Mauro Tosco

On language, government, and the reduction of linguistic diversity

Extracted from

———◉———

HE BITANEY LAGGE

~

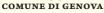## STUDIES ON LANGUAGE AND AFRICAN LINGUISTICS

IN HONOUR OF

MARCELLO LAMBERTI

———◉———

Edited by

Luca BUSETTO • Roberto SOTTILE • Livia TONELLI • Mauro TOSCO

HE BITANEY LAGGE

⁓

STUDIES ON ON LANGUAGE
AND AFRICAN LINGUISTICS
IN HONOUR OF
MARCELLO LAMBERTI

⁓

Edited by
• Luca Busetto • Roberto Sottile •
• Livia Tonelli • Mauro Tosco •

He bitaney lagge · *Studies Studies on Language and African Linguistics in honour of Marcello Lamberti*

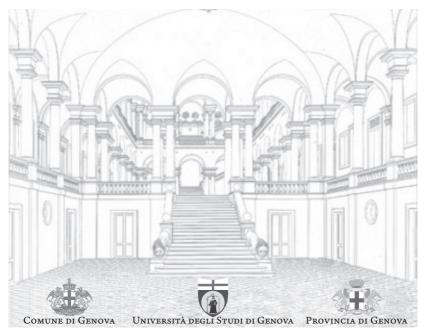*Edited by* Luca Busetto • Roberto Sottile • Livia Tonelli • Mauro Tosco

Contents

ቃለ፡ በረከት፡ ዘሄኖክ፡ ዘከመ፡ ባረከ፡ ኅሩያነ፡ ጻድቃነ፡ እለ፡ ሀለው፡ ይኩኑ
በዕለተ፡ ምንዳቤ፡ ለአሰስሎ፡ ኩሉ፡ እኩያን፡ ወረሲዓን።

Qāla barakat za-Hēnōk zakama bārraka ḫirūyāna wa-ṣādḳāna ʾila halaw yikūnū
baʿilata mindābē laʾasaslō kʷilū ʾikūyān wa-rasīʿān•

'Word of blessing of Henok, wherewith he blessed the chosen and righteous who would
be alive in the day of tribulation for the removal of all wrongdoers and backsliders.'

(*1 Enoch*)

Mauro Tosco

On language, government, and the reduction of linguistic diversity

Abstract

THE ARTICLE provides a cursory overview of the role of various types of governments and their ideological foundations in reducing or suppressing linguistic diversity. The universalist empires of Antiquity and Early Middle Ages, the early sovereign states and the modern nation-states are taken into examination. The general claim is that the reduction of linguistic diversity is positively correlated, first, with the modern state, and, to an even greater degree, with nation building. It will be argued that the ideological bases of the sovereign state (a form of government which arose in Western Europe in the late Middle Ages) and of the modern nation-state (as exemplified by the French Revolution) require the reduction of language diversity.

1. Language and government: a missing link?

The basic idea underpinning this work is quite simple: the reduction of linguistic and cultural diversity as witnessed in the contemporary world is quantitatively and qualitatively different from similar developments in pre-modern times. It is argued that one of the reasons for this difference lies in the planned nature of reduction in the modern world. It is also contended that the planning of linguistic reduction is an inescapable ingredient of the nation-state and its ideology.

I further assume that the reduction of linguistic diversity is just an aspect of a more general drift towards societal impoverishment as a means to bring about the equality of all individuals in front of the state and to increase the powers of the latter. In this regard, modern democratic countries represent the most perfect embodiment and final stage of the nation-state; and, consequently, they should lead the reduction of linguistic diversity to its final stage.

This idea, in its essence, is far from new: as remarked by DORIAN (1998: 18), «it is the concept of the nation-state coupled with its official standard

language, developed in modern Europe and extended to the many once-colonial territories of European states, that has in modern times posed the keenest threat to both the identities and the languages of small communities.» Likewise, the lack of explicit, direct connection between language and political contingencies in the pre-contemporary world is obviously far from a new idea: to take just one example among many, CALVET (2002: 155) has drawn the attention to the fact —paradoxical to the modern observer— that as late as at the Congress of Vienna (1815) «tout se passait en français, la langue des vaincus.»

What in my opinion has not so far been provided is an analysis of the role of the state (as opposed to other models of social organization) and its ideological, cultural and symbolic values, in the reduction of linguistic and cultural diversity.

As is well known (cf. NETTLE 1999), languages are not uniformly distributed over the planet. In particular, the number of languages per state is significantly lower in Europe than in other areas. *Per se*, this does not disprove the argument that the reduction of language variety is associated with industrialization and economic globalization (as generally implied in the literature on language ecology), or even with capitalism, rather than to the form of government. A complete discussion of the whole issue should take into considerations other factors: as almost any portion of the globe is under the official control of some form of government, the hypothesis that government involvement is directly correlated to the reduction of language diversity cannot be checked against a stateless area. In order to prove that language reduction is positively correlated with the successful implementation of forced reduction of diversity (as an instance of Weber's rationalization applied to language), one will have to seek for different rates of language reduction among economically comparable portions of the globe. As the nation state is nowadays the dominant, if not unique, form of government, this remains empirically difficult to demonstrate.

