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The place of mother tongue in school education

Report
Committee on Culture, Science and Education
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Summary

Many different languages are spoken in Europe and are the mother tongues of European citizens. Some of those are official languages, others regional or minority languages and others are not linked to any particular territory or are immigration languages. From a pedagogical point of view, school results are better when children are taught in their mother tongue but this is not always possible. Nor can every language spoken in Europe be treated in the same way.

Every European citizen should be able to study their mother tongue but every European citizen must also be able to speak the official language (or one of the official languages) of the country of which he or she is a citizen. "Strong" bilingual educational models, which aim to equip the future adult with real bi/plurilingual proficiency and, in particular, biliteracy, should be implemented whenever possible.

A. Draft recommendation

1. In the Parliamentary Assembly's view, considerations of various kinds influence the place of the mother tongue in schools. There is the question of rights – both the right to education and the right to a national identity. There is preservation of the linguistic heritage, both European and world, there is the promotion of dialogue and exchange through linguistic diversity, and there are pedagogical factors, to say nothing of the political use which is often made of the issue.

2. The Assembly has often concerned itself with language matters. Recommendation 814 (1977) on modern languages in Europe, Recommendation 928 (1981) on the educational and cultural problems of minority languages and dialects in Europe, Recommendation 1203 (1993) on Gypsies in Europe, Recommendation 1291 (1996) on Yiddish culture, Recommendation 1333 (1997) on Aromanian language and culture, Recommendation 1353 (1998) on access of minorities to higher education, Recommendation 1383 (1998) on linguistic diversification, Recommendation 1521 (2001) on the Csango minority culture in Romania, Recommendation 1539 (2001) on European Year of Languages, Recommendation 1688 (2004) on diaspora cultures and Resolution 1171 (1998) on endangered Uralic minority cultures are examples.

3. The Assembly recalls the importance of the instruments adopted by the Council of Europe such as the European Charter for regional or minority languages as well as those adopted by other bodies, such as the Unesco Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions.

4. It would be desirable to encourage, as far as possible, young Europeans to learn their mother tongue (or main language) when this is not an official language of their country.

5. At the same time, every young European has the duty to learn an official language of the country of which he or she is a citizen.

6. The language which is the vehicle of instruction has a crucial role in that command of it is the key to classroom communication and consequently to pupils' acquisition of knowledge. A great deal of research has confirmed that types of education based on the mother tongue significantly increase the chances of educational success and give better results.

7. In European societies, everyday use of the official language is the main precondition for the integration of children whose main language is different from the official one of the country or region. However, a large amount of research is agreed on one point: immediate schooling of such children in a language they do not know well, or not at all, seriously jeopardises their chances of academic success. Conversely, bilingual education based on the mother tongue is the basis for long-term success.

8. Recent studies have shown that the ideas that every language is linked to a particular culture and that bilingualism ultimately excludes the individual from both cultures are mistaken. The view that bilingualism or plurilingualism is a burden on pupils is also incorrect – they are assets.

9. There are various ways in which child bilingualism can be supported by education systems. They are distinguished by their political objectives: maintaining a minority language, revitalising a less widespread language or integrating children who speak a foreign language into the dominant society. There are appropriate bilingual educational models in all cases. Which is chosen will depend on prior reflection and a transparent decision on objectives, negotiated with the players.

10. "Strong" bilingual educational models which aim to equip the future adult with real bi/plurilingual proficiency and, in particular, bi-literacy, have many advantages over "weak" models which treat bilingualism as an intermediate stage between mother-tongue monolingualism and official-language monolingualism rather than as an end in itself. These advantages concern both the people who benefit from such models and the societies that provide them. In all cases, however, the condition for success is that bilingual educational programmes should last several years.

11. Particular attention should be paid to the case of regional languages exclusively spoken in a country with a different official language or which are spoken in more than one country but are not official languages in any of them, as well as in the case of deterritorialised or diaspora languages. Significant support by educational systems can be the condition even for the survival of these languages.

12. The Assembly accordingly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

12.1. inventory the different models and types of bilingual education in Europe;

12.2. promote exchange and meetings between practitioners involved in bilingual education;

12.3. prepare a recommendation inviting the governments of member states to:

12.3.1 develop bilingual and plurilingual education on the basis of the principles set out above;

12.3.2 foster development of children's plurilingual repertoires and give substantial support to all languages in children's repertoires;

12.3.3 propose, whenever possible, strong support in their mother tongue for children for whom it is not an official language of the state;

12.3.4 promote threatened languages with parents and communities so that their commitment to a threatened language receives support and reinforcement;

12.4. invite those member states that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the relevant instruments adopted by the Council of Europe and Unesco.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Legendre

1. On 11 February 2004 a group of Parliamentary Assembly members presented a motion for a resolution on educational reform in Latvia. They were worried about the possible abolition of secondary schooling in minorities' languages, particularly Russian.

2. On 5 October 2004 another group of Parliamentary Assembly members presented a motion for a recommendation on education in the Transnistrian region of Moldova. This time the worry was closure by the "self-proclaimed authorities in Tiraspol" of schools delivering instruction in the Latin alphabet.

3. The Assembly Bureau referred both motions to the Committee on Culture, Science and Education for report. On 2 December 2004 the committee, anxious to deal with the matter from a cultural standpoint and steer clear of the political controversy which characterised both situations, decided to deal with the motions on educational reform in Latvia and education in the Transnistrian region of Moldova in a wider-ranging report on the place of the mother tongue in schools, and appointed me as the rapporteur.

4. The Assembly has, in the past, been called upon to express views on language matters, whether generally or on regional or minority languages or on specific languages or groups with specific languages.

5. In 1977, for instance, it recognised the need to assist migrant acquisition of languages, including the mother tongue and the language of the host country (Recommendation 814 on modern languages in Europe); in 1981 it recommended that the Committee of Ministers consider whether it would be possible for governments of member states to gradually adopt children's mother tongues for their education (Recommendation 928 on the educational and cultural problems of minority languages and dialects in Europe); lastly, in 1997, the Assembly recommended encouraging Balkan countries which had Aromanian communities to support Aromanians in education in their mother tongue (Recommendation 1333 on Aromanian language and culture).

6. In Recommendation 1353 (1998) on minority access to higher education, the Assembly called on governments of countries that had signed the European Cultural Convention to avoid prescribing the exclusive use of the official language and abstain from pursuing policies aimed at the assimilation of national minorities into the majority culture. Persons belonging to a linguistic minority, it said, should have access to suitable types and levels of publicly provided education in their mother tongue in order to prepare for higher education, and all citizens should be able to study their own language and culture in general.

7. Other relevant documents are the recommendations on Gypsies in Europe (1993), Yiddish culture (1996), linguistic diversification (I myself presented this recommendation in 1998), Csango minority culture in Romania and European Year of Languages (2001) and diaspora cultures (2004) and the resolution on endangered Uralic minority cultures (1998). The committee is currently working on Kurdish culture and on Finno-Ugrian languages.

8. On 6 September 2005 the committee had an initial exchange of views on the question. It drew attention to work on language questions, whether generally (modern languages, linguistic diversification, diaspora cultures), regional or minority languages (work on the charter, minority access to higher education) or specific languages/groups with specific languages (Gypsies, Yiddish, Aromanians, Csangos, Uralic languages).

9. In the committee's view, from that body of work it was possible to extract various principles, such as that everyone should be able to study their mother tongue and that everyone must speak the official language (or one of the official languages) of the country of which they are citizens. However, it is not possible to treat all languages – official languages, regional or minority languages, and immigration languages – in the same way.

10. Given the technicality of the subject we enlisted the aid of Professor Lüdi, Basel University, who produced the document appended hereto and with whom the committee had a discussion on 1 December 2005. The following paragraphs (11 to 22) summarise the main findings of that document.

