

Designing a language policy for ISCHE standing conference: issues, models and blueprint for action

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This report provides a framework for reflection and pragmatic suggestions on handling linguistic diversity within ISCHE – the International Standing Conference for the History of Education.

The reflections are based on:

- *2019-06_20 ISCHE language policy* (document added to conference package of ISCHE 41, 2019)
- Individual reports by V. Boretska, T. Hamel, F. Herman, A. Novoa, F. Simon and D. Toepper
- Language Policy Committee suggestions - synthesis report by R. Rogers

A long-debated topic

The document *2019-06_20 ISCHE language policy* provides an illuminating timeline. It shows that language questions have been long debated at ISCHE. Like the other reports, it displays a strikingly responsive attitude towards respecting the diversity and linguistic heterogeneity of its members.

ISCHE debates in a global context of changing communicative needs

Long-debated questions may sometimes feel wearisome and repetitive: the same questions recur, and it is not always clear what progress has been made in the discussion. This is often the case when dealing with linguistic heterogeneity – there is really no one approach that can fix the most obvious problem of international organizations: not everyone masters common language(s) to the same degree and there are professional, political and identity issues bound up with language use.

What is interesting to note, however, is that over the 40 years of ISCHE's existence, what appears from the outside to be one and the same conversation can be more accurately described as an evolving discussion. With geopolitical transformations, profound changes in communicative needs and demands have arisen as well as new ways of conceptualising social, cultural and economic relations.

For example, from the void left by the end of the Cold War, two types of force have emerged: the centripetal forces of nationalism (exemplified by the war in Yugoslavia) and the centrifugal trend of the globalization of economic, social and political relations.

One hallmark of globalization is that people have been more mobile, which has created more zones of contact (Pratt 1981). They have maintained their affiliations with communities in

different locations through digital communication and travel, and have engaged in more mixed linguistic and cultural practices. More multilingual practices have also emerged. Increasingly, there has been a shift from what Hall terms ‘modernist globalization’ towards ‘postmodern globalization’ (in Canagarajah 2006). In the modernist vision, nation states and dominant communities ‘assumed the superiority of their cultural, linguistic and social systems’, and ‘conceived communities as related in hierarchical and unilateral fashion’ (Canagarajah 2006, p.). In post-modern conceptions, more multilateral relations and more multilingual and mixed identities and practices are recognized, with more people demanding that their lifestyles and histories be seen as a legitimate part of national collectivities and histories (Pratt 1981, Canagarajah 2006).

These tendencies are also seen in higher education, an institution at the nexus of complex competing demands, being mandated both to meet national states’ demands and to participate in the transnational conversations necessary to address today’s global issues.

The contemporary forms of internationalization of academia (Knight and de Wit 1995) have thus led to the rise of new tensions around linguistic questions: how to have a fair communication environment and support science in multiple languages while simultaneously keeping a competitive edge in the knowledge economy and building the transnational networks essential to tackle world problems. Responses to these tensions have varied from (a) claiming or re-claiming more national, community-based languages and ways of thinking, organized according to the community’s standard assumptions and concepts; (b) adopting more polycentric, multilateral and hybrid practices, on the grounds that centring a variety of cultural, historical and linguistic imaginaries has become vital; (c) using global lingua francas as pragmatic solutions to ensure transnational communication; and (d) adopting a mix of positions.

ISCHE – which model?

A quick look at the status of ISCHE, the *201906_20 ISCHE Language policy* document and the reports seems to indicate that ISCHE members oscillate between three positions:

- going for English as the official/main language as a pragmatic option, ignoring calls for more flexible multilingual practices
- developing parallel language use, with the problem that new languages will constantly need to be added in the future
- adopting a flexible multilingualism, i.e. a mix of practices aiming for inclusion and respect for diversity, with the fear that this will be time-consuming, costly and burdensome, and may prove to be a distraction from the main goal of talking history.

