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When sticking out your tongue is even ruder!

Abstract

It is hard to talk about particular languages from diverse, even conflicting, points of view. Speakers of demographically large and politically powerful languages have their own views, and many are insensitive to the view and experience of demographically smaller and politically weaker languages. In particular, in the traditions of the nation-state building process and of national romanticism, nationalist discourse has become internally invisible and regarded as the natural way of the world. I intend to delve into these issues, with special reference to language policies in Spain. I will end with an appeal for a reconsideration of the criteria for EFNIL membership, which I believe would add value to the Federation's work and scope, and make it more inclusive.[1]

Surely we all agree that it is rude to stick your tongue out at somebody. Today I hope to convey to you that there are cases when showing your tongue in public is even ruder than in others.

As you all know, the Yiddish linguist Max Weinreich gave us an insightful definition of a language: "A language is a dialect with an army and a navy".[2] A 15th century Latin specialist in Castile, Antonio de Nebrija, came to a similar conclusion, just as Christopher Columbus was sailing to the west across the Atlantic, a feat that was to pave the way to Castile's building its own empire. In the prologue to the first *Gramática Castellana* to be published Nebrija wrote: "siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio" (language has always accompanied empires).

Another well-known Jewish academic, Joshua Fishman, was responsible for the edition of an interesting book on the "first congresses" – including Hebrew, as you may well imagine – of a wide range of languages. And some of these congresses led to the establishment of the academy for the relevant language (as was the case for Catalan, incidentally).

In my contribution to this Conference I should like to discuss with you some of the attempts to create hierarchies of languages, and some of their usually perverse effects.

In France, and since at least the mid-17th century, French has been identified as the language of **reason**. We may ask ourselves: French, as opposed to what language(s)? My suspicion is that this discourse was and is addressed inwards, not outwards: that is, instead of making the claim that French was (and is) "superior" to German, English or Italian (for instance), it was aimed at the majority of the inhabitants of France who at that time knew no French, but spoke instead what are contemptuously termed "les patois": Catalan, Basque, Breton, German (whenever Alsace and Lorraine have formed part of the country), Occitan and, from the end of the 18th century, Corsican.

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[1] I also recommend the following to those who understand Spanish:
   - Lecture by Juan Carlos Moreno Cabrera: "Lingüística y el nacionalismo lingüístico español" (39:31): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4B6Hu3z-4A.
   - Juan Carlos Moreno Cabrera: Entrevista (36:00): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z57J88m0_MU.
[2] "A shprakh iz a dialekt mit an armey un a flot".

Speaking differently from the dominant majority has always given rise to reactions. Barbarians[3] were identified as such by the Greeks, who regarded their language(s) as what in English we call "babble".[4] This, incidentally, is why the Berbers now prefer their language to be referred to by a more neutral word, *Tamazight*. A similar process occurred to the people in the north of Scandinavia, who prefer Saami to the term "Lapps", a word which came to be scornfully used by their immediate neighbours. A first conclusion here is obvious: it is not the language itself which is under attack, the attack is social, against the people that speak it. Ironically, prejudice can continue even if a people abandon their language completely: it is sufficient for someone to be identified as belonging to such and such a group for that person to continue to be the object of prejudice.

Recent events in the Balkans remind us that the **name** given to a language is of course a political issue. Why else would the split between what for academics still refer to as Serbo-Croat have taken place? Why else would "Macedonian" have appeared, when Bulgarians see it as not significantly different from their own language? Why else would the first "Bosnian" grammar books be published, also not long after independence? These developments lead to differentiation, a search for "genuine" words and expressions that the "other language" does not have, or to scripts that write the same words differently. Such attempts may at times seem laughable, but they are closely interwoven with issues of group (that is, political) identity. They help to create or reinforce political and group borders. They help the difference(s) between "us" and "them" to become more visible.

In any growing territory in which integration is taking place there is more and more movement of, and contact between, people who speak differently. This nearly always takes place in the larger cities (which become larger mainly because of the arrival of new inhabitants). The way people speak in such circumstances obeys the law of linguistic convergence, which is again social rather than linguistic. However, elites tend not to converge with other social classes: even without having to formally propose it, the way the elite speaks comes to be seen, and then to be more or less formally chosen, as the "correct" way of speaking, and others are expected to conform to it. This is Weinreich's army and navy effect.