12. It is important to avoid ambiguity in recommendations on the “mother tongue”. In linguistic contexts characterised by diversity, the mother tongue will mean *a child’s principal language (or one of his/her principal languages) at the time of his/her first contact with the official education system, ie at the age of four or five..*

12. Obviously, in European societies, everyday use of the official language is the main precondition for the integration of children whose main language is different from the official one of the country or region. However, a great deal of research is agreed on one point: immediate schooling of such children in a language they do not know well or at all – here, the term is teaching “through submersion” – seriously jeopardises their chances of academic success. Conversely, bilingual education based on the mother tongue is the basis for long-term success.

13. Early bi- or plurilingualism gives children significant cognitive and emotional advantages and advantages with respect to social skills. It is therefore advisable to foster the development of their plurilingual repertoires. These advantages are greater still when the child’s plurilingualism is balanced. It is therefore recommended that education systems should consistently support all the languages in children’s repertoires and aim for bi-/pluriliteracy.

14. There are various ways in which child bilingualism can be supported by education systems. They are distinguished by their political objectives: maintaining a minority language, revitalising a less widespread language, integrating children who speak a foreign language into the dominant society, and so on. There are appropriate bilingual educational models in all cases. Which is chosen will depend on prior thought and a transparent decision on objectives, negotiated with the players.

15. “Strong” bilingual education models which aim to give children real bi/plurilingual proficiency and, in particular, bi-literacy have many advantages over “weak” models which consider bilingualism an intermediate stage between monolingualism in the mother tongue (or principal language) and monolingualism in the official language. These advantages concern both the people who benefit from such models and the societies that provide them. In all cases, however, the condition for success is that bilingual education programmes last for several years. “Strong” bilingual education models are therefore recommended, whatever the objective.

16. There are many possible forms of bilingual education, not all of which are necessarily appropriate to all possible objectives or social contexts. In order to choose a specific policy, politicians will have to weigh up the pros and cons of the different bilingual education models in relation to their own objectives. One of the most important criteria is the demolinguistic and geopolitical situation of the particular minority language.

17. In the case of regional languages exclusively spoken in a country with a different official language or which are spoken in more than one country but are not official languages in any of them, as well as in the case of deterritorialised languages, significant support by education systems is particularly important since what is at issue is not just an educational question, but the very survival of those languages. As mother tongues, they should be languages of instruction in primary schools and have a significant place in secondary education and vocational training.

18. In the case of languages which are regional in one country but have official status in a neighbouring country, the situation is a little different. On the one hand, the need to preserve the language as such no longer applies, but international pressure in favour of minority groups is often very strong. Furthermore, bilingualism of a section of the population aids cohesion between different countries in the region and for the populations concerned is often an economic asset, as well as support for their ancestral identity. As mother tongues, these languages should therefore also have the status of languages of instruction in compulsory education and at least be taught as subjects at secondary level.

19. Languages of immigration which are official languages in one or more countries do not call for protection as such. The arguments concerning education and identity remain and these justify or make essential measures in favour of children's mother tongue. The minimum required is sufficiently developed *transitional* models; various forms of support from migrants' countries of origin are also to be expected.

20. The situation with respect to languages of immigration which are neither recognised nor supported by migrants' countries of origin is significantly different. These are modern cases of linguistic diaspora, as it were. The criterion of preserving the linguistic heritage, not of Europe this time, but of the whole of humanity, may be applied. In this sense, host countries have greater responsibility, not only to enable mechanisms for teaching the mother tongue to be put in place but also to support them where the communities alone are unable to do so.

21. The conditions in which bilingual education is offered should be very liberal. If schooling in general is free, bilingual education should be also; the number of pupils required should be as low as possible and, if numbers permit, it should also be offered outside regions in which minority languages are traditionally spoken, in particular in major and capital cities.

22. In all countries there are children who are taught in a language which is not their mother language. It often happens that this situation leads to school failure.

23. It is certainly not possible to guarantee that all children, in all countries, are literate in their mother tongue, but it seems desirable that teaching in mother tongue should be provided when justified by a sufficient number of children.

24. As regards Latvia, government funded education is available in eight minority languages. The Latvian authorities' desire that pupils from minority communities should acquire a good command of the official language is legitimate, especially in view of the need for equal opportunities in access to higher education and greater competitiveness on the labour market. But it is no less legitimate for the many minorities who live in Latvia to demand the opportunity to have schooling in their mother tongue so that their cultural heritage is preserved. The schooling model here should be a *strong* one – ie, aiming at bilingualism and balanced command of the two languages. Demands for monolingual schooling in Russian throughout compulsory schooling and attempts to introduce *weak* or *transitional* models which would not enable children from the Russian-speaking minority to become genuinely bilingual should both therefore be rejected.

25. As regards the Transnistrian region of Moldova, the schools which had been closed were able to reopen in time for the 2004-2005 school year and are continuing to operate, despite a still precarious situation. We have here a criminal instance of use of the place of the mother tongue in schools for political purposes by the authorities of the Transnistrian region, to the children's detriment.

26. In conclusion the Council of Europe could work to resolve the deadlocks in the various situations in which negative connotations of bilingualism have frightened both those in government and leaders of non-majority linguistic groups. Multilingualism is a positive factor in today's society.

APPENDIX

Considerations on the place of mother tongue in schools

By Georges Lüdi, University of Basel

1. Introduction

Modern languages do not exist in themselves but by and for the groups that use them in daily communication. A dead language is one that has lost its speakers. The disappearance of languages is not always natural and is, above all, generally undesirable. The reasons for a language's disappearance often have nothing to do with the wishes of its speakers. We may then hypothesise that the preservation of linguistic diversity – and therefore of particular languages, especially those that are endangered – as part of the heritage of humanity is one of the common responsibilities of the community of nations. In other words, the survival of a little spoken or minority language is not the responsibility of the community that speaks it alone (although the will of that community to preserve its language is a *sine qua non*), but of society as a whole.

One of the best known measures for strengthening less used or endangered languages is teaching them in schools. *Education in the mother tongue* is often spoken about in this connection. The term is not without problems, however, and the first part of this paper will discuss them. Part two will be devoted to the advantages that education systems using the majority language can derive from including the mother tongue of pupils belonging to linguistic minorities. Part three will examine the issue of evaluating child bilingualism as a frequent result of education in the mother tongue in the context of another dominant language. Lastly, the advantages and disadvantages of various forms of bilingual education and bilingual programmes will be compared.

2. What is a “mother tongue”?

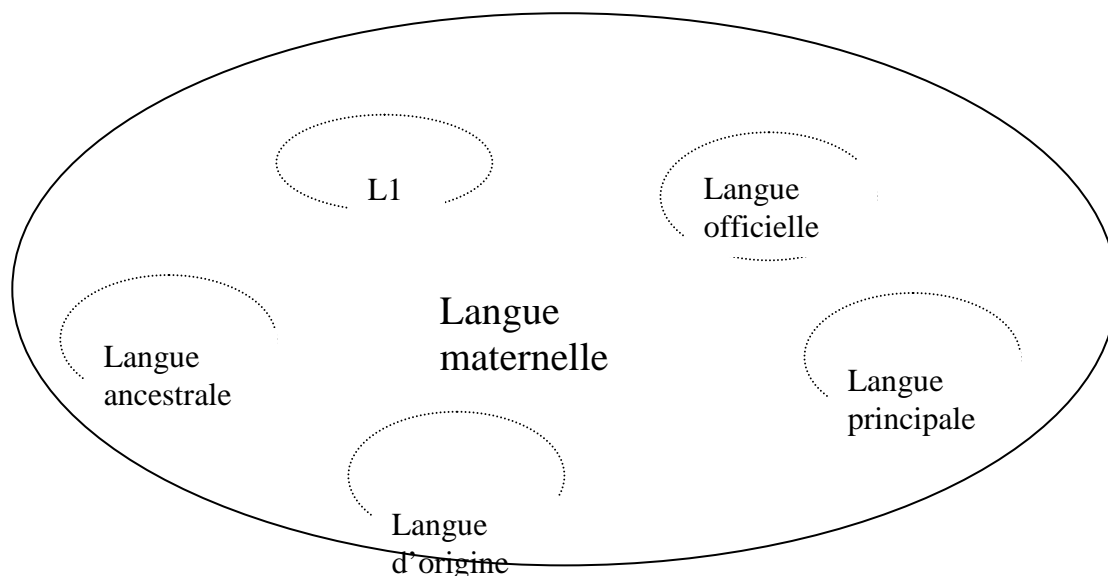
Before going any further, it has to be pointed out that, in semantic terms, the concept of the “mother tongue” is ambiguous.

