

# Languages in a globalising world

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*Editors*

Jacques Maurais and Michael A. Morris



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## 9 Regional blocs as a barrier against English hegemony? The language policy of Mercosur in South America

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*Rainer Enrique Hamel*

### **Latin America and linguistic globalisation**

The outlook of geopolitical linguistics is discussed at present at the two poles of the multilingual world continuum. On the one hand, the warning launched by Hale (1992), Krauss (1992) and others regarding the possible death of 90% of the languages of the world by the end of the twenty-first century as a result of linguistic globalisation has strengthened a series of movements and concerns for the most endangered languages. Some of them relate the dangers of a reduction in biodiversity with those involved in linguistic diversity (compare Harmon 1996; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). In general they are champions of an unlimited defence of all languages of the world, arguing along with Fishman (1991; 2001) and others that the disappearance of any language constitutes an irreparable loss of global linguistic treasures. They particularly defend the fundamental linguistic rights of all citizens of the world to be educated and to have access to other public services in their own language (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 1994; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000).

At the other end of the continuum we find the debate on the worldwide spread of English: for the first time in the history of humankind one single language has been globalised not only among an international elite, but on a massive basis, posing a threat to many other languages' space. The danger represented by the expansion of English is, however, indirect for the languages at risk of extinction in other latitudes, except for those found in Anglophone countries, due to a general reordering of the complex linguistic mosaic in many countries and regions.

There is little doubt about the role of English as the sole hegemonic language at present. However, regarding the future outlook, there are divergent opinions. Will the dominance of English persist forever, only reversible through a major political earthquake, as claimed by Crystal (1997), or may the monopolistic status of English be changed through other means such as the emergence of new world languages, perhaps in the course of several decades, as argued by Graddol (1997)?

Here we find the second debate, since the worldwide spread of English affects and threatens, first of all, the status of the second-tier languages of the past and present, which to date have played a role as international languages. Among the western languages with this status we have French heading the list, along with Spanish, Portuguese, German, Italian and Russian. Their relevance in the past and in the present can be evaluated, to a great extent, by their role in international communication, their importance as second or foreign languages, and by the role they play in the lives of those who learn them in formal or informal contexts (the scope of the 'outer circle' and 'expanding circle'; see Kachru 1986; Crystal 1997; Graddol 1997). For all the above-mentioned languages a very significant setback of their role as second languages can be observed, alarming in some cases, such as Russian, particularly in central and east Europe after the downfall of the Soviet Union.

Not everybody is in agreement in this debate. Even among those who are opposed to the total hegemony of the English language, there are divergent views and strategies. On the one hand, we have already described the position in favour of the unrestricted defence of each and every one of the world's languages and of the rights of all citizens to be educated in their own language. On the other hand, there are those who feel that the main contradiction is between English and all the other international languages. Within French sociolinguistics some authors point to the risks involved in strengthening local languages to the detriment of national and supranational languages. In his gravitational model Calvet (1999) establishes a typology of four language types and three linguistic functions to which all people ought to be entitled. English is the 'hyper central' language in this model, then we have a limited number of 'super central' languages (e.g. French as the official language of Francophone Africa), others which he calls 'central' such as national languages and regional *lingua francas*; finally, the fourth group is composed of 'peripheral' languages (first or vernacular languages). For Calvet the three designated functions (official, vehicular and first), which correspond to linguistic rights, may materialise for individuals in the form of one, two or three languages, according to each case. Unlike the previous position, for Calvet not everybody should be entitled – nor is it necessarily an advantage for every person – to be educated in their first language, since the introduction of literacy in illiterate cultures often upsets the pre-existing ecological balance and can accelerate displacement of the vernacular languages (on this issue, see Mühlhäusler 1996).

Calvet's main argument is that the spread of English imperialism can not only coexist with lesser used languages, but can actually benefit from the process of minority language revitalisation, since the strengthening of local languages weakens national and super central languages, which are often an obstacle for the spread of English. In the case of Europe, the emergence of national languages such as Catalan, Basque and Galician in Spain is a contributing factor

to the weakening of Castilian Spanish. The transformation of the European Union (EU) from the present community of nation-states into a federation of regional nationalities would mean that English became the only language of communication among them, thus destroying the principle of present-day multilingual communication.<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly an outlook of this nature is an attractive argument.<sup>2</sup> In Latin America, however, the debate over the past twenty years has not taken on this bent, since the sociohistorical conditions of its languages and cultures are of a different nature. The struggle for recognition of the Indian (*aboriginal* or Native American) peoples and the transformation of nation-states and their traditional monocultural conception into pluricultural states have opened new spaces for the recognition of the rights of the Indian peoples, including the right to bilingual intercultural education based on the Indian languages. It is only from the most conservative positions that the strengthening of the Indian languages (and, in the case of Brazil, of certain immigrant languages) has been seen as a threat to the nation-state. However, it seems that it is important to take into account global strategic factors that this view implies when discussing the relationship among the different types of languages that dispute their spaces in the Latin American context. The main global and external language conflict in Ibero America<sup>3</sup> is no doubt represented by the relationship between English as a global language and the national and regional (supra-national) languages. This fact should, however, not blur the reality of internal language conflicts between the dominant national languages and subordinate indigenous languages as the

<sup>1</sup> Mon idée est que la mondialisation n'est pas gênée par les micronationalismes et les micro-États, qui lui servent plutôt (paradis fiscaux, etc . . .) mais qu'en revanche elle ne supporte pas les grands ensembles (type Union Soviétique, aujourd'hui éclatée, ou type Europe, qui lui oppose une résistance, voir par exemple l'exception culturelle). Or les micro États se multiplient depuis la chute du mur de Berlin (Croatie, Serbie, Tchéquie, Slovaquie, etc . . .) et avec eux les micro langues. Cette tendance se manifeste également en Europe. Sans l'Amérique Latine et son réservoir d'hispanophones, l'espagnol serait en voie d'être rétrogradé en Espagne au rang de langue régionale, à côté du catalan ou du basque. C'est d'ailleurs le sens de son changement de nom dans la constitution (castillan et non plus espagnol). Et nous revoilà au corse (depuis hier, les nationalistes basques et breton se sont manifestés, réclamant un statut semblable à celui que se profile pour la Corse). Il y a là une tendance à ramener les langues supercentrales au rang de langue centrale, qui était la ligne de force de la mondialisation linguistique. C'est à mes yeux la principale raison de lutter contre l'anglais. De ce point de vue, en termes de politologie linguistique, la promotion des langues "minoritaires", ou "régionales", ou "petites", irait dans le sens de l'impérialisme anglophone."

<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Calvet's position can objectively be used to support the aggressive language policy of the Francophonie, e.g. in Africa, which pushes for 'French only' on all levels, and for French literacy instruction among indigenous peoples speaking their own vernacular languages. Thus, Calvet's view could be seen as part of the 'politically and linguistically correct discourse' – to use his own expression – of the Francophonie itself, notwithstanding his critical view of French international language policy.

<sup>3</sup> In this chapter I use the term 'Ibero America' instead of Latin America when referring to the countries where Portuguese or Spanish are used as the official languages.

main internal and single most important language conflict in most countries, especially in regional areas such as the Andes or Mesoamerica with a high concentration of indigenous populations. In my view there is no theoretical support nor empirical evidence that the strengthening of indigenous languages in Latin America and the teaching of literacy and content matters through them (see Hamel 1996; 2001) could in any way weaken the position of Portuguese and Spanish as national and international languages.

In this debate we must shield ourselves from reductionist perspectives, which view globalisation in unidirectional or dichotomous terms. The head-spinning worldwide spread of the hegemonic language and culture of the USA at the same time implies globalisation of local concerns, the emergence of 'third cultures' with no territories, particularly in massive national and transnational migrations, with multiple expressions of syncretism and hybridisation (see García Canclini 1999). This implies overcoming a somewhat 'military' and strictly territorial view, as though languages move as troops do: where one advances the others take a step backwards.

