

Andrea Bernini

University of Heidelberg, Germany

LANGUAGES AS INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: ABOUT AN 'ECOLINGUISTIC CAPITAL'

Summary. The spreading of few 'powerful' languages to the detriment of numerous 'weak' languages has led to the endangerment of many idioms, a process caused by three main factors: linguistic imperialism and globalization, the language policies traditionally adopted by nation-states, and language shift. Some theoretical frameworks justify the impoverishment of linguistic diversity according to an instrumentalist viewpoint, while others support linguistic diversity. Two documents by UNESCO, for instance, underline the importance held by languages in relation to the I(ntangible) C(ultural) H(eritage), not only as vehicles of culture, but also as part of the ICH themselves. Other theoretical frameworks stress the importance of linguistic diversity according to both an ecolinguistic perspective and a rights-oriented approach. From these starting points, the expression 'ecolinguistic capital' is proposed to designate that particular intangible capital by implying an anthropocentric view, and composed of three interrelated elements: languages, individuals and places.

Keywords: ecolinguistic capital, ecolinguistics, endangered languages, intangible cultural heritage, linguistic diversity, linguistic rights.

Or une des manifestations les plus hautes, en même temps que les plus banalement quotidiennes, de ces cultures [*scil.* 'humaines'], ce sont les langues des hommes. Les langues, c'est-à-dire, tout simplement, ce que les hommes ont de plus humain.

Claude Hagège (2002, p. 9)

Introduction⁴

In contemporary times, linguistic diversity is severely threatened, as evident from the fact that many languages reduce their domains and many disappear. Such a situation, due to three main historical phenomena (i.e., linguistic imperialism and globalization, the spreading of the model of the nation-state, and language shift) has gained great attention for some years. The position held by scholars is not unique; some perceive linguistic diversity as an important resource, whereas others consider language shift and language loss as normal phenomena, almost lacking in negative outcomes.

Languages are evidently bound to some 'practical' matters, being the necessary instruments allowing people to live in society. However, the cultural and rights-oriented aspects of languages have been perceived as more and more important; a paradigm such as ecolinguistics, the perception of linguistic rights as human rights, as adopted by UNESCO (2003a; 2003b), focuses on the 'intangible' features of languages. By taking into account all these remarks, the present article proposes the definition 'ecolinguistic capital' to indicate a particular form of intangible capital focusing on the individual.

Main factors against linguistic diversity

Linguistic imperialism and globalization

At the supranational level, linguistic diversity is threatened by two factors: linguistic imperialism⁵ and globalization. The direct bond existing between past

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⁵ Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (2013) list the main features of linguistic imperialism: 1. it interlocks with a structure of imperialism in culture, education, the media, communication, the economy, politics and military activities; 2. it is about exploitation, injustice, inequality and hierarchy that privileges those who master the dominant

and present imperialisms and the language of the colonizers led (and leads) to the creation of linguistic hierarchies⁶ in colonized territories. Such processes imply the stigmatization of dominated languages, the consequent glorification of the dominant language, and then the rationalization of the relationship between languages in favor of the dominant one (Phillipson, 2012). Thus, the power of weapons and the power of language mutually legitimize themselves. This is a constant factor in the history of imperialism.

In 1492, at the very beginning of European colonization, the Spanish scholar Elio Antonio de Nebrija wrote in his grammar of the Castilian that the language was the companion of the empire, and that the destinies of both were closely related⁷. Language and power are bound also in both English and French imperialisms, sharing six common characteristics that lead to linguistic hierarchization (Phillipson, 2012): the low status of the dominated languages, the small proportion of the population in formal education, the tendency to ignore local traditions, the unsuitable educations provided for Africans, an explicit policy of 'civilization', and the attribution of civilizing properties to the dominant language. In this way, the myth of the equivalence of 'superior language' = 'superior culture' was originated.

language; 3. it is structural: resources and infrastructures are mostly accorded to the dominant language; 4. it is ideological, implying the glorification of the dominant language and the stigmatization of the others; 5. the dominance is hegemonic; 6. it entails unequal rights for different speakers/signers; 7. language learning and use is often subtractive; 8. it is a form of linguisticism; 9. it is invariably contested and resisted.

