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## MINORITY LANGUAGE MEDIA & THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Jacques GUYOT

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For the last ten years, the development of audio-visual and multimedia technologies has been providing a vast variety of worldwide channels, opening up outlets and prospects for alternative or community media.

In the meantime, as a reaction against state centralized policies as well as against the deterritorialization of traditional cultural and social spaces caused by the internationalization of communication systems, a new consciousness for cultural diversity gradually grew up (Mattelart, 1994). This new situation holds for the entire planet, thus not just in Europe where, until recently, the variety of languages spoken in the different countries was considered as a serious drawback to create unity, according to Julien Benda (1933; 1947). In many regions throughout the world, linguistic minorities strongly claim the right to be officially present in the audiovisual media. For many endangered languages, expression used in a Unesco report by Wurm (2001), this expresses the concern to legitimize their cause and to reach a wider audience thanks to digital networks.

Often considered as a cultural phenomenon, linguistic issues are a very political matter. Indeed, they convert into demands for official recognition to the States as well as supranational authorities (for example the European Union). Above all, they question the public sphere<sup>1</sup> and imply redefining the social contract that links citizens. They also suppose special attention from political authorities as well as specific policies. The recent unrests in Bolivia and Peru opposing Aymara communities to their local corrupt politicians show how the lack of interest from their respective States can drive the Indians – long considered as second-class citizens – to violent actions (El País, 2004).

I would like to tackle two complementary sides of the question: on the one hand, the legal framework set by political institutions in order to organize or restrict the expression of minority languages in the media; on the other hand, a critical survey of the different theories which discuss the stakes of multiculturalism and citizenship in relation to media public sphere. As a matter of fact, the two sides are closely related : political and academic debates are deeply marked by national historical traditions, thus affecting the legal or institutional solutions set up by the different countries.

Most of the examples are extracted from the European context which undoubtedly best illustrates the on-going relationships between national and supranational political authorities and their linguistic minorities.

### **Minority language media: unequal treatment and involment.**

Historically speaking, two factors played an important part in the fate reserved for minority languages: the construction of modern states and the successive waves of immigrants. In many countries, the choice of one sole official language is the direct result of the creation of the modern Nation/States after the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Within newly-unified geopolitical spaces, many official languages were in fact former vernaculars which could help build *Imagined communities* based on a common idea of nationalism (Anderson, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990). In view of the linguistic variety, many native vernaculars were hit directly as they could not reach a national status. As for the immigrants, in their quest to integrate their host countries, they quickly switch to the official language, at least for their children, keeping their mother tongue within the private domestic sphere. Democracies were in a paradoxical situation since the state institutions had to promote a common language to communicate and educate while protecting the cultural heritage, at least theoretically speaking. History reveals moments of progress and times of harsh decline.

As a matter of fact, the existence of minority languages generally comes from the obstinacy of militants or close-knit communities struggling for official recognition. However, whichever conflicts existed – and still do exist – between linguistic minorities and State political authorities to grant more rights, minority language issues have always been part of the public debate, at least in Europe. Each Nation constitutes a specific historical construction, which means that the laws passed to allow minority language expression are different from one country to the other and determine the way minority languages are taken into account in the media, generally through the public service broadcasting.

*Specificities and limits of public service broadcasting in Europe :*

When dealing with the organization of minority language media, one of the most remarkable features is that there is a clear-cut distinction between the press and the audiovisual means of communication.

The existence of newspapers and magazines dedicated to minority languages has always been left to the initiative of the linguistic groups themselves. Although some of the minorities launched their own papers (like *Avui*, a daily circulating in Catalonia), they usually benefit from the regional press which regularly publish articles using the local language : Asturian in the 4 Spanish regional papers, Corsican in *La Corse* or *Corse Matin*, Frisian in *Het Friesch Dagblad* and *Leeuwarden Courant* or Friulan in *Messagero Veneto* and *Il Gazzettino*. As for the immigrants, they generally turn to the daily press from their home country. On the whole, the situation is pitiful and the press can be considered as the forgotten media.

