Prologue

The value of language diversity

Languages are humanity's most valuable cultural heritage. They are fundamental to understanding. Each language provides a system of concepts which helps us to interpret reality. The complexity of reality is easier to understand thanks to the diversity of languages. Progress in understanding is due, amongst other things, to the growing linguistic diversity that has characterised the human species. Languages are also fundamental in the generation and transmission of values. Each language expresses a differentiated ethical sensibility. Each language provides us with symbols and metaphors to deal with the mysterious and the sacred. Furthermore, languages are not closed or exclusive universes. All of them express the rationality of the human species, as well as its common fears and hopes. Linguistic diversity is the most obvious manifestation of cultural diversity. In a world characterised by growing processes of globalisation, it seems necessary to assert the value of cultural diversity as a guarantee of more democratic and more creative coexistence. Cultural uniformity would mean a decline, to the extent that we would lose our ability to give specialised answers to specific challenges. The report "Our Creative Diversity", published by UNESCO in 1995, pointed out what orientations were necessary to preserve diversity without renouncing positive aspects of globalisation. In the field of cultural and linguistic diversity we often coincide with the criteria of the defenders of diversity of living species in the natural environment. In both cases it is said that there is a need to protect the heritage. The reason is not exclusively ethical. Both the defence of biological diversity and the defence of cultural and linguistic diversity are necessary conditions for the well-being of humans, for the balances that protect life and for the life quality we aspire to develop.

The defence of languages and cultures is part of a larger project which aspires to a more rational, fairer and freer organisation of humanity. We have entered the twenty-first century without giving sufficient answers to very serious global problems. These could be grouped under seven headings. First of all, the failure in the system of distribution of the planet's wealth, which leads to poverty and extreme hardship, so objectively described by the successive reports on human development by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Secondly, unsustainable production and consumption systems, which increasingly deteriorate the planet's

ecological balance, as studies by the Worldwatch Institute, amongst others, have shown. Thirdly, the non-fulfilment of international conventions in matters of human rights, as denounced by the annual reports of Amnesty International and other governmental and non-governmental human rights organisations, as well as the persistence of undemocratic governments. Fourth, the weakness of the United Nations and of international tribunals as a result of the inertia of the system of state sovereignties and the excessive weight carried by some states. Fifth, the practice of very unbalanced cultural relations to the extent that the technologically dominant culture aggressively imposes its myths and its values on other cultures. Sixth, the marginalisation of many peoples and minorities whose aspiration to various forms of cultural or political self-determination is not sufficiently recognised by centralist and uniformist political traditions. Seventh, the use of enormous scientific and technological resources for security and defence systems which have little bearing on the objectives of human security and peace.

These challenges also define our responsibilities. We want to build a world with fair economic structures, with a sustainable model of development, with effective protection of human rights, with a United Nations that can exercise governance of globality, with harmonious coexistence between cultures and religions, with recognition of all peoples and with peace guaranteed by human security.

Globalisation, socio-economic development and protection of language

The protection of the linguistic heritage forms part of the construction of a more orderly, more balanced and more advanced world. There is a very clear relationship between language policies, economic, cultural and social development, the perfection of democratic systems, stability and peace. In the past, some very mistaken principles regarding linguistic questions gained prestige which fortunately now are no longer defended. It was thought that languages could be ranked according to a hierarchy and that it was therefore a good thing to replace the use of inferior languages with that of the higher languages essential for science or for abstract speculation. Today we know that all languages are equal in dignity and in communication and thinking capacity and that the hierarchy among languages is based on prejudices characteristic of cultural colonialism. It was also believed that linguistic uniformity of the population was desirable in the governance of states, in the same way as there was opposition to other aspects of pluralism such as religion or ethics. Today we attach prestige to policies that can manage complex societies. Pluralism is perceived as an asset. Ethnic, religious or linguistic cleansing belongs to mistaken, primitive political philosophies.