⁶ Linguistic hierarchization is not limited to colonization in a strict sense, occurring also in other contexts in order to legitimize a kind of supremacy that can be religious (when one language is thought to be 'the language of God', such as Sanskrit, Arabic in the Islamic world or Dutch in South Africa); ideological (French before and after the Revolution); or racial (when one language reflects the superiority of an ethno-national group, as happened with the Nazi ideology) (Phillipson, 2012).

⁷ "Cuando bien conmigo pienso, mui esclarecida reina, i pongo delante los ojos la antigüedad de todas las cosas que para nuestra recordación i memoria quedaron escritas, una cosa hallo i saco por conclusión mui cierta: que siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio i de tal manera lo siguió que junta mente comenzaron, crecieron i florecieron i, después, junta fue la caída de entrambos." (de Nebrija, 2011, p. 3).

The current emergence of English as the leading language all over the world takes place within a particular process acting against linguistic diversity: globalization. It is not a neutral phenomenon, being substantially due to three interacting factors that are strictly connected with military power: the role played by English in the British Empire; the strength of the American economy in the 20th century; and the global power structures put in place from 1945 (Phillipson, 2012). English is also increasing its own predominant position within institutional contexts, even within those institutions that, although they should be at the forefront in the protection of linguistic diversity, in fact do not always protect equal multilingualism: namely, the European Union (EU) and other supranational organizations. Within the EU, a sort of pyramidal hierarchy can be seen, with a substantial difference between the top and the bottom of the ranking⁸; on the other hand, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) do not always completely respect multilingualism, since the highest level of communication adopts 'strong' languages⁹.

The concept of language as an instrument of power that replaces traditional military power was expressed in a lecture at Harvard University by Churchill (1943), who, dealing with the spread of English in the world, pronounced an effective sentence (presage of the later historical events): "[s]uch plans offer far better prizes than taking away people's provinces or lands or grinding them down in exploitation. The empires of the future are the empires of the mind."

⁸ According to Ammon (2012) this ranking consists of seven levels: 1. "working languages of the EU institutions"; 2. "official languages of the EU"; 3. "national-official languages of EU member states"; 4. "regional-official languages (of EU member states)"; 5. "indigenous (or autochthonous) minority languages"; 6. "indigenous minority languages in EU member states *not* under the protection of the *European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages*"; 7. "exogenous (or allochthonous) minority languages" (pp. 575-578).

⁹ de Varennes (2012) lists three levels of language policies: 1. "languages to be used for deliberations of the supranational organization itself"; 2. "languages of work within the internal structure of the supranational organization"; 3. "languages to be used in communications, exchanges with the organizations' clientele or public" (p. 152).

Lingua instrumentum regni

The second main factor responsible for language loss (with particular reference to local languages) is represented by traditional language policies, inspired by the principle *lingua instrumentum regni* ('language is the instrument of political control') derived from the French Revolution¹⁰, which implies the legitimization of the state power through the national language. As a result, different states have different languages, and different people speak different languages; the language embodies the essence of the nation (Dell'Aquila & Iannàccaro, 2011). The spread of national languages to the detriment of non-national languages has been a gradual process, carried out through the so-called 'instruments of deferred execution'; i.e., army, media and schools (Hagège, 2002). In parallel, the neglect (or suppression) of dialects has been in general seen as an "unavoidable side-effect of nation-building" (Ammon, 2012, p. 574).

The historical phenomenon of the nation-state materialized in two different kinds of nationalism: the French model (the 'contractual nationalism') and the German model (the 'ethno-linguistic nationalism'). The French Revolution supported without any hesitation the monolingualism that played an ideological role in every field of life¹¹, thus becoming a cornerstone of the new-born nation-state: "[s]peaking the language fluently and correctly takes on more than instrumental value: it demonstrates the individual's loyalty and commitment to the nation" (Wright, 2012, p. 61). Such a principle on the one hand is inclusive, since anyone can be part of the nation; on the other hand, it is coercive, because "there is no room for diversity" (p. 61). Different features can

¹⁰ Previously, during the *Ancien Régime*, the political power was legitimized by religion, as summarized by the formula *religio instrumentum regni* (i.e. 'religion is the instrument of political control'; Dell'Aquila and Iannàccaro, 2011).