- In so far as it is the language of his/her mother (or nanny!) that the child hears first, the term refers to the first language the child learns. Specialists prefer to refer to this as the “first language” (L1). Often, when children are brought up by parents or other people speaking different languages, they acquire several languages simultaneously. Whoever it is who speaks this language, it can be considered a “mother” tongue. This situation is referred to as multiple L1 acquisition or early bilingualism.
- During population censuses people are often classified according to their mother tongue. An example of this is the figures in the 1996 Census on the mother tongue, home language and the knowledge of languages published by Statistics Canada in 1997. As it was adults who were being questioned, the definition of mother tongue was slightly different: “the first language learned at home in childhood *and still understood by the individual at the time of the census*”. The L1 can indeed be completely lost without leaving any traces in the brain. Here the name of the writer Elias Canetti, winner of the Nobel Prize, springs at once to mind. He was born in 1905 in the town of Roustchouk (now Ruse) on the south bank of the Danube in Bulgaria in a very multilingual environment, with two L1s, the Judeo-Spanish or Sephardi spoken by the family and the Bulgarian spoken by the servants. He learned German with his mother from the age of 7; this was, in a sense, his mother tongue, although he began to acquire it long after the acquisition threshold of an L1. This is therefore referred to as his second language (L2). He was educated in German L2 in Vienna and Zurich and won the Nobel Prize in this language - and, as he said himself, completely lost both his L1s.
- Until 1980, federal censuses of the Swiss population also asked about the mother tongue. Since 1990, it is the principal language (= the language in which one thinks and of which one has the best command) that must be indicated. This change in paradigm is relevant because loss of L1 is not the only possibility; it may also simply be dominated by one or more other language(s) used regularly in later phases of life, in particular during secondary socialisation

by education systems. It will be seen from this that an adult's "mother" tongue is far from always being his/her "principal" language, but is more a mark of ancestral identity.

- One may usually tick only one mother tongue or principal language. This demonstrates another dimension of the meaning of the concept mother tongue: it connotes a very emotionally charged sense of belonging to a group and of linguistic identity. Asking someone what their mother tongue is amounts to asking them about their linguistic identity. According to old homoglossic ideologies (and contrary to what we know from recent research in the social sciences), the latter is one and indivisible. Hence the political will to make speakers choose, to make them perform a veritable act of linguistic loyalty in favour of one of their languages – and against the others. This is particularly striking in the case of heteroglossic linguistic situations with many bilinguals speaking either languages of migration (original languages) or family languages different from the majority language (ancestral languages). What statisticians and politicians are often interested in is obtaining clear groups by forcing bi- or plurilingual speakers to choose. It is therefore obvious that people may reply differently to a question on the mother tongue (that they may still understand but can hardly now speak) and one on the principal language (which may be a language learned later in life).
- It will be noted that in writings on language education policies or languages in education, the term mother tongue is sometimes used to refer to something a little different again, and different in two radically opposed ways:
 - the mother tongue is contrasted with foreign languages, and the concept is used to refer to lessons on/in the official local language insofar as it is the L1 of a majority of pupils. This seems to be the case in Turkish legislation which lists children's mother tongues and purposely leaves out Kurdish, as though a child's principal language could be defined by law. It is tempting to read some European Union documents in the framework of the programme "Mother tongue plus two other languages" in the same way as they recommend "teaching at least two foreign [sic!] languages from a very early age". (COM (2003) 449 final);
 - sometimes reference is made to the mother tongue of children from minorities or migrant groups to indicate that they belong to a foreign language-speaking group or community often on the basis of nationality alone, without asking whether it is a language they still actually speak – or that they have ever learned as members of a regional community (eg, Kurdish in Turkey, Berber in North Africa).

What has been said above can be summarised in a diagram. The concept mother tongue is part of several semantic fields, each of which is covered by another, more specialised, term:



In the “ideal” case of monolingual, homoglossic nation-states in which the whole population shares the same language, the formula is usually *Mother tongue = L1 = ancestral language = official language = principal language*.

This scenario is rather rare in today’s world, which is characterised by territorial demarcations which often do not follow linguistic borders, and by increasing mobility of the population for ethnic, political, humanitarian and other reasons. In all other scenarios, and it is these that are the subject of the rest of this paper, the exact meaning given to the term mother tongue has to be defined. For the purposes of this paper, which concerns the problems of school education policy, it will be used in the following meaning: *Mother tongue = a child’s principal language (or one of his/her principal languages) at the time of his/her first contact with official education systems, ie at the age of 4 or 5.*

3. The starting-point: the conditions for successful education

When discussing the role of the mother tongue in this sense in education systems, we can immediately take two standpoints: legal and educational. Let us take the example of a French-speaking child in a small town in German-speaking Switzerland. Educationally speaking, he/she may suffer serious negative consequences from the sudden shock caused by the exclusive use of German from the first hour at school. Such cases are usually referred to as education by *submersion*. Legally speaking, in the Swiss system schools have no duty to take a child’s L1 into account; the territorial system prevails. In other words, Swiss law clearly gives precedence to the collective preservation of the national languages within their territories to the detriment of the individual’s right to the preservation of his/her language, whether it is foreign or official in another region of Switzerland. Without questioning the legitimacy of this legislation – and without even entering into the legal considerations - the issue will be examined here from the *point of view of the conditions for children’s success at school*. Initially, no distinction will be made between different configurations of linguistic diversity. It is only later that the question of the balance between the particular context, in other words the local linguistic situation, and the different forms for maximising children’s chances of success will be examined.

There are many conditions that enable or facilitate success at school. They go from the quality of the relationships between adults and children to the fit between the school’s requirements and the child’s potential. Here I should like to stress the importance of the language of instruction. It plays an essential role because command of that language is the key to communication processes in class and, therefore, to children’s acquisition of knowledge. A great deal of research has confirmed that mother tongue-based education in the sense established above (ie in which mother tongue may mean for plurilingual children any variety in their repertoire of which they have a good command) significantly increases the chances of success at school, if not gives the best results. In fact it has a number of recognised educational advantages (see Baker 2001; Cummins, 2000; CAL 2001 and especially, Benson, 2004, etc). The most important of these are as follows:

- Acquisition of the written language is significantly more effective when pupils already know the language. They are able to use psycholinguistic strategies to form hypotheses about the correspondences between an image and a word they know; they can also begin to communicate in writing as soon as they understand the rules underlying the spelling of their language. In submersion situations, on the other hand, pupils may manage to decipher words written in a language they know only imperfectly or not at all, but it may be years before they understand what they are “reading” and manage to express themselves in writing.
- If a pupil’s knowledge acquisition takes place in L1, it begins much earlier and not only at the (much) later stage when he/she is sufficiently proficient in L2. The construction of new concepts in the negotiation between teacher and learners creates participatory acquisition contexts that foster cognitive and linguistic developments simultaneously. Conversely, submersion virtually excludes such interaction owing to limited linguistic knowledge.
- The teaching/learning of L2 is not subordinated to the acquisition of the written form and a new conceptual network; it can be more systematic, based on orality and adapted to the children’s abilities and needs.
- Once children have developed written proficiency in L1 and communicative proficiency in L2, they will easily transfer the writing techniques and cognitive faculties acquired in the familiar language to L2. This happens through what Cummins (1991, 1999) has called the “theory of interdependence”, or “common underlying proficiency” which makes such cognitive and linguistic transfers possible and explains why it is unnecessary to acquire these faculties a second time.
- Pupils’ progress is easier to assess if they are tested in L1 whereas, in submersion, linguistic competencies and knowledge of subjects are so confused that teachers cannot tell whether children do not understand a concept or have difficulties expressing themselves.
- The affective aspect, particularly children’s self-confidence, self-assurance, self-respect and identity, is strengthened if L1 is used as the language of instruction. It increases children’s motivation, initiative and creativity and enables them to develop their personality and intelligence. Conversely, submersion makes them silent and passive; mechanical repetition leads to frustration and, in the end, failure at school.