As far as audiovisual media are concerned, there really is a European specificity as most countries opted for a public-service system. Within that context, a number of public missions were defined in the articles of the schedule of conditions, which is quite contrary in comparison to the situation of the press. Typically, the public service broadcasting guarantees political pluralism, religious expression, speaking times for political parties or union representatives, quotas of national or European audiovisual works. In many countries,

particular obligations referring to “regional” languages were also integrated to public-service missions, sometimes after a period of experimentation (in France, the situation became official when the regional Network France 3 was created in 1973). The change appears at a regional level thanks to local “windows” broadcasting within existing radio and television stations.

Radios started hosting programmes in Irish on *Raidio na Gaeltachta* (1945), in Sami in Norway (1946) and Finland (1947), in Welsh on BBC (1950s), in Frisian on *Omrop Fryslân* (1950s) (Moragas, Garitaonandía & López, 1999), or in Breton in 1959. Following radio a few years, Television also opened “windows” to minority languages : Irish in Ireland (1960), Welsh in the United Kingdom (1964), Breton (1964) and Basque (1971) in France, Frisian in the Netherlands (1979).

In spite of these advances, which in fact concerned a small number of European public media, the linguistic communities were not wholly satisfied with their lot. Indeed, the amount of broadcast programmes was far under their expectations. Whatever the media, radio or television, minority languages get the smallest share of programme planning : a few hours every week with no real hope of development, i.e. low volume that cannot efficiently contribute to revitalize language practice. Two reasons account for this situation. First of all, when dealing with minority languages, the national public service operating statutes show their limits. In the list of missions assigned to public media, the linguistic issues are one of the many obligations and no quotas are fixed. This means that in order to ensure political and social cohesion, priority is given to contents with a common cultural background, thus leaving aside language diversity. Secondly, it is always difficult to promote a “regional” language within a national media system. If most countries have a regional network, few give their regional or local channels a real autonomy. This is why many minority-language production units suffer from endemic lack of funding or, at least, from drastic dependence on subsidies and public institutions (Guyot, Ledo & Michon, 2000: 73).

*Political and technological changes in the seventies:*

As seen before, until the 1970s, very few countries make it possible to include linguistic issues in the media, generally for quite different reasons : for instance, Spain was still under Franco's dictatorship while Italian Public media were facing raging competition from local and private television channels. In an apparently frozen context, three phenomena brought significant changes in the audiovisual media: 1- the general deregulation process which put an end to the last state broadcasting monopolies (except for Great Britain and Finland, all the other European countries had the audiovisual under state control until the 1980s); 2- the devolution policies which were applied in Great Britain and Spain ; and 3- the arrival of digital technologies.

The consequences are important for the organisation and workings of the media : more democracy with an opening to the private sector and also the legalization of community media, a variety of news channels and media thanks to digital broadcasting, the development of the World-wide Net. The other side of the coin is that media profusion does not necessarily match with plurality. Indeed, the capitalistic integration of communication means being in the hands of big industrial groups is the general trend at an international level. Bertelsmann and Fininvest (Berlusconi) showed the example in Europe. But the recent evolution is worrisome as the main activity of new cultural industries may have nothing to do with media and culture: in France, the multimedia group TF1 belongs to the building contractor Bouygues; in 2004, Dassault and Lagardère, two firms involved into the production and sale of weapons, took the control of 80% of the French publishing business.

The first media to benefit from the situation is the radio, a media which has many advantages: low operating and production costs, cheap transmitters and receivers, a broadcasting range which perfectly fits with the local or regional dimension thanks to a simple technology as well as light mobile equipment. Typically, launching a radio station is within a small community's means. This is why, long before national legalization policies, the ground had been invested by pirate commercial or alternative radios, thus preparing future evolutions.

