ECDA-7002: Societal Bilingualism

Foreword

This is the second 20-credit module in the MA course, Bilingualism and Multilingualism. Societal bilingualism covers many sub-dimensions which, in turn, involve a multitude of variables emanating from the contact of two or more languages within various linguistic contexts, ranging from small social groups or communities to large countries. This Guidance Handbook is designed to introduce and discuss the main aspects of this sociolinguistic aspect of bilingualism and to assist the student in fulfilling the assessment requirements of the two assignments related to the module, details of which are provided below.

However, although the handbook provides a sound introduction to the main issues, it cannot possibly cover the work of all academics who have made a valuable contribution to this field of study. It is for this reason that students are also advised to read related chapters from the book which accompanies this course, namely, "Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism" (Baker, 2011, 2017). It will be seen that **Chapters 3, 4, 17, 18 and 19** are particularly relevant. Other readings also provide means by which knowledge and understanding of various issues discussed in the Guidance Handbook can be enhanced and enriched.
These are:

Reading 1: UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages. Language Vitality and Endangerment. Document submitted to the International Expert Meeting on UNESCO Programme Safeguarding of Endangered Languages. Paris: 10–12 March, 2003.

Reading 2: Appel, R. & Muysken, P. Language Contact and Bilingualism. London: Edward Arnold, 1987.

Reading 3: Edwards, J. Multilingualism. London: Routledge, 1994.

Reading 4: Dorian, N.C. Minority and Endangered Languages.
In T.K. Bhatia, & W.C. Ritchie (eds) The Handbook of Bilingualism. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.

ECDA-7002 Assessment
Coursework: 100%
The assessment of module ECDA-7002 involves two assignments which are *unequally weighted*; the first being **60%** and the second **40%** of the final award**.** Students will be provided with details at the start of the module. Although assignments can vary from one semester to another, the weighting and specified length of each will apply until any further notice.

The following are provided ***as examples only:***

Assignment 1 (approximately 3,500 words)
1. By referring to specific examples, discuss analytically the main factors which can ensure or undermine the vitality of a minority language within a political bilingual or multilingual context. (60%)

Assignment 2 (Seminar presentation, 30 minutes)
By referring to various theoretical frameworks, analyse the key factors in the revitalization or language shift of a specific minority language within a bilingual or multilingual context. (40%)

ECDA-7002: Societal Bilingualism

Introduction

The study of bilingualism and multilingualism is seen as dividing into two broad areas:

1. Bilingualism / multilingualism in the individual person
2. Societal bilingualism / multilingualism relating to the use of two or more languages within society.

Each of these two broad areas, however, covers a range of aspects. Bilingualism in the individual encompasses, for example:

- linguistic competence
- psycholinguistic, cognitive and intellectual aspects
- language acquisition

Societal bilingualism encompasses political, economic and historical aspects as well as issues related to educational systems. It can, therefore, involve aspects such as:

- language contact
- language and identity
- language maintenance, shift, revitalisation or death
- language planning
- bilingual/ multilingual education

The course framework outlined in the Programme of Study Handbook illustrates how various aspects have been allocated to different modules. The first module (ECDA-7001) concentrated on bilingualism in the individual and addressed aspects related generally to linguistic competence including, for example, defining what we mean by being bilingual, levels of bilingual proficiency and methods of measuring competence. However, it would be both misleading and artificial to suggest that a clear dichotomy exists between individual bilingualism on the one hand and societal bilingualism on the other since the interface is often extremely thin. For instance, the linguistic behaviour of an individual can be influenced even *without* direct social contact or engagement with others. Conversely, as we discovered in the previous module, interference is one phenomenon which can characterise language use on an *individual* basis but which emanates ultimately from contact with other languages or speakers of those languages on a *societal* level. Nevertheless, albeit for reasons of clarity alone, it seems advisable at this stage to investigate aspects of societal bilingualism separately, although

the permeability of this relationship will become increasingly evident from time to time.
As stated previously in the Foreword, a very detailed account of the multi-faceted nature of societal bilingualism and multilingualism is difficult to encompass in a guidance handbook such as this. The aim, therefore, is to address the main aspects of the field of sociolinguistics and to provide a basis for further study. However, the book which accompanies this course, along with the various readings attached, provide adequate elaboration on the issues discussed in order to enhance and enrich one's knowledge and understanding. Students are, therefore, strongly advised to read **Chapters 3, 4, 17, 18 and 19 of Baker (2011) or (2017)** which accompanies this course, and **Readings 1-4.**

During the course of this module, the student is again reminded that what is discussed with regard to bilingual situations also applies to multilingual contexts, unless mentioned otherwise.