1.   Linguistic fragmentation

In many integrating states linguistic continua are found, and most of the population speaks what in modern terms we would call "varieties" of the same "language". This seems to be declining: in Denmark I am told that the 20th century saw the end of geo-

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[3] "Such words as βάρβαρος, βαρβαρίζειν, βαρβαρισμός, βαρβαριστί, βαρβαρόγλωσσος, βαρβαροστομία, βαρβαροϕωνεῖν, and βαρβαρόϕωνος are indeed often used for indiscriminate gibberish or broken Greek, generally referring to non-Greek speakers, βάρβαροι, but this does not mean that the Greeks thought all non-Greeks spoke the same language. It is true that Strabo suggests that the word βάρβαρος may have originated in onomatopoeia, but he says this in a context in which he refers to the characteristics of various different (non-Greek) languages." (Wasserstein/Wasserstein 2006, 2).

[4] One internet source defines *babble* as "inarticulate speech, such as was used at the building the tower of Babel" (http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/babble). The same source gives Dutch *babbelen*; German *bappeln*, *bappern*; French *babiller*; Italian *babbolare*.

graphical differences, and all Danes now speak like the Copenhageners. But for others the "standard" language means learning a very different language: German-speakers in south Tyrol or Alsace, Basque-speakers in France and Spain, Welsh-speakers in the UK. When a particular speech form is not the basis for wider communication (in modern parlance, when it is not an "official" language), over time it tends to fragment into local forms, and any contact with speakers of other forms will more and more be in the standard language, not in their own, which therefore ceases to have a unified form. It ceases, in effect, to **need** a unified form for a function which it no longer serves, because the function has been usurped by another language. This has happened to Catalan and Occitan, for instance, both being spoken over very wide areas and in several countries. Over time speakers have come to refer to the way they speak by naming it after the local place name: Provençal, Languedocien, Béarnais, Gascon (indeed, the very term "Occitan" is relatively new, as you know); or *rossellonès, mallorquí, valencià, tortosí, empordanès*, for Catalan. This is not a banal process, and has political and social consequences. If in the Valencian region the academic word for their language ("Catalan") is used outside educational circles, we may find people hotly denying they speak Catalan, and claiming that "Valencian" is quite different. And as recently as 1986, the language census in southern Catalonia (the district of Tortosa) revealed a fair number of generally aging inhabitants who acknowledged they could understand Catalan but claimed they couldn't speak it (Strubell 1989). For them, their own language was "tortosí", while "Catalan" was what Catalan television presenters and news readers spoke!

Unlike the Balkan phenomenon, in cases such as Catalan and Occitan this name-giving is a result of the **lack** of power. The impact of the standard (official) language leads to language shift, and also to a growing influence on the structure and vocabulary of these language forms. Only in very isolated linguistic islands (such as the Walzer German-speakers in northern Italy, or Occitan-, Greek- or Albanian-speaking villages in central and southern Italy) does that form survive, protected in a relatively "pure", that is archaic, state.

Note that many speakers of these marginalised languages object to the process of developing a shared standard, whereas they are quite happy about the existence of such a standard in the language that is threatening or displacing their own!

The positive side of the processes of standardisation undertaken by many of these languages in the past century or so, is that they are responses to a social need: their introduction into domains such as the media, education or officialdom from which they had been previously excluded.

Physical distance can, of course, lead to fragmentation. So it is odd that North Americans have never claimed they speak "American", the word "English" never being put in doubt. Indeed, Sir Winston Churchill is widely quoted as having described Britain and America as "two great nations divided by the same language" (though I have failed to find the exact citation. It is also attributed to Oscar Wilde, though it seems he actually wrote, in *The Canterville Ghost*, that "We have really everything in common with America nowadays, except, of course, language".

At the same time, it is curious how many South Americans reject the use of the term "Spanish" to designate the language they speak; they prefer the word "Castilian" instead. This is, again, "simply" a matter of the name of the language – yet it is closely related to identity issues.