During the eighties, local and regional stations flourished, including those dedicated to minority languages which are widely represented. One interesting feature is that the stations are operated by all kinds of broadcasters. Four big categories can be distinguished. The first one includes the “historical” public service through their regional networks: *BBC* Wales or Scotland in the United Kingdom, the *RAI* in Italy for Ladin and Slovene, *France 3* for Alsatian, Basque, Breton, Catalan, Corsican and Occitan, *Omrop Fryslân* in the Netherlands for Frisian, etc. The spaces offered to minority languages are usually limited. The second case concerns private commercial broadcasters operating on a local or regional scale, like *Radio Onde Furlane* for the Friulan community, *Cadena Nova* in Catalonia, *Radio Ceredigion* in Wales or *Radio Ser* in Asturia. The third category includes local radios run and financed by municipalities. Most of them appear in regions which have gained autonomy like Catalonia or the Basque country in Spain : the figures are impressive according to Mercator data base (2004) with respectively 180 and 120 local radio stations. The last group is composed of all the independent radio stations created by associations. They are often subsidized by cultural organizations or public institutions. They reveal the capacity many minority groups have to mobilize themselves in order to revitalize their languages. Indeed, if the independent radios are not necessarily monolingual, most of them broadcast a high volume of programmes using the native language. As far as minority-language stakes are concerned, the independent radios launched by minorities undoubtedly constitute the most equally-distributed and developed media in Europe.

*Television or the quest of legitimacy.*

As for television, except for Spain, the situation is far from being satisfactory for the linguistic minorities. After a short period of competitive spirit with optimistic promises from public and private media, the volume of programmes quickly came to a standstill. Brittany is a good example of this stimulating but short moment. On the one hand, the creation of a private Channel, *TV Breizh*, by the French multimedia group Bouygues TF1, spurred the regional

television *France 3* to increase the volume of Breton programmes, particularly those aimed at children and teenagers. On the other, the original project of launching the bilingual private television soon came to a sudden end, revealing that the ambition displayed by TF1 had little to do with the defence of Breton language and culture. This is what the Daily *Libération* noticed when reporting that the percentage of programmes in Breton was seriously declining (Libération, 2003). But when paying close attention to the different press conferences held between 1998 and 2000 by TF1's chairman Patrick Le Lay, his intention had always been perfectly clear and had little to do with the defense of Breton culture : as a matter of fact, *TV Breizh* was designed as a technological and commercial tool to test the Breton consumers and to be present at a regional level when the invitation to tender for digital terrestrial TV channels would be launched (Guyot, 2001; 2002: 243). On the whole, nothing much changed in the Breton-language programmes. In its last report, the French regulating authority even points out the “insufficient space dedicated to programmes using regional languages, situation which is against what viewers expect in their regions”: programmes in Breton dropped from 63 hours a year in 2001 to 50 hours in 2002 (CSA Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel, 2003: 25-26).

Linguistic minorities are of course eager to have access to independent television channels. It confers a strong legitimacy on any linguistic cause. In this day and age, when everything is assessed according to market values, the interest of the private multimedia group TF 1 for a Breton television channel confirms the wealth of a culture that can be translated into the economic sphere. Another argument is that, thanks to satellite television, a small community can reach a world-wide audience. After all, the TVG (Televisión de Galicia) is watched outside Galicia via Panam Satellite by the diaspora living in South America (almost 2 million people) (Guyot, Ledo & Michon, 2000: 41). It shows that a virtual social link can be established through satellite networks between members of a community scattered all around the world. It can also revitalize the culture and languages of minorities.



However, television is a very expensive media, which explains why the only channels dedicated to minority languages can be found in countries where political autonomy or devolution were granted to regions: Spain and the United Kingdom. A simple comparison speaks for itself: almost 40 hours a week of Welsh on *S4C*, 16 hours a day in Galician on TVG and less than 300 hours a year on France 3 for the six regional languages all together (Guyot, Ledo & Michon, 2000: 17).