A choice of three options

To gain a clearer view of these three positions, it is useful first to recall what these three models mean:

- *Lingua franca* or *official language* policy (Backus et al. 2013, Sanden 2018)
 - In this model, one language (usually English) is adopted and enforced as the means to address the linguistic heterogeneity of the participants across the board.
- *Parallel or complementary language use* (Hultgren 2016)

- In this model, there are several official languages, used concurrently, none of which abolishes or replaces the others (an example of this in a conference is whole sessions in French, in parallel with whole sessions in German, Spanish or other languages).
- *Inclusive multilingualism* (Backus et al. 2013)
 - This model considers that when multiple languages are present, not all participants will have the same level of proficiency. The focus is not on languages but on techniques that can help achieve mutual understanding and make everyone feel they belong. The model is familiar to anyone who has travelled to a foreign country and tried to make themselves understood by all means available: using a lingua franca, asking someone to help with translation, code-switching, making use of technologies, gestures or visuals, adapting their speaking pace and choice of words in order to be understood, using their receptive skills in order to understand. The focus is less on linguistic rigour than on negotiating the most effective communication for the situation for the sake of a shared goal. This is the most recent model and perhaps the least known. One example of it is multilingual sessions at which people use bilingual modes of presenting, adapt their language to their audience, provide translation and/or alternate languages across presentations.

Each model rests on different understandings of language, and comes with particular advantages (A), disadvantages (D), ethos (E) and relation to linguistic norms (N) that can be briefly summarized as shown in Table 1.

English as lingua franca	(A): facilitates communication, fosters sense of belonging, widely used academic language (D): participants may have different levels of proficiency, which can present professional challenges for some and put others in an advantageous position (E): associated with a pragmatic, efficient transnational ethos (N): standard varieties of English (UK, US) and global Englishes are acceptable; applying 'native language norms' confers advantages (e.g. the person who speaks English well gains a reputation for intellectual rigour and articulacy)
Parallel use of multiple languages (e.g. concurrent use of languages, with none given priority)	(A): facilitates communication by giving a choice: participants can communicate in their preferred language; this fosters symbolic recognition of several languages and avoids domain loss (e.g. "German science" not done in German anymore) (D): minority languages are often not used in this model, because they are spoken by too few participants; there are risks of cliques and sub-groups forming, and of the historical imagination becoming limited to national/regional frames of reference (E): associated with equality, equal value of languages for science, centring of local histories and imaginaries in addition to global ones (N): using 'native language norms' in the chosen language confers advantages (e.g. the person who speaks one of the languages well gains a reputation for intellectual rigour and articulacy)
Inclusive multilingualism (e.g. mix and flexible use of languages to meet the communicative demands of the context)	(A): facilitates communication by using strategies to include less proficient speakers, fosters sense of belonging, adapts flexibly, requires collaboration over the best way to achieve mutual comprehension and intelligibility (D): linguistic rigour, fluency and native norms are not centred; can feel disorienting to monolingual speakers of majority languages not used to hybrid communication practices such as constant code-switching, translation, adjustment of language to the persons present

	<p>(E): associated with pluralist, inclusive, non-hierarchical ethos as well as pragmatic ethos. Communication partners help each other to achieve communicative goals</p> <p>(N): native speaker norm is not sought after. Being able to support comprehension, mutual understanding and having intercultural negotiation skills confers advantages (e.g. the multilingually aware person usually deals with the situation better and gains a reputation for multilingual and multicultural skills)</p>
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Challenges associated with adopting the models in a multilateral, international, non-hierarchical academic context

Research has shown that all three models are routes regularly taken to address linguistic and culturally heterogeneity in a group, and to a large extent do the job. Research has also highlighted that each model comes with specific challenges, especially in contexts where multilateralism and pluralism are regarded as important.

Some of the challenges especially related to using one or more main languages (in either the lingua franca model or the parallel language use model) are listed in Table 2. They are borrowed from Sanden (2018) and adapted to the academic context.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO...	MAY LEAD TO...
Rhetoric and performance	→ loss of rhetorical power and status, disempowerment; lack of rigour, imprecision; lack of visibility
Group dynamics and networking	→ withdrawal, formation of cliques, stereotyping, lack of access
Capacity building and support for young researchers	→ limited opportunities to network and to present work in best light, negative evaluation
Epistemology and knowledge transfer	→ misunderstandings, loss of perspectives, hierarchies of views, ethnocentricity of concepts, standards and assumptions
Prestige allocation and participation	→ discrimination, glass ceiling, exclusion
Cost and resources	→ time-consuming, inefficient, expensive for the less proficient users; language-related investment not possible

Table 1. Pitfalls associated with adopting one or more main languages (adapted from Sanden 2018)

Challenges associated with adopting one or more ‘main’ languages

In the context of an international conference such as ISCHE, for example, **rhetoric and performance** challenges can affect participants when they are writing, presenting or discussing their research in a language other than their own. Less proficient speakers may experience ‘a feeling of status loss, decreased professional regard, less individual prestige and influence’ or cognitive depletion (Neely 2013, Sanden 2018).

