

An Early Attempt to Prepare a Global Strategy for Endangered Languages: CIPL, IIC and the ‘primitive languages in process of extinction’ (1928-1929)

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Abstract

At the 1st International Congress of Linguists in 1928, the linguistic community organised itself in a professional association named the *Comité International Permanent des Linguistes* (CIPL). Cooperation between CIPL and the executive agency of *International Committee for Intellectual Cooperation* (ICIC), the Paris-based *Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle* (IIC), began forthwith. Amongst the recommendations of the The Hague Congress was a request to governments and the competent bodies of the League of Nations to organise a global survey of languages and dialects, as many of these were disappearing before they had been studied. Cooperation between CIPL and IIC on this issue, however, ended abruptly, due to disagreement between the two organisations. The issue at stake was the scope of the survey: the whole world or only its ‘exotic’ parts; and the type of linguist, ‘generalists’ or ‘descriptionists’, to be invited for the expert meeting. But underneath a more political question played its part: who should take the lead, the linguists of CIPL or the international civil servants of the IIC?

Introduction

In the general introduction to the Encyclopedia of the world’s endangered languages Christopher Moseley draws attention to the novelty of the concept of ‘endangerment’ in linguistics.¹ He singles out the years 1993, which saw the publication of the UNESCO Red Book of Languages in Danger of Disappearing, and 1995, when Tokyo University set up its Clearing House, as important landmarks in the dissemination of awareness of language loss.²

Likewise Mark Janse, while admitting that language death had been occasionally studied by individual scholars from the end of the 19th century onwards, argues that serious attention developed only in the 1970s. He points to the 15th International Congress of Linguists, held in August 1992 in Laval, Quebec, as the moment when language endangerment was put on top of the agenda, with the adoption by the *Comité International Permanent des Linguistes* (CIPL) of the following resolution:

‘As the disappearing of any one language constitutes an irretrievable loss to mankind, it is for UNESCO a task of great urgency to respond to this situation by promoting and, if possible, sponsoring programs of linguistic organisations for the description – in the form of grammars, dictionaries, and texts including the recording of the oral literatures – of hitherto unstudied or inadequately documented endangered and dying languages’.³

It can be argued, however, that endangered languages were already much earlier ‘on top of the agenda’. In 1928, the participants of the 1st International Congress of Linguists in The Hague not only founded CIPL, but also addressed a resolution to ‘governments and to the

competent bodies of the League of Nations’ that contained very similar language, declaring that there was not sufficient scientific knowledge of the languages of the world and that a lot of languages might be lost before they have been described.

In this article I hope to describe how this resolution came about, and what was undertaken by CIPL and the League of Nations to carry it out.

ICIC and IIC

The ‘competent bodies of the League of Nations’ to which the linguists in The Hague looked for support were the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC), and its executive organ, the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation (IIC). The ICIC was created in January 1922 after a French initiative to this effect was adopted by the Council and Assembly of the League of Nations in September 1921.⁴ It started as ‘a commission for the study of international questions of intellectual cooperation and education’, acting as a ‘consultative organ of the Assembly’⁵ and convened once or twice a year in Geneva. There were three sub-committees - for bibliography, inter-university relations and intellectual property, to which was added in 1926 a sub-committee for arts & letters. Membership of the ICIC gradually rose from 12 to 19. Amongst its members were many prominent intellectuals from the period, like the philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) who was president of the Committee from its creation until 1925⁶, the chemist and physicist Marie Skłodowska-Curie (1867-1934), the physicist Hendrik Lorentz (1853-1928) and the classical scholar Gilbert Murray (1866-1957).

¹ Moseley (2007), p. vii.

² *Idid.*, p. x.

³ Janse (2003), p. xiv.

⁴ Renoliet (1999), p. 7.

⁵ Pham-Thi-Tu (1962), p. 25.

⁶ Renoliet (1999) p. 184.

The establishment of the IIC by the French government in 1926 opened up possibilities for the Committee to have some real work undertaken. From that period until 1930 the Institute managed a large number of often very small projects. These were mostly of a practical nature, like coordinating the bibliographical work in economics or carrying out a questionnaire on libraries, and they soon became the target of criticism. Julien Luchaire (1876-1962), the first director of the IIC, defended this policy by stressing the experimental character of the work in this first phase of the Institute's life.⁷ But in his memoirs he complained about it bitterly: to him, this kind of subservient work was forced upon the Institute by countries like Britain that were against the whole idea of intellectual cooperation in the first place.⁸

The IIC divided its work in seven sections⁹; projects that touched on linguistics were mainly carried out in the science section. At the time of the 1st International Congress of Linguists this section worked on projects on linguistic bibliography, on unification of grammatical terminology and on phonetic transcription.¹⁰ Head of this section was the Dutch astronomer Jacob Evert de Vos van Steenwijk (1889-1978). Other functionaries that have to be mentioned were the Deputy Director Alfred Zimmern (1879-1957) and the head of the section of historical and social sciences, Władysław Folkierski (1890-1961).