*Multilingualism and protection of minorities : the role of European authorities.*

Faced with their own historical contradictions, many countries are still reluctant to accommodate linguistic minority claims. They usually maintain a basic organization of linguistic expression in their audiovisual system.

However, most nations belong to broader political and economic entities. This is what has happened in Europe since the creation of the Council of Europe in 1949. The council which is composed of 44 member States developed a very active policy in the field of human rights. There is also a concern for the protection of minorities. Compared to other continents, Europe has less minority languages (Grimes, 2000) but, on the whole, they are better protected thanks to the existence of a legal framework.

As the sociolinguist Henri Giordan (2002: 1-2) notices, the necessity to defend linguistic diversity was not immediate. In fact, the conception of language issues evolved in three stages. First, until the Second World War, multilingualism was seen as an obstacle to European construction. According to the linguist Antoine Meillet, quoted by Giordan (2002: 1), language diversity is a real evil and multilingualism – restricted to French, English and German -, should only be reserved to the elites. This conception radically changed after Hitler's will to establish the Third Reich over Europe, when it became obvious that the hegemony of one sole language was not desirable. The European Cultural Convention signed in December 1954 illustrates the change in course. Article 2 specifies that each contracting party should "encourage the study by its own nationals of the languages, history and civilisation of the

other contracting parties and grant facilities to those parties to promote such studies in its territory". Of course what is taken into account here are the official national languages. The last stage occurs in 1992 when explicit reference to cultural issues appears in the Maastricht Treaty. As mentioned in Article 128: "The Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore."

The recognition of the "regional diversity" opened up new prospects to minority language representatives and associations whose efforts led to two important treaties requiring special attention: the *European Charter for regional or minority languages* and the *Framework Convention for the protection of national minorities*.

The Charter was adopted by the Council on June 25th 1992. It is based on the principle that linguistic rights are part of Human Rights and that they belong to fundamental freedoms. It also expresses the awareness that European languages are a precious heritage, contributing to cultural wealth and traditions. It proposes a series of measures aiming at protecting and promoting regional or minority languages in the fields of education, judicial authorities, administrative authorities and public services, media, cultural activities and facilities, economic and social life. It was ratified by 5 states in 1997. Concretely, this first ratification led to its official application in 1998. When a State decides to ratify the Charter, it can choose the languages it wishes to protect and "undertake to apply a minimum of 35 paragraphs or subparagraphs chosen from among the provisions of part III of the Charter, including at least three chosen from each of the articles 8 to 12 and one from each of the articles 9, 10, 11 and 12."

The enforcement of the Charter is each signatory country's responsibility. Today, 27 countries have signed the Charter and 14 of them have ratified it. Contrary to what is often said, when one particular country does not ratify the Charter, it does not necessarily mean that minority languages cannot be taught or appear in the media. Usually, it indicates that

some of the Charter's articles are in contradiction to the official constitution of the member State. Constitutional changes must be brought by the appropriate national Assemblies : this requires internal debates and despite political tensions, solutions are on their way. Another point which also needs to be discussed is that the languages of migrants are not taken into account. After all, there is no reason why Arabic or Turkish should be confined to the private sphere. Such exclusion process may have a serious impact on social integration, as analysed in the next chapter.

On the whole, the advantage of the Charter is that many States use it to set up their linguistic policies. This is particularly important for the 10 countries which recently joined the E.E.C. Among other things, the treaty signed by Member States includes a variety of clauses which can be, for future candidates, criteria of eligibility.

As for the *Framework Convention for the protection of national minorities*, it was signed on February 1st, 1995. After its ratification by 12 countries, it came into effect in February 1998. It constitutes a further imprecise and vague framework. It is a basic contract offering minimum, acceptable protection of national minorities. It can be considered as a first step towards the recognition of the linguistic features contained in the Charter.

In both cases, the European institutions do not have the means to enforce these treaties. But they at least provide legal material which gives substance to linguistic issues : the treaty and convention establish an institutional link with member States and above all, they postulate that linguistic issues must be discussed within the democratic public sphere.