¹¹ It was perceived as a prerequisite for democracy, as the French political leader Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac asserted in a speech to the Convention in 1794: "[I]a monarchie avait des raisons de ressembler à la tour de Babel; dans la démocratie, laisser les citoyens ignorants de la langue nationale, incapables de contrôler le pouvoir, c'est trahir la patrie ... Chez un peuple libre, la langue doit être une et la même pour tous" (Wright 2012, p. 60).

be identified in the German model, based on *ius sanguinis*: ethnic groups are divided by language, and therefore language and identity are viewed as naturally linked¹², but the acquisition of a language does not imply as an immediate consequence the inclusion into the nation Wright, 2012, pp. 62-63).

The close connection between a language and its speakers is not a novelty, as witnessed by a sentence taken from the 7th-century *Etymologies* (9.1.14), the masterpiece by Isidore of Seville: *ex linguis gentes, non ex gentibus linguae exortae sunt*¹³. What is new is the relationship between people-language-institution, characterized by both the French and the German models, that implies the idea of the state as a monolingual entity.

According to the nation-state ideology, the concept of 'linguistic minority' results, deriving from the opposition to the idea of 'majority' in a way that it is perceived as a sort of exception to the rule (Wright, 2012). Such nationalistic ideologies were born in Europe, but have spread outside Europe in various geo-political contexts: in many postcolonial states (especially the African ones), that adopted, in particular, the French model; in the USA at the beginning of the 20th century¹⁴; and also in new-born countries like Turkey¹⁵. The nationalistic view has been widely perceived as the normal and obvious founding idea of a state, thus leading to the subordination of language policy to ethnic identity, to

¹² See Fichte (1978, p. 207): "[w]as dieselbe Sprache redet, das ist schon vor aller menschlichen Kunst vorher durch die bloße Natur mit einer Menge von unsichtbaren Banden aneinandergeknüpft; es versteht sich untereinander, und ist fähig, sich immerfort klärer zu verständigen, es gehört zusammen, und ist natürlich Eins und ein unzertrennliches Ganzes".

¹³ '[N]ations arose from languages, and not languages from nations' (Isidore of Seville, 2007, p. 192).

¹⁴ The words by the American President Theodore Roosevelt in a letter dating back to 1919 are emblematic: "[w]e have room for but one flag, the American flag [...] We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language [...] and we have room for but one sole loyalty and that is a loyalty to the American people." (cited in Skutnabb-Kangas, 2010, p. 213).

¹⁵ In 1931, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, asserted: "[I]anguage is one of the essential characteristics of a nation. Those who belong to the Turkish nation ought, above all and absolutely, to speak Turkish. [...] Those people who speak another language could, in a difficult situation, collaborate and take action against us with other people who speak other languages" (cited in Skutnabb-Kangas, 2010, p. 213).

linguistic uniformity, and in turn to the suspicion towards those languages which are not officially recognized, and therefore are not institutionalized.

Language shift: speakers 'against' their own language

The survival of a language is threatened also by speakers themselves, when they shift from a language to another or when children speak a language different from the one of their parents (the 'traditional' language). Beside the historical phenomena aforementioned in the previous paragraphs, four main factors are nowadays playing a key role in fostering language shift: urbanization, globalization, social dislocation, and cultural dislocation (Grenoble, 2011, pp. 33-35). Thus, behind language shift lie economic, social and political elements favoring the powerful languages, which increase the number of speakers at the expenses of the other ones, perceived in turn as debased and unable to express modernity, and the most prestigious languages are the most requested, exactly as it happens with Stock Exchange titles (Hagège, 2002, pp. 145-147).