One could further assume that, *ceteris paribus*, the more efficient a government will be, the lower the number of languages spoken in the areas under its control. The time factor must be controlled, too: given enough time, older and less efficient forms of government could bring about a good amount of reduction of language diversity, irrespective of their ideological foundations. Moreover, when time is considered, an additional problem is

given by the fact that we do not know the original (i.e., before the unification of an area under the same polity) number of languages.

A complete or even adequate coverage of these issues cannot even be attempted in the short span of this article. The following observations are to be considered a first, preliminary step in this direction.

2. Why pre-modern "language policies" were not language policies

We are all citizens of modern nation-states; consequently, we have a certain familiarity with their mechanisms and problems, and, quite understandably, we tend to project this knowledge onto the past. When modern concepts such as "language policy", "national language", or even "state" are involved, this may lead to historical simplifications and sometimes downright errors in perspective. Thus, Wardhaugh (1987: 7), when dealing with language loss in the past, mentions Latin, Greek, and Arabic as languages which were «imposed over a particular area as a result of economic conquest and, once imposed, maintained by force there for several centuries.» But it is easy to note that none of these languages was strictly speaking imposed, not in the same sense, at least, in which one can say that, for example, French or Italian have been and are imposed in France and Italy —i.e., by law (which in turn implies the legitimate use of force). What was imposed and maintained by force was political power, not a specific linguistic medium. Neither Classical Greek nor Latin were ever "imposed", if not metaphorically. As to Arabic, it is certainly imposed today as a national language in the Arab countries, but it was not in that long period in which Arabic, after the spread of Islam, was the language of the Islamic community, the *umma*, without being associated exclusively to a specific ethnic group, let alone an "Arab nation" (which is obviously a modern concept).

The very history of Greek bears witness to the fact that language spread was often quite independent of political power: as is well known, Greek retained within the Roman Empire most of the commercial, cultural and even administrative functions which it had inherited from the Hellenistic period. Not only «*T*he Romans probably had no coherent plan to stamp out the languages they met,» and «even in the Eastern end of the Empire the main reasons for learning Latin were the simple practicalities of international life, such as the need to survive in the army, or the desire to gain employment elsewhere, perhaps in Rome itself,» but «*E*ven educated speakers of

Greek saw no particular reason to learn Latin before the general adoption of Christianity. Greek culture could satisfy most literary tastes» (Wright 2002: 4-6).

After the fall of the (Western) Roman Empire, Greek remained the official language of the Byzantine Empire, which continued to call itself "Roman" although Latin, the original language of the Roman Empire, played scarcely a role. In other words, and to reiterate the concept, language was one thing, power another. That Latin, or a form thereof, spread over vast portions of the Western Empire —at least all those areas where nowadays Romance languages are spoken— was not the result of a specific language policy aiming at the universalization of Latin. The spread and final victory of Latin were certainly a function of many factors, both internal and external, ranging from the absence of a competing lingua franca —the absence of another Greek to compete with— to the prestige of Rome and the long period over which it exercised its power. The conquered populations were gradually brought into a more intimate contact with Rome and, therefore, its language, but the process was a gradual, contradictory and long one, as witnessed, indirectly, by the gradual extension of Roman citizenship:

> «*T*he Roman Empire, like many other traditional empires, was a capstone government. Whereas elites were united horizontally, through common language and culture, the majority of the society consisted of a plurality of groups, with their own identities and few links with others. These segmental groups were allowed to retain their own religions and cultures, provided they did not interfere with Roman political rule. *The empire stretched wide but not deep.*» (Spruyt 1994: 211, fn. 56; emphasis mine)

As is well known, the legal status of foreign peoples and towns was always far from uniform: if in 88 B.C. the Roman citizenship was granted to the Italic peoples, the process culminated only in A.D. 212 (three centuries later), with the extension of citizenship to all the inhabitants of the Empire, decreed by Emperor Caracalla in the *Constitutio Antoniniana*. But, again, a knowledge of Latin had in principle nothing to do with citizenship. Already the contemporary historian Dio Cassius connected the *Constitutio Antoniniana* to the growing financial needs of the Empire: in particular, universal citizenship meant for the treasury universal application of the *vicesima hereditatium* (a succession duty of a twentieth part, i.e. 5%) and of the *vicesima manumissionum* (a duty on the value of freed slaves, in the measure again of 5%).

This is not to say that political power and political developments had no bearing on language behavior and the reduction of language diversity: of course they had, and quite radical ones, too. But language uniformity was a product of political unification, not its prerequisite. In a way, there was a language policy, but no language politics: power made use of a language, which therefore gained in importance and spread at the expense of other languages. But changes in language behavior were not the immediate interest and concern of political power; they were rather a by-product of far-reaching changes in the demographic, cultural and economic milieu —themselves the result of different policies in various domains: social, economic, and so on.

