

EDITORIAL:

As of 1 May, the enlargement of the European Union means an 82 per cent increase in the number of official Union languages. It was probably with this situation in mind that the French National Assembly, last January, saw fit to adopt a “Resolution concerning linguistic diversity in the European Union” (see p. 110)

Although it is quite obvious that the main aim of this measure is the protection of French interests, the document does contain recommendations that many other member states of the Union could sign up to as well.

All the resolution does, after all, is clarify those principles officially advocated by the EU. Thus does the National Assembly confirm in Article 1 “its appreciation of the linguistic and cultural diversity enshrined by the ten nation enlargement of the EU” and in Article 2, “the right of all national representatives, in all circumstances, to express themselves in their mother tongue...”. Consequently, in Article 4, the National Assembly “opposes any increase in the number of conferences without interpretation that would favour the use of a single language”. Finally, in Article 9, the Assembly “calls for the systematic reporting of linguistic violations committed by EU institutions and organizations”.

It is hard not to interpret these “articles of faith” as a counter-attack in what Claude Duneton called “the hidden war waged in Europe by the supporters of a single language”. (LSP & Professional Communication 2002).

What then are the elements of this “war” in which all parties agree to promote linguistic diversity?

The fact of the matter is that not all parties agree on the nature of linguistic diversity.

Two articles recently published in a special edition of “Science Magazine”(vol. 303, 27 February 2004) clearly demonstrate the complexity of the problem that has political and economic, sociological as well as technological, even ideological dimensions.

The one was written by David Graddol, an English linguist who, for many years, has been preoccupied by the fate of languages world-wide and the other by Scott Montgomery, an American geologist and a veteran translator in his own right, who has many publications on science, culture and languages to his credit.

Present-day Europe, according to David Graddol, with its nations and national languages, leftovers from that period known to the English as “modernity” i.e., between the renaissance and the rise of mass-media, is well on its way to disintegration. In his view, Swedish and the other minor European languages are already reduced to the status of “local languages of solidarity” rather than that of

languages that can be used in the spheres of science, university education and European communication.

The historical reasons for the predominance of English in the world today are explained although David Graddol is, however, compelled by statistics to point out that English will never become the world language to the exclusion of all others. This is particularly true in Asia as well as certain other parts of the world.

His recommendation of a bilingual or a multilingual approach creates an unfortunate impression of an attempt to ensure the durability of English, in this century and those to come, as at least the second or third language in areas where other languages predominate rather than that of an attempt to ensure the survival of other European languages.

Scott Montgomery confirms in his article the importance of English as the language of science (80 per cent of science papers are published in English), he is particularly worried about the fact that scientists and engineers throughout the world are not speaking the same English. Terminological and grammatical divergence can still be overcome at this point in time. Should these differences, however, become too great, the use of English as the language of science would then become meaningless. He goes on to point out that there is still a good deal of technical literature as well as verbal exchanges of all kinds that still rely entirely upon national languages and that the predominance of English is essentially limited to those situations arising within formal or international contexts.

Neither of the articles contain decisive arguments in favour of the extinction of national languages. David Graddol's article, however, does make it quite plain what a chaotic situation awaits us if we just let things drift. Maybe we should not be quite so censorious of those politicians and linguists of the above-mentioned "modern" period who advocated and applied interventionist methods in the area of language.

Unfortunately many of the new generation of linguists along with politicians in positions of responsibility are opposed to legislation that would limit the damage.

It is probably in this state of affairs that the cause of the current hidden conflict is to be found.

The Editorial Board

DEADLINES

Any contribution to be published in the International Journal "LSP and Professional Communication" should reach us within the following deadlines:

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