

## THE USE OF LATIN: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIOLINGUISTICS\*

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In 1924 Thomas Mann wrote in *Der Zauberberg*:

*"Sit tibi terra levis. Requiem aeternam dona ei, Domine.*  
Vois-tu, lorsque'il est question de la mort ou que'on parle à  
des morts, ou des morts, le latin reprend ses droits, c'est la  
langue officielle dans ces circonstances-là, on voit  
comme la mort est une chose particulière. Mais ce n'est  
pas par une courtoisie humaniste que l'on parle le latin en  
son honneur, la langue des morts n'est pas du latin  
scolaire, tu comprends, elle est d'un tout autre esprit, d'un  
esprit, en quelque sort opposé. C'est du latin sacré, un  
dialecte de moines, le Moyen Age, un chant sourd,  
monotone et comme souterrain." (Mann 1924:437)

Perhaps because he was writing literature, Mann changed the human properties that were commonly attributed to Latin into contextual properties of the same tone. This text might be seen as a brief account of a widely accepted view of Latin as a dead language, imputing these properties to the domains of the use of language. In this case, it is not Latin which is dead, but people, and the claim is that the language merely tries to fit into the situation properly.

Reversing the classical anthropomorphist picture, Mann also states a deep disagreement between social meanings on the one hand and the knowledge of Latin on the other. Society is no longer concerned chiefly with burial rituals; and religious commitment in general has lost its place. The defeat of Latin seems also related to a certain inadequacy of contents, to its insuitability to contemporary problems. This is pointed out by Mann in his novel by suggesting the degree to which the context of its use was restricted. One of the questions I would like to raise here is how we have established and accepted the notion of *dead language*.

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\* An abbreviated version of this paper was presented in the *XV<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Linguists* held at Laval University (Québec), 9-14 August 1992, under the title *Latin & Vernaculars in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> Century*. I benefit here from the discussion generated in that occasion.

*Der Zauberberg* contains more relevant data. Mann shows himself to be responsive to the language question, even when vernaculars are concerned. Halfway through the novel, he introduces the use of French into the main dialogue between Hans Castorp, the main character, and Mme. Chauchat, who is Russian. The scene of the action is a health resort in the Swiss Alps, a good meeting point for people coming from different countries. In this way the author manages to draw a picture of different languages which is not unfamiliar to us.

In this paper I would like to follow the main suggestions of an early paper presented by Professor Lluís V. Aracil at the *XIII Congrès International de Linguistique et Philologie Romanes* (Aracil 1971), and two subsequent papers, one that he read at Meran at the *Congress on Linguistic Problems and European Unity* (Aracil 1980), and the other one read at Barcelona (Aracil 1988). His main purpose was to draw our attention to the historical source of sociolinguistic concepts and ideas and the way we shape a kind of sociolinguistic mentality to judge linguistic uses.

The sociology of language has traditionally been devoted to empirical studies or local surveys and, unlike to general sociology, has not paid much attention to theory. Nor has it paid much attention to history. Moreover, the history of specific languages as normally presented in the European tradition lacks generality. The analysis of historical and political factors that are active in the promotion or recession of linguistic varieties is limited by national aims. Particular histories of languages call for a comparative approach. Comparisons bring to light general tendencies and coincidences in time.

In this respect, the role of Latin is crucial, as is usually stated, due to its character as first European *interlingua*. But problems arise when we come to a closer examination of this phenomenon because there is no history of Latin in the modern period, not even a dictionary. Although the main interest has traditionally been in medieval and ancient periods, the use of Latin continued (albeit irregularly) during the eighteenth century. One of the intriguing questions at this point is to find a coherent explanation for its decline. Some European vernaculars acceded by then to formal uses, adopting different positions with respect to uses of Latin, which until then had been their main language for wider communication.

We can approach the coexistence of Latin and European vernaculars in the eighteenth century in two different ways: first of all, by setting the relegation of Latin against the more general background of *language shift*; then, by posing the question in functional terms; for instance, asking how communicative purposes are better achieved. In the specialized literature, the relegation of Latin is mostly discussed with regard to the spreading of general education and literacy, but these factors force us to consider languages other than Latin that rely on very different written traditions.