The effort for intellectual cooperation was furthered at the country level by National Commissions consisting of academics and other intellectuals and by National Delegates that represented the Member States at the IIC. These were often diplomats of the embassies in Paris. Luchaire actively pursued the establishment of National Delegates in order to gain independence from the Secretariat of the ICIC in Geneva.

Paris, March 1928

The first contact between the IIC and the linguists who later were to establish CIPL seems to have been made via the slavist Nicolaas van Wijk (1880-1941) who was not only the president of the Netherlands National Commission for Intellectual Cooperation but also member of the Organising Committee of the The Hague Congress. Six months before the opening of the Congress, Luchaire wrote to its secretary, professor Jos. Schrijnen (1869-1938) of *Nijmegen University*, congratulating him on this promising new example of international scientific cooperation and offering the good services of the Institute.¹¹ He stressed the fact that the Institute could contribute only in matters of the organisation of scientific work; purely scientific issues fell outside its programme.

⁷ Ibid., p. 78.

⁸ Luchaire (1965), part II, pp. 83-84.

⁹ Anon. (1926), p. 2.

¹⁰ IIC, DD.VII.3, letter of Luchaire to Schrijnen 10.10.27.

¹¹ Ibid.

Schrijnen answered with an invitation to Luchaire to send in propositions bearing on the six items on the agenda.¹² These had been sent to the invited linguists already in July 1927.¹³ Two of these items concern us here: the methodology of geographical linguistics and the methods of study for languages that have not yet been subject to satisfactory philological investigation.

The programme of the congress does not state precisely when a language can be said to be satisfactorily investigated. In the *ordre du jour* two categories of insufficiently studied languages are distinguished, 'insufficiently known cultural languages' and 'languages of primitive peoples'. This seems to point to a concept related to what we would now call 'endangered languages'. But on the other hand, the explanatory text accompanying the programme defines the first category of languages so broadly that all languages fall under its scope: 'because, ultimately, the languages of great centres of culture are hardly better known than those of far-off countries.'¹⁴ If this were taken at its face value, then the item on the agenda would simply be the methodology of language study.

Luchaire did not make use of Schrijnen's offer to send a preliminary reaction in writing on the agenda, but the IIC showed its support for the initiative in various ways: it announced the Congress in the periodical of the Science Section *Bulletin for Scientific Relations* twice¹⁵, it was officially represented by Folkierski, and it would later publish the resolutions in the same periodical.¹⁶ The Institute even presented its expert meeting on linguistic bibliography, that was organised as a result of a decision of the ICIC on 26 July 1927 and in no way depended on the initiative of the Dutch linguists, as a preparation for The Hague: 'The work of the Experts, on the whole, should be considered as a preparation for the first International Congress of Philologists [sic], which will be held at The Hague on April 10th, 1928'.¹⁷

This expert meeting on linguistic bibliography was part of a project that is typical of the kind of work that the Institute undertook during the first years. The subject was suggested to the Institute by the famous French linguist Antoine Meillet (1866-1936) and aimed to facilitate linguistic bibliography by providing directors of linguistic periodicals a list of bibliographical specialists from all over the world and by urging editors to induce linguists to add objective abstracts to their publications. The expert meeting mentioned above took place on 12 and 13 March 1928, only a few weeks before the International Congress of Linguists. Meillet

¹² IIC, DD.VII.3, letter of Schrijnen to Luchaire 23.10.27.

¹³ De Boer et al (n.y.), p. v.

¹⁴ IIC DD VII 3, Programme du premier Congrès international de Linguistes.

¹⁵ Bulletin for Scientific Relations no.3 August 1927, p. 374, and no. 4 December 1927.

¹⁶ Bulletin for Scientific Relations no.3 August 1928, p. 134-136.

¹⁷ Bulletin of the Information and Documentation Section of the League of Nations 17 (February 1928), p. 10.

was elected chairman. The archives of the IIC contain two very comprehensive reports of the meeting, one written by the rapporteur Jules Marouzeau (1878- 1964) and one by an anonymous collaborator of the institute. At the end of the meeting the Americanist Paul Rivet (1876-1958) asked attention for the problem of endangered languages:

‘The ethnologists and linguists are very frightened by the thought that a whole series of populations disappear and languages die, and that no sufficient effort is undertaken to try to collect documents on these civilizations and languages. Examples abound in the history of ethnology and linguistics [...] I think that our Commission could ask the International Institute for Intellectual cooperation to take this up with the League of Nations; there is an effort to undertake here. In archeology, the earth will preserve for us the remnants, but for the dying languages it is high time to study them before they disappear. Examples abound, and there is reason to ask the League of Nations to use all its influence to facilitate a serious enquiry in the different points where the problems are encountered.’¹⁸

