cause for the disappearance of other languages, it could be seen otherwise. The concomitant perception of contributing to the "destruction of cultural diversity (...) could encourage anti-English movements worldwide (to) begin to associate language loss with the rise of global English" (Graddol 1997a:39; Watson 1998). This is already occurring (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas 1999:32; *GEN-Global English Newsletter* 5 1999:4, 10-11).

While there is considerable evidence to support the antithetical view, Graddol concludes that "it is no longer appropriate to assume the English language has an unassailable place, guiding a technology-driven world to a better, richer future" (Graddol 1997b:17). Put another way, "*The Future of English?* sounds the death-knell of large monolingual communities. Bilingualism will increasingly be the norm . . ." (Harmer 1998:23).

2.4 The 'Small' Languages

The above focuses primarily on the major global languages, but let us recall Crystal's telling comparison: 96 percent of the world's population speak 4 percent of the world's languages. Put another way, 4 percent speak 96 percent of the world's languages (Crystal 2000:14). What of these others, which constitute the multitude of tongues used by an inordinately small number of speakers?

Their future is less assured.

2.5 Language Death

While the acts of imperialistic nations have had a detrimental effect on languages historically - in all areas of the globe - a decided threat to indigenous languages everywhere has been the dominance of the linguistic preference of the conqueror. This has often been underwritten by policy designed to marginalise or eradicate the languages of minority groups. In some cases, genocide has been the order of the day, but government policy to ban the education and usage of minority languages has also been effective.

Historically, we have seen the decimation of nations, of tribes, of languages in the wake of colonialism. Estimates suggest that in the New World there were 100 million inhabitants before European contact, but only 1 million 200 years later (Crystal 2000:72), many of these dying from imported diseases. How many languages were lost in the process? We will never know!

At the time of British colonisation of Australia in 1788, it is estimated that around 600 languages were spoken by some 500,000 Aborigines on the continent and in Tasmania. Through acts of genocide (eg Tasmania), disease, redeployment to less desirable areas and other factors, in 200 years the number of languages has at least halved, and is more reliably estimated to be around 250 (Crystal 1997:326) at the end of the twentieth century.

For another example, we turn to New Guinea, the most linguistically rich land mass remaining on the globe, hosting up to one fifth of the world's languages. A critical reason for this is that much of the country, very mountainous, remains untouched by modern civilisation. This complexity is unparalleled elsewhere; another mountain, another valley, another tribe, another language ...

Indeed, when contacted for information on languages in Papua New Guinea for a current UNESCO Project, Dunc Pfantz, the Director of Language Affairs for the Papua New Guinea Branch of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), replied:

"There are around 860 languages in Papua New Guinea. Between 400 to 600 of these languages have no sociolinguistic data collected from them. The approximately 100 reports that SIL has done are mostly in-house papers not intended for general distribution. Each report took a team of about three people three weeks to collect and compile the data and write the paper. Many of these reports required a helicopter or many hours of hiking in mountainous jungles" (Pfantz 1999:1).

The contrast between the geographically close countries of Australia and New Guinea provides two very different perspectives on language retention. In Australia, language

reclamation and retrieval has been on the agenda for the last twenty years - perhaps 180 years too late - while in New Guinea, many languages, still undocumented, have remained secure as outside forces have not been encountered.

There is a moral here: one of the best ways to ensure language retention is to deny contact with invasive factors, where this is possible. This was not the case, however, when a tsunami swamped four villages on the north coast of New Guinea in July 1998, effectively destroying the villages and probably leading to the demise of the languages spoken there.

And here is the paradox: many of these languages remain unrecorded, as the speakers remain secure . . . but isolated, having little or no access to the technology to use the electronic networks under discussion.

While the genocide witnessed previously - and the resultant eradication of hundreds of languages - came about through acts of colonialism, the current threat to linguistic diversity arises from other factors. But the net result, linguistically, will be the same. Between 50% (Crystal 2000:165) and 90% (Crystal 2000:18) of the globe's 6000 languages could disappear during the next century.

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

3 Action

It is patent that immediate action is required at the humanitarian level and this will have ramifications for the field of technology.

We can't promote our ideals enough nor underestimate the need to publicise our goals at all levels, on all fronts. We need to lobby politicians, reach decision-makers, impact on those responsible for developing policy. To promote languages, to retain a firm commitment to multilingualism, to enable those in lesser developed countries to access adequate education and use of technology, we must use any legitimate means to promote our cause: personal, professional, political, input to policy drafts, publications and on the Web.