### **Minority language media in the public sphere: the price of social cohesion and integration.**

According to Tomazs Goban-Klas (1989:31), minority media fulfil two main functions. One consists in “fighting for the rights of minorities”, the other helps “giving minority members a feeling of identity, increasing their social cohesiveness, and providing an escape

from homesickness and the isolation of life in a strange or hostile environment.” This second aspect is particularly important because it points out how media can participate in the social integration of individuals belonging to a minority. Presence in the media is also access to public visibility and consequently to full citizenship.

Quite often, linguistic diversity is restrained due to economic or socio-political reasons. As a matter of fact, the vitality of a language is directly related to its usage value : some are highly quoted on the economic international scene, others are depreciated along with the people who speak. Political action is a way to counterbalance this trend.

*Linguistic diversity, media and democracy.*

The existence of a language is linked to its geopolitical and economic situation. This is the “language market” Louis-Jean Calvet (2002) speaks about when assessing the linguistic effects of globalization. On a planetary scale, this is particularly true when considering Chinese or Hindi which, despite their being the first two languages in the world, do not have the international status of English or Spanish. At a national level, the same factors play an important role as far as the mode of existence of minority languages is concerned.

Indeed, wealthy regions, like Catalonia, are in a better position to promote the native idiom. Territorial implantation is also a very favourable point. It bestows visibility on a language and enhances its legitimacy which considerably helps official recognition. To quote Michel de Certeau, one can say that the territory - with consequently all its representative bodies and cultural institutions - is an essential element in developing a strategy: territorialized minorities can speak from “a *proper*, i.e. a place which can stand the test of time and "serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, "clientèles", "targets", or "objects" of research." (De Certeau, 1984: 17-18) In a way, media can fulfil the same function.

Unfortunately, the languages spoken by nomads and migrants cannot rely on such advantages. Moreover, these social groups of people are the first to be affected by ostracism

and racism. Above all, they are the victims of socio-economic exclusion. This means that there is no point in defending a language without trying to fight against all forms of social, political and economic exclusion. Here again, the linguistic issue is bound up with political considerations.

In Europe, two kinds of non-territorial minorities are directly concerned. The Romanis, who arrived from India in the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, are a particularly fragile minority. In many countries, they suffer violence, hatred and relegation to the fringes of symbolic and physical space. They demonstrate all the signs of marginalization: high unemployment, high illiteracy and petty criminality. Romani and its dialectal forms are hardly taught, to say nothing of their absence in the media. Any proposal dedicated to the protection of Romani culture must include the social and economic dimensions.

Immigrants, like the Arabs in France, are likewise invisible. Some of them still being in illegal situations, their main concern is to get identity documents. In addition, in a context of economic crisis and geopolitical unrest, they are targets for all the resentment of host-country populations (racial discrimination and violence from right-wing political groups). Most immigrants use their mother tongue at home. They also watch video cassettes and satellite-television programmes. The video material is usually distributed in suburbs by radical Islamic groups. The TV programmes are available from satellite networks controlled by countries like Saudi Arabia. This means that, on the one hand, many host countries are afraid of the spread of Islamic propaganda, but, on the other hand, they do not do anything to offer alternatives through their own media system. Most European satellite television networks do not offer specific channels to immigrants. On the contrary, they spread a very negative image of immigration [Deltombe, 2005]. Undoubtedly, European democracies fail to recognize the importance of the languages of immigrants in the public media sphere.

As a matter of fact, if the issues related to the political expression of linguistic diversity are a challenge to democracies, they also arouse theoretical debates among social scientists.

*The deadlocks of multiculturalism.*

In the 1990's, North-American works on multiculturalism became very popular, both in the academic community, thanks to the works of Charles Taylor, Will Kymlicka as well as others (Taylor, 1992; Kymlicka, 1995), and in politics (mostly through the policy of affirmative action or the debate over political correctness). These North-American trends, often presented as the apology of differentialism, tend to absorb all the discussions which, here and there around the world, try to question the legitimacy of cultural claims in the public sphere.

