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Abstract :

In an interconnected world where states come together in international organizations to achieve common goals, intercultural communication is paramount. To enable multilateral diplomacy among the more than 6,000 existing languages, the United Nations has adopted a multilingual regime that includes six official languages, ensuring everyone can be heard and understood. This multilingualism aims to place states on an equal footing, achieving linguistic justice and promoting the organization's multiculturalism. This thesis aims to understand why, despite member states' intention to create a multilingual organization, one language has come to dominate all areas of the United Nations: English. This study delves into international relations since 1945 to identify three elements that have influenced the organization's language choices, leading to the development of English as the lingua franca. Geopolitical trends related to power dynamics and contemporary history have influenced the creation of the United Nations and its linguistic regime. The special status given to the victorious powers of World War II, whose languages were declared official and working languages of the organization, is a prime example. Additionally, examining historical and geopolitical events such as the Cold War and globalization will further elucidate why English has become the dominant international language. Finally, the objective of this thesis is to highlight the linguistic challenges the organization faces, particularly regarding respect to the linguistic regime established in 1945. We will also see that if the United Nations aims to achieve its goals and fulfill its missions, the inclusion of so-called indigenous languages must be part of the organization's agenda. Thus, this thesis will demonstrate that the UN's linguistic regime reflects the organization's overall functioning.

Abstrakt :

In einer vernetzten Welt, in der Staaten in internationalen Organisationen zusammenschließen, um gemeinsame Ziele zu erreichen, ist interkulturelle Kommunikation von größter Bedeutung. Um multilaterale Diplomatie unter den mehr als 6.000 vorhandenen Sprachen zu ermöglichen, hat die Organisation der Vereinten Nationen ein mehrsprachiges Regime mit sechs offiziellen Sprachen eingeführt, das sechs Amtssprachen umfasst, um sicherzustellen, dass ein jeder gehört und verstanden wird. Diese Mehrsprachigkeit sollte die Staaten ermöglichen, ein Ideal der sprachlichen Gerechtigkeit zu erreichen und die Multikulturalität der Organisation zu fördern. Diese Arbeit zielt darauf ab zu erklären, warum trotz des Wunsches der Mitgliedsstaaten, eine mehrsprachige Organisation zu schaffen, eine Sprache alle Bereiche der Vereinten Nationen dominiert und zwar English. Diese Studie untersucht die internationalen Beziehungen seit 1945, um drei Elemente zu identifizieren, die die Sprachwahl der Organisation beeinflusst haben und zur Entwicklung des Englischen als Lingua Franca geführt haben. Geopolitische Trends im Zusammenhang mit Machtverhältnissen und zeitgenössischer Geschichte haben die Gründung der Vereinten Nationen und ihr sprachliches Regime beeinflusst. Das besondere Privileg, das den siegreichen Mächten des Zweiten Weltkriegs eingeräumt wurde, deren Sprachen als offizielle und Arbeitssprachen der Organisation erklärt wurden, ist ein hervorragendes Beispiel. Darüber hinaus wird die Untersuchung historischer und geopolitischer Ereignisse wie des Kalten Krieges und der Globalisierung weiterhin verdeutlichen, warum Englisch zur dominanten internationalen Sprache geworden ist. Schließlich besteht das Ziel dieser These darin, die sprachlichen Herausforderungen hervorzuheben, denen die Organisation insbesondere im Hinblick auf die Einhaltung des im Jahr 1945 festgelegten sprachlichen Regimes gegenübersteht. Darüber hinaus werden wir sehen, dass, wenn die Vereinten Nationen ihre Ziele erreichen und ihre Aufgaben erfüllen wollen, die Einbeziehung sogenannter indigener Sprachen Teil der Agenda der Organisation sein muss. Diese These wird daher zeigen, dass das sprachliche Regime der UN ein Spiegelbild der Gesamtfunktion der Organisation ist.

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Introduction

« Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and fire them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the Lord said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth, and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth » - Genesis 11:1-9 (NRSVUE Bibel).

How could we not refer to the Tower of Babel to introduce a discussion on language, and more specifically, multilingualism? While this may seem like the easy option, it's not. The Tower of Babel is a myth, a fabulous, imaginary tale that nevertheless attempts to explain reality, as mythology has always sought to lift the veil on shadowy areas. Today, there are over 6,000 daggers on earth, but where do they come from? Why did we decide to change the words we use to name things as soon as we crossed a border? No one can come up with a rational explanation, and I'm not going to try. What we are interested in is the idea that God wanted to blur the dialogue between human beings by scattering them around the planet in linguistic communities. So, what does this have to do with multilingualism at the United Nations? Well, it's twofold. First, this myth tells us that language is not just a means of communication and understanding, it's a means of identification with one's community, a means of recognition, and it's around a language that a culture is created. Secondly, this myth tells us that a lingua franca is a danger to humanity, that it can only bring out human pride and vanity. To achieve the best, the diversity of languages and cultures must be preserved. This biblical story lays the foundations for understanding the profound and lasting impact of languages on our world. By examining how languages shape cultural identities and social interactions, we can better grasp their fundamental role in shaping modern societies.

In 1945, in the aftermath of World War II, a devastating moment for humanity, 50 states decided to gather in San Francisco to create an international organization that would become the United Nations. The world was destroyed both physically and psychologically, but the ideas of Woodrow Wilson, former President of the United States, endured. Through

his 14 Points speech in 1918, he played a crucial role in the genesis of what would later become the United Nations. With his ideal of international cooperation and his vision of peace and global security, he was the precursor of the institution that would be born in 1945: the United Nations. After this devastating period, a single will prevailed: to create an organization capable of preventing another such catastrophe. The 50 states aimed to protect humanity for future generations.

At this moment, multilateralism became a genuine political project. However, it is well understood that when discussing politics, we speak of interests; and in the case of multilateralism, we speak of national interests. The United Nations may be an international organization with 193 member states, but it is not a world government; it is a forum for discussion among states that share common interests.

The United Nations is indeed at the heart of multilateral diplomacy. All member countries convene within the Organization to agree on common goals and implement effective international policies. However, in an Organization now comprising 193 states, a question quickly arose: how to achieve mutual understanding? All these different linguistic communities gathered in one Organization must find a way to communicate in order to understand and express themselves.

To address this issue, the UN has adopted a multilingual system, recognizing six working and official languages. Since its creation in 1945, the UN has recognized English, Chinese, Spanish, Russian, French, and Arabic (which was added later) as the Organization's official languages. Together, these languages represent more than half of the world's population.

From an ideological point of view, we can ask why this choice was made. Why only six languages when there are more than 6,000 languages spoken on earth? Is it a way of excluding other languages, despite the UN's claim to be an international organization representing humanity? From a political point of view, we can also question this choice. Language is not merely a communication tool enabling individuals within a group to understand each other; it is the very essence of humanity. Man is a political animal, or "Zoon Politikon," as Aristotle put it, meaning that humans are naturally inclined to live in communities; they coexist with their peers in society. Communication and language are therefore what enable a group of individuals to understand each other and unite.

When the concept of the nation developed in the 17th century with the Treaties of Westphalia, the idea of a national language became crucial. Some thinkers defined peoples as linguistic and cultural groups, emphasizing that language is linked to the culture, history, and way of thinking of a community. Over time, languages have come to be recognized with

a political connotation: they define a state, a nation, and a culture. Language is no longer just a means of communication; it is a policy and a marker of identity.

In this context, we need to define the term « multilingualism», as it lies at the heart of this research. First of all, it is crucial to differentiate between the terms « plurilingualism», and « multilingualism», because although they are often used interchangeably, they do not mean exactly the same thing. The European Observatory for Plurilingualism defines plurilingualism as « the use of several languages by an individual », while multilingualism is described as « the coexistence of several languages within a given social group». The distinction between these two terms is important because plurilingualism focuses on the individual, whereas multilingualism refers to a social group. For the purposes of this research, we will focus on a social group, represented by the international community.

Today, multilingualism is a core value of the Organization. This can be explained by the intrinsic link between language, culture, and nation. The United Nations is a multicultural organization where different communities coexist despite their differences. This multiculturalism is the driving force of the Organization and is a value protected by the United Nations, even recognized as part of humanity's intangible heritage. The corollary of multiculturalism, as we shall explore in greater detail, is multilingualism.

This organization represents a common quest for global cooperation and unity. This quest for unity is also evident in the intensifying globalization over time, where borders between nations blur, legislations harmonize, and generally, the world becomes more uniform. New global challenges require close collaboration between nations, and the challenge of this collaboration lies in the effective management of communication within international institutions. However, today multilateralism seems to be in crisis and decline. This decline is accompanied by a rise in international insecurity. Crises in the Middle East and Europe are proof: the Organization has been unable to find solutions.

But if multilateralism is in crisis, the Organization's multilingualism is as well. The legal regime established in 1945 has never been fully respected despite the will of member states. This thesis will attempt to draw a link between several notions that may at first sight seem remote. I will seek to find a link between the notions of language, geopolitics, power, and history to explain this crisis of multilingualism. The existing literature on the theme of multilingualism in international organizations has been extensively explored in the fields of linguistics and sociology. As we shall see, these fields explain in concrete terms why multilingualism is important and why it must be ensured in an organization like the United Nations. In the field of international relations, there is relatively little variety on the subject, and authors are generally content to demonstrate that the United Nations is a monolingual

organization, dominated by English even though the UN has made the principle of multilingualism a core value and protects it with legal instruments. But now this hypothesis is a fact. Of course, it remains important to highlight this point, which shows that the Organization has failed in its mission in this respect. However, what is now important to do, and what has not yet been fully explored, is to understand why the Organization, since its creation, has been dominated by the English language.

So, in this thesis, we will ask why, despite the importance of multilingualism in the context of multilateral diplomacy, we observe a strong tendency towards monolingualism?

A quotation will give direction to my thesis: « If geopolitics can be defined as the analysis of power rivalries over a given territory, it is clear that languages are a reflection of power relationships »¹.

My theory will develop the idea that the language regime of the United Nations is shaped by historical, geopolitical and power dynamics, rather than by a genuine desire to promote multilingualism. By combining these three analytical grids, this thesis will attempt to provide a complete explanation for the hegemonic position of English today. By combining historical perspectives, which show the evolution of national influences on the world stage, with geopolitical analyses, which explain current and past rivalries between states for cultural and linguistic control, this thesis intends to demonstrate that the multilingualism promoted by the United Nations can sometimes look more like an ideal than a practical reality. This observation is reinforced by the political decisions that have favored English over other major languages, illustrating how global power relations affect language policy.

To demonstrate this theory, we will first study the history of the quest for multilingualism at the United Nations (Chapter 1). We will see that from the outset, the member states, which numbered 50 in 1945, had a clear desire to elevate multilingualism as a founding principle of the Organization. As early as 1946, the General Assembly (GA) adopted a multilingual linguistic regime in its famous Resolution 2(1), a regime which continued to evolve in the years that followed, thanks to a determination to strengthen the presence of multilingualism in the Organization's work. But implementing this principle has proved difficult. Despite the proactive determination of the Secretary General and member

¹ Jean-Marie Le Breton, *Réflexions anglophiles sur la géopolitique de l'anglais*, *Herodote*, N°115-4, (2004)

states to respect the Organization's linguistic diversity, it wasn't until 2024 that a strategic framework for the principle's implementation was adopted. Indeed, even though the Organization's language rules are a legal instrument, failure to respect them has led to a de facto monolingualism and an alarming situation. From the Organization's inception to the present day, English has held a hegemonic position. But this is not without consequences: not only does this monolingualism have implications for the adoption of international law, it also greatly endangers humanity's intangible heritage.

We will then attempt to understand the reasons that led the Organization to adopt a multilingual regime, as well as the challenges these theories face (Chapter 2). If the UN has opted for multilingualism since its inception, it is because of the inextricable link between language and culture. As the United Nations is the mirror of multiculturalism, it is the duty of such an organization to protect cultural diversity. Moreover, multilingual practices have a major impact on communication and intercultural understanding, which cannot be overlooked in a multilateral organization. But on top of this, the linguistic injustice created by the hegemony of one language cannot be institutionalized in an organization like the United Nations. Yet when national interests come into play, it's difficult to reconcile international aspirations for justice and equality with the will of states. Scholars have already explained the difficulty of this conflict. That's why this thesis develops the theory of a geopolitics of language, which explains why today, the Organization is dominated by English. Indeed, when we combine the historical and colonial heritage of dominant languages with geopolitical and power dynamics, we find an explanation for English hegemony.

To demonstrate this theory, we will then study the geopolitical and historical influence on the linguistic regime of the United Nations (Chapter 3). Through this case study of UN languages, we'll see that the hegemony of the English language can be explained in part by the development of American power during the Cold War, but also by American cultural and economic hegemony linked to globalization, as well as by the strategic choice of location for the Organization's headquarters. Next, we'll see that the addition of Arabic to the UN linguistic reigns is linked to the rise of Arab powers in the '80s, and we'll see that this opened the door to other languages such as German, which nevertheless failed to become an official or working language, due to its lack of weight on the international scene. Next, we'll look at the emergence of the BRICS to see whether they're following in the footsteps of Arabic or German. Finally, we'll look at the new challenge facing the United Nations: the integration of

indigenous languages into the UN language regime. We'll see that the UN has already taken steps in this direction, but the organization needs to go further if it is to successfully carry out its missions and operations.

Methodology

To provide a comprehensive analysis of the question posed in this thesis, I have adopted a methodology that primarily relies on document analysis. To explore the dynamics of language use within the UN and its impacts on multilateralism and multiculturalism, an exhaustive review of existing literature has been conducted. This analysis encompasses academic publications, specialized articles, and official reports from the Organization, such as resolutions from the General Assembly and the Security Council. These reports and resolutions from the Organization will be presented chronologically throughout the research to trace the evolution of language policies, practices, and discourses. This approach will allow us to observe the changes and continuities in the UN's approach to multilingualism.

In parallel, an analysis of the theories surrounding the principle of multilingualism will also be conducted through a review of the existing literature on the subject.

Finally, to address the research question more concretely, and in complement to the document analysis, this thesis will employ a qualitative case study approach. By studying the different languages present in the Organization's linguistic regime, we will attempt to test the theory advanced in this thesis.

Thus, by combining document analysis and qualitative case studies, this methodology will provide a thorough and nuanced understanding of the issues related to language use in an international context.

Chapter 1: The History of the Pursuit of Multilingualism at the United Nations: Between Aspiration and Reality

As discussed in the introduction, the United Nations were born from the ashes of World War II. The 50 countries that gathered at the San Francisco Conference, which took place from April 25 to June 26, 1945, were devastated and sought to build a better world. These nations aimed for peace, prosperity, and the primacy of international law. Consequently, the Organization was given a broad mandate and is today responsible for a wide range of missions, from conflict resolution to addressing global hunger. In this context, it is important to note that from the very inception of the United Nations, member states expressed the desire to establish a multilingual regime. From the San Francisco Conference and the first sessions of the General Assembly, states adopted an ambitious linguistic policy marked by a commitment to respect and equality among peoples.

The study of the linguistic regime of the United Nations, the focus of this first chapter, reveals that the Organization strives to promote, develop, and evolve a *de jure* and *de facto* multilingualism within its institutions. An examination of various General Assembly and Security Council resolutions demonstrates a genuine intention to make multilingualism a tool of multilateralism, with positive developments over time.

However, despite this legal and ideological evolution, reality appears to diverge. The practical application of multilingualism at the United Nations faces obstacles, resulting in monolingualism, dominated unequivocally by the English language. Various researchers have observed this, noting, for example, that « English is dominant in international politics and commerce, its privileged role being strengthened through such bodies as the United Nations »². Many non-English-speaking authors have explored this issue, notably the French scholar Yannick Naré, who acknowledges that the United Nations is an « organisation à vocation universaliste où le monolinguisme anglais dispute la primauté au multilinguisme »³.

² Robert Phillipson, English for Globalisation or for the World's People? *International Review of Education* n°47, 185–200 (2001)

³ « Organization with a universalist vocation where English monolingualism competes with multilingualism » [translated by : author] - Yannick Naré, Les réseautages politico-diplomatiques de la Francophonie au sein de l'Organisation des Nations unies (ONU), *Revue internationale des francophonies* (2018)

Thus, the aim of this first chapter is to demonstrate the disparity between the positive evolution of the United Nations 'linguistic regime, which aspires to a *de jure* multilingualism, and the reality of a *de facto* monolingualism, as corroborated by several studies. To this end, we will first examine the initial intentions of member states, who sought from the outset to make multilingualism a founding principle of the United Nations, as well as the legal evolution of this principle (I). We will then nuance this analysis by studying the challenges faced by UN bodies in implementing multilingualism, despite the adoption of a strategic framework (II). Finally, we will look at the dominance of English and the consequences it entails for an organization with a universal vocation (III). In summary, this chapter will demonstrate the divergence between law and reality.

I - A Clear Commitment to Elevate Multilingualism as a Founding Principle

The principle of multilingualism is enshrined in various United Nations legal instruments, but its application varies across different UN bodies. For instance, the legal framework within the General Assembly (GA) differs from that of the Security Council (SC) and the Secretariat. In this first section, we will explore the evolution of the legal framework for multilingualism within UN institutions. We will first look at how the principle of multilingualism was established through resolutions, particularly those of the General Assembly, which played a pivotal role in recognizing the importance of multilingualism (A). Next, we will examine specific GA resolutions that contributed to establishing the principle of multilingualism, highlighting its evolution over time, and addressing the need for updating the initial language regulations for political and member state equality reasons (B). These initial sections will primarily focus on the legal framework surrounding language use within different UN bodies. To fully appreciate the principle's significance, we will also observe and understand how and why UN member states have made multilingualism a core value of the organization (C). This exploration of the legal framework for multilingualism at the United Nations will shed light on how this linguistic diversity is recognized and protected within the organization. Additionally, it will lay the groundwork for understanding the challenges and trends in the actual use of languages at the United Nations, addressing the central question of the trend toward monolingualism despite the importance accorded to multilingualism.

A) The General Assembly's Primary Objective: Establishing a Multilingual Language Regime

To comprehend the first General Assembly resolution marking the cornerstone of the UN's language regime, we must trace back to the organization's inception.

The San Francisco Conference, held at the invitation of China, the USSR, the United States, and Great Britain, established the United Nations and resulted in drafting and adopting the UN Charter. This Charter sets forth the principles, objectives, functioning, and structure of the Organization. With 50 countries representing 80% of the world's population at that time, the choice of language was swiftly deemed essential for international negotiations, ensuring mutual understanding and the ability to assert interests. Thus, on the second day of the Conference, it was decided that the Conference would be bilingual, conducted in English and French⁴, with all discussions translated between these two languages, both recognized as working languages.

Following the Conference's language decisions, the participating states had to agree on the linguistic rules for the Organization itself. At the request of Georges Bidault, French Foreign Minister and head of the French delegation at that time, French was maintained as an official and working language of the United Nations along with English.⁵ The member states soon recognized the importance of language in such an organization and its potential role, as the recognition of a national language as an official language of the organization aligns with each state's interests and soft power strategies. Additionally, the countries present at the Conference acknowledged that multilingualism is foundational to multilateralism and a necessary component of an organization intended to produce international law.

The United Nations recognizes this today, stating that the regime adopted by the General Assembly in 1946 represents « a fair recognition that multilingualism effectively served as an enabler and a prerequisite to multilateralism »⁶. Consequently, the UN Charter from 1945 includes a clause advocating for multilingualism. Article 111 of the UN Charter states that « the present Charter, of which Chinese, French, Russian, English, and Spanish texts are equally authentic ». These languages were already the official languages of the San

⁴ « English and French shall be the working languages of the Conference », PC/20, Report of the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations 1945-1946, San Francisco and London (1945)

⁵ UN News, San Francisco 1945 : la conférence qui changea le monde (2020) - <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2020/06/1071882>

⁶ Dag Hammarskjöld Library, Multilingualism at the United Nations (2023) - <https://www.un.org/en/library/whyitmatters>

Francisco Conference⁷. While this article does not explicitly mention *multilingualism*, it clearly shows the member states' initial intent to embed this principle in the Charter. However, Article 111 only specifies the languages of the Charter and does not provide details on the official or working languages of UN bodies, leaving each body to define its language policies.