2.   Languages and European integration

Europe has for fifty years been undergoing a process of integration, both through the Council of Europe and, increasingly, through membership of the European Union. This is forcing member States to rethink the role of language, and languages, in their own countries and in national discourse. Only members of the European Parliament and of the Council of Ministers are adamant in protecting what they see as their personal right to be monolingual. They argue (and they have a good point!) that in order not to give anyone else an unfair advantage when it comes to effective communication, such as negotiation and persuasion, everyone has to be able to put their case in the language they speak best. This makes it essential to ensure that translation and interpretation into and out of every single "official and working language of the institutions of the European Union" is freely available to them. But even they pay lip service to what everyone else in Europe sees as essential for a competitive future: the need for each citizen to acquire a good command of several languages, other than their own language. This is the 1+2 objective first formulated, I believe, when madame Cresson was Commissioner for Education and Culture. It was logical that the French (with the support of the Germans) would do their best to ensure that English would not become the only foreign language learned in schools across Europe: only thus could their languages have a good chance of keeping a strong foothold in schools, competing with each other – and not with English, an impossible task and a lost cause almost everywhere – for a fair portion of the **second** foreign language "cake".

Returning to the institutions of the European Union, may I first get on my hobby-horse and criticise the misuse of terms used to refer to the languages included under Regulation No. 1 (1957) of the Council (Strubell 2007). They are not "official European Union languages" or "official Community languages",[5] far less "official European languages". Such terms can be found in Union documents in which the official status of these languages has been the basis of listing languages to be included in programmes. Exceptions to this norm (such as the inclusion of Irish and Luxemburgish in the former Lingua programme) had to be individually justified, with reasons that would not open the floodgates to other languages, some of which have many, many more speakers – and learners across Europe - than others on the list). I shall return to the Lingua programme shortly.

Over a period of time, the number of "official and working languages of the institutions of the European Union" (the correct term, though I admit that the expression is unwieldy!) grew from the highly manageable initial four to the current 23 (am I right?). Well, coping with 23 languages is probably "unwieldy" too! But right from the start, the internal working of the Commission and the Council, largely involving

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[5]   E.g. http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/en/overview/lingua_overview.htm.

the drafting of documents, was not equally in all four languages (French, German, Italian and Dutch). I know of no early studies, but several (e.g. Quell 1997; Lenaerts 2001) found that an overwhelmingly high proportion of EU internal documents were in English or French, and a small minority in German. Virtually no other language was used, even at that time. The imbalance is not only in internal work of the two institutions. Other EU agencies (such as the Research and Patents offices) unblushingly use a limited number of languages, and have won several European court of justice cases in order to continue being able to do so. Unless I'm mistaken (and correct me if I am wrong) the Commission's press office uses five languages in its events, having backed down on a proposal to drop Spanish from this already short list.

The conclusion is this: despite a series of European Parliament resolutions and Council and Commission statements to the effect that all languages are equal (or at least, the 23 languages!), in practice the Union itself has been developing a hierarchy of languages. Even in regard to the official and working languages of the institutions of the European Union - that is, leaving aside the so-called "regional and minority languages" - in the words of Lenaerts (2001):

> the current situation shows no marked improvement over the language problems perceived from the very start. With every accession of new Member states, it again becomes painfully clear that the democratic principle of Regulation No. 1 is a far cry from the undemocratic reality apparent from a consistent stream of complaints and a string of reports re-investigating the problem.

Calls have been made, from Catalonia at least, for the privileged languages (whose industries are powerful generators of wealth and employment) to economically compensate those that are "disenfranchised" by this hierarchy, and whose speakers have to invest time and energy to learn the privileged languages.

3.   The "minoritisation" of majority languages?

The speakers of some languages (quite a few, in fact) are beginning to experience a phenomenon that speakers of what many call "minority" languages are all too familiar with. Is "minority" a feature of the language itself (as in "Romance languages"), or of the speakers of the language (as in "immigrant languages")? There is probably no simple answer. What is clear is that it is not a reference (or at least, a direct one) to the size of a language's dictionary! We can probably get closer to the meaning of the word if we paraphrase Weinreich's definition thus:

> A "minority" language is spoken by a people without an army and a navy.