The dynamics of languages depends to a large extent on collective orientations by linguistic groups (compare Ruiz 1984; Hamel 1999b; 2000), either towards monolingualism or enriching plurilingualism, towards additive or subtractive bilingualism.<sup>4</sup> If we manage, however, to broaden the scope of the 'discourse spaces' of various languages within one territory (Guimarães 1999) which is at stake in the case of Mercosur (the South American Common Market or *Mercado del Sur*), it would be possible to achieve greater plurilingual density.

Ibero America reveals a relatively clear panorama with respect to the distribution and dynamics of its languages. It is the great reserve for Spanish (with more than 250 million speakers<sup>5</sup>) and Portuguese (about 170 million speakers) in a world where the importance and dynamics of these languages have surpassed their countries of origin. They are both in a whirl of development, with growing numbers of speakers, and are in no way endangered territorially nor by functional domains.<sup>6</sup> Linguistic stability in the region depends on the deep-rooted roles of these two languages. The influence of other languages – Indian,

<sup>4</sup> When minorities are schooled in the majority language the linguistic maturation of the first language, especially in writing L1, may be incomplete; this is called 'subtractive bilingualism'. However, members of the linguistic majority are more prone to reap benefits from being taught in the minority language because their L1 has a very strong extra-scholar vitality; this is called 'additive bilingualism' (Mackey 1997, p. 62).

<sup>5</sup> The British Council (1999) states that *Ethnologue* corrected their census data about speakers of Spanish in the world from 266 million in 1998 to 362 million in 1999. GEN comments that apparently *Ethnologue* had corrected a previous underrating, but that the new figure about the speakers of Spanish does not seem realistic either.

<sup>6</sup> Not even on the Mexican–USA border do we find any signs of Spanish language shift. Rather, the opposite occurs: Spanish is making inroads and is conquering significant language domains and territories in the US border states (see Hamel 1999a). As is the case with other European

immigrant and foreign – are defined in relation to the linguistic soundness of these two languages on the sub-continent.

Indigenous peoples who continue to speak their own languages can be found in practically all the continental Ibero American countries with the exception of Uruguay. Their demographic weight ranges between 0.17% of the population in Brazil to over 50% in Guatemala (for more details, see Maurais 1992; Hamel 1994a). It is hard to arrive at exact numbers due to their systematic underrepresentation in most census taking. According to the more optimistic estimates (*América Indígena* 1990), there are some thirty million Indians who speak one of the 1,000 autochthonous languages of the sub-continent. Although there has been an overall loss of these languages, the major languages among them enjoy great vitality, and in absolute figures the number of speakers has increased. From a geostrategic outlook, we would like to emphasise that in all the Ibero American countries with indigenous populations, recognition of the autochthonous people and their political punch has grown enormously over the past twenty years. This is reflected in legislative changes (constitutional reforms in most cases) that recognise their rights, and in bilingual educational programmes which, at least officially, point to the preservation of these languages (compare Maurais 1992; Hamel 1994a; von Gleich 1997; González Gutiérrez 1999).

Also, European immigration – and to a lesser degree Asiatic immigration – have left linguistic marks. Huge waves of European immigration arrived between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries and settled mainly in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and, to a lesser degree, in Bolivia, Central America, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Paraguay and Venezuela. This immigration reached important heights, especially in the countries of the Southern Cone. Even today there are important pockets of ‘colonies’ of Danes, English, French, Germans, Italians, Japanese and Serbo-Croatians (the Japanese in Brazil). In most cases, the displacement of individuals’ heritage languages (i.e. mother tongues) is at an advanced stage, and we find very few speakers who maintain balanced bilingualism. Through their bilingual schools, some of these colonies have contributed to the development of a plurilingual and multicultural educational supply of high standards in Latin America, which in turn has influenced the choice of the main European languages as privileged foreign languages. In general, historical plurilingual offerings – which provided various options and promoted the learning of two foreign languages at school – are today threatened by a growing dominance of English as the sole foreign language. Just as occurs on other continents, the languages most affected by this process are French, followed by German and Italian.

languages (other than English), however, Spanish and Portuguese are losing ground in the domains of science and international communication.

### **Mercosur: Regional linguistic dynamics**

In the Latin American context Mercosur, which comprises Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay as member states,<sup>7</sup> is a unique attempt of cultural integration and geolinguistic dynamics in the whole region. Mercosur is a socio-economic community that includes some of the most important countries along the main linguistic border between Spanish and Portuguese;<sup>8</sup> and it is the only relevant and vigorous community of countries in the Americas that operates outside the control of the USA.

In Mercosur, four countries of very different sizes, power structure and culture have come together. Brazil, the Latin American giant with the greatest economic and technological development, is almost a continent unto itself and covers 47% of the South American surface with 8.5 million square kilometres. About 55% of its 170 million inhabitants (in 1999) are of European descent (especially Portuguese); another 38% are Mulattos, 6% Black and only 1.7% of the population is Indian, but they speak some 195 different languages. Illiteracy is estimated at 18% of the population over fifteen years old. The GDP (Gross Domestic Product) was calculated at US\$850 billion in 2000, which represents a per capita income of US\$5,000.<sup>9</sup>

Argentina, the second most powerful country in the region, was the first nation to achieve a high level of modern urban and sociocultural development of European style, which began at the end of the nineteenth century, but whose dynamics turned stagnant during the second half of the twentieth century. It has a surface area of almost 2.8 million square kilometres, and a population of 35.7 million people (1997), mostly of European descent. Only 1% of the population is Indian, but twenty-five aboriginal languages are spoken. Illiteracy hovers between 5% to 7% of the population, and Argentina's GDP was US\$335.6 billion in 1997, i.e. US\$9,400 per capita.

Next in size we have Paraguay, with 406,750 square kilometres, and an estimated population of 5.1 million people in 1997. Around 95% of the population is Mestizo and about 1.5% of the population is Indian. They speak twenty-one languages, without counting Guaraní (alongside Spanish, an official language of Paraguay, which is also spoken as an indigenous language in Argentina and Brazil, where it is spoken by 93% of Paraguay's population). In 1997 the GDP reached US\$17.2 billion, or some US\$3,480 per capita.

<sup>7</sup> Chile and Bolivia have the status of associated members. In this chapter I deal exclusively with the four founding members of Mercosur.

<sup>8</sup> Mercosur includes the most populated areas of a border of more than 15,000 kilometers that links Brazil with ten out of twelve South American nations. In all of them except Guyana, Spanish is the official language.

<sup>9</sup> Source for these data for all four countries: *L'État du Monde: Annuaire économique et géopolitique mondial*, Paris, La Découverte, 1999, The Library of the Congress Country Studies, 1997 and Grimes (2000).

Finally, we have Uruguay, the second smallest country in South America, with a surface area of 176,215 square kilometres and a population of 3.2 million people (1997). Uruguay is similar to Argentina, with 88% of its population of European descent, 8% Mestizo and 4% Black. Only 4% of the population is illiterate, which is the lowest figure in Latin America. Uruguay's GDP was US\$24.9 billion in 1997, or US\$7,760 per capita.

Mercosur was established as an initiative of Argentina and Brazil, historical rivals in South America, who realised that they could not continue with a policy of protectionism and import substitution, particularly in the case of Brazil, who had to face globalisation. On 26 March 1991 the four member countries signed a 'Treaty for the Establishment of a Common Market', which foresees domestic trade free of tariff barriers and non-tariff barriers, as well as a unified trade policy with a common external tariff (between 0% and 20%) as of 1995.<sup>10</sup> With the 'Ouro Preto Protocol' signed in December 1994, Mercosur assumed a new legal status based on a system of mutual consensus, but without establishing supranational institutions.