We should look first at how the decline of Latin fits into our theories of language shift, and what the basic implications of this could be. Perhaps a fair remark to start with could be that language shift has not only to do with small communities or isolation, but can also take place in wide networks of communication, in which a fast spread is ensured. Latin in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was exactly the kind of specialized network that ensured that ideas were spread and exchange.

My second remark draws on a well-known statement attributed to Max Weinreich about armies and navies in relation to language borders and language definitions. Here we are confronted with the opposite case: the core of Latin is books and readers, and written material is the accepted stuff from which standard languages are made. Sociolinguistics reminds us of the role of cultural elaboration in the definition of languages. It seems fair to put all these books in the right place and to realize what our opposite case means: some languages have been used only for public purposes, with no colloquial counterpart. These languages are also a proper target for linguistic shift. Posing this in terms of speech communities, it means that we are dealing with adoptive linguistic communities, their members also being members of some other native speech community. I have found no sound sociolinguistic description of what could be called speech communities for special purposes, contrasting with native or ordinary linguistic communities. The main point is that in both cases the organization and the aims of the groups will differ significantly.

Of course, wider communication requires a good deal of material support, and it has to provide the means to cover distances. This is my third remark. The main point is that changes in the sociocultural structure bring on changes in the material support and in the means for covering distances. Therefore, changes in one domain can bring on language shift processes. In this respect, the relegation of Latin in the eighteenth century coincides with the death or a serious boundary retreat of certain European languages. Vendryes (1921) mentions Polab, a Slavonic variety spoken near the lower Elba, and the well-known case of Cornish, among the languages that became extinct about the end of the century. The Cumans of Hungary dropped their language in favor of Hungarian about the same date. Prussian, a Baltic variety spoken between Dantzig and Königsberg, had already disappeared at the turn of the century. The list would increase if we took into account American reports such as Tovar's (1984). The geographical retreat is well represented by the Celtic family (see for instance Williams, 1988, for Gaelic and Breton), and it is also the case of the Basque speaking area. Likewise, in the Romance family, written production in Catalan reaches its lowest level during this century. These apparently marginal processes follow the promotion of the main written European vernaculars as well as the relegation of the common language.

The complexity of its material support is a basic feature of any learned language. Without a colloquial, everyday counterpart to ensure their transmission, learned languages are only active in cultural practice. Applied linguistics studies the organization and diversification of material efforts devoted to this practice. Kelly (1969) showed us the historical dimension of language learning, and particular grammarians like Chevalier (1968) have stressed the role of auxiliary materials in cultural transmission and literacy. The weight of this dimension might explain why Latin in the modern period is used mostly by people who are not from Romance countries. The last phase of this period could be represented well by Newton's *Principia mathematica* (1687) and its end could be marked by the Swedish scientist, Carl von Linné, and his *Fundamenta botanica* (1753). Significantly, the work of Linné was translated into Spanish before the end of the century. This highlights the scant use of the learned language in some countries. A greater or lesser degree of difficulty in grammar is not the only argument we may use when we consider linguistic decline. It is significant that the *Society of Friends*, the

religious organisation born in England in 1668, set up its theological grounds with Robert Barclay's work called *Theologiae verae christianae apologia* (1676). Here was a new social group using Latin to shape itself.

My fourth remark has to do with Bernstein's framework. Learned languages are used as elaborated codes, in the Bernsteinian sense. This is consistent with the lack of a colloquial counterpart, and the need for auxiliary and applied techniques to improve their learning. An elaborated code is a framework within which great concerns and values can be expressed. It is also the way to transmit specific knowledge from one generation to another. A clash of generations can be viewed as the collapse of one particular elaborated code. Then a whole range of related interesting topics cease to be interesting. The eighteenth century undergoes this collapse with the *Querelle des Anciens et Modernes*. Charles Perrault's *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes en ce qui concerne les Arts et les Sciences* (1693) represents the formal opposition to the old code. The discredit mainly affected what was to be learned in the future, i. e. the contents of cultural transmission. A few years later, Jonathan Swift gave us a more balanced approach with his ironical essay *The Battle between the Ancient and Modern Books in St. James' Library* (1704). The *Querelle* cast serious doubts on the topics and values of cultural transmission. Apart from its importance for the start of new forms of knowledge, the *Querelle* was the framework within which the contents associated with Latin were discussed and relegated. Latin as an elaborated code had lost its main argument there: the relevance of discourse.