Teaching L1 has been particularly vigorously promoted in many African countries in recent years. In the framework of a programme at the ECML, Graz, one African specialist said explicitly of Africa:

“Early childhood education in a multilingual situation is characterized by a variety of practices including the use of one language for initial literacy only, biliteracy, mother tongue based literacy, dual or multilingual medium, etc. Given the range of practices, it is clear that no single fixed model can be adopted for all situations. Whichever model is adopted, *the minimum requirement is that every child should be taught in his or her mother tongue or a language that the child already speaks by the time he or she enrolls in the primary school.* To insist on this is not only a matter of language rights, *it is a linguistic requirement* related to concept formation and the technicality of coding and decoding of symbols as well as a psychological requirement related to the cultivation of self-confidence, self-worth and identity.”

Ayo Bamgbose: ‘Linguistic Diversity and Literacy: Issues and Way Forward’, contribution to the Workshop on “Linguistic diversity and literacy in a global perspective”, ECML, Graz, June 23 – 25, 2005; *my italics*).

A whole series of carefully evaluated examples of “good practices” have shown that children living in countries where the official language is English or French but whose initial schooling took place in a local African language (often called the “national language”) did far better in final school examinations (in the official language) than those who were in submersion programmes in the official language from the outset. A striking example of this is the success of bilingual schools in Burkina Faso. They were developed by the Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy (MBEL) in 1994, with the technical and financial support of the Oeuvre Suisse d’Entraide Ouvrière (OSEO). Bilingual schools

have a five-year programme instead of the classic six and reconcile children's "knowledge, know-how and interpersonal skills". In a bilingual school the pupil's mother tongue is used 90% of the time in the first year, the remaining 10% of the time being in French. After that, French is gradually introduced and by the fifth and final year is used in 90% of teaching activities as compared with 10% for the national language. The results have been spectacular. At the June 2002 session, children in bilingual education who had spent five years at school instead of the usual six had a success rate of 85.02% compared with the national average of 61.82%. From an initial two Mooré-French classes in 1994, bilingual education now has 41 experimental bilingual schools in seven national languages plus French in ten of the thirteen regions of Burkina Faso.

These research findings can easily be extrapolated and applied to Europe. It is obvious that in Europe, too, command of the dominant language is the main precondition for success at school and for children's integration in society and the world of work. This is why many parents from minority groups choose to educate their children in the dominant language as early as possible and why many children belonging to linguistic minorities, even recognised ones, are educated exclusively in the dominant language. The findings of a great deal of research lead to a very different conclusion, however: education "by submersion" in the dominant language has the worst educational results both academically and linguistically and often results in failure. Conversely, bilingual education based on the mother tongue provides the basis for long-term success.

A document submitted to the fourth session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples (cf. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/>) goes so far as to describe monolingual education through submersion in the dominant language as a factor of poverty. Consequently, educating children from minority, indigenous and tribal groups in the dominant language, rather than in their mother tongue, perpetuates poverty.

4. Child bilingualism: asset or cognitive overload?

Before I go into the details of bilingual education, I would like to make a short digression on received ideas about bi- and plurilingualism. Obviously, children who have gone through a system such as the one described in the previous few paragraphs will not be monolingual, but will have a reasonable command of two languages and be literate in both: they will be bi- or plurilingual. This raises a number of contentious issues. The standard criticisms of bilingualism (and therefore bilingual education) can be summarised as follows:

- growing up with two languages means cognitive overload;
- such children run the risk of not mastering either language well;
- their social integration will be made difficult by the fact that they will at least to some extent lose their linguistic and cultural identity and at best develop a mixed identity;
- culturally, they will be lost to the minority culture/culture of origin, bilingualism involving languages a and b being regarded as a transitional period between monolingualism in language a and monolingualism in language b.

In Western societies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries becoming bilingual or plurilingual was seen as a handicap rather than an asset. For example, in the late nineteenth century an eminent English professor said (with absolute impunity): "If it were possible for a child to live in two languages at once equally well, so much the worse. His intellectual and spiritual growth would not thereby be doubled, but halved. Unity of mind and character would have great difficulty in asserting itself in such circumstances" (Laurie, 1890). Moreover, the nationalist ideology then prevailing consisted in saying and thinking that national borders "naturally" defined monolingual territories; belonging to two nations at once was therefore suspect. Bilinguals were regarded as potential traitors. In fact, an individual with two or more cultures was regarded as not altogether reliable because the norm was monolingualism, and multilingualism was seen as a curse of God that had weighed on humanity since the Tower of Babel.

Fortunately, such prejudices have now been largely disproved by research, in the cultural field as well as with respect to linguistic proficiency, but they are far from having completely disappeared.

- One of the most extreme arguments against bilingual education, according to which each language is linked to a particular culture, each individual belongs to only one culture at a time, and the “biculturalism” associated with bilingualism will in the end exclude pupils from both cultures, continues to be heard. It is interesting to see that this argument, which is deeply rooted in centuries-old monolingual, homoglossic ideologies, is used both by those who want to assimilate linguistic minorities and are opposed to any form of education in the mother tongue and by their adversaries, who are in favour of education only in the minority languages concerned. Recent studies have shown this argument to be invalid, so long as both the cultures concerned are accorded all the value due to them in the social context in which pupils develop. Conversely, there can be a danger in “submersion” models if pupils do not completely accept the ancestral or original language and the cultural traditions associated with it (or if they are rejected for other reasons, such as a racist attitude on the part of the majority population).
- In the framework of research into specific models of bilingual education, “dual proficiency” was often considered problematic from an educational point of view. Does command of one language not prevent the learning of another? In fact, as we have seen, the major argument in favour of a command of the L1 in the context of bilingual programmes for children who speak a minority language is precisely that such competencies also facilitate the learning of L2, the dominant language of the society concerned.
- The argument that bilingual people do not have complete command of either of their languages is probably the most tenacious. It is said that bilingualism (as a particular type of plurilingualism) is now defined as the ability to communicate in two (or more) languages, regardless of the individual’s level of competency in each language, the mode of acquisition of these competencies and the age at which they were acquired or, again, regardless of the psycholinguistic relationships between the various idioms making up an individual’s repertoire. According to this definition, one could go so far as to say that the majority of the world’s population is bilingual. It is true that such bilingual competency is often asymmetric; it is nonetheless increasingly seen as an asset rather than a handicap. Each of a bilingual individual’s competencies should not therefore be measured by the yardstick of the (often ideal, rather than actual) skills of a “native”, monolingual speaker; what he/she is able to do should instead be assessed with the aid of all his/her linguistic resources. If one of a bilingual child’s two languages is weaker, but he/she is able to perform cognitively demanding tasks in the other one, there is nothing to worry about. It is true that some children have limited competencies in all their languages. Contrary to the frequent prejudices, however, the cause of this is no longer attributed to bilingualism, but to the child’s social context (particularly the one in which he/she acquired L1). It has been shown that the most appropriate solution to this type of problem is not abandoning the language of origin or ancestral language in favour of the language of the host society/dominant language but, on the contrary, supporting and reinforcing L1.