Under such circumstances, changes in language behavior tend to operate at a much slower rate than in modern nation-states. Furthermore, as to the specific linguistic medium which is chosen by power, it is characteristic that it can, but it need not be, the first, native language of the power-holders: as such a language is largely devoid of symbolic values, it will also be a quite inefficient instrument in securing and maintaining power. Power-holders may in such cases resort to the use of a language different from their own: such a language will often be a language already present in the territories under their control, maybe an existing lingua franca, ready-made for the new power to be put to use as a convenient medium for administration. Alternatively, the power-holders may be instrumental in standardizing and spreading a "new" medium, which as a consequence will gain in prestige, multiplying its functional domains. It is also important to note that such a language will often preserve its role irrespective of the political fortunes. Given enough time, the language may —but, again, need not— spread as a mother-tongue, too: in this last case, reduction of language diversity will certainly occur.

3. The rise of the sovereign state: a look at the late Middle Ages

The link between state and language is a function of the territoriality of both (cf. Laponce 1984, 1993 on language as a territorial entity). But where does the territoriality of the state come from?

To answer this question, one must embark into an analysis of the ideological foundations of the sovereign state and of its historical sources. Most of all, one must take care not to equate a modern state (i.e., a sovereign

nation-state) with any political organization which, across time and space, we choose for convenience to label a "state". For example, it is intuitive that even in a state in which the concept of nation plays no role a certain amount of homogeneization will nevertheless be achieved through the forced integration of people within the borders of the state: in setting barriers to the free movement of people and goods (e.g., through the imposition of duties), the movement within the borders will concurrently be enhanced, and in due time this will have obvious reflexes on language habits. CALVET (1999: 61) well describes this phenomenon:

> «la première intervention de l'État sur les systèmes écolinguistiques est celle qui consiste à tracer ses limites territoriales, à imposer à la trame des peuples, des ethnies et des langues une division qui, à l'origine, ne relève en général ni des peuples, ni des ethnies, ni des langues. […] le système gravitationnel est modifié, une langue peut être écartelée entre deux attractions, coexister avec des langues différentes et être marquée par elles, entrer dans des rapports diglossiques différents.»

On the other hand, the very concept of borders is a relatively modern one, dating from the rise, development and final victory of the sovereign state in the late Middle Ages, and finding its most rigorous implementation very late in the history of Europe. Throughout the Antiquity, and down to the Middle Ages in Western Europe and much later across much of the globe, states typically did not have borders, but border provinces or buffer zones, often more or less independent from the center. Also the Roman concept of *limes* does not correspond to the modern idea of state boundaries. Borders had a different meaning than for the modern state because authority was not «contingent on, or defined by, control over a specific territory with fixed boundaries» (SPRUYT 1994: 35). Logically, therefore, CALVET's common-sensical (to our minds) influence of political borders on language behavior could come into being only with the development of forms of political organization defined by territoriality. This is not to say that earlier forms of political organization were not bounded by physical space; of course, as any human institution, a political entity will always be both temporally and spatially delimited; rather, «*T*he question is whether the system of rule is predicated by on and defined by fixed territorial parameters» (SPRUYT 1994: 35). Again, we must be wary not to impose our

concept of what is the space of a modern (i.e., sovereign) state upon earlier, and to us by now unfamiliar, forms of "state".

In order to understand the role of the state in language behavior we must therefore analyze the cornerstones of the sovereign state and what makes it different from other forms of political organization.

The sovereign state is a rather recent innovation, dating from the late Middle Ages. Although its theoretical bases were laid down much later (essentially, with Jean Bodin's theory of sovereignty, 1576, and possibly even later), it is in the late Middle Ages that the system itself was born. The modern state was neither historically necessary nor was it the only solution which came into existence in that period. But it was the *winning* solution. By the early Modern Age, it had become the paramount form of political organization. It has been with us for the last few centuries, it is the only form of political organization we are familiar with, and, although it, too (like any human institution) will certainly give way to *something else*, we may be hardly put even to imagine what this something else could and will be.

A state in the modern sense of the world is based upon two interrelated concepts: *sovereignty* and *territoriality*. A modern state «is sovereign in that it claims final authority and recognizes no higher source of jurisdiction. It is territorial in that rule is defined as exclusive authority over a fixed territorial space» (Spruyt 1994: 34). Authority is defined as «administrative control over a fixed territorial space. It is delimited in an external sense, vis-à-vis other actors, by its formal borders. Unlike the church or empire, it advances no superiority over other rulers» (Spruyt 1994: 36).

If one compares a different kind of political organization, such as the universalist empires of the pre-modern type, with modern sovereign states (nation-states included), one cannot escape the conclusion that

> «universal empires are difficult to accommodate in a state system. Traditional universalist empires, such as the Ottoman, were based on a different logic of organization. Such empires sought to exercise political control over their sphere of economic production and trade, and herein they diverge from the statist logic of organization where political rule and sphere of interaction are separated. China and the Parthian Empire, for example, could exist in their respective spheres of influence without having to formally agree upon borders.» (Spruyt 1994: 16)

Different from a modern, sovereign state, which actually comes into existence only through external recognition (otherwise it simply "does not exist" for the "international community" —actually a metaphor for the other states), traditional empires did not recognize each other in principle (that they did in practice is a totally different matter). Empires, especially if based upon a religious concept (as the Islamic Caliphate and, in the West, the Holy Roman Empire) were universalistic per definition: «Although there were of course pragmatic limits to the factual exercise of power, their claims to rule were not defined by territory» (Spruyt 1994: 35). If, for example, the ideological basis of the empire was a religious claim to represent the believers, «*T*here were believers and infidels. Logically, there were no territorial limits to the inclusion of such faithful» (Spruyt 1994: 35).