My fifth remark has to do with the perception of the problem. I think that the final shift from Latin to vernaculars in the eighteenth century has not been perceived as the breakdown of Latin as a language of wider communication because the different European vernaculars occupied this domain very early. However, at least Antoine Meillet, in *Les langues dans l'Europe nouvelle* (1928), devoted a chapter to *Les langues savantes* and noticed that they could be relegated. The coherence he shows in approaching this topic can be contrasted with his approach to the minorities question, which is solved as a dialect problem. Perhaps there is a deep coherence in dealing with learned varieties and minority varieties in a different way, but I will not pursue this question now. Some years before Meillet's book, a survey by Couturat & Leau (1903), *Histoire de la langue universelle*, had also devoted some doubtful lines to Latin as a learned language, in the context of its retrieval as an international auxiliary variety.

Lluís V. Aracil (1988) notes our degree of implication in the building of sociolinguistic labels:

"For a start, [when we talk about European Latin] I want to show that we are dealing with a whole world [...] and in relation to this world, where are we? are we inside? Is it a familiar world or a distant one? Is it our world in any sense? All these questions are unavoidable and are troublesome too. [...] We must realize that if we say that this world is not ours, we are saying that we are outside. [...]"

In the same context, there is another question which is subtly related to the ones above. Are we dealing with a

real world? [...] When we talk about European Latin, the question of its degree of reality is a very powerful one. There is a reason for that. [...] We know that all languages discriminate between people who know them and people who do not. Every language is a power for the person who knows it, a power of understanding, a power of saying, a power of doing things. For a person who does not know it, the opposite is true. As European Latin has become less and less known, the degree of mystery has increased. It seems that the idea of a *dead language* had been devised on purpose for the case of European Latin and we are not innocent on this account." (Aracil 1988:2; translated by myself)

As Aracil says, the most intriguing aspect of the notion of dead language, apart from its historical link with Latin, is the fact that it claims to be retroactive. People who presumed this property of Latin were not thinking about the future, not even about an immediate present. The property refers mainly to the past. I would like to quote the passage in which Diderot mentions Latin when he is surveying the relations between language and culture. It occurs in the *Encyclopédie*, under the entry *encyclopédie*, and could perhaps be considered as the official declaration of the status of the language:

"Il n'y a qu'une langue morte qui puisse être une mesure exacte, invariable et commune pour tous les hommes qui sont et qui seront, entre les langues qu'ils parlent et qu'ils parleront. Comme cet idiome n'existe que dans les auteurs, il ne change plus; l'effet de ce caractère, c'est que l'application en est toujours la même, et toujours également connue. Si l'on me demandait, de la langue grecque ou latine quelle est celle qu'il faudrait préférer, je répondrais ni l'une ni l'autre: mon sentiment serait de les employer toutes les deux; le grec partout où le latin ne donnerait rien [...]; je voudrais que le grec ne fût jamais qu'un supplément à la disette du latin; et cela seulement parce que la connaissance du latin est la plus répandue [...]. (Diderot 1975:195)

*Répandue* and *morte* are in the same paragraph. Of course *les auteurs dans lesquels l'idiome existe* belong to the past, although the readers are contemporaries. These misfits are typical of language shift processes, and they are the proper context of sociolinguistic labels. The opinions of Frederick of Prussia in the second half of the century, about French as a learned language, show equally the same background<sup>1</sup>. In the context of the restoration of the *Académie Royale des Sciences et Belles-Lettres de Prusse* (1743), the French Maupertius gathers again *répandue* and *morte* now in the same sentence:

<sup>1</sup> "Si les Français n'ont pas produit encore des auteurs comme Thucydide, comme Tite-Live, du moins en ont-ils qui en approchent bien [...]." (Frédéric II, 1879: *Histoire de mon temps*, Leipzig: Posner, p. 196. Quoted by Brunot 1967:561).