I would like to focus on some key areas of operation and include a consideration of technology in these contexts, before turning to the priority of this presentation. These include: policy and programs; education policy and practice; teacher training and professional development; language databases, retention and reclamation.

4 Policy and Programs

4.1 Policy

The most effective means of retaining the existing linguistic wealth globally is to have linguistic diversity, the promotion, teaching and learning of languages, enshrined in government policy and law where there is a priority commitment made to fund the education and support for languages in the wider community.

The above is an ambitious requirement, especially given the regrettably low number of languages policies in place across the globe - and in the paucity of resources allocated. We are heartened to see the notion of language policy being given serious attention in some countries (Cunningham 1999d; Extra 1999; Lambert 1994; Lo Bianco 1999, 2000), and in the European Union.

A recent, ambitious attempt to impact on government policy on behalf of languages was the *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights* (UDLR) (<http://www.troc.es/dudl>).

We must be cautious, however, as we argue the case for diversity in the languages taught and learned as the means to effective communication and harmonious co-existence. Speaking the same language does not, in itself, guarantee understanding and peace. Witness the decades of conflict in Northern Ireland, revolutions in a number of countries and civil wars in Vietnam, Cambodia and in English-speaking nations in recent centuries. Unity of purpose, respect for others and fair government practice, usually democratic, also need to be present.

Another trap in the desire for effective communication is the belief that, if we all speak the same language, we can achieve this. This conclusion supports the notion of an international *lingua franca*, but denies the nature of the human race. Research has taught us that we have a greater appreciation of the differences of others, if we learn their languages and view the world from their perspective. History has also taught us that usage of only a dominant language could place others in the uncomfortable position of feeling inferior, aggravating negative emotions and discouraging trust and friendship.

4.2 Programs

FIPLV is also involved in another excellent project initiated by the Council of Europe, that of the European Year of Languages - 2001 (EYL-2001). The major aims of this project, which have obvious global relevance, are:

- to increase awareness and appreciation among young people and adults, including parents, policy deciders and those responsible for language teaching, of the richness of Europe's linguistic heritage
- to celebrate linguistic diversity and to promote it by motivating European citizens to develop plurilingualism, that is, to diversify their learning of languages including less widely used and taught languages, whilst also protecting and encouraging multilingualism in European societies
- to encourage language learning on a lifelong basis, not only by creating an awareness of its necessity, but also by providing sufficient information concerning ways and possibilities of learning, depending on regional and national situations and possibilities (Herold 1999:1)

There is already talk of similar activities being organised in other areas of the globe, based on the EYL-2001 model.

5 Education

The budget allocation for language teaching in public education - at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels - should be adequate to employ a sufficient number of excellent teachers to enable all students to access quality language programs. At the same time, we are witnessing an increasing number of educational options available online, especially at the tertiary level.

5.1 Education Policy

As a counterpoint to the above attempts to develop national and supranational policies and underwrite linguistic rights at the international level, I would like to provide an example of retrograde action, or apathy.

In Australia, there was no extant language policy in place before 1987. *A National Language Policy* (1984) followed and generated intense submission-writing, and lobbying as groups sought a high profile in language recommendations of the forthcoming policy. Over the

following decade, we witnessed policies - or accords which drove policy because of funds attached - which identified varying numbers of languages for especial or priority focus:

1987 - *National Policy on Languages* (9 languages: Mandarin Chinese, Indonesian/Malay, Japanese, French, German, Italian, Modern Greek, Arabic and Spanish)

1991 - *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy* (8 of 16 languages to be chosen: Aboriginal languages, Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Modern Greek, Russian, Spanish, Thai and Vietnamese)

1994 - *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future* (4 languages: Japanese, Chinese (Mandarin), Indonesian and Korean)

While funding has continued federally for languages, the last five years have seen a concerted move to focus on literacy - in English, of course. This has been articulated in *The National Literacy Policy for Australia* (1997), the current political doctrine which emphasises literacy in English ... and marginalises other languages. As such, it represents a relative vacuum in formal policy on languages (other than English) at the national level. From having the best languages policy across the globe in 1987, a decade later Australia has none. We need to fight such trends.

5.2 Education Practice

The most important element in teaching languages is the student. While I have said that the most effective means of getting students in language classes is government policy which underwrites and resources language study, the most effective means of keeping students in classes is the personal challenge of the teacher.

Quality of teaching, linguistic proficiency, empathy and compassion are essential ingredients of successful language teaching. What is taught and how it is taught are also critical to the cause. The rationale must be informed and flexible, the curriculum must be relevant and motivating, assessment must be meaningful and transparent, reporting must be informative and forward-looking, while teaching strategies need to invoke elements pertinent to modern media, technological developments (where possible) and capitalise upon areas of interest and evolving (preferred) learning styles of students.