This idea was taken up eagerly by the assembled linguists. Meillet remarked that the languages of Europe had to be taken into account as well, citing Slovincian, only known by the work of one man, Friedrich Lorentz (1870-1937), and arguing that even the French as it was spoken around Paris was not sufficiently known. Marcel Cohen (1884-1974) pointed to the The Hague Congress as a good opportunity to attract the attention of the League of Nations to this issue. He also pleaded for the establishment of an organisation ‘of small staff, but highly qualified that could easily influence affairs’.¹⁹ Marouzeau, in his report of the meeting, gives it a tentative name: *Union linguistique universelle*.²⁰ George Oprescu (1881-1969), who represented the Secretariat of the ICIC at the meeting, explained the way to proceed: the linguists in The Hague should come up with a resolution, Folkierski could bring this to the attention of the ICIC, that then could bring a resolution to the Assembly and the Council of the League of Nations. Such a resolution might well induce governments to take their responsibility towards the languages in the areas under their jurisdiction.²¹ Meillet promised that the Congress of Linguists would issue ‘as precise and energetic a request as possible’.²²

¹⁸ IIC DD VIII 25, *Compte-rendu de la réunion des experts pour la bibliographie linguistique* – 12 et 13 mars 1928, pp. 39-40. Translated by the author.

¹⁹ *Idem*, p. 41.

²⁰ IIC DD VIII 25, *Rapport de M. J. Marouzeau à la Sous-Commission des Sciences et de Bibliographie sur la réunion des experts pour la bibliographie linguistique* (12 et 13 mars 1928). (1928) p. 10.

²¹ IIC DD VIII 25, *Compte-rendu de la réunion des experts pour la bibliographie linguistique* (12 et 13 mars 1928), pp. 42-43.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

The trajectory sketched by Oprescu would indeed be followed, at least in the first two stages. The collaborators of the Institute were understandably quite pleased with this by-product of their meeting, especially as the project on linguistic bibliography as a whole didn’t reach very striking results. In their report of the project to the Sub-Commission for Science and Bibliography they stressed the good timing of this meeting, enabling the experts to prepare parts of the debates in The Hague. And although the undescribed or insufficiently described languages had been tabled by the Organising Committee of the The Hague Congress, the actual idea of a resolution to obtain the assistance of the League of Nations seemed to have originated during this meeting of the IIC.

The Hague, April 1928

Exactly one month later, the 1st International Congress of Linguists brought together some 250 linguists under the chairmanship of C.C. Uhlenbeck (1866-1951). Meillet had indeed submitted a proposition to the item of geographical linguistics, under the heading of ‘description of the totality of languages’.²³ Neither the appeal to the League of Nations, nor the urgency of the problem are mentioned in this text; it had undoubtedly already been submitted before the expert meeting in Paris. In the proposition Meillet pleads for a global linguistic atlas for which uniform and very concise questionnaires are required: ‘cartographical exposition demands [...] simplifications that, at first sight, surprise and shock’. The work would need a coordinating commission. Later, when presenting his plan at the congress he proposed national commissions to be established by governments.²⁴ Meillet adds that the atlas will have to be complemented by detailed studies of a certain number of dialects, but for this work he deemed international cooperation not feasible.

Judging from the provisional report that Schrijnen read at the closing session, at the time of the congress the two most prominent outcomes were the establishment of CIPL as a crowning act of emancipation of general linguistics and the issue of undescribed languages that had now received the designation of ‘linguistic inquiry’ (*enquête linguistique*). Schrijnen calls it the ‘big question’ (*grosse question*) and the ‘highlight’ (*pièce de résistance*) of the Congress²⁵.

The resolution to the League of Nations runs as follows:

‘1. There is not sufficient scientific knowledge of the languages spoken in the world. A lot of languages and dialects are in the process of extinction and run the risk of disappearing without having been collected.

‘2. The Congress unanimously agrees that all governments are obliged to organise as complete as

²³ De Boer et al (n.y.), pp. 28-30.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 99.

possible a study of the languages and dialects of all countries under their control.

‘3. A simple and quick procedure consists in dispatching inquirers to a certain number of localities in the region under study. These inquirers will be equipped with a questionnaire that has to be translated in the speech form of the localities. This inquiry can result in a cartographical representation of the facts. That would yield the elements of a first linguistic atlas of the world.

‘4. In order to give a complete idea of the functioning and the intimate nature of languages, it is necessary to collect also original texts of all the languages and to obtain, if this is possible, phonographic recordings.

