

# THE LOGIC OF MULTILINGUAL CITIES AND THEIR POLITICAL PROBLEMS

## A lógica das cidades multilinguísticas e seus problemas políticos

## La lógica de las ciudades multilinguísticas y sus problemas políticos

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**Abstract:** As they are fundamentally meeting points organized to facilitate all forms of social and economic intercourse, cities attract people speaking different languages, but exchange has to rely on shared codes: hence the role of official languages and *linguas francas* and the frequency of diglossy. The need to communicate induces a tendency towards the generalization of one, or a few, standardized languages.

They are many reasons, for linguistic groups, to withstand this process. An important autonomy was often granted to linguistic minorities in preindustrial cities. Industrial revolution was synonymous with the progress of urbanization and linguistic rationalization. Today, linguistic groups are more active in struggling for the free use of their mother tongue: the decline of Western ideologies and the on-going globalization explain this evolution.

**Key Word:** City, communication, diaspora, diglossy, globalization, industrial revolution, language, mother tongue, traditional society.

**Resumo:** Como são, fundamentalmente, pontos de encontro organizados para facilitar todas as formas de intercursos sociais e econômicos, as cidades atraem pessoas falando diferentes línguas, cujas trocas são baseadas em códigos compartilhados: daí, o papel das línguas oficiais e das *linguas francas*, e a frequência das perdas. A necessidade de comunicação induz à tendência para a generalização de uma ou de várias línguas estandarizadas.

Há muitas razões para que os grupos linguísticos resistam a esse processo. Uma importante autonomia linguística era frequentemente concedida para as minorias linguísticas nas cidades pré-industriais. A revolução industrial era sinônimo do progresso da urbanização e da racionalização linguística. Atualmente, os grupos linguísticos estão mais ativos na luta pelo uso livre de suas línguas mães: o declínio das ideologias ocidentais e a crescente globalização explicam essa evolução.

**Palavras-chave:** cidade, comunicação, diáspora, perdas, globalização, revolução industrial, linguagem, língua mãe, sociedade tradicional.

### Introduction

Multilingual cities are numerous and diverse. Because of the increasing mobility of persons and news and of the growth of giant metropolises attracting migrants from faraway countries, many people think that they constitute one of the major specificities of modern societies. The history of multilingual cities is in fact an old one : they date back from the earliest forms of urban development. Even then severe problems of communication were experienced : they were conducive to tensions and feuds - remind of the myth of Babel!

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We think that a look back to the history and theory of cities is useful when trying to understand what is going on today. After a first paragraph on the genesis of multilingual cities, we shall analyze multilingualism in the perspective of the dominant theories of cities : communication (paragraph 2), urban advantages (paragraph 3) and cultural identity (paragraph 4). All these theories are focused on macro-processes and ignore the role of individual or collective decision making. We shall consider it in the 5th paragraph. It will be then easier to understand the political problems of multilingual cities (paragraph 6).

## The nature of multilingual cities

1- Multilingual cities are a natural outcome of urban growth and life : they attract migrants speaking different dialects or languages, and serve as meeting points to people coming from distant places. Bilingual cities have often developed on the limit, or close to the limit, of linguistic areas : in Switzerland, Bienne and Fribourg, which are the two officially bilingual cities in the Confederation, are on the border of the French and German speaking areas. In Canada, Montreal is in a similar situation : the English speaking part of Canada starts from the Western part of the metropolis.

The setting of Brussels is akin to the preceding ones : the city, where Flemish was originally spoken, was so close to the Walloon area that it early attracted a French-speaking population. With the Independence of Belgium, in 1830, Brussels became the capital city of an officially French-speaking kingdom, which gave a distinctive advantage to the French language, which became predominant in the city itself.

Multilingual cities are not restricted to the areas where linguistic areas meet. Their development is often linked to their economic attractivity, which induces people coming from foreign countries to settle in. As long as there was no air warfare, the security was generally higher in cities than in the open country : many inhabitants came originally as refugees, but did not move back to their home regions when peace came back.

Multilingual cities of today are still fed by migrants who look for jobs, higher wages, a better access to culture or social welfare. They wish to enjoy the economic security offered by urban institutions.

The bigger the city, the bigger its attractivity, the higher the chance to find in it a multiplicity of groups practicing different languages.

2- Multilingual cities differ by the statutory position given to the different languages their inhabitants are using (Laponce, 1984).

- In some cases, there are two or several official languages : they can be used for business, relations with the public administration, cultural or religious activities. These situations can be observed in States where there are two, or more than two, official languages. The different languages enjoy the same statute : there are used on an equal basis for business, public administration, justice, cults, etc.