Societal bilingualism and multilingualism as a field of academic study
We shall define societal bilingualism as a context in which two or more *individuals* use language for the purpose of communicating with each other.The relationship between individual and societal bilingualism is reflected in Fishman's (1965) often quoted question, "*Who* speaks *what* language to *whom* and *when*?" The study of societal bilingualism, therefore, is essentially the study of *language contact*. This, inevitably, has a strong *dynamic* dimension which makes it multi-faceted. As Appel & Muysken (1987: 7) state:

> Bilingualism or language contact in itself is not a scientific discipline. It is an issue, a subject or a field of study to which various disciplines can contribute. The disciplines can interact or, on the other hand, function independently, because of differing viewpoints, methodologies or terminologies.

The global context
It would be useful in the first instance to provide an outline of the current diversity of languages which exists on a global scale. Estimates vary. Since the end of the nineteenth century we have had the following estimates of the number of languages which exist:

Whitney (1874) = 1,000
Bodmer (1944) = 1,500
Whatmough (1956) = 3,000

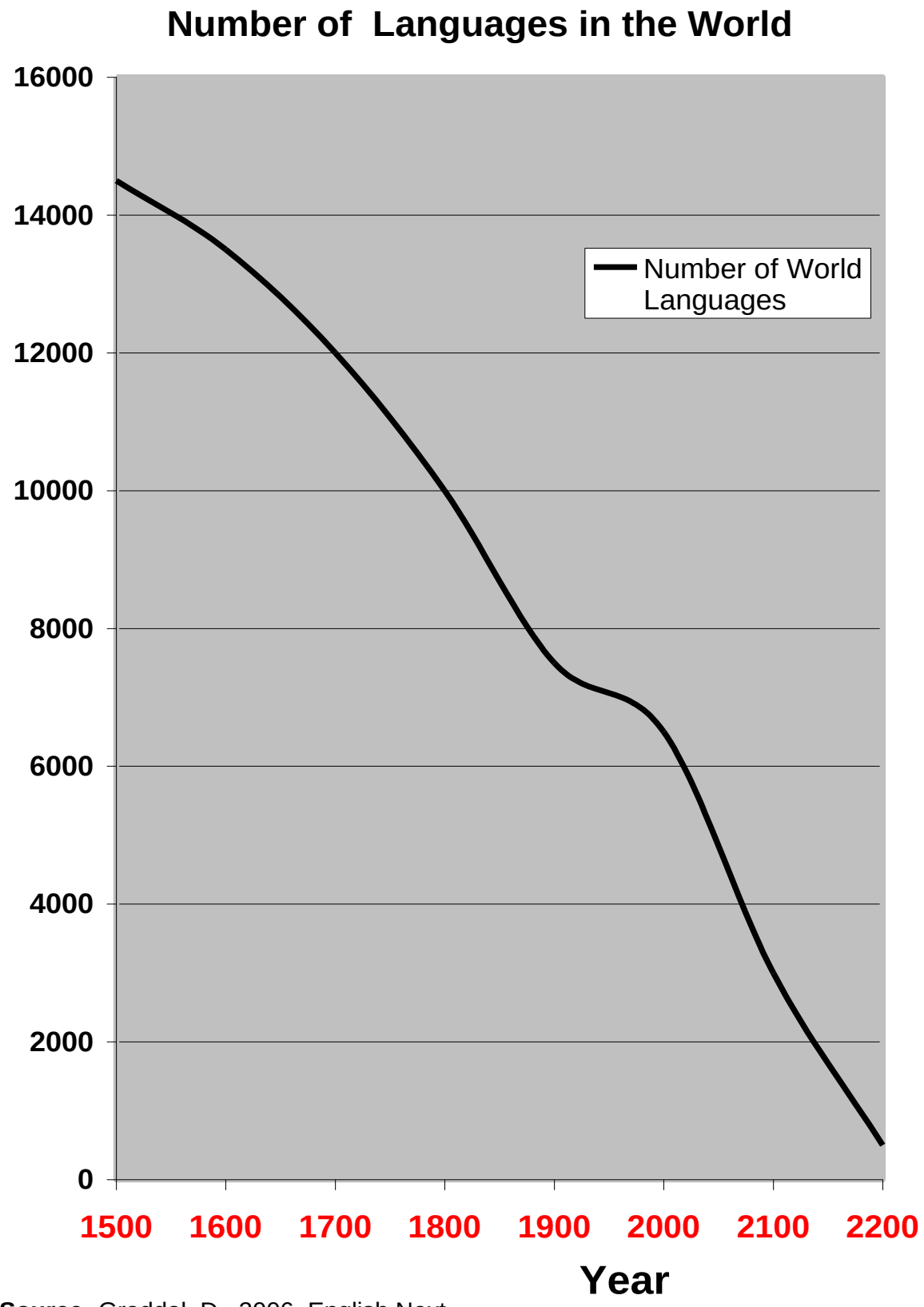
However, it is currently believed that there are still between 5,500 and 7,000 languages in existence, despite the historical extinction of many. Austin (2008) puts this number currently at approximately, 6,900 pointing to the range of numbers of respective speakers (from millions to as few as one or two unevenly distributed geographically and across speaker populations) and maintaining that only 4% of all languages (approximately 275) are spoken by 96% of the world's population. Conversely, only 4% of the world's population speaks 96% of the world's languages.
As we shall see later (Table 1), "Ethnologue" (Lewis, 2009) puts the number at 6, 909 with languages distributed globally as follows:

Ewrop	3.4%
Americas	14.4%
Africa	30.5%
Asia (approx.)	33.6%
Pacific	18.1%

Graddol (2006) provides a graphic illustration of the chronology of the reduction in the number of languages being spoken world-wide since the year 1500 (Figure 1), maintaining that, by the year 2200, the total of over 14,000 which existed previously would be reduced to only a few hundred. As Figure 1 also illustrates, the *rate* of this reduction could be described as being dramatic as well as constant.

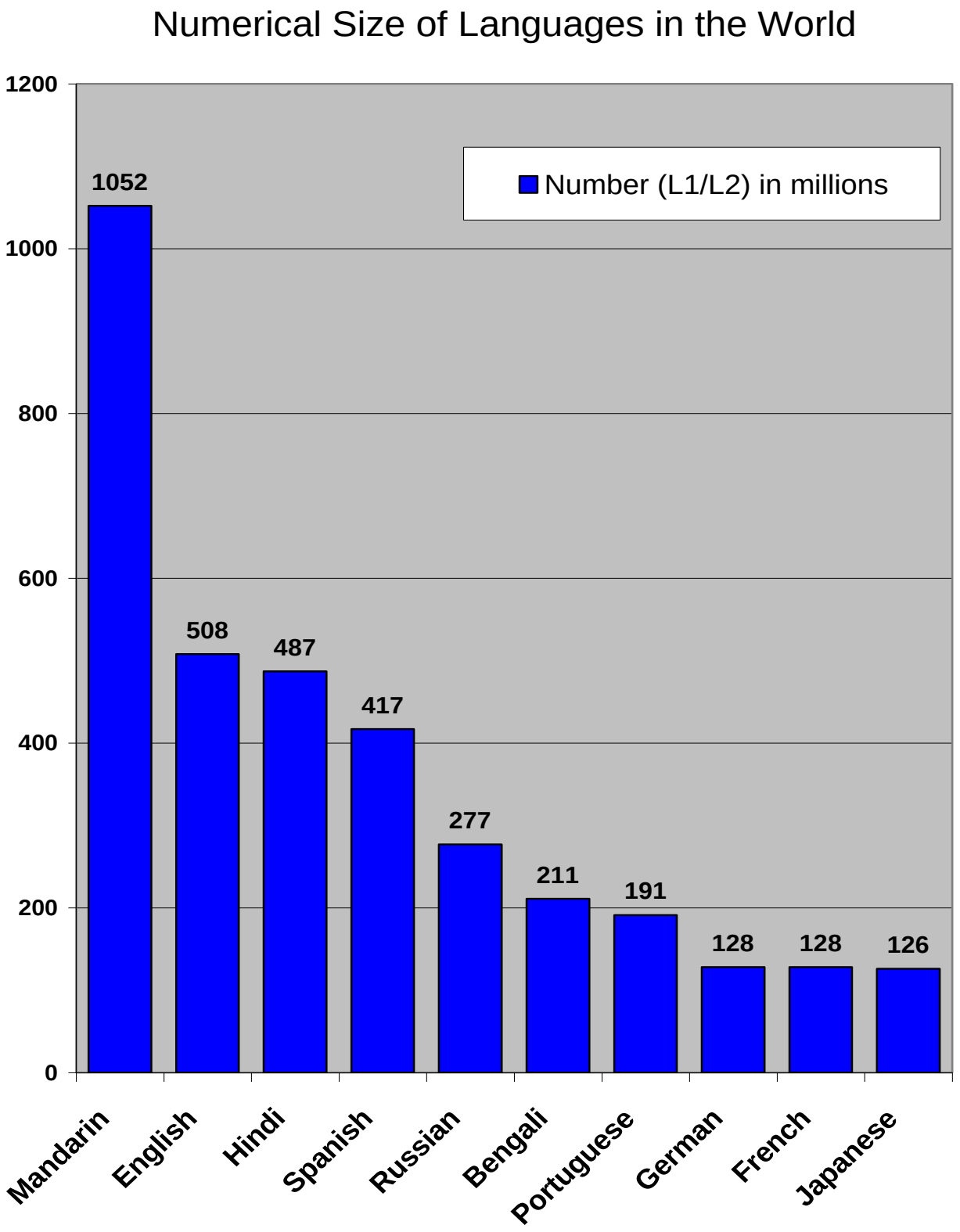
Graddol (2006) (Figure 2) also provides a graphical illustration of the world's major languages in terms of the current *number* of combined first language (L1) and second language (L2) speakers, with Mandarin (due to the obvious demographic effect of the large Chinese population) being much greater in terms of the *number of speakers*, having over twice the number (1,052 million) of a major global language such as English (508 million). However, as we shall see later, in terms of language *vitality*, one needs to be mindful of the fallacy of assessing *all* languages according to such criteria. Of course, despite the fact that Mandarin has more speakers than English, the former is not as widely spread globally and, therefore, is currently less powerful than English in terms of its global adoption as a *lingua franca*.