‘5. The Congress has designated a Commission charged to execute these proposals and that will keep itself at the disposal of governments and inquirers to help them to provide the inquiry with the necessary unity.’²⁶

The special commission referred to in (5) was called the *Commission d’Enquête Linguistique* (CEL) It had initially eight members: Franz Boas (1858-1942), Carl Meinhof (1857-1944), Paul Rivet (1876-1958), Matteo Bartoli (1873-1946), Karl Jaberg (1877-1958), Wilhelm Schmidt (1868–1954), Alf Sommerfelt (1892-1965), and Nikolaj Jakovlev (1892-1974).²⁷

The proceedings of the Congress give some idea of the debate.²⁸ Leo Spitzer (1887-1960) and Uhlenbeck criticized Meillet’s plan. The former preferred dictionaries and grammars to atlases, the latter doubted the possibility of uniform questionnaires. In an article in the *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris* Meillet refuted Spitzer’s criticism: linguists need a general picture of the linguistic situation of the world, that gives a preliminary insight in the genetic relationships as a starting point for more detailed studies. If one denies this, one denies the value of the comparative method itself.²⁹

Schrijnen’s provisional report at the closing of the Congress stressed the unanimity of the support for ‘a study as complete as possible of the languages of all countries (*une étude aussi complète que possible des langues de tous les pays*)’³⁰, but a personal letter of Uhlenbeck to Schrijnen from 3 March 1929 reveals how deep the divisions ran between linguists as to the scientific relevance of the data that might be gathered in a global survey. Uhlenbeck described Cohen, Meillet and Rivet as forming an impenetrable front of ‘unbridled comparatists of petty words’ (*toomeloze woordjesvergelijkers*) against whom Uhlenbeck could bring in little. Apparently forgetting Spitzer, he named the Danish specialist of greenlandic languages W.

Thalbitzer (1873-1958) as his only partisan. The three Frenchmen were, according to Uhlenbeck, victims of aprioristic tendencies and nationalistic ambitions’.³¹

The disagreement had an obvious methodological aspect, that can be captured in dichotomies like ‘Popperian vs. Marxist’ or ‘top down vs. bottom up’, but had linguistic facets as well. In the introduction to their *Les langues du monde* of 1924, Meillet and Cohen had expressed doubts whether the comparative method - applied with great success to the Indo-European languages in the nineteenth century – could be applied to American languages; this had earned them a strong rebuke of Leonard Bloomfield (1887-1942).³² The global survey of CIPL could easily be conceived as an attempt to establish the genetic relationships between all languages of the world via pre-scientific shortcuts. The doubts of Spitzer and Uhlenbeck would later be echoed by Meinhof, when the members of CIPL prepared the second edition of Cohen’s *Questionnaire Linguistique général*: ‘I don’t nourish high hopes of simple comparison of vocabulary without precise observation of sounds and the establishment of sound changes and I could not attach myself to this kind of endeavours; but I don’t believe that these are really envisaged.’³³

Geneva, July 1928

From 25 to 30 July 1928, the ICIC held its 10th session in Geneva, and two resolutions from CIPL were discussed. A few weeks before the session, Folkierski, who had represented the Institute in The Hague as planned, promised Schrijnen to back the resolutions of the linguists.³⁴ Besides the one on endangered languages, there was one on the organisation of scientific work (card-indexing) that will not occupy us here.

The CICI adopted the resolution that the Sub-Committee on Science and Bibliography had prepared during its 10th session from 20 to 24 July.³⁵ There was only one linguist in this Sub-Committee, Otto Jespersen (1860-1943), but he was member of CIPL and had moreover chaired the session in The Hague where Meillet’s proposal had been discussed. The resolution ran as follows:

³¹ This letter is the subject of Daalder (2006). The question that puzzles the present writer in connection to this letter is not addressed there: is Uhlenbeck not aware that the fierce criticism of the French position also implies his correspondent, who during the whole project always sided with Meillet?

³² Andresen (1990), p. 189

³³ KDC collection Schrijnen 232. Letter of Meinhof to Schrijnen 06.06.30. Translated by the author.

³⁴ KDC collection Schrijnen 232. Letter of Folkierski to Schrijnen 07.07.28.

³⁵ International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation – Minutes of the Tenth Session – C.533.N. 160..1928.xii (1928), p. 47.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 95. Translated by the author.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 95.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 82-83.

²⁹ Meillet (1928).

³⁰ De Boer et al (n.y.), p. 99.

‘The Sub-Committee takes note of the request submitted by the first International Congress of Linguists at The Hague to the competent Committees of the league of Nations with regard to the organisation of the study of primitive languages in process of extinction. In order to obtain fuller knowledge of this question, it instructs the International Institute to convene a meeting of linguistic experts dealing with such languages.’³⁶

The resolution of the linguists had only asked the League of Nations to plead with governments for support for the project of CEL; with this resolution, however, the ICIC began its own project, and limited its scope to ‘primitive languages in process of extinction’.

Schrijnen was informed by Folkierski on these results in a letter from 13 October 1928.³⁷ The Institute started drafting a list of experts with the assistance of Rivet and Schmidt, both members of CEL, but chosen by the IIC because they had been present at the Paris meeting on linguistic bibliography.³⁸ This choice, and the passing over of Meillet, was consistent with the accent on endangered languages that the project had received in Geneva; Rivet was a specialist on American languages and Schmidt on Mon-Khmer languages. Moreover, the latter had published a monograph on the languages of the world a few years earlier (Schmidt 1926). Schrijnen and Meillet, both Indo-Europeanists, were at this stage not amongst the *invités*, although their role in bringing the project about had been decisive. And Meillet had published a similar work as Schmidt, *Les langues du monde*, together with Cohen, in 1924.