The Preparatory Commission, established in 1945 after the Charter's adoption, played a crucial role in setting a legal foundation for the UN's linguistic regime. The San Francisco Conference rules did not necessarily apply to UN bodies since the Charter did not specify precise regulations. Nevertheless, the Preparatory Commission, based on the Conference rules, proposed in its report on December 23, 1945, language rules applicable to the GA and the SC. The Preparatory Commission suggested that the General Assembly adopt, in its Rules of Procedure, Rules 57 to 66, stating that « Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish shall be the working languages » with French and English as the working languages⁸ as during the Conference. However, this recommendation was non-binding, this means that each organ of the UN, whether it be the GA, the SC, or even specialized institutions like UNESCO for example, will not be subject to the same linguistic regime by default, and they will have to adopt their own rules in their internal regulations.

In 1946, the General Assembly adopted its language regulations during its 21st plenary session. The notable resolution 2(1), adopted on February 1, 1946, laid the groundwork for the General Assembly's language regime after discussing the first commission's report presented by Mr. Bech, Luxembourg's representative and Vice-President of the First Commission. The first commission, was mandated during the 16th plenary session to study:

- « a) The language rules adopted at San Francisco,
- b) The rules proposed by the Executive Committee in its reports to the Preparatory Commission,
- c) The extract from the minutes of the twelfth meeting of the Technical Committee at which language rules were discussed »⁹

The commission also designated a subcommittee to study the language rules. This subcommittee included representatives from Ukraine, Luxembourg, Ecuador, Brazil,

⁷ « English, Russian, Chinese, French and Spanish shall be the official languages of the Conference » , PC/20, Report of the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations 1945-1946, San Francisco and London (1945)

⁸ PC/20, Report of the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations 1945-1946, San Francisco and London (1945)

⁹ A/PV.21, Rules of procedure concerning languages

Canada, China, Egypt, the USA, France, Mexico, Norway, the Netherlands, the UK, Czechoslovakia, and the USSR. After presenting its report to the first commission, which then presented it to the GA, the subcommittee proposed recognizing five official languages and two working languages.

The real debate was whether two or five languages should be recognized as working languages. Resolution 2(1) was adopted after extensive debate during two plenary discussions, establishing that « in all the organs of the United Nations, other than the International Court of Justice, Chinese, French, English, Russian, and Spanish shall be the official languages, and English and French the working languages ».

This rule became the cornerstone of the UN's linguistic legal regime, with the General Assembly recommending other UN bodies adopt consistent regulations. The Security Council adopted the same linguistic regime as the General Assembly on a Technical Committee's proposal.

Adopting different linguistic procedural rules for various UN bodies was a lengthy process marked by significant political stakes, as we will see in the following section.

B) The evolution of the initial resolution through the recognition of new working and official languages

The initial discussions on languages highlighted the political significance languages can hold for states, with the recognition of one language over another demonstrating a substantial political impact. Several authors acknowledge that « bringing about change in the language regime at the United Nations is above all a political issue. No member state whose language is among the working languages of the UN is likely to give up that status without a fight, so addition rather than substitution or reduction of languages is about the only possibility »¹⁰.

During the technical committee's early discussions on the SC, Soviet delegates already emphasized that « the question of working languages was especially important »¹¹. The Soviets indicated that « the Soviet Union and China were permanent members of the Security Council, which would also probably include Spanish-speaking countries ; for this reason, French and English should not be given a preferential position »¹².

¹⁰ Humphrey Tonkin, *Language and the united nations : a preliminary review* (draft)

¹¹ PC/20, Report of the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations 1945-1946, San Fransisco and London (1945)

¹² PC/20, Report of the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations 1945-1946, San Fransisco and London (1945)

Similarly, in the GA, the same type of discussions took place from the outset, with countries like China and Spanish-speaking groups requesting recognition of their languages as working languages.

However, before examining the evolution of language status, we must define what the UN means by working and official languages. The UN distinguishes between the two since 1945, recognizing that they serve different purposes. Official languages are defined as « the set of languages selected and recognized by the Member States as the principal languages of communication in the framework of the decision-making of the organizations 'legislative or governing bodies, used for verbal and written exchanges among the delegates of the Member States as well as for the agreed upon mandatory documentation, normative and parliamentary documents, and publications addressed to them and the organizations »¹³, while working languages are defined as « official languages of each organization that are used: (a) for internal – both verbal and written – communications among the staff members and other personnel of the respective secretariat of each organization in their day-to-day operations; and (b) among the delegates of the Member States, in all the instances when they are not obliged by the rules or practices to use the remaining official languages. »¹⁴ The GA and SC's Rules of Procedure indicate that working languages hold a more significant status than official languages. Thus, working languages are more visible than official languages, notably through interpretation and translation. As of 1972, all official languages became working languages of the General Assembly and Security Council, making it more pertinent to study the importance of differentiation before 1972.

In the 1947 provisional Rules of Procedure of the GA, Article 53 stated that « speeches made in either of the working languages shall be interpreted into the other working language, » while Article 54 added that « speeches made in any of the other three official languages shall be interpreted into both working languages ». Furthermore, Article 56 stipulated that « verbatim records shall be drawn up in the working languages. » Although Article 59 indicated that « all resolutions and other important documents shall be made available in the official languages, » the previously cited articles clearly show a predominance of working languages, specifically English and French. Articles 53 and 54 implied a significantly greater presence of French and English in speeches. Articles 56 and 58 regarding verbatim records and the General Assembly Journal also indicated that documentation was dominated by working languages. These same rules applied to the Security Council. Conversely, these rules imply that official languages held a less significant

¹³ JIU/REP/2020/6, Nikolay Lozinskiy, Multilingualism in the United Nations system, Report of the Joint Inspection Unit (2020)

¹⁴ JIU/REP/2020/6, Nikolay Lozinskiy, Multilingualism in the United Nations system, Report of the Joint Inspection Unit (2020)

role. It should be noted that the General Assembly thus recognized « the principle of equality of the official languages »¹⁵.

Currently, the GA and the SC have six official languages, all recognized as working languages. Consequently, the six languages should be on an equal footing. However, at the Secretariat, one of the main organs of the United Nations, only English and French are considered working languages, which explains why the differentiation between these two types of UN languages remains important.

Fairly quickly, the United Nations expanded its language policy. In 1948, the General Assembly amended Article 44 of its Rules of Procedure to include Spanish as a working language¹⁶. In 1968, Russian became a working language of the Assembly, and the resolution adopted indicated that it « considers it desirable to include Russian and Spanish among the working languages of the Security Council »¹⁷. Consequently, the Security Council amended its Rules of Procedure to include Spanish and Russian as working languages in 1969¹⁸. In 1973, the General Assembly recognized that « four of the official languages have already been made working languages of the General Assembly and the Security Council »¹⁹. Thus, the General Assembly decided on December 18, 1973, that all the official languages of the United Nations would also be working languages of the Assembly and again suggested that the Security Council do the same, which it did in 1974²⁰. Even more notably, for the first and only time since the creation of the United Nations, a new language was recognized as an official and working language: Arabic. It gained this status at the GA in 1973²¹, although it was not until 1982 that the Security Council recognized Arabic as an official and working language²².

¹⁵ A/RES/50/11, Multilingualism (1995)

¹⁶ A/RES/247(III), Proposal for the adoption of Spanish as one of the working languages of the General Assembly (1948)

¹⁷ A/RES/2479(XXIII), Inclusion of Russian among the working languages of the General Assembly (amendment to rule 51 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly) and question of including Russian and Spanish among the working languages of the Security Council (1968)

¹⁸ S/RES/263, working languages of the Security Council (1969)

¹⁹ A/RES/3189(XXVIII), Inclusion of Chinese among the working languages of the General Assembly (1973)

²⁰ S/RES/345, Inclusion of Chinese among the working languages of the Security Council (1974)

²¹ A/RES/3190(XXVIII), Inclusion of Arabic among the official and working languages of the General Assembly and its Main Committees (1974)

²² S/RES/528, inclusion of Arabic among the official and working languages of the Security Council (1982)

Therefore, from 1982 onwards, all six official languages of the United Nations held the same status as they were all equally recognized as working languages. This means that all documents written in one language must be translated into the other five languages. It also means that state representatives can speak in any of the six languages, and their statements will be automatically translated and/or interpreted into the other five languages for everyone's understanding. This clearly demonstrates how the principle of multilingualism at the United Nations has evolved positively through the successive recognition of new working languages and the addition of an official language.

The evolution of the linguistic framework logically implies the expansion of the United Nations conference service, which is responsible for translating and interpreting speeches and documents. It will be interesting to study this service in the continuation of our discussions to understand the implementation of the linguistic regime and the challenges it imposes.

It is also important to note that despite the importance that the GA and other United Nations bodies have given to the principle of multilingualism by recognizing six official languages and six working languages, the term multilingualism is not explicitly mentioned in any of the aforementioned resolutions. Therefore, it will be interesting to focus on the principle of multilingualism itself, recognized by the General Assembly of the United Nations as a « core value of the Organization that contributes to achieving the goals of the United Nations »²³.

C) Multilingualism Elevated as a Core Value of the Organization, Not Merely a Linguistic Regime

In the first two points of our research, we saw that the United Nations established a clear legal framework governing the use of languages. However, multilingualism is not just a linguistic regime, and the Organization and its member states truly consider it a fundamental value. This section will allow us to see how and why linguistic diversity is at the heart of the Organization.

The United Nations defined multilingualism a founding principle of the United Nations and then as a fundamental value of the UN. This evolution demonstrates the increasing importance accorded to the principle. Founding principles define the purpose and goals of the UN, while core values shape the work and commitment of the UN. Elevating a principle to a fundamental value demonstrates its critical role in achieving the goals of the United

²³ United Nations, Strategis framework on multilingualism (March 2024)

Nations. This is why member states « acknowledge the contribution of multilingualism to the three pillars of the United Nations: peace and security, development, and human rights »²⁴.

As the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) indicates, « while languages are the attribute of nations, multilingualism is the attribute of the United Nations »²⁵. However, it was not until late that the term *multilingualism* was explicitly used in a General Assembly resolution. Indeed, it took the request of 18 countries to add multilingualism to the UN Agenda and the adoption of a resolution on the issue in 1995 for the GA to address the matter. It was then in 1995, with the adoption of resolution 50/11 on November 15, that the United Nations officially recognized that multilingualism is the corollary of « the universality of the United Nations». From this famous resolution, multilingualism was added to the Organization's Agenda. Subsequently, the GA regularly used this term in its resolutions.

One regularly finds references in literature and GA Resolutions to multilingualism as a « core value »²⁶ of the UN system. However, one notices in the UN Charter that the fundamental values are peace, human rights, the equality of men and nations, and international cooperation²⁷. The Charter, therefore, does not explicitly recognize multilingualism as a fundamental value of the Organization. In fact, multilingualism directly stems from the principle of the equality of peoples and nations and respect for diversity; it is more precisely « an essential component of cultural diversity »²⁸. One may wonder why multilingualism is a component of cultural diversity, and we will study this point more precisely in the course of the research. However, it should be noted at this stage that states « reaffirm that linguistic diversity is an important element of cultural diversity, stress the importance of the full and effective implementation of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which entered into force on March 18, 2007».²⁹ This is why it is important to note at this stage that the link between culture and language explains why language is a political issue.

Different researchers in linguistics and anthropology demonstrate in various studies the link between language and culture. As Levi Strauss declared, « une langue, en usage dans une

²⁴ A/RES/76/268, Multilingualism (2022)

²⁵ JIU/REP/2011/4, Papa Louis Fall Yishan Zhang, multilingualism in the United Nations system organization : status of implementation, Joint Inspection Unit (2011)

²⁶ JIU/REP/2011/4, Papa Louis Fall Yishan Zhang, multilingualism in the United Nations system organization : status of implementation, Joint Inspection Unit (2011)

²⁷ Unites Nations Charter, preamble

²⁸ A/67/78/Add.1, Multilingualism in the United Nations system organizations : status of implementation : note / by the Secretary-General (2012)

²⁹ A/RES/71/328, multilingualism (2017)

société, reflète la culture générale de la population »³⁰ and added that « le langage est une partie de la culture ; il constitue un de ses éléments »³¹. The link between culture and language is thus twofold: language is a component of culture, but language also reflects that same culture. Thus, returning to the UN, cultural diversity is considered a value of the Organization, which logically explains why multilingualism is also considered a value of the Organization.

Respect for cultural diversity is not the only explanation for the respect and protection of multilingualism. Indeed, this Principle is seen as « a ferment of tolerance and, therefore, a means of realizing the primary aspiration of the founders of the Organization, namely, to save future generations from the scourge of war».³² Multilingualism « strengthens dialogue between people from all backgrounds and ensures tolerance among countries. »³³ One of the objectives of the United Nations is to « achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion. »³⁴ For this, dialogue and multilateralism must live and enable the international community and all its member states to address global issues. Multilingualism serves precisely this purpose, as some authors demonstrate, « effective communication is essential for effectively addressing complex issues and problems at all levels»³⁵. Thus, in a multicultural and multilingual environment like the United Nations, this choice of multilingualism serves multilateralism and allows everyone to express themselves freely and achieve the Organization's objectives. As Catherine Pollard, Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and Coordinator for Multilingualism, stated, « Nous ne réaliserons pas la paix et la sécurité internationale, le développement durable ni les droits de l'homme, en ignorant les contextes locaux et les langues qui y sont parlées ». ³⁶

³⁰ « a language, used in a society, reflects the general culture of the population » [translated by : author] - Claude Lévi-Strauss, Linguistique et anthropologie, *Anthropologie structurale*, Ed. Plon, (1958), p. 78-79

³¹ « language is a part of culture; it is one of its elements » [translated by : author] - Claude Lévi-Strauss, Linguistique et anthropologie, *Anthropologie structurale*, Ed. Plon, (1958), p. 78-79

³² A/71/757, multilingualism, Report of the Secretary-General (2017)

³³ Melissa Flemming in Dag Hammarskjöld Library, Multilingualism at the United Nations (2023) - <https://www.un.org/en/library/whyitmatters>

³⁴ UN Charter, Article 1

³⁵ Kathleen Stein-Smith, The Role of Multilingualism in Effectively Addressing Global Issues: The Sustainable Development Goals and Beyond, *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol.6, No.12 (2016)

³⁶ « We will not achieve international peace and security, sustainable development, or human rights by ignoring local contexts and the languages spoken there » [translated by: author] - Catherine Pollard, Le monolinguisme à l'ONU n'est pas une fatalité, *Radio France Internationale* (2017)

II - The Challenges of Implementing the Principle of Multilingualism at the United Nations

The first part of the research establishes the legal framework surrounding the use of languages in the various bodies of the United Nations. From the first General Assembly resolution in 1946 to the most recent ones, it is evident that multilingualism is a genuine political will of the member states, aiming to elevate cultural diversity as a fundamental value of the Organization. We have seen how the legal framework has evolved over time, but to fully understand multilingualism within the United Nations, it is essential to focus on the implementation of this principle, which should provide a more nuanced view of its importance. To study the implementation of multilingualism within the United Nations bodies, we will first examine the essential roles played by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the member states in the application of the previously studied rules (A). The Secretary-General, as the head of the UN administration, plays a crucial role in driving and supervising the application of language policies, while the member states contribute by their commitment and support to shape and sustain these policies. Next, we will delve into the strategic framework recently adopted and launched to implement the resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly (B). This strategic framework provides an understanding of the concrete initiatives and actions undertaken to promote and strengthen multilingualism within the organization. Finally, we will explore how interpretation and translation enable the implementation of multilingualism in all UN bodies, despite the budgetary and other challenges these services face. Translation and interpretation services are vital for ensuring communication and mutual understanding among member states, which is indispensable for the organization's proper functioning (C). We will analyze the mechanisms in place to overcome financial and logistical challenges to guarantee a quality service.

This exploration of multilingualism's implementation within the United Nations will allow us to better understand how this fundamental principle is applied in practice, despite the obstacles encountered. It will highlight the ongoing efforts and necessary adaptations to preserve and promote linguistic diversity in the complex and ever-evolving international context of the United Nations.

A) The Secretary-General and Member States as Guardians of Multilingualism

To protect and ensure the implementation of multilingualism in the different organs of the Organization, two key actors play essential roles: the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the member states themselves.

From the outset, it has been the member states who have taken on a leadership role in promoting and protecting linguistic diversity. It was the member states who, in 1995, took the initiative to request the addition of a new item to the agenda of the fiftieth session of the GA. This request was initiated by Belgium, Burundi, Capo Verde, Djibouti, Egypt, France, Greece, Guinea-Bissau, Morocco, Mauritius, Monaco, Niger, Portugal, Romania, Senegal, Togo, Tunisia, and Vietnam. This request led to the addition of the theme of « multilingualism » to the General Assembly's agenda, and since then, it has regularly adopted resolutions on this topic as we have previously seen. Several states are considered staunch defenders of multilingualism, especially several *groups*, notably the Group of Francophone Ambassadors (GAF) and the Group of Friends of the Spanish Language (GAE).

As Ms. Vives Balmana, representative of Andorra to the United Nations, recalls, the GAF and the GAE regularly provide « inestimable soutien »³⁷ to multilingualism promotion projects. Indeed, the GAF represents 88 states (members and observers of the OIF), and the GAE comprises 20 member states. These groups do not only promote their languages but genuinely strive for strict respect for multilingualism. For example, at the 2006 Francophonie Ministerial Conference in Bucharest, OIF member states committed to formulating « au sein des groupes d'ambassadeurs francophones, des propositions pour favoriser l'usage du français et réagissent auprès des secrétariats, collectivement si nécessaire, en cas de manquement aux règles du multilinguisme ».³⁸ It is important to note that these groups do not gather according to regional group logic but unite states based on their language. This *de facto* creates very diverse groups that share common values and ideas, transcended by a common language. Thus, these groups clearly demonstrate how a language can unite and rally, and especially how a language can facilitate the recognition of common goals and values.

Other countries, although already part of the GAF or GAE, are genuinely involved in promoting multilingualism. For instance, Canada, a multilingual country itself, often leads resolution projects (e.g., « Canada is proud to co-sponsor this resolution project again this

³⁷ « invaluable support » [translated by: author] - A/76/PV.81, General Assembly official records, 76th session (2022)

³⁸ « proposals within the groups of Francophone ambassadors to promote the use of French and react to secretariats collectively if necessary in case of breaches of multilingualism rules » [translated by : author] - Conférence ministérielle de la Francophonie, vade-mecum relatif à l'usage de la langue française dans les organisations internationale (2006)

year »³⁹), and they frequently express their commitment to « demeure résolu à (..) promouvoir (le multilinguisme) et à le préserver »⁴⁰

We have thus observed the leading role of member states on this issue, but it is also important to note that through the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, the states particularly request the Secretary-General and, more broadly, the Secretariat to be the « guardian » of the principle.