The advantages of children having a plurilingual repertoire are particularly striking in the case of early plurilingualism (two or more L1s in earliest childhood). The state of research can be summarised as follows:

- Early plurilinguals have an enhanced faculty for creative thinking. They are significantly better at tasks that require them to find, not *the* correct answer to a question, but to imagine a multitude of answers, eg to imagine a maximum of interesting and unusual uses of a cup (Baker, 1988, Ricciardelli, 1992).
- Their metalinguistic faculties are more advanced than those of their monolingual peers. This means they have better analytical skills but also and above all better cognitive control of linguistic operations (Bialystok, 1987, 1988). This has advantages when acquiring literacy and gives them better chances of success at school.
- They have greater communicative sensitivity in that they are better at perceiving situational factors and react to them more quickly to correct errors of schematisation and behaviour (Ben-Zeev, 1977). It is thought that this is because of the need to determine rapidly on the

basis of various indicators the choice of language appropriate to a particular situation (Baker, 1996, 136).

- They score better in tests of spatial perception. Bilingual children are therefore better at redrawing the right-hand figure in the left (embedded figures test), which means greater cognitive clarity and better analytical skills.

The advantages bilingual children have could be explained by more varied cultural experiences and the need to choose and alternate between two languages (code-switching). Following Vygotsky, I would add greater distancing in relation to language: they are aware of the relativity of the conceptual grid through which a particular language verbalises the world because they use two or more. This gives them a greater capacity for abstraction and more facility manipulating categories (Vygotsky, 1985, Diaz/Klingler, 1991).

5. Ways in which child bilingualism is supported by education systems

Having established that child bilingualism is a definite advantage for children, I can now return to the subject I abandoned for a moment: bilingual education.

Increasingly, children's bi- or plurilingualism results from a deliberate choice by parents. As one French-speaking mother living in a German-speaking area said, "I'd like my children to be bilingual; I don't know what else I'll teach them but, in any case, bilingualism has been an absolute revelation to me since I've lived in Basel". In such cases one can speak in terms of a *bilingual education strategy*. More generally, the term "bi/plurilingual education" can be applied to any particular education strategy on the part of parents, communities or governments that aims to develop children's bi/plurilingualism.

When done well it

- gives children the opportunity to succeed academically and linguistically and develop the awareness and competencies needed to function in a more just world;
- creates a strong, positive, multilingual and multicultural sense of identity, accompanied by positive attitudes to self and others;
- preserves linguistic and cultural diversity.

Conversely, education through submersion in the dominant language hinders children's chances of academic and personal success, reduces their self-confidence and self-respect, as well as their respect for their own culture *and* the dominant culture, makes communication with parents and community difficult and therefore isolates them from their culture. It is very possible that the current disturbances in some neighbourhoods of major French cities where the majority of the population is immigrant are the result, among other things, of the failure of the official education system to take into account their language and culture of origin.

Education through submersion also contributes to loss of the knowledge, traditions and religious beliefs of the minority/indigenous group and accelerates the disappearance of ancestral regional languages and cultures.

In fact, parents sometimes apply a bilingual educational strategy with no external assistance. One often sees this in situations where two languages coexist and a minority language is dominated by the official language. In such cases, schools are little concerned with young pupils' linguistic repertoires and teach them through submersion; if the family language is maintained, it is only through parental effort. Parents' and communities' bilingual educational strategies are increasingly supported – or even generated – by the education system itself, however. It is these *forms of bilingual programmes or bilingual education*, supported by the education system – and aiming to establish linguistic diversity, preserve the linguistic rights of minorities, improve their academic results or simply give initially monolingual children better chances on the labour market – that are the subject of this paper.

The question then arises of the forms of bilingual education and their appropriateness to specific situations when languages and cultures are in contact with each other. What are the objectives of

bilingual education policies? How are such policies implemented? Does bilingual education reach its objectives? Who benefits from them and who bears their cost, both in human and financial terms? I will now examine these questions, first looking at the forms of bilingual programmes and then at the question of their appropriateness in certain contexts.

In practice, the content of bilingual programmes varies considerably. It is therefore useful to establish and identify a few models or types of bilingual programme.

Bilingual education models

A first classification of models is based on the general objectives of bilingual education. Thus, following Colin Baker (2001), “weak” and “strong” models can be identified.

- “Weak” bilingual education models consider bilingualism an intermediate stage between monolingualism in L1 and monolingualism in L2, rather than an end in itself, and in principle seek to ensure controlled transition from an L1 different from the official language used at school to that language. Such models are usually described as *transitional*. Although this type of model does not explicitly aim to suppress the pupil’s L1 completely, it is not really supported by the education system beyond the transition period.

“Weak” bilingual education models are traditional in contexts of immigration everywhere where “submersion” programmes are rejected for educational reasons. In many cases transitional bilingual programmes in the official education system are supplemented by personal efforts on the part of parents or their community to counter the risk of “language loss”. Such initiatives are sometimes co-funded by immigrant children’s countries of origin. Some such models offer such limited teaching of the first language and transfer pupils to teaching entirely in L2 at such an early age that they cannot really be considered to be covered by the concept of “bilingual education” as defined above. In this type of model children do not really have the advantages of bilingualism. Indeed, while weak bilingual programmes aiming for transition to the majority language may avoid the negative effects of the “submersion” method, this is not enough in itself to resolve the political, cultural and identity problems connected with this type of situation, particularly where regional minority languages are concerned.

- By contrast, “strong” bilingual education models aim to give children real bi/plurilingual competence and biliteracy in particular. In other words, this type of model considers the various forms of plurilingual repertoire an important resource and is designed to develop them. This type of model responds to the aspirations of parents who live in multilingual contexts and want their children both to maintain the ancestral minority language and have equal opportunities on the employment market thanks to their proficiency in the official/majority language and other languages.

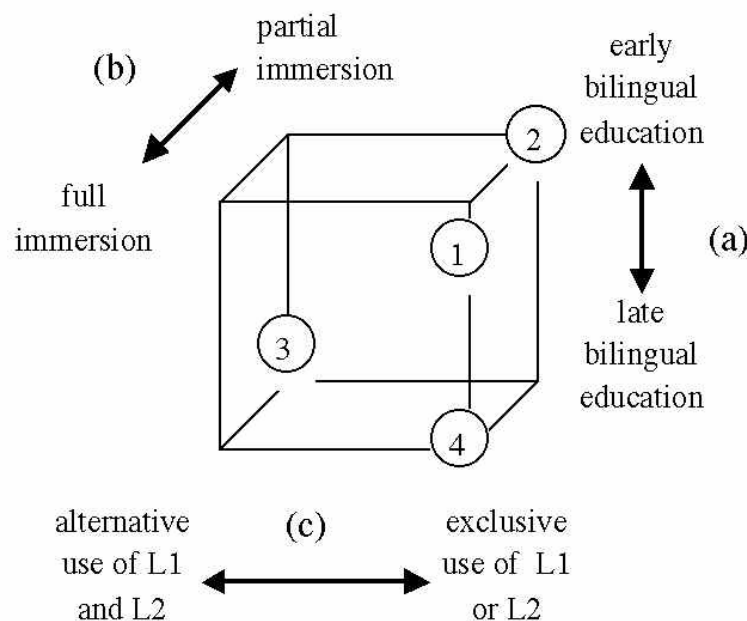
Three types of “strong” bilingual education model can be distinguished according to different contexts:

- models that aim to support a less used language (national language, diaspora language, immigrants’ language of origin), with the dual objective of maintaining that language and teaching pupils the official language of the country or region in which they live. This model is sometimes referred to as the “support” or “linguistic heritage” model. An example would be Sorbian in the Land of Brandenburg and the Free State of Saxony in Germany;
- models that seek to *normalise* a minority language that has lost much of its former prestige, some of its areas of use and – this is not the least of the elements – many of its speakers, for economic or political reasons; here the objective will be to create the necessary conditions for use of the minority language concerned to be recovered, in other words, to re-establish its use as a recognised written language (cf. Aracil, 1965). This model has been put in place in Ireland for Irish and for Catalan and Basque in Spain (while the models chosen in France for the same languages have distinctly less ambitious objectives);
- models aiming to develop or enrich the monolingual (or already plurilingual) repertoires of young speakers of a majority language, eg bilingual Dutch-English

education in the Netherlands and German-French in the Saar (Germany). Such models are not relevant to our subject and will not be discussed further.