- Generally, the statutory position of the different languages are unequal. In many cases, one is official and has to be used in political life and public administration. The other languages are used by minorities in their domestic or communitarian life. In 17th century Brazil, *tupi* was used practically by every one in São Paulo. The *bandeirantes*, who raided the hinterland of the city for Indian slaves, used them as home servants and had children with Indian women : hence the place of *tupi* language. However all the official aspects of life went on in Portuguese. In this type of cities, diglossy was widespread, which meant that the linguistic problem was transferred from the political sphere to the domestic one.

In modern cities, when an industrial firm recruits exclusively its manpower in one linguistic group, its language is often used in the workshops or plants. Multilingualism does not only function in the domestic or communitarian field. It is important in the economic sphere.

Transactions between different groups may also rely on the use of a *lingua franca*, which is not necessarily the official language.

## Communication and the logic of cities

1- In order to understand the problems of multilingual cities, it is good to start from the theories of cities. The more general ones emphasize the role of urban centers in the processes of communication and exchanges (Tsuru, 1963; Lopez, 1963; Meier, 1966; Remy, 1966; Claval, 1981; Derycke, Huriot et Pumain, 1996). An analogy with telephone exchanges is good to understand the nature of urban areas, and more particularly, of their centres - their economic centres, their Central Business Districts, or CBDs. When calling someone, the main cost comes from the difficulty to get in touch with him : hence the idea to draw lines connecting directly all the people who have a telephone with a telephone exchange. Its function is to allow for the easy and cheap switching from one partner to the other. Originally, a switchboard operator inserted the pin corresponding to your line in the plug of your correspondent.

Cities developed in order to answer the same problem, but in situations when there were no telecommunication facilities. Information could not travel independently from the people who had it in their possession. When a person had to meet a multiplicity of partners, the best solution was to give appointments to all of them in the same place : it reduced the time lost in switching from one to the other. The central parts of cities, with their market places, shops and offices, the convergence of transportation facilities and accommodation for the people coming from distant places, were in fact communication exchanges. The city lived basically from the possibilities these districts offered for transferring informations from one partner to the other. Many productive activities relied on access to fresh information sources : the best location for them was within, or close to, the central business district of cities.

Many relations depend today on telecommunications, which are, in a way, substitute to cities. It is no more necessary to meet people in order to buy things and to pay for them. You can phone and order the food or services you need. However, whenever you try to evaluate the sincerity or capability of your economic partners, face to face relations remain the best solution. If in many fields, contacts do not play the same role than a century ago, it is not true for important economic decisions. Financial executives have to know personally the managers of the firms with which they work, to which they lend money, in which they invest. They need contacts with them and all the enterprises which can provide valuable informations on the risks involved in economic activity. As a consequence, financial institutions generally stuck to the CBDs at the time when many activities left them.

2- In the field of administrative life, the situation is in many respects similar. Rulers have to know what is happening in the areas they govern. The best way for them to get informed is to organize a network of observation and controlling places - or administrative centers - all over the country (Foucault, 1975; Lepetit, 1988). The information on what is happening all over the area is collected in these centers, processed and transferred to higher points in the administrative hierarchy.

In political life, decisions have to be negotiated. Athens and other Greek cities developed, during the 5th centuries B.C., the prototypes of modern democracies : in Athens, they relied on the meeting of all the citizens on the Pnyx, where power found its legitimacy. Everyone was able to expose his ideas or to ask questions before voting : the political process involved the centralization and exchange of information. The need for collecting and processing information is as strong for representative democracies or non-democratic regimes as for direct democracies. Since they rely on the delegation of power and the use of bureaucratic structures for controlling people, they involve networks of hierarchized cities, dominated by a capital city.

3- In order to build efficient communication systems, it is necessary to provide them with particular spatial structures : we call them cities. They are machines devised in order to facilitate all forms of interactions between people - social, cultural, economic as well as political ones (Claval, 1981).

The centralization of communication is most efficient when all the partners use the same codes, the same language. The logic of cities involves that everyone is able to understand everyone and to be understood by him when he uses his own language. When there are only two languages, a generalized bilingualism may function. With more languages, it is problematic.

In the European institutions in Brussels, the delegates or representatives of each country use their own language, each intervention being translated into the others. Until 1972, there were 6 countries : 36 channels of translation were needed. In the 90s, with 15 States, 225 were required. In 2004, there will be 25 States, with 625 channels ! The costs keep jumping. Highly developed countries with high incomes are able to pay for such a system, but it is heavy to manage and relatively inefficient.

The normal solution is for everyone to master a common language. States have imposed official languages. In economic life, partners use *linguas francas* for their transactions. All over the World, the English language is spoken for that reason. French was for a long time the *lingua franca* in many part of Europe, the Mediterranean countries and Indian ocean. It was the language of diplomacy until the negotiation of the treatise of Versailles in 1919.