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

One educational model to epitomise the objectives dear to us, which I would like to share with you, is a school in Australia. Established in 1935, the Victorian School of Languages (VSL) (<http://www.vsl.vic.edu.au>) teaches languages in an out of hours context to those students who cannot access their language of choice in the mainstream school.

Over the following 65 years, the VSL evolved and grew to the extent that now 40 languages are taught - excluding English - to 13000 students in 650 classes across 30 metropolitan and rural centres. Six of these languages, plus Latin, are taught to another 1300 students via distance mode throughout the State of Victoria. The students are generally of school age, but there are some adults enrolled. In 2000, the languages taught were:

Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Bengali, Bosnian, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Dari, Dutch, Filipino, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian,

Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Latvian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Maltese, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Pushtu, Russian, Serbian, Sinhala, Slovenian, Spanish, Tamil, Turkish, Ukrainian, Vietnamese (and Latin by distance mode).

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

Let us not forget that our young people are way ahead of most of us in computer skills and technological literacy and we need to tap into this technological know-how. An instance of cutting-edge practice, is the use of Powerpoint by primary students in Australia to deliver the traditional “show and tell”.

6 The Teaching Profession

I am the average age of not only language teachers but all teachers in Australia. At 49, the tragedy of this is not that I have aged, but that I am too old to be the average age of teachers. This situation is reflected elsewhere. What we need is the youth - and the enthusiasm, refreshing ideas and new attitudes to current theory and practice in language teaching - coming into the profession to counterbalance the experience and expertise of those nearing the end of their careers. We need the balance, the blend, the beauty of what the combination can provide for our students.

In some countries, this is not happening for languages. While those of us of my age will soon be gone - retired or resigned, promoted or packaged, or dead! - secondary graduates are not being attracted in sufficient number to tertiary pathways which include languages, nor tertiary graduation to enter language teaching. Student attrition rates in courses for languages other than English are cause for concern.

We are aware of many of the causes of the shortage - the decreasing attractiveness of the languages profession, significant attrition rates in language teachers, inadequate salaries, lack of policy and government support, increased demand, contracts, etc - as teacher employment is cut despite increasing student enrolments. More administrative demands have been placed on teachers as allotments increase and class sizes grow. Professors, elite educators, have had to become managers, administrators, finance experts in a dollar-driven environment. In a reign of economic rationalism, the razor gangs have had a field day.

In Australia, the number of languages graduates undertaking qualifications for education is minuscule, when faced with the projected demand over the next decade.

In some areas of the globe, the teaching profession is in crisis.

As more and more demands are placed on educators at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels and, in the face of public attitudes often unsupportive of teachers, the past gloss has disappeared from the teaching profession in the eyes of many potential educators. Teacher shortages threaten in many countries. What is the situation in your countries? Are there predictions of teacher shortages in the next few years? Is the teaching profession in your countries coloured by perceptions of inadequate salaries, questionable status, unforgiving demands, unavailable vacancies in desired locations?

7 Languages Databases, Retention and Reclamation

The global conscience for endangered languages is a very recent phenomenon - and is far too late. In the 1990s, we witnessed the establishment of such excellent projects and organisations (Crystal 2000:167-169) as:

- Ethnologue (<http://www.sil.org/ethnologue>)
- Foundation for Endangered Languages (<http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/Philosophy/CTLL/FEL>)
- Logosphere (logosphere@aol.com)
- International Clearing House for Endangered Languages (ie UNESCO's Red Book) (<http://www.tooyoo.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp>)

and the series on language planning, edited by Kaplan and Baldauf, among others.

An ambitious project of UNESCO, where FIPLV is represented, is to focus on the Languages of the World. Objectives of this project include the mapping of the languages scene globally in 2000, the identification of policies in place to retain languages, and the positing of strategies of intervention which can be shared internationally to be pro-active about the retention of endangered languages. This project will draw upon existing data on languages, accumulated by UNESCO's Study of Endangered Languages as well through the other projects listed above.

8 Technology

We are in an age of technological evolution, the Information Age, where advances at the cutting edge outstrip our ability to keep pace, to capitalise fully upon recent developments.

When we talk of technology, most of us think immediately, and perhaps only, of computers. It would be accurate to suppose that all of us here now regard the computer as an essential tool in our everyday existence. But this wasn't always so, was it?