Conception of bilingual education in particular models

Within the general framework of the models that have just been outlined, more precise sub-categories can be established based on criteria such as length/continuity of bilingual education, its intensity and regularity, class composition and the choice of subjects taught in the framework of education in the second/modern language. Each type of bilingual education supported by the school system can be situated in the grid below:



- No single answer can be given to the question as to the “*ideal*” time when bilingual education should begin. This depends on the socio-economic context and the fundamental objectives of the particular programme. From the point of view of acquiring a second language in general, one is tempted to reply “the earliest will be the best”, so long as an appropriate “period of exposure” to the second language has already been determined (bearing in mind that for successful learning, the younger the child, the longer the period of exposure to L2 should be). From the point of view of supporting or reinforcing the L1, one also has to ask at what scale and intensity the use of L2 as language of instruction might threaten L1. The objective of reinforcing L1 could be compromised by premature immersion in L2, particularly if the national language of the country also has a significant place in children’s daily lives. In other words, the objective of supporting a language that is part of the heritage may lead those responsible for language policy to believe that the L1 framework should be maintained for as long as possible (at least throughout primary education), before L2 is introduced as a language of instruction through partial immersion. Conversely, the advocates of transitional models argue that teaching in L1 should last no longer than necessary and that total immersion in L2 should take place as early as possible in order to guarantee equal opportunities to, for example, children who are from immigrant communities and those who are not. More generally, objectives should be diversified by varying the intensity of the use of L1 and L2, rather than waiting too long before introducing L2, in order to draw the maximum benefit from the capacity very young children have to learn modern languages.
- The length of the bilingual education process is as important as the choice of the time when it should start. Everyone knows that it takes many years to acquire intellectual/theoretical proficiency in an L1 as much as an L2. Programmes should provide a sufficient number of years of instruction in L1, especially “support” programmes, but also “transitional” programmes. In the latter case, the length, intensity and continuity of teaching in L1 should be determined according to the need for

children who are speakers of foreign languages (ie, at the outset, of languages other than that of the country) or from minorities to succeed at school and become integrated in the dominant society as soon as possible.

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples document referred to earlier cites numerous studies of children belonging to indigenous populations, ethnic minorities or immigrant groups that support the maximum length of education in L1. To summarise their results, the studies compared children belonging to three different categories:

- Children taught in the dominant language through submersion;
- Children essentially taught in their L1 for a few years, during which time they learn the dominant language as L2 before going over at quite an early stage to teaching in L2, while continuing to receive support in L1 (early exit);
- Children essentially taught in their L1 for a longer period during which they learn the dominant language as L2 before going over at a rather later stage to teaching in the dominant language, while continuing to receive support in L1 (late exit).

All the studies indicate that the more children receive an education in L1, the better they will learn the dominant languages as L2. Children in the third group attained the highest level of bilingualism and academic success. In fact, the children in the third group seemed to be the only ones capable of speaking the dominant language as well as their own. Some studies also suggested that the longer children are taught in their mother tongue, the more respect they will have for both the dominant culture and their own culture.

Much experience concerning immigrant children in Europe shows that L1 is the most effective language of instruction and that speedily going over to programmes taught exclusively in L2 does not satisfactorily develop pupils' linguistic and cognitive capacities. Initially, the United Kingdom adopted the principle of learning the language through submersion (this was in fact referred to as "total immersion") in order to facilitate the integration of immigrant children. However, by the late 1970s the shortcomings of this model had become clear and there was serious concern about the fact that immigrant children were behind at school. Between 1978 and 1981 the University of Bradford (United Kingdom) looked at the effects of an annual bilingual programme on 5-year-old Punjabi-speaking children. A control group that used only English obtained significantly poorer results than the children who were taught partly in English and partly in Punjabi. The same was observed of Italian-speaking children. I have already cited research that shows that the acquisition of a second language is far more effective if pupils start with a good knowledge of a first language and that effective acquisition of the second language can be obtained by devoting at the very most half of teaching time to classes taught in that language. Consequently, the great question of when immersion in L1 should end and use of L2 as language of instruction should begin (but not as a taught language!) is a pedagogical one: it is a matter of knowing whether or not the level of proficiency in L1 needed to transfer intellectual/theoretical faculties to an L2 has been achieved. This question also has a political dimension, however. Children may therefore leave a transitional bilingual programme earlier (for example, at the end of primary school) but will leave a support programme much later (for example at the end of middle school), according to whether the objective just mentioned has been reached.

- The last question to take into consideration is the target groups of bilingual education. In the case of a homogeneous school population (eg composed of speakers of the same regional language), the relationship between L1 and L2 is unidirectional. It will be asked (a) whether bilingual education should be offered only to elites or to the school population of a whole region or country, and (b) whether "balanced" or "functional" bilingualism should be the objective. The principle of universality would require bilingual education to be designed for the whole of the education system and that the levels of bilingualism and biliteracy achieved should be balanced. In regions with a mixed linguistic population special attention should be given to class composition. Although bilingual education is sometimes only offered to a single community (for example, in Estonia to speakers of a minority national language who do not speak Estonian), in many other cases teaching of the minority or local language is offered to speakers of the dominant language. In this type of situation, in which pupils living in a bilingual linguistic community learn the language of the other part of the community (what is

known as the “dual” or two-way linguistic model), pupils from the two linguistic communities can be brought together in the same class on the basis of the fact that children learn better through reciprocal interaction. This means that the two languages have a normal, perfectly equal, place in class. This is what is generally referred to as “dual”, “interlaced” or “reciprocal” immersion.

An argument frequently put forward against bilingual programmes is their cost and the difficulty of setting them up. Setting up good bilingual education programmes requires considerable investment – for producing teaching materials and for teacher training, for example – but, over the long term, bilingual education has proved more effective and more economic because far fewer pupils repeat years.

6. Which model(s) should be chosen?

It will be concluded from what has been said so far that child bilingualism is an asset and that bilingual education has a number of educational advantages. There are many possible forms of bilingual education, however, not all of which are necessarily appropriate to all possible objectives or social contexts. In order to choose a specific policy, politicians will have to weigh up the pros and cons of the different bilingual education models in relation to their own objectives.

There are many criteria according to which the choice may be made. I will concentrate here on a single dimension: the demolinguistic and geopolitical situation of the speakers of the particular minority language. The following scenarios can be identified:

- (a) A regional language which is spoken exclusively in a country with a different official language and which is not the official language in any country. Examples: Sorbian and Breton.
- (b) A regional language spoken in more than one country that is not an official language in any of them. Examples: Basque and Catalan.
- (c) A deterritorialised language with no recognised ancestral territory, or a language spoken in the diaspora. Examples: Yiddish, Roma and Judeo-Spanish.
- (d) A language that is regional in one country but has the status of official language in a neighbouring country. Examples: Hungarian and Italian in Slovenia, Russian in Estonia and Latvia.
- (e) A language of immigration in one country which is the official language of one or more other countries. Examples: Turkish in Germany and the Netherlands, Arabic in France, Spanish in Sweden.
- (f) A language of immigration in a country that is not an official language in the country of origin. Examples: Kurdish in Switzerland, Berber in France.

Sub-categories are obviously possible and necessary. We know, for example, that the status of Catalan is very different in France and Spain. While it is a joint official language in the provinces of Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearics in Spain (and one of the official languages of the Principality of Andorra), its position in France (in what is also known as North Catalonia) is far weaker. The examples given are sufficient for the discussion of a number of points, however.

I said that the objectives of forms of bilingual education should be appropriate to the particular situation. Monolingual teaching in L2 with no support of L1 should in principle be proscribed everywhere. The measures recommended for L1 are not the same everywhere, however.