Indeed, « all United Nations Secretariat entities are expected to contribute actively and demonstrate their commitment to this joint endeavor. »⁴¹ Since Resolution 42/207 C of December 11, 1987, the General Assembly has tasked the Secretary-General with « ensuring the equal treatment of the official languages of the United Nations. » To this end, the Secretary-General regularly writes reports on language use and is responsible for appointing the Coordinator for Multilingualism, who is the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management. The coordinator must « relay the concerns and questions raised by Member States and Secretariat entities, » « facilitate a concerted, uniform, and coherent course of action on multilingualism within the Secretariat, » and « propose and introduce innovative solutions to instill a culture conducive to multilingualism in all departments and offices. »⁴² To achieve this, the coordinator must implement several strategies, including awareness-raising activities among member states and stakeholders. The coordinator is not alone in fulfilling this mission; they can also rely on a network of reference persons representing the various Secretariat entities. Antonio Guterres, the current Secretary-General of the United Nations, has placed multilingualism at the heart of his action, being multilingual himself and frequently speaking in different official languages during his addresses. Since 2019, the Coordinator for Multilingualism has been Mr. Movses Abelian, an Armenian national from Georgia. In a statement at a translation contest, he quoted Confucius:

« If language is not correct,
then what is said is not what is meant;
if what is said is not what is meant,

³⁹ A/76/PV.81, General Assembly official records, 76th session (2022)

⁴⁰ « promoting and preserving multilingualism » [translated by : author] - A/76/PV.81, General Assembly official records, 76th session (2022)

⁴¹ Secretary General, multilingualism- <https://www.un.org/sg/en/multilingualism/index.shtml>

⁴² A/71/757, multilingualism, Report of the Secretary-General (2017)

then what ought to be done remains undone. »⁴³

Through this quote, Mr. Abelian demonstrates the importance of multilingualism in multilateralism and indicates his interest in the language issue.

Additionally, the Secretary-General and member states work closely with other international organizations, such as UNESCO, to promote joint initiatives in language training and cultural awareness, thereby enhancing the impact of their efforts. Concrete examples of initiatives include language scholarship programs, educational partnerships, and cultural events aimed at celebrating and promoting linguistic diversity within the UN and beyond. These actions show that multilingualism is not only a matter of communication but also a vector of peace, understanding, and international cooperation.

After examining the crucial role of the Secretary-General and member states in promoting multilingualism, it is essential to focus on the recently adopted strategic framework by the United Nations in March 2024, which promises to turn these commitments into concrete actions.

B) The United Nations Strategic Framework for Implementing the Principle

Despite the importance given to multilingualism by UN bodies, it was not until March 27, 2024, that the UN finally adopted a Strategic Framework on Multilingualism. Indeed, following the reminder that « multilingualism is an enabler of multilateral diplomacy and that it contributes to the promotion of the values of the United Nations, as well as the faith of our people in the purposes and principles enshrined in its Charter, »⁴⁴ the United Nations GA « regrets the delays in the development of a Secretariat-wide coherent policy framework on multilingualism to support a comprehensive and coordinated approach on multilingualism within the UN. »⁴⁵ The cited resolution dates from 2022, it is the latest resolution adopted by the GA on multilingualism, and it indeed highlights that before 2022, no strategic framework or clear policy for implementing the language regulations had been adopted. This new strategic framework from March 2024 is a significant step forward in the implementation and protection of multilingualism within the United Nations, and it will be interesting in the future to see how this strategic framework has impacted the various organs of the Organization.

⁴³ Mr. Movses Abelian Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and Secretariat-wide Coordinator for Multilingualism, Statement at the St. Jerome translation contest (2020)

⁴⁴ A/RES/76/268, multilingualism (2022)

⁴⁵ A/RES/76/268, multilingualism (2022)

As previously studied, it was the member states during a General Assembly who requested the Secretariat to implement a coherent policy on multilingualism⁴⁶, a request reiterated in 2019 and then in 2022. Indeed, in 2020, the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) « included a review of multilingualism in the UN system in its work program for 2019. »⁴⁷

In its 2020 report, the JIU found that « United Nations entities did not apply the relevant rules (regarding multilingual staff) either at the recruitment stage or in staff promotion procedures »⁴⁸ and also noted a « slow progress across the system in initiatives supporting multilingualism as a fundamental value. »⁴⁹

The JIU proposed seven recommendations:

1- Adoption of a « strategic framework for multilingualism with administrative and operational guidelines for its implementation, to be submitted for adoption by the end of 2022. »

2- Appointment of « a senior official as coordinator or focal point for multilingualism, clearly defining their responsibilities and delegated powers for coordinating the implementation of the strategic framework within their entity. »

3- Improvement of policies already in place to attract new translators and interpreters and retain talented and qualified staff in language services. »

4- Adoption of « training policies that encourage staff to continuously improve and enhance their skills in the official languages of the entity. »

5- Create a working group tasked with developing, for adoption by the end of 2022, a framework for the UN system on teaching, learning, assessment, and certification in the six official languages of the UN.”

⁴⁶ A/RES/71/328, multilingualism (2017)

⁴⁷ JIU/REP/2020/6, Nikolay Lozinskiy, Multilingualism in the United Nations system, Report of the Joint Inspection Unit (2020)

⁴⁸ JIU/REP/2020/6, Nikolay Lozinskiy, Multilingualism in the United Nations system, Report of the Joint Inspection Unit (2020)

⁴⁹ JIU/REP/2020/6, Nikolay Lozinskiy, Multilingualism in the United Nations system, Report of the Joint Inspection Unit (2020)

6- “Task the High-Level Committee on Management with developing a comprehensive and coordinated approach to multilingualism as a core value of the UN system.”

7- “Plan awareness-raising actions, such as language-related events or other activities to promote multilingualism as an expression of diversity and a means of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals during the last decade of the 2030 Agenda.”

We note that these recommendations cover the entire Secretariat’s activities, including its staff, which explains why the strategic framework adopted in March 2024 covers “all areas of the Secretariat’s activities, including its interactions with the global community and local populations and its role as an employer.”⁵⁰ This new strategic framework marks a crucial step in realizing the UN’s commitments to multilingualism. It aims to enhance communication and understanding among its members and the global population.

The strategic framework is based on several principles and commitments, all linked to the recommendations issued by the JIU. With this new strategic framework, the Secretariat commits to linguistic diversity by recognizing the cultural richness brought by this diversity. To this end, the Secretariat pledges to promote a balanced use of the six official languages. Next, the Secretariat commits to strengthening the linguistic capacities of its employees through continuous training programs. The Secretariat plans to establish a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to measure progress in implementing multilingualism through regular reporting. Furthermore, the Secretariat is dedicated to promoting multilingualism in UN events to raise awareness among the public and staff about the benefits of linguistic diversity. The Secretariat also highlights the importance of multilingualism in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to education, gender equality, and reducing inequalities.

With this 2024 strategic framework, the United Nations aims to turn theoretical commitments into concrete and measurable actions. It remains to be seen how these initiatives will be implemented and their impact on various aspects of UN activities. Successful implementation of this framework could serve as a model for other international organizations seeking to promote multilingualism and cultural diversity.

C) Interpretation, Translation, and Innovation: Challenges and Opportunities

⁵⁰ United Nations, Strategic framework on multilingualism (March 2024)

Some describe UN interpreters as those who « vivent et font l'histoire chaque jour, en luttant contre les barrières culturelles et linguistiques à l'échelle mondiale »⁵¹. Thus, the pillars and key players of multilingualism within the United Nations are undeniably the interpreters and translators who work there. Before examining the challenges these interpreters and translators face, it is important to understand the difference between these two roles. Indeed, « the distinction between 'translation' (written product) and 'interpretation' (oral product) is being recognized, »⁵² even though they are closely related linguistic disciplines.

Translation is defined as « rendering text from a source language into a target language while preserving meaning. Translation is written, » whereas interpreting is « the oral form of translation, enabling real-time cross-linguistic communication either face-to-face, in a conference setting, or over the phone. »⁵³ In both cases, the goal is to convey a message from one language to another, but the key difference lies in timing. Interpretation is immediate and must occur at the moment the speech is given, being oral, while translation is written, allowing for a time gap between the original written text and its translation. Ultimately, the work of interpreters and translators is not the same and each requires specific skills.

As early as 1946, with the notable Resolution 2(I), interpreters and translators were granted a place within the Organization. Thus, interpretation was implemented as soon as possible⁵⁴, starting from the first session of the General Assembly, and the same applied to the translation service. Interestingly, the annex of the aforementioned resolution shows that the United Nations itself distinguishes between translation and interpretation since the two terms are used in different contexts, oral and written. In both cases, the work is monumental.

In 2022, 243 million words were translated, and 21,511 meetings were interpreted simultaneously⁵⁵. The complexity of the translators' and interpreters' work is heightened by the fact that delegations sometimes must speak in a language that is not their primary one (since it is not one of the official languages). They must therefore be able to adapt to the speed, style, and accents of the speakers. To ease their task, interpreters have requested

⁵¹ « live and make history every day, overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers on a global scale » [translated by : author] - Rodrigo Demetrio, *La vie d'un traducteur et interprète des Nations Unies: les interprètes de l'ONU fournissent au monde un travail essentiel*, *bureau works* (2024)

⁵² Nancy Schweda Nicholson, translation and interpretation, *annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, Cambridge University Press(1995)

⁵³ Language scientific, what is the difference between translation and interpreting ?, <https://www.languagescientific.com/what-is-the-difference-between-translation-and-interpreting/>

⁵⁴ « enquiry into the question of the installation of telephonic systems of interpretation and, if possible, arrangements for the establishment of such a system for the second part of the first session »

⁵⁵ United Nations, Strategic framework on multilingualism (March 2024)

the implementation of certain speaking rules, such as not exceeding 120 words per minute. Additionally, before some meetings, experts gather with interpreters to share technical vocabulary that continually evolves. However, interpreters also face cultural challenges, which is why during meetings, they must « trouver des équivalents culturels appropriés et de tenir compte du contexte culturel du discours, ils doivent posséder les connaissances voulues du point de vue tant linguistique que culturel »⁵⁶

Yet, these are not the only challenges faced by the interpretation and translation services. Two significant crises have impacted the services: the budgetary crisis and COVID-19. Over time, the budget for the interpretation service has been reduced, leading to the situation where « due to budgetary constraints, a number of documents that used to be translated are now delivered in English only »⁵⁷. Regularly, the GA calls for a review of interpretation budgets to restore more linguistic justice. In addition to budgetary constraints, the United Nations also faced COVID-19, which left a notable mark on multilingualism at the UN. During this period, many informal meetings were held online without interpretation since simultaneous online interpretation was not offered. This challenge prompted the United Nations to reflect on the use of technology in its interpretation and translation services.

The 2024 strategic framework proposes the strategic use of technology by leveraging the most advanced translation and interpretation technologies to improve the efficiency of multilingual communications. This includes the adoption of computer-assisted translation software and the extension of machine translation services. COVID-19, for example, led to the development of Remote Simultaneous Interpretation (RSI) for interpreting online meetings. However, interpreters note that « remote meetings pose challenges (...) which make it unlikely that they will replace in-person meetings over the long term. »⁵⁸ Despite certain negative aspects of artificial intelligence, the UN Conference Services must stay current, and these new technologies will help reduce both the workload and the costs associated with interpretation and translation. Artificial intelligence (AI) is defined as « the theory and development of computer systems capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, translation, and interpretation »⁵⁹. Currently, the use of AI is not unanimously accepted, and it seems unlikely that humans can be excluded from interpretation and translation work.

⁵⁶ « find appropriate cultural equivalents and consider the cultural context of the speech, requiring the necessary knowledge both linguistically and culturally » [translated by : author] - Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, interpretation, <https://www.un.org/dgacm/en/content/interpretation>

⁵⁷ GA/SPD/592, Budgetary Constraints No Excuse for Lack of Complete Linguistic Parity in United Nations Activities, Speakers Tell Fourth Committee (2015)

⁵⁸ Prisca Chaoui, remote interpretation, *UN Today* (2020)

⁵⁹ Milica Begovic, Alex Oprunenco, Lejla Sadiku, Parlons de l'intelligence artificielle, UNDP (2018)

Nonetheless, this is a point that will need to be closely monitored because AI's use could potentially allow for a broader and more comprehensive implementation of multilingualism within the Organization in the future. Despite this, the quality of current interpreters and translators and their role in « building culture, understanding, and lasting peace » remains beyond doubt.

III- De facto Monolingualism: English Dominance Since the Institution's Inception: Observation and Consequences

Multilingualism, as we have studied, is a fundamental value of the United Nations. The legal framework surrounding this principle has evolved significantly over the years, aiming towards increased protection of the principle. Several actors uphold this principle, including the member states at the forefront, followed by the Secretary-General, and especially the interpreters and translators. UN doctrine indeed emphasizes the importance of linguistic diversity for respecting diversity, equality, and human rights. However, the implementation of this principle falls short of the objective, and the very late adoption of a strategic framework demonstrates the difficulty of achieving linguistic justice within such a diverse organization. In this section, we will examine the alarming observation made by the Organization itself, as well as by member states and scholars. Despite the legal framework, one language overwhelmingly dominates the Organization's daily work, and unsurprisingly, it is the English language (A). This observation is not new, but the consequences it entails are significant. One of the United Nations' principles is to adopt international law, common to all member countries, to achieve various organizational goals. The adoption of this international law logically rests on multilateralism and therefore on negotiation. This part will allow us to examine precisely the consequences of English linguistic hegemony on the adoption of international law (B). Finally, we will see that the monopoly of the English language within the Organization jeopardizes linguistic diversity, which is advocated, thus de facto posing a threat to humanity's heritage (C).

A) Alarming observation: The linguistic empire of english challenges multilateralism

After studying the linguistic regulations in force within the United Nations organs, as well as their implementation, we must now assess the current state of multilingualism within the Organization and more broadly in diplomacy and international relations.

Historically, French was considered the language of diplomacy, but the 19th century marked a turning point for the French language. Between the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the United States and the British Empire, the English language spread rapidly. The First and Second World Wars only reinforced the position of English-speaking powers on the international stage, and their language seemed to naturally impose itself in international relations. While French did not lose its prestige or status as the language of diplomacy at that time, the presence of English continued to increase.

The First World War marked a real turning point in the international use of English. For example, the importance of English in the world of international politics was recognized when the Treaty of Versailles of 1919 was drafted in both French and English. Additionally, the creation of the League of Nations was one of the first international institutions to have two official languages: French and English.

French, which was widely dominant in the diplomatic sphere, saw the rise of English questioning its monopoly. Today, « English language has become the lingua franca because this is the common language and most suitable mode of communication that helps people understand each other regardless of any ethical or cultural background». ⁶⁰ Thus, the English language widely dominates international relations, and more broadly, the world. It is now interesting to see where English stands at the United Nations.

As we have studied above, it was only in 1995 that the term multilingualism appeared in the General Assembly resolutions, and it was only in 2024 that the Secretariat adopted a strategic framework for language use. Over time, member states have demanded the fair application of the existing language regime and respect for linguistic diversity; however, the UN organs took many years to consider the will of the member states. As in the international sphere, English has become widely dominant in the United Nations. The JIU in 2011, for example, recognized that « the trend towards 'monolingualism' is far from decreasing, with the 'hegemonic' use of one language, English, over the other five United Nations languages, for the sake of pragmatism. » ⁶¹

From its inception, the United Nations was an organization dominated by the English language, and it failed to reverse the balance. For example, at the San Francisco Conference, five languages were recognized as working languages. However, all speeches made in a language other than English had to be translated into English only and all writings from different delegations had to be written in English at the request of the US delegation. Over time, English has continued to assert itself in the organization as the classic and, above all, normal language of communication. The organ that seems most affected by the

⁶⁰ Mirvan Xhemaili, the importance of English language in public diplomacy and international relations, *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, 8(1) (2022)

⁶¹ JIU/REP/2011/4, Papa Louis Fall Yishan Zhang, multilingualism in the United Nations system organization : status of implementation, Joint Inspection Unit (2011)

widespread use of English is the Secretariat. Some even say that English is « the true working language of the Secretariat »⁶² because this organ seems to work mostly in English. For example, the Secretariat publishes documents in English first, then publishes their translations. This is because the documents are initially written in English and then translated; however, the regulations of the UN organs require simultaneous publication of documents in all working languages.

One significant indicator of the organization's monolingualism is the near-exclusive presence of UN websites in English. Thus, today, in 2024, 117 United Nations websites are written in English, 28 in French, 25 in Spanish, 10 in Arabic, 4 in Russian, and 1 in Chinese. It is evident that English is widely dominant, with even French not leading the pack. But what seems even more alarming is the gap between French, Spanish, and the other official languages. What is most striking about the Organization is that English dominates not only in the General Assembly's speeches, documentation, press services, and negotiations. Ultimately, what is noticed is that despite the Organization's multilingual character, English has clearly become an undisputed lingua franca, affecting all the Organization's organs and work. Now, it is necessary to examine the consequences of this monolingualism for the Organization. We will also attempt to explain the consequences of English dominance on the participation of non-English-speaking countries.

B) The Consequences of Monolingualism in the Adoption of International Law

One of the United Nations 'essential missions is to promote the development and codification of international law. The GA plays a predominant role in customary law formation, expressing the *opinio juris* of member states⁶³. Language undoubtedly plays a role in the development of this international law because « la langue est la clef de voûte de toute pensée et pratique juridique ». ⁶⁴ We will see that the dominance of the English language within the UN's normative organs significantly influences legal thought and practice.

⁶² Jesús Baigorri Jalón, *Interpreters at the United Nations. A history*, *Universidad de Salamanca*, translated by : Anne Barr (2004)

⁶³ Philip C. Jessup, the U.N General Assembly as a parliamentary body, *Pakistan Horizon*, vol. 14, no. 1, (1961)

⁶⁴ « language is the keystone of all legal thought and practice » [translated by : author] - Carolyn Moser, *Ma patrie c'est le multilinguisme. Une réflexion sur l'utilisation du français dans l'étude et la pratique du droit*, *Max-Planck-Institut für ausländisches öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht* (2024)

There exists what is called the « myth of linguistic equivalence, » as demonstrated by Jacqueline Mowbray⁶⁵. In her research, Mrs. Mowbray demonstrates that there is a myth of translation and that there is thus no direct and perfect correspondence between words and concepts in different languages. By explaining that languages are shaped by specific social, cultural, and historical contexts, it implies that concepts and meanings do not necessarily overlap from one language to another. When it comes to law, each country or community holds its legal culture, which implies two things. First, it means that different cultures do not have the same approach to law. Secondly, it means that certain legal terms or concepts do not exist in all legal cultures. Moreover, legal concepts do not have exactly the same meaning in different cultures.

English-speaking countries, especially the United Kingdom and the United States, are Common Law countries. Common Law is a legal system based on precedents. Thus, although rules are codified, they remain secondary, and the judge is bound by the rule of *stare decisis et quia non movere*, which means that the judge must stick to what has been decided and not change what exists. This legal culture gives the judge a central role because precedents make the law. This legal culture is closely linked to the English language. For example, some legal terms specific to Common Law are untranslatable into languages other than English, such as the terms *trust*, *equity* or *triable either way*.

Not all UN member states share this legal culture; others are of the Romano-Germanic tradition, like many French and Spanish-speaking countries. In this culture, the written law plays a predominant role, and the judge has only a secondary role. Codified law is paramount in this culture.

Several legal cultures are thus at the heart of the UN, and it can be challenging to combine them given their disparities. The UN's goal is to create a common set of values and thus a bridge between different legal cultures. But many now speak of the *Americanization of international law*⁶⁶. This Americanization would affect all branches of law and even more particularly economic law. This remark is of particular importance for the continuation of our research because it demonstrates how states have been led to imitate the legal models of dominant countries, as was the case with the United States. The idea that growth would reach an economic optimum with the opening to global competition, which is the United

⁶⁵ Jacqueline Mowbray, multilingualism, translation and international law : four myths, *Cambridge International Law Journal* vol.12, no 2, (2023)

⁶⁶ Allan Farnsworth, L'américanisation du droit — Mythes ou réalités », *Archives de Philosophie du Droit*, 45:21-28 (2001)

States 'liberal economic policy, implies the use of the Common Law system because this legal culture seemed more flexible and pragmatic to meet the Organization's needs.