From the Brazilian point of view, the initiative was developed under their hegemony as a new modality for 'reacting and having options in the face of hemispheric integration as proposed by the United States' (Vizentini 1999, p. 3). At the same time Brazil accepted the global guidelines established by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, abandoning the country's traditional policy of national development and import substitution, and created a regional body whose objectives go far beyond trade. Mercosur aims at attaining profound regional integration and at strengthening the international position of its member countries.

Immediately the differences with another common market in the continent – the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) among Canada, the USA and Mexico – becomes apparent. According to the South American point of view, in the dichotomy between 'Pan-Americanism' (economic base without a common cultural foundation) and 'Latin Americanism' (cultural community without a common economic base), Mercosur was born out of cultural convergence, while NAFTA represents a mere market aggregation based on cultural divergence (Ferré 1997; Recondo 1997).

Whether we agree with such a rather black-and-white juxtaposition or not, the truth is that from the very beginning Mercosur set forth a programme of educational integration that took into account cultural and linguistic aspects. In December 1991, the four ministers of education met and constituted the Commission of Ministers of Education. In June 1992, a three-year plan was approved (Ministerio de Educación y Cultura 1997), which established three

<sup>10</sup> For a number of sensitive products (automobiles, sugar, etc.), periods of transition were extended until 2001; for more details, see van Dijck 1999; Vizentini 1999.

lines of action: formation of citizen awareness favourable for integration, training of human resources and harmonisation of educational systems.<sup>11</sup> The plan includes teaching in the two official languages of Mercosur: Spanish in Brazil and Portuguese in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, within their respective educational systems.

In summary, a market of four unevenly matched countries emerges, where Brazil represents 71% of the GDP, 71% of the territory and 78.7% of the population. We pick up on the progress made in this area below. To better understand the fairly radical changes that Mercosur means for the cultural, educational and linguistic policies of these countries, we need to know a little more about the history behind their individual statehood that has allowed them to differentiate themselves from each other.

*History of linguistic and educational policies  
in the Mercosur countries<sup>12</sup>*

In the past Spanish enjoyed greater prestige than Portuguese as an international language for economic, educational and scientific development within Ibero America. Since Simón Bolívar, San Martín and other liberators freed their countries from Spain at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a Hispano American community was postulated rather than Ibero American unity. The huge Portuguese-speaking portion of the continent, which went through a very different history upon becoming independent, was left outside. From early on Spanish made its presence felt in many Brazilian arenas – including the educational system – through textbooks and abundant Hispanic literature, especially in the most developed regions in the south and central-south of Brazil (Rio, Sao Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul). The opposite phenomenon did not occur: the Hispanic countries maintained a historical barrier in the face of Portuguese, which never went beyond border areas. It was thus that a unidirectional receptiveness and comprehensibility between the two languages came about, which has its foundation in the differentiated complexity that exists between them. The Spanish phonological system in the Americas is undoubtedly simpler than Brazilian Portuguese, but above all there is an asymmetric sociolinguistic prestige factor that comes into play. While Spanish has always enjoyed considerable recognition as a language of culture, science, literature and international communication, Portuguese was considered to be a less important language for international communication in the view of the Hispanic countries, so investing

<sup>11</sup> Information on this topic is taken from *Zona Educativa, Revista 19, La educación en el mundo* (Argentine Electronic Journal), Recondo (1997), and from the Ministerio de Educación y Cultura (1997).

<sup>12</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to Leonor Acuña and Roberto Bein from Argentina, Graciela Barrios and Beatriz Gabbiani from Uruguay and Gilvan Müller de Oliveira from Brazil for their magnificent support in obtaining information, and for their very valuable comments and debates on the situations in their countries.

in learning it was considered not to be worthwhile. Along many border areas in Brazil, however, the opposite trend emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century due to the commercial and industrial dynamics and superiority of this giant country; thus, Portuguese has become increasingly important along border areas with Hispano American countries.

Whatever the case may be, both Brazil and the Hispano American countries have historically felt a stronger inclination towards the more prestigious European languages, above all French, followed by English, Italian and German. Preference was shown for these foreign languages above the language of their neighbour.

*Argentina* Since its independence in 1810, Argentina's cultural policies were aimed at building a homogeneous nation-state based on European descent and monolingualism in Spanish. To the present day Argentina is the Latin American country that has most intensely tried to model itself after Europe and set itself aside from the rest of the Latin American continent. From 1853 on the state developed an intense policy of European immigration, while at the same time organising military expeditions to annihilate, reduce and subordinate the Indian population in the south of the country. In its imagery of a national identity, all immigrants of European descent were welcome, but not indigenous people. Immigration was at its peak between 1895 and 1914, when the number of foreigners in the overall population reached 42.7%, and in the city of Buenos Aires foreigners comprised over half the population (Bein 1999). In spite of their numerical clout, linguistic assimilation occurred even quicker than in the USA during the same period, especially in the case of the Italians (Fontanella de Weinberg 1979), who numerically (32% of Buenos Aires' population) could well have formed a solid linguistic enclave for preserving their language.

This rapid and peaceful assimilation was fostered by impressive socio-economic development, based mainly on agriculture and livestock, which allowed immigrant peasants and workers a much higher standard of living than was enjoyed in most European countries. Buenos Aires became the 'European' capital and built a metro railway system at almost the same time as London, Paris and Berlin, whilst in the other Latin American capitals people still rode to the main square on horseback. It is precisely this social, economic and cultural development that is behind the sense of superiority<sup>13</sup> that characterises Argentines with respect to the other Latin American nations to date, in spite of the constant economic decline during the second half of the twentieth century.

<sup>13</sup> This sense of superiority is reflected in stereotypes about themselves and about their neighbours: 'Argentina is the Europe of the Americas,' 'Uruguay is an Argentine province,' 'Brazilians are funny and black,' 'Paraguayans are ignorant.' It can even be found in official documents: 'Argentina, who maintains a clear cultural leadership over all Spanish-speaking communities. . . .' (All examples are quoted from Axelrud 1999, p. 63).

Various Argentine authors (Arnoux and Bein 1997; Bein and Varela 1998; Axelrud 1999; Bein 1999; Varela 1999) maintain that the success behind the assimilationist policy of huge contingencies of immigrants and the construction of an Argentine identity based on monolingualism in Spanish is due to a great extent to a solid academic and scientific level in public schooling, based on models of European positivism.

This educational-linguistic policy included a component of teaching foreign languages that reflected generalised interest in Europe and the influence of the main immigrant groups. The first foreign language during most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was French, followed by English and, to a lesser degree, by Italian and German (Bein 1999).<sup>14</sup> The traditional educational system – seven years of elementary school and five of secondary school – included a ‘plurilingual design’ that allowed pupils to choose to learn one of several foreign languages for three years, and then continue with a second foreign language for another two years. From the 1980s onwards there was, however, more demand for English than all the other languages combined. Portuguese was never considered a foreign language of importance, although in 1935 a university chair was established for teaching this language (Bein 1999).

By the end of the military dictatorship (1976–83) a new policy was in place regarding the Indian groups in the country (1% of the population divided among twenty-five living languages<sup>15</sup>). Recent constitutional reforms (1994) recognise the ethnic and cultural pre-existence of the Indian peoples and the right to bilingual intercultural education, with instruction in the mother tongue during the first three years of elementary school (Law 23,302, 1985 González Gutiérrez 1999). However, these reforms, no matter how important, have not changed the collective Argentine identity which leaves no door open for the Indian population (‘In Argentina there are no Indians’).

In summary, linguistic, cultural and educational policies have contributed to shape a relatively homogeneous culture and a unique national identity closely associated with the main European cultures (Spanish, Italian, French and English) and monolingualism based on the Argentine variety of Spanish, all of which, when taken together, lead to a sense of superiority and set them aside from their neighbours.