Indeed, multiculturalism is a very polysemic and polemic notion, as Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (2000) comment: “Neither a concept, nor a theory, nor a social or political movement – while pretending being all that at the same time.” Beyond the success of the term, the concern for multiculturalism is often considered as the result of the crisis of modernity. We could also say that the phenomenon of internationalization of communications has emphasized this crisis (Semprini, 1997: chap. VII). What is it all about anyway? The return of subjectivity, the revenge of cultures or saying things differently the existence of binary oppositions: global/local, universalism/communitarianism, rationality/subjectivity?

Will Kymlicka thinks that minority claims to administrative and/or political rights must be satisfied by political authorities, particularly in the case of "national minorities" (The American Indians, the Bretons, or the Catalans). The liberal theory of minority rights (Kymlicka, 1995) as well as the politics of recognition defended by Taylor (Taylor, 1992) have often been criticized because they postulate that the autonomy of minority groups (considered as sets of responsible and rational individuals) comes first. In other words, their actions are pre-eminent since they determine political choices, thus subjugating the political system to civil society. It also privileges whichever minorities are capable of organizing themselves and being heard by authorities: this is the case of the linguistic groups who are the "historical" inhabitants in a region. But locally, a minority must be a majority to apply its

linguistic rights (Kymlicka, 1995: chap. 6). On another level, multiculturalism is more concerned in theorizing linguistic rights from the perspective of political correctness rather than from the point of view of minority languages. Lastly, what multiculturalism cannot take into account is the socio-political hierarchy of cultural issues : taking the examples mentioned in the preface to the French edition of his book, can the Islamic veil be placed on the same level as territorial autonomy in Corsica? Can French centralized policy be reduced to those two devilish sides with, on the one hand, what is presented as a harmless cultural sign that deserves recognition within what Kymlicka calls *migration multiculturalism*, and on the other hand, the future of a Mediterranean island which will one way or another reach some form of devolution? As a matter of fact, multiculturalism is often very elusive regarding the political consequences of some cultural idiosyncracies.

In short, multiculturalism professes a kind of denial of politics, but it also conveys a very restrictive and essentialist vision of the identity construction. The Franco-Lebanese novelist, Amin Maalouf (1998), has a more interesting approach based on his own experience: he explains how his identity is the result of a more intercultural pattern, mixing different cultural traditions and thus obtains its real meaning in the adherence to common values. This attitude as a citizen is what the political expert, Fred Constant (2000: 89) defines as “the first rule of a *savoir-faire* in plural.”

*A European approach to cultural and linguistic plurality.*

Deeply marked by the North-American context, according to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1984: 110), the term [multiculturalism] “In Europe has been particularly used to define pluralism within the public sphere while, in the United-States, it refers to persistent aftermath of the exclusion of the black and to the crisis of the national mythology of the “American dream.” Then the notion would not correspond to European realities as the issues dealing with cultural and linguistic plurality are discussed in their relation to the common good.

Therefore, the problem is to imagine how linguistic diversity could be better taken into account in public life and the media. In the Constitutions adopted by each nation, a variety of choices can be made: some mention linguistic issues (France, in a very exclusive way, Spain and the U.K. with a more extensive vision), others do not at all (The U.S.A.). It is a historical construction directly linked to the creation of modern States. All constitutions rest on a number of principles determining what falls within the private domain and what belongs to the public sphere, i.e. what needs to be publicized to build public opinion. The German philosopher Habermas analyzed how the principle of publicity has been perverted and how the public sphere is being refeudalized (Habermas, 1984, 1989). At the same time, reviving the spirit of the Enlightenment which associated *reason* and *subjectivity*, cultural issues are now part of the public debate. This means that the democratic public sphere must be refounded and Habermas is aware that cultural diversity must be taken into account. But in order to avoid a mere piling up of ghettos or communities, he thinks that the notion of *tolerance* should be a model to theorize multicultural societies. This notion, inherited from the wars of religion, is interesting because it supposes a social contract between different cultures that are capable of sharing a common vision of the world.