In West Africa, *diola* and *hausa* were the more widely used *linguas francas* before European colonization and have maintained their positions in some areas. *Suabili* was developed as a commercial language on the Eastern coast of Africa, before becoming the official language of some modern States.

The use of a common language makes communications easier, but there is no necessity to use the same one for economic relations, political life, cultural activities, etc. In the same African city, the official language, the only one to be used for administrative purposes, may be the French one, and the *lingua franca* for economic transactions the English or an African one. In Europe, religious communication of a high level relied, until recently, on Latin in the Roman Catholic communities, and on Greek in a part of Orthodoxy.

4- The logic of communication is in this way conducive to situations in which people have to know at least two languages : in order to participate to the transactions which occur in a city, its is necessary to master, besides the mother tongue, the language(s) which serve(s) as support for economic and political relations. Those who do not practice the official or dominant languages rely, for their relations, on intermediaries able to make translations. It is necessary to pay for their services. Middlemen take often advantage of their position to retain some piece of relevant information. This possibility gives them opportunities to exploit their partners and exercise a power on them. Political theory has stressed the role of notables in societies when only a minority was fluent in the official language : the power of the provincial elites in many parts of Western Europe relied on this situation until the generalization of the school system.

Multilinguism is in this way conducive to situations of diglossy (Laponce, 1984) : the people who master the different languages spoken in a city know the situations when they have to use one or the other. Immigrants in Montreal switch from French for school, justice and domestic life to English in the productive life and their mother tongue at home. As a consequence, they have no need to diversify their own language for expressing all the aspects of reality : it was easier for them to switch from French or English when they had to express the economic or technical dimensions of modern life. In the languages of minorities, many terms or notions are directly borrowed from the dominant languages.

There are clear disadvantages in not been able to master the main languages - official ones or *linguas francas*. There are also good reasons not to rely uniquely on them : the minority languages are efficient instruments for keeping alive cultural traditions or developing counter-cultures.

5- Because of the modern technologies of rapid transport and telecommunications, globalization of economic activities has proceeded quickly during the last forty years. For an increasing proportion of enterprises in the fields of industrial production and tertiary activities, markets are now Worldwide. This evolution is important for multilinguism. It strengthens the role of the English language in economic transactions all over the World. At the same time, it gives advantages to cities where it is possible fo find persons able to speak the languages of distant markets : people pertaining to linguistic minorities are given new economic opportunities. They have however to speak the official language of the city in which they have settled as well as English in order to translate all the information required by the firms which employ them or hire their services as experts.

National diplomatic services and export-import firms located in the ports were the basic tools of international relations until fifty years ago. Inland cities had few direct relations with distant markets. The situation is now different. Continental locations suffered from a disadvantage vis-a-vis harbours, since long distance travel was mainly by sea. People now fly directly from the city in which they live, or from the nearest metropolis, to their final destination, or the nearest metropolis. Inland cities are as active as coastal ones in the field of long-distance economic relations. Globalization is an active agent of metropolization (Claval, 1989) : the share of the most important cities in long distance relations is growing. Productive *filières* have ceased to be generally encompassed within a national territory : they are located according to the comparative advantages of all the places in the World. It means that a growing proportion of enterprises are multi- or transnational corporations.

In the field of caritative relations, non-governemental organizations increasingly displace the older channels of interventions. Tourism develops direct contacts between populations who had no previous experience in this field.

When an international problem arises, rulers develop new strategies to solve it : instead of relying on their diplomatic services, they call directly their partners and meet them.

The overall structure of the contemporary World is increasingly based on networks (Badie and Smouts, 1992). National territories still play an important role, but international relations are increasingly direct ones, from persons to persons, enterprises to enterprises, cities to cities. It means that the status of linguistic minorities has changed. They have ceased to appear as a burden for the cities which harbour them. Diasporas confer them distinctive advantages (Prévelakis, 1996). The more cosmopolitan a city, the higher its advantages in the harsh competition in the World economy. In industrial countries two or three generations ago, the aim of national or urban authorities was to integrate immigrants and transform them into citizens. The perspective is now different : multilingual situations reflect, at the urban scale, the new structure of the economic scene. They do not constitute a drawback. They appear as an advantage. It would certainly be unwise to suppress them.

With the growing role of networks, diasporas gain more easily support from abroad : their political significance is growing. Urban authorities have to take them into account.

### **Urban advantage and multilingualism**

1- Theories of cities do not stress only the role of cities as devices for maximizing all forms of interaction. Cities owe much of their dynamism to advantages which grow indirectly from their communication functions or have other bases (Tsuru, 1963; Remy, 1997; Remy and Voyé, 1992).