Returning to Weinreich's text, if a language has an army and a navy, it has – almost by definition - a right to be regarded as a "majority" language… where the army and the navy are.

Thus a political frontier can radically change the status of a language in a particular area and, as a result, of its speakers there. Hungarian is the official language of Hungary, to be sure: but what about the several million speakers of the same language that

live across the present borders of Hungary, in neighbouring countries such as Slovakia, Romania, Austria or Serbia and Herzogovina? In these other countries they are speakers of a language which is **not** the official language of the country. Is their national loyalty suspect, for that reason? Some may feel it is, and this is a first step towards xenophobia. I shall come back to this later. Here, my point is that it may be impossible to convey what belonging to a minority actually means, to someone who belongs to the hegemonic, or dominant, culture of their country. I am absolutely certain that belonging to a minority has psychological (or more exactly, socio-psychological) correlates. It is very unlikely that a majority member can appreciate this on the basis merely of a perception of a threat to the status, within an integrated Europe, of many "national" languages.

Nevertheless, the progressive breaking down of linguistic monopolies in a number of domains (such as research, telecommunications, etc.) is raising the alarm in several countries, and this issue may be raised by other speakers at the Conference.

4.   Banal nationalism

This inability to perceive the nature of the relationship between a hegemonic language (and culture) and a subordinated language (variously referred to as "lesser-used language", "regional language", "minority language", etc.) is closely related to what Michael Billig (1997) has called "banal nationalism". The member of a hegemonic culture is generally quite unaware of her (or his) nationalistic perspective. It seems quite "natural" to display behaviour, and to hold values and beliefs, with regard to her (or his) own nation, that are exactly equivalent to those held by members of a neighbouring, even hostile, country. Into how many wars have opposing armies marched, invoking the help of the same God: a divine quandary indeed! In the same vein, any member of a "minority" or marginalised group within the same state is likely to be perceived, and therefore portrayed, as a deviant. Using a language other than Spanish (like Catalan), in some parts of Spain, is perceived as a deliberate affront, an aggressive act going against "common sense" and the rules of courtesy… like sticking out your tongue!

For now, let us bear in mind Kymlicka's valuable contribution to the topic, in which he rejects the neoliberal argument that minority groups (such as the constituent nations of America, or national minorities in Europe) need no special legislation to protect them in a liberal democracy. He argues convincingly (to my mind) that such groups (but not, perhaps, immigrants) have a perfect right to ensure that they are protected from the mainstream culture of the majority, and this may include – quite legitimately - legislation and other positive discriminatory measures. In Spain Catalonia's language legislation is often attacked by right wing Spaniards, who would never describe themselves as nationalists, and who may be blissfully unaware of the existence of several hundred laws and norms, many very recent, that make the use of Spanish compulsory. They may be unaware of this, or even be quite happy with it.

Whenever I come to this point, I quote a beautiful graphic, and neat, statement by a Frenchman whose identity escapes me. The fact that it has been attributed to at least eight authors probably attests to its popularity. Though not originally devised to take into account language legislation, it is still appropriate:

> Entre le riche et le pauvre, entre le fort et le faible, c'est la liberté qui opprime, et la loi qui affranchi (or libère).

It is quite legitimate, in short, for positive measures to promote a threatened language. Not to do so is to expose it to erosion from the dominant language and culture. In metaphorical terms: maybe a sheep and a lion **can** live together in the same cage - but you can be sure that the sheep won't sleep at night!

It is in the European context that affirmations about the purported superiority of any given language are most easily shot down. Would anyone accept that "English is the language *par excellence* of freedom, of culture and of creation", or that "El español es la llengua por antonomasia de la libertad, de la cultura, y de la creación"? Well, in fact these are adaptations of a statement by a Frenchman, written not in the throes of the Enlightenment but in 2004, by the French Ministre de la Culture et de la Communication: "Le français est par excellence la langue de la liberté, de la culture et de la création" (Donnedieu de Vabres 2004).

The clash between linguistic ideologies, which is so very, very visible to students of the relationship between majority and minority languages, is now very clear in the attempts to develop a new, much more collaborative view of languages in the European Union.