A lingua franca will facilitate exchange across cultures and languages, but it can also affect negatively **group dynamics and networking opportunities** (Sanden 2018). Participants may fall silent in conversations they can only partially follow. They may remain within cliques, creating social pockets within the conference. Native speakers may also feel sidelined in

conversations between highly multilingual international speakers who speak a norm different than their own (e.g. global English vs. UK English, American English).

Language can also affect who people can network with. Younger scholars, for example, may fail to attract the attention of more senior scholars because of their rhetorical performance, leading to **limited support and capacity building**.

Language, concepts and academic cultures of thinking are intimately intertwined. An additional unwanted effect of using a lingua franca may be **epistemological**. Always using the same language(s) presents the risk that the same (Eurocentric) concepts, standards and assumptions will be centred.

As scholars are assessed not just on the quality of their ideas but also on their articulacy, rigour and quality of communication, being able to use a favoured language may give them more credibility and make their work more influential. The use of a lingua franca may thus have consequences in terms of **prestige allocation** (Sanden 2018).

Finally, functioning in a lingua franca in which one is not very proficient will usually result in a **cost**: the work will take more time for less rewarding outcomes. It may require a financial investment in services such as proofreading and editing and keep some scholars in a situation of peripheral participation.

Challenges of adopting a flexible multilingual model

With the **flexible** model, specific challenges also arise. When people constantly switch languages in one and the same presentation, the more **monolingual speakers** in the audience may feel excluded, disoriented or cognitively depleted. They may experience temporary **loss of rhetorical power or receptive abilities**.

Making sure that communication is inclusive also requires more than linguistic skills. It requires metacommunicative skills – the skills involving in adapting one’s speech to the level of others (e.g. by slowing down, choosing easier words, paying attention to the languages spoken by the people present, etc.) (Canagarajah 2006). For some scholars lacking these **metalinguistic and negotiation skills**, participation may be more difficult.

In all cases, globalization creates challenges for science, networking and relations. Depending on how these professional challenges are met with actions, participants may feel that a varying effort is required of them in order to feel included. They may experience more or less rhetorical power, symbolic and professional visibility and networking opportunities. They may enjoy more or less equal status, sense of belonging, prestige and recognition for their ideas. The choice of model will also affect whether the association has more of a global and transnational outlook, or is dominated by certain language groups.

A way out of the dilemmas: pragmatic suggestions and possibilities

In the face of the long list of challenges reviewed so far, I now offer a set of pragmatic suggestions. The goal is to be able to background linguistic questions in favour of concentrating on the core business of ISCHE: the history of education.

The first suggestion is to see if the EC can settle on one or other of the models detailed in this document. The guiding questions for reflection could be:

- Which general orientation/framework/ethos does the EC feel to be best adapted to ISCHE's current or future needs and identity? Are there any parts of this report that create consensus and can constitute starting points for this general framework? How strongly does the group feel about the different models? Do they have ideas for an additional model not described here?
- What is the expected outcome of the Language Policy Group's work: is a policy the best outcome? (A policy is usually easy to communicate, but it is also often rather static. It risks not being adopted in practice and may be costly to implement.) Or is it more to have a more flexible set of concrete actions that can be tried and tested according to resources and interest over time, in an incremental fashion?

My own view is the following:

- There seems to be a preference for privileging English as a lingua franca, and phasing out the 'official ISCHE languages' aside from English.
- Choosing to make English the official language of ISCHE will likely provoke heated debates. Other language groups may view this as a loss for their own group. In a multilateral, pluralistic context, it is unlikely that the officialization of any one language will find a consensus. Keeping global English as a lingua franca without necessarily elevating it to the status of 'official language' might create less tension.
- Opting for a continuing parallel language model may be problematic for the future: how many more languages will need to be integrated as official languages? Will this create permanently separated sub-groups within the association? It will also create issues with publications, translations of official documents into multiple languages, etc. This approach seems difficult to sustain. Recognition of a language does not necessarily come with redistribution of resources, prestige, etc.

A flexible model could be more workable in the long term, if it is conceived as a creative, evolving strategy, implemented through minor adjustments over time, and if there is truly an alternating approach and a mixed orientation to languages. This model would also seem to sit well with the initial report received – presenting ISCHE as a pluralistic, international, non-hierarchical context which 'respects diversity, cultural differences and the profound meaning of language'.