<sup>14</sup> According to a number of sources (official governmental documents; Roberto Bein, personal communication) there are no reliable data on foreign language teaching. The Alliance Française in Buenos Aires reports an increase in learners of French enrolled in that institution between 1990 (36,172) and 1994 (45,846), and a strong decrease afterwards (31,878 for 1997). These changes are probably due to economic ups and downs of the country and do not reflect a reliable tendency.

<sup>15</sup> According to Grimes (1996), *América Indígena*, vol. 50, 1999 quotes sixteen languages, based on a different system of classification.

*Uruguay* As the smallest country in Mercosur, its history has been similar to Argentina's. As a matter of fact, in linguistic and cultural aspects there is a Rio de la Plata culture common to both countries. Uruguay is the only continental Ibero American country whose indigenous population was exterminated almost 200 years ago. Lodged between two giants – Argentina and Brazil – its history is marked by efforts to defend its borders and to develop a national homogeneity strong enough to consolidate its territory as a state with its own identity. Uruguay's geographical space was historically a source of conflict between the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal, and between two linguistic poles located in Buenos Aires, capital of the Spanish vice-royalty, and the Portuguese-speaking pole located in Rio Grande do Sul (Elizaincín 1996).

The independence of Uruguay (1828) was not the result of political action by a nation that was homogeneous and clearly defined linguistically and culturally. Quite to the contrary, Uruguay was constituted as the union of two regions with different cultural and linguistic traditions (Barrios 1995; 1996). The central-south region, with Montevideo as the capital, and the western strip, have a Spanish substratum and the strong influence of European immigrants, comparable to the make-up of the Buenos Aires region in Argentina. The north-east, on the other hand, was settled by Portuguese peasants who remained in Uruguayan territory after the borders were defined.<sup>16</sup> Integration of this region came about through colonisation from Montevideo during the second half of the nineteenth century, when the government founded several cities along the border with Brazil to safeguard the frontier. In 1877 the Law of Common Education established obligatory elementary school education in Spanish for the whole territory.

Governmental linguistic policy throughout history has always attempted to homogenise the country based on an emerging variety of Uruguayan Spanish. It used public education as the main vehicle, as was the case in Argentina. In the south this policy was aimed at diverse groups of immigrants, while in the north it was aimed at assimilating the Portuguese-speaking population. To date there is a rural population that speaks 'Portuguese dialects of Uruguay' (PDU or DPU) (Elizaincín 1981; 1992; Elizaincín *et al.* 1987; Barrios *et al.* 1993). These low-prestige dialects are clearly differentiated from the variety of Portuguese spoken by Brazilians; they are the linguistic product of Hispanic colonisation of the Portuguese-speaking population by the Uruguayan state. This was how the rural peasant population went from Portuguese monolingualism to bilingualism with Spanish and DPU. A second kind of Spanish–Portuguese bilingualism among the border area's middle class reflects Brazilian economic influence.

<sup>16</sup> The first national census of 1860 counts a total population of 200,000 inhabitants; 40,000 of them are reported to be speakers of Portuguese (Barrios *et al.* 1993).

Teaching foreign languages in public education developed in a similar way to what occurred in Argentina and forms part of the assimilation policies in the two directions mentioned. The most prestigious and important European languages offered coincide with the presence of immigrant groups of French, English and Italian origins. However, the official reasoning behind teaching these languages has always been of an instrumental nature, without reference to these immigrant groups, since general policy supported monolingualism in Spanish. French was justified given France's cultural weight, English for its commercial importance, and Italian as the language of law and medicine (Gabbiani 1995). Private bilingual schools (in English, French, German, etc.) maintained by their heritage groups played an important role in education, especially for the socioeconomic elites.

Before Mercosur there were several options, and the learning of two different foreign languages was fostered. From 1885 on French and English were taught during junior high school (seventh to ninth grades) and during senior high school (tenth to twelfth grades); Italian was additional to these languages (Gabbiani 1995). It is significant that, until the beginning of Mercosur, Portuguese – also a European language of culture and of great commercial value – was considered to be a threat, and as such was always excluded from public education since it was perceived to place at risk Uruguayan unity and linguistic homogeneity (Barrios 1999).

At present (1997–2000) an educational reform under way is transforming the composition and weight of each one of the languages. Controversy revolves around preserving plurilingual course offerings – that is, the possibility for pupils to learn more than one foreign language and to choose from various options – or for English to be the only obligatory language, which would in turn practically eliminate other foreign languages. During the first cycle (junior high school), the reform has taken effect and English is the obligatory language, while Portuguese, Italian and French are offered as electives at a 'Second Foreign Language Teaching Centre' located in the capital, Montevideo, with some branches in outlying areas. The greatest demand among them is for Portuguese, followed by Italian and French. During the second cycle (senior high school), the reform is not yet in place. Italian is taught as the obligatory foreign language and there is a choice between English or French as the second foreign language (Barrios 1996).<sup>17</sup>

In summary, Uruguay's linguistic policies have in the past successfully aimed at the unification and standardisation of Spanish and the assimilation of the linguistically different population, the Portuguese-speaking peasantry in the north

<sup>17</sup> Graciela Barrios, personal communication; I could not obtain numbers of enrolled students. The number of learners of French at the Alliance Française dropped from 3,588 in 1990 to 665 in 1997.

and the immigrants in the south. These policies also acted as a homogenising force within the country and as a separatist force to the outside, especially when facing their powerful neighbour Brazil.

*Brazil* Although the history of Brazil, in its struggle for independence and constitution as a nation, followed a course different from that of Hispanic American countries, it shares with them one fundamental characteristic: Brazil also forged its nation with a view towards creating a homogeneous, monocultural, nation-state, segregated from its neighbours. At the beginning of its colonising efforts, Portugal opted for an expansionist policy extending its borders to territories a papal edict had assigned to the Spanish crown. Its linguistic policy spurred the teaching of Portuguese and Latin, a clear intent at segregation towards Spanish colonisation (Pagliuchi da Silveira 1999). This expansion created the need to standardise Portuguese, the first grammars of which appeared in the sixteenth century (Fernão d'Oliveira 1536; João de Barros 1540). The clergy sought to establish an indigenous *lingua geral* (general language), Guaraní, for the religious mission, which underwent a major expansion and was not displaced until the second half of the eighteenth century by Portuguese (Baranow 1988). At the start, the creation of a huge colonial territory encouraged the development of a European Portuguese purism, a defence of their internal unity in the face of the external threat from Spain, as well as from French and Dutch invasions.

Brazil underwent two quite different types of massive immigration: the importing of 3.8 million African slaves throughout the three centuries up to the nineteenth century, and the voluntary immigration of approximately five million Europeans and Japanese during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The forced assimilation of the slaves, who belonged to different linguistic groups, led them to quickly abandon their languages. In contrast, European immigrants have partially preserved their languages up to today.

Among Latin American countries, Brazil represents a typical case in its indigenous policy. It combined systematic genocide with segregation, as well as the paternalistic tutelage of the indigenous population in legal and political terms. The latter dropped from some 2.5–5 million at the beginning of the colonisation to approximately 200,000 in 1990, representing 0.17% of the overall population.<sup>18</sup> At present, approximately 195 languages survive, comprising twenty-six linguistic families (Rodrigues 1986). Diverse historical studies (Orlandi 1993) show how, since colonial times, the ideological construction of *brasilianidade* has systematically been erasing the existence of the Indians from the national identity. In contrast with the Andean countries and

<sup>18</sup> Only after 1930 did the indigenous population start to grow again in absolute numbers (Rodrigues 1986).

Mexico, this process led to the formation of a mutually exclusive identity between Brazilians and indigenous peoples, similar to what happened in Argentina.