The higher the prestige of a language is, the larger number of people speak it, because language prestige, involving economic, political and cultural factors, often coincides with the prestige of its speakers. From language shift originates language loss, and in turn loss of language leads to loss of identity (Grenoble, 2011, p. 37): from society the issue moves on the individual, thus raising questions regarding individual rights. In fact, language shift can be 'voluntary' at an individual level, in the meaning that it can be due to economic benefits as well as ideological persuasion and hegemonic mind-mastering, but "if people are forced to shift their languages in order to gain economic benefits of the kind which are in fact bare necessities for basic survival, this is a violation of not only their economic human rights but also their linguistic human rights" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999, p. 214).

Trends in favor of linguistic diversity

Ecolinguistics

Here, ecolinguistics is essentially understood as language ecology, which “refers to the relationship between languages and the people who speak them ... The field of language ecology studies the interrelationships between speakers and their languages as situated in their full (contemporary and historical) context” (Grenoble, 2011, p. 30), thus interacting with social, cultural and ecological factors. According to an ecolinguistic approach, the preservation of linguistic diversity is founded on the awareness of the value of languages, namely the value to the heritage communities themselves, the value to the scientific community, and the value for the world cultural heritage (pp. 36-38).

Ecolinguistics pays great attention to language endangerment¹⁶ and language loss, phenomena that are not unbiased and result from specific causes: 1. natural catastrophes, famine, disease; 2. war and genocide; 3. overt repression, often in the name of ‘national unity’ or assimilation; 4. cultural/political/economic dominance (Austin & Sallabank, 2011b, p. 5). Since it has aimed at protecting ‘weak’ languages, ecolinguistics counteracts those factors that support ‘strong’ languages at both the national and supranational levels. Thus, on the one hand, it opposes traditional language planning, the main goal of which is the promotion of a single language to the detriment of others through top-down processes led by external language authorities; whereas ecolinguistics is bottom-up, focusing on speakers and communities (Grenoble, 2011). On the other hand, it thwarts the current linguistic imperialism of English, as evident from ‘Tsuda’s scheme’ (Table 1).

¹⁶ For an overview about endangered languages, see Moseley (2010), who lists 2471 endangered languages, divided into five categories according to the degree of vitality: 1. vulnerable: 598; 2. definitely endangered: 646; 3. severely endangered: 528; 4. critically endangered: 576; 5. extinct: 231.

Table 1

Tsuda's scheme¹⁷

Diffusion of English Paradigm	Ecology of Language Paradigm
A. - capitalism B. - science and technology C. - modernization D. - monolingualism E. - ideological globalization and internationalization F. - transnationalization G. - Americanization and homogenization of world culture H. - linguistic, cultural and media imperialism	1. - a human rights perspective 2. - equality in communication 3. - multilingualism 4. - maintenance of languages and cultures 5. - protection of national sovereignties 6. - promotion of foreign language education

Linguistic rights as human rights

Despite various international, regional and multilateral human rights instruments include language among the characteristics on the basis of which discrimination is forbidden, such good intentions are not always carried out (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999, p. 204). In recent years, some scholars have focused on the safeguard of these rights, by perceiving them as true human rights, closely related to freedom and respect for the person. A clear stance is taken by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, who speaks explicitly of a particular type of human rights, the 'linguistic human rights', perceived as "an essential dimension of human rights" (*ibid.*, p. 202); rights that are not limited to intangible aspects, but result in tangible outcomes: there is a parallel between economic exploitation and monolingualism on the one hand, and equal economy and multilingualism on the other hand (*ibid.*, pp. 196-197, figure 9.1).

The topic of 'linguistic human rights' opposes to the concept of 'glottophagie' (i.e. 'linguistic cannibalism')¹⁸, referring to "dominant languages

¹⁷ Cited in Phillipson (1999, p. 29).

¹⁸ See also the concept of 'linguicism', defined as "ideologies, structures and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on

eating up and extinguishing dominated languages”, a phenomenon that can be considered as a crime against humanity (Phillipson, 2012, p. 206). More precisely, linguistic human rights involve both the individual and the collective dimensions (table 2).