Promoting linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe was stressed above. In this context, the importance of literacy in the first language(s) is widely recognised. Except for official languages, the educational infrastructure is most developed with respect to minority ancestral languages. Various authorities in Europe have urged countries to offer education in these languages, and progress has been significant. The means deployed vary greatly, both in terms of teaching methods and pupils' access to them, however.

- In some regions the education system provides total immersion in L1, in other words, the regional language is the only language of instruction while the official language is taught as a subject. This option provides the best guarantees of literacy in L1; it is highly recommended

for the first years of schooling and should last for several years. If the total immersion model is maintained beyond primary level or continued throughout compulsory education, however, it may lead to shortcomings in pupils' proficiency in the official language and therefore compromise their academic success.

- The partial immersion model is often chosen, in other words, the ancestral language and the official language are both used as languages of instruction. This option is not recommended for the early years of schooling (unless the pupils are bilingual), but is without doubt the best option for post-primary education. It guarantees harmonious development of pupils' repertoires and allows the gradual introduction into the curriculum of other languages as taught subjects. It also makes it possible to put pupils with different L1s in the same classes, both of the groups benefiting from partial immersion in what is their L2.
- Other support measures (in most cases the minority language is simply a subject on the curriculum) are clearly inadequate, both for guaranteeing a good level of literacy in L1 and for supporting the ancestral language as such. They cannot really be considered forms of bilingual education. They may be conceivable in higher secondary education or at university for students who have previously been in bilingual education.

A whole series of documents and declarations by the Council of Europe, the European Union, the UN, organisations of African states and others stress that, in the case of endangered regional and diaspora languages, so-called "transitional" programmes that provide assistance for L1 only in so far as it will facilitate academic success in L2 do not comply with international standards and requirements, which postulate "support" programmes in such cases because, otherwise, the languages in question may disappear altogether. This is particularly flagrant with respect to populations that may otherwise not transmit the ancestral language to the next generation. Schools using these languages as languages of instruction in primary education therefore have two different, but correlative, objectives:

- to reinforce children's knowledge of a language with a restricted sphere of use;
- to enhance the status of those languages in the eyes of parents and communities in order to support and strengthen their will to maintain them.

In addition to the cases cited under (a) to (c), I will mention here the example of the Csango in Romania. Romanian legislation provides that parents may choose the language in which their children are educated (Section 180 of the 1995 Education Act). There are three possibilities: teaching in Romanian, teaching in the mother tongue with history and geography in Romanian, and teaching in Romanian with the mother tongue as an optional subject. In the spirit of the considerations outlined above, this third option, although it is the one chosen by many Csangos, is far from sufficient to preserve this ancestral language. It is the choice of Csango (not standard Hungarian) as the language of instruction (not simply as an option) that is needed and moreover demanded by parents in the face of the resistance of local populations (see the report of the Committee on Science, Culture and Education of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on *Csango minority culture in Romania* (Doc. 9078 of 4 May 2001).

There is not such a strict necessity in type (d) cases, although international pressure in favour of the regional language is often stronger in these cases.

In these cases, too, however, the diversity of cultures and languages in border regions should be seen as a valuable resource that enriches European heritage, strengthens the identity of every nation and individual, and is a factor in international cohesion. European assistance, including in particular assistance from neighbouring countries in which they are official languages, is justified to support such linguistic minorities.

In the context of the *Strategy for economic, social and environmental renewal* drawn up in Lisbon in March 2000, a European Union action plan 2004-2006 aims to promote language learning and linguistic diversity. The approaches supported include those based on multilingual understanding in the framework of courses in mother tongues and foreign languages. Neighbouring national languages play an important role in this. For example, the teaching of French is favoured in Saarland

and in the upper-Rhine area of Baden-Württemberg. It is therefore only logical that promoting bilingual French-German education in Alsace should be perceived also and above all as a cross-border collaboration measure. Similar collaboration could be fostered between the region of Prekmurje in Slovenia and Hungary, between German-speaking minorities in Denmark and Germany, etc.

A further example is Latvia. It is understandable that the Republic of Latvia's law on languages stresses Latvian rather than minority languages. During the Soviet era, the use of Latvian in the life of the state and society decreased substantially; this is why measures to protect Latvian were plausible when the country became independent. The measures to restore Latvian were very radical, however; being designed to "latvianise" Russian-speakers in particular, together with Ukrainians, Belarussians and Poles – roughly a third of the population in all – the measures were much criticised. One of the main recommendations made to Latvia by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in January 2001, at the end of the procedure to monitor its honouring of the obligations it accepted when it joined the Council of Europe, was to ratify the Council's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. However, in May 2004 the Diet of Latvia again refused to ratify the Convention. This decision directly concerns the issue of teaching the Russian mother tongue in Latvia. According to the principles put forward here, there is no doubt that the Latvian authorities' wish that all pupils, including the Russian-speaking, should acquire a good command of the official language is legitimate. But it is equally legitimate for the Russian-speaking minorities to insist on teaching in the mother tongue. This teaching should take place according to a "strong" model, in other words, aim for balanced bilingualism and biliteracy. Therefore demands for monolingual education in Russian and attempts to introduce "weak" or "transitional" models that seek to latvianise children from the Russian-speaking minority rather than turn them into true bilinguals should both be rejected.

The teaching of several L1s for migrant populations is still fairly marginal in education systems. The majority of countries leave responsibility for teaching L1 to communities or countries of origin. With the exception of a few projects to develop teaching material for the languages of the largest migrant groups in Europe, the availability of educational material for literacy in L1 depends either on its availability in countries of origin or local initiatives, improvisation by teachers, etc. Several factors connected with the language obstruct the successful development of (multi-)literacy in primary education: the low status many languages have in host countries, lack of support from parents, lack of access to or simply the lack of children's books, lack of adequately trained teachers (language of origin plus familiarity with host country education system), the priority given to the host language which results in literacy in L1 being developed, at best, in parallel (instead of successively) to literacy in L2, etc. A recent Council of Europe document on language policy, "Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe: from linguistic diversity to plurilingual education" (April 2003), expressly emphasises the importance of plurilingual education and literacy and considers migrants' languages an important resource. Several initiatives in the framework of the ECML in Graz are similarly motivated and advocate teaching in L1, bi- and multilingual education and linguistic diversity in general as a means of promoting social cohesion and intercultural understanding. It is true that the implementation of such an education policy, even if only transitional bilingual education policies are involved, is not easy in the current political climate in Europe. But the youth violence at present affecting France (November 2005) may be the result of failure of an education policy of assimilation, which was nonetheless well thought out. Education through submersion is largely responsible for this.

A 1991 decision by the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Directors of Education is an example of measures that barely reach the minimum threshold required. The Conference reaffirmed the principle that it was important to integrate in publicly run schools all children who were speakers of foreign languages living in Switzerland, avoiding any form of discrimination and emphasising that integration should take place respecting children's right to maintain the language and culture of their countries of origin. After stressing the need for free support for the acquisition of L2 before they start school proper, the Conference recommended to cantons, among other things, support for efforts to promote languages of origin and, in the framework of evaluation of pupils when decisions were being taken on promotion and selection, taking into account to an appropriate degree foreign-language speaking and extra knowledge of the language and culture of countries of origin. According to the Conference, it was above all important to avoid placing pupils who were speakers of foreign languages in special

classes or requiring them to repeat years only because of deficiencies in the language of instruction. Extra-curricular support was therefore proposed for all children who needed it. For their part, teachers had to be prepared to teach foreign children in multicultural classes. Collaboration between foreign and native teachers had to be promoted, the needs of children who spoke foreign languages taken into account when preparing teaching materials, study plans and timetables, and the needs of children who spoke foreign languages and their families taken into account in the organisation of the school. Lastly, it was suggested that, as far as possible, a minimum of two hours a week of language and culture classes should be included in the timetable, that these classes should be adequately supported and that attendance at them and, if appropriate, marks obtained should be included in children's reports; contacts and all forms of intercultural education should be encouraged and supported at every level; cantonal officers should be appointed and/or working units set up with responsibility for encouraging and coordinating application of the Conference's recommendations.