In a more sociological perspective, Michel Wieviorka, a specialist of racism and nationalism, tackles the problem from the angle of ethnicity. He objects that the debate cannot be reduced to an opposition between tradition and modernity, or "community" and "citizenship". He also points out that, in France, the assimilation of immigrants was helped considerably because the community they belonged to was a vital link which allowed them to shift from the cultural shock caused by uprooting to full access to French citizenship. Their mother tongues played an important part in the assimilation process. Wieviorka proposes a sociological definition of ethnicity, which he considers as a space organized around three complementary and indissociable poles: 1- individualism and universal values (the legacy of the Enlightenment), 2- subjectivity (cultural identity) and 3- communitarianism (community



networks) (Wieviorka, 1993: 125-136). This model can be transposed to the many linguistic groups that suffered from modernity and its consequent normalization of socio-cultural life. It also summarizes the tensions and problems social actors are likely to experiment when manoeuvring in this *triangle of ethnicity* (Wieviorka, 1993 : 125).

In short, some of these theoretical approaches provide models that can be adjusted to different situations and respect both cultural idiosyncracies and a collective socio-political contract. In that particular context, linguistic issues deserve to be officially recognized and promoted. At the same time and apart from political actions, minorities can use more systematically the existing media in order to promote their culture and language.

*A multimedia strategy for minority media.*

Quite surprisingly, minorities rarely resort to the vast range of media, except for the radio. Let's briefly go through what is still called mass media and comment on some of the most recent developments. First, the press, which the French psycho-sociologist Gabriel Tarde assigned an important role to, in the construction of public opinion (Tarde, 1989). In many rural areas, where books had little circulation, generations of children and sometimes adults were taught to read and write thanks to the newspaper. At another level, films can strongly echo cultural diversity and help individuals become aware of belonging to a singular community (See *Atarnajuat, The Fast Runner*, the 1999 feature film about the Inuits produced by Isuma Productions Inc.). As for radio, it is a very flexible means of communication, both from a technical point of view and for economic reasons. It is associated with orality but can be used quite successfully for literacy campaigns as well. A basic review of the presence of minority languages in "traditional media" shows that, at best, languages appear marginally in national daily papers, radio and television programmes. When it is a matter of preserving and enhancing their language and culture, minorities have to struggle to set up independent media. They generally face economic problems, mainly because market scale implies meeting a wide audience. Just one example: the free French daily *Vingt minutes* costs 100,000 euros to

operate everyday for a circulation of 450,000 issues and sells each page of advertising for 12,000 euros.

For the last twenty years, media, telecommunications and data processing have merged into what we call multimedia. Regardless of their physical nature, written text, figures, graphics, pictures or sound are processed by computers thanks to uniquely binary digital code. Multimedia integrates all these different data which can be viewed, listened to, transformed, recorded and transmitted through the World Wide Web.

With multimedia, traditional means of communication, like the newspaper, radio and even television, gain increased influence through the possibility of mixing media contents, user-friendliness, disappearance of space and time constraints or low operating costs.

Most minorities do not take full advantage of these new opportunities. There are a number of interesting experiments carried out by cultural groups or linguistic associations, but on the whole, there is no real multimedia strategy. Thus there are very few on-line daily newspapers (Guyot, 2004). Of course, almost half of the languages of the world have no writing. But, if we take the case of Europe, all idioms could launch dailies. In fact, even if few languages have a daily press (Basque, Catalan, Galician), now would be a good time to go directly to electronic publishing. This is already what some academic institutions or socio-political movements are doing with a minimum of funding and staff. No heavy structural investments, no need to sub-contract with a printing company and distribution networks, no paper to buy. These expenses account for 40 to 65% of the retail price.

