UNESCO

Research Report

The Question of:

Promoting multilingualism as means to create greater understanding between people

Introduction

Humans, by nature, are communicative species. We love to express our desires, fears, difficulties, etc. One of the most common methods of showing these emotions are through using a language.

In the past, humans lived in small communities and each community had its own language. Most people never ventured outside their own community. This resulted in them knowing only a single language.

Today, globalization has caused small communities to merge into larger communities. Furthermore, with a click of a button, we can converse with individuals across the globe. Ergo, as we meet more people from outside our "community", we realize that we must learn more than one language to attain mastery in communication and thrive in the modern world. Hence, raising the question of;

Promoting multilingualism as means to create greater understanding between people

The Committee

UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture. UNESCO's programs contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals defined in Agenda 2030, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015. UNESCO's vision is to provide lasting and sincere support among people. Also, in order to provide this sincerity and support, it is stated that peace must be founded upon dialogue and mutual understanding and must be built upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity. UNESCO has ongoing projects to ensure peace and help people live as global citizens free of hate and intolerance.

In Leiden Model United Nations, in the UNESCO committee, we expect delegates to prepare resolutions whilst considering the vision and principles of UNESCO and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The rules of procedure of the committee is the standard MUN procedure with lobbying, submission of resolutions, then debate about the agenda issues. Since UNESCO is a committee that aims to ensure peace through international cooperation, the decisions made in the committee and new implementations should be routed from their vision, in peaceful and cooperatively manners.

Key Terms

Multilingualism –*When a person knows more than one language.*

Bilingualism – *When a person knows two languages.*

Monolingualism – *When a person speaks only one language.*

General Overview

History

The promotion of multilingualism to enhance understanding between individuals in an ancient issue.

2000 years ago, the ancient romans used to struggle with the same issue. In fact, the old roman poet, Homer, described it beautifully, "*Vox diuersa sonat populorum, tum tamen una est, /cum uerus patriae diceris esse pater."* This can be effectively translated to *"All these peoples speak different languages, and how it is in unison that they still proclaim you the true father of the homeland?"*. In simpler terms, Homer is trying to ask. *How do we make the people of an empire with so many languages understand each other?*

The Romans tackled the issue by implementing the two-language policy by making Greek and Latin the official languages. This implied that all students were taught Greek and Latin at school. However, most students would also speak a third language at home. This was usually the one native to their community.

After the fall of the Romans, most of their knowledge, findings and culture seemed to be on the track of being lost forever. Yet, thanks to the growth of the Arabic empire, manuscripts of the ancient Greeks and Romans would be transported to official Arabic libraries. In these libraries such as Bayt al-Hikmah (house of wisdom), the manuscripts of foreign languages would be translated to Arabic.

As we approached the Islamic Golden Age, the Arabic manuscripts were transported across the globe; from Spain to India. In many places this resulted in countries becoming monolingual. For example, in the country of Egypt, the official language changed from Egyptian to Arabic. However, in countries such as Spain or India, multilingualism started to play a great role in the general understanding between individuals. Many of these countries adopted Arabic as their second language to communicate with the world. Such adaptations still exist today. For example, in the country of Turkey, excluding the official language Turkish, Arabic is quite a well-known language.

Coming back to Europe, as the continent descended into its "dark ages", four languages became prominently spoken;

- **Spanish** – Since there was no need to officially speak Latin, many countries in the Iberian Peninsula started speaking their own language. This language was similar to Latin yet there were a few differences such as conjugation, devulcanization, palatalization, etc. Over time, this language became to be known as Spanish. Since countries in the Iberian Peninsula border many Arabic countries, modern Spanish is also influenced heavily by Arabic.

- **French** – Before the Romans, Southern-France used to be inhabited by people who were called "Gauls". After coming under Roman occupation, the Gauls continued speaking their

language and Latin was only spoken during work. At the same time, Northern-France, was a region not occupied by the Romans. The inhabitants of that territory, "Franks", would often times attack and occupy areas where the Gauls lived. Over time, a combination of Latin and the languages spoken by the Franks and Gaul merged to become the language that we call French. French was different from Latin in many aspects, but most importantly in Vowels and Consonents.

- **English** – After the Roman empire collapsed, many people from France, Netherlands, Germany and Denmark slowly moved to England. These people spoke different dialects of Latin. These dialects combined with the local language of Brittonic Celtic to form "Old English". To us, old English is completely different from modern English. A major change to Old English came when the Normans, who spoke French attacked England. The conqueror's language merged with the settlers to form "Medieval English". With the help of Shakespeare the medieval English became the English we are accustomed to today.

Although history has had its problems with multilingualism, the real issue came during the industrial era (1800's). Due to inventions of the steam trains, cars, telephones, etc. not only did we progress greatly as society, but the world also became a smaller place. "Globalization" brought with it the impending problem of communication. Though times have changed, the issue of the languages remains with us today.

<u>Present day - Problems</u>

Today many countries fear to adopt multilingualism as it comes with a few problems that must be overcome;

- *Assimilation of languages* – A very common phenomenon that occurs in multilingual communities is that since people use multiple languages daily, those languages end up merging with each other. People inside the community do not even observe the merging of languages. However, to an outsider who is visiting the community, it is very difficult to comprehend what is going on at hand.

- *Loss of language* – Speaking multiple languages can be difficult and most of the time, it can result in the loss of ability on one of the languages. This is quite common in families where a kid speaks one language at home and one language at school (usually, English). Over time, the language the kids speak at home worsens.

- *Death of nationalism/culture* – Many people who are nationalists believe that multilingualism could cause the "end" of their country and the culture. The basic idea behind this is that the underlying pillar of a nation is its language. When a country promotes multilingualism of other languages than its own, it destroys that pillar and brings end to its respective culture.