Many also speak of « droit mondialisé »⁶⁷. This is a law that originates from a local culture and has been transformed by the addition of a global dimension. Thus, the United Nations creates global law, mixing on the one hand the desire to create common law as a common set of values and on the other hand Common Law, which therefore leads to a certain Americanization of law. The role of language in international law is not limited to the simple translation of terms. The predominance of English profoundly influences the codification and interpretation of international laws. Common Law concepts, for example, may be privileged in official documents, thus creating a bias in favor of Anglophone legal systems. This phenomenon can bias the interpretation of legislative texts, implicitly favoring pragmatic and casuistic approaches over civil law traditions, which emphasize the codification and precision of written laws. Take, for example, the term *trust*, specific to Common Law. This concept has no direct translation in many languages and legal systems, posing significant challenges during international negotiations. Efforts to find approximate equivalents can lead to misunderstandings and divergent interpretations. This problem is not merely theoretical: it has concrete repercussions on how laws are applied and respected on an international scale.

International negotiations can also be influenced by this linguistic dominance. Delegations from non-English-speaking countries may find themselves disadvantaged not only due to linguistic barriers but also because of the need to navigate a legal framework that may be less familiar to them. This linguistic and cultural imbalance can affect power dynamics within the United Nations, making some voices less audible.

We have thus examined in this part the impact of English dominance on the adoption of international law. As we have seen, law is dominated by the legal culture associated with the English language, namely Common Law. But this is not the only consequence of English linguistic dominance. Indeed, we will see that the dominance of one language can be a threat to humanity's heritage.

C) Linguistic Diversity at Risk: Threats to Humanity's Heritage

UNESCO defines humanity's heritage as « our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass to future generations »⁶⁸. What interests us more precisely is

⁶⁷ « globalized law » [translated by : author] - Thierry Rambaud, Introduction au droit comparé, *Presses Universitaires de France* (2014)

⁶⁸ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, World Heritage - <https://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=160>

the intangible cultural heritage, also protected by UNESCO. This intangible cultural heritage represents the intangible, including practices, representations, knowledge, and know-how. Since the 1980s, UNESCO has recognized that language diversity is an essential element of cultural diversity. As UNESCO explains in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of 2001, « Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation, and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations». Thus, protecting cultural diversity is linked to respecting human dignity and therefore human rights, which are a common set of values shared by the international community. Languages are then protected for their connection with culture. Because indeed, language is a link between past, present, and future generations. In all languages, we have untranslatable expressions that represent a historical moment or a cultural event specific to the place where that language is spoken. Protecting linguistic and cultural diversity is thus ensuring the transmission of cultures, traditions, knowledge, and identities. It was not until the 1980s that UNESCO recognized language diversity as an essential element of humanity's cultural diversity. Since then, the Organization has greatly worked to protect languages.

Today, there are between 6,000 and 7,000 languages spoken on Earth, and according to some experts, if humanity does not protect them more, only 200 languages will be spoken in the world in 100 years, and only 100 languages will be present in 200 years⁶⁹. As Moves Abelian, coordinator for multilingualism, reminds us, « almost half of the 7,000 identified languages in the world are endangered, we risk a loss of linguistic diversity on a scale at least equivalent to the loss of biodiversity, with consequences that remain to be seen. »⁷⁰ By indicating this, Mr. Abelian demonstrates the importance of protecting languages and also indicates the catastrophe that could result from a loss of linguistic diversity. Stefan Zweig accurately described what appears to him as a cultural homogenization affecting the entire world, caused in part by technological advancements and in part by the Americanization of society. Because the result of the loss of linguistic diversity is a standardization of language, a standardization of the world, and a standardization of culture. Consequently, this would result in a loss of traditional knowledge and cultural practices.

⁶⁹ UNESCO Canadian Commission, Les langues maternelles, un joyau de l'humanité (2018) - <https://fr.ccunesco.ca/blogue/2018/2/langues-maternelles-un-joyau-de-l-humanite>

⁷⁰ UN Chronicle, Linguistic Diversity: An Imperative for the United Nations (2022) - Linguistic Diversity: An Imperative for the United Nations - <https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/linguistic-diversity-imperative-united-nations>

What contributes today to the disappearance of languages is particularly globalization and the influence of dominant languages. The predominance of English within international organizations, and more specifically the UN, can accelerate the marginalization and disappearance of minority languages. Indeed, this dominance creates an imbalance in linguistic practices worldwide. Minority languages, often undervalued and underrepresented, see their speakers adopting dominant languages for economic, educational, and social reasons. Thus, English, as the language of international communication, exerts enormous pressure on local languages, threatening their survival. Mechanisms by which this marginalization occurs include the lack of institutional support and resources for learning and using minority languages. Educational policies often favor dominant languages, leaving little room for teaching local languages. Furthermore, mass media and digital platforms, dominated by a few languages, contribute to this linguistic standardization. Younger generations, attracted by the opportunities offered by mastering dominant languages, are gradually abandoning their mother tongue, further accelerating the process of disappearance.

UNESCO and other international organizations play a crucial role in combating this trend. Through initiatives like the International Mother Language Day, UNESCO raises awareness of the importance of linguistic diversity and promotes policies to preserve endangered languages. However, these efforts must be strengthened and supported by concrete actions from member states and civil society.

Protecting linguistic diversity is essential not only to preserve local cultural heritages but also to guarantee genuine cognitive diversity and varied perspectives globally. The loss of languages equals the loss of an invaluable part of humanity's heritage. Therefore, it is essential to redouble efforts to safeguard and revitalize endangered languages, recognizing their inestimable value for present and future generations. The UN must set an example for the rest of the world. If the trend toward monolingualism in the Organization persists, the protection of cultural diversity will not be able to progress favorably. It is the UN's responsibility to counter this trend and make strict decisions to uphold the principles that the same Organization has imposed.

CHAPTER 2: Theories of a Multilingual World: Perspectives and Challenges

After studying the linguistic legal regime of the United Nations and its relative implementation, we observed that despite the members' and the Organization's desire to elevate multilingualism as a core value, English has become the lingua franca of the Organization. From the first resolution 2(1) of the General Assembly in 1946 to the adoption of the Secretariat's first strategic framework in 2024, the Organization has consistently demonstrated its commitment to linguistic diversity. However, the six languages recognized as official and working languages have never been on an equal footing. Since its creation, English has always been the dominant language within the Organization, at all levels. The adoption of the strategic framework, however, indicates a certain willingness to make progress in this area, and this chapter will allow us to understand the ideologies behind this desire for evolution.

Indeed, we have briefly mentioned some ideologies that explain why multilingualism is important for the Organization. We have shown that the idea that languages are part of humanity's intangible heritage explains why this heritage is protected by organizations like UNESCO, which partly explains why the United Nations has a multilingual regime. But we will delve deeper into the importance of languages in this section. The indissoluble link between culture and language indicates why multilingualism is synonymous with multiculturalism (I). This theory of multiculturalism is at the heart of the United Nations, which promotes itself as an international organization bringing humanity together and working for « the people ». Thus, we will understand the reasons why this Organization has opted for a multilingual policy.

However, we will then see that member states, as the primary protectors of multilingualism, can slow down the Organization's aspirations. Despite the common desire to achieve linguistic justice, the issue of languages is particularly important for member states (II). The choice of languages, as we have briefly seen, is a political issue and generally forms part of a real foreign linguistic policy for states. Languages can indeed be seen as a tool of soft

power for states or as proof of their place on the international stage. Thus, we will be led to understand why the recommendations of the General Assembly have taken time to be respected.

Finally, one of the explanations for the current failure of multilingual policies remains little discussed among scholars, but it is the one that will interest us in our research. Indeed, some mention the theory that the choice of languages used at the United Nations is influenced by the international system. In this section, we will see that the choice of languages, and the predominant use of English within the explanation, can be linked to global geopolitics (III). It will also be interesting to note that the historical events that took place in the second half of the 20th century shaped the linguistic regime of the United Nations and led to the dominance of the English language.

I - Multilingualism, Advocate of Multiculturalism

Multilingualism, as a foundational element of cultural diversity, plays a key role in promoting multiculturalism. In this section, we will explore the intrinsic relationship between language and culture. Recognizing this link will allow us to highlight the ideology behind the United Nations' multilingual policy. Indeed, language is much more than just a communication tool; it reflects the cultural identity and history of a community. We will highlight why the choice of a multilingual regime is essential for promoting linguistic diversity. By addressing how English, as it has become a global lingua franca, has lost part of its original culture, we will see the challenges and compromises inherent in adopting a universal language at the expense of cultural particularities (A). Secondly, we will see that the studied Organization plays a crucial role in promoting multiculturalism worldwide. By adopting a multilingual policy, the UN recognizes and values the linguistic and cultural diversity of its member states, thus promoting multiculturalism within its ranks (B). Finally, we will see that adopting multilingual practices has a significant impact on intercultural communication and understanding. We will examine how multilingualism facilitates exchanges and reduces misunderstandings between different cultures. By allowing everyone to express themselves in their native language, the Organization fosters more authentic and inclusive communication. This section will demonstrate that multilingualism is an indispensable pillar of multiculturalism, contributing to a world where diversity is not only recognized but also celebrated.

A) An Indissoluble Link Between Language and Culture: The Reason for the Choice of a Multilingual Regime

In the beginning of our research, we quickly mentioned the link between language and culture, but it is important to study this more deeply. Scholars widely recognize the dual connection between language and culture. On one hand, « language plays a vital role in establishing and maintaining what we call culture, including conventions, habits, and interpretive practices of individuals and communities »⁷¹. It is through language that humanity's heritage is transmitted and developed. Thus, language influences the culture of a country or region; communication allows a community's practices and habits to transcend eras and create new cultural elements. On the other hand, « how a particular culture uses language can reveal important aspects of sociality and behavior »⁷². A community's culture influences its language and the behaviors of its people. Recognizing that culture influences language and vice versa, language shapes culture, explains the importance the United Nations places on multilingualism.

At this stage, it is important to define what we mean by culture. For analytical research, culture « remains implicit and often undefined, while its manifestations such as rites, rituals, and organizational stories, symbolic manifestations of the 'deeper' phenomena, occupy center stage and become the de facto definition of culture »⁷³. The intangible nature of culture makes it particularly complex to analyze. Language offers an analytical framework to understand what constitutes a community's culture. Moreover, cultural practices and traditions, passed down from generation to generation, are key elements that shape collective identity and influence individual and social behaviors. These practices or traditions, which form a community's identity and culture, are expressed through language. Certain expressions referencing historical moments are indicators of a community's culture. The grammar rules of a language can also help understand the thinking and reasoning of a community.

This link between culture and language implies two hypotheses for our research. On one hand, the link would explain why the dominance of English in the Organization is undesirable. On the other hand, some researchers attempt to refute the presence of a

⁷¹ Elizabeth Keating, Language and Culture, *Linguistic anthropology : Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems - UNESCO (2009)*

⁷² Elizabeth Keating, Language and Culture, *Linguistic anthropology : Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems - UNESCO (2009)*

⁷³ Edgar H. Schein, What is culture, *Sociology of Organizations : Structures and Relationships*, Sage (1991)

relationship between culture and language, which explains why the widespread use of English would not be problematic.

Indeed, a researcher attempts to differentiate between « languages of communication » and « languages for identification »⁷⁴. These two types of languages differ in their connection to a community's culture. Juliane House explains that languages of communication are a « useful instrument for making oneself understood in international encounters, » whereas languages of identification are « the main determinants of identity. » What is interesting in this research is that the researcher does not deny the link between culture and language; she even acknowledges its importance for languages of identification. However, she explains that some languages, particularly English, which has become widely dominant on the international stage, lose their cultural connotation to become a mere tool or instrument of communication. With this theory, Juliane House tries to explain why the dominance of the English language would not be a threat to multilingualism. She explains this for reasons of practicality and pragmatism. However, this study demonstrates the danger of this ideology for humanity's heritage. The link between language and culture is too strong to disappear.

The monolingualism of the United Nations, if studied through Juliane House's theory, would not be a danger to multilingualism, but a danger to the culture associated with the English language. Indeed, by becoming the lingua franca on the international stage, the researcher explains that English would have lost its cultural component. However, we have seen that the relationship between language and culture is dual. Thus, this theory would mean that Anglophone culture is in danger, becoming more uniform and tending towards a global culture. Anglophone identity would then be partially questioned by this hypothesis.

However, as we briefly studied earlier and will examine in more detail later, the widespread use of English seems to have conveyed ideas linked to English-speaking countries. For example, we have seen that the hegemonic use of the English language explains why the Common Law legal culture has become predominant within the Organization. This example contradicts House's theory.

Thus, for the remainder of our research, we will not follow Juliane House's theory and will recognize the indissoluble link between language and culture. This relationship explains why multilingualism is upheld within the Organization.

B) The United Nations at the Heart of Multiculturalism

⁷⁴ Juliane House, *English as a Lingua Franca: A Threat to Multilingualism?*, *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7/4, (2003)

If the link between language and culture is widely recognized by scholars, we must study the connection between multilingualism and multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is a notion that has evolved over time with the historical changes in the world, reflecting « a debate about how to understand and respond to challenges associated with cultural diversity based on ethnic, national, and religious differences »⁷⁵. Multiculturalism is seen as « a normative ideal »⁷⁶ in which members of a minority group can maintain their collective identity and their own cultures and practices.

From its inception, the United Nations made multiculturalism a sine qua non condition of the Organization. When 51 nations signed the UN Charter in 1945, they decided to include certain references, including the protection of future generations and respect for human rights, notably through the inclusion of non-discriminatory clauses.

It is widely recognized that World War II was a period during which multiculturalism was forgotten. 1945 marks a real paradigm shift, and the notion of multiculturalism that interests us « refers to the political, legal, and philosophical strategies that emerged after World War II to accommodate this newfound social diversity »⁷⁷. After experiencing six years of intense war, it was necessary to rebuild a world based on human values and respect for diversity, which was the goal of the United Nations. The United Nations was created based on the example of various multicultural countries that succeeded in developing respect for others within their communities. Many authors recognize the benefits of a multicultural state. Some note, for example, that Belgium, Switzerland, and the Netherlands « were stable and democratic when their religious and ethnic diversity ought, according to many writers at the time, to have led to democratic instability and violence »⁷⁸. To achieve this peace, these states relied on the theory of consociationalism, which « featured the inclusion of minorities in a political 'grand coalition' that granted them cultural autonomy »⁷⁹. This consociationalism policy inspired the United Nations because the peace brought by these national policies was the goal of the United Nations on an international scale. However, this consociationalism theory implies the adoption of a common law that respects minorities. This is why the United Nations 'will translated into the creation of a common international law for the member states of the Organization. Indeed, « multiculturalism and cultural

⁷⁵ Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2020)

⁷⁶ Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2020)

⁷⁷ Richard.T. ASHCROFT and Mark BEVIR, What is postwar multiculturalism in theory and practice?. *Multiculturalism in the British Commonwealth: Comparative Perspectives on Theory and Practice* (2019)

⁷⁸ Steven Ian Wilkinson, India, Consociational Theory, and Ethnic Violence, *Asian Survey*, vol. 40, no. 5 (2000)

⁷⁹ Steven Ian Wilkinson, India, Consociational Theory, and Ethnic Violence, *Asian Survey*, vol. 40, no. 5 (2000)

diversity are the 'raison d'être' for the existence of international law, because without cultural diversity there is no need for international law »⁸⁰.

The concept of multiculturalism is complex to measure because it contains many aspects. One of the determining proofs for evaluating multiculturalism is therefore the law, especially the law that protects cultural diversity. As we have seen, the United Nations decided to put this idea of respecting cultural diversity at the heart of the Organization. Several policies clearly demonstrate the Organization's willingness to respect and protect cultural diversity to make the United Nations a place of multicultural gathering. For example, preventing discrimination, protecting against genocides, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, and protecting minorities are laws and policies that favor multiculturalism by protecting it. These notions have evolved alongside the notion of multiculturalism itself.

Thus, the goal of multiculturalism is respect for diversity, not the inclusion of minorities into a majority group. Often, in states with different cultures, the practices and language of the majority group have been imposed on minorities. In a multicultural state, this imposition is not present, and each minority is on an equal footing with the majority group. Thus, it is noted that language, or linguistic diversity, is also an element for measuring multiculturalism within a country or organization. By choosing a multilingual regime, the United Nations recognizes the multicultural nature of the Organization. By opting for a multilingual policy, the Organization protects multiculturalism by respecting cultural diversity. Multilingualism thus plays a crucial role in supporting multiculturalism by allowing the expression and preservation of various cultural identities through their respective languages. By offering individuals the opportunity to speak and promote their mother tongue, it fosters the inclusion of linguistic minorities and ensures equitable representation. This linguistic diversity also encourages intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding, reducing misunderstandings and potential conflicts. A multilingual policy ensures that all members of a society or international organization have equal access to information, resources, and opportunities, avoiding exclusion based on language barriers. At the United Nations, such a policy reflects their commitment to universal values of respect for human rights, diversity, and equality. By adopting a multilingual linguistic policy, the United Nations can better manage intercultural tensions and maintain international peace and security.

In 2023, UN experts explained that « the UN and international community have failed to focus efforts where they are most needed: on preventing conflict and ensuring equal protection of the human rights of marginalized minorities in a world of rising nationalism,

⁸⁰ Johannes Van Aggelen, The Shift in the Perception of Multiculturalism at the United Nations since 1945, Multiculturalism and International Law, *Multiculturalism and International Law : Essays in Honour of Edward McWhinney* (2009)

xenophobia, and prejudice »⁸¹. Indeed, many authors highlight a general trend of crisis in multiculturalism. The UN's multilingual policy is precisely an example of this crisis. We have indeed seen previously that the United Nations tends to be a monolingual organization, and that the multilingual policy is therefore in crisis. The hegemonic use of English contradicts the idea of multiculturalism advocated by the United Nations since its creation. Indeed, the imposition of a majority language is contrary to respect for minorities.

C) Impact of Multilingual Practices on Communication and Intercultural Understanding

We have respectively examined the link between language and culture as well as the reasons, notably related to multiculturalism theory, which explain the United Nations' choice for a multilingual regime. To understand the UN's intentions, we must investigate the impact of multilingual practices on communication and intercultural understanding, as multilingualism is not merely a matter of translation or interpretation; it is a practice that profoundly influences the social, cultural, and political dynamics of international interactions.

The United Nations is based on the principle of multilateralism, defined as « the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions »⁸². Multilateralism thus relies on effective communication among different speakers who must feel equal during negotiations. Therefore, multilingual practices play a crucial role in inclusion and equity within international organizations like the United Nations, as this practice « fosters harmonious communication among peoples and enables multilateral diplomacy »⁸³. By providing access to information in various languages, these practices ensure that all members, regardless of their native language, can fully participate in debates and decisions. This notably avoids exclusion based on linguistic barriers and ensures that the voices of linguistic minorities are heard. The interpretation of meetings, as we have previously studied, allows representatives from different cultures and regions to express themselves freely and understand speeches in their own language, thus enhancing participation and engagement.