Table 2

Linguistic human rights¹⁹

Individual dimension	Collective dimension
A. - the right to identify positively with one’s own mother tongue, and have that identification respected by the others, whether minority or majority language B. - the right to learn the mother tongue C. - the right to use it in official contexts	1. - the right of minority groups to exist (i.e. the right to be ‘different’) 2. - the right to develop and enjoy their language 3. - the right for minorities to establish and maintain schools and other educational institutions, with control of curricula 4. - the autonomy in administrative matters internal to the group

Likewise, Lenzerini (2011), discussing the relationship between I(ntangible) C(ultural) H(eritage) and human rights, proposes the bipartition individual dimension/collective dimension, asserting that ICH safeguarding is a prerequisite for guaranteeing certain human rights, in favor of both individuals and communities. In fact, “ICH often represents an element, the preservation of which is indispensable for the enjoyment of certain human rights of its creators and bearers” (p. 118). Thus, the protection of linguistic variety goes beyond the protection of languages and concerns the protection of individual freedom; as a consequence, it enters a wider argument:

[a] recurring focus shows – and tends to liberate from blurring of stifling contexts – various angles of a very simple truth: Languages are different. Therefore, in the realm of languages, the right to be equal cannot be implemented, cannot even be understood, without insistence

the basis of language (on the basis of their mother tongues)” (Skutnabb-Kangas, cited in Phillipson, 2007, p. 379).

¹⁹ See Sallabank (2011, p. 288; in turn citing Skutnabb-Kangas et al.).

on the right to be different (Kontra, Phillipson, Skutnabb-Kangas & Várady, 1999a, p. 18).

Is language just a tool?

The instrumentalist approach

The instrumentalist approach "considers language as a tool, an instrument that is valuable to the extent that it helps us achieve goals and objectives that we value" (Robichaud & De Schutter, 2012, p. 124), thus focusing on its extrinsic value. First, it affects language policies, taking into consideration economic and social issues.

The language policies based on the instrumentalist approach plan language acquisition in light of work-related opportunities; the corpus operations imply that a language can be valued and altered so as to better fulfill tasks that are not just communicative; and lastly, status is based on the communication options offered by a given language, options that can be both quantified and qualified in relation to the speakers. According to this view, the central point is held by the opportunity deriving from the mastering of a particular language within society, whereas the right of the individual to choose the language he/she prefers is not considered as fundamental.

As for the economic field, the respect for language diversity (which materializes in transaction costs) is seen as an obstacle for trade, the basic criterion being merely economic. In fact, "every time we manage to produce the same amount of goods using fewer resources, we get efficiency improvements" (Robichaud & De Schutter, 2012, p. 129). When systematically applied, this approach would theoretically lead to the use of one language all over the world.

The instrumentalist view focuses on the importance of speaking a language widely shared in society. This is profitable for people in professional fulfillment. In the work market, it limits socioeconomic inequalities; and within a democratic state, it is a requisite for guaranteeing equal conditions to citizens.

Regarding the cultural field, it is assumed that language shift and language death are not responsible for loss of knowledge, because if a particular piece of knowledge is useful for people, it can survive in another language.

These remarks are reflected in the proposal to English as the lingua franca inside the EU. Starting from the communicative value of the language and considering the current spread of English, which is widely spoken or understood in Europe, Robichaud and De Schutter (2012) assume English to be able to satisfy equality-related criteria.

Languages are evidently *also* tools, but they are not *just* tools; the aforementioned observations focus only on the instrumentalist aspects of language (and disregard its intrinsic value), to which some objections can be raised.

Economy and endangered languages

The opinion that linguistic diversity is harmful for economy is contradicted by the fact that endangered languages play new roles in this field nowadays, so that one can assert that promoting a language is promoting an economy (Sallabank, 2012). The new roles for endangered languages are evident in specific domains, namely media and pop-culture, which are not sufficient to secure the future of such languages, but can help in revitalizing them, being “indicative of a possible return to vitality” (Moriarty, 2011). The spread of endangered languages in the media can also be viewed as a “basic human right of equal access to public discourse” (Moriarty, 2011, p. 450). In particular, Moriarty argues that the use of the internet has the potential to overcome the effects of migration on endangered languages by creating virtual communities. Another other domain is music, which can be seen from two different perspectives: as a cultural product, tied to the value and the prestige of the language(s), and as a fruitful instrument for the pedagogical field.