Let us do a little survey! How many of you were using computers twenty years ago? ... ten years ago? ... I won't ask how many don't use a computer now!

To generalise a little, the computer invaded our lives around ten to fifteen years ago. Would this be correct? Do we all agree that it has become integral to our lives now - for communication, for information, for pleasure and perhaps for 'edutainment'?

In the meantime, we have witnessed waves of technological variants and/or configurations come and go, some of these used for education. Several have not involved the computer (eg audioconferencing or telelearning, radio, television or broadcast television, videotext (or teletext), talking book, videoconferencing, videophone, photo-CD, satellite television and interactive satellite television).

The second wave of technologies incorporated the computer in some way. It may have involved software or authoring packages, simulations or games, wordprocessing or databases. The computer may have been coupled with other media, audio or video, to improve efficacy, but the application of the computer to linear presentation denied it one of its greatest strengths: randomness. Over the last fifteen years, we have seen developments - and, in many cases, used them in languages - such as multilingual wordprocessing, synthetic speech and digitisation, speech recognition, laser disc and interactive video, audiographics, the interactive book, bulletin boards and email, computer conferencing, desktop videoconferencing and machine translation.

Some of these had short life spans, while others have been compatible with or have entered the next level: interactive multimedia. Some examples of this which we enjoy personally or professionally might be CD-ROM, electronic texts, CD-Interactive, touchscreen, multimedia authoring shells, laboratories, and DVD.

We must remember however, that in the context of electronic networks, access is reliant upon the availability of the infrastructures of electricity, telephony and computing.

8.1 Reality

The reality is that many people across the globe do not have access to electricity and, in 1997, half the world's population had never used a telephone.

If half the human race has not used a telephone, what percentage would have never used a computer? 50 percent, 75 percent, 90 percent, more?

What does this tell us? First and foremost, it emphasises the inequalities of existence as the chasm between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' broadens. This chasm often reflects the other existential injustices of food and famine, wealth and poverty, health and disease, education and illiteracy. We are among the fortunate, the educated, the technologically rich, whatever our nationality. For most of the world's population, this is not so. A salutary thought, isn't it?

Where does this leave us? It certainly informs us that the technologies we enjoy place us apart from the majority of the world's people. While many others will join this technological evolution, it is likely that we will continue to advance within the spiral, further widening the aforementioned chasm.

It also underlines the magnitude of the task before us all, as we try to bring about a more egalitarian global society.

9 The Internet

While many of us have used computers for some time for word-processing, databases and spreadsheets, the emergent technological phenomenon of the 1990s was the Internet. This phenomenon, invented in 1961, generally abbreviated with usage and familiarity to the 'Web' provides those of us who can access it with a wealth of information, almost instantaneous or synchronous electronic communication, the potential for entertainment and the challenge of tackling technology ... as we develop our personalised home pages and websites.

As the Director-General of UNESCO points out, "the new information and communication technologies represent for UNESCO at once a formidable opportunity and an ethical challenge because of their inherent dangers in terms of cultural uniformization and impoverishment, or excessive commercialization" (Matsuura 2000:3).

The language of the Internet is English. In fact, we are informed that 80 percent of Web content and traffic was in English (Graddol 1997a:50; <http://www.soc.org>). This preponderance of English on the Web is under threat, and should be. But the languages where Web usage is increasing are far less the other languages of Europe - except Spanish, largely because of Latin America - than some of the languages of Asia. Chinese, in particular, and Japanese are occupying larger Web content as wordprocessing packages for ideographic languages become more sophisticated and newspapers come online.

It is important to note that this situation is paralleled in the Deaf community, where "there is a fear (in the International Deaf Community) that ASL (ie American Sign Language) will take over the other sign languages of the world because of its presence on the Web, compared with the same fear of English being the dominant language on the Web" (Mannington 2001:1).

While an estimated 80 percent of Web content in 1997 was in English, this is expected to halve by 2003 (*GEN-Global English Newsletter* 5 1999: 2). At the same time, it is estimated that around 500 languages currently have an Internet presence (Crystal 2000:142).

10 Communication

We considered earlier the need for effective communication. As we know, electronic mail (or email) has been a godsend in this context. "Data traffic, it is claimed, has now overtaken voice traffic in the developed world" (Graddol 1997b:16). The benefits of email - when the messages arrive, if we know - are obvious, but a by-product of this technological advance threatens the linguistic diversity which we hold so dear.

Another aspect of electronic communication is synchronous or asynchronous interaction through bulletin boards, chat programs, discussion groups, etc, such as NetMeeting, ICQ and others.