The first indirect advantage which cities offer is linked with information (Scott, 1988). Since there are many partners meeting and discussing in a business district, one has often a free access to a part of the information which is exchanged. In the ready-made clothes business, it is important to know what will be the next fashion : valuable information in this respect may be gleaned just listening to people chattering in bars and coffee-houses, getting on hire people coming from other workshops or frequenting buyers and sellers : hence the concentration of this type of industrial production in big cities.

As soon as the concentration of population in an urban centre is big enough, scales economies add their effects to external economies : local markets are big enough to absorb many products. Their labour markets offer many skills. When a big plant has to be operated, it is generally easier to locate it in an urban centre where the employers have not to house the workers (Vance, 1977), and where it is easier to hire or fire them. As soon as it was possible to use concentrated forms of energy thanks to the industrial revolution, cities attracted a large part of the new productions. From the end of the 19th century to the end of the 50s, industrial employment often counted for more than fifty percent of the active population present in a city.

2- The urban advantage is not only located in the productive sector of the economy. It results from the possibilities of benefiting from social aid, free medical care and other forms of social welfare. In Europe hospitals for sick and old people were built and food distribution to

the poor was practiced in many cities from the Middle Ages, which explained their attractiveness for people, even if they had no prospect to get a job (Duby, 1981; Heers, 1990).

The situation is similar today, but at a different scale. Many people coming from developing countries enjoy a better life depending on public welfare in European or American cities than working hard in their home countries. It means that the motivation behind many migration flows has changed during the last fifty years. Until the 50s, foreigners were mainly pushed to migrate and settle in Western cities by the opportunities of getting jobs in manufactures or domestic services. Today a fair proportion of them are just fleeing misery. They are not really looking for employment.

The attitudes of this type of migrants toward the urban society in which they live differ from those prevailing fifty years ago. Immigrants have less interest in learning the dominant languages of the city in which they have settled : their aim is not social promotion through work, but subsistence. They only wish to get all the advantages which are provided to the poor and unemployed persons. They do not try to develop their skills : the kind of jobs they occasionally practice need no qualification and are very unstable. It is enough to have somebody in the group to serve as a middleman with employers.

3- Other advantages were, or are, linked to the sheer size of cities. In the past, as soon as they were populated enough, they could protect themselves thanks to walls and fortifications. Citizens could buy weapons for themselves or pay for mercenaries. In time of war, cities were safer than villages or dispersed farmsteads. They could withstand the actions of pillaging groups and discourage many regular troops.

Physical security was one of the advantages of cities (Heers, 1990). Their population grew rapidly when troubles developed. Even if cities did not produce the food they used, they often escaped the worst famines thanks to the constitution of stocks.

Today, these advantages have disappeared, except in situations of guerrilla warfare. They are, or were, recently frequent in many parts of the World : Vietnam and Afghanistan in Asia, Algeria, Nigeria, Congo, Kenya, Angola, Mozambique, Rwanda, etc. in Africa, Columbia, Peru, Salvador, Guatemala in Latin America.

4- A part of the cultural advantages of cities are linked to their scale effects : theatres, opera houses, music halls can thrive only on a big enough public. The same is true for the museums. In the field of education, major urban centres offer schools for every type of knowledge, and possibilities of apprenticeship in any craft. When asking people the reasons for which they have settled in cities, cultural advantages rate high. Many of the migrants coming from the Third World have no ambitions for themselves, but wish to give their children better chances for life.

5- Urban advantages have not the same effects on multilingualism than communication. Many urban dwellers are not active in the field of information processing or exchange. They are working in the industries attracted in the cities by external or scale economies. They try to benefit from the housing facilities and welfare programmes of big cities. For them, there is no direct interest in learning the official language or the *linguas francas* used in economic exchange. They have no reason to concede prominence to a specific language only because it allows for a better integration in the fields of communication, either economic, political or cultural. They are glad with their own languages and wish to maintain their use. Since their economic expectations are relatively low, they will not earn much if practicing the dominant language. Since they have no use of it in their daily life, they often prefer to pay translators and middlemen.

### **Cultural life, identity and multilingualism in cities**

1- During the 50s, 60s and 70s, theoretical reflexion on cities stressed their economic life and delved deep into their functioning. It did not care for their symbolic value and role.

As any other places, cities are loaded with sense and values by the people who inhabit them or by those who reside outside. Urban centres are located in a beautiful valley, with a big river which give them some grace, or have grown on an arid plateau. They enjoy a mild climate or suffer from periods of excessive heat or cold. Their physical environment is more or

less pleasant. It is an important element in the attractiveness of a city.

Townscapes speak about the past, of the grandeur of former rulers, the religious faith of city dwellers, the wealth and taste of elites. Monuments are reminiscent of important historical events. The centre of the city, where churches, palaces and beautiful mansions are numerous, is imbued with symbols.