By 1980, only five of the 195 linguistic groups were receiving any specific education from the state, and only 10% of the Indian population received any formal education at all (Melià 1979; Varese and Rodríguez 1983; Montserrat 1989). This situation has changed significantly over the past twenty years. The new Constitution of 1988 considerably expanded the rights of indigenous peoples and reflected a change in the focus of their treatment (Hamel 1994a; 1994b). Article 210 establishes that the language of instruction in public education is to be Portuguese, but indigenous peoples are granted the right to use their own languages and pedagogical procedures for primary schooling. The *Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* of 1994 and the *Referencial Curricular* of 1998 design a bilingual and intercultural focus for indigenous education, supporting and strengthening the preservation of indigenous languages. However, in a country with a dominant ideology of monolingualism as an ideal and as a constructed reality, the existence of social bilingualism and bilingual education goes unnoticed in national thinking (Cavalcanti 1999).

When Brazil went from colony to empire – headed by the Portuguese royal family who went to Brazil in 1808 with the help of the British – Brazil began to open up to trade with Europe. They started teaching French as a privileged European language. The massive immigration of European colonists began in the nineteenth century, and this fostered a plurilingual linguistic policy. The state supported the immigrants' wishes to preserve their languages of origin and made the teaching of French, English and Spanish official in schools, in addition to Portuguese and Latin, and with German and Italian as options (Pagliuchi da Silveira 1999, p. 432). At the same time, Brazilian Portuguese was being consolidated as the national language and became distanced from Iberian Portuguese.

Only the censuses of 1940 and 1950 report data on the speakers of immigrant languages, since, subsequently, this information was excluded from the national census for political reasons (Oliveira 1998). In the south of Brazil, wide-ranging bilingualism between Portuguese and several immigrant languages had emerged. Both censuses counted more than 500,000 speakers of German born in Brazil, followed by Italians and Japanese. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, a plurilingual policy was maintained in teaching foreign languages, always privileging French and English before Spanish. However, from the 1930s, government policy changed abruptly. A new repressive policy towards immigrant minorities attempted to force their accelerated assimilation, prohibiting their bilingual schools and the use of their languages in public spheres. When Brazil entered the Second World War against the powers represented by the main immigrant languages, repression intensified. This led to a 37% decrease in the use of Italian and a 14% decrease in German between

1940 and 1950. During this period, therefore, the Brazilian state developed a marked assimilation policy towards its aboriginal and immigrant minorities, contrary to bilingual education.

In a third period of time, after the Second World War, linguistic policy was transformed in two ways. In its language planning, the Brazilian state distanced itself all the more from Portugal. In contrast to the Hispanic world – which has maintained its orthographic unity to date – Brazil broke with linguistic unity, establishing its own norms in grammar, orthography and linguistic terminology. Although some authors continue purporting the meaningful unity of Portuguese to date, with attempts to maintain or bring the divergent normativities closer (Baranow 1988), there is little doubt that Brazil established its hegemony over the Lusitanian world. The second aspect refers to the greater orientation of Brazil towards the USA, leading it to abandon its plurilingual policy in favour of a monolingual foreign language approach, so that since the 1960s only English is obligatory in public education (Pagliuchi da Silveira 1999). This trend reflects a new distancing from Hispanic America.

For some Brazilian authors (e.g. Ribeiro 1995), the building of a national identity took a different path from that of the River Plate nations, Argentina and Uruguay. From this view, Argentina and Uruguay are seen as ‘transplanted peoples’ of European characteristics, while Brazil, as a ‘new people’, achieved its own, different identity, based on its basic cultural homogeneity, beyond its social and racial inequality.

In summary, a policy of internal homogenisation has developed in Brazil, with a view towards building a nation-state, with strong spurts of linguistic assimilation of its aboriginal and immigrant minorities. Just like its neighbours to the south, Brazil was aiming to distance itself from the Hispanic world, historically privileging the teaching of the most prestigious European languages.

*Paraguay* Of the four, Paraguay is the county that most distinguishes itself from the European model of nation-state. It is the only country of the Americas with massive bilingualism that constitutes the axis of national identity (see Corvalán 1997). An urbanised, formerly indigenous language, Guaraní is spoken by more citizens than Spanish. To a certain degree, Paraguay was born from a Jesuit ‘state’, with Guaraní as the general language of the mission, literacy and government (Barros 1993). During their existence and up until their expulsion in 1767 by papal edict, the indigenous Jesuit community developed a feverish activity of oral usage and literacy development, as well as editing and publishing in Guaraní (Melià 1969; 1995; 1999). These historical roots of Guaraní, as the merger of regional and functional varieties (Dietrich 1990, von Gleich 1993), constitute the basis for explaining its stability and singular extension. Therefore, the linguistic situation in Paraguay was taken by sociolinguists as a paradigmatic case of massive social, but asymmetric,

bilingualism from the very beginnings of the discipline (e.g. Garvin and Mathiot 1956; Rubin 1968).

A comparison of the two censuses from 1950 and 1992 yields significant results: in 1950, 50% of the population was monolingual in Guaraní, while monolingual speakers of Spanish were limited to 4%. In 1992, Guaraní accounted for 37% of the monolingual speakers, while only 7% reported they were monolingual in Spanish, and 50% said they often used both languages. Some 6% spoke immigrant languages (Corvalán 1997, p. 39). These figures are absolutely unique in the Americas and, although they reveal a slight shift of Guaraní,<sup>19</sup> they show likewise the great stability in the relationship between the languages and the degree of massive bilingualism encompassing all social strata.

At present, Paraguay is facing the challenge of incorporating and transforming its national bilingualism into a resource for the modernisation of its economy and educational system. Notwithstanding the ample diffusion of Guaraní, education was offered exclusively through Spanish up until a short time ago. As recently as 1983, bilingual transition programmes were offered, based on initial literacy teaching in Guaraní. According to Corvalán (1997), they were a failure and led to abandoning attempts at bilingual education for quite a while. The new Constitution of 1992, promulgated after decades of dictatorship, gave Guaraní the rank of an official language and placed it on the same level as Spanish for the first time in history.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Paraguay is the only Ibero American country with two languages of equally official status.

A type of dual language bilingual education has been in place ever since: primary education is to be given in the official mother tongue of each child, and the teaching of both languages is compulsory in public education.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to prior transitional programmes, a bilingual maintenance curriculum is now being proposed, with equal treatment for both languages. The two modalities – for pupils speaking Guaraní or Spanish as their first language – have gradually been implemented since 1996 (Melià 1999). The linguistic policy of teaching

<sup>19</sup> Gynan (1997) maintains that these figures reflect a clear tendency of Guaraní language shift. He arrives at the conclusion, however, that if the present tendency persists Guaraní would survive for some 120 years.

<sup>20</sup> Article 140: 'On the languages. Paraguay is a pluricultural and bilingual country. Paraguay's official languages are Spanish and Guaraní. The law will establish the modalities of their use. The indigenous languages, as well as the languages of other minorities, are part of the cultural patrimony of the Nation.' (quoted in González Gutiérrez 1999, p. 588). Here, Guaraní is clearly not considered an indigenous language, which reflects its real status as a language that was 'de-indigenised' long ago.

<sup>21</sup> Article 77: 'On the teaching of the mother tongue. In the beginning of schooling, teaching will be carried out in the official mother tongue of the learner who will also be taught in the two official languages of the Republic. In the case of those ethnic minorities whose language is not Guaraní, one of the two official languages may be chosen for instruction.' (quoted in González Gutiérrez 1999, p. 586).

and developing educational content in the mother tongue requires a significant *Sprachausbau* (language development) of Guaraní at the language planning level. Normalisation not only encourages the creation of an educational and scientific language, but also aids the development of a linguistic base, permitting the expansion of Guaraní to the domains of public administration and justice where it had been largely absent except for oral use.

In the mass media, Guaraní has been especially prominent on the radio – just like indigenous languages in other countries (for the case of Bolivia, see Albó 1999) – and also on television, with broadcasts of news and other programmes. Several newspapers have opened their pages to Guaraní, in particular directed towards teachers and students (Corvalán 1997, pp. 40–41).

