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### Schriftleitung:

Prof. Dr. Friederike Klippel

Prof. Dr. Gudrun Ziegler

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Prof. Dr. Friederike Klippel

Prof. Dr. Gudrun Ziegler

Prof. Dr. Sabine Doff

Prof. Dr. Dietmar Rösler

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### Kontaktadresse:

forum-sprache@hueber.de

www.forum-sprache.de

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## LINGUAPAX - Working for peace and linguistic diversity

Alícia Fuentes-Calle

LINGUAPAX originated from a UNESCO experts meeting in 1987 which was followed up by a series of workshops and international meetings focused on the promotion of plurilingual education as a means of education for intercultural dialogue. LINGUAPAX emerged therefore as a UNESCO program devoted to the search and operation of ways to relate linguistic diversity, multilingual education and peace. The LINGUAPAX Schools network was established soon afterwards to embody the LINGUAPAX program in the elementary and secondary education contexts.

### A little bit of history

In the year 2001, coinciding with a growing awareness of the loss of the world's linguistic heritage, the UNESCO Center of Catalonia decided to host the LINGUAPAX project and establish its headquarters in Barcelona. LINGUAPAX is now a non-governmental organization working for the preservation, promotion and activation of linguistic diversity worldwide. Its main aim is to rally linguistic communities worldwide around the core idea that languages are to be harnessed as the basic generators of cultural, epistemic and creative diversity. LINGUAPAX has traditionally developed activities along three major lines: consultations to state and substate language policy makers, collaboration in language revitalization projects; and elaboration of (multilingual) teaching materials advocating the values of linguistic and cultural diversity.

In 2006, LINGUAPAX established an international network of organisations, from every big geolinguistic area in the world, involved in the safeguarding of linguistic diversity and in the identification of local projects to be promoted according to a bottom-up logic. These partners became regional LINGUAPAX delegations, acting both autonomously and interactively, with the capacity to carry out specific projects suited to local needs and harmonising with the recent normative texts and declarations promoted by the main intergovernmental institutions. Current LINGUAPAX delegations are based in Yaounde (LINGUAPAX-Africa), Mexico City (LINGUAPAX-Latin America), Tokyo - Kuala Lumpur (LINGUAPAX-Asia), Bilbao - Bremen (LINGUAPAX-Europe), Noumea (LINGUAPAX-Pacific), University of Alberta (LINGUAPAX-North America).

Together with the worldwide network of delegations, LINGUAPAX works with an international Advisory Board formed by (socio)linguistic and educational experts coming from academia and activism from 15 countries in the world.

### Aims

The LINGUAPAX approach to multilingual education as a way to foster peace is based on the belief that promoting multilingual education is the most effective way to preserve linguistic diversity – the management of cultural and linguistic diversity being one major indicator of the quality of democracy. Through its major ways of action (assessing linguistic policies, promoting community-based linguistic revitalization projects and the production of multilingual materials), LINGUAPAX engages in the exploration of how to harness the potential of linguistic diversity and multilingualism as a key element for a necessary rethinking of Humanism. For the sake of a Humanism grounded on linguistic diversity for peace, through the continued action of its network of delegations, LINGUAPAX can contribute to progressively bridging the gap between two emanations of the hierarchisation of languages: *cultures* (channelled by those many

small, local or endangered languages; languages and cultures usually addressed by Anthropology) and *knowledge* (the one that normally feeds the Humanities, usually channelled by the small group of languages that produce and distribute knowledge), a double academic standard, eventually translating into a double standard of the very human being: *anthropos* vs. *humanitas*, as Japanese author Nishitani Osamu put it<sup>1</sup>. Every language, every communication culture/ethos can (re)generate (the) Humanities. Really plural or pluri-versal Humanities should rethink their role in a globalising world and translate its new approaches and practices into the education field.

By presenting the learner with communicative practices and cultures (communication *ethoi*) different from his/her own, language teaching offers an excellent means of promoting values and representations favouring the development of a culture of peace.