IIC meeting cancelled

In these last months of 1928, De Vos van Steenwijk, who took over this project as Folkierski returned to Poland, was busy establishing a list of experts that would be representative both in terms of nationality and speciality. Amongst the names we find yet more members of CEL (Boas, Meinhof, Jacovlev, all suggested by Rivet³⁹) and others like Kai Donner (1888-1935) for the languages of Northern Europe, Carlo Conti Rossini (1872-1949) for Ethiopian, Francesco Beguinet (1879-1953) for Berber.

On 25 November Schrijnen was in Paris and spoke with Meillet and with Zimmern and De Vos van Steenwijk. After his meeting with Schrijnen, Meillet wrote a letter to Zimmern that shows that he was still confident that cooperation between CIPL and the IIC was possible: ‘it is important that it [the planned reunion] will remain linked with the reunion in The Hague and with the

Committee that represents it’.⁴⁰ He trusted that Schrijnen would propose nothing but sensible things and he offered his assistance for further fine-tuning. So at this time Meillet was not in principle against a role of the Institute in the project of CEL.

The results of the discussion between Schrijnen, Zimmern and De Vos van Steenwijk were set down in a report headed ‘confidential’.⁴¹ Schrijnen expressed three complaints: he had not been officially informed of the results of the ICIC decisions; he objected to the use of the unscientific term ‘primitive languages’ and he strongly disagreed with the change of scope of the inquiry by the stress on exotic languages only.

Luchaire, Zimmern and De Vos van Steenwijk decided that the limitation to ‘primitive languages’ should be kept, but that the phrase ‘in process of extinction’ should be changed into ‘in danger of extinction’. To keep CIPL happy, they would be willing to add some linguists with a background in general linguistics (*quelques linguistes de linguistique générale*), like Schrijnen and Meillet themselves, to the list of experts.⁴²

In December, Schrijnen received the official letter from Luchaire that he had asked for. Luchaire explained that the ICIC always proceeded step by step, and therefore a limitation to the languages where the problems are most urgent was justified.⁴³ The text of this letter had already been shown to Meillet, and had provoked an angry response: the limitation to exotic languages not only ‘falls out of the wish expressed by the Congress of Linguists [...] but will also [...] endanger the whole scheme that I elaborated. I am of the opinion that, in order to be useful, a linguistic inquiry should cover a large area, and that it should be a part of a general inquiry.’ Meillet remarked that the misunderstanding would not have occurred if a competent linguist would have been consulted.⁴⁴ This remark of course questions the competence of the IIC, but backfires on the linguists themselves, implying, as it does, that at least two incompetent linguists, Rivet and Schmidt, had been allowed to become members of CEL.

Schrijnen answered quickly, apparently without taking this matter up with the members of CEL. He reacted in the same vein as Meillet: ‘I am sorry to have to say that I see fundamental oppositions between your views and ours’. He reminded Luchaire that the linguists had called on the ICIC in order to obtain material support for the inquiry. But now it looked as if the Commission aimed to usurp the place of CIPL. The main objection of Schrijnen is, again, the limitation to exotic languages.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 122.

³⁷ IIC DD.II.3. Letter of Folkierski to Schrijnen, 13.10.28.

³⁸ IIC DD.II.3. Rapport de l’Institut à la Sous-Commission des Sciences et Bibliographie – point 10 de l’ordre du jour : langues primitives en danger d’extinction (1929).

³⁹ IIC DD.II.3. Note concernant la liste des experts pour l’étude des langues primitives en voie d’extinction.

⁴⁰ IIC DD.II.3. Letter of Meillet to Zimmern, 25.11.28.

⁴¹ IIC DD.II.3. Résumé d’un entretien de Mgr. Schrijnen, secrétaire permanent du congrès des linguistes avec MM. Zimmern et de Vos van Steenwijk (26.11.28).

⁴² IIC DD.II.3. internal note dated 26.11.28.

⁴³ KDC collection Schrijnen 232. Letter of Luchaire to Schrijnen, 03.12.28.

⁴⁴ IIC DD.II.3. Letter of Meillet to Zimmern, 30.11.28.