In the early Middle Ages, authority was shared —and contested— between two universalist and translocal centers of power: the Church and the Holy Roman Empire. One may look at that specific type of political organization called feudalism only against and in the backdrop of the respective, often antagonistic, realms of these two authorities. Feudalism may be defined as «a highly decentralized system of political organization which is based on personal ties» (Spruyt 1994: 36). In such a system, political authority is highly fragmented, and public power is in private hands; furthermore, there is no monopoly of force. Systems of rule «were nonterritorial, and sovereignty was, at best, disputed.» (Spruyt 1994: 35). In short, «*T*he medieval period lacked not only exclusivity, but also territoriality […] inclusion in the feudal structure was not defined by physical location. That is, territory was not determinative of identity and loyalty. One's specific obligations or rights depended on one's place in the matrix of personal ties, not on one's location in a particular area» (Spruyt 1994: 35). According to Spruyt, the logic of feudal organization differed from that of a sovereign state because «feudal rule lacked hierarchy. Second, territorial rule was not exclusive. Third, feudal rule of territory was imperfect» (Spruyt 1994: 38).

There was no final source of authority and jurisdiction, and, although a lord held jurisdiction over a given area, he was in his turn dependent on specific personal relations, and «*S*ervice was owed to those with whom one had entered into vassalage» (Spruyt 1994: 38). As was the case, for example, of the Count of Luxemburg, a lord could be at the same time a prince of the empire nominally subject to the emperor, and hold a fief from

the King of France and be subject to him (Spruyt 1994: 39). At all levels, «*Individuals could be subject to multiple authorities because government was not defined by mutually exclusive criteria*» (Spruyt 1994: 55). Jurisdiction was also seldom absolute, and lacked a final locus: different types of law applied to different people, and, again, irrespective of territoriality (for example, ecclesiastics were subject to canon law and by religious courts).

On a similar vein, Rosenberg – Birzell (1986: 61-62) note that «*The most striking political effect of Western and Japanese feudalism was to create a plurality of power centers, each combining major or minor military strength with the economic base necessary to its support.*» And: «There is thus a political perspective from which feudalism can be seen as an antecedent of capitalism, logically as well as temporally, in that feudalism preceded capitalism in rejecting the notion of an absolute state in favor of the notion of a state with powers and limits determined by agreement with its inhabitants and with other autonomous social institutions.»

Rather than a system of territorial rule, feudalism may be conceived as an organization based on personal bonds: «Feudalism is rule over people rather than land» (Spruyt 1994: 40), and it is no chance that one spoke of the king of the English or of the French, rather than of the king of England or France.

Boundaries were rather indeterminate: «in the early Capetian period, when the kings were little more than princes among equals, the royal domain was best conceived as a package of rights rather than as rule over a specific territory. The king was thus entitled to income from sources, such as bishoprics, outside his domain over which he also might have jurisdiction» (Spruyt 1994: 40).

Starting from the late eleventh century, increase in agricultural production brought about a dramatic growth of population and a resurgence of trade. This led to the emergence of towns and of new social classes, with distinct economic interests and belief systems. The rise of the sovereign state (as well as of other competing "solutions," such as the city-leagues of the Hanseatic type and the city-states of Northern Italy) must be seen against the background of this economic upswing.

Against the feudal system of personal ties and extreme particularism, in which «Currency, language, law, all these varied widely across small areas of geographic space» (Spruyt 1994: 70), «*The development of sovereign-*

ty meant a formal demarcation of political authority on territorial grounds. Unlike universalist empires or the translocal organization of the Hansa, states thus have very precise limitations to their claims to rule» (SPRUYT 1994: 17). Which were the linguistic consequences of this radically new basis of political power?

4. The rise of the nation state and the birth of national languages

Empires did not need linguistic homogenization in order to ensure their internal stability and ideological legitimation. Moreover, their economic sphere of influence was often simply too vast for the empire to be able to exercise upon it an effective policy of cultural and linguistic homogenization. The very lack of territorial contiguity which marked the pre-modern political structures acted as an obstacle to the implementation of homogeneization policies. Being both ideologically unnecessary and technically scarcely feasible, homogeneization proceeded at a slow pace, by the mere force of attraction exercised by a prestigious centre upon its periphery. Often, the official language was a non-ethnic sacred language conceived of as a "universal" medium. Within their respective domains in the East and the West, Arabic and Latin had exactly this value. All this had to change with the rise of states based upon territoriality. While in the feudal order territory was not determinative of identity or loyalty, the sovereign state can lay claim upon defining individuals on territoriality:

> «The modern state […] defines individuals by spatial markers, regardless of kin, tribal affiliation, or religious beliefs. Individuals are in a sense amorphous and undifferentiated entities who are given an identity simply by their location in a particular area. Thus one must make Acquitanians, Normans, and Bretons into French people» (SPRUYT 1994: 34-35).