One delicate question is where and under what conditions bilingual education (partial or total immersion) is to be offered. Some countries restrict it to territories in which the language is traditionally spoken; others require what is considered a sufficient number of pupils; still others require the availability of adequate funding and/or a sufficient number of qualified teachers. These conditions are sometimes combined and make bilingual education an illusion. Paradoxically, it is where the language has least need of support – in regions where the ancestral language is the official language in the neighbouring country – that conditions are best. Teachers can be trained abroad, some of the teaching materials can be imported and in some cases neighbouring states even provide some financial support. When it comes to maintaining Europe's linguistic heritage, however, it is the regional languages that do not enjoy such support that need support most. Teacher training and the development of teaching materials are entirely in the hands of the state and the regional community, both of which must have the political will and provide the necessary funding. It also has to be decided where, geographically speaking, bilingual education is to be offered. Traditionally, it has tended to be restricted to the ancestral part of the territory in which the language is still regularly spoken. In view of the increasing mobility of the population, this may be entirely insufficient to safeguard a language. An example is Rhaeto-Romansh in Switzerland, half of whose speakers now live outside what remains of the ancestral territory, many of them outside the Canton of Grisons where it is one of the official languages – for example, in Zurich, the business capital of German-speaking Switzerland. Similarly, a large number of families of Breton origin live in Paris, Slovene civil servants of Hungarian origin in Ljubljana, etc. There should also therefore be provision for a bilingual education system in major cities where the official language is dominant. The question arises still more acutely with respect to deterritorialised diaspora languages and for the language of the Sinti or Roma, whose speakers often travel around Europe with no fixed place of residence.

In many countries parents have considerable freedom of choice with respect to how their children are educated. In the case of the various forms of bilingual education, education systems should decide what choice they want to – or should – give parents. In some regions the minority language is imposed as the language of instruction. This is the case in the Rhaeto-Romansh-speaking region of Switzerland, which, like other regions of the country offers no choice as to the language of instruction but states that the local language alone (in this case, it is the municipality that decides) is legal. Children from elsewhere, including Swiss children speaking a different national language as L1, receive extra help to avoid the most flagrant disadvantages of submersion. Safeguarding the local language takes precedence over all other considerations, however. The results seem to prove politicians right. Strongly dominant in an essentially bilingual region, German suffers little from this; but the influence on the frequency of use of the minority language is striking. According to the results of the 1990 federal census, Rhaeto-Romansh was more frequently spoken in German-speaking districts with early total-immersion Rhaeto-Romansh schools than in districts where the majority of Rhaeto-Romansh-speakers had opted for German as the language of instruction. In other regions – and rightly in capitals where speakers of the official language constitute the overwhelming majority – parents have a vast choice of schools to respond best to what they believe to be their children's needs and aspirations. However, the low prestige of some ancestral languages may determine parents' perceptions and representations of their usefulness. They often opt for the dominant language in what they believe to be their children's interests, even if objectively this is not the case. Indeed, in addition to the disadvantages for their children's cognitive development that education through submersion entails, there is the increased risk of loss of ancestral languages. Parents can obviously not be held responsible for this as long as they are simply internalising the

representations of society as a whole. The result of all this is that, in order to maintain regional languages as such, it is entirely inadequate to introduce them as optional languages of instruction in education systems. The social and linguistic context therefore has to be changed in such a way that proficiency in them is perceived by actors as a desirable good.

It is all the more important to respect parents' wish to transmit their language to their children where they so desire. I will again cite Latvia as an example. Any tendency for the state to restrict Russian-speaking children's access to a bilingual education, which would give Russian a significant role as a language of instruction, would be contrary to the principles stated in this paper. But, I repeat, there should be no right to monolingual education in a minority language and the state's concern to enable children who are foreign language-speakers to participate fully in cultural, social and political life through proficiency in the official language is perfectly right and legitimate. It would seem that the negative representations of bilingualism described above arouse fears among leaders on both sides. It is this that has to be worked on if the deadlock is to be broken.

Reporting committee: Committee on Culture, Science and Education

References to committee : Doc. 10076, Reference No 2924 of 02.03.2004 and Doc. 10316, Reference No 3007 of 08.10.2004

Draft recommendation unanimously adopted by the committee on 25 January 2006

Members of the Committee: Mr Jacques **Legendre** (Chairman), Baroness Hooper, Mr Josef **Jařab**, Mr Wolfgang **Wodarg**, (Vice-Chairpersons), Mr Hans **Ager**, Mr Toomas Alatalu, Mr Emerenzio Barbieri, Mr Rony **Bargetze**, Mr Radu-Mircea Berceanu, Mrs Marie-Louise Bemelmans-Videc, Mr Radu-Mircea Berceanu, Mr Levan **Berdzenishvili**, Mr Italo Bocchino, Mr Bořidar Bojović, Mr Ioannis **Bougas**, Mrs Anne Bresseur, Mr Osman Cořkunoęlu, Mr Vlad Cubreacov, Mrs Maria **Damanaki**, Mr Joseph Debono Grech, Mr Stepan **Demirchyan**, Mr Ferdinand **Devinski**, Mr Detlef **Dzembitzki**, Mrs Kaarina **Dromberg**, Mrs Åse Gunhild Woie Duesund, Mrs Anke Eymmer, Mr Relu Fenechiu, Mrs Blanca Fernández-Capel (Alternate : Mrs Soledad **Becerril**), Mrs Maria Emelina Fernández-Soriano, Mr Axel Fischer, Mr José Freire **Antunes**, Mrs Siv Friedleifsdóttir, Mr Ian Gibson (Alternate : Mr Robert **Walter**), Mr Eamon Gilmore (Alternate : Mr Paschal **Mooney**), Mr Stefan Glăvan, Mr Luc Goutry, Mr Vladimir Grachev (Alternate : Mr Igor **Chernyshenko**), Mr Andreas Gross, Mrs Azra Hadžiahmetović, Mr Jean-Pol Henry, Mr Rafael **Huseynov**, Mr Raffaele Iannuzzi, Mrs Halide **İncekara**, Mr Lachezar Ivanov, Mr Igor Ivanovski, Mr József Kozma, Jean-Pierre **Kucheida**, Mr Guy Lengagne, Mrs Jagoda Majska-Martinčević, Mr Tomasz Markowski, Mr Bernard Marquet (Alternate : Mr Christophe **Spiliotis-Saquet**) Mr Andrew **McIntosh**, Mr Ivan Melnikov, Mrs Maria Manuela de **Melo**, Mr Paskal Milo, Mrs Fausta Morganti, Mrs Christine Muttonen, Mrs Miroslava **Němcová**, Mr Jakob-Axel Nielsen, Mr Edward **O'Hara**, Mr Andrey Pantev, Mrs Ganira Pashayeva, Mrs Antigoni Pericleous Papadopoulos, Mrs Majda Potrata, Mr Lluís Maria de Puig, Mr Anatoliy Rakhansky, Mr Johannes Randegger, Mr Zbigniew **Rau**, Mr Zoltán Rockenbauer, Mrs Anta Rugăte, Mr Piero Ruzzante, Mr Volodymyr Rybak, Mr Pär-Axel Sahlberg, Mr André **Schneider**, Mr Vitaliy Shybko, Mr Yury Solonin, Mr Ninoslav Stojadinović, Mr Valeriy Sudarenkov, Mr Mehmet **Tekelioęlu**, Mr Ed **van Thijn**, Mr Piotr Wach, Mrs Majléne **Westerlund Panke**, Mr Emanuelis **Zingeris**, NN (Andorra)

N.B. The names of those members present at the meeting are printed in bold

Head of Secretariat: Mr Christopher Grayson
Committee secretariat : MM Ary, Dossow, Chahbazian