Foreign-language teaching has experienced limited development in a predominantly rural country, with little higher education and limited contacts with non-Spanish-speaking foreigners.<sup>22</sup> The proposals emanating from the country's National Commission on Bilingualism recognised this field as a pending task for linguistic policy and planning, proposing a gradual programme of foreign-language teaching at whose centre were to be English and Portuguese (Corvalán 1997, p. 46). Undoubtedly, the step towards democracy, the official recognition of Guaraní (*Comisión Nacional de Bilingüismo* 1997; Melià 1997), as well as educational reforms, point towards a revalorisation of Guaraní, not only as a core value of Paraguayan identity – which it has always been and which distinguishes Paraguayans from all their neighbours – but also as a language of the formal spheres of education and public life.

In the light of this panorama, technological innovation and regional integration pose major challenges for Paraguay as the least modern, urban and industrial country in the context of Mercosur. Contact between its own languages and Portuguese is seen as an obstacle in the educational system and in relation to the training of a labour force. The presence of 'Portuguese in full and aggressive expansion in the extensive border area with Brazil' (Corvalán 1977, p. 39) is considered a threat to Paraguay's cultural and linguistic identity, undoubtedly due to the significant economic and technological superiority it represents. In this context, in Paraguay overall modernisation is extremely urgent, including educational reform so as to reduce the disadvantages vis-à-vis its main partners in Mercosur.

### **The dynamics of integration and changes in state policy: Conflicts and contradictions**

What have been the dynamics and new policies of cultural, educational and linguistic integration of the four countries since the founding of Mercosur? As

<sup>22</sup> I was unable to obtain reliable figures about foreign language teaching in Paraguay.

a point of departure, we can see four countries which, although they share major features as collective subjects of Latin American history, have built their own national identity, each one creatively incorporating the most significant elements of their historical components: autochthonous inheritance, colonisation and immigration patterns, languages and cultures. They always sought homogenisation inward and delimitation – sometimes, separatism – vis-à-vis their neighbours. From the point of view of the state, these policies have been successful in forming a national linguistic identity based on standardised and widely accepted varieties of Spanish (Argentina and Uruguay) and Portuguese (Brazil), and of a particular symbiosis of Spanish and Guarani as a bilingual communicative repertoire in the case of Paraguay.

With its dynamics of regional integration, Mercosur encourages these four countries to abandon or, at least, tone down the cultural, educational and linguistic traditions that had lent them stability in the past, presenting them with a paradox (Barrios 1996). Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay – who have experienced the presence of Portuguese inside their borders as a threat (especially Uruguay, because of the historical presence of Portuguese dialects within its territory) – now find themselves in need of promoting the Portuguese language, which they so battled with before, as a language of integration within their own territory. Brazil had always considered Argentina a rival in all spheres. Until a short time ago, the military had impeded setting up large-scale industries within a hundred-kilometre strip of the border because it was a military-deployment zone. Now, with Mercosur, they are forced to open these demarcations and to establish multiple contacts through them.

Furthermore, the dynamics favourable to integration unleashed between the most diverse social sectors, particularly in the border regions, far outstripped not only expectations, but the often-timid policies of their own governments. Before recounting the activities undertaken, we will pause to look at the official policies of education, culture and languages in Mercosur.

### *Educational and linguistic policies since 1991*

As to institutional initiatives, so far there are abundant protocols, agreements, agencies created and, generally speaking, proposals for the future. The start-up of said projects is taking some time and, according to Mercosur experts themselves, it is almost impossible to obtain solid data or consolidated results at the present time.

We summarise here some of the major institutional initiatives regarding educational, cultural and linguistic integration. The main and primary instrument is the Triennial Plan for the Educational Sector of Mercosur approved in 1992. Since that time, it has been renewed every three years. It considers educational and cultural integration a prerequisite for all economic and

political integration,<sup>23</sup> and establishes, as we stated, three programmes with their respective sub-programmes (*Ministerio de Educación y Cultura* 1997):

1. Development of a favourable awareness among the citizenry concerning integration, with two sub-programmes:
  - 1.1 Informing and reflecting on the impact of Mercosur's integration process;
  - 1.2 Learning official Mercosur languages (Spanish and Portuguese).
2. Training human resources so as to contribute to development, with four sub-programmes for the different educational levels, research and graduate studies.
3. Making educational systems compatible and harmonious. This contemplates the co-ordination of academic, legal, administrative, as well as information, systems.

In 1997, the representative of the Uruguayan MEC (*Ministerio de Educación y Cultura* 1997, p. 29) considered that the first stage had reached its conclusion with institutional consolidation, accreditation of academic titles and credentials, and the coordination of educational sub-systems, with the exception of higher education.

Let us consider the policies referring to language teaching. Their main proposal – the teaching of the two official languages in the respective educational systems – has followed a slower course and even in 2001 no large-scale and successful implementation can be observed. According to the same source, in 1993 ‘an educational programme was designed for teaching the official languages, promising to earmark adequate financial resources to it’ (*Ministerio de Educación y Cultura* 1997, p. 19).

As an element of integration, the Asociación de Universidades del Grupo de Montevideo (AUGM) was created in 1991, made up of the public universities of the member countries. It is characterised as a virtual university or as a ‘common expanded academic space’ (Guerrero 1995). In 1995 it included the national universities of Paraguay and Uruguay, as well as five universities in Argentina and another five in Brazil. Among their eleven fields of study, one entitled ‘Education for integration’ is concerned with defining linguistic policies and preparing the basis for implementing the teaching of Spanish and Portuguese as second languages in Mercosur countries. There are two working groups: one, on linguistic policy, is to take over the analysis of data on the topic, as well as intervention through the creation of proposals and consultation for the political actors in that area. A diagnosis of the working group on teaching Spanish and Portuguese (Gabbiani 1999) observes that, in 1999, five years after having made a policy decision thereto (Triennial Plan), the teaching of official languages has

<sup>23</sup> It may be worth pointing out the differences between Mercosur and the two other blocs in the Western world: in the European Economic Community (today, the European Union) the topics of educational and cultural integration were dealt with a long time after its foundation. NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement between Canada, the USA and Mexico), has not established any relevant programme in terms of harmonising the educational systems of the member countries or of teaching their official languages in basic education.

still not been incorporated into the curriculums of member states' educational systems. Likewise reported is an acute shortage of trained teachers and national proficiency tests based on the local varieties of the languages.<sup>24</sup> It is therefore recommended that research be encouraged on these topics, including studies on the images and expectation regarding the languages in Mercosur, the elaboration of linguistic census and adequate proficiency tests. Generally speaking, it was agreed to encourage plurilingual offerings in the educational system, that is, to maintain several foreign-language options at each level.

At this time, it is difficult to evaluate the start-up and results of the proposals. From all the documentation published and the personal information available, it is the large number of institutions that have been created and the meetings held over the past ten years that stand out as being significant; however, little is said about concrete experiences and the proposals implemented. On the other hand, there is a series of extremely interesting initiatives. We can cite, as an example, the designing of specific courses for teaching Spanish and Portuguese in São Paulo (Pagliuchi da Silveira 1999) or a teacher training programme established at Uruguay's national university, with assistance from experts from the Brazilian Campinas University (Gabbiani 1999). As a first stage, programmes for university-level teacher training and language courses were established at institutions in Uruguay (Gabbiani 1995) and in Argentina. A large part of the general demand for language courses is, however, absorbed by private institutions (Gabbiani 1999; Varela 1999).

According to several Argentine critics, political will is missing to implement the teaching of Portuguese in Argentina (Arnoux 1999; Varela 1999). Axelrud (1999) states that the Argentine government is not attempting any real regional integration, but prefers to adapt to globalisation under the hegemony of the USA. In contrast, Brazil is said to be developing a more decisive policy of linguistic integration. In addition, Portuguese competes with other established foreign languages in the educational systems and, in several cases, interferes with the reforms underway. The issue of policy regarding foreign languages – plurilingual or monolingual offerings, specific weight and sequence of teaching them – no doubt reflect divergent cultural and political orientations.