Interestingly, SPRUYT (1994: 106) notes that the Capetian kings and the rising class of merchants favored the French vernacular against the "universalist" language of the Church, Latin.

If the "birth" of French is usually dated at the Oath of Strasburg (14 February 842), its rise to the status of official language is put on 15 August 1539 (when, in articles 110 and 111 of the famous Ordinance of VillersCotterets, King François I decreed that French should replace Latin as the language of justice).

French had thus become the official language of the kingdom; but an official language is not the same of a *national* language. Early states had official languages, or, simply, languages they used in their official documents (that they were *declared* official languages or not is immaterial); only modern states — *qua* nation-states — have national languages. The latter could logically only be born after the very idea of nation as a political entity.

As early as 1672, the King had decreed that in Perpignan (Roussillon) children of both sexes had to be schooled at public expenses; although the program had limited application, it is to be noted that schooling had to be done «tant en langue française qu'en celle du pays et même en l'écriture desdites deux langues»; it is also interesting to note that the motivation was to enhance «l'union et l'amitié *entre les peuples des différentes nations*» (DE CERTEAU – JULIA – REVEL 1975: 357, fn. 4; emphasis mine). The use of the plural (*peuples*, *nations*) is here crucial.

In a way, the early access of French to the role of official language resulted in its "un-national" character: FISHMAN (1972: 64) remarks on an early prenationalist ideology of French, a view which

> «contains no clearly nationalist flavor or fervor, as is the case with many languages of more recent nationality-states and of nationalities still seeking cultural or political security. There is no indication that some typically or uniquely French behavior is fostered or facilitated by means of the French language. French is viewed as a gift to all of mankind, as an instrument of pure reason and as a creation of sublime and natural beauty, rather than as something parochially and primarily French.»

Similarly for the French Academy, founded in 1635:

> «Several aspects of the Academy's approach reveal its premodernization goals and views. Far from seeking to provide technical nomenclatures for industrial, commercial, and other applied pursuits the Academy steadfastly refused to be concerned with such "uncultured" and "unrefined" concerns. Instead of attempting to reach the masses with its products the Academy studiously aimed its publications (at least for three centuries, if not longer) at those already learned in the French language. Finally, *instead of appealing to anything essentially French in "spirit," in "genius," in "essence," or in "tradition" it defended its recommendations via appeals to such purportedly objective criteria as euphonia, clarity, and necessity (redundancy).*» (FISHMAN 1972: 78; emphasis ours).

While the concept of nation played a role during the last phases of the absolute kingdoms as part of an effort to justify power, it was only with the French Revolution that the state was framed as the embodiment of a nation, and government as acquiring its legitimacy from representing the nation's will. Only after the French Revolution one can properly speak of national languages. And only since then a language or a variety could become critical in state matters, because by then the linguistic behavior of a population could be interpreted as a crucial sign of its legitimate affiliation within a certain state.

As people become one and the same with government, a linguistic difference between citizens and the caretakers of power, as well as among the citizens themselves, becomes logically impossible: if the state and the citizens form sort of a mystical body, how could its single parts not be able to communicate? KUEHNELT-LEDDIHN (1952: 100-101) remarked that «a society consciously and collectively safeguarding a common *political* ideology is automatically pledged to common *cultural* values resulting in a rigorous homogeneity as to its "way of life".» SMITH (1986: 136) observes:

> «territorial nations must also be cultural communities. The solidarity of citizenship required a common 'civil religion' formed out of shared myths and memories and symbols, and communicated in a standard language through educational institutions. So the territorial nation becomes a mass educational enterprise. It [sic!] aim is cultural homogeneity. Men and women must be socialized into a uniform and shared way of life and belief-system, one that differs from those round about, which marks them off from outsiders who lack empathy with the national symbols and myths, ans for whom the national values and memories hold no meaning.»

SMITH argues at length against the role of language as the main or sole differentiating mark of ethnicity, and mentions the Scottish and Welsh identities, equally shared by English- and Gaelic- or Welsh-speakers, and, on the contrary, the non-language-based ethnic tensions in former Yugoslavia, remarking that

> «language is one of the most malleable and dependant cultural categories; apart from the great language fissures (for example, between Romance, Slavonic, and Germanic language groups in Europe), particular linguistic formations are largely the product of the interplay of religion and political organization in a given area.» (SMITH 1986: 27).

The link between Smith's "cultural communities" and the drive to language uniformity is hardly escapable. Laponce (1984: 192-193) remarks that

«L'État moderne, celui surtout qui recherche la mobilité géographique et sociale de ses citoyens, s'accommode mal du multilinguisme. À moins qu'il n'établisse des obstacles institutionnels dont le plus puissant est la frontière linguistique, il suit une pente naturelle qui le mène à l'unilinguisme, qui le mène vers cette situation où la langue cessant d'être un clivage interne, on peut parler vraiment d'État sans langue, au sens ou Marx parlait d'État sans classe.»