A remarkable example of reversing language shift, resulting in positive economic outcomes, has been carried out in the Irish city of Galway and its related county. Since the 1980s, the use of Gaelic in shops and in advertising

has been supported in order to promote the economy of the area, given the appeal of Gaelic language. This process, based eminently on economic reasons, has proven to be successful, since not only the language, but also the economy, have profited²⁰.

Politics and linguistic diversity

The assumption that a common language can ensure an equal treatment to all the people (unlike multilingualism) might be theoretically right in case the shared language to be equally extraneous to all the speakers, and actually remains very difficult to put into practice. Nowadays English is often assumed to represent the 21st-century lingua franca *par excellence*, thus providing equal opportunities. But this is not true, since today's English linguistic imperialism favors some sectors of society by creating a hierarchization of languages, and as a consequence of speakers. The stereotype that English would be a neutral language is incisively refuted by an emblematic sentence by Phillipson (1998, p. 108): "English for business is business for English".

Also the idea that linguistic diversity generates clashes, whereas monolingualism brings peace, is highly questionable, since the cases of conflict generated by linguistic reasons alone are extremely rare. Conversely, the recognition of linguistic rights and language identity can resolve conflicts. Likewise, the suggestion to learn widely spread languages instead of endangered languages is equally questionable, because any multilingual competence improves the linguistic skills of the speakers (regardless of the language(s) spoken), and any language has its own value. In addition, language shift from a

²⁰ "The Irish language is worth in excess of € 136 million annually to the economy of Galway City and County, and supports over 5,000 jobs. More than 90% of Galway City businesses believe that it is a unique selling point for Galway's image and cultural identity. These are the key findings of a study into the economic benefits associated with the Irish language which accrue to Galway City and to the Galway Gaeltacht. The study was published today on 27th November 2009 by Gaillimh le Gaeilge" [retrieved from <http://www.gaelport.com/default.aspx?treeid=37&NewsItemID=3478>].

minority language to a more powerful language can hide discrimination and even racism, or can at least show that one culture is believed to be 'superior' (Austin and Sallabank, 2011b, pp. 10-11).

Languages as intangible cultural heritage

A fundamental effort aimed at safeguarding world cultural diversity, in opposition to the current context of cultural impoverishment and consequent standardization, was made through the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* adopted by UNESCO (2003a). Concerning the present argument, the following happen to be the core points:

1. *The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. [...]*
2. *The "intangible cultural heritage", as defined in paragraph 1 above, is manifested inter alia in the following domains:*
 - (a) *oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;*
 - (b) *performing arts;*
 - (c) *social practices, rituals and festive events;*
 - (d) *knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;*
 - (e) *traditional craftsmanship.*

This document is discussed by Lenzerini (2011), who focuses on five fundamental features: 1. self-identification; 2. constant recreation; 3. connection of ICH with the identity of its creators and bearers; 4. authenticity; 5. relationship between ICH and human rights. Two of these points closely relate to the present discussion. The third point underlines the importance of safeguarding ICH under a subjective perspective, because the transmission of such capital to future generations means "promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity" (p. 110), while the fifth point is related to the topic of human rights. It means that establishing a hierarchy among the various examples of cultural heritage can lead to the idea that some of them are better than other ones, but

[w]hile this approach can be appropriate – at least partially – for monumental heritage, it is totally improper for intangible heritage, exactly for the reason that its main significance rests not on its exterior qualities, but rather on the degree of significance it has for its creators and bearers. Therefore, the listing of ICH implicitly amounts to classification of the different communities which create such a heritage, implying that the communities whose ICH is listed are more valuable than others (Lenzerini, 2011, p. 110).

According to UNESCO (2003a), languages belong to the ICH, but only as vehicles. Such a statement is criticized by Smeets (2004), who emphasizes that languages respect all the parameters requested for the inclusion in the ICH: they are transmitted from generation to generation and constantly re-created; they presuppose knowledge and skills; speech acts are linguistic practice and expressions; and languages play an important role in defining the identity of both groups and individuals.