Again, assistance is forthcoming for the Deaf community, in that "the Web has been a wonderful bonus for Deaf people with the necessary literacy skills - some Deaf people cannot read and write so the Web can't help them as much - as it allows them to communicate with other people (deaf or hearing) on the Web without the barrier of not being able to communicate orally . . . hence programs like ICQ are very popular with the Deaf community and some specific Deaf chat rooms have also been set up by some enterprising Deaf people (eg MSN Deaf Cafe, Deaf Universe, etc)" (Mannington 2001:1-2).

11 Information

An increasing number of individuals use the Web to access information for professional, educational, entertainment or personal purposes. One would expect this trend to continue, despite the lack of quality control, censorship (in many areas) and the comparatively small amount of quality material available. But there is some quality there and, for research in particular, a degree of currency reminiscent of the microfiche systems of the past. As a result, one would expect Web usage to further increase, with the encouragement of business, education and finance.

Clearly, the languages of websites, of data sources, drive language usage on the Internet - and will probably have an effect on language policy, both on and off the Web.

12 Multilingual Access

We must remember that the content of English on the Web has not decreased. It has increased. It is just that the use of other languages (collectively) has increased disproportionately. And, continuing to parallel developments, "electronic multilingual networks is a very relevant topic with the Deaf community, a very exciting time for them to explore how they can put sign languages on the Web" (Mannington 2001:1).

12.1 Hardware

We mentioned previously the obvious need for greater access to the infrastructures of electricity, telephony and computing. While we anticipate the convergence of television, telephony and computing in the imminent digital era, this will not help those who have none of these.

For those who do, we echo the need for increased bandwidth to facilitate speedier access to more voluminous items, graphics, images, music and sound, with the emergence of video mail.

One acknowledges the futility of these recommendations in the face of the millions across the globe unable to access computers. But for those who can, the situation is not so simple. As PC's and i-Mac's continue to evolve through successive generations, more powerful machines replace their forerunners, making it incumbent upon users to upgrade frequently . . . which they can't always afford to do.

On another level, equity of access becomes relevant again.

Again, voice-driven computers could address this challenge, but what are those without voice going to do?

12.2 Software

While computers are soon superseded, generations of new software occur more frequently, leaving users with the aggravating need to upgrade their packages. Driven by mega-conglomerates like Microsoft, this appears to be an unending spiral as the interrelationship between programs necessitates further spending - and increased profits to the makers. The increasing complexity of software packages ensures the challenge of keeping abreast of developments. The choice of browser - dubbed the "browser war" - between Internet Explorer and Netscape is another factor in increasing expenditure for users requiring versatility.

12.3 Websearchers

As the use of languages on the Web diversifies, we already witness the introduction of multilingual access through search engines (exploring up to 4 percent of Web content). AltaVista, for example, provides search potential in 25 languages, while Yahoo allows for 24 geographical locations and searches in an increasing number of languages.

12.4 Translation Tools

Translating packages have been around for some decades, housed on immense mainframes or consolidated in hand-held contraptions. We have all heard of humorous results of translation - such as "out of sight, out of mind" being rendered as "blind drunk" - as the quality of the translation has been a challenge - and still is - but we can be confident that, with the customary speed and certainty of technological advance, these programs will become more sophisticated, increasingly accurate and readily accessible. The costs will decrease, the number of such programs will increase and more and more will turn to them.

It was to be expected that such programs emerge on websites over the recent decade, but my attitude to them remains wary and ambivalent. While being a further threat to linguistic diversity and the teaching and learning of languages, such websites render a service which is linguistically diverse. Among computerised or Web-based translating packages, Babel Fish (<http://www.babelfish.com/>), provides translations between English and another eight languages; Systran (<http://www.systranlinks.com/systran/cgi>) also offers translation between English and five other languages, between French and another six languages, as well as more limited choices for German, Portuguese and Spanish.

But, I can predict that there will be many situations where it would be impossible or inconvenient to consult such a Web-based program, or where a mobile translator would be inappropriate. In an era of economic rationalism, it may be fashionable to replace human contact by technology, but imagine resorting to a machine in business meetings (where live interpreters could do more), during conference sessions or at dinners and other socio-cultural activities at conferences, personal visits and other encounters. A computer - even a laptop - wouldn't always be available or desired, and a mobile translator could just get in the way.

12.5 Human Translators

A recent challenge to machine translation is the use of human translators - how original is that! - through Internet-based companies such as WorldPoint (www.worldpoint.com), offering translations in 13 languages. It is also an option of Systran.