"Si quelque autre [langue] pouvait lui disputer [*to the French language*] cette universalité, ce serait la latine. Cette langue, il est vrai, est répandue partout, mais morte, et partout réservée pour le petit nombre de savants [...]" (Brunot 1967:564)

But now the dead language is no longer the source of authors and concepts. The retroactive effects brought about some short-term sociolinguistic shifts. Indeed, *le petit nombre de savants* from the restored *Académie*, began to write their academic *Mémoires* in French, instead of Latin.

Despite these pompous declarations, the world of references remained classical for at least some decades. The excellent report by George Gusdorf (1973), *L'avènement des sciences humaines au siècle des lumières*, clearly shows how the displacement of Latin was accompanied by a large-scale contact with classical letters:

"L'Antiquité demeure l'âge d'or des formes de la sensibilité et de l'expression. Pope et Voltaire, Montesquieu comme Klopstock ou Lessing, et le Goethe émerveillé du voyage en Italie, les meilleurs d'entre les meilleurs, sont les élèves respectueux des maîtres anciens. Les architectes, les peintres, les sculpteurs qui modèlent le décor de la vie sont tributaires de cette perfection des formes que ne cessent de conjuguer à nouveau, avec ravissement, les architectures palladiennes d'Angleterre, les tableaux d'Horace Vernet, les gravures de Piranèse. [...] L'Antiquité impose ses modèles en matière d'ameublement et d'habillement; elle tend à remodeler plus puissamment que jamais le décor intérieur et extérieur de la vie. Le classicisme est cette métalangue des sentiments, des idées et des valeurs, qui parvient à bloquer l'horizon de la pensée." (Gusdorf 1973:209-210)

The main cause of Rivarol's well-known discourse in the Académie Royale of Berlin was competition between Latin<sup>1</sup> and the vernaculars. Ten years later, Grégoire's *Rapport sur la nécessité et les moyens d'anéantir les patois*, which claims the knowledge of French inside the state, starts with a reference to Rivarol and echoes the topic of Rome. Gusdorf's remarks (1973) about the contact with classical letters, including the dependence of the vernaculars on Latin and Greek grammars for questions of language use, seem very sound and are probably the complementary side of dead language qualifications. Richard Waswo (1987) has also noted a similar complementation for the Renaissance period, where these

<sup>1</sup> The text begins with a reference to this language and *l'orgueil des Romains*: "Une telle question proposée sur la langue latine, aurait flatté l'orgueil des Romains, et leur histoire l'eût consacrée comme une de ses belles époques [...]" (Rivarol 1784:1); and it is sprinkled with classical names and comparisons: "[...] En même temps, un roi du nord faisait à notre langue l'honneur que Marc-Aurèle et Julien firent à celle des Grecs: il associait son immortalité à la nôtre; Frédéric voulut être loué des Français, comme Alexandre des Athéniens." (Rivarol 1784:90).

qualifications begin to appear<sup>1</sup>. These remarks, which seem evident in the case of linguistic elaboration, prove useful also in dealing with sociolinguistic shift.

I will pursue my analysis with some functional considerations about the critical domains of use in the displacement of Latin. The main paradox is that the Latin-speaking community, a member of the class of adoptive linguistic communities, is mostly related to the spread of writing and education. The second part of the paradox is that as these goals were achieved, written Latin fell more and more into disuse. The more literacy increases, the less the framework that made it possible was understood and used. The great sixteenth century debate on the *Questione della lingua* has no parallel in the eighteenth century: there was no argument about the loss of universality, apart from the few remarks of D'Alambert's *Discours Préliminaire* in the *Encyclopédie*. A better balanced notion of linguistic equality was still to come. For a long time, written texts were the only source of sociolinguistic legitimation. Aracil (1988) reports evidence from a Spanish nineteenth century writer, recalling that many of the so-called living European vernaculars had no stock of written texts some centuries ago<sup>2</sup>. The measure of social acceptance was closely linked to written texts.