Archeology and Ancient History have proven that in many countries, cities were initially ceremonial centres (Adams, 1966; Wheatley, 1971). They had no economic functions so that their permanent population was rather small. Their main role was to attract people from the rural areas all around for rituals of collective significance. They often concerned fertility - the fertility of soils or women - and the relations between cosmic and terrestrial orders. Later, the symbolic role of cities remained associated with religious events (Racine, 1993). Rulers soon discovered the benefit they could gain in giving a supernatural legitimacy to their power : hence the frequent association of religious and political symbolisms.

In modern societies, legitimacy has ceased to be rooted in transcendental realms. Governments represent the people. Cities have become symbols of groups, and capital cities of nations. They also exhibit the faith in human justice and scientific progress which guarantee better futures for their population.

2- The symbolic value of a city is not the same for all its inhabitants. People attend churches, temples, synagogues or mosques. The ruling elite manifests more attachment to the symbols of authority and power than the lower classes. Since a fair proportion of urbanites are newcomers, they cling to their places of origins as symbolic centres.

Jean Laponce proposed an interesting model of the mental maps of urban dwellers (Laponce, 1984). For him, these maps are strongly polarized. They are structured around the point where the highest collective values are invested. For the ruling elite and those who share its interests because they have reverence for the establishment and long for success for themselves or their children, mental maps are focused on the oldest part of the city, which is also generally its central business district. Immigrants have still a part of their heart in the area where they were raised. Achievement is still equated for them with the value they have adopted when they were young. To succeed according to the criteria of the dominant urban elite has no meaning for them. Their mental maps are generally centred on their home places.

Jean Laponce used this model to explain the situation in Montreal, which is a bilingual city since the end of the 18th century, and increasingly a multilingual one. For the English-speaking part of the population, what was important was economic achievement and material prosperity. The centre of the city was devoted to Imperial grandeur and business. The English-speaking part of the population recognized itself in the CBD.

For the French-speaking part of the population, the situation was different. For it, the major achievement was to live according to the Roman Catholic faith, have a big family and raise children honestly. The centre of collective life was the parish church, in East Montreal, and the village where a large share of the extended family still lived. Mental maps of French Canadians did not focus on the central part of the city, but on peripheral or external points. The church and the municipality, which were strongholds of the French Canadian societies, struggled in order to maintain French symbols in central Montreal, or close to it - the City Hall, Roman Catholic churches, mainly the Cathedral - but until the 1940s, there were no collective effort to transform central Montreal into a French-speaking area.

3- Depending on the periods and motivations behind the decision to settle in a city, the mental maps of city dwellers changed. Before the industrial revolution, many cities in Europe were similar to 19th century Montreal : there were dominated by a ruling elite, knowing and using the official language. An important part of the population came from the rural areas all around. They were speaking dialects - often, a wide range of dialects or vernacular languages when the region was peopled by a mosaic of groups. Since these groups gave more importance, as symbols, to religion (either christianism or judaism) than to power and wealth, they willingly accepted to practice the kind of diglossy in which the mother tongue is used at home and in the community, and official or economic languages for the other aspects of life : they located their

major symbols outside city centres.

Multilingualism did not appear as a political problem : there were often many languages spoken in a city, but their use was restricted only to well defined areas or circumstances - *tupi* served at home in 17th century São Paulo.

4- The industrial revolution was conducive to rapid urbanization and the growth of big cities, which drew a part of their population from distant areas : the diversity of languages was strengthened. As far as the immigrants were employed in the industrial sector of the urban economy, they could use their own language at work as soon as a few of them were able to translate orders. The foreman often spoke the dominant language and acted in this case as an agent of linguistic unification, but the situation was not universal.

Since immigrants longed for a better situation for their children, they were glad to see them learn the dominant language. Their mental maps were centred on their home countries, but because they worked for the future as much as the present, they were not hostile to the generalization of a bilingualism in which their own language was restricted to domestic or communitarian use. There were no linguistic political problems. The only difficulty was to organize an efficient school system for the newcomers and to pay for it.

5- The situation differs today. Migrants are less open to the values of the host population. Critiques of Western civilization are universal (Said, 1978). Everyone is glad to benefit from the facilities provided by technical progress, but the prevailing feeling is that too much progress is dangerous both for nature and humanity. In such conditions, people coming from areas of non-Western traditions cease to strive for integrating Western values.

Since a part of the migrant population is living on social welfare, the necessity to learn the official or dominant language(s) is less vital. Because travel expenses are lower, trips shorter and telecommunications provided by radio or T.V give news from the home country, the people who had personally migrated maintain closer ties with their home country than in a recent past. Their children often do not master perfectly well the mother tongue of their parents, but they idealize it.