Not all accounts of the linguistic side of the French Revolution stress the qualitative cleavage between the involvement of the state in linguistic matters before and after the Revolution — a difference which is a result of the involvement of the state in the personal lives of its subjects. Calvet (1974), for example, leaves the reader with the impression of a single (albeit accelerating) path, a steady process going from the conquest of Southern France, through the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterets, to the French Revolution, and, finally, the implementation of these goals in the second part of the nineteenth century through the imposition of compulsory education and military service. Calvet stresses how the goals of the Revolution could not be implemented, and their successful realization had to wait much longer, with the technological developments of the 19th and 20th century being central in the successful implementation of the ideological promises of the French Revolution.

This is obviously true: *per se*, the "nationalization" of language" was not enough. Even in France, it is well known by now that the actual Frenchization of the country did not occur until much later, and starting from the second half of the nineteenth century. The long-sought final victory of the French state over language diversity still had to wait for industrialization, compulsory and effective mass-education, etc. But the moral and philosophical bases which mandated language uniformity had been laid by the French revolution: linguistic constructivism was born there.

5. The French Revolution and the ideological bases of monolingualism

Monolingualism was part and parcel of the French Revolution, and it is exactly the new democratic ideas that required it. The great constructid

vist utopia ("vouloir faire l'État") of the French revolution has language uniformity at its core: «L'unité de l'idiome est une partie intégrante de la Révolution…Il faut identité de langage» (quoted in DE CERTEAU – JULIA – REVEL 1975: 170).

The link between forced language uniformity and "political good" was very clear to the main actors of the Revolution: Abbé Grégoire, in his *Essay on the physical, moral, and political regeneration of the Jews*, wrote that «l'anéantissement des patois importe à l'expansion des lumières, à la connaissance épurée de la religion, à l'exécution facile des lois, au bonheur national et à la tranquillité politique» (*Essai sur la régénération physique, morale et politique des Juifs*, Metz, 1789: 161; quoted in DE CERTEAU – JULIA – REVEL 1975: 25). And Barère, in his *Rapport du Comité du Salut Public sur les idiomes* (8 pluviôse an II), insisted that «les premières lois de l'éducation doivent préparer à être citoyens» (quoted in DE CERTEAU – JULIA – REVEL 1975: 325). The revolutionary intellectuals had an equally clear view of the local languages, defined as «tous ces différents patois qui sont un reste grossier de la tyrannie féodale et une preuve honteuse de la distance et de l'abaissement où les Grands tenaient la multitude» (from the newspaper *La Feuille villageoise*, quoted in DE CERTEAU – JULIA – REVEL 1975: 46). Indeed, linguistic unification goes hand in hand with administrative centralization, as Grégoire noted in his *Rapport*: «Nous n'avons plus de provinces, et nous avons encore environ trente patois qui en rappellent les noms» (quoted in DE CERTEAU – JULIA – REVEL 1975: 333).

Before the Revolution, the *Encyclopédie* (1778) had already defined the *patois* as «language corrompu tel qu'il se parle presque dans toutes les provinces… On ne parle la langue que dans la capitale» (quoted in DE CERTEAU – JULIA – REVEL 1975: 49). Now the change is made clear by the way in which the opponents in this war are defined: «on n'a plus, au centre du débat, la "langue de la capitale", mais la "langue *nationale*" qui se distingue formellement des "idiomes *féodaux*" plutôt que des dialectes ruraux» (DE CERTEAU – JULIA – REVEL 1975: 170).

Together with education and centralization, even road-making comes to have the same, well-defined ideological purpose: to destroy diversity. A letter sent to Grégoire says so explicitly; in the answer to question 30 of his questionnaire about «the means to destroy the dialects' we can read: «Les moyens consisteraient à ouvrir des chemins vicinaux et de communication

de village à village, de bourg a bourg, de ville à ville; de placer dans chaque paroisse un maître d'école instruit, qui fût de bonnes mœurs, qui sût bien le français et ne parlât que cette langue» (quoted in DE CERTEAU – JULIA – REVEL 1975: 167).

After having destroyed the local attachment to the land and having killed the king as a symbol of unity, «c'est le langage qui doit prendre en charge la symbolisation nécessaire du patriotisme. Il a le statut d'être le corps propre, — non plus reçu, mais produit. Fonder une nation et lui faire un langage ne constituent qu'une même tâche politique» (DE CERTEAU – JULIA – REVEL 1975: 174-175). The war against the patois is thus inscribed in the on-going shift from the notion of people ('unité quasi *ethnique*') to that of Nation, «unité *politique* dont l'idiome va devenir l'instrument» (DE CERTEAU – JULIA – REVEL 1975: 59).

Finally, language unity as a necessary and preliminary step in world unification seems implied in the following remarks by Grégoire in his *Rapport sur la nécessité et les moyens d'anéantir les patois et d'universaliser l'usage de la langue française* (16 prairial an II):

> «Quoiqu'il y ait possibilité de diminuer le nombre des idiomes reçus en Europe, l'état politique du globe bannit l'espérance de ramener les peuples à une langue commune. […] Mais au moins on peut uniformer le langage d'une grande nation, de manière que tous les citoyens qui la composent puissent sans obstacle se communiquer leurs pensées. Cette entreprise […] est digne du peuple français, qui centralise toutes les branches de l'organisation sociale et qui doit être jaloux de consacrer au plutôt, dans une République une et indivisible, l'usage unique et invariable de la langue de la Liberté» (quoted in DE CERTEAU – JULIA – REVEL 1975: 334).