Another advantage is that Internet technology is quite adaptable to target small groups, all the more so in the case of deterritorialized minorities. In fact, the concept of mass media is no longer appropriate to describe a medium whose networking logic favours more user-friendly, interactive point-to-point links. In other words, new media can meet the needs of fragmented audiences.

Last but not least is the archive function. This means that through the Internet, readers can consult old issues. This can prove to be a strong point since minority languages often lack written material for those who wish to learn.

David Crystal (2000) is quite right when, among the six key areas he suggests to help language revitalization, he mentions access to electronic technology. It may appear utopian, like the dreams of the 1970's of user-friendly, small community media. With the exception that, in this particular case, it involves rather reasonable means. The on-line press, which is usually forgotten, represents an interesting alternative, just like radio on the Net. In that case, the two media can merge into a hybrid solution, which is more faithful to the definition of multimedia: an on-line paper can integrate sound files.

### **Conclusions.**

The presence of linguistic minorities in the media is a legitimate claim as it is an integral part of everyday life in a democracy. Their access to media – as a complement to real educational policies -, is the sign that they are no longer discriminated, marginalized and invisible. In this sense, they can be considered as ordinary citizens belonging to groups or associations bound to respect the common rules leading media and usually guaranteed by national regulating authorities.

However, the situation is far from being satisfactory, particularly in the case of television channels. Whenever the question of setting up new local television stations is raised, the national regulating authorities often tend to favour projects that are brought forth by economically wealthy urban areas rather than those carried by cultural or linguistic communities. Hence the strange paradox: while the number of channels increases exponentially due to digital technology, the opportunities for cultural and linguistic minorities to express themselves seem to shrink (Cheval 1996: 210; Morley and Robins, 1997). Obviously, the economic paradigm leads the development of networks and digital video

broadcasters are mostly interested in solvent customers to whom they can offer international second-market television productions. Following the example of free radio, there is a danger that local televisions do serve, sooner or later, the interests of private groups, particularly in a context of increasing media concentration [Mattelart, 2005].

Future solutions should probably resort to joint actions from regional, national and European policies in order to extend the missions of public service and to bring financial support to the media projects developed by linguistic minorities.

From an academic point of view, it is obvious that investigation about minority language media still requires to be structured and organized. The issues raised by the media expression of linguistic communities are quite new, contrary, for instance, to alternative media which lead to a large variety of studies and research works. In a context of internationalization of media and culture, minority language media deserve special attention from researchers. Indeed, they reveal some of the paradoxes of internationalization : within the intersections of the market communication flow, they express the “revenge of cultures”, in the terms of Mattelart (1994), i.e. a particular reaction against the standardization of cultural contents and exchanges, against the acceleration of acculturation processes. Minority language media also illustrate one kind of interesting link between the local dimension and global networks : thanks to satellite television or the Web, “regional” minorities can reach their diasporas while immigrants, scattered all over the world, can still have bonds with their home culture and language. Minority language media issues are a good way to analyse the evolutions of cultural and communication practices. They are also quite relevant to assess the relationships between culture and politics in contemporary democracies. In order to forge specific tools to shed light on naturally complex and changing phenomena, a project focusing on minority language media should be conducted in an interdisciplinary perspective, borrowing concepts from cultural studies, linguistics, information and communication sciences, political sciences, sociology, law or political economy of communication.

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of *public sphere* we use in that text is borrowed from Jürgen Habermas (1989). It can be defined as the *agora* where private people can gather to form a "public." Through clubs, associations, assemblies or medias, citizens can freely discuss general interest matters and reach consensus. Thus, media play an important part in the construction of a public sphere. As far as television is concerned, the profusion of channels does not necessarily provide more spaces to mediate democracy, since, as Peter Dahlgren notices, television is an industry whose main purpose is not so much "public sphering" as profit-making (Dahlgren, 1995, 148). Hence the importance of paying attention to institutional logics, for instance in

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preventing audiovisual media from being totally controlled by private groups, thanks to regulating institutions, public policies and legal frameworks which guarantee pluralism and freedom of expression.