

Conclusion

This Guidance Handbook has attempted to introduce students to the main issues involved in the study of societal bilingualism: namely, language maintenance, language shift, language death and revitalisation; each, as we have seen, being inextricably linked to the other and often difficult to disentangle. As stated at the beginning, societal bilingualism encompasses a wide range of sociolinguistic dimensions involving innumerable variables which can impinge directly or indirectly upon the vitality of a language and its ability to survive in an increasingly linguistically homogeneous world where minority languages, despite being *academically* categorised as varying in levels of endangerment, continually face the same threat of extinction in the face of increasing globalisation. In view of the scale of the current threat to the world's languages, Fishman (1999: 57) provides a timely warning:

“Language itself is not enough of a bulwark to defend threatened cultures and identities. Languages cannot be the ultimate defence for threatened cultures and identities, because threatened languages themselves need defences; the distinctive values, cultural practices and beliefs (including uncompromising identity-beliefs) that make a distinctive language necessary and even possible.”

We shall conclude on a positive note by quoting from the UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment document (2003) which is included as Reading 1:

“The world faces new challenges in keeping its languages alive and well. It is time for the peoples of the world to pool their resources and build on the strengths of their linguistic and cultural diversity... We all share the responsibility of ensuring that no languages will disappear and that all languages will be maintained and perpetuated into the future generations.”

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