Figure 1



Source: Graddol, D., 2006, English Next. London: British Council

Figure 2



Source: Graddol, D., 2006, English Next.
London: British Council

According to Austen (2008), so-called major languages (namely, Mandarin, English, Arabic, Hindi, Spanish, Russian, Bengali, Portugese, German, French and Japanese) account for 40% of the world's population, each having over 150 million speakers. However, more than half of all languages have less than 10,000 speakers and more than a quarter have less than 1,000 speakers, the global overall average number of speakers of all languages being approximately only 6,000. Since 20,000 is considered to be a "danger-point", there are about 4,000 languages under threat. 472 of the languages listed in the 2009 *Ethnologue* (Lewis, 2009) are classified as virtually extinct with less than a hundred speakers. Approximately 50 languages have currently only one speaker, as found in Australia and the Americas, for example. It is estimated that approximately 50% of the world's languages are expected to die due to not being transmitted to children, which means that only around 300 to 600 languages (5%-10%) are deemed safe in the "long term".

Crystal (2000) refers to Kasabe one of the Cameroon's languages which died on November 5th, 1995, stating:

> When a language dies which has never been recorded in some way, it is as if it has never been.(Crystal, 2000:2)

The largest numbers of languages are found in Africa and Asia, and numbers are much fewer elsewhere. Papua New Guinea has 820 languages as a single island; Vanatu has the highest language density in the world with 120 languages shared amongst a population of 100,000 (Austen, 2008). Ethnologue (Lewis, 2009) provides the following data:

Table 1: Distribution of languages by area of origin

Area	Living languages		Number of speakers			
	Count	*Percent*	*Count*	*Percent*	*Mean*	*Median*
Africa	2,110	30.5	726,453,403	12.2	344,291	25,200
Americas	993	14.4	50,496,321	0.8	50,852	2,300
Asia	2,322	33.6	3,622,771,264	60.8	1,560,194	11,100
Europe	234	3.4	1,553,360,941	26.1	6,638,295	201,500
Pacific	1,250	18.1	6,429,788	0.1	5,144	980
Totals	6,909	100.0	5,959,511,717	100.0	862,572	7,560

Source:Ethnologue (Lewis, 2009)

Only approximately one-third of languages have a written form, most existing in spoken form only. As Austen (2008) points out, most of those which do have acquired it relatively recently, often due to education systems established during the 19th and 20th centuries. Most have taken their writing systems from neighbouring languages; for example, in the way that the Romans historically borrowed from the Etruscans who, in turn, had borrowed from the Phoenecians. Writing systems have developed independently only a few times in history. Nevertheless, even if not written down, languages have their own oral literature and much written literature originates in an oral form e.g. Homer's Odyssey and the Welsh "Mabinogi".