13 Future Directions and Recommendations

In this section, I would like to identify examples of trends, initiatives and best practice, from which to make suggestions and recommendations which could serve as a starting point for

robust discussion. The objective is not one of predicting the future, which can be perilous, but to recommend directions for the satisfactory evolution of the field.

13.1 Access and Equity

“UNESCO has a duty to promote access for the greatest number to information belonging to the public domain, be it scientific, cultural or educational, as well as to strengthen intercultural understanding” (Matsuura 2000:3). This is a bold statement, but I don’t believe that is the responsibility only of UNESCO.

It is recommended that:

- all humanitarian and economic steps be taken at the global level to alleviate the social injustices which beset many individuals not only in less developed countries (LDC’s) but also in developed countries

13.2 Policy and Programs

Excellent **policy** has been in evidence across the globe and provide substance for future development.

It is recommended that:

- UNESCO, in its second strategic axis of “enhancing diversity”, encourage States to enact policies which are inclusive and non-discriminatory
- States be encouraged to adequately resource the existential and social needs of their constituents
- the UDLR be re-visited with a view to modifications being conducted to have it adopted as an international policy by UNESCO, the UN and member countries

In the context of **programs**, we have as an example the excellent project of the European Year of Languages - 2001 (EYL-2001), initiated by the Council of Europe.

It is recommended that:

- the activities of the EYL-2001 be extended beyond the calendar year of 2001
- similar projects (possibly modelled on the EYL-2001) be initiated in other areas of the globe to increase educational and community awareness of the value of languages and linguistic diversity

13.3 Education

The Director-General of UNESCO correctly identifies that “education for all is without a doubt the most crucial challenge of our day”, as “knowledge is at the centre of economic development and social transformations” (Matsuura 2000:2). At the same time, we read in the *UNESCO Courier* (November 2000) of the privatisation of education (pp 16ff).

In line with priorities already identified and being undertaken by UNESCO, it is recommended that:

- UNESCO be the forum through which to promote and uphold the primary and overriding responsibility of the State to ensure the right to **quality** education for all, taking advantage nonetheless of the many new possibilities being made through partnerships with the private sector, civil society and other actors (Matsuura 2000:2)
- the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity be a clear focus of policy development

13.3.1 Policy

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

It is recommended that:

- States be encouraged to create, enact and implement non-discriminatory educational policies which adopt and fully resource the quality teaching of languages
- States give due consideration to the teaching of several languages, whether these are of local, strategic or international importance
- UNESCO, member NGO's and other relevant agencies assist States in the development of the above policies
- States be encouraged to create, enact and implement educational policies which adopt and fully resource the use of technology (ie ICT)

13.3.2 Practice

We can again draw upon exemplary practice in the teaching of languages and technology.

It is recommended that:

- the quality teaching of languages be resourced at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of public education
- wherever possible, access to technology (ICT) be available to students at all levels of primary, secondary and tertiary education
- courses in keyboarding skills continue to be available at all levels of education above the lower primary level
- strict quality controls be placed on the content and delivery mechanisms of online courses at whatever level of learning
- a critical evaluation of website content is conducted before students are referred to any websites
- the notions of appropriateness and suitability are carefully examined before students are referred to websites
- children, to enhance future prospects and be flexible lifelong learners, should acquire not only skills in literacy and numeracy but also in technology, before the end of primary education.
- initiatives, such as the Global Classroom (<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/gc>) of the Department of Education, Employment and Training in Victoria (Australia), be publicised and replicated to improve student collegiality and learning internationally
- the example of the Victorian School of Languages be publicised and promoted as a model upon which similar schools could be created elsewhere to address the language needs of primary and secondary students unable to access their language of choice in mainstream schools

13.3.3 Teacher Training

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

It is recommended that:

- where necessary, teaching be publicised in the wider community and resourced as an attractive profession

- we plan effectively and train a new cohort of teachers skilled not only in their chosen curriculum areas, but also in the uses of ICT (where possible) to enhance their pedagogical skills
- ICT be a major focus of professional development for existing teachers in those countries where the technology is available and accessible
- strict codes of practice be in place and be enforced in the teaching profession and in the use of ICT
- checklists for skills in technology in teacher training, such as that proposed in Debski & Levy (1999:352-353), be adopted, updated and implemented appropriately
- the existence of advanced education and training, standards of practice and certification (Nunan 1999a/b: 1), sound pedagogy, effective teaching tools, excellent curriculum, appropriate assessment and reporting practices, etc, be established and maintained
- projects collecting data on language teaching internationally and other relevant fields, such as that of the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT) (www.linguanet.org.uk) and Linguanet (www.ac-dijon.fr/crdp/conseil/linguane.htm), be encouraged and publicised
- enhanced sharing of multilingual information, resources, etc, be identified as a reality on the Web

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

13.4 Language Documentation

While some question the documentation of existing (and especially indigenous) languages, there is doubtless value in resourcing the work of established projects, such as those listed above (refer #7).

