

OUR IDENTITY IN DANGER : THE DEATH OF OUR DIALECTS !

Kenerwerk, Norman, Morlockese, Basque, Inari Sami, Breton... do those words speak to you ? Have you heard about them ? Do you know what they represent and how important they are to our identity and cultural heritage ? No ? Then read further to learn everything about them !



Unesco Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger

Out of 6000 languages that exist in the world, 3000 are now disappearing ! How did we come to such a situation ? And can we save those languages ? This is what we are going to answer here, but first I want to talk about a tool that helped me to understand this topic better : UNESCO atlas of the World 's Languages in Danger. This shows us what languages are in danger on a scale (from vulnerable to extinct) and the purpose of it is to raise awareness about a language's situation and a conference given by AMC specialists about the solutions to save languages and dialects from death. And I know you are thinking "Why is this important?" Well, just a little reminder here : languages are part of our intangible

legacy, classified at the UNESCO. Did it clear your mind ? Without further ado, let's jump into the topic !

First, we need to understand what are the reasons those languages are in danger. The first thing that everyone would say is that it's no longer transmitted to the younger generation which leads to the oversight of the languages/dialects. Well, it's true, but there is more behind that fact. Once, the language's disappearance was linked to the disappearance of nations, due to wars, epidemics, or low births. However, nowadays, the major factor is the fact that a majority of us tend to adopt the Lingua Franca or the national language, at the expense of native languages .As an example, we can talk about France, and its politics of Francisation that took part during the last century. In fact, France has forbidden the schools to teach dialects, "patois" in French, to the children , as a consequence , many patois disappeared or are severely endangered, such as Gascon, Breton or Basque. So, a lot of dialects are in danger and this is the fault of the nationalist politics that happened in many countries. Moreover, the lingua franca is taking more and more place in our society, and this thanks (or not) to globalization. Besides, as a lingua franca, English is used in a lot of

different fields, like travels, on the Internet,air traffic, advertising and much more but especially for commerce and business. The expanse of English has a lot of advantages, there's no doubt about that, but this leads to the death of languages, like Mortlockese (a dialect from Hawaii with only 9000 remaining speakers), or Tamil in India. For the last dialect that I mentioned, Tamil, the situation is critical, teachers teach subjects in English and yet, some of them don't speak proper English ! This leads to economic problems, many students don't have the level required at the end of their scholarly, and a lot won't find a job. Another problem is that if children can't speak English, or the official mother tongue of their countries, they might be marginalized by society, this could be a problem for their social integration. We can also mention the mixed weddings, the one speaking an endangered language is more likely to stop speaking it because their partners do not speak it, or the fact that some languages are just transmitted orally, and if there's no one remaining to speak it, then it will die without the world knowing it has ever existed !

This loss could be a problem for our identity, our legacy, because in fact we built ourselves around it. I identify myself as a French citizen, and a big part of the construction of that identity is possible because I speak French, and this applies to everyone. Plus, globalisation can be scary for some people, they feel lost, like they don't belong to anything, they can't identify themselves to it, and having a dialect only spoken in their area/country could be an anchor point. So, it's very important to keep those languages alive. I will now list some solutions that I've heard in the Languages in Danger conference, given by AMC's specialists. The first thing that comes to mind is of course the schools ! In fact, if we want to revitalize those languages, we need to teach it to the younger generation, so bilingual classes seem to be the most logical thing to do. We don't want just to teach it for two hours per week, but to make it a language that is really used by the pupils, so that they can fluently speak it when they are together or at home. Creating some institutions could also be a possibility for those languages to be revitalized. It could take the form of an association or academies. Another thing mentioned in the conference was that museums participate in the revitalization of a language, because it could bring those languages to light. As an example, Inari Sami , a

language spoken in North Finland considered as severely endangered (only 300 speakers remain), has a museum to make people discover everything about the language, its speakers, the culture and traditions linked to it. However, one of the main criticisms about it is that in a museum it's mostly dead, and except giving the endangered language some credits, it does nothing tangible/concrete to save it. They also spoke about all the cultural initiatives, thanks to books and music it's easier to make people interested in the language. What I found the most interesting was the initiative from the Inari Sami speakers, who translated the movie Frozen in their language : what a clever way to encourage children to learn it and the comic Tintin translated in Kenerwerk (a celtic language from Cornwall) ! But the most relevant way to spread it is ...Social media ! Spread it on those platforms : in our very connected society, what's the most efficient way to spread something ? Instagram, Facebook, Twitter... It's easy, fast but more importantly it can reach a lot of people. So share your favorite music, translated movie, book on social media to make sure more people get to know your dialect ! Or even create some apps to learn it, Babel for example, as the Basque speakers did.

To put it in a nutshell, we could easily stop this problem just by taking, like five minutes to share some content in those endangered languages ! Of course, we also need some official schools to make it lasting nevertheless we have many different keys to make those languages alive again !
A special thanks to all the specialists of the Conference.