As I said before, the issue is one of power and status. Languages sometimes fall between the two, however. Why has Ireland not ratified the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages? Nominally, for the same reason as Greece: "no minority languages are spoken here". But in effect, because the status of Irish as the national language and the first official language is incompatible with its public recognition as a minority language. Again, please correct me if I'm mistaken.

The criterion that was applied to Irish for it to become a "Lingua" programme language, despite not being official at EU institutional level, was purely bureaucratic:

> Whereas there is a specific need to encourage the teaching as foreign languages of all official languages of the Communities, together with Irish, *one of the languages in which the Treaties establishing the European Communities are drafted*, and Letzeburgesch, a language spoken throughout the territory of Luxembourg […]. (Lingua Programme Council Decision 1989)[6]

Note that the criterion for including Letzeburgesch was carefully chosen to ensure no other (that is, no "minority") language could claim the same status; it is perhaps significant that it did not say that Letzeburgesch was official throughout the member state (Strubell 2007).

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[6]   89/489/EEC: Council Decision of 28 July 1989 establishing an action programme to promote foreign language competence in the European Community (Lingua). Official Journal L 239, 16/08/1989, 24-32. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31989D0489:EN:HTML.

Basically, then, every member of the European Union sitting round the table wanted their own language included in the list of Lingua languages. This was (perhaps part of) the cost of obtaining their vote in favour of the programme.

5.   **Invisible ideologies**

But power has another perverse consequence that I should like to discuss with you today. Being the sole language of the administration of a country leads to choosing to use it becoming automatic, or taken for granted. The very discourse behind it becomes invisible, in fact. Juan Carlos Moreno Cabrera, who holds a Chair in General Linguistics at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, is the author of a book which has been very successful, at least in non-Spanish-speaking parts of Spain: *El nacionalismo lingüístico. Una ideología destructiva*. His book claims that from a linguist's point of view, only one language is politically driven by what he describes as "linguistic nationalism", and that is Spanish. Given that the language policies of Catalonia and, to a lesser extent, Galicia and the Basque country, are periodically subjected to onslaughts through the press, the radio and other media, it was timely to hear the considered opinion of a Spaniard who is not regarded as being an active partner in these sterile but bitter controversies.

In a nutshell, two ideologies can be evoked to defend or promote a language in contact with another. This has been studied by Susan Gal and Kathryn Woolard (2001) through two concepts: **Authenticity** and **Anonymity**.

> The ideology *of Authenticity* locates the value of a language in its relationship to a particular community. That which is authentic is viewed as the genuine expression of such a community, or of an essential Self. Within the logic of authenticity, a speech variety must be perceived as deeply rooted in social and geographic territory in order to have value. [In some circumstances "the significance of the authentic voice is taken to be what it signals about who you are, more than what you say"] (Woolard 2005, 2)

> In contrast to minoritized languages, hegemonic languages in modern society often rest their authority on a conception of *anonymity*. The disembodied, disinterested public, freed through rational discourse from the constraints of a socially specific perspective, supposedly achieves a superior "aperspectival objectivity" that has been called "a view from nowhere" [quote from Nagel (1986), M.S.] […] Anonymity is attributed not just to publics but also to public languages. We have seen that a minority language like Corsican gets no authority from sounding like it is from "nowhere". But dominant languages do. (Woolard 2005, 3-4)

Woolard concludes that

> Sociolinguistic case studies have shown how an ideology of anonymity allows institutionally or demographically dominant languages to consolidate their position into one of hegemony […] which allows their superordinate position to be naturalized, taken for granted, and placed beyond question. (Woolard 2005, 4)

For Gal and Woolard, this is a highly political issue, going well beyond linguistics.

> The standard language, usually best instantiated in print, defines (and legitimates) a political territory, sometimes precisely because it is not spoken by any actual group [...] and [...] is "devoid of ethnic inflection" (Gal/Woolard 2001, 8, quoted by Frekko 2009, 71-72)

Once a language gets into this "anonymous" position, its hegemonic status becomes invisible, unquestionable, taken for granted. And attempts to provide a framework (social, economic, political…) in which a so-called minority language can survive are doomed to be attacked. The very use of a particular language may be seen as **rude as sticking out your tongue.** All the more so when, as often occurs, the language of the minority is the hegemonic language, across the border, of a neighbouring state. Members of such a language community, rather than being regarded as an opportunity for international cooperation and trade, may be seen, instead, as potential traitors. An uncomfortable situation, which Alsatians, for instance, have avoided by insisting that their language (which is virtually identical to the language spoken just across the river in Germany) is most certainly NOT German.