In summary, the area of educational and linguistic policy highlights basic agreements of the political institutions that aim towards a regional integration

<sup>24</sup> In August 2000 the Ministers of Education reinforced the adopted programme, which establishes the teaching of Portuguese in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, and of Spanish in Brazil, as compulsory content matter in the state school system. According to *Comunica* ([www.comunica.es](http://www.comunica.es)), which quotes the Spanish newspaper *El País*, France, Great Britain and Italy are said to have protested against this measure. The three countries 'have mobilized their diplomatic machinery in order to prevent Brazil from turning, perhaps irreversibly, to the Spanish world' (*Comunica* 21 June 2000, quoted in Fréchette 2001, p. 12). According to the same source, in 2000 only 200 secondary school pupils out of 340,000 in Buenos Aires had enrolled in Portuguese language courses.

far beyond the economy. This includes programmes of coordinating educational systems, campaigns encouraging a favourable attitude towards integration, and the decision to teach the official languages – Spanish and Portuguese – throughout Mercosur. At the level of implementation, however, there is a lack of necessary resources, and the rhythm is so slow that many observers doubt the governments' resolve to spur real cultural integration. It is clear, on the one hand, that cultural, educational and linguistic aspects are clearly subordinated to economic decisions and to the dynamics of integration, while, on the other, there is quite a bit of resistance to integration itself. This derives both from a historical hesitancy towards neighbours, as well as from orientations towards Pan-American globalisation under US leadership, ever present between the political actors and the governments of the member countries.

### *The dynamics of integration in civil society*

In contrast to the somewhat timid actions of national governments, which often seem to want to curb the processes, the creation of Mercosur has unleashed an unprecedented dynamic in favour of the integration of the most diverse sectors of civil society. These initiatives, occurring especially in border areas, far outstrip the governmental policies of each state.

There has been massive demand for Portuguese courses in Argentina and Uruguay (and to a lesser degree in Paraguay), as well as for Spanish courses in Brazil. This demand, which state institutions have so far proven to be incapable of satisfying, has created a dynamic and growing market for private initiative. Even though among the many academies and schools that mushroomed there are many deficiencies (see criticism by Varela 1999), one cannot deny that they fulfil a positive function for the purposes of integration.

The dynamics of integration, globalisation and transformation of the borders deserve particular attention. In traditional thinking, borders draw a line beyond which all paradigms change abruptly. Nation-states have always considered borders as strategic and threatened places where they have to reinforce the nation's military, demographic, cultural and linguistic presence.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, these areas were the objective of homogenisation policies.

The reality at the borders themselves generally yields quite a different story. Rather than dividing lines, they appear to be areas of ancient interaction, constituting strips of fluid contact and developing hybrid cultures and systems of

<sup>25</sup> In the two Brazilian censuses mentioned above, the immigrant population of Germans, Italians and Japanese amounted to 1.3 million in 1940. This information was included in the census to supply the government with a database to evaluate the 'threat to national security' (Oliveira 1999) in the context of the Second World War. In the case of Paraguay and Uruguay, the presence of speakers of Portuguese in the national territory or on the borders has always caused concerns among the military.

communication. Elizaincín (1998) characterised these border dynamics as a situation of 'pre-integration', which fertilised the terrain for Mercosur's integration policies.<sup>26</sup>

At the borders, trade, cultural contact and exchange were considerably reinforced, together with a reaffirmation of the regionalisms vis-à-vis the central power of each country. Therefore, many of the proposals for trans-border educational cooperation (Barrios 1996; Fedatto 1996; Trinidad and Behares 1996; Behares 1998) oppose homogenising policies regarding the two official Mercosur languages and argue for a differentiated education taking into account local varieties such as Portuguese dialects in the North of Uruguay or regional dialects of Spanish.

To recap, most outstanding dynamics of integration arise from the different economic and cultural sectors, often contrasting with the slow actions of governments and multilateral Mercosur institutions. Noteworthy are the actions taken at the borders which strengthen regional positions in contact and keep a distance from national governments. At the language-policy level, integration will centre on the propagation of the two official languages of the member countries. Pending still is the role of Guaraní – the widespread official language of Paraguay, which is also spoken as an indigenous language in Argentina and Brazil – which some actors have proposed should be included as another official language of Mercosur.

### **Geolinguistic perspectives in Mercosur**

In the emergence of Mercosur we can observe a dynamics of integration and repositioning of the four member states, which bears upon their cultural, educational and linguistic relations as a whole. At the same time these relations constitute a centrepiece of integration itself. A number of policies and specific proposals have appeared over the short time of Mercosur's existence. Their implementation, as we have seen, proceeds so slowly that many observers doubt the governments' political determination to cede some degree of sovereignty in favour of a profound regional integration (Arnoux and Bein, 1997; 1999). Our attention is drawn as well to the lack of coherence between political discourse and the concrete measures to put policy into practice (Axelrud 1999).

Resistance against integration represents, on the one hand, the historical inertia of nation-state policies based on a tradition of monolingualism, cultural homogenisation and segregation from neighbours. It is certainly not easy, as it

<sup>26</sup> Grimson (1999), on the contrary, warns us not to adopt a romantic view of the borders as zones of brotherhood and intensive interaction, as if the borders only existed on maps. He reports the case of a new bridge over the borderline Parana River, which linked two towns, a Paraguayan town and an Argentine town. Since the building of the bridge various local conflicts have become more intense due to Mercosur's policies on tariffs and integration.

is not in the EU or elsewhere, to transit from national identity planning based on one language and culture, towards the construction of a pluricultural regional identity sustained by various national, regional, indigenous and immigrant cultures around the centrepiece of a bilingual, Spanish–Portuguese communicative repertoire. On the other hand, diverse internal and external political forces oppose Mercosur's integration under Latin American leadership, and prefer a Pan-American integration under US hegemony. Clearly, the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas) proposal launched by US President Clinton in the 1990s and revitalised by President Bush in 2001 represents an attempt to undermine any regional integration outside US control.

We must not forget that the Mercosur initiative emerges as a defensive measure in a historical phase of ferocious globalisation. During the 1990s, the member states – particularly Argentina and Brazil – underwent processes of neo-liberal conversion of their economies, which entailed severe social disarray, the loss of sovereignty, and a political and cultural reorientation towards the USA. These contradictory stands – towards a region to be constructed and towards a new subordination under US leadership – bear upon the field of tensions between the languages and cultures involved: national and international, regional, indigenous, immigrant and foreign. As we have seen, no simple, bipolar opposition obtains. The observed dynamics not only resize the spaces of each language, but also their speakers' conceptions of them, and the relations among them. The role of language ideologies and representations becomes evident as foundational components in the struggles about the languages involved.

Let us consider some examples. In the past the states justified the teaching of French, Italian or German without explicit reference to the powerful immigrant groups that identified with them. In the Brazil of the 1940s and 1950s, they were, however, coined as 'immigrant languages', implying a menace to national unity. The label of 'bilingual', was imposed on members of heritage communities, even when they referred to fourth or fifth generation Brazilian citizens, without scrutiny to their real linguistic competence in the language concerned. Conversely, the same label is hardly ever used to refer to someone who has studied and acquired advanced proficiency in a foreign language (Arnoux and Bein 1999). The concept of a 'language of wider communication' fits Guarani in Paraguay, as well as Spanish and Portuguese in the regional, supra-national context, and new definitions arise such as 'language of integration' or 'participation' (Barrios 1996). Thus, the re-conceptualisations and re-definitions of languages play a significant role in the debates about language and educational policies.