He bluntly refuses the offer of some seats in the expert meeting: 'The object of the meeting has been set without us; the members are selected without us; the date might not suit us [...]. Therefore, while thanking you for your intentions, we estimate that we cannot sacrifice our scientific autonomy, which we cherish above everything else'.⁴⁵

After this, De Vos van Steenwijk advised his Director to postpone the expert meeting and to discuss the project again at the 1929 session of the ICIC. He argued that the views of Meillet and Schrijnen are not shared by all linguists, otherwise Folkierski and Jespersen would have prevented the turn that the project had taken in Geneva.⁴⁶

Meillet put the blame on Folkierski. He even advised Luchaire to supervise his staff members from Central Europe closely, as no one from that region could be trusted in linguistic matters.⁴⁷ As to Jespersen, Meillet was convinced that he had no interest in the project.⁴⁸

The suggestion of De Vos van Steenwijk was taken up by Luchaire, who informed Schrijnen that Murray, at that time the President of the ICIC, had invited Meillet to present his views to the Sub-Commission 'in his quality as president of the first reunion of linguistic experts'.⁴⁹ The decision to invite Meillet in this quality, rather than as the godfather of the CIPL resolution, clearly indicates that the Institute wanted to stick to the project as it had been defined in Geneva. But Luchaire was all but inclined to obedience to the ICIC; in a letter to comfort De Vos van Steenwijk for the hardships he had to endure in managing this project, he showed his true colours: 'Later, we will have enough authority to bring them [the disagreeing linguists] to a decision, and determine ourselves what should be done'.⁵⁰

So, inevitably, the Institute took sides in the linguists' disagreements. On second thoughts, however, the IIC must have realised that the Sub-Commission would have to discuss the issue with someone who represented the linguistic community. A few months later, Luchaire asked Schrijnen to instruct Meillet to present the point of view of CIPL.⁵¹

Paris, June 1929

Schrijnen's response did not deal with the status of Meillet at the ICIC session, but announced the meeting of CEL that would take place in Paris on 14 and 15 June, financially supported by the Dutch government.⁵² At this phase in the conflict, CIPL definitely had the upper hand. Schrijnen invites the Institute politely to support the project along the lines of the The Hague resolution: to lobby governments for financial support; but for all other tasks its services are not needed. The Institute had already been informed about this meeting by Meillet in March 1929.⁵³ Meillet had described it as a 'private reunion' - this wording would lead to yet another misunderstanding.

For this meeting more linguists were invited than the eight CEL members had agreed upon in The Hague. The Dutch authorities had given 400 guilders for the meeting on the ground that the 1st International Congress had been held under the auspices of the Dutch government, so that there was a moral obligation to help the realisation of its resolutions.⁵⁴

In total 16 persons gathered in premises placed at their disposal by the *College de France*: Bartoli, Cohen, Kai Donner, Jaberg, Bernhard Karlgren (1889-1978), Henri Labouret (1878-1959), David Lorimer (1876-1962), Meillet, Meinhof, Konrad Preuss (1869-1938), Rivet, Philippus van Ronkel (1870- 1954), Schmidt, Schrijnen, Sommerfelt en Václav Važný (1892-1966). Boas, Nikolaj Jakovlev (1892-1974), and Theodor Frings (1866-1968) could not attend. Meillet was elected President, Schrijnen Secretary. Schrijnen started the meeting with a circumstantial account of the troubles with the Institute, showing all relevant letters to the assembled linguists, and ending on a note of triumph: 'This is what can be called exemplary international intellectual cooperation: here we are gathered, gentlemen, in complete independence, under the patronage of CIPL only'.⁵⁵

The agenda of the meeting, set by Meillet and supplemented by Schmidt⁵⁶, lists three 'general problems' that cover the items discussed in The Hague: the object of the enquiry, the procedures to follow and the resources needed. Beside this, some 'particular cases' are tabled, all on the initiative of Schmidt: the conservations of languages in Australia, and proposals to find resources for the study of the Kindiga language

⁴⁵ KDC collection Schrijnen 232. Letter of Schrijnen to Luchaire, 04.12.28.

⁴⁶ IIC DD.II.3. Letter of De Vos van Steenwijk to Luchaire, 19.12.28.

⁴⁷ IIC DD.II.3. Letter of Meillet to Luchaire, 12.01.29.

⁴⁸ KDC collection Schrijnen 232. Undated letter of Luchaire to Schrijnen, written before June 1929.

⁴⁹ KDC collection Schrijnen 232. Letter of Luchaire to Schrijnen, 15.01.29.

⁵⁰ IIC DD.II.3. Letter of Luchaire to De Vos van Steenwijk of 01.02.29.

⁵¹ KDC collection Schrijnen 232. Letter of Luchaire to Schrijnen of 30.04.29.

⁵² KDC collection Schrijnen 232, letter of Schrijnen to Luchaire of 06.05.29.

⁵³ IIC DD II 3, letter of Meillet to Luchaire received on 19.03.29.

⁵⁴ KDC collection Schrijnen 232, letter of *Minister van Onderwijs, Kunsten en Wetenschappen* to Schrijnen of 17.12.28.

⁵⁵ KDC collection Schrijnen 232, undated text of Schrijnen's introduction to the meeting.