Because of the failure of its traditional system of values, Western civilization is going through an identity crisis. People are searching for strong symbols in order to build their egos. The symbolism displayed in central cities reflects history, the hopes and ideals of local ruling elites and bourgeoisies, and the successive forms of political power. Young people from foreign families are not really interested in these symbols of past. They long for a closer and more emotional foundation for their identities : hence their interest in their own traditional cultures, and the way they invest languages.

Until the 1950s, the structure of the mental maps of urban dwellers reduced the tensions which might have arisen from multilingualism. The situation is today different. Newcomers have still mental maps partly centred on their places of origin, but they draw from that fact a new sense of dignity for their language : they wish to have it granted an official recognition.

6- Urban areas have grown rapidly since a century : their extension is caused by demographic expansion, higher standards of life which induce people to inhabit larger homes or apartments, and facilities offered by private or public transport.

There are two possibilities for people to locate in a multilingual city : to live close to those using the same language in domestic life, or to mix with people using other languages. There are examples of both situations. Mosaic is perhaps more frequent when people are living in detached houses, and mixity when apartments are dominant, but there are many exceptions to this rule.

In many big cities, urban sprawl was so rapid that political units did not evolve fast enough for preventing the multiplication of municipalities. Minorities are sometimes able to dominate some of these localities. They lie either in the periphery or in the heart of the urban area itself. The nature of political problems in multilingual cities change.



## Individual and collective strategies in multilingual cities

Theories of urban forms and life as developed until the 80s generally used global approaches : they analyzed the structures of costs inherent to different patterns, and supposed that the cheapest and most efficient ones will be chosen. They ignored the decision makers.

Today the situation is different. The analysis of decision making plays a central role in contemporary theoretical developments.

1- A first hypothesis relies on the idea that decisions are the outcome of individual choices. People are able to withstand the pressures of their social environment. They have preferences and transform them into action. Economic theory relied, and still relies on these basic tenets.

In the linguistic field, what are the strategies for people who do not practice the official language or the economic *lingua franca* of the place where they live ? To learn them has a cost. It is time consuming. For an adult, it is always difficult to get rid of a foreign accent : it reduces the advantages he can expect from learning the official language of the host country. Mastering it enables him to establish direct contacts, but his partners will immediately recognize in him a newcomer. They will invest him with all the prejudices they nurture against foreigners.

On the other hand, even if learning the official language is never completely successful, it offers serious advantages : easier access to all the informations useful for daily life and economic activities, and a guarantee against the unfair pretensions of middlemen. It opens many opportunities and makes people freer.

Economic rationality generally favours the choice of linguistic integration.

2- The theoreticians who insist on the individual character of decision making, recognize at least one social dimension in it : the familial one. They consider that the Western structure of small families, parents and their young children, is a rational one. As a consequence, people do not choose only for themselves. They do not try only to maximize their personal happiness. They take into account in their analyses the interests of their children. If they learn when still young the language(s) of the city in which they live, they will speak it (or them) without a foreign accent. Their integration in the global society will be easier, the opportunities open to them in the economic competition, greater. Hence the strategy often developed by migrants : they learn enough of the language of the host city to be able to buy whatever they need and to understand the orders which are given to them in the workshops or plants where they work, but did not strive for its perfect knowledge. Their efforts of assimilation mainly concern their children. They send them to the best local schools. They often force them to speak the dominant language at home, and use it with them.

3- Sociologists and ethnologists differ from economists : for them, decision making is basically a collective venture, since individuals are conditioned by the environment in which they live and are not really free of their choices.

The sociological analysis of linguistic minorities generally stresses the strength of the solidarities which exist inside their communities. They are based on shared values and habits. They result also from power structures.

When a migrant settles in a city, he is unable to succeed if he is not backed by relatives or fellow countrymen. He has to pay them for that - up to one third or half of his wages in some cases - but he accepts because of the security he is gaining.

The pressures which limit the individual liberty of choice last after the initial stage of integration. They have several components. To refuse to maintain relations with his countrymen in the host city can have negative consequences on the situations of relatives still living in the home country. There are often forms of organizations stretched over both the native land and the new locations of the group. In Algerian Kabylie, political authority is traditionally decentralized. Villages are self-governed units. They are ruled by councils of family heads. All the decisions have to be controlled by them - marriages for instance. There are numerous Kabyls in Paris. They do not constitute ethnic neighborhoods, even if there are important concentrations of North African populations in some of the Parisian arrondissements (mainly 12th, 18th, 19th,

20th) or in the suburbs (mainly in the first suburban ring to the North and South-East of Paris). But the villages do exist in Paris as well as in Kabylie : the council of family heads in the native country is doubled by a council of family heads in Paris. It meets regularly in coffee-houses and treats of all the problems which were traditionally dealt with in Algeria - the marriages of the young women for instance. Parents are not free to authorize their daughters to marry a Frenchman : they have first to refer to the council of family heads, which is generally critical towards such decisions.