Indeed, some schools of thought have always focused on the perception of language as an integral part of culture, such as in the U.S.A. According to an

anthropological²¹ point of view, language has three fundamental features that characterize it as a “non-neutral medium”: 1. “a code for representing experience”; 2. “a form of social organization”; 3. “a system of differentiation” (Duranti, 2011, p. 30). In particular, “language use is *constitutive* of our social life, that is, speaking does not just happen in social interaction, speaking itself is social interaction” (pp. 38-39); thus language, beside being “a medium for representing experience”, plays “a crucial role in the constitution of the social context in which it is used” (p. 42)²².

These remarks seem to be mirrored in another document by UNESCO (2003b) that is purposely devoted to languages, as they are considered as fundamental parts of human cultural heritage:

Language diversity is essential to the human heritage. Each and every language embodies the unique cultural wisdom of a people. The loss of any language is thus a loss for all humanity (p. 1).

The extinction of each language results in the irrecoverable loss of unique cultural, historical, and ecological knowledge. Each language is a unique expression of the human experience of the world. Thus, the knowledge of any single language may be the key to answering fundamental questions of the future. Every time a language dies, we have less evidence for understanding patterns in the structure and function of human language, human prehistory, and the maintenance of the world’s diverse ecosystems. Above all, speakers of these languages may experience the loss of their language as a loss of their original ethnic and cultural identity (p. 2).

²¹ Duranti (2003) identifies three *paradigm* in U.S. anthropology: 1. language documentation; 2. language in context; 3. the focusing on identity formation, narrativity and ideology.

²² The ICH aspects have played a key role in the revitalization of extinct languages that have involved ‘famous’ languages such as Hebrew, and ‘less famous’ ones such as some indigenous languages of the Americas and some European local languages (Bernini, 2014).

Ecolinguistic capital

Two main approaches to linguistic diversity can be seen: on the one hand, 'aggressive' factors such as linguistic imperialism and nation-states have led (and still lead) to language shift, and in turn language loss, implying the language to be a mere instrument of power. On the other hand, linguistic diversity is promoted and supported by ecolinguistics and by linguistic rights-oriented trends that presuppose the full inclusion of languages into the ICH. On the basis of these theoretical frameworks, language diversity materializes in a particular type of capital, here named 'ecolinguistic capital'. Giving a name to this capital is important from a practical viewpoint; in a certain sense, it is like 'to do things with words', taking inspiration from the title of Austin's (1962) main work. In this way it can be better understood, appreciated and defended.

Whereas 'linguistic capital' can be defined as "language – at all levels – which carries the authorized, sanctioned forms" (Grenfell, 2011, p. 53), "a kind of subcategory of *cultural capital*, therefore representing certain dominant cultural values" (p. 59), the 'ecolinguistic capital' is based on strictly linguistic aspects. Namely, it implies the idea that languages are spoken by individuals living in places that have their own history and cultural peculiarities. It is composed of the following interrelated elements (see fig. 1): 1. languages; 2. individuals; 3. places.

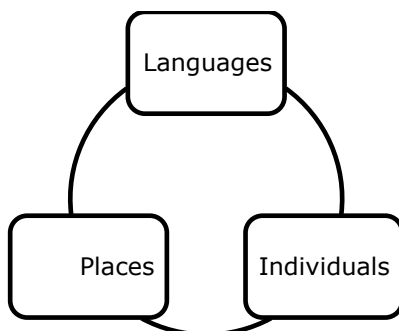


Fig. 1. Representation of ecolinguistic capital

According to this model, languages (linguistic level) are perceived from a merely linguistic point of view, in the light of the ICH, and no hierarchization exists. With respect to cultural diversity, considering languages in the same way implies the overcoming of distinctions such as language/dialect. All idioms are languages, and even if a language does not have an important literary tradition, nor is used in all domains, it should not be perceived as 'less important', 'less evolved' or even 'inferior'. This leads to a multilingual society.