- *Inadept language education systems* – Nearly all education systems offer a foreign language that a student can learn. In many international schools, the foreign language usually allows

the student to fit into the community better. Unfortunately, most of these education systems fail to teach the language correctly. There are various reasons for this such as passive participation by the students, no motivation, old learning materials, etc.

The above are 4 reasons that show why the promotions of multilingualism could be a challenge. It also shows why many countries are tentative of promoting multilingualism

<u>Present day – Advantages</u>

Regardless of some problems that need to be overcome, there are many advantages to the promotion of multilingualism;

- *Sharper perception of language and greater cognitive ability*– Research has shown that people who are multilingual can understand the dynamics and complexities of languages much quicker. Multilinguals can also pick up new languages much quicker. Furthermore, people who are multilinguals have a much larger cognitive ability than monolinguals. In fact, research done by various universities concluded that students in highs school who know more than one language, generally score a better grade.

- *More open individuals* – Since each language can represent a culture, those who know a lot of languages, generally have a much greater knowledge into different cultures. Multilinguals can also can "take a step back" and reflect on their current culture. This result in them gaining insightful information and making the individual more "open" in general.

- *Preservation of culture* – Multilinguals who become fluent in a language in some ways also become fluent in the culture associated with language. This can be very useful in cases where a person becomes fluent in a dying language.

- *Greater understanding* – Many arguments (even wars) occur because of miscommunication. If we decided to become multilingual and learn each other's language, not only will there be greater co-operation but also more empathy and understanding. This will naturally lead to a better world to live in.

These are only a few of the reasons why we should work on promoting multilingualism.

Major Parties Involved

There are a few parties involved in which it is very important that multilingualism should be promoted;

EU – The European Union boasts 28 members and 24 languages. For the union to work properly, ensuring proper communication is important. The EU spends 1% of its annual budget on translators. It strongly encourages each country to promote multilingualism. Yet, a larger percentage of the population have strong tendency to use their native language only regardless of the situation.

Luxembourg – Luxembourg is home to 4 major languages; English, German, French and Luxembourgish. Therefore, it is very important that it promotes multilingualism to improve understanding.

Singapore – Singapore also hosts 4 major languages: English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. Implementing multilingualism is a must in there too.

India – English and Hindi are the official languages in India. However, each state has its own language. In countries such as India, which boast a wide array of languages, it is important that the method of communication is clear.

South Africa – South Africa has 11 official languages. This means that communication can be very difficult if the idea of multilingualism is not promoted.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Each country has had its own way to solve this issue. However, the United Nations has attempted to implement multilingualism into its states twice. Below are the resolutions;

- Resolution JIU/REP/2002/11 – This resolution was the first resolution to be published regarding multilingualism. It is 49 paged (see further reading 1) and has many good recommendations; for example, the creation of annual country meetings strictly related to multilingualism.
- Resolution CL-145/INF/10 – This resolution builds up on the previous resolution. It is 73 pages (see further reading 2). It has great clauses such as appointing a senior coordinator for multilingualism in each country.

The Future

Like discussed in the "General Overview" section, there are three main problems that need to be overcome regarding multilingualism;

- Assimilation of language
- Loss of language
- Loss of nationalism and culture
- Inadept language education systems

These can be overcome in many ways. For "assimilation of language", the government could interview people and create "language brochures" for each community (community can either be the city or the state). Tourists traveling to the community, can use these brochures to understand the language of the place they are visiting.

For example, we could create a committee that works on recovering dying languages. This committee would work to interview people who know dying languages and then try to create subsequent language course for people to enrol in.

Regarding "loss of nationalism and culture", we could create more national heritages which not only maintain culture but promote the idea of nationalism. Furthermore, the government could try to improve the societal integration of expats who speak other languages.

Fixing the language education system is difficult. However, the first step that could be taken is to give the students a choice of languages to study. Although this is a more expensive approach, it will give the students more motivation. Furthermore, students should be encouraged to talk in their new language. Methods of this could include foreign exchange trip or some form of online communication with foreigners. The final method to improving the language education system could be through giving choices of learning materials to the student. Students often have a different style of learning than what they are forced to do at class. Ergo, teachers/schools should create different learning materials for the different types of learner. It will then be up to the student which learning material they should use. This is only beneficial to the student, but it also gives more motivation for the student to learn the language.

Questions a Resolution Must Answer (Q.A.R.M.A.)

These are a few questions the resolution must answer. Do remember to not limit yourself to these questions alone! Try to also create your own questions 😊

- How does multilingualism overcome the problems stated above (assimilation of culture, loss of language and loss of nationalism/culture)?

- The definition of multilingualism can vary, so how do we create a universal definition of multilingualism?

- How can we inform citizens across the world of the benefits of multilingualism?
- What are some initiatives that can be introduced to motivate people to learn a new language?
- Will the Ancient Roman method of implementing "official languages" work today?
- What action must be taken for people who do not want to learn more than one language?
- If a person has learned a language, how do we make sure he does not forget it over time?

Further Reading

- http://www.fao.org/3/me743e/me743e.pdf - Resolution 1
- https://www.unjiu.org/sites/www.unjiu.org/files/jiu_document_files/products/en/reports-notes/JIU%20Products/JIU_REP_2002_11_English.pdf - Resolution 2
- https://www.mnn.com/lifestyle/arts-culture/stories/9-of-the-worlds-most-multilingual-countries - 9 most multilingual countries
- https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/02/speaking-more-languages-boost-economic-growth/ - Benifits of being multilingual

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