The philosophical basis of this longing for a radical and final uniformity was the view, common in the 18th century, of the multiplicity of languages as a product of History, as well as a fault and a crime which Reason, in its quest for a universal language, was bound to redress (DE CERTEAU – JULIA – REVEL 1975: 81): Reason has the power to redo History. Language uniformation becomes the political realization of a philosophical work (the quest for the origins of languages) and a philosophical dream (the universal language) which have attained power (DE CERTEAU – JULIA – REVEL 1975: 170).

Of course, much to Abbé Grégoire's discontent, the effacement of lin‐ guistic diversity is a colossal task, similar to the very overturn of nature's laws: «Pour le détruire [: le patois; MT], il faudrait détruire le soleil, la fraî‐ cheur des nuits, le genre d'aliments, la qualité des eaux, l'homme tout en‐ tier» (*Réponse de la Société des Amis de la Constitution de Perpignan*, quoted in DE CERTEAU – JULIA – REVEL 1975: 154, 182). The road was still long, but the path was set …

Later, during the 19th century, the nation-state (*qua* territorial sovereign state in which the power belongs nominally to the people) was exported to the bulk of the European states; since the second half of the 20th cen‐ tury it has become the dominant form of state ideology all over the world, and its philosophical tenets the cornerstone of the legitimacy of the state. This means that all governments are expected (and claim) to exercise their power in the name and behalf of "their" people; they also regard the build‐ ing of a nation (i.e., of that vey same people) as a legitimate and inescapable moral obligation. And since language has become a key factor in national‐ ity, and nationality cannot be split, governments take a keen interest in the (often forceful) spread of a language as part and parcel of the legitimation of their power. In this context, language unity may be actively pursued or can be decreed by law: very often, what passes for the language of the country is not the actual linguistic behavior of not even a majority of its people, but an ideological representation of that behavior, as interpreted by nationalist intellectual circles serving the interests of the present or of would-be gov‐ ernments. Just as for Abbé Grégoire, the languages of the actual speech be‐ havior can be dubbed dialects, either in relation to the national language or *tout court*, i.e., as inferior forms of speech.

6. Summary, conclusions, and perspectives

That the modern state embarks in a whole range of activities which im‐ pound upon language and the language uses of their citizens is little more than a truism. WARDHAUGH, after remarking that «In the pre-nineteenth century world […] There was little direct management of language affairs by states and empires» (WARDHAUGH 1987: 4), rightly notes how «The modern state is involved extensively in such matters as the economy, edu‐ cation, security, planning, employment, government services, culture, etc.» (WARDHAUGH 1987: 22). He also observes that «Directives, orders, and

laws there were, but these tended to affect the few rather than the many»
(WARDHAUGH 1987: 4). WARDHAUGH helps us in understanding how
early sovereign, but not-yet-national states had a minor effect on language
behavior. Although intellectuals and bureaucrats had of course to use the
language of the court in order to get a living, they did not have to develop
any special attachment to it. There was of course an incentive to know the
language as best as one could. For a would-be poet, to be a native speaker
of the language used at court was of course an advantage. But, at a societal
level, this incentive was reduced by the small number of positions open for
poets — and this even without taking into consideration that the use of a
language of culture different from the many and diverse spoken languages
was the norm rather than the exception. Moreover, it is and it was difficult
for a poet to pass on his job to his offspring. As to a bureaucrat, he probably
had a higher possibility to pass on his position, and therefore a higher incen-
tive to raise his offspring as native speakers of the official language. On the
other hand, the highly codified character of the bureaucratic style required
probably a lower degree of active proficiency. And, apart from these limited
segments of population, there was little incentive to learn an official lan-
guage and extend its domains of use to the detriment of a local variety. In
such a situation, societal diglossia (or multiglossia) was the norm.

We can compare this hypothetical but plausible reconstruction to the
actual situation of all those African countries (almost the totality of them)
which use a European language as their official language: the number of
Africans who are native speakers of the official European language is ex-
tremely small, and whatever language shift and language death are occur-
ring (and they do indeed occur) are mainly the result of the intra-African
struggle among languages. This results in a typical "endocentrism" of the
African scene, which starkly contrasts with the much more active role of
the colonial European languages in suppressing language diversity in other
parts of the globe.

Just as many centuries earlier in Europe, officialdom in Africa has there-
fore not brought about much language shift. When the use and knowledge
of a European language expand, more and more people come to master
it as a second language. To say that African states have failed in the field
of language policy is tantamount to say that they have failed in transform-
ing their official language into the national language of the country: they

have, so to speak, failed *qua* nation-states, not *qua* states. And insofar as they have failed, they have not reduced language diversity; while the more they have "built a nation", the more the fate of the languages of that country is in danger: among the African states, a good case can be made for Somalia and Tanzania to be relative success stories. Somalia has relatively less language diversity than most countries, and could officialize a native koine which was already widely used as an intertribal means and as the language of poetry. Tanzania has been quite successful in its imposition of Swahili. Not surprisingly, as BATIBO (1992) has noted, many languages of Tanzania are endangered by its spread. Somalia and Tanzania are even more interesting given their repeated failures in economic development: what reduction of language diversity may be observed stands therefore a better chance of being the result of the successful implementation of nation building rather than the side-effect of economic take-off.