In some cases, the collective structures which stretch over the immigrant group and the home country are of the mafia kind : all the activities, or a large part of the activities, of the foreigners are controlled by these organizations. They have to pay for the shops they have opened. A percentage is levied on salaries. These transactions are not one-way ones : individuals and families are rewarded in job opportunities and security.

4- Decision making is both an individual and a collective process. The share of personal initiative varies according to the cultures and values of the linguistic group under scrutiny, its social organization in the native country and the way it takes advantage of the host country institutions to organize itself. It depends also upon the prestige of the host country culture and its institutions.

### **Multilingualism, political life and political problems in cities**

1- Problems of multilingualism are fundamentally political problems, since they concern the daily life of everyone and his rights and opportunities to participate in the economic, cultural and political activities of the city in which he lives.

In traditional societies, multilingualism appeared in fact more as a problem for individuals than a political question : everyone could normally speak his own language at home or with his neighbours. Since school education was still a privilege of elites, children naturally learnt the language of their parents. It was up to them to rely on translators or notables when they were dealing with other groups, or make the effort of mastering the official language or the prevailing economic *lingua franca*. In that case, they generally accepted diglossic practices - reserving each language for a different type and level of activity.

The prevailing political structures were not democratic, even when mayors and town hall officials were elected : the electorate was a narrow one, and all the people have not the same weight when they were consulted. In many cases, cities were ruled in an authoritarian way by an appointed governor.

When town halls did exist, they often did not deal directly with the linguistic groups. Since the political system combined a representative system, at the upper level, and clientship relations lower in the hierarchy, linguistic groups supported influential families and were protected by them.

In Venice, the Councils dealt directly with the problems of foreigners. They parked the Jewish community in the ghetto. Foreign merchants were attached to the warehouse and commercial facilities of their nation - the *Fondaco dei Tedeschi* for the German speaking ones.

When cities were ruled in an authoritative way, governors often acted along lines similar to those practiced in Venice : they allocated neighborhoods to ethnic and linguistic groups and gave them a large autonomy. When these groups played an important role in the economy of cities, they enjoyed royal protection - it was the case for the Jewish or German merchants in many Eastern European countries. The Moslem custom was also to allocate neighborhoods to the different groups and let them settle their internal problems : it was the *millet* system (Hjarpe, 1997). The rulers did not interfere as long as there were no feuds with the dominant Moslem population, or with other linguistic (and ethnic and religious) groups.

Pre-industrial societies did not offer individuals much room for their personal initiatives. The social structures in the host cities and in the rural areas from which came linguistic minorities had a strongly hierarchized component. People had to conform with the prevailing models of choice. There was often no way open for integration in the host population : the only possibility left was to accept the rules of the communities of fellow countrymen.

2- With the industrial revolution and the rise of democratic regimes in Western Europe and North America, the political problems and the way to tackle with them changed. Since formal education became a part of the democratic system, school problems were important. To deal with foreigners was partly to decide of the languages used in the schools attended by their children. In some countries, a complete freedom was left to the parents, at least if people were able to pay for the education of their boys and girls - it was the case in some South American countries, which allowed for the existence of multilingual elites for a long period : their members were able to speak Portuguese or Spanish, according to the country, English or French as a cultural language, and the language of their home country when coming from abroad.

The majority of linguistic groups were made of blue collars. They could not pay for the education of their offspring. They depended on the State - or City - system of public education. Generally, it was a monolingual system. In some cases, where two languages were officially recognized, there were some possibilities of choice, but not always. In the Province of Quebec for instance, Protestants had to send their children to the English speaking schools, and Roman Catholics to the French speaking ones. Since the prevailing attitudes of immigrants favoured integration at the political level, the school problem was more an economic one - how to pay for the State or City supported system ? - than a political one.

In the countries where naturalization occurred rapidly - mainly North American - linguistic groups soon discovered the power they could gain through electoral bargaining. Political parties had to win the support of enough people to get elected. They proposed platforms in which they afforded the different groups a more or less substantial part of what they asked. It gave linguistic communities a strength they could not achieve elsewhere, in Western Europe for instance. It was the reason for which collective bargaining and collective decision making were more significant in North America than in Europe (Dahl, 1961). It did not hamper the process of assimilation, but it made it longer : integration took generally two generations.