Multilingualism also facilitates intercultural dialogue by reducing misunderstandings and communication errors. Linguistic barriers are often sources of conflict, as they can lead to

⁸¹ OHCHR, Press release « UN and international community must focus on minorities to address global crises and conflict prevention, UN expert warns » (2023)

⁸² Robert.O. Keohane, Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research, *International Journal* 45, no. 4 (1990)

⁸³ United Nations, Strategic framework on multilingualism (March 2024)

misunderstandings and misconceptions about the intentions and attitudes of others. Multilingual practices therefore improve the clarity and accuracy of communications, which is crucial in the context of the United Nations. They also help understand cultural nuances, values, and different perspectives better. For example, UN interpreters do not just translate words but must also convey the tone, emotion, and cultural context of speeches. This helps preserve the integrity and authenticity of messages, thus fostering a deeper and more respectful understanding between cultures. Respecting diverse languages strengthens trust and cooperation between nations. By demonstrating a commitment to diversity and inclusion, multilingual practices contribute to building stronger and more positive relationships between countries.

There are many examples of successful multilingual policies that demonstrate the positive impact of these practices on intercultural communication. For instance, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), which used three official languages (English, French, and Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian) to ensure a fair and transparent trial, allowing victims, witnesses, and defendants to speak and understand legal proceedings in their own language. Indeed, the ICTY « delivered a first set of trial transcripts produced in local languages to the Serbian War Crimes Prosecutor as part of a project that aims to enhance the capacity of judiciaries in the region to handle complex war crimes cases »⁸⁴. With this action, the ICTY makes justice more accessible to local populations, fostering better understanding of procedures and verdicts, as well as trust in the international judicial system. This availability of documents in local languages can also serve educational and public awareness purposes.

To maximize the positive impact of multilingual practices on communication and intercultural understanding, the United Nations must continue to promote multilingualism as a core value of its mission. It is crucial to develop strategies to assess the effectiveness of multilingual policies and adapt them to the changing needs of linguistic communities. For example, the United Nations could consider expanding the number of official languages to include other widely spoken languages or strengthening translation and interpretation capacities for endangered languages. Furthermore, efforts must be made to raise awareness among Organization members about the importance of multilingualism and its benefits for international cooperation and peace. The Organization must take into account the importance of these multilingual practices, which play a vital role in promoting multiculturalism, inclusion, and international cooperation. By enabling authentic and inclusive communication, they facilitate intercultural understanding, preserve cultural identities, and strengthen trust between nations. For the United Nations, adopting and

⁸⁴ IRMCT, Press Release « ICTY Delivers First Transcripts in Local Languages to Serbia » (2010)

promoting multilingual policies is essential to fulfilling its commitment to cultural diversity and universal values of respect for human rights, diversity, and equality.

II - Linguistic Justice or Language Politics: The Struggle Between International Aspirations and State Interests

We have previously seen that the link between language and culture partly explains the linguistic regime of the United Nations. Indeed, by promoting multilingualism, the Organization emphasizes and protects its multicultural character. The variety of countries involved in international negotiations, a characteristic of multilateral diplomacy, implies intercultural communication and understanding, which, on paper, may seem difficult to achieve. Multilingualism is therefore the tool for understanding and bridging the gap between culturally opposed states.

In the complex arena of international affairs, where cultures intersect, languages overlap, and national interests clash, the United Nations stands as a bastion of multilateral dialogue. However, behind the apparent unity lies subtle dynamics where language, this fundamental pillar of cultural identity, becomes both a bridge and a barrier. Understanding the role of multilingualism at the United Nations is delving into a debate between the quest for linguistic justice and state power games. It is with this perspective that the United Nations has built its foundations on the ideals of multiculturalism, respect for diversity, and the defense of human rights. However, as we will explore in more detail, the multilingualism of the United Nations rests on a delicate balance between the pursuit of linguistic justice (A) and national political imperatives (B). While justice and equality occupy a central place in the goals of the United Nations, the reality of state interests and local language policies sometimes undermines these noble aspirations (C).

A) Toward Global Linguistic Justice: Objective of the United Nations

In the 1840s, with the advanced industrialization of France and Great Britain, the concept of *social justice* emerged. Social justice can be defined as « the fair treatment and equitable status of all individuals and social groups within a state or society »⁸⁵, and this definition is readily transferable to an international organization such as the United Nations (UN). Indeed,

⁸⁵ Brian Duignan, Social Justice, *Britannica* (2024)

the UN's objective is the equitable treatment and recognition of status for all its member states. Without delving too deeply into the broader concept of justice, it is important to note that « institutions are not an end in themselves: they are a means to getting things done »⁸⁶. When the concept of social justice emerged, some believed that the development of certain institutions could be considered a final demonstration of the presence of social justice. However, institutions should be viewed as tools or means to achieve specific goals such as social justice. On a global scale, the United Nations is an institution that works towards social justice, which is one of its objectives. February 20th has been recognized by the United Nations as World Day of Social Justice, because « it enables societies and economies to function more cohesively when social justice is prioritized »⁸⁷.

However, it is important to note that social justice is not solely based on economic justice. « Social justice is about the treatment of inequalities of all kinds »⁸⁸. This is why the theory of social justice has given rise to the theory of linguistic justice, which will now be our focus. This theory is defined as the idea that every individual has the right to use and maintain their mother tongue or language of choice in all spheres of social, political, and economic life, without suffering discrimination or undue disadvantages due to their language. According to this theory, three elements explain why the spread of a lingua franca worldwide is unjust. According to Philippe Van Parijs, the spread of a lingua franca, while facilitating communication, reducing linguistic barriers, and aiding international cooperation, is unjust for three reasons:

1. « It is unfair that non-Anglophones should shoulder the whole burden of learning a lingua franca. »⁸⁹

Indeed, the justification for the concept of linguistic justice would be economic. « Competence in a shared language provides a major public good by enabling communication between all those who share that competence »⁹⁰. A lingua franca fulfills the two elements of a public good: it is non-rival, meaning that its use by one person does not reduce its availability to others; and it is non-excludable, as no one can be prevented from using it. The problem then becomes the cost. Non-native speakers of the lingua franca must

⁸⁶ Brian Barry, *Why social justice matters*, *Polity* (2005)

⁸⁷ UN, World Day of Social Justice 20 February (2024) - <https://www.un.org/en/observances/social-justice-day>

⁸⁸ Brian Barry, *Why social justice matters*, *Polity* (2005)

⁸⁹ Philippe Van Parijs, *Linguistic Justice for Europe and the World*, *Oxford: Oxford University Press* (2011)

⁹⁰ Philippe Van Parijs, *Linguistic Justice for Europe and the World*, *Oxford: Oxford University Press* (2011)

learn it, which incurs a cost in time and possibly money. In contrast, native speakers of the lingua franca do not bear this cost, giving them a significant advantage.

2. « It is unfair that the growing currency acquired by their language should give Anglophones a multi-dimensional advantage, particularly in competition for jobs in an increasingly trans-national labor market. »⁹¹

The United Nations, by choosing a multilingual policy, aims to give equal opportunities to both Anglophones and non-Anglophones, thereby putting the idea of equal opportunity into practice.

Finally, it is recognized that:

3. « It is unfair that the native language of a subset of the European or world population should be given a manifest precedence over all other languages. »⁹²

The issue of language fairness and equality is complex and multifaceted. While it is true that certain languages have historically been given precedence over others, often due to political, economic, or cultural reasons, promoting equality among languages is an important goal, and this is the objective set by the United Nations. One approach to addressing this issue is to advocate for linguistic diversity and multilingualism. Encouraging the preservation and promotion of all languages can help prevent the dominance of any one language and ensure that diverse linguistic communities have the opportunity to thrive. Additionally, providing resources and support for language revitalization efforts can help preserve languages that are at risk of extinction.

B) Language Policies and National Interests: The Delicate Balance

Language, a corollary of culture, is an integral part of states and is widely recognized on the international stage. The Romantic movement suggests that « langues et nations (sont) des objets non seulement naturels, mais encore strictement discontinus et homogènes, au point de savoir reconnaître les limites d'une langue équivalait à tracer les frontières de la nation correspondante »⁹³. Indeed, language has several components.

⁹¹ Philippe Van Parijs, *Linguistic Justice for Europe and the World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2011)

⁹² Philippe Van Parijs, *Linguistic Justice for Europe and the World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2011)

⁹³ « languages and nations are not only natural objects but also strictly discontinuous and homogeneous, to the extent that recognizing the boundaries of a language equated to drawing the borders of the

Languages possess an identity component. All individuals who speak the same language can identify as belonging to the same group; conversely, language can exclude those who cannot communicate with the community. « Lors du processus d'édification nationale, un rôle primordial est accordé à la langue, elle est le ciment de la nation qui émerge »⁹⁴. Thus, language becomes a marker of national identity. However, in this process of nation creation, the largest ethnic communities tend to acquire the status of a nation, while other ethnic groups are marginalized or given minority status. Therefore, language serves as a means of inclusion in the majority group or exclusion from it.

Languages also have a nationalist component. « La langue est, sans contredit, une des caractéristiques les plus essentielles d'une nation, puis qu'elle permet les rapports entre ses divers membres; la langue est l'expression de la pensée; elle conditionne l'épanouissement d'une littérature nationale et c'est par elle enfin qu'une nation manifeste son idéal, c'est son meilleur aiguillon; la langue est-elle en décadence, commence-t-elle à céder la place à une autre, la vitalité nationale s'en ressent»⁹⁵.

This is why there is a noticeable tendency among certain nationalist parties to use language as a means of rallying. Catalonia, an autonomous community of the Spanish state, is a perfect example. In Catalonia, « the Catalan language is indeed the nodal differentiator of the Catalan nation and the central identity support of nationalist ideology »⁹⁶. Consequently, nationalists engage in what is described as a « language battle » or « language war »⁹⁷. In this context, we speak of linguistic nationalism and linguistic loyalty.

corresponding nation « [translated by : author] - Patrick Sériot, La linguistique spontanée des traceurs de frontières. *Cahiers Du Centre De Linguistique Et Des Sciences Du Langage*, (8) (2022)

⁹⁴ « In the process of nation-building, language plays a crucial role; it is the cement of the emerging nation » [translated by : author] - Iveta Todorova-Pirgova, *Langue et esprit national : mythe, folklore, identité*, *Ethnologie française*, vol. 31, no. 2, (2001)

⁹⁵ « Language is, without a doubt, one of the most essential characteristics of a nation, as it enables communication between its various members; language is the expression of thought; it conditions the flourishing of national literature, and it is through it that a nation manifests its ideal, serving as its best spur; if the language is in decline, if it begins to give way to another, the nation's vitality suffers » [translated by : author] - Ivanoff (1919) cited in Patrick Sériot, *La linguistique spontanée des traceurs de frontières*, *Cahiers de l'ISL n°8* (1996)

⁹⁶ « the Catalan language is indeed the nodal differentiator of the Catalan nation and the central identity support of nationalist ideology » [translated by : author] - Henri Boyer, « Identité (nationale), nationalisme linguistique et politique linguistique. Réflexions à partir de quelques situations contemporaines », *Cahiers du plurilinguisme européen* (2016)

⁹⁷ Henri Boyer, « Identité (nationale), nationalisme linguistique et politique linguistique. Réflexions à partir de quelques situations contemporaines », *Cahiers du plurilinguisme européen* (2016)

Thus, language is a « tool for identity construction and assertion »⁹⁸, explaining why states have addressed this issue since the formation of nation-states. We observe two types of nations: multilingual nations like Canada, Belgium, and India, and monolingual nations like France and the US. Different countries have adopted various language policies depending on the state's environment and the presence or absence of different ethnicities. States have had to consider language issues and define their status due to the potentially contentious nature of language. The language policies adopted by states often reflect their efforts either to promote national unity or to accommodate the cultural and linguistic diversity of their population.

In multilingual nations like Canada, Belgium, and India, language policies often aim to balance the needs of different linguistic communities. For instance, in Canada, official bilingualism recognizes and values both English and French, the country's two official languages. This policy aims to promote equality between Anglophone and Francophone communities and prevent linguistic conflicts. In Belgium, linguistic federalism acknowledges and respects Dutch-speaking, French-speaking, and German-speaking communities, each region enjoying significant linguistic autonomy. In India, the recognition of 22 official languages in the Constitution illustrates an inclusive approach to managing its immense and complex linguistic diversity. In contrast, monolingual nations like France or the United States have historically favored a single national language as a means of unification. In France, the promotion of French has been central to nation-building since the French Revolution, with policies aimed at eradicating regional dialects and imposing a standardized language through education and administration. This policy, known as linguistic Jacobinism, aims to strengthen national unity and ensure communication among all citizens. However, it has also led to the marginalization of regional languages and resistance in certain regions.

These examples illustrate how language can be both a tool of cohesion and division. The choices made by states regarding language policy can either reinforce national unity or exacerbate ethnic and cultural divisions. Linguistic tensions can lead to separatist movements or demands for autonomy, as seen in Catalonia, Scotland, or Flanders. Managing language policies thus requires sensitivity to the social and cultural dynamics of each country.

Therefore, language, as an element of national identity, plays a crucial role in the construction of nation-states and the management of ethnic and cultural relations within a country. Language is far more than a mere means of communication: it is a central factor in defining and preserving national and cultural identity. States must navigate these issues

⁹⁸ Michelle Edwige Jeanne Martineau, *La langue comme outil de construction et de revendication identitaire, Concepts et savoirs* (2022)

carefully to avoid conflicts and promote the harmonious coexistence of their diverse linguistic communities. What interests us in our research is understanding the importance that language holds for each state. Thus, it is crucial to remember the identity and nationalist character of language.

C) Conflicts and Compromises: Reconciling International Aspirations and State Will in Language Affairs

Although linguistic justice is largely recognized as one of the aspirations of the United Nations 'language regime, it seems to be challenged by the importance each member state places on its own language. The complexity of the United Nations stems from the fact that each member state, being independent and sovereign, cannot be compelled by the international community to adopt a particular policy. This dynamic creates fertile ground for linguistic conflicts, where aspirations for equitable global communication must be balanced with the respect for national linguistic identities. For example, countries like France and China insist on the use of their languages in official communications to preserve their cultural heritage and geopolitical influence. On the other hand, less represented languages, such as Arabic or Russian, can experience relative marginalization, exacerbating feelings of injustice among their speakers.

To navigate these challenges, the United Nations has adopted compromise measures. Compromise is considered the foundation of multilateralism. The recognition of six official languages (English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, and Arabic) is one such illustration. However, this solution is not without criticism, as it does not fully address the global linguistic diversity. Moreover, the practical implementation of this policy often faces budgetary and logistical limitations, making universal simultaneous translation and interpretation difficult.

Thus, the United Nations finds itself at the delicate intersection of international ambitions and state realities, constantly navigating between the ideal of linguistic justice and the reality of national language policies. Progressing towards a more just linguistic regime requires enhanced cooperation and balanced compromise, allowing both respect for linguistic diversity and effective global communication. However, the crux of our research lies here. Today, there is talk of a general crisis of multilateralism, characterized by the weakening or questioning of international institutions and the principles governing international cooperation. This crisis is manifested by a retreat into nationalism and unilateralism, the rise of geopolitical tensions, withdrawal or non-participation in international agreements, and thus the weakening of international institutions.

Additionally, we must note that the phenomenon of power holds considerable importance on the international stage. States recognized as powerful have significant weight in international cooperation and can more or less impose their will. Indeed, it is not possible to speak of international democracy because not all actors have the same weight or influence. Major powers, such as the United States, China, and Russia, exert disproportionate influence over the organization's language policies, reflecting their weight on the international stage. These countries can impose the use of their language due to their economic and military power, creating a dynamic where the languages of less influential countries are relegated to the background. Moreover, colonial history plays a significant role in the predominance of certain languages. For example, the legacy of colonialism has consolidated the place of French and English in international communications. This historical dominance perpetuates structural linguistic inequality within international institutions, including the UN.

Thus, the crisis of multilingualism at the UN is intimately linked to the complex international context, where power and history determine linguistic influence. Increased recognition of these dynamics and a commitment to balancing them are essential for advancing towards a more just and equitable linguistic regime within the United Nations. In sum, resolving the crisis of multilateralism and multilingualism requires a holistic approach that considers both political realities and aspirations for equitable global communication. The remainder of our research will be based on this observation: multilateralism is in crisis and power is a determining factor on the international stage; in this context, could the crisis of multilingualism at the UN be explained by this complex international context? In the following section, we will see how geopolitics, power, and history determine the use of languages at the UN, and how this use of languages reflects political reality.

III - The Geopolitics of Language: Towards an Explanatory Theory

We have previously seen that the importance of multilingualism at the United Nations is explained by the intrinsic link between language, culture, and nation. Indeed, each nation has its own language, which explains why language has been recognized as an element of identity and nationalism. The strong connection between language and nation indicates why the UN's linguistic regime must not and cannot be neglected. The United Nations, representing « the people », must adopt a linguistic regime that represents all of humanity. Although, for practical and pragmatic reasons, this is not entirely possible, it is necessary to find a middle ground between the aspiration for linguistic justice and national interests.

However, we have observed that the UN system tends towards de facto monolingualism, which we will now attempt to explain.

Firstly, we will examine how the dominant languages at the United Nations possess a significant historical and colonial legacy that explains the past importance of their dominance (A). Secondly, we will discuss how 1945 was a turning point for the international system, involving crucial changes, particularly in terms of linguistic implications (B). Finally, we will explore how power dynamics and geopolitical influence shape the linguistic regime of the studied Organization (C).

A) The Historical and Colonial Legacy of Dominant Languages

We have previously seen that two languages, French and English, dominate the UN system. To understand the current presence of these languages, it is necessary to undertake a historical investigation that explains why these languages were dominant and why they remain prominent on the international stage today.

For nearly 200 years, French was recognized as the language of diplomacy, replacing Latin. This follows the adoption of the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts signed by François Ier in 1539, which mandated the use of French in judgments and official acts « afin qu'ils soient en un langage claire et qu'il n'y ait ni puisse y avoir aucune ambiguïté ou incertitude »⁹⁹. By the 17th century, French had spread widely among the elites of neighboring countries. For example, it was mandatory to speak French in European courts partly because international treaties and letters between states were written in this language. Notably, the Treaty of Rastatt, signed in 1714 between the Kingdom of France and the Habsburg monarchy, ending the War of the Spanish Succession, was the first treaty written in French rather than Latin. During this period, « on l'a parlée dans toute l'Europe et son usage est devenu presque universel »¹⁰⁰. The negotiations of the Congress of Vienna also took place in French, and the world recognized the importance of a lingua franca for diplomacy. Even Ottoman diplomats in the 19th century used French as their working language. It is important to note that this dominance of the French language at that time was not « le résultat d'une prédominance politique de la France à cette époque, mais bien la reconnaissance du rayonnement culturel de la langue française »¹⁰¹. Indeed, many new ideas and concepts

⁹⁹« so that they are in a clear language and there is neither nor can be any ambiguity or uncertainty »
[translated by : author]

¹⁰⁰ « it was spoken throughout Europe, and its use became almost universal » [translated by : author] -
Claude Hagège, *Le Souffle de la langue. Voies et destins des parlers d'Europe*, Odile Jacob (1992)

¹⁰¹ « the result of France's political predominance, but rather the recognition of the cultural influence of the French language » [translated by : author] - Raoul Delcorde, *Le français, langue de la diplomatie?*, *Le devoir* (2016)

emerged in France during this period. French literature was also significant and influential on the international stage. The influence of literary salons, academies, and intellectual exchanges also contributed to the rise of French as the language of diplomacy. The precision of the French language also played a role in its use in the diplomatic sphere. Even today, some diplomatic terms like « chargé d'affaires » or « agrément » are French terms that have been adopted into other languages because there were no equivalents.

Thus, France's history partly explains why French was considered the *lingua franca* of diplomacy for almost two hundred years. However, we must also consider that colonial history explains the dominance of both French and English on the international stage. This is referred to as linguistic imperialism, describing a form of cultural domination through language. This is what happened with French and English, and it is why these two languages are still spoken in former colonies even after their liberation. When these states conquered new territories, the colonizing countries imposed their languages. For example, « The use of English was enforced in many regions and remains one of the official languages in several former British colonies, such as in South Africa or Fiji »¹⁰². This citation demonstrates that even after decolonization, the imposed languages remained in use, notably due to the identity and cultural significance that languages hold.