My next point has to do with the bilingual writers. They are difficult to group because there are large differences between them, in terms of time and geography. They belong to different native speech communities, and of course they represent a subtle interweaving of vernacular and learned cultures. This overlapping was necessary for communication and cultural transmission and it conforms mostly to the distribution of languages that we now assume for scientific purposes. In the seventeenth century, John Milton was a good English example of this practice, as little-known for his Latin work as Jacques Bossuet, a French writer of the same century. The point is that in the course of the next century bilingual writers disappear. The Italian scholar, Ludovico Muratori, who wrote a substantial work on history in Latin and vernacular between 1723 and 1749 is perhaps one of the last bilingual researchers. In the case of Catalan, Fuster's accurate survey (1968) gave a correct description of the evolution of bilingualism. Perhaps the last European group of Latin writers are to be found in Italy, among the exiled Spanish Jesuits. The episode was reviewed by Batllori (1966), who mentioned the controversy with Italian writers that produced Aymerich's work *De vita et morte linguae latinae* (1780), which is a dissertation about the users and the quality of classical Latin.

Nearly everything written in Latin during the eighteenth century was on learned topics. My next point is that the course of scientific events played its role in the defeat of the common language. The paradox again is that science and theory were the last domains of use of Latin. The importance of the *Encyclopédie* in the progress of natural sciences has been shown elsewhere (for instance, in Hazard,

<sup>1</sup> As he says: "Thus began the long process by which the modern European languages were assimilated into the canons of description and analysis -grammatical, syntactic, rhetorical, and prosodic- developed in and for Latin. [...] Vernaculars overthrew the dominance of Latin only by subjugating themselves to its terms." (Waswo 1987:136-137).

<sup>2</sup> "Sí señor, y sé muy bien que si atrás retrocedemos, unos seis u ocho siglos, no se haya impreso del tamafito de un dedo de los que se llaman vivos idiomas europeos. Y sin embargo a la altura llegaron en que los vemos [...]" (Pintos, J.M., 1853: *A gaita galega tocada polo Gaiteiro, ou sea, Carta de Cristus para ir dependendo a ler, a escribir e falar ben a lengua galega e ainda mais*, Pontevedra, [A Corunha:Real Academia Galega 1981:38]. Quoted by Aracil 1988:4).

1946). Therefore, the reversal of values between humanist and technical knowledge which is achieved after the Enlightenment may well be a determining factor in explaining the claims of vernaculars. Latin was classified from the very beginning on the humanist side, which was going to lend its good name to technical improvements and natural sciences. In the world of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was little doubt about the secondary place of these latter fields of knowledge. The fact that Latin took shelter in the sciences made apparently little sense in a context of great changes in this domain.

Some particular considerations have to be made about the topic of national education. A general basic program had appeared, prepared in Latin by Amos Comenius, the Czech essayist, in the previous century. Its discussion was mainly in vernacular and related to national aims. Again, GUSDORF's excellent study (1973) leads us to the relevant arguments: vernaculars had become necessary and useful, as Latin and Greek were for scholarship. The supposed divorce between the need for spreading the national language and the obsolescence of the *langues de savants* is now the key. Vertical circulation was preferred to the horizontal pattern. The Spanish case has been analysed by LÁZARO (1949). The Asturian writer, Gaspar de Jovellanos, wrote several reports on education such as the *Memoria sobre la educación pública* (1802) and the *Bases para la formulación de un plan general de instrucción pública* (1811) where the notion of dead language appears in the new sense, linked to erudition. The minimal hypothesis is that this new meaning is a functional outcome of the vertical requirements. The living languages were now those that took part in public instruction. The discussion also drew on the shift of contents. As GUSDORF says:

"L'opposition s'établit entre la pédagogie de tradition, et la pédagogie de novation, soucieuse de modifier les pré-supposés en vigueur. [...] La pensée traditionnelle partait du problème résolu. Sa tâche était de former des hommes cultivés, des humanistes chrétiens, dotés d'un équipement intellectuel adéquat [...]. La mutation pédagogique est liée à la curiosité neuve pour l'homme concret en sa présence réelle. L'empirisme se décide à commencer par le commencement, l'enfance et la petite enfance, jusque-là négligées, présentent un intérêt considérable [...]. Chaque nouveau-né est appelé à parcourir le chemin de l'humanité, à vivre pour son compte l'aventure d'une croissance physique et morale, qui récapitule l'histoire de l'espèce depuis les origines." (GUSDORF 1973:147-148)

A clear consequence of this state of things, including its inner contradictions, was the inclusion of Latin in basic education programs. Thus, its incorporation in the schools as a reminiscence came to be parallel to its preclusion from Academies and Universities, as two different sides of the same process.

My last remarks come from our best source of sociolinguistic data for the eighteenth century, the *Histoire de la langue française* by Ferdinand Brunot. My proposal would be to collect information, by means of an indirect reading of the work, about the critical domains of use in the period. Brunot's aim was to explain the spread of one specific vernacular among the learned circles in Europe.



References to Latin are compulsory, because the common language occupied the places to which the new vernacular moved. Besides, this vernacular also filled a set of new functions related to new social activities, in this case without competition. The rhythm of its incorporation in different European countries is perhaps the first parameter to take into account. This issue depends heavily on the cultivation of respective vernaculars, apart from their particular attachment to Latin. At one end of Europe, following always Brunot, Scandinavia knows a *Suecia antiqua et hodierna* in 1746, written by a Frenchman. Significantly, the first known French grammar for Polish people was written in Latin (Mesgnien, *Grammatica gallica, in usum juventutis maxime Poloniae composita*, Danzig, 1649), but the same author also wrote a Polish grammar in French (*Grammaire polonoise à l'usage des François*, 1649). The case of Hungary is probably the most prominent one. Brunot quotes:

"Il est certain que, dans toute l'Europe, on ne parle pas si bien Latin, si proprement, si élégamment, si facilement qu'en Hongrie: celui du temps d'Auguste n'y a pas dégénéré, ny dans la frase, ny dans la prononciation. On le cultive encore avec soin dans les Universitez de ce Royaume, aussi célèbres que nos meilleurs de France ou les anciennes des Espagnes. Les maîtres de poste ne peuvent être reçus s'ils ne parlent la Langue Latine comme la Hongroise, et généralement tout le monde en a l'usage avec même facilité." (Regnard 1681: *Les anecdotes de Pologne ou mémoires secrets du règne de Jean Sobieski*, v. I, pp. 208-209, in Brunot 1967:18)

The quotation is from the end of the seventeenth century. Half a century later, Voltaire, in the *Lettres philosophiques*, mocked the colloquial Latin spoken in the hostleries of Poland.

This geographical diversity subdivides into different trends of use and linguistic genres. Innovations dictate the choice of linguistic variety. For example, improvements in the mail service established a standard way to send letters. Brunot notes that this new formal practice was in the beginning restricted to French (see Chamereau, 1737). Another important new medium of communication were the *gazettes*, which quickly spread all over Europe adopting the French form: Stockholm's *La Gazette française* (1742), the *Journal littéraire de Varsovie* (≈ 1777) or the *Gazette de Saint Pétersburg* (≈ 1768). Latin was absent from these new domains. We have already mentioned the case of restored Academies and their language shift process. Brunot gives a list of German towns where French began to be taught from 1715 to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The intermediate role of Latin can be seen in many cases<sup>1</sup>. Brunot's list concerning international politics is also interesting, not being this exactly a new activity but in a way quite a controversial one. The international treatises that were signed indistinctly in Latin or the vernacular during the first half of the century, select the vernacular invariably at the end<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See the *Tableau d'ensemble des villes où fut établi, de 1715 à 1800, un enseignement de français*, in Brunot (1967:624-625).

<sup>2</sup> See *Le français dans les relations diplomatiques*, in Brunot (1967:799-837).