If this third model is chosen, the actions required would be in fact very minimal. A blueprint could look as follows:

- 1) Inform members about the strategy/philosophy and its rationale. This could be done through a document such as the *2019-06_20 ISCHE language policy* added to a conference package or through a one-paragraph statement on the website;
- 2) Highlight what is already in place in terms of inclusive strategy (e.g. using (global) English as a lingua franca, using other languages as lingua francas (French, German, Spanish, any regional language that has a larger number of representatives), the presentation of ISCHE which already appears in multiple languages on the website, other known initiatives);
- 3) Suggest additional initiatives ISCHE members or the EC can take at their own level to support the move toward a more transnational outlook (see ideas in Annex I).
- 4) Pick one or two suggestions from the list in Annex I, from time to time. The idea picked must seem feasible and engender minimal costs. Review over time to see if further progress has been made or could be made in a spirit of incremental change.

- 5) If the model shifts towards more multilingual practices, pay extra attention to the more monolingual speakers, as they may be the most disoriented at first in the new model. Pay attention to ensure that no specific language group becomes centred all the time, keeping an eye on diversity at all times (this could be the job of ‘language chairs’ as suggested in the documents received).

In Annex I, I compile a list of suggestions which can be taken as a blueprint towards an inclusive, flexible multilingual strategy. It includes and builds on remarks provided in the reports received. Some ISCHE members will be curious about some of these options – becoming de facto ‘innovators’ or ‘superspreaders’ of new practices. Other members will have little interest, but may be moved over time to adopt some of the new practices they see emerging, especially in the newer generations. A strong commitment from everyone is not needed if a bottom-up, distributed approach seems acceptable to the EC.

What are the possible benefits ?

At the outset, little will change if the flexible model is adopted. What the blueprint provides, however, is a framework to re-think collegial relations, academic activities, normativities. The benefits of creating an inclusive culture over the long term are typically presented as more cohesion, respect and a strong sense of belonging and affiliation (Backus et al. 2013).

For younger scholars, who increasingly have to navigate a global academic scene and address transnational questions, being socialized into inclusive/flexible practices will contribute to their professional development. In particular, it would support:

- The development of skills in addressing a diverse, international audience in a sensitive way
- Self-reflection on potential blindspots or parochialism in research, and increased criticality
- The modelling of more multilateral modes of discussion across values, histories, meanings.
- More diverse international collaboration and alliances

More monolingual speakers also find themselves navigating a multilingual and multicultural global world. It seems unwise for them to be left out of opportunities to develop competencies in other languages. They too will increasingly need to participate in interactions with more varied conversational partners from more diversified backgrounds (Canagarajah 2006). A multilateral orientation suited to today’s global context could support them in that journey, allowing them to practise their foreign language skills, either receptively or by performing in foreign languages. This journey could be supported with in situ translation by colleagues, bilingual presentations (PowerPoint in one language, presentation in another, summary points in English, etc.).

Creating an inclusive spirit and taking small actions would therefore be my suggestions on how to address linguistic issues at ISCHE – in addition to the pragmatic use of English.

Further reading and resources

- Backus, A., Gorter, D., Knapp, K., Schjerve, R., Swanenberg, J., ten Thije, J. and E. Vetter (2013). Inclusive Multilingualism: Concept, Modes and Implications. *European Journal of Applied Linguistics* 1 (2) 1–37.
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- Sanden, G. (2018). Ten Reasons Why Corporate Language Policies Can Create More Problems than They Solve. *Current Issues in Language Planning* 21(1) 22–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2018.1553914>.
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PRAGMATIC MILESTONES TOWARDS A FLEXIBLE LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT MODEL

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ANNEX I – This Annex compiles a list of possible initiatives and actions towards an inclusive multilingual framework for ISCHE¹. Together, they provide a blueprint towards a flexible multilingual model of language management. This list includes the actions summarized in R. Rogers’ report (marked RR, and copied verbatim) as well as additional suggestions. The idea is to focus on selectively picking a few actions that seem appealing, feasible and the least costly – with a ‘work-in-progress’ attitude. The list can also support the committee articulating to its members which actions it has considered but decided not taking and why. Pragmatism should be the guiding principle in order for the actions to be sustainable. The ideas are presented in no particular order. Rows left empty are for further ideas.