What does this demonstrate? We observe that power explains the dominance of a language. Indeed, if French dominated diplomatic practices for over 200 years, it was because the country was culturally, politically, and militarily powerful. France was a model for its neighboring countries. Additionally, France used its language as a remarkable form of soft power and the imposition of the French language conveyed the values attached to it. If French and English were dominant in the 20th century, was also because both states imposed their languages by force in their conquered territories. Thus, it is clear that « Questions of value, power, and access are in this way deeply intertwined with language »¹⁰³. It is important to note, however, that the dominance of a language can be explained either by the use of coercive force or by the use of soft power. Thus, French became an international language through soft power and later through the use of coercive force in the colonies, which was also the case for the English language.

For the remainder of our research, we will keep in mind that history and power shaped the use of languages long before the creation of the United Nations.

B) Contemporary Geopolitical Dynamics and Their Effects on Multilingualism

¹⁰² Emilie Tenbroek, *Decolonising Language in History*, *Durham University* (2022)

¹⁰³ Emilie Tenbroek, *Decolonising Language in History*, *Durham University* (2022)

1945 is a landmark year for international relations, marking a period when the world underwent major transformations with profound repercussions on numerous aspects of international cooperation.

World War II was a devastating moment for humanity, leaving numerous nations destroyed both physically and mentally, and generating a universal desire for peace and international cooperation to prevent future wars as catastrophic as those experienced. This period heralded a new era characterized by increased multilateral cooperation. One of the most significant developments during this time was the creation of the United Nations (UN) in 1945. This international organization aimed primarily to promote peace, security, and cooperation among nations to prevent future conflicts. Notably, the UN was established by giving a special role to the victorious powers. The countries granted veto power in the Security Council (China, France, the United Kingdom, Russia, and the United States) were the Allies victorious in the Great War. Additionally, the official languages of the UN were chosen in 1946 to reflect the major victorious powers of the war and their geopolitical spheres of influence. Thus, from 1946 onward, the languages of the veto-holding states were included in the linguistic system of the Organization. This linguistic selection aimed to represent various continents and cultures, making the UN truly multilingual and reflecting the new dynamics of global power.

The end of World War II also marked the beginning of the bipolar era, with the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as global superpowers. This geopolitical rivalry, known as the Cold War, significantly influenced international linguistic dynamics. English and Russian became crucial languages in diplomacy, science, and technology. English, in particular, established itself as the dominant language not only due to the economic and military power of the United States but also through its massive cultural diffusion via Hollywood, music, literature, and later, the digital and internet revolution. Russian, on the other hand, remained the communication and scientific language in Soviet bloc countries, extending its influence in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and certain countries in Africa and Latin America.

A third significant change during this period was decolonization. After 1945, the world witnessed a vast movement of decolonization, liberating numerous countries in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean from European colonial domination. These new states, although freed from colonial rule, often retained the languages of their former colonizers as official languages, as previously discussed. For example, English remained an official language in several former British colonies such as India, Nigeria, and Kenya. Similarly, French was maintained in countries like Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and Morocco. This practice can be explained by several reasons: the need to maintain national cohesion in countries often

marked by great linguistic and ethnic diversity, the desire to facilitate administration and education, and the lack of consensus on a single indigenous language that could replace the colonial language.

During this same period, new states emerged, leading to an increase in the number of UN member states. With the growing number of UN members, linguistic diversity became more pronounced, creating challenges in terms of translation, interpretation, and effective communication. Although English and French remain essential working languages at the UN, the institution has had to adapt to the inclusion of new languages and promote multilingualism to respect the cultural identities of the new member states. Globalization and the Internet have also favored the diffusion of English as a global language but have also allowed other languages to gain importance through digital media and cultural exchanges. Today, linguistic competence has become a major asset in international relations, not only for communication but also for understanding and intercultural negotiation. Diplomats and international officials must now be polyglots and culturally sensitive to navigate this diverse linguistic landscape. Linguistic competence has become crucial for modern diplomacy, as it helps overcome communication barriers, strengthen mutual understanding, and facilitate international negotiations. Mastery of multiple languages also allows diplomats to better understand the cultural and historical contexts of the countries with which they interact, thus enhancing the effectiveness and depth of diplomatic relations.

The events of 1945 profoundly transformed the global political and linguistic landscape. The rise of superpowers, decolonization, and the creation of the United Nations all contributed to shaping the use and dominance of languages on the international stage. But why, despite the desire to protect multilingualism and multiculturalism, does the UN tend to be a multilingual organization? I argue that the geopolitics of the post-war period influenced the use of languages within the Organization. During this period, the world shifted from a multipolar to a bipolar structure, with American and Soviet power. Despite this, American power managed to endure over time, reinforcing its role on the international stage. Today, we can almost speak of a unipolar world dominated by American power, which is very influential in all fields. Thus, as previously discussed, French managed to dominate diplomacy through its culture, its connection with literature, science, and new ideas. Since 1945, the United States has imposed the use of English on the international stage thanks to its remarkable soft power. It will therefore be interesting to see in the case study how English paved its way to become a lingua franca of international relations.

C) Public Diplomacy and Soft Power: The Geopolitical Role of Language

Public diplomacy has become a crucial practice for states and an important element of national foreign policy. The term *public diplomacy* was developed in the 1960s to replace the term *propaganda* which had acquired a pejorative connotation over time. Public diplomacy describes the conduct of foreign policy directed towards foreign publics. It is defined as « a government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and cultures, as well as its national goals and current policies »¹⁰⁴. This form of diplomacy targets not only state actors, unlike more 'classic' diplomacy, but also the populations of other countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Korea for example acknowledges that « public diplomacy aims to attract foreign audiences through the arts, knowledge sharing, media, language, and aid ».¹⁰⁵

We must remember that public diplomacy helps to « increase the soft power of a given state »¹⁰⁶. We have previously mentioned the link between soft power and language, but to further develop our explanatory theory, we need to define what is meant by soft power. In 1990, Joseph Nye developed the concept of soft power in contrast to the already recognized term of power. Nye states that « power is the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one prefers, and that can be accomplished by coercion, payment, attraction, and persuasion, » while he defines soft power as « the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment »¹⁰⁷. Thus, soft power allows a state to impose its ideas on other actors without using force, but through the spread of culture or language.

What interests us in our research is one element of this public diplomacy and state soft power. Indeed, « the promotion of the national language is a key aspect of reaching foreign audiences »¹⁰⁸, as it allows the sharing and transmission of the country's culture. Some researchers explain how language can create soft power. César Villanueva Rivas proposes five different levels of soft power that can be observed in the study of a language. The first level is *empathetic*, which involves communicating a worldview and national idiosyncrasies; the second level is *sympathetic*, referring to the aesthetic level of the language; the third level is *geopolitical*, involving the exercise of symbolic persuasion and ideological influence

¹⁰⁴ Hans M. Tuch, *Communicating With the World: U.S. Public Diplomacy Oversea*, Palgrave Macmillan (1990)

¹⁰⁵ Eduardo Luciano Tadeo Hernández, *Public Diplomacy, Soft Power and Language: The Case of the Korean Language in Mexico City*, *Journal of Contemporary Eastern Asia* Vol. 17, No. 1 (2018)

¹⁰⁶ Eduardo Luciano Tadeo Hernández, *Public Diplomacy, Soft Power and Language: The Case of the Korean Language in Mexico City*, *Journal of Contemporary Eastern Asia* Vol. 17, No. 1 (2018)

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Nye, *Soft power: the origins and political progress of a concept*, *Palgrave Communications* 3(1) (2017)

¹⁰⁸ Eduardo Luciano Tadeo Hernández, *Public Diplomacy, Soft Power and Language: The Case of the Korean Language in Mexico City*, *Journal of Contemporary Eastern Asia* Vol. 17, No. 1 (2018)

over foreign identities through cultural industries; the fourth level is the *diplomatic circuit*, exercising influence over decision-making by positioning the language in multilateral forums; and finally, he highlights the *utilitarian* level of a language to help in economic transactions and promote businesses. Thus, language can create soft power by generating 1- cultural attraction (empathetic, sympathetic, and geopolitical levels) or 2-political and economic attraction (diplomatic and utilitarian levels).

Few researchers recognize the link between geopolitics and language, as Rhys Jones and Huw Lewis explain, acknowledging that « geography's study of language and languages has been partial, underdeveloped, and inconsistent »¹⁰⁹. However, for the purpose of our research, I support the idea that the diffusion of a language by a state, and the desire to make this language a global one, is part of a geopolitical strategy implemented by soft power created through cultural attraction. Thus, language is not only a means of communication but also a strategic tool used by states to reinforce their global influence. States may employ various strategies for linguistic diffusion. Examples include cultural institutes, exchange programs, and international media. Given the crucial role played by language in multilateral organizations, the recognition of a language as an official language of the United Nations, for instance, can increase a state's diplomatic influence. However, this relationship is reciprocal since the recognition of a language as an official UN language also demonstrates a state's political and diplomatic influence on the international stage.

Language is therefore a powerful geopolitical tool that allows states to project their influence beyond their borders. By promoting their language, states can enhance their soft power, improve diplomatic relations, and create economic opportunities. Additionally, history, particularly colonial history, reinforces this theory.

CHAPTER 3: Case Study: Historical and Geopolitical Influence on the Linguistic Regime of the United Nations

The United Nations, as a multicultural organization, advocates for the respect of cultural diversity through the recognition of linguistic diversity. This recognition has been achieved through the adoption of a multilingual language regime based on the theory of linguistic justice. Despite this aspiration for justice, hidden state interests behind the recognition of official languages appear to have overshadowed the organization's intent. Indeed, it has been observed that one language, English, largely dominates communications

¹⁰⁹ Rhys Jones and Huw Lewis, *Introducing the Geographies of Language: Language, Culture and Politics in Wales*, *New Geographies of Language* (2019)

within the United Nations. We have endeavored to discern the reasons behind this monolingual trend. Some attribute it to the failure of multilateralism, while others cite reasons of pragmatism and simplicity. From my perspective, I support the thesis that historical, particularly colonial, legacies have conferred a particular status upon certain languages (French and English) due to centuries of cultural, political, and colonial dominance. Furthermore, I contend that major transformations following World War II, notably the creation of the United Nations, the Cold War, and decolonization, have afforded the United Nations a distinct place for the victorious powers of the war, thereby consolidating the position of English. Finally, I emphasize the notion that language serves as a tool of soft power and public diplomacy, which states employ to bolster their cultural and political influence worldwide. In summary, my theory posits that the linguistic regime of the United Nations is shaped by historical, geopolitical, and power dynamics, rather than by a genuine desire to promote multilingualism.

To demonstrate this, we will delve specifically into the reasons behind the increased use of English at the United Nations (I). We will explore how two major historical events explain the role that the English language plays on the international stage today. Firstly, we will examine how the Cold War, a period marked by the significant influence of the Soviet bloc and the United States, solidified the position of the United States globally, resulting in an increased use of the English language in multilateral diplomacy. Secondly, we will discuss how globalization, which brought about cultural and economic hegemony for the United States, further strengthened the position of the English language within the UN. Additionally, it will be intriguing to study the strategic choice of the United Nations headquarters and its influence on language usage within the organization.

Furthermore, we will see that the 1980s were characterized by geopolitical shifts in favor of Arab powers, which had repercussions on the UN's linguistic regime (II). The recognition of Arabic as an official and working language can be attributed to the rise of Arab states. However, we will also observe that the addition of this new language has opened the door to the consideration of other languages within the UN system. Thus, we will explore how the evolving roles of new actors, such as reunified Germany or the BRICS, are likely to lead to the emergence of new languages on the international stage, as well as to a stricter enforcement of the existing language regime.

Finally, we will examine how the integration of indigenous languages into the United Nations 'linguistic regime presents a significant challenge for the organization (III). We will explore the initiatives undertaken by the organization to recognize and utilize indigenous languages. This challenge pertains to the missions and operations of the UN, which must be closely aligned with the global population to meet its needs.

I - English: Historical and Geopolitical Domination

In order to rigorously assess the previously posited theory, our examination will focus on elucidating the intricate factors contributing to the preeminence of English within the United Nations, notwithstanding the institution's ostensibly multilingual framework comprising six official working languages. Through this analysis, we aim to unravel the complex interplay of historical, geopolitical, and power dynamics shaping linguistic hegemony. Initially, we will delve into the pivotal role of the Cold War era in establishing the United Nations, marked by the cultural and political dominance of the United States and the Soviet regime, thereby fostering the ascendancy of English as a dominant language (A). Subsequently, we will scrutinize the ramifications of globalization, which notably facilitated the consolidation of English hegemony (B), a trend further fortified by the strategic decision to situate the organization's headquarters in New York (C). By meticulously examining these multifaceted influences, we endeavor to provide comprehensive insights into the prevailing linguistic dynamics within the United Nations.

A) The creation of the UN and the Cold War: Consolidation of English at the UN

The dominant position of English within the Organization can primarily be explained by a geopolitical factor related to the post-war period. At the end of World War II, the United States emerged as a leader in all fields, because unlike other states, « the United States was strengthened by war »¹¹⁰. According to M. Rioux, « Étant devenu l'État le plus puissant du monde à la fin de la seconde guerre mondiale, les États-Unis allaient devenir la force motrice du processus de création des organisations internationales »¹¹¹. Indeed, the United States was the most enthusiastic about the idea of creating this organization due to their desire to exert influence over the world and international organizations.

Thus, the United States considers the United Nations an element of their soft power. It is evident that the United States dominates the functioning of the organization. Financially, the United States is the largest contributor to the UN. At its inception, the US subsidized more than two-fifths of the organization's budget. Although this share has significantly reduced in

¹¹⁰ Joseph.S. Nye, *Soft Power*, *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (1990)

¹¹¹ « Having become the most powerful state in the world at the end of the Second World War, the United States was going to become the driving force behind the creation of international organizations » [translated by : author] - Michèle Rioux, *Les organisations internationales*, *Cahier de recherche - CEIM* (2012)

subsequent years, America's contribution remains crucial for the organization, providing the US with considerable leverage. They can threaten to delay their payments if a decision does not suit them. This dominance allows the United States to disseminate its ideology, as M. Rioux explains, « les États-Unis perçoivent l'ONU comme un lieu, voire un instrument, qui leur permettra d'atteindre des objectifs de politique internationale »¹¹². American influence over the organization is also demonstrated by the undeniable dominance of the English language. If America was able to secure this position, it is due to the new status accorded to the United States after World War II. The post-war period marked « une nouvelle étape dans la consolidation des position géopolitiques de la langue anglaise »¹¹³.

But this hegemony is also due to cultural influence, as the United States succeeded in promoting its ideology and culture through soft power during the Cold War. In fact, this hegemony of the United States and the English language was further reinforced by the Cold War. This period remains widely debated among scholars. Historians do not agree on the exact beginnings of this period, nor on its end date. Some date the beginning of this period to 1946 when the United States and the British clashed with the USSR during the Greek Civil War. Others trace this conflict back to the end of World War II, while others still mark the beginning of the Cold War with the Bolshevik coup in Russia in October 1917. Regardless of its exact starting point, it is undeniable that this period was marked by political and military tensions between the two superpowers of the time, the United States and the Soviet Union. Approximately, we can say that the Cold War extends from the end of World War II to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. This period profoundly shaped the global political, economic, and cultural landscape. During this time of intense geopolitical tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, the UN became a major arena for international rivalries. The impact of the Cold War on the linguistic regime of the United Nations, particularly the consolidation of English as the dominant language, is thus a topic of significant interest.

This period is characterized by an ideological war: on one side, the communist bloc, which advocated for a controlled economy and the abolition of social classes; on the other side, the Western bloc, which promoted liberalism and capitalism. English, as the primary language of the United States and many other Western countries, naturally benefited from the ascendancy that the Western bloc took on the international stage during this period.

¹¹² « the United States perceives the UN as a place, even an instrument, that will allow them to achieve international policy objectives » [translated by: author] - Michèle Rioux, *Les organisations internationales*, *Cahier de recherche - CEIM* (2012)

¹¹³ « a new stage in the consolidation of the geopolitical positions of the English language » [translated by: author] - Jean-Marie Le Breton, *Réflexions anglophiles sur la géopolitique de l'anglais*, *Herodote*, N°115-4, (2004)

Official documents, meetings, and diplomatic negotiations were often conducted in English, further reinforcing the position of this language within the UN.

A key element in the consolidation of English at the UN during the Cold War was the political and cultural influence of the United States. Besides military and economic competition, this struggle took place on the cultural front. The United States used its soft power to spread its democratic and capitalist values worldwide. American media, Hollywood, music, and other forms of popular culture played a crucial role in promoting English. American films and television shows, widely distributed internationally, helped familiarize millions of people with English. For example, films from Disney not only entertained generations but also exported the English language and American values.

Academic exchanges and educational programs, such as the Fulbright Program, also played a key role. This program allowed students and researchers from around the world to study in the United States, strengthening the use of English as a scientific and academic language.

Thus, we see that the hegemony of the English language is explained by the central role played by the United States in the creation of the organization in question, but also by their position as a world leader developed through powerful American soft power. The United States' ability to use the English language as a tool for promoting their interests and values has deeply influenced the linguistic regime of the United Nations, consolidating English as the organization's *lingua franca*.

In conclusion, the consolidation of English at the UN during the Cold War resulted from a combination of historical, political, and cultural factors, primarily orchestrated by the United States. The predominant influence of the United States on the international stage, coupled with its ability to disseminate its language and culture through various means of soft power, solidified the position of English as the dominant language within the United Nations.

B) Globalisation: The Cultural Hegemony of the United States

The phenomenon of globalization is praised by some, and demonized by others, but always controversial. It is a complex phenomenon that affects the political, economic, cultural, and social spheres. Despite the complexity of defining the term, we recognize that "Globalization involves economic integration; the transfer of policies across borders; the transmission of knowledge; cultural stability; the reproduction, relations, and discourses of power; it is a global process, a concept, a revolution, and 'an establishment of the global market free from sociopolitical control'»¹¹⁴. For our case study, it would not be relevant to look at all aspects of globalization, so we will focus mainly on the cultural and social aspect of the phenomenon,

¹¹⁴ Dr. Nayef R.F. Al-Rodhan and Ambassador Gérard Stoudmann, Definitions of Globalization: A Comprehensive Overview and a Proposed Definition, *Gevena Center for Security Policy* (2006)

because indeed, « culture is arguably the most direct way in which we experience globalization »¹¹⁵.

In discussions of cultural globalization, two prominent theories emerge: cultural imperialism and hybridization. Cultural imperialism refers to « the imposition upon other countries of a particular nation's beliefs, values, knowledge, behavioral norms and style of life »¹¹⁶. In other words, it refers to the process by which a nation imposes its beliefs, values, knowledge, behavioral norms, and style of life on other countries. This is usually done subtly and indirectly through various cultural vectors such as the media, education or language. Cultural hybridization « argues that cultural globalization is accompanied by a desirable outcome, the hybridization of national cultures, which Nederveen Pieterse (2004: 64) defines as 'the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices »¹¹⁷. This means that specific cultural elements are detached from their original contexts and reinterpreted or combined with elements from other cultures to create something new. In reality, these two theories do not contradict each other; indeed, I would argue that they complement each other. The diffusion of a culture cannot take place uniformly in all environments, which explains why in some cases the imposition of a culture may be more 'straightforward', while in other cases there is a need to adapt the cultural elements transmitted so that they integrate uniformly into their new environment. In both cases, « cultural globalization is criticized on the basis that it is disseminating a homogeneous, hegemonic form of culture, reflecting the attitudes and values of western, particularly American, capitalist societies »¹¹⁸.