The study of particular domains of use can furnish us with the basis for comparisons. Music, with its deep implications of orality and learning, is a very singular example. In this domain, Latin combined well with different vernaculars during the eighteenth century, but when the century ended a new type of musical composition was coming forth: national anthems spread everywhere in the respective vernaculars<sup>1</sup>, thus linking French or English to a set of situations that were to become more and more formal as the new century went on.

The work on Brunot's *Histoire de la langue française* and parallel materials leads us to Tsunoda's survey (1983) for the nineteenth century. The implications of a comparative approach to the subject are obvious. I have tried to expound here the background of inquiry: there are many open questions to be analysed that they will be understood in future research. Our sociolinguistic notions and practices are set in a framework that is taken for granted without further examination. How have we built up the view about Latin that Thomas Mann expressed so well? The growth of a notion like *dead language*, bound to the first European *interlingua* is also related to the growth of literacy and review of the past. The decline of a learned language must have broad implications for our sense of what a culture is.

I would like to add a final word. The subject can also be considered under a premise of sociolinguistic relevance which is very seldom stated in our scientific milieu. The question is probably relevant too for a correct policy towards any endangered language. It was formulated in the sixteenth century in the context of humanism by Joan Lluís Vives in *De tradendis disciplinis* (1531), a work about the reform of studies and the scope of knowledge. At the end of the book Vives asks: what are languages for without the knowledge with which they are related? *Or what importance is it to know Latin, Greek, Spanish and French, if the knowledge contained in those languages were taken away from them?*<sup>2</sup> Vives' advice could be a right way to approach Thomas Mann's problem and perhaps our problems too.

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<sup>1</sup> See Kohn (1944), Chapter fifth, fn. 44.

<sup>2</sup> "Theophrasti etiam sententia iure laudatur, quae cuncti sciunt, minimam esse eorum quae ignorent portionem: [...] quid si executiat singula, & ad subtile examen revocet? Nae illi tam magnifici tituli sordere incipient. Linguae quid aliud sunt, quam voces? Aut quid interest semotis disciplinis, Latinè & Graecè novis, an Hispanè, & Gallicè? Dialectica & Rhetorica instrumenta sunt artium, non artes [...]" (Vives 1551:375). ["But rightly the opinion of Theophrastus is praised 'that even the knowledge possessed by all men, is a very small portion compared with the amount of that, of which all men are ignorant' [...]. What if anyone would examine things one by one, and bring them to a close testing, would not those magnificent titles of knowledge begin to appear paltry? What are languages other than words? Or what importance is it to know Latin, Greek, Spanish and French, if the knowledge contained in those languages were taken away from them? Dialectics and Rhetorics are the means of knowledge, not knowledge itself [...]" (*On Education*, translated by F. Watson [Appendix 1, *The aim of studies*], 1913)]

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## RESUM

### L'ús del llatí: la construcció social de la sociolingüística

Les disciplines científiques són també productes socials, que operen amb conceptes que s'originen en un context històric. L'estudi del pensament sociolingüístic ens ensenya com han sorgit molts dels conceptes que avui dia donem per suposats, com si fossin normals. Al voltant del llatí, i de les tensions que genera el seu ús a l'època moderna, els diferents idiomes nacionals europeus van forjant una mentalitat que desplaça l'idioma comú i prefigura la distribució sociolingüística actual. En l'endemig d'aquest procés, el passat és revisat i el coneixement escrit canvia radicalment el teixit social i la mateixa concepció de la ciència.

## SUMMARY

The history of specific languages as normally presented in the European tradition lacks generality. Particular histories of languages call for a comparative approach. In this respect, the role of Latin is crucial, due to its character as first European *interlingua*. But there is no history of Latin in the modern period, not even a coherent explanation for its decline. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the historical source of our sociolinguistic concepts and the way we shape a kind of sociolinguistic mentality to judge linguistic uses. The growth of a notion like *dead language* is bound to the growth of literacy and review of the past. The decline of a learned language must have broad implications for our sense of what a culture is.