Topic	Y/N	Initiative/Action detailed	Further details, rationale or examples
Building a shared culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	Circulate a short ‘language policy’ document with conference package.	This helps create a common frame of reference.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide recommendations for presentations to a heterogeneous audience in guidelines for conferences.	E.g. explain how and why a bilingual presentation should be made; make recommendations to native English speakers that they adjust presentations for international audiences to adjust presentations for international audiences.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Create some awareness about the professional challenges and issues of presenting in a foreign language.	E.g. recognize the effort made by international participants to present in a language not their own at the conference opening when thanking them for their presence. This helps build recognition and a sense of belonging for them, and makes native speakers aware of the heterogeneity in the group.
Attitude survey	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop a short online survey people can fill in via smartphones or tablets during the opening of the conference. (RR)	In addition to asking questions about members’ opinion regarding panels in specific languages, survey people on actions they would be willing to take to make their presentation better tailored to an international audience (e.g. how would they accommodate non-native speakers in the audience, would they be willing to develop multilingual

¹ This compilation includes suggestions summarized in Rebecca Rogers’ report and additional ones.

			PowerPoints, adapt pace and lexicon, summarize key points in two languages, etc.). This would help assess how much the group is interested in an inclusive framework or prefers to focus on the use of a lingua franca. It shifts the responsibility to the audience to take action to ensure a more multilingual framework. It also creates awareness and gives ideas of practical steps for the audience (even if in the end, all activities remain in English only).
Conference management system (ConfTool)	<input type="checkbox"/>	If possible, use the multilingual interface available from developer.	This can symbolically make participants feel more welcome, especially if other documents cannot be translated. It helps the participants to focus on preparing their abstract rather than translating the conference system, if they have a lower level of competence in English.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	If the multilingual interface is too costly for the budget, provide a rationale for why the English-only version is used and/or suggest freely available tools for translation ² . (RR)	In general, written text is less of a barrier to understanding than oral language, because many free tools exist to provide quick translation (e.g. Google Translate, Deep-L).
Call for papers	<input type="checkbox"/>	If there is enough manpower, translate into the four main languages of ISCHE and/or additional languages.	There could be the official call, and the possibility for participants to provide an 'unofficial' translation of the call in a variety of other languages. This would create more international visibility. The 'unofficial' translation would be flagged as such to avoid quality problems, and the reference call would always be the one in English.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Decide to keep the call for papers always in English + main language(s) of the conference location.	Conference organizers would usually have the resources to translate the call into the country's language. By alternating languages, different languages will become centred over time.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Keep the call for papers always in English but suggest freely available tools for translation.	In general, written text is less of a barrier to understanding than oral language, because many free tools exist to provide quick translation (e.g. Google Translate, Deep-L).

² There may be of course ethical issues with supporting ultimately for-profit tools.

Constitution and bylaws	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide the bylaws in the language of the country where the association is officially registered. (RR)	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide the bylaws in the language of the country where the association is officially registered and in English.	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide the bylaws in the language of the country where the association is officially registered + links to freely available translation tools.	
Minutes of General Assembly	<input type="checkbox"/>	In English + link to freely available translation tools.	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	If enough manpower, in English and other lingua francas currently in use (French, German, Spanish) or mastered by the EC + links to freely available translation tools.	
Website	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide the title of the association in English + allow for an unofficial list of names in other languages to be provided by participants.	An example: https://discourseanalysis.net/DN/mission
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Present the association in multiple languages.	This is already done in the 'About ISCHE' section of the website.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	If resources are available, provide mirror sites in multiple languages.	An example: https://discourseanalysis.net/DN?language=en . This will enhance the global reach and transnational visibility of the Conference.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide a Language Statement in the section 'About ISCHE'.	This would be a means to explain the position of ISCHE with regard to the diversity and linguistic heterogeneity of its members. It could answer the following questions: what the linguistic and inclusion challenges are for ISCHE, what decisions have been taken for now to meet them, what cannot be done due to lack of resources but could be envisaged in the future.
Publications	<input type="checkbox"/>	In CFP of international edited book, encourage participation of scholars who have not previously published extensively in English .	An example: CFP for international edited book: "Curriculum of the body and the school as clinic: Histories of public health and schooling, 1900-2020".
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vary languages for Book Awards.	

	<input type="checkbox"/>	Paedagogica Historica – make a pragmatic decision on which languages to accept based on manpower/reviewers available.	Explain the rationale for language choices. If possible, regularly publicize and summarize an outstanding publication in language other than English.
Conference materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	Offer conference material in English as a lingua franca + the language(s) the local committee can afford to translate into.	Choice of language will vary from year to year, centring different languages over time.
Communications	<input type="checkbox"/>	Proposals for communication could be written in two languages (English and another language). The main text/communication should be in the primary language (which could be English or another language), and a summary with the basic ideas of the proposal would be made in the secondary language (which could be English or another language). (RR)	This could be just an option rather than an obligation so as not to double the work of participants.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	To help multilingual audiences follow presentations in a language other than English, presenters could be