6.   EFNIL and the other languages of Europe

I come to my final question: why should EFNIL close its doors to the official academies of other European languages, merely on the grounds that they are not "official and working language of the institutions of the European Union"? I shall state the case for Catalan (natively spoken in four European countries, by over eight million people, with a literary tradition dating back at least eight centuries, widely used as an official language, and also in the media, the education system at all levels, etc. and with a unique top level domain on the Internet, .CAT[7]). Other languages can also put in a strong case. But allow me to choose Catalan to illustrate my point.

Our own Academy is the ***Institut d'Estudis Catalans***, a member of the **International Union of Academies** (IUA),[8] an organisation founded in 1919 with the following objective:

"To encourage cooperation in the advancement of studies through collaborative research and publications in those branches of learning promoted by the Academies and institutions represented in the IUA: philology, archaeology, history, the moral, political and social sciences."

"Le but [...] est la coopération au progrès des études par des recherches et des publications collectives, dans l'ordre des sciences cultivées par les académies et institutions scientifiques participantes: sciences philologiques, archéologiques et historiques, sciences morales, politiques et sociales."

Since then Catalan delegates in the IUA have included (among others) Pere Bosch i Gimpera, Lluís Nicolau d'Olwer, Ramon Aramon, Josep Ainaud de Lasarte and, currently, Josep Guitart. Even when the Institute had to survive in a semi-clandestine state under the Franco regime, it still remained a member of the IUA.

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[7]   The domain got the green light on September 16th, 2005. According to a recent report (personal communication from Joan Soler i Martí, of WICCAC, 27/9/2009), 38,000 websites now use this TLD.

[8]   http://www.uai-iua.org/english/delegates/delegates_s_en.asp.

It is not irrelevant, I think, to point out that the following European organisations belong to both the International Union of Academies and to EFNIL:

– Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,

– Hungarian Academy of Sciences,

– Accademia della Crusca (Italy),

– Institut Grand Ducal (Luxembourg),

– Polska Akademii Nauk (Poland),

– Academia Româna,

– Slovenská Akadémia Vied (Slovakia).

It is also to my mind significant that a number of countries are represented in EFNIL by several organisations: Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and the UK.

Article 1 of your Constitution states that

> The European Federation of National Institutions for Language is a body consisting of the central or national institutions for research, documentation and policy relating to the officially recognised standard languages within the states of the European Union ("EU"), called Federation Members. (EFNIL Constitution Article 1)

Inasmuch as Catalan, Basque and Galician are "officially recognised standard languages" which are not the object of study of Spain's "central or national institution" devoted to language, but have their own institutions spanning international borders, in two of the three cases, an invitation to them would, I'm sure, be in the mutual interest of all concerned.

7.   Conclusion

Catalans feel that we share many of the challenges facing other medium-sized languages, that we can learn from their experience… and perhaps share with them some of our own experience. As a graphic example of this: on this very day, November 5th, the second of three sessions is being held in Barcelona on the subject "The challenges facing medium-sized language communities in the 21st Century". It is the turn of Latvian, Estonian and Hebrew linguists to explain their experience.

Thankfully, the days of outright repression of languages and their use seem to be over. Children are no longer scolded in the classroom for speaking their own language, nor are teachers threatened with unemployment or sanctions if they use theirs even in the playground. But this does not mean to say that all of Europe's languages are now politically or socially equal: and there are still parts of Europe where conflict on account of language is present. There are still parts of Europe where using a particular language is perceived as being as rude as sticking out your tongue.

All this should help to break down the conceptual barriers that have created hierarchical divisions between languages... and in the case of subordinated languages, their speakers as well. These conceptual barriers are in themselves big obstacles to be over-

come. I am sure that the European Federation of National Institutions of Language can play an important role in achieving this goal. I am confident that the whole of Europe will benefit as a result.

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