LINGUAPAX, to promote understanding between communities and peace through the teaching of languages, has the following aims:

- ▶ to contribute to the promotion of plurilingual education, especially through teacher training;
- ▶ to direct plurilingual education towards a culture of peace;
- ▶ to prepare teaching instruments to aid plurilingual education and the teaching of foreign languages.

### Activities and projects

The LINGUAPAX activities in the field of education take the form of:

- ▶ the organisation of training seminars directed at professionals in the field of teaching, especially the field of plurilingual education;
- ▶ the preparation, practical testing and publication of teaching material;
- ▶ the creation of an international school network that shares the LINGUAPAX philosophy.

A whole series of materials have been produced as “Multilingual Teaching Units”, some of them in Catalan and others in multilingual editions (English, French, Catalan, Spanish) (<http://www.LINGUAPAX.org/en/plurilingual-education>).

A holistic approach to linguistic diversity nurtures every LINGUAPAX action, in the educational domain and in the others. If we are to think in a New Communicative Order, not only “threatened” languages but also “threatening” languages are to be fully included. We need to generate a balanced and harmonious order where “dangerous” languages may even help out endangered languages. Lachman Khubchandani insisted on this during our last LINGUAPAX Advisory Board and delegations meeting held in Barcelona, in September 2009. He speaks from the perspective of the plurilingual *ethos* of Indian society, where speakers manage the linguistic diversity they create on a daily basis, where languages thrive in fuzzy borders, as is usually the case in many autochthonous multilingual societies in Asia. From such a perspective, the European construct, viewing languages as clear-cut entities and the conflictive opposition between majority and minority languages, becomes an exotic notion, one embedded in monolingual cultures and also in many of our language teaching approaches.

Languages are the cornerstone of cultural diversity, the basic generator of knowledge. Linguistic diversity is not just to be preserved from a fossilised heritage perspective, but rather as a generator of contemporary culture, or in other words, as culture to be considered contemporary in its own right. The multi-layered diversity inherent in linguistic diversity embraces not only different codes (languages), but also particular cultural representations on communication and on the linguistic dimension of human life and coexistence. These are also part of the epistemic capital of linguistic communities.

LINGUAPAX’s commitment to the preservation and activation of linguistic diversity worldwide is inscribed in this direction and is fuelled by the enthusiasm of the different

1 Osamu, N. (2006). *Anthropos and Humanitas: Two Western Concepts of “Human Being”*. *Translation, biopolitics, colonial difference*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

regional delegations and experts of our Advisory Board contributing to a more interesting and fair human coexistence through the promotion of languages and multilingual environments.

LINGUAPAX's mission, operated little by little over the years, over many different territories in the world, is to enhance the potential of linguistic diversity to generate a more peaceful and creative human life. In the quest for a more “balanced and harmonious communicative order”, LINGUAPAX, via its delegations and the multiple perspectives on language(s) that its international network keep contributing, may help create a space for the different linguistic communities to thrive, a way to preserve and activate genuine voices by the introduction of some of the LINGUAPAX principles in the educational context.

If you would like to learn more or join LINGUAPAX activities in your corner of the world, then contact your regional office at Yaounde (LINGUAPAX-Africa), Mexico City (LINGUAPAX-Latin America), Tokyo - Kuala Lumpur (LINGUAPAX-Asia), Bilbao - Bremen (LINGUAPAX-Europe), Noumea (LINGUAPAX-Pacific), or the University of Alberta (LINGUAPAX-North America) or go to the main LINGUAPAX website at [www.linguapax.org](http://www.linguapax.org) ([info@linguapax.org](mailto:info@linguapax.org)).

Alicia Fuentes-Calle  
Head of the Linguistic Diversity Department – LINGUAPAX  
UNESCO Center of Catalonia (Barcelona, Spain).  
E-mail: [a.fuentescale@unescomcat.org](mailto:a.fuentescale@unescomcat.org)