Various academics have classified languages according to their *vitality;* one classification being:

- Safe languages
- Languages in danger
- Dead languages

Krauss (1992) adopts the term *"moribund"* to refer to those where there is a lack of transference between generations. For example, in Alaska it is estimated that this is happening in only two out of twenty indigenous languages.
Kincade (1991) adopts the following categories:
Viable languages: populations of sufficient numbers without any threat to long-term survival;
Viable but small languages: having more than c.1,000 speakers and in isolated communities where the language is a characteristic of identity;
Endangered languages: spoken by sufficient numbers to make survival possible under favourable circumstances;
Nearly extinct languages: considered to be beyond the possibility of revitalisation and usually spoken by a few of the older generation;
Extinct languages: where the last speaker has already died.

Wurm (1998) categorises *weak* languages in the following manner:
Languages having the potential to die: being under economic disadvantage, under the threat of a majority language and beginning to lose speakers amongst children;
Languages in danger: no children, or only a few, speaking the language and where the youngest competent speakers are adults;
Languages in serious danger: where the youngest competent speakers ar 50+ years of age;
Dying languages: where there are only a few speakers left and being generally amongst the older generation;
Dead languages: no remaining speakers.

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) (2009) has designed a Language Vitality and Endangerment tool (**Reading 1**) and asesses linguistic vitality on the basis of nine criteria:

1. Intergenerational language transmission
2. Absolute number of speakers
3. Proportion of speakers within the total population (that is, the critical mass)
4. Trends in existing language domains
5. Response to new domains and media

6. Materials for language education and literacy
7. Governmental and institutional governmental attitudes and policies, including official status and use
8. Community members' attitudes towards their own language
9. Amount and quality of documentation.

On the basis of these criteria and according to their levels of endangerment, languages can be placed in one of 6 categories as being:

- safe: that is, spoken by every generation and transmitted from one generation to the next
- unsafe: spoken by some children in all domains and by all children in some domains
- definitely in danger: spoken by the parental generation and above and where transmission to a lower generation has ceased
- in severe danger: spoken only by the grandparental generation and above
- critically endangered: spoken by very few speakers of a grandparental generation
- extinct

Leonard (2008) adopts a continuum of language danger. On the left are placed strong languages and on the right those which are not spoken any longer but have been sufficiently documented to enable revitalisation. Between the two extremes are placed minority languages and those not being transmitted across generations. The more to the left a language can be located, therefore, the greater are its perceived chances of survival. Another method of categorising languages in danger is according to the number of *domains* and *purposes* for which the language is used e.g. for religious purposes only. Van Hoorde (1998:6) makes the following observation with regard to Dutch:

> Dutch may not be threatened with extinction in the short or medium term, but it is in danger of losing domains. It could eventually become just a colloquial language, a language you use at home to speak with your family – the language you can best express your emotions in - but not the one you use for the serious things in life: work, money, science, technology.(Van Hoorde, 1998:6)

Historically, language surveys have been few in number, incomplete and statistically problematic due to being unable to decide whether some languages were independent or variants of the same. There was also the

possibility that some were different names for the same language. Such issues raise fundamental questions.

The huge numbers of languages which seem to exist in close proximity inevitably causes us to ask what is a language?
Can we differentiate between a language and a dialect?
As Austen (2008) points out, common criteria which have mistakenly been applied to differentiate between languages and dialects include whether or not they are:

- written or spoken
- rural and highly variable or urban and standardised

We should also mention the mistaken perception that speakers of different dialects are mutually intelligible whereas speakers of different languages are not. The status of the spoken word as a "language" is often determined by *political* criteria. Austen (2008) refers to Weinrich's joking observation that "a language is a dialect with an army and a navy", making the point that it is the the *political* status of the speakers of a particular language which determines its status as a language or dialect. Danish, Swedish and Norwegian, therefore, despite being quite mutually intelligible, are seen as separate languages because they belong to separate countries. Chinese is, therefore, referred to as one language, though speakers of Mandarin (North China) and Cantonese (South China) cannot understand each other. Serbo-Croat, the language of the old Yugoslavia is now treated as Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian in the wake of political changes (Austen, 2008).