Industrial revolution had a strong influence on the strategies available to linguistic groups. Because the labour market was buoyant, controls on immigrants and minorities were relaxed. Newcomers and outsiders had more opportunities to carve their ways through the host society. Industrial cities were parts of modern open societies. The values promoted by these cultures appeared attractive for many foreigners, since they stressed more the role of individual initiatives, work and personal energy than inherited positions. They made people dream of happiness for everyone. In such contexts, many people accepted to sever their links with the traditional societies in which they had been raised. Linguistic minorities organized their communities according to the prevailing values of the host country more than along the lines adopted in their home countries. Conditions for a high permeability between linguistic communities were optimal. The predominance of individual objectives in decision making was conducive to integration, and the progressive reduction of linguistic diversity.

3- Today democratic structures are present all over the World. Cities are ruled by elected mayors. In many countries, the process of naturalization is shorter than half a century ago. In some Western European countries, immigrants vote in local elections even if they are not citizens.

Because of urban sprawl, many metropolitan areas are divided between several municipalities - a few hundreds in the case of Paris. It offers sometimes possibilities for linguistic minorities to control specific areas.

School problems are still important, but their solution has changed. Monolingual school systems are less universal than formerly, even in nations where the policy is still to teach the same official language to all the children : it often appears wise to start reading and writing using the mother tongue and to move later to the official language. These measures are often strongly supported by the linguistic minorities, since they give them better opportunities for the preservation of their languages. Many parents of the linguistic minorities are however against such policies, since they reduce the opportunities for their children to succeed in the school system - it was particularly true in Eastern Socialist Countries, former Yugoslavia for instance, where each national group had an obligation to use its own language in education.

Today labour markets of the majority of Western countries are depressed and job

opportunities are scarce, specially for immigrants and people unable to speak the prevailing language(s). Many newcomers are in fact more interested in consumption opportunities than in employment : they are glad to live on social welfare, which does not need a high degree of proficiency in the official languages, nor any technical skills. They are aware of the critiques against the Western societies and do not dream to integrate them. Second generation migrants stick to the values which prevailed in the home country of their parents in order to build their identity.

It does not mean that we are back to the situation when urban people were caught in rigid social structures. There is today more room for initiative. What has changed is the way these initiatives have to be taken. What appears important is to achieve the promotion of whole groups rather than the success of individuals. It is the reason for which collective decision making is important in the contemporary context.

Because of the growing significance of networks in social and economic life, the role of small linguistic group in foreign cities is changing. Traditionally, there was only one choice open to them: to stick to an organization modeled on the home country, or integrate the host society on an individual basis. Today diasporas serve often as social laboratories for innovations : it is in the big cities of the World that people can develop new social and professional skills and accept new values. A part of their initiatives is then channeled back to the home countries. The process is particularly evident for developing countries : modern forms of cultures or counter-cultures in Turkey owed much to the Turkish communities in Germany. The situation is similar for North African communities in France, and North African countries.

In a World where international competitiveness is harsh, it is important for cities to attract people with the kind of skills useful for business or production. Since the competent specialists are often foreigners, who have no intention to settle permanently in the country, it is important to offer them opportunities to have their children educated in their own languages. Even in countries where the official policy is to stick to monolingualism, some exceptions are made in order to strengthen the attractiveness of major cities. In Paris, the international *lycées* offer opportunities to be trained both in French and another language.

Because of the rising sensibility to problems of identity, attitudes of many linguistic groups have changed: they now struggle for the legal recognition of their languages. It explains that linguistic problems are increasingly political ones. It is evident when looking at the evolution of immigration in the United States. *Latinos* are increasingly conscious of their number and strength, and try to get the right to use Spanish instead of English in many circumstances, at least in the cities along the Mexican border and in Florida, where Cuban refugees are specially numerous.

## Conclusion

The perspectives opened by theoretical reflection on the nature and form of cities are useful for understanding the evolution of multilingual cities and their problems. As they are fundamentally meeting points organized to facilitate all forms of social and economic intercourse, cities attract people speaking different languages, but exchange has to rely on shared codes : hence the role of *linguas francas* and official languages. The need to communicate induces a tendency towards the generalization of one, or a few, standardized languages.

There are many reasons, for linguistic groups, to withstand this process : they cling to their own cultures, values and religions since the use of a particular language makes easier the defense of a separate identity. At a time when networks play a growing role in international life, linguistic minorities are less isolated than in the past : they keep closer relations with the mother-tongue areas. As diasporas, they are given opportunities to be active actors in the process of globalization : it may be interesting to serve as intermediaries in the economic relations with their home countries.

The historical perspective explains why autonomy was often granted to linguistic minorities in preindustrial cities. Industrial revolution was synonymous with the progress of urbanization and linguistic rationalization. Today, linguistic groups are more active in struggling for the free use of their mother tongue : the decline of Western ideologies and the on-going globalization explain this evolution.

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