In the Mercosur member states the controversies about ideological orientations and language planning in foreign language teaching focus more and more on the opposition between English and the Spanish–Portuguese pair as priorities for the curriculum. These debates go far beyond the educational

system itself. Especially in Argentina and Uruguay we can identify two positions. One advocates a plurilingual model, meaning the teaching of more than one foreign language for each pupil, or at least more than one language option in the curriculum. The other one defends English as the only or principal foreign language, given its role as the language of the global world and as international lingua franca.<sup>27</sup> The other traditional European ‘languages of culture’ are considered of little value and have lost their place in the curriculum, according to this position. Thus, the plurilingual curriculum in force since the nineteenth century is menaced by a ‘modern’, functional and instrumental view of foreign language learning proposing ‘English only’ as the answer to educational needs on the level of secondary and even tertiary education.

The defenders of Spanish and Portuguese converge with the ‘traditionalists’ (who are in turn allied with the international ‘Francophonie’, the French-speaking world) in their opposition against the total and exclusive hegemony of English and in their defence of a plurilingual option. The two basic positions are associated with two divergent projects of integration and a conflict between a Latin American identity in the first case, and a Pan-American identity in the second, beyond the functional and educational value of each proposal.

this is foremost a question of the construction of identify – Latin American or Pan American – where English does not reassert its role as an international language; in case it impedes the teaching of Portuguese [in Argentina, R.E.H.], English would assume the symbolic value of submission under the hegemony of the United States of America. (Arnoux and Bein 1997, p. 52)<sup>28</sup>

Should the debate really be reduced to a mutually exclusive opposition between English and Spanish–Portuguese in the Mercosur, serious conflicts may arise that could ultimately slow down the process of cultural and linguistic integration. Therefore, other actors (e.g. Barrios 1999 from Uruguay) attempt to neutralise this polarised opposition. They maintain that both language proposals have different and complementary functions. Barrios redefines the official languages of Mercosur as ‘languages of integration and participation’, not as ‘foreign languages’ as is the case of English. To create a new regional identity, a new type of massive bilingualism is needed that would allow free and extensive communication within the common market. The interesting difference with an

<sup>27</sup> Varela (1999, p. 587), an Argentine critic, quotes a governmental document that refers to foreign language teaching: ‘English is the language of international communication which unites a universal community in brotherhood with no geographic or political frontiers. English has become the natural lingua franca and has thus gained distance from its cultural roots.’ This is a good example of the ideology of ‘many Englishes’, of a de-territorialised and neutralised language that belongs to nobody and therefore to everybody; as if English were not backed any longer by the world’s most powerful army and navy. Varela rightly criticises this inappropriate (and technically wrong) use of the term lingua franca for English.

<sup>28</sup> The other European, Asian and indigenous languages would thus become optional in the system.

international language community such as the Francophonie is that, in the case of Mercosur, integration and communication should not be constructed around one hegemonic language, but on the basis of a bilingual system of communication and identification grounded in two languages that at the same time have national, regional and international status.

The viability and the limits of such a proposal will be determined by political perspectives of the member states, their governments and civil societies, their educational systems and their extramural markets. In my view, the plurilingual position has a weak side in its strategy to place all involved languages in a frame of formal equality, since this does not exist in the real world. In any case, the 'traditional' European languages will be among the losers, since both the educational systems and the open markets have already opted for both English and Mercosur's official languages. A realistic, pro Latin American strategy should foster these three languages and try to avoid any polarity among them. It should stress the complementary functions of English and Spanish-Portuguese, which may fulfil quite different instrumental and identificational functions. Additionally, from a psycholinguistic and educational perspective, the acquisition and teaching of these languages could be planned as different but complementary processes. Learning Portuguese for Hispanophones and vice versa may be based on a method that extends already existing competencies, as well as on reciprocal receptive language skills. Creativity is called for to design methods that combine formal (institutional) and informal ways of learning and practising these languages. And the acquisition of English and Spanish-Portuguese could be differentiated by placing them in early and late phases of the curriculum.

The multipolar tension that operates in Mercosur between the different types of languages may well be conceptualised within Calvet's (1999) framework of language ecology. English is no doubt the hyper central language, but it may have a different and more counterbalanced weight than in some other areas of the world. Spanish and Portuguese are super central languages, Guaraní has the role of a vehicular language in Paraguay with some outreach to Argentina and Brazil; and the vast number of indigenous and immigrant languages occupy the place of local vernacular languages with a significant role in local communication, identity planning and education. Although the other European super central languages (French, Italian, German, etc.) will see their 'outer circle' diminished over time, the door should be left open for them as languages of a certain cultural community, and for specific bilateral relations with their home countries in economy, science, literature and international relations. Although English is certainly not threatening Mercosur's official languages in their vitality or in their traditional domains, Portuguese and Spanish could function as a barrier against the international hegemony of English and its domain invasion, particularly in the fields of international relations, trade, science and

technology. On the contrary, regional integration based on the acquisition of the Iberian languages and their massive use – especially in the ‘high’ domains – could no doubt strengthen their role as relevant American and world languages in significant areas. Conversely, a unilateral language policy of ‘English only’ in the Mercosur could severely damage regional integration. Last but not least, there is virtually no risk that the revitalisation and institutional support of indigenous and immigrant languages could in any way affect the two official languages, as Calvet maintained in the case of the EU. The integration of Mercosur should, indeed, support each country’s effort to consolidate and extend indigenous language education where this is demanded by native populations.

This argument poses a caveat against the generalisation of theoretical models that may have significance and empirical support in some areas but not in some others. Namely, the three processes of regional integration mentioned in this text – NAFTA, Mercosur and the EU – correspond to quite different economic, cultural and linguistic traditions. While a profound knowledge of other experiences is always useful, we should be careful not to transfer models too easily from one place to the other (on this issue, see Born 1999; Fischer 1999; see also Kremnitz 1997).

Finally, the case of Mercosur invites us to reflect on existing language policy models in general. Traditional models rooted in static and rather ‘military’ views of spaces and territories will probably not be very helpful in explaining dynamic processes characterised by globalisation and massive migration. As in many other places and cases, Mercosur faces the challenge of transforming the linguistic orientations (compare Ruiz 1984) and policies of their actors from a position I have called ‘*de facto* multilingualism’, which conceives of language diversity as a problem, to an orientation of ‘plurilingualism’, which perceives linguistic heterogeneity in an enrichment perspective (Hamel 1997; 2000). With such a view, the sociolinguistic dynamics do not end up as a zero sum game – where one language enters and the other ones have to leave – but rather in a new integration where the potentials of the languages involved could add up and complement each other. We will therefore have to revise both the principle of territoriality and of personality (as rights to monolingualism) that have sustained traditional models of language policy, even at the risk of new ‘perverse effects’.<sup>29</sup>

In other words, we have to counteract the ideology of monolingualism (and of *de facto* multilingualism) which has proven extremely harmful for cultural diversity, massive bilingualism and minority languages. Its credo establishes the incompatibility of several languages in one territory, and it has its correlate on the level of the individual in the psycholinguistic concept of subtractive bilingualism: if minority language children want to acquire the national

<sup>29</sup> See Laponce’s (1987; 1989) classical critique of the perverse effects of language planning.

language successfully, their own language must go. In a similar way, as research has shown the fallacy of this view, there is no evidence that, in principle, several languages could not share and coexist in common social and territorial spaces.

As a matter of fact, the new relationship that emerges between Spanish and Portuguese in the Mercosur reflects an orientation that aims to amplify and to enlarge the 'discursive spaces' (Guimarães 1999) of both languages, and to create additive bilingualism and plurilingualism. Any language policy that promotes such an objective could not limit itself to a traditional policy of restricted domains or territories, or language homogenisation and standardisation. New concepts of intercultural communication (Moya 1996; Godenzzi Alegre 1996) are called for that integrate heterogeneous communicative systems based on the interface of diverse dialects, 'interlects' and languages, as well as models of reciprocal receptive bilingual communication. Last but not least, they will have to accommodate and enlarge the discursive and social spaces of subordinate minority languages as well.

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