By considering individuals (human level) as the fulcrum of society, the focus is on personal language skills, not limited to officially recognized languages. The Earth is populated by individuals, not by the masses. To go beyond the mass society, therefore, languages should not be evaluated on the basis of the masses who speak them. Multilingualism derives from the respect of individual rights; everyone has the right to speak the language he/she prefers. Another consequence is the promotion of individual multilingualism. In the plurilingual competence of any speaker should be present a 'lingua personale di adozione' (Iannàccaro, 2009, p. 30) that should be ecological rather than economic.

The idea that our planet is divided not into nations (that is to say, institutions), but into places (geographical level) highlights the bond existing between languages and people on the one hand, and to relating places on the other one. Going beyond the borders of institutions implies, as a consequence, going beyond the concept of *lingua instrumentum regni*; the existence of a language is established by its own existence, not by the legitimization coming from an institution (whether political or not). Places do not belong to states, to institutions, but to people, because they have been bound to the cultural aspects of human life through the centuries; they are, in a certain sense, the stage of history. This approach also favors the preservation of ethnolinguistic diversity (not just at the supranational level, but also inside nation-states), perceived as the evidence of the degree of tolerance within society.

Conclusions

Ecolinguistic capital originates from a humanist view of the individual, and as a consequence, of society. The bond between a person and his own language(s) is so close that it goes even beyond the fundamental ICH aspects. In fact, although all living beings (both mankind and animals) communicate, only men use language. In the 4th century BC, Aristotle wrote a famous sentence about human nature, asserting the man to be by nature a 'political living being' (*Politics*, p. 1278b, 19 B., φύσει μὲν ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος ζῶον πολιτικόν). In contemporary times, even though we are witnessing the loss of many languages all over the world, languages are thought to be the most human possession we have ("ce que les hommes ont de plus humain", as written by Hagège (2002)), and linguistic rights are included among human rights, so that we can perceive the deepest human nature in a different light. In fact, by paraphrasing Aristotle's sentence (and taking into consideration the scientific evidences resulting from the generativist approach²³), we can say that man is by nature not just a 'political living being', but first of all a 'linguistic living being'²⁴.

From this point, the real value of language clearly emerges. It is an immeasurable and even indefinable value, since language is an essential part of both biological and cultural human identity. And when a language ceases to be spoken, we lose something that cannot be replaced, so that we become poorer, and maybe, in a certain sense, less human.

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²³ See e.g. Moro (2013).

²⁴ See also the Lacanian *parlêtre*.

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Andrea Bernini

Heidelbergo universitetas, Vokietija;
andrea.bernini@zaw.uni-heidelberg.de

KALBOS KAIP NEMATERIALUS KULTŪROS PAVELDAS: „EKOLINGVISTINIO KAPITALO“ ANALIZĖ

Santrauka. Kelių „įtakingųjų“ kalbų plėtra, daranti žalą daugybei „silpnųjų“ kalbų, sąlygoja kalbos pavojuje statuso suteikimą nemažam kalbų skaičiui. Pagrindiniai šį procesą lemiantys faktoriai yra šie: lingvistinis imperializmas ir globalizacija, tautinių valstybių tradiciškai vykdoma kalbų politika bei kalbos kaita. Kai kurios teorijos netgi pateisina tokį kalbinės įvairovės skurdinimą tam tikru instrumentiniu požiūriu, kai tuo tarpu kitos teorijos daugiakalbystę skatiną ir puoselėja. Pavyzdžiui, du UNESCO dokumentai pabrėžia kalbų svarbą Nematerialaus, Kultūros, Paveldo kontekste, kur kalbos matomos ne tik kaip kultūros perteikimo instrumentai, bet kaip reikšminga NKP dalis. Kita teoriją akcentuoja kalbinės įvairovės svarbą iš ekolingvistinės ir kalbinių teisių perspektyvų. Šie atskaitos taškai leidžia apibūdinti sąvoką „ekolingvistinis kapitalas“ kaip tam tikrą nematerialų kapitalą, atspindintį antropocentrinį požiūrį bei apimantį tris susijusius elementus: kalbas, individus ir aplinkas.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: ekolingvistinis kapitalas, ekolingvistika, pavojuje esančios kalbos, nematerialus kultūros paveldas, kalbinė įvairovė, kalbinės teisės.