⁵⁶ KDC collection Schrijnen 232, undated invitation to the Paris meeting.

of East Africa and the Negrito languages on the Philippines.⁵⁷

Schrijnen presents the decisions some years later as follows: the goal of the project was still to make a global overview (*état des parlers du monde*), but there was now a strong focus on endangered languages. For all languages, except the languages of civilization, three goals were set: to determine (a) the principle devices used (*les moyens principaux employés par chaque langue*), in order to compare languages and to establish families; (b) the geographical area and (c) the anthropological and cultural conditions. The wording of (a) raises the suspicion that the linguists who hoped to determine language families without the help of the comparative method, had again prevailed.

As another preparatory work for the general survey, the linguists conferred on Schrijnen the task of making a bibliography of linguistic atlases and other collective works.

Concerning the 'particular cases', CEL identified two lists of languages that demanded urgent attention: a small list of languages in process of extinction: Pygmy languages and Kindiga; Vazimba (Madagascar); the language of the Taulis in New-Britain; the languages of the 'Western Islands': Vuvulo, Ninigo, Kanied and Hermit; and a list of little known, but apparently not threatened languages: the langue of the Orang Kubu in Sumatra; the language of the Punan in Borneo; the languages of New Guinea; the Negrito languages of the Philippines and Burushaski in Asia.⁵⁸ All these languages were suggested by Meinhof, with the exception of Kindiga, Negrito (Schmidt) and Burushaski (Lorimer).

Geneva July 1929

A month after the CEL meeting in Paris, the ICIC would decide how to proceed with its project. Between these two meetings, the Institute wrote a letter to Schrijnen asking him about the decisions taken at the 'private meeting'.⁵⁹ Schrijnen, unaware that the designation had been used earlier by Meillet, reacted furiously: it had been a meeting convened by the Secretary General of CIPL, carrying out a decision by the linguistic community in The Hague. He announced that it had been decided to refuse the support of the IIC and to contact the ICIC directly.⁶⁰ The ICIC decided in its turn to stop the project:

'The Sub-Committee on Science and Bibliography, having noted, on the one hand, the report of the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation on languages in danger of extinction and, on the other hand, the correspondence exchanged in this connection

⁵⁷ KDC collection Schrijnen 232, *ordre du jour* of the CEL meeting, undated.

⁵⁸ Schrijnen (1933), p. 5-10.

⁵⁹ IIC DD II 3, letter of Mercier to Schrijnen of 27.06.29.

⁶⁰ IIC DD II 3, letter of Schrijnen to Luchaire of 27.06.29.

between the Institute and the Secretary-General of the Permanent International Committee of Linguists, considers at present it cannot deal with the question.'⁶¹

With this, the cooperation between the ICIC and CIPL, hardly begun, came to an end. Luchaire, who we saw so confidently looking ahead to the final victory of the Institute over the quibbling linguists, had to hand in his resignation in April 1930 after a *comité d'étude* had described the Institute as bureaucratic, inefficient and unfocused.⁶² He had lost the confidence of many of his collaborators and the French government had to sacrifice him in order to save the Institute.⁶³ In the newspapers ugly articles appeared on the abuses at the Institute; he and his son were even accused of theft.⁶⁴

Folkierski's successor at the Science Section of the Institute, Ch. Mercier, wrote a curious personal letter to Schrijnen a few days after the publication of the report of the *comité d'étude*; invoking the bond of affection that had existed between Schrijnen and Cardinal Desiré-Joseph Mercier, his uncle. He proposed to investigate a renewal of cooperation that would be good for science, for the Institute and for cooperation between Catholics.⁶⁵ Schrijnen answered courteously, and proposed a meeting. Nothing, however, seems to have come out of this; after 1930 the Institute limited its actions in the field of science to natural sciences.⁶⁶ In 1936 Schrijnen could describe the international organisation of linguistic science in the *Revue de Synthèse* by listing the activities of CIPL without any mention of the League of Nations.⁶⁷

CEL activities after June 1929

Immediately after the meeting in Paris, Schrijnen asked the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to fill in for the IIC. In a letter from 10 July 1929 he asked for a circular letter to all governments to gain support for CEL and for a *démarche* to the ICIC in Geneva. The reaction was reserved; for direct contact with foreign governments Schrijnen is referred to another part of the Ministry, and the chances of success for direct subventions from Geneva to a body outside the League of Nations system are judged to be slight. Schrijnen is advised to mobilize the governments of the other CEL members.⁶⁸ The Ministry of Education, Arts and

⁶¹ International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation – Minutes of the Eleventh Session – C.342.M.121.1929.xii (1929), p. 108.

⁶² Renoliet (1999), p.92.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.105.

⁶⁴ Nationaal Archief, 2.14.45, Agenda Onderwijs, Kunsten en Wetenschappen, afdeling Kunsten en Wetenschappen, inv.nr. 37 (1930) nr. 5278. Luchaire refers to the case in Luchaire (1965), part II, p. 98 where the blame is put on the servants.