It is recommended that:

- existing initiatives to detail languages be adequately resourced
- provided strict controls are in place (Crystal 2000:152-154), the documentation of indigenous languages continue and be resourced sufficiently
- projects such as UNESCO's World Languages Report be encouraged, resourced and publicised
- if agreed by the relevant agencies involved, some synthesis of existing data be facilitated to create one database of the world's languages
- every reasonable step be taken to arrest the disappearance of endangered languages

13.5 Technology

The major challenge facing us in the context of technology is equity of access.

It is recommended that:

- a concerted effort be made to increase access globally to the infrastructures of electricity, telephony and computing
- steps continue to be taken at the international level to enhance the possibility of egalitarian access to ICT
- serious consideration be given to wireless access to the above technologies, especially where the infrastructure is not yet in place

13.6 Internet

With respect to the **Internet**, the dominance of one language is a reality, but it is already being predicted that English will become a minority language on the Web in the foreseeable future.

It is recommended that:

- the greater diversity of languages used on the Internet be encouraged
- access to multilingual shareware upgrades be encouraged and publicised

13.7 **Communication**

Electronic **communication** is now more prolific than old-fashioned means of written exchange in the developed world.

It is recommended that:

- individuals at all levels be given access to education and training in the uses of email
- the cost of Internet Service Provider (ISP) programs continue to reduce with the desire that they be made available free of charge, as is the current trend
- multilingual communication platforms, such as ICQ (<http://www.icq.com>) with a choice of fifteen languages, be publicised and replicated as required
- such platforms be used and encouraged to expand their choice of languages available
- a qualitative and annotated database of such programs be created and publicised with recommendations for usage
- pressure be brought to bear on the providers of all such programs to ensure the highest degree of multilingualism
- a common platform for encoding standards for multilingualism in email be explored
- the use of PDF be explored as a possible means of establishing the aforementioned platform

13.8 **Information**

Another key use of the Internet is to access and share **information**.

It is recommended that:

- linguistic diversity on the Web be seen as a priority by all, with the desirable outcome being to see all languages represented
- quality websites be developed and publicised in languages other than English
- **language specific websites** in languages other than English - such as TennesseeBob's Globe-Gate for French and other languages (<http://globegate.org/french/globe.html>) - should be publicised and recommended
- a critical database of quality language specific websites be created and publicised, not only for information but also to provide examples of good practice
- groups, such as language specific language teacher associations, be resourced to develop websites for their languages, as has been done in Australia with LOTElinx which includes 21 languages (<http://www.lotelinx.vic.edu.au>)
- websites be created for minority and endangered languages and that these be publicised as focal points for the expansion of these languages on the Web
- websites for sign languages, including dictionaries, (eg www.handspeak.com) also be developed and publicised
- the developers of all language specific websites be encouraged to establish hyperlinks to other quality websites of the same language
- catalogues of language specific resources be created and housed on accessible websites of associations, libraries, etc, and that the sources of these be identified, possibly through hyperlinks

- **multilingual websites** - such as the website of the State Library of Victoria (<http://www.openroad.vic.gov.au/>), which offers navigation in eleven languages, including Arabic, Chinese and Russian - should be encouraged and created
- wherever relevant, websites of libraries, universities, organisations, international conglomerates, etc, should be made multilingual
- a critical database of quality multilingual websites be created and publicised, not only for information but also to provide examples of good practice
- groups be encouraged to undertake the critical role of filtering quality websites from those that are bad and that this information be made available and hyperlinks be established as relevant, such as has been done by Department of Education, Employment and Training (Victoria) in Australia (<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/resource/reslote.htm>)
- initiatives, such as Babel (<http://www.isoc.org/>), be publicised and encouraged to expand multilingualism on the Web and facilitate the development of websites in a range of languages

13.9 Access to multilingual programs is a question of equity, not only in the context of having the technology available, but also in being able to use current hardware and the most recent software packages.