The United States dominates the globalist trend, and some authors even speak of *Americanization*¹¹⁹ rather than *globalization*. Cultural imperialism can have profoundly transformative effects on local cultures. For example, the omnipresence of American media, led by Hollywood, influences norms and values around the world, often to the detriment of local traditions. Indeed, as UNESCO demonstrates, « in almost all countries feature films from the United States of America (USA) (or USA coproductions in conjunction with primarily

¹¹⁵ Paul Hopper, *Understanding Cultural Globalization*, Polity Press (2007)

¹¹⁶ Salwen (1991) cited in Triranjana Raj, Cultural recognition in this era of globalization, *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 73, no. 4 (2012)

¹¹⁷ Triranjana Raj, Cultural recognition in this era of globalization, *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 73, no. 4 (2012)

¹¹⁸ Triranjana Raj, Cultural recognition in this era of globalization, *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 73, no. 4 (2012)

¹¹⁹ Harvey B. Feigenbaum, *Globalization and cultural diplomacy*, Center for Arts and culture (2001)

European countries) dominated the Top 30 in 2010 and 2011 »¹²⁰, and this trend has continued over time. Moreover, Ho Kin Tong and Lin Hong Cheung agree that language, a determinant of cultural identity as we saw earlier, is also a determinant of cultural globalization¹²¹. They explain that, even in the field of language, the United States has succeeded in imposing itself culturally on other countries.

We have seen that this Americanization has taken place through culture, but we cannot neglect the economic and political aspects of globalization, which are crucial. In these last two areas, the Americans are once again the leaders, and have succeeded in imposing their ideas.

Although the United States acquired a leading position following the Second World War and during the Cold War, globalization has only strengthened this position. The central role played by the USA on the world stage is explained by its cultural, economic and political hegemony. American economic power and its central role in trade, the influence of the Hollywood film industry, and the dominance of English in scientific publications, international conferences and academic exchanges have made English the dominant language for international communications. The hegemonic use of English at the United Nations and in international affairs is simply a reflection of this American power, which has been reinforced by the globalization process.

In this section, we will not discuss the criticisms levelled at the phenomenon of globalization. However, for the rest of our research, we must bear in mind that this Americanization is widely criticized, and that there is a growing worldwide tendency to move away from this phenomenon.

C) New York: Strategic Location and Linguistic Influence

Previously, we discussed how politics and American power explain the position of English within the United Nations. However, we must also add a geographical aspect to our analysis because we need to study the impact of the choice of the Organization's headquarters on language use. Thus, we will see that location plays a significant role in language use, but combined with mimicry among elites and international professional culture, we will see that

¹²⁰ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Emerging markets and the digitalization of the film industry : an analysis of the 2012 UIS International Survey of Feature Film Statistics, UIS Information paper n°14 (2013)

¹²¹ Ho Kin Tong, and Lin Hong Cheung, Cultural Identity and Language: A Proposed Framework for Cultural Globalisation and Glocalisation, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 32 (1): 55–69 (2011)

these two elements have allowed English to become the working and daily language of the Organization.

On December 10, 1945, the U.S. Congress unanimously voted to invite the United Nations to establish its permanent headquarters in their country¹²². Subsequently, the General Assembly decided to implement the Organization's headquarters in New York during its first session on February 14, 1946, which took place in London. It was only in 1951 that the Organization's definitive headquarters would be inaugurated, marking an important date for the international community. Firstly, this demonstrates, as previously noted, that the United States exerts influence over the Organization. But even more notably, before this date, the political weight on the international community was in Europe; now it resides in America. This change is significant; the political center of gravity has shifted, clearly demonstrating the emergence and recognition of American power.

This location consequently influences the use of language within the Organization. Indeed, the establishment of the English language in UN corridors occurred naturally. To recognize the influence of location on language use, one only needs to compare the practices of the New York headquarters with those of the Geneva headquarters, for example. Thus, « French is used slightly more at the UN office in Geneva than at the Headquarters »¹²³. This demonstrates that the geographical aspect played a role in English monolingualism. But it also has another consequence: as the main seat of the Organization is in New York, the most important decisions are made there, and high-level meetings, such as those of the General Assembly, also take place there, ultimately offering English a dominant position at the main headquarters and within the Organization as a whole. Hence, even though French is more spoken in Geneva than in New York, English remains dominant in both seats.

In addition to this, mimicry among international civil servants is a key factor contributing to the predominance of English within the United Nations. This trend is partly explained by the strong presence of English-speaking employees, a legacy of the League of Nations (SDN), and reinforced by the dominant status of English in international circles. Furthermore, the pressure felt by non-English-speaking employees often encourages them to resort to English intensively, thus contributing to its promotion. Moreover, English-speaking officials, operating in their natural linguistic environment, are less inclined to speak another language, further consolidating the predominance of English within the UN. This mimetic phenomenon is associated with linguistic convergence within multilingual international organizations, as explained by Pierre De Visscher. He indicates in his research that the more a language is

¹²² History of United Nations Headquarter - <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/headquarters.pdf>

¹²³ Jesús Baigorri Jalón, *Interpreters at the United Nations. A history*, *Universidad de Salamanca*, translated by : Anne Barr (2004)

used daily, the more it tends to be favored, despite rules on multilingualism at the United Nations. This convergence is felt as a form of pressure, encouraging officials to predominantly use English. Thus, « Si l'anglais se répand partout (..) cela signifie simplement que les locuteurs utiliseront une langue locale dans leur sphère propre et la langue internationalisée, pour l'heure l'anglais, afin de communiquer au-delà de cette sphère »¹²⁴. Consequently, English has become the dominant language within the UN secretariats and informal meetings. This situation is reinforced by the fact, as previously noted, that documents are first drafted in English before being translated, thus circumventing regulations requiring simultaneous publication in all official languages.

Furthermore, in informal meetings, English often becomes the primary language again, thereby favoring English-speaking officials. This intensive use of English gives Anglophone delegates an advantage in negotiations, as noted by Boutros Boutros-Ghali during the Symposium on Plurilingualism in International Organizations. He indicates that « We all know that obliging international civil servants, diplomats, or ministers to express themselves in a language that is not their own is equivalent to placing them at a disadvantage. This deprives them of the ability to nuance and refinement, which amounts to concessions to those whose language is their mother tongue. We also all know that concepts that seem similar are often different from one civilization to another. Words express a culture, a way of thinking, and a worldview. For all these reasons, I believe that, just as the democracy of a State is based on pluralism, democracy between States must be based on plurilingualism ».

So, mimicry among international civil servants, combined with linguistic convergence and the geographical dominance of English, have contributed to making this language the most exploited in the daily work of the United Nations. This phenomenon illustrates the complex influence of political, cultural, and geographical factors on language use within the Organization.

II - Arabic at the UN: Towards Increased Multilingualism?

English became the dominant language at the UN primarily due to the geopolitical influence of the United States after World War II and during the Cold War, globalization that reinforced American cultural and economic hegemony, and the strategic location of the UN headquarters in New York. The American presence solidified English as the daily working language, supported by the linguistic mimicry of international officials. Thus, English

¹²⁴ « If English spreads everywhere (...) it simply means that speakers will use a local language in their own sphere and the internationalized language, for now, English, to communicate beyond this sphere » [translated by: author] - Pierre De Visscher, L'emprise sociétale du langage, instrument du pouvoir, *Les Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale*, vol. 114-115, no. 2-3 (2017)

emerged as the lingua franca of the UN due to historical, geopolitical, cultural, and geographical factors.

However, these dynamics have evolved since the UN's creation in 1945, influencing the recognition and usage of other languages within the organization. This section will evaluate the link between the rise of Arab powers on the international stage in the 1980s and the recognition of Arabic as a working and official language of the UN (A). Additionally, we will examine how the addition of Arabic opened possibilities for the recognition of other official languages by studying the impact of German reunification on multilingualism within the organization (B). Finally, we will explore whether the growth of the BRICS has enabled Russian and Chinese to gain prominence within the UN and whether this emergence has paved the way for new languages in the UN system (C) .

In summary, this case study will highlight that the linguistic regime of the United Nations is shaped by historical, geopolitical, and power dynamics rather than a genuine commitment to promoting multilingualism.

A) The 1970s-1980s: The Rise of Arab Powers

As we have already seen, the only time a language was added to the UN language regime was in 1973. On that date, Arabic was granted the status of official and working language of the General Assembly, and it was in 1982 that the Security Council aligned itself with the General Assembly's regime. This section examines the reasons behind the addition of Arabic to the Organization.

On October 1, 1973, nineteen member states of the Organization requested the addition of an item to the Agenda of the 18th session of the General Assembly entitled « Inclusion of Arabic among the official and working languages of the General Assembly, its committees and sub-committees ». Importantly, the memorandum accompanying this request explained that « political, social, and religious importance of Arabic, its position as a working language in various specialized agencies, and the positive effect its adoption would have on the image of the United Nations by communicating its work and goals to the Arabic-speaking people »¹²⁵ motivated this request. Following negotiations, the General Assembly adopted resolutions 3190 and 3191 without a vote on December 18, 1973, adding Arabic to the Organization's official languages.

In fact, the 1970s were a defining period for the Arab countries, with three key events contributing to the region's development. These included the withdrawal of the British from

¹²⁵ Tabory M, The Addition of Arabic as an Official and Working Language of the UN General Assembly and at Diplomatic Conferences, *Israel Law Review* (1978)

the Gulf region, leading to decolonization, the development of the Arab League, and the rise in oil prices¹²⁶.

The post-World War II era saw the decolonization and independence of many Arab countries, mainly in North Africa and the Middle East, leading to the creation of new states that subsequently decided to become members of the Organization. These newly sovereign states sought to assert their national identity and their place on the world stage, marking a significant transition in international relations. In reality, « The change in membership shifted the power relations within the UN system, and according to one standard account of UN history, ended the years of 'Western domination' within a decade »¹²⁷, and this is exactly what explains the entry of Arabic into the Organization. The USA and the USSR were gradually losing their influence within the UN, and a new opposition was emerging: that between southern and northern states. It was the recently decolonized states, or those belonging to the Third World movement, that were to reappear in the Organization from the 70s onwards, without however annihilating the United States, which remained the dominant power.

During this period, the Arab League, founded in 1945, also grew in importance and became an influential regional organization, reinforcing the position of the Arab states. Indeed, by uniting Arab states to defend their common interests on the international stage, the League facilitated the recognition of Arabic as an official language of the UN. Other events have also highlighted the strategic and political importance of the Arab countries. The wars that marked the Middle East were decisive for the inclusion of Arab countries at the UN, because of their impact on regional and global stability. Conflicts such as the Arab-Israeli wars (notably the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War) and the Iran-Iraq war attracted international attention and required mediation and diplomatic resolution by the UN. These events amplified the voice of Arab countries in world affairs, forcing them to engage more closely with international institutions such as the UN to defend their interests and seek peaceful solutions to conflicts.

We have seen that these three geopolitical and historical reasons have strengthened the place of Arab countries on the international scene. But we can't overlook the economic aspect, which has been a determining factor in the growth of Arab power.

Indeed, the oil shock of 1973, triggered by the OPEC oil embargo, demonstrated the economic power of the Arab oil-producing countries. By using oil as a political and economic lever, these countries increased their global influence and their ability to negotiate

¹²⁶ Roger Owen, 'The Arab economies in the 1970s', *Middle East Report* 100 (1981)

¹²⁷ Eva-Maria Muschik, Special issue introduction: Towards a global history of international organizations and decolonization, *Journal of Global History* (2022)

advantages on the international stage. Indeed, « oil (...) was at the center of the economic transformation of the region »¹²⁸.

So, the economic prosperity of these countries, coupled with the strategic recognition of the region and the powerful development of certain Arab countries, explains why the language of these states has made its appearance at the UN, despite certain misgivings. We also note that the Arabic language spoken by only nineteen member states is not really a major tool of multilingualism and communication, which clearly demonstrates that language is a political tool, rather than a tool of equality between members.

B) Reunified Germany: A Candidate for a New Official Language?

The addition of the Arabic language to the UN's linguistic regime opened the door to discussions about recognizing other languages. One of the major events of the 1990s was the fall of the USSR, notably symbolized by the German reunification. This section will consider the impact of this major event on the inclusion of the German language in the UN's linguistic regime.

The case of the German language is intriguing due to its particular status within the UN system. German became a language of the organization in 1974, but it is neither recognized as an official language nor a working language. This date is notable because it was only in September 1973 that the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic joined the United Nations. It is significant that just one year after they acceded to the UN, the two republics sought to promote their language, a request granted a year later. On December 18, 1974, the General Assembly decided, « im Einklang mit Regel 57 der Geschäftsordnung der Generalversammlung, daß die Resolutionen und Beschlüsse der Generalversammlung und die sonstigen Beilagen zu ihrem Offiziellen Protokoll sowie die Resolutionen und Beschlüsse des Sicherheitsrats und des Wirtschafts- und Sozialrats ab 1. Juli 1975 auch in deutscher Sprache herausgegeben werden ».¹²⁹ Three states made this request: Austria, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the German Democratic Republic. Since then, German has become an additional language of the United Nations, with the

¹²⁸ Roger Owen, *The Arab economies in the 1970's*, *Middle East Report* 100 (1981)

¹²⁹ « following Rule 57 of the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly, that the resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly and the annexes to its official records, as well as the resolutions and decisions of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, will be issued in German as of July 1, 1975. » [translated by : author] - Resolution des Generalversammlung 3355 (XXIX), Übersetzung bestimmter offizieller Dokumente der Generalversammlung sowie der Resolutionen des Sicherheitsrats und des Wirtschafts- und Sozialrats in die deutsche Sprache (1974)

financial costs borne by the three German-speaking states. Nations with official languages in the UN system did not wish to finance the expenses related to creating a new working language, leaving the cost exclusively to the three requesting countries. At this point, German became a *Dokumentsprache*¹³⁰, meaning that the most important documents are translated into German but not interpreted. As with Arabic, the financial contribution of Austria and Germany greatly contributed to the international prestige of the language¹³¹.

However, German has never achieved the status of an official or working language despite Germany's emergence as an economic and political powerhouse. To understand why the language has not attained this status, we need to conduct a comparative study with the recognized languages.

First, it is essential to remember that the linguistic regime established in 1945 reflects the victorious powers of World War II. At that time, German could not have been recognized as an official language because it represented the causes of the war. Subsequently, the geopolitical evolution of Germany in the decades following the war also played a role. During the Cold War, Germany was divided into two states with opposing political alignments, limiting their unified influence within the UN. It was only after reunification in 1990 that Germany emerged as a unified and influential power. The German reunification of 1990 marked a significant turning point, not only for Germany but also for Europe and the world. This reunification allowed Germany to strengthen its position on the international stage, both politically and economically. However, despite this rise in power, the German language was not promoted to the status of an official or working language at the UN. In reality, the historical weight carried by this language still seems too heavy for it to be recognized as an official language of the organization. The legacy of World War II and the role of Germany as an aggressor continues to influence perceptions, making it difficult for the German language to overcome these historical associations. Additionally, the division of Germany during the Cold War further fragmented its influence. Despite Germany's reunification and rise as an economic powerhouse, these historical and political complexities contribute to the reluctance to elevate German to the status of an official UN language. This underscores the enduring impact of historical events on contemporary diplomatic decisions.

Several factors can explain this situation. Firstly, the linguistic balance within the UN is delicate, and adding a new official or working language involves considerable costs and logistical implications. Secondly, the current official languages—English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, and Arabic—represent a wide range of geopolitical regions and historical

¹³⁰ Stephan Jaschek, *Deutsch Als Sprache Der Vereinten Nationen*, *Vereinte Nationen: German Review on the United Nations* 25, no. 1 (1977)

¹³¹ Nelde, J. Darquennes, German as a lingua franca, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* (2006)

spheres of influence. For instance, Arabic managed to become part of the UN's linguistic regime because 19 countries pushed for its inclusion, representing a politically and economically influential region capable of swaying the organization's decisions. Introducing German as an official language would have required a consensus among member states, which is politically complex and has not yet been possible.

In conclusion, although reunified Germany has become a major global power, various historical, political, and logistical factors have prevented the German language from becoming an official or working language at the UN. The evolution of the organization's linguistic regime reflects not only past geopolitical realities but also the complex dynamics of current international diplomacy.

C)The BRICS: Emergence of New Languages on the International Stage?

The BRICS represents 5 countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. I've decided to focus on the languages of these five countries because their power seems to have grown significantly since the 1990s. These countries represent 25% of the world's land area, 40% of the world's population, 25% of global GDP, and 15% of global trade, making them an influential group. In this section, we'll look at whether the emergence of the BRICS as an influential economic and political bloc has potentially stimulated interest in this country's languages on the international stage.

First of all, we'll look at Russian and Chinese, which have been recognized as official languages since the creation of the Organization. As far as Russian is concerned, representatives of the USSR have been trying on several occasions since 1948 to have it granted the status of a working language, a status it did not achieve until 1969. What did we notice? First of all, when the Russians asked for Russian and Chinese to become a working language, three English-speaking countries opposed them: the first time, in 1948, the chairman of the December 7, 1948 session, an Australian delegate, declared the Russian amendment request inadmissible, as it fell outside the session's agenda¹³². In 1968, a draft resolution of the Fifth Committee concerning the inclusion of Russian as a working language gave rise to a debate on the voting modalities for this resolution; New Zealand, supported in particular by the United States, insisted that the resolution should be seen as an « important question » (which had not been the case in 1948 for the accession of Spanish as a working

¹³² « the president objected that the matter raised by the representative of the USSR was not a point of order but a request to deal with a question which was not before the Assembly and therefore could not be discussed at that time » - A/PV.174

language), and should therefore be adopted by a two-thirds majority¹³³; in this period of the Cold War, the USSR was not prepared to obtain this two-thirds majority, and the resolution was therefore rejected. So it's worth noting that it was the English-speaking countries (USA, New Zealand and Australia) that were always opposed to Russian becoming a working language. So, once again, the issue is not one of communication, but of politics, reflecting Cold War opposition. If the Russian language managed to achieve working language status in 1969, it was thanks to the policy of de-Stalinization that the USSR had been undergoing since the 1950s.

The Chinese language also struggled to achieve working language status, and was not recognized until 1972. Although attempts were made as early as 1948 to grant the Chinese language a status similar to that of Spanish, these efforts were initially unsuccessful. However, the geopolitical context evolved rapidly in the years that followed, particularly with the Sino-American rapprochement initiated by Richard Nixon's historic visit to China in 1972. This led to a series of rapid changes, culminating in the 1973 General Assembly resolution granting the Chinese language the status of a working language. This decision was facilitated by the UN's recognition of the People's Republic of China as the legitimate government in 1971, followed by Nixon's visit to Beijing. In just four years, the perception of China and its official language changed radically, from one of potential exclusion to one of recognized power. This shows that the question of multilingualism at the UN is intrinsically linked to geopolitical considerations, serving both the interests of the United States in strengthening its relations with certain states, and those of other states in asserting their power on the international stage.

We have seen that the recognition of Chinese and Russian as working languages was linked to geopolitical developments during the Cold War, and in particular to the easing of tensions between the two blocs.

