

The UN proclaimed 2008 as the International Year of Languages in order to highlight the need to defend and preserve the world's languages. The Catalan universities wish to contribute to this by spreading the importance of the sustainability of linguistic diversity among the university community.

Between 4,000 and 6,000 languages are spoken in the world today, and about half, according to the most optimistic estimates, are at risk of extinction in the next hundred years and 96% are spoken by just 4% of the world's population.

The number of speakers is an important factor, but it is not always a good indicator of the state of health of a language. The optimal conditions that ensure the vitality of a language are complex. They include a combination of institutional support, the utility of the language in the economic sphere of the country and its use in the global communications media, as well as the feeling of speakers' fidelity towards their language and the consideration they have of it as a symbol of identity as equally or even more essential factors.

Linguistically sustainable students value people, and for this reason they do not expect them to subordinate themselves. They value diversity, because they are free people and they know that freedom implies not giving up being who you are. They value knowledge, because it makes them freer and more human. Linguistically sustainable students act according to their beliefs, and so their linguistic behaviour works in benefit of people, diversity and knowledge.

LINGUISTICALLY SUSTAINABLE

RESPECT ALL LANGUAGES

When you say you don't like a language or that it isn't useful or important, without realising you apply these prejudices to those who speak it. All languages are equal and they are all different.

far more than you think and that good ideas are not limited to any specific language, or that all languages have good ideas. Different languages express different outlooks on reality. Learning languages will help you broaden your horizons.

the people you are really saying something to. When Shakespeare wrote, there were fewer than six million speakers of English.

OBSERVE AND LISTEN: TAKE AN INTEREST IN THE LANGUAGES AROUND YOU

Often near and around you, languages are spoken that you didn't even know existed. You don't even know what they're called. Sometimes knowing the name or the odd word of a language is enough to show that you are aware of those around you, that you are not indifferent to them. Say *thanks* to someone in their language and you'll get a smile in return, for sure.

GIVE VOICE TO MINORITIES AND LISTEN TO THEM

Lots of minorities all together make up a majority. Don't add to linguistic imbalances, don't treat languages spoken by just a few like you don't like being treated. If you have a choice, give priority to the ones who have fewer loudspeakers. Help them reach all parts and they'll help you with it too.

PRACTISE LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY ON YOUR TRAVELS

Take advantage of the wealth and diversity the world offers if you listen to it. Don't go to Wales or to Malta just to learn English. Try to speak the languages of the places you visit: the less the people you are speaking to expect to hear you say things in their language, the happier they'll be.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO LEARN NEW LANGUAGES, THEY'LL ALWAYS BE A HELP TO YOU

A lot of people think that a language is either spoken or not and that there's no half way house. Or they think that in order to fit one language in your head you have to make room for it by ejecting another. Learning a language, whether on the surface or in depth, doesn't mean forgetting another or speaking it worse. A single word might prove useful, and however far you get with it, little is better than nothing. You always end up winning.

DON'T IMPOSE DOMINANT LANGUAGES, REPLANT THREATENED LANGUAGES

North Catalan writer Joan Lluís Lluís says that many Catalans from the south like going to French Catalonia to prove how they can speak French. Don't act just as a disseminator of the major languages to the detriment of those with fewer speakers. Try and take an interest in a dying language: you'll see it's useful and necessary and you'll contribute towards linguistic *reforestation*.

PRESERVE YOUR SPACE OF FREEDOM: NO ONE CAN TAKE YOUR LANGUAGE FROM YOU IF YOU DON'T WANT THEM TO

Languages are not items, they don't get in the way of each other: don't be led to think the contrary. Certainly, as life goes on, it won't always be possible for you to speak in the first language you learnt, but you can always maintain it: it is knowledge that will help you to learn other languages. Don't lose it: the more languages you know, the more you'll know about your own language and the world.

LANGUAGES OPEN UP NEW HORIZONS: DON'T RENOUNCE THE SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE THAT DIFFERENT LANGUAGES PRESENT YOU WITH

All languages contain knowledge and produce new knowledge; don't limit yourself to English. Don't leave aside what's written in languages closer to you. You'll often find that you can read them and understand

A SMALL MARKET MIGHT BE A GREAT GATEWAY

It is important not to confuse the potential audience with the real audience. Writing or speaking a language spoken by many is no guarantee of being heard. On the other hand, to speak in the same way as those nearest to us is to make ourselves heard. What matters is not the number of people that might understand you but

DON'T EXCLUDE ANYONE FROM A LANGUAGE

Languages, especially those that are spoken by just a few or are not very widespread, create invisible links, they are welcome signs, they turn a stranger into a neighbour. Don't deprive others from learning and using your language. Don't use language to tell them they are not one of yours. In Catalonia, for example, always ask to be spoken to also in Catalan; don't be left out. Catalan is like a passport with no expiry date: once you've got one, it's for ever.

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Hi col·labora:

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