O U T L I N E

Expert Meeting
30 May – 1 June 2011

Towards UNESCO Guidelines on Language Policies: a Tool for Language Assessment and Planning

Venue:
UNESCO Headquarters,
7 Place Fontenoy, 75007 Paris, France
Meeting Rooms XIII, VI, VII and VIII

Context

At the latest session of the General Conference, UNESCO's Member States (October 2009) adopted a resolution (cf. 35 C/Resolution 43), inviting the Director-General to continue to monitor:

(i)   the impact of existing standard-setting instruments on the protection of languages;
(ii) national and regional policies on language protection and language planning; and
(iii) international cooperation programmes in this field, together with the provision of funds from donors for that purpose'.

The present expert meeting aims at consolidating the action undertaken by the Organization to implement item (ii) of the above resolution by bringing together the representatives of three UNESCO Sectors (i.e., Education, Culture and Communication and Information) involved in relevant programmes and external experts working in such areas as linguistics, anthropology, education, media and Internet.

This meeting is financed by the Norwegian Fund-in-Trust in the framework of Norway's support to UNESCO's project '*Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (print edition and interactive online resource)'* and UNESCO's Regular Programme budget (2010-2011).

Background

UNESCO's methodological document entitled 'Language Vitality and Endangerment' (LVE) was developed by an Ad hoc expert group comprising linguists from various regions in 2001-2002 and adopted by an international meeting 'Safeguarding Endangered Languages' held at UNESCO Headquarters in 2003. This document is a tool intended for those involved in designing language maintenance and/or revitalization measures, surveying the status of languages and linguistic diversity and developing language policies.

UNESCO operationalized the methodology in 2005 by developing a Data Collection Questionnaire, made available online and also disseminated through various networks. Since then, the LVE methodology has been used by individual researchers and in governmental surveys. It has also been commented on by several scholars and government representatives.

The LVE identifies the following nine criteria ('factors') to be used in determining the degree of vitality/endangerment of a language and developing measures for its maintenance or revitalization:

1. Intergenerational language transmission
2. Absolute number of speakers
3. Proportion of speakers within the total population
4. Shifts in domains of language use
5. Response to new domains and media
6. Availability of materials for language education and literacy
7. Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies including official status and use
8. Community members' attitudes toward their own language
9. Amount and quality of documentation

Objectives

The objective of this expert meeting is to develop a tool that would enable UNESCO's Member States to assess the language situation in a local or national context and, based on that assessment, develop and implement appropriate languages policies and measures.

More specifically, the meeting will review the use that has been made of the LVE paper and the questionnaire over the past eight years, taking account of the critical comments and suggestions, and will propose revisions and enhancements.

The nine language vitality factors presented above will be considered during the meeting in four clusters, based in their primary relevance to a particular area of UNESCO's mandate, as follows:

- ***Factors 1, 4 and 5,*** centered on intergenerational transmission, and on the ever-increasing relevance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), including Internet and media (particularly Public Service Broadcasting);

- ***Factors 7 and 8,*** focusing on language attitudes, policies, status and use;

- ***Factors 2 and 3***, which concern numbers of speakers of endangered languages; and

- ***Factors 6 and 9***, focusing on education, literacy and language documentation.

Relevant Documents

The following background papers and documents are provided for this meeting:

1. *UNESCO's 'Language Vitality and Endangerment' Methodological Guideline: Review of Application and Feedback since 2003,* prepared by UNESCO's Culture Sector, 2011

2. *UNESCO Questionnaire 'Language Vitality and Diversity'*, prepared by UNESCO's Culture Sector, 2006

3. *Public service broadcasting and language development: A summary report on the situation in five countries*, prepared by Mr Levi Obijiofor, School of Journalism and Communication, University of Queensland, Brisbane for UNESCO's Communication and Information Sector, 2011

4. *Assessing Language Situation and Planning in Relation to the Internet*, prepared by Mr Marcel Diki-Kidiri, University of Paris 7 for UNESCO's Communication and Information Sector, 2011

5. *State of the Art on Multilingualism and Education*, outline of the document prepared by UNESCO's Education Sector, 2011

Reference documents:

Language Vitality and Endangerment methodological Guideline, 2003, UNESCO, prepared by UNESCO Ad Hoc Group on Endangered Languages
http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/cultural-diversity/languages-and-multilingualism/endangered-languages/language-vitality/

UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001
http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127160m.pdf

Public service broadcasting: a comparative legal survey, second edition, 2011, UNESCO prepared by Tobi Mendel.
http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/31375/13052976943public_service_broadcasting_en.pdf/public_service_broadcasting_en.pdf

Securing a Place for a Language in Cyberspace, 2008, UNESCO prepared by Marcel Diki-Kidiri, CNRS research officer, Laboratory on "Language, Languages and Cultures of Black Africa" (LLACAN)
http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001497/149786E.pdf

Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace, 2003, UNESCO
http://portal.unesco.org/ci//en/files/13475/10697584791Recommendation-Eng.pdf/Recommendation-Eng.pdf

Implementation of Standard-Setting Instruments. Part IV. Application of the 2003 Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace, 21 March 2011 (second consolidated report), p. 19-25
http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001916/191614e.pdf

First consolidation report to the General Conference on the measures taken by Member States for the Implementation of the Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace, 20 July 2007
http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001519/151952e.pdf

Education in a Multilingual World, 2003, UNESCO Position Paper
http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001297/129728e.pdf

Expected outcomes

The meeting will generate the blueprint for the 2nd, revised and enhanced, edition of the *Language Vitality and Endangerment* paper, accompanied by a more focused data collection questionnaire, and possibly one or more complementary questionnaires or checklists to facilitate the planning of appropriate measures and policies.

In addition, the review and adjustments of UNESCO's proposals for a Language Vitality Indicator will result in a new methodological tool to be tested at the national, regional and global levels.

All the above materials will be published in electronic and print form.