Despite this, these two languages still lag well behind the use of English in the Organization, which is why it is interesting to ask whether the emergence and development of the BRICS could influence the recognition of new languages (Portuguese, Hindi) and the use of Russian and Chinese in the Organization. As we saw with Arabic, the group effect influences the status of languages. So, with the BRICS emerging as a group representing major emerging economies, and a significant share of the world's population, the BRICS have the potential to exert increasing influence on the international stage. This could translate into increased demand for recognition of languages such as Portuguese and Hindi, representing Brazil and India respectively, two influential members of the BRICS. In addition, the strengthening of the political and economic position of Russia and China within the BRICS group could also encourage more widespread use of Russian and Chinese in international interactions,

¹³³ Art 18 UN Charter (1946)

including within the UN. However, the widespread use of English in the organization remains a challenge to overcome, given its predominant status as the language of international communication. Nevertheless, the evolution of the BRICS could prompt a reassessment of the linguistic balance within the UN, taking into account the linguistic diversity and growing influence of these countries on the world stage.

III - Integrating Indigenous Languages: A Challenge for the United Nations

The previous section has shown that one of the ways in which a language can find its way into the United Nations system, without its country having the power of the USA, is if it belongs to a powerful regional and/or economic group. However, linguistic diversity is an essential feature of the cultural richness and identity of peoples throughout the world.

As the UN strives to promote peace, human rights and sustainable development on a global scale, it faces the complex challenge of ensuring the equitable representation and participation of all linguistic communities, including indigenous languages. In this section, we will first examine the UN's initiatives for the recognition of indigenous languages and their impact (A). Next, we'll see that language plays a crucial role in the UN's missions, and that the effectiveness of these missions can depend on linguistic proximity (B). Finally, we'll look at the importance of indigenous languages to UN operations, and in particular to their conflict resolution missions (C).

This section will help us to understand why the UN must move beyond historical, geopolitical, and power dynamics to keep multilateralism alive and achieve the Organization's objectives.

A) UN Decade for Indigenous Languages: language as a Human Right

Indigenous languages are endangered; anthropologists and linguists even question whether these languages will survive. In this section, we'll look at the UN's initiatives to protect indigenous languages, and we'll see that although « it remains unclear why some attempts at language revitalization succeed, whereas others fail. (It) is clear that the process is profoundly political »¹³⁴. The current historical context has developed a negative atmosphere for languages. Between the policies of assimilation, colonization, and globalization, these languages have been marginalized.

¹³⁴ Michael Walsh, Will indigenous language survive ?, Annual review of Anthropology vol.14 (2005)

Indigenous languages represent around 4,000 of the world's 6,000 languages, and indigenous people account for 6% of the world's population. First, we need to define what we mean by an indigenous language. It is « any language that is *native* to a particular area »¹³⁵. The legal framework surrounding indigenous languages is particularly interesting, as it shows that there is a real international will to protect these languages, and this protection has been achieved through the recognition of a linguistic human right. The term language human right (LHR) is used to describe « the fundamental rights protecting language-related acts and values »¹³⁶. This right is further subdivided into core rights, such as the right to speak one's language¹³⁷, and auxiliary rights, such as the right to have recourse to translation or interpretation in another language¹³⁸, or the right to learn a language¹³⁹. These rights are set out in The Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights (UDLR), a document signed in Spain in 1996 after the World Conference on Linguistic Rights. This document was signed by the International PEN Club (a worldwide association of writers) and several non-governmental organizations. However, this declaration has not been adopted by international organizations, especially UNESCO. Indeed, there is no international convention, ratified by a majority of states, based exclusively on languages. There are references to linguistic human rights in various instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹⁴⁰, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights¹⁴¹, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

This study of the legal framework demonstrates several things. Firstly, there is a real awareness and growing recognition of the importance of indigenous languages at international level. But the study also highlights a number of persistent challenges. Indeed, although there are references to linguistic rights in various international instruments, there is no specific international convention devoted to languages. Moreover, the absence of a single binding legal framework shows the limits of current protection.

We should also note that the non-adoption of the Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights by major international organizations such as UNESCO underlines the divergence of

¹³⁵ Michael Walsh, Will indigenous language survive ?, *Annual review of Anthropology* vol.14 (2005)

¹³⁶ Ran Yi, Book review, *International Journal on minority and group rights* (2024)

¹³⁷ Article 3 UDLR

¹³⁸ Article 20 UDLR

¹³⁹ Article 23 UDLR

¹⁴⁰ Article 2 : « Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, ... »

¹⁴¹ Article 27 : « In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language. »

commitment among states and institutions. Thus, there is a real need to strengthen and coordinate policies for a more coherent and effective protection of LHR.

There is an urgent need to develop stronger international mechanisms for the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages, and the United Nations seems to be taking the lead. The Organization has proclaimed 2022-2032 as the decade of indigenous languages in order to « draw attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalize and promote indigenous languages »¹⁴².

The Decade of Indigenous Languages is not the Organization's first initiative. For example, in 1982, the UN created the first working group on indigenous populations, and in 2000, a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was set up within the UN Economic and Social Council. It was from the 1980s onwards that the issue of indigenous peoples gained in importance within the Organization. The UN recognized that « when indigenous languages are under threat; so too are indigenous peoples themselves »¹⁴³, which is why this initiative, and others before it, were taken by the UN. It's important for an international organization like the UN to take initiatives like these. By playing a crucial role in raising awareness and coordinating global efforts to preserve indigenous languages, the UN proves that multilingualism is an essential value for humanity.

However, the success of these initiatives largely depends on the commitment of member states, the availability of resources and political will. In addition, the active involvement of indigenous communities themselves is essential to guarantee appropriate and effective solutions. However, as we shall see in the next section, the UN can play a leading role in the promotion of LHR if it succeeds in bringing indigenous languages into its language regime in one way or another.

B) UN Objectives and Indigenous languages : reinvigorating the UN

If the United Nations is taking the lead in highlighting indigenous languages, it's not just for their link with respect for human rights, but particularly for their close connection with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Among the 17 Goals formulated by the UN, indigenous languages play a crucial role in achieving three of them. To begin with, it is undeniable that MDG No. 4, « Quality Education », can be affected by the failure to respect DHR. On August 11, 2022, the United

¹⁴² A/74/396, report of the Third Committee on the rights of indigenous peoples (2019)

¹⁴³ UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues - <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/04/Indigenous-Languages.pdf>

Nations Development Programme (UNDP) awarded the 13th Equator Prize to ten indigenous people, recognizing the role of indigenous women in preserving and transmitting traditional knowledge. Indigenous people are often the hardest hit by poverty and educational exclusion. The UN's recognition of the role of indigenous populations in education, illustrated by the Equator Prize, enables us to highlight the importance of indigenous languages in the transmission of traditional knowledge, and to integrate these languages into formal education systems.

The protection of indigenous languages is also in line with MDG 10, « Reducing inequalities », as the disappearance of indigenous languages can have a lasting impact on the social and economic development of communities.

In addition, this increased protection also ties in with MDG 16, « Peace, justice and effective institutions », aimed at promoting an inclusive, peaceful society that also takes account of indigenous and peaceful populations. These efforts underline the importance of indigenous languages in building more just and equitable societies, aligned with the United Nations' global sustainable development goals.

However, indigenous languages are still marginalized within the Organization. We saw earlier that the number of speakers of a language does not explain why an idiom becomes an official or working language of the Organization. So the fact that these languages are spoken by only 6% of the population doesn't give a clear answer to why they are not part of the Organization's language system. Let's put aside the pragmatism thesis to understand how politics explains the decline of these languages. We must ask ourselves whether geopolitical interests and strategic alliances have also had an impact on the presence of these languages.

Since the 1980s, the UN and its agencies, such as UNESCO, have been taking action to protect indigenous populations. This is because the once marginalized peripheries are now at the heart of the center, thanks to globalization, which has brought the centers of power and the peripheries closer together, making geographical and cultural boundaries more porous¹⁴⁴. Growing recognition of the cultural richness and unique knowledge of indigenous peoples is enhancing the value of these cultures on the world stage. In addition, technological advances and global communication networks enable the voices of the peripheries to be heard and influence global debates. Since the 1980s, the world's population has been hearing about the problems affecting indigenous peoples, and understanding the wealth they can bring us.

¹⁴⁴ Irène Bellier, L'Organisation des Nations Unies et les Peuples Autochtones :La périphérie au centre de la mondialisation, *Socio-Anthropologie* (2004)

So, while the Organization is not yet ready to recognize indigenous languages in its linguistic regime, globalization has enabled the UN to take clear action to protect these languages as a human right. However, it is crucial to note that these initiatives, while laudable, are often insufficient and marked by the geopolitical dynamics that shape the UN's language policies. The languages of the historic powers continue to dominate, reflecting geopolitical interests and strategic alliances, rather than a genuine commitment to multilingualism and the inclusion of all the world's languages. But taking indigenous languages more concretely into account would reinvigorate the Organization for several reasons.

First, there is increasing talk of the democratization of international relations. This world is largely dominated by sovereign states, but taking the people into account is a real challenge for the Organization. Giving a voice to indigenous people, through the recognition of their language and culture, would go some way towards taking into account this hitherto marginalized section of the population. What's more, if we consider that reinvigoration involves three dimensions - consolidation, elaboration, and transformation¹⁴⁵ - we can see that taking indigenous languages into account would meet all three. If consolidation comes down to « strengthens again what has been weakened »¹⁴⁶, then recognizing indigenous languages in the Organization's linguistic rules would revive multilingualism that has faded over time. If elaboration comes down to « adding new elements »¹⁴⁷, the addition of these languages to the UN's language policy would respond to the need to reinvigorate the Organization. Finally, if transformation « is about changing some of the foundations of the UN system »¹⁴⁸, the addition of indigenous languages to the UN system would demonstrate the Organization's willingness to move away from power politics, by offering a place in the Organization to unrepresented groups.

C) Indigenous Languages and Conflict Resolution: An Operational Necessity

Indigenous languages play a pivotal role in conflict resolution, serving as essential tools for effective communication, and community engagement. The operational necessity of incorporating indigenous languages into conflict resolution frameworks is multifaceted, encompassing aspects of cultural identity, trust-building, and inclusive dialogue. This section explores the critical importance of indigenous languages in conflict resolution processes and highlights the practical implications of their use in various contexts.

¹⁴⁵ Markus Kornprobst and Slawomir Redo,(Eds.)Reinvigorating the United Nations, *Routledge* (2024)

¹⁴⁶ Markus Kornprobst and Slawomir Redo,(Eds.)Reinvigorating the United Nations, *Routledge* (2024)

¹⁴⁷ Markus Kornprobst and Slawomir Redo,(Eds.)Reinvigorating the United Nations, *Routledge* (2024)

¹⁴⁸ Markus Kornprobst and Slawomir Redo (Eds.), Reinvigorating the United Nations, *Routledge* (2024)

Indigenous languages are intrinsically linked to the cultural identity and heritage of indigenous peoples. These languages carry the collective wisdom, traditions, and historical narratives of communities, serving as repositories of cultural knowledge. In conflict situations, the use of indigenous languages can facilitate a deeper understanding of the underlying issues, as these languages often encapsulate unique perspectives and worldviews that are not easily translatable into dominant languages¹⁴⁹. For instance, many indigenous languages have specific terms and concepts related to peace, reconciliation, and justice that do not have direct equivalents in other languages. These terms can offer valuable insights into indigenous approaches to conflict resolution, which often emphasize restorative justice, communal harmony, and the reintegration of offenders into society.

Trust is a fundamental component of any conflict resolution process because it « allows living with a particular conviction that enables a good feeling about the other »¹⁵⁰. However, trust can be difficult to establish in contexts where there are significant cultural and linguistic barriers between conflicting parties and mediators. The use of indigenous languages can bridge these gaps, fostering a sense of respect and recognition for the cultural identities of all parties involved. When mediators and peacebuilders use indigenous languages, they demonstrate a commitment to understanding and valuing the perspectives of indigenous communities. This can enhance the credibility and legitimacy of the conflict resolution process, encouraging greater participation and cooperation from indigenous peoples. Furthermore, communication in indigenous languages can reduce misunderstandings and misinterpretations, which are common sources of conflict escalation.

Effective conflict resolution requires the active participation of all stakeholders, including marginalized and underrepresented groups. Indigenous communities often face systemic exclusion from formal conflict resolution mechanisms due to language barriers and cultural differences. By prioritizing the use of indigenous languages, conflict resolution practitioners can promote more inclusive dialogue and ensure that the voices of indigenous peoples are heard and respected. This new type of method are called « indigenous conflict resolution mechanism »¹⁵¹, and they were for example used in the North West of Ethiopia when they were facing strong indigenous conflict. Inclusive dialogue is not only a matter of fairness but also a practical necessity for sustainable peace. Conflicts that involve indigenous

¹⁴⁹ Owolabi, Toyosi Olugbenga Samson, and Adeniyi Olalekan Hassan, Building a Culture of Peace and Conflict Resolution Through Indigenous Language Media, *Indigenous African Language Media: Practices and Processes*. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore (2023)

¹⁵⁰ Ilai Alon and Daniel Bar-Tal (Eds), The Role of trust in conflict resolution: the Israeli-Palestinian case and beyond, *Peace Psychology Book Series* (2016)

¹⁵¹ Ajanaw Alemie and Hone Mandefro, Roles of Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms for Maintaining Social Solidarity and Strengthening Communities in Alefa District, North West of Ethiopia, *Journal of Indigenous Social Development* vol.7 n°2 (2018)

communities are often rooted in historical grievances, land disputes, and resource allocation issues. Addressing these complex issues requires the input and cooperation of those directly affected.

Several case studies highlight the operational necessity of incorporating indigenous languages into conflict resolution processes. One notable example is the peacebuilding efforts in Colombia, where indigenous languages have played a crucial role in post-conflict reconciliation. Indigenous leaders and communities have used their languages to convey traditional peace practices, mediate disputes, and advocate for their rights during the peace process. The inclusion of indigenous languages has rebuilt the relationship by « connecting people through their heart »¹⁵², the heart being the language.

In Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) emphasized the importance of indigenous languages in its work to address the legacy of residential schools and promote reconciliation. The TRC conducted hearings in indigenous languages and produced reports that included indigenous linguistic and cultural perspectives. This approach not only validated the experiences of indigenous survivors but also highlighted the broader societal value of indigenous languages in fostering understanding and healing¹⁵³.

While the benefits of using indigenous languages in conflict resolution are clear, there are also significant challenges that need to be addressed. One major challenge is the shortage of trained interpreters and mediators who are fluent in both indigenous languages and the dominant languages used in formal conflict-resolution processes. This can limit the effectiveness of communication and impede the resolution of conflicts. To overcome this challenge, it is essential to invest in the training and capacity-building of indigenous interpreters and mediators. This includes providing resources and support for language education programs that aim to preserve and revitalize indigenous languages. Additionally, conflict resolution practitioners should receive training on the cultural and linguistic dynamics of the communities they work with, ensuring that they are equipped to engage effectively with indigenous peoples.

Another challenge is the potential for political resistance to the inclusion of indigenous languages in formal conflict resolution mechanisms. In some cases, state authorities may view the recognition of indigenous languages as a threat to national unity or as a concession to separatist movements. To address this, it is important to advocate for the recognition of indigenous languages as a fundamental human right and to promote their use as a means of fostering social cohesion and mutual respect. This is the role of the UN

¹⁵² Lucia Mesa-Vélez, Culture of Dialogue as a Decolonial Peace-Building Tool: The Case of Colombia. *Journal of Dialogue Studies* vol. 7 (2019)

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and it is time for the Organization to move towards this option if it aims to restore global peace, which has been its objective since 1945.

Conclusion and recommendations

Exploring linguistic dynamics within international organizations, particularly the United Nations, unveils a complex interplay of historical, geopolitical, and socio-cultural factors shaping multilingualism. This study delves into the evolution of language policies, the challenges of their implementation, and the implications of linguistic diversity on multilateral diplomacy and cultural exchanges.

Our analysis underscores the foundational commitment of the United Nations to multilingualism as a core value of the Organization, essential for achieving UN objectives. Since its inception, the organization has acknowledged the significance of linguistic diversity in fostering inclusivity and global dialogue. To this end, five languages were recognized as official and working languages of the General Assembly and the Security Council, with a sixth later added. Thus, the Organization's legal framework has evolved through the will of member states and initiatives by the Secretaries-General.

However, despite this commitment, the reality of *de facto* monolingualism, notably the dominance of English, poses significant challenges. Since the organization's inception, multilingualism has never been fully respected, and the trend shows no signs of reversing. This hegemony of English in international discourse has profound repercussions on the Organization and its principles. Not only does it undermine principles of equality and representation, but it also limits access to decision-making processes for non-native speakers. Moreover, the strong link between language and culture renders monolingualism perilous. By asserting itself within the Organization, the English language has influenced the work of the UN, notably through the adoption of a Common Law legal practice associated with the English language.

Furthermore, our examination of the theoretical foundations of multilingualism highlights its role as an advocate for multiculturalism and intercultural understanding. Language serves as a conduit for the expression of cultural identities and diverse perspectives. Consequently, policies promoting multilingualism within international organizations not only facilitate effective communication but also contribute to the preservation and celebration of cultural heritage, protected by legal instruments created by the UN itself. Thus, the loss of linguistic diversity poses a real threat to intangible cultural heritage.

The pursuit of linguistic justice remains fraught with complexities, as evidenced by tensions between international aspirations and state interests. While the United Nations seeks to uphold linguistic diversity as a fundamental human right, member states often seek to promote their national languages to assert political influence and cultural identity. Language serves as an instrument of states' soft power, and the recognition of a national language on the international stage enhances a country's international prestige. Balancing these competing interests requires careful negotiation and compromise, highlighting the intricate interplay between language policy and diplomatic relations. The core of this thesis demonstrates that the adopted linguistic regime mirrors the functioning, or dysfunction, of the Organization and multilateralism. Indeed, the dominance of the victorious powers of World War II is evident at all levels within the Organization, particularly in the Security Council, where the five veto-wielding countries also have their official language adopted in the Organization's linguistic regime. The linguistic regime thus mirrors the Organization.

While many speak of a crisis of multilateralism at the UN, the crisis of multilingualism reflects this.

Moreover, our exploration of the geopolitical dimensions of language reveals the enduring legacy of historical and colonial power dynamics. Dominant languages, French and English, inherited from colonial empires, continue to exert global influence, reflecting within international institutions, perpetuating inequalities in global discourse. However, the emergence of new linguistic powers, the languages of BRICS countries, underscores shifts in geopolitical landscapes and their implications for multilingualism. Thus, while French and English dominate the UN today, this may evolve in the future. Hence, we should expect a more diligent adherence to the current linguistic regime. One of the UN's upcoming challenges will be to integrate indigenous languages into the linguistic regime to achieve the Organization's objectives.

As the United Nations advocates multilingualism as a cornerstone of its ethos, the realities of linguistic hierarchies and power dynamics present significant challenges. To move forward, efforts to promote linguistic diversity must be accompanied by concrete policies addressing inequalities and fostering inclusive dialogue. By embracing multilingualism as a means to bridge cultural divides and promote global cooperation, the United Nations can fulfill its mandate to build a fairer and more equitable world for all. But for this, the United Nations must reinvent itself.

This thesis highlights several inherent problems within the Organization that could and should be addressed and overcome by the following recommendations:

Firstly, the Organization should break free from the grip of powers. The place of victorious powers no longer makes sense today, and if the UN wants to become a more democratic organization, its functioning must be altered. By including languages other than those of the victorious powers, and those of currently influential powers in international relations, the UN's linguistic regime would recognize the importance of equality among all members, which does not seem to be true today.

Secondly, the dominance of the USA within the Organization should be diminished, and the linguistic regime could be an instrument for this. By encouraging the fair and balanced use of all official languages in its activities and communications, the UN would once again demonstrate that its initial desire to develop a multicultural organization is still present.

Finally, we have seen that one of the reasons why the Organization did not want to add new languages to its linguistic regime was financial. To overcome this economic barrier, the use

of new technologies could be a first step for the Organization; While we have seen that AI is not as effective as a translator or interpreter, its use could still help evolve multilingualism within the Organization.

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