In recent years, studies by sociolinguists have drawn attention to the speed of the changes affecting linguistic communities. Languages are living realities and there have always been relations between linguistic communities that have contributed to their development. Relations of power, wars, migrations and technological changes have had an important influence in the life of languages. All languages, with the

passage of time, have evolved. Linguistic contacts have been something very common. Many languages have suffered irreversible processes of minorisation or of repression and have died. Others have changed through the evolution of the linguistic community itself and have given rise to new languages. Scientists of language warn us of the conventional nature of our concept of language or of languages. In reality what we find are linguistic practices which become diversified over the human geography but that do not permit the establishment of clear borders. Political borders are often presented as linguistic borders, but in the majority of cases there is no real break to be seen in the linguistic practices of areas separated by borders. Furthermore, while in some territories only one language is used, in other territories it is normal for various different linguistic communities to coexist in some form and for multilingualism to be a generalised and socially well considered practice. What is new in our time is the pace affecting linguistic contacts, the growing complexity of all societies from the point of view of their linguistic diversity and the generalised risk of linguistic take-overs as a result of certain aspects of globalisation.

Goals of the Review

This Review sets out to present the universal sociolinguistic situation. The Review describes the linguistic diversity which currently characterises the human species and the trends indicating the risks of losing a considerable part of this diversity. The Review is not intended as a linguistic atlas. Many researchers have prepared maps locating the linguistic communities and illustrating linguistic contacts. Neither is it intended to provide an official list of the world's languages or an encyclopaedia classifying each and every one of them. Many works have already been published in this field without having reached general agreement as to either the number of languages that exist or even a form of reckoning that distinguishes properly between languages, dialects and pidgins. The Review sets out to present significant data on linguistic diversity and its speeding evolution. The authors of the Review have sought out opinions on linguistic uses and their evolution from individuals, groups and institutions concerned with the trends they observe as members of specific linguistic communities or as researchers. The Review is intended as an appeal to the responsibility of everyone to protect linguistic diversity. In this respect, the Review aims to contribute to the rise of a linguistic ethic, that is to a set of attitudes in favour of the protection of the linguistic heritage. Finally, the most important objective of the Review is to establish a set of guidelines with a view to the future. Many actors play a part in the life of linguistic communities: governments, popular movements, teachers, media, religious leaders, non-governmental organisations, research centres and of course self-organised linguistic communities themselves. The Review puts forward guidelines of language policy for all these actors. In the realisation that each specific situation has novel aspects, the Review merely recommends language policy measures on the basis of a typification of situations which would have to be adapted and completed locally. In many cases the objective of the Review will have been

achieved if it avoids mistakes that have been very common in public interventions in matters of language policy. For this reason some authors are sceptical about the appropriateness of promoting language policies. The Review, with its recommendations, tries to allow for modest, sensible language policy measures that favour the weakest or most endangered linguistic communities.

History of the Review

In preparing the Review a fairly complex methodology was established. The Director-General of UNESCO Federico Mayor Zaragoza at a seminar of experts held in Bilbao (Spain) in 1996, proposed the drafting of a review on the world's languages. The government of the Basque Country (Spain) provided the funds for the first review in the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding signed on 23 July 1997. Coordination of the project was entrusted to UNESCO Etxea (UNESCO Centre of the Basque Country). A board of directors was set up for the project, along with a scientific committee and a technical committee, which worked at a good pace during the years 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002. We decided to launch a survey to get direct information from the linguistic communities themselves and from a variety of informers. More than one thousand replies were received, which once analysed allowed confirmation or modification of the research hypotheses used to draft the surveys. At the same time, continental meetings served to get a better understanding of the linguistic problems of each continent and request the collaboration of experts for the different parts of the Review. The Linguapax university network coordinated by the UNESCO Chair at the University of Mons (Belgium) collaborated in the different stages of the project. The scientific committee, chaired by Dr Miquel Siguan, met regularly and discussed the successive draftings of the review with the members of the board of directors and the technical committee. The final result is the one offered in this text.