13.9.1 Hardware

On the issue of **hardware**, it is recommended that:

- access to up-to-date computers be assured for students in those countries where machines are available
- wherever possible, compatibility of powerful machines be guaranteed
- the use of writing tablets be explored fully as a potential time-saving means of wordprocessing in ideographic languages
- voice-activated computers - as they become more accessible, less expensive, more powerful and accurate, they will become more widespread - be explored to facilitate a greater spread of languages and simpler use

13.9.2 Software

In the context of **software**, we cannot overlook the curse of the 21st century: time. We are all extremely busy and time is of the essence. With keyboarding skills, using computers in English and similar languages can be quite easy and time-effective. With the increase in the number of characters, whether roman, Cyrillic or other, the task becomes more difficult, more time-consuming. And when we turn to ideographic languages, what may be an easy task in English becomes an onerous chore. We have all heard of native speakers of Chinese, Japanese or Korean, communicating in English (or pinyin, romaji, etc) by email, as this is less time-consuming.

Another key software issue is the characters used for a language. With English being the dominant language of software development, the coverage of accents and non-Roman alphabets is less rigorous. Multilingual software packages have existed for some years, some including a wide range of languages, different fonts and ready transfer across Roman, Cyrillic and others, as well as ideographic scripts.

It is recommended that:

- software developers need to become more multilingual (Crystal 2000:142)
- we control, formalise and place the user before the software developer to increase the potential for multilingual usage

- enhanced multilingual capacity be a priority of more flexible data management systems
- attention be given to the development of software packages which are less time-consuming and labour-intensive for larger alphabets and for script languages
- writing recognition software programs be explored for the potential they may have in reducing the time to wordprocess in ideographic languages
- software packages be developed for non-Roman alphabet languages in rigorous consultation with speakers and users of these languages
- more comprehensive coding conventions for non-Roman alphabets be implemented (Crystal 2000:142)
- versatility of cross-language programs be recognised as a priority for action by software developers
- the potential of language universals be explored for the enhancement of multilingual sites
- the further potential of HTML be explored with a view to eradicating the challenges identified above
- quality multilingual software packages be identified, publicised and used

13.9.3 Websearchers

The current wave of search engines or **websearchers** is likely to be supplanted by upgraded multilingual versions and more powerful meta-searchers, such as www.dogpile.com, which searches through existing search engines, and www.wal.hello.com, which does the same in forty languages.

As this occurs, it is recommended that:

- we ensure that the multilingual facility not only continues to exist but is expanded to become more powerful, more efficient and more egalitarian
- of the dozens of search engines available, we recognise and encourage those which have a clear facility for searching in languages other than English, such as AltaVista which offers a range of 25 languages, and Yahoo
- a hierarchical database be created and publicised of websearchers which offer quality access to a range of languages, and that these services be recommended
- the potential of powerful search engines with quality assurance - such as the Education Channel (http://www.education.vic.gov.au/ch/other_languages.asp), with hyperlinks to sites in 22 languages - be explored across languages
- we try to ensure that global multilingualism is retained in the context of technological advance, that they are integrally interrelated so that any future successes in technological development carry with it the linguistic diversity we are promoting

13.9.4 Translation

I have recorded above my ambivalence to availability of **translation** packages on the Internet, but they are a reality. Personally, I am still more convinced of the quality of **human translators**, even when these are available through the Internet. But the question of the quality of software programs which fulfil this service, is likely to be somewhat temporary.

As a result, it is recommended that:

- information on translation websites, such as Babel Fish, be made available
- priority be given to translation websites that include the availability of human translators, such as WorldPoint (<http://www.worldpoint.com>) and Systran (<http://www.systranlinks.com/systran/cgi>)
- the practice of free Web-based translations (eg <http://www.freetranslation.com>) be encouraged and publicised

- a qualitative database of such websites be created and publicised, with recommendations that the best and most comprehensive be used

14 Conclusion

While global multilingualism is a reality, it is under siege. On the one hand, languages are disappearing rapidly from the face of the globe; on the other, the emergence of English as the international *lingua franca* will have a negative impact on language choice, planning and policy. At the same time, the predictable backlash to global English (and its evolving derivative Englishes) is already visible in some countries, in an attempt to quarantine the purity or existence of some of the world's other languages.

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

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

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

In this period of the consolidating global village, of more effective intercontinental travel, of globalised markets and international conglomerates, travel is likely to be commonplace for many of the future computerised world. The young learner must be given the wherewithal to compete, despite protestations of irrelevance to a personal future. Again, languages have an integral place in the future of the globe.

Technology, a twin-edged sword in this context, threatens to minimise language diversity while maximising communication possibilities in a wealth of languages. What we, as leaders, as policy-makers and as language educators, can do is to take all reasonable steps to ensure that the linguistic diversity of our multilingual globe is ensured and enhanced for future generations.

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