⁶⁵ KDC collection Schrijnen 232. Letter of Mercier to Schrijnen, 06.05.30.

⁶⁶ Mayoux (1947), p. 342.

⁶⁷ Schrijnen (1936).

⁶⁸ KDC collection Schrijnen 232, letter of Dancert to Schrijnen of 12 July 1929.

Sciences wrote a letter to their colleagues explaining the situation and backing the request.⁶⁹ This seems to have had some effect, because Chr. Mohrmann (1903-1988) asserts that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indeed lobbied governments for subsidies, but without results.⁷⁰ Schrijnen archives give very little information on this part of the story. There are some letters proving that members of CEL – Cohen, Meillet and especially Lorimer – were canvassing with their governments for support, and there is a letter from the Lithuanian government informing Schrijnen that his request has been transferred to the University of Kaunas for advice.⁷¹ In the following years Schrijnen and Mohrmann assert subsidies promised by 8, later 11 countries: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Norway, The Netherlands, Romania, Switzerland, and Czechoslovakia.⁷² The French stipulated that a national committee should be established in order to receive the grant; Cohen therefore proposed to form such organs, and to combine them into an international union. Schrijnen was not in favour of this; he asked Meillet to bring it to the vote, but warned that he will in that case offer his position of secretary of CEL to Cohen.⁷³ It is difficult to determine to what extent the promised assistance was actually given; in Schrijnen's paper the present writer has only found proofs of two subventions from the Dutch government, given in 1930 and 1932.

The tool that CEL was to recommend for the global enquiry, Cohen's *Carnet Enquête Linguistique I & II* (1928), seems hardly adequate to trace the desired 'devices', as it deals mainly with lexicography. Cohen's *Enquête* had already been on show at the First Congress of Linguists, and after the Paris meeting CEL members worked diligently for a improved edition, that appeared in 1931 under the aegis of CEL.⁷⁴

Schrijnen's bibliography was published in 1933 under the title *Essai de bibliographie de géographie linguistique générale*.⁷⁵ Schrijnen planned a complementary *Essai de bibliographie de géographie spéciale*, but this book, announced in 1933 to appear 'soon'⁷⁶, and to be 'in the press' in 1936,⁷⁷ never saw the light.

⁶⁹ Nationaal Archief, 2.14.45, Agenda Onderwijs, Kunsten en Wetenschappen, afdeling Kunsten en Wetenschappen, inv. nr 33 (1929, no. 3901)

⁷⁰ This follows Mohrmann (1933), p. 23. There is strong reason to doubt this, because the interval between the request of Education, Arts and Sciences to Foreign Affairs (19.08.29) and the request of CIPL to the Lithuanian government (September 1929) is extremely short for an official request.

⁷¹ KDC collection Schrijnen 232, letter of Minister to Schrijnen of 22.10.29.

⁷² Mohrmann (1933), p. 27; Schrijnen (1933), p. 9.

⁷³ KDC collection Schrijnen 232, letter of Schrijnen to Meillet of 10.11.31.

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⁷⁵ Schrijnen (1933) p. 9.

⁷⁶ Migliorini & Pisani (1935), p.14.

⁷⁷ Schrijnen (1936), p. 64.

As for the actual research to be carried out under the auspices of CEL, in the case of Burushaski the real problem was the lack of funds for the publication of work already done; Lormier was negotiating with the Clarendon Press in Oxford at the time of the meeting⁷⁸, and his work on Burushaski would eventually be published in three volumes in Oslo, between 1935 and 1938.

The mention of Kindiga in 1929 brings to mind the fieldwork of Dorothea Bleek (1873-1948) in Tanzania amongst the Hadza in 1930, but it is unlikely that CEL assisted in this case, as Schrijnen would certainly have mentioned it. This leaves the case of Negrito as the only example to the present writer's knowledge where CEL co-financed linguistic fieldwork. It was carried out by Morice Vanoverberg in 1936 and concluded the investigations that were published in *Some undescribed languages of Luzon* in 1937.⁷⁹ In the preface to this book Schrijnen announced 'systematic investigations in poorly known languages in process of extinction in the British and Dutch Indies'⁸⁰, but if these were carried out, they were not published by CEL.

Conclusion

So, although CEL undertook a variety of activities after the Paris meeting, it never came near the general enquiry that was its ultimate aim. This can no doubt be attributed to the lack of agreement within the Committee that was discussed above, but also because mobilizing governments without the League of Nations proved more difficult than hoped when Schrijnen and Meillet decided on their *Alleingang*.

After the Second World War CIPL and UNESCO, the successor of ICIC and IIIC within the United Nations, would cooperate in the field of endangered languages again, as was alluded to in the introduction of the article. The present writer hopes to deal with that period at another occasion.

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⁷⁸ KDC collection Schrijnen 232, letter of Lorimer to Schrijnen.

⁷⁹ Vanoverbergh (1937), p. 9.

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