About language diversity and social peace

Linguistic issues have a very fundamental effect on human identities at an individual and a collective level, and it is not easy to deal with linguistic pluralism calmly, rationally and objectively. In some states there are conflicts which have linguistic components. For this reason reflection on the past and future of linguistic communities can be seen as over-politicised or destabilising. The Review does not set out to disguise the political implications of the management of linguistic diversity by states and by the international community, but it stresses the pacifying nature of a management of linguistic pluralism which takes into account the principles of democracy and justice. The Review is offered in the framework of the Linguapax spirit that inspired UNESCO linguistic activities during many years in the conviction that language policies which respect diversity and promote linguistic communication also favour peace. Linguistic security – that is the perception by linguistic communities that they are not going to suffer deliberate aggressions – is one of the conditions for peace. Multilingual education is another of the conditions for peace. Self-enclosed communities that are

unable to understand other communities living around them can give rise to preju-
dices, fear and intolerance. Peace is built with the enjoyment of rights that affirm one's
own linguistic identity and by promoting relations of understanding and sympathy
towards other linguistic communities. These judicious principles constitute the
Linguapax philosophy. The Review is inspired in these principles and it is hoped it will
contribute to the solution of conflicts with a linguistic dimension.

This Review is the result of a work done by an independent group of experts. The
authors have worked in excellent collaboration with the Languages Division, until it
was suppressed in 1999, as well as with many permanent delegations of the UNESCO
member states, but the Review is the responsibility of the technical committee, the
scientific committee and the board of directors. Its mistakes and its limitations must
be attributed to its authors, and as figures in many publications, the opinions and
judgements expressed cannot be considered official opinions or judgements of
UNESCO. The editors offer this text with the intention of contributing to a much-
needed international debate on measures to protect the linguistic heritage. Amongst
sociolinguists this debate already exists, but it would be good if this Review served to
enlarge it. It is indispensable that we find out the points of view of linguistic commu-
nities, of state and intra-state governments, of international organisations, of NGOs,
of teachers, of experts in the new communication technologies, of cultural promoters
in the cities and of everyone interested in the life of languages.

Contributions and limits of the Review

The Review is intended to be of use to all citizens, in the same way as reports on the
other great challenges affecting our societies are directed at all the citizens. The
Review aspires to go beyond ignorance and the prejudices which negatively affect the
life of linguistic communities. At the same time, the Review is not intended merely to
present the situation of languages in danger of extinction. It wants to contribute to
organising the relations between all languages according to new criteria, that is the
relations between local, national, state, regional and international languages. All
languages must think about their future and their mutual articulation. In this respect
the group of experts proposes a text whose interest is universal. In the context of
speeding globalisation, all languages must imagine and find their place in the
universe of languages, that is in the set of all human languages. The possible models
for international linguistic coexistence must be the subject of debate, and ultimately
of individual and collective decisions. The Review can help to establish hypotheses
free of private interests of a political, economic or ideological type.

All those who have contributed to the preparation of this Review are conscious of
the limits of the text they are offering to the public opinion. They deem it to be a first
global diagnosis with a series of recommendations the application of which shall be
subject to adaptations to each concrete situation. They believe that the Review can
orientate a wide international debate and that the observations made by the readers
will help draft future reports about the world languages.

Reading notes

Apart from being able to read the Review from the first to the last chapter, the monographic character of the book allows the reader to read each one independently. The reader can make more rapid progress, for example, following the recommendations that one can find at the end of each chapter. Another interesting itinerary would be to follow all the testimonies of the informants that are marked in italics throughout the text and that is maybe the more original and authentic contribution of the Review. A graphic view of world language diversity can be obtained from the thirteen maps of thirteen different geographical areas that are included in a separate section according to the interest that a particular area has as an example of the phenomena analysed in each chapter, together with the tables and graphics. The various monographic texts, in boxes, of the specialists that have collaborated in the Review, offer a varied and contrasted way of understanding many of the more highlighted aspects of the situation of the languages of the world. The reader can also consult the different indexes, the extent list of collaborators and informants, the questionnaire used, the list of the languages quoted in the Review or the subject index always depending on the reader's interest.