What about ideology? We have seen that ideologies, at least as much as the actual policies which stem from them, have consequences on language behavior. The 20th-century developments of the nation state and the birth of contemporary democracies cannot be taken into consideration here. Still, we can note that multiculturalism is the word of the day, and sensible governments are urged to make provisions for language minorities and implement a pluralistic language policy. Given that almost no ethnically and linguistically homogeneous country exists, such recommendations are in principle applicable to any government. But they still stem, at least partially, from a state-preserving ideology: the holders of power are advised that to generously accommodate to language minorities is in their best interest, as a strategy to prevent the growth of ethnic tensions and possible dangerous splits. The ideological premise still holds that the existence of *one* state is considered a *good*, and its split a *bad*. This is so because the centuries-old cornerstones of statehood, i.e., sovereignty and territoriality of power, are still in place.

Actually, even when ethnic groups are collectively granted "linguistic rights" (themselves a very dubious philosophical concept) and languages are "recognized to exist" by benign governments, the future of minority languages as full-fledged means of communication (rather than as mere tokens of folkloric attachment to long-dead identities) remains dark. To the great puzzlement of language activists, languages (and cultures) still die, and pos-

sibly they do it all the more rapidly the more the governments mess with them.

In fact, many aspects of the ideology and practice of the contemporary democratic state have not so far been analyzed in the light of their (often unintended) consequences on language diversity. For example, welfarist policies, insofar as they bring citizens in closer contact with the center of power, could in principle have a community-destroying effect. Even policies aiming at preserving and fostering minority languages could result (and often do) in their opposite: when language and culture have become a political issue taken care of high above, any small-scale activity at the local, community level is comparatively devalued. Yet, as Fishman (1991) has beautifully explained, grassroot activities are precisely the most important in stopping and reversing —if at all possible— language death.

Maybe, if states are bad for language and culture diversity, and nation-states are worse, democratic nation-states are the worst of all.

References

Batibo, Herman 1992. *The fate of ethnic languages in Tanzania*. In: Matthias Brenzinger (ed.), *Language Death: Factual and Theoretical Explorations*. Bere lin: Mouton de Gruyter: 85-98.

Calvet, Louis-Jean 1974. *Linguistique et colonialisme.* Paris: Payot [2002].

— 1999. *Pour une écologie des langues du monde.* Paris: Plon.

— 2002. *Le marché aux langues. Essai de politologie linguistique sur la mondialisation.* Paris: Plon.

de Certeau, Michel – Julia, Dominique – Revel, Jacques 1975. *Une politique de la langue. La Révolution française et les patois: l'enquête Grégoire*. Paris: Gallimard [2002].

Dorian, Nancy C. 1988. *Western language ideologies and small-language prospects*. In: Lenore A. Grenoble – Lindsay J. Whaley (eds.), *Endangered languages: language loss and community response*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 3-21.

Fishman, Joshua A. 1972. *Language and Nationalism*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House Publishers.

— 1991. *Reversing Language Shift.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Kuehnelt-Leddihn, Erik von 1952. *Liberty or Equality. The Challenge of our Time.* London: Hollis & Carter.

Laponce, Jean A. 1984. *Langue et territoire.* Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval (English translation: *Languages and Their Territories.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 1987).

— 1993. *Do languages behave like animals?* «International Journal for the Sociology of Language» 103: 19-30.

Nettle, Daniel 1999. *Linguistic diversity.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Rosenberg, Nathan – Birdzell, Luther Earle Jr. 1986. *How the West Grew Rich. The Economic Transformation of the Industrial World.* New York: Basic Books.

Smith, Anthony D. 1986. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Spruyt, Hendrik 1994. *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Wardhaugh, Ronald 1987. *Languages in competition: dominance, diversity, and decline.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell in association with André Deutsch.

Wright, Roger 2002. *A sociophilological study of late Latin.* Turnhout: Brepols.

Mauro Tosco
University of Turin
mauro.tosco@unito.it

Mauro Tosco

Università degli Studî di Torino

mauro.tosco@unito.it

On language, government, and the reduction of linguistic diversity

He bitaney lagge

~

Studies on Language and African Linguistics in honour of Marcello Lamberti

Edited by

Luca Busetto • Roberto Sottile • Livia Tonelli • Mauro Tosco

Contributors:

- Sergio Baldi – Rudolf Leger
- Václav Blažek
- Vermondo Brugnatelli
- Luca Busetto
- Guido Cifoletti
- Grover Hudson
- Herrmann Jungraithmayr
- Olga Kapeliuk
- Ilaria Micheli
- Abdirachid Mohamed Ismail
- Moreno Morani
- Umberto Rapallo
- Graziano Savà
- Roberto Sottile
- Gábor Takács
- Livia Tonelli
- Mauro Tosco
- Martine Vanhove
- Rainer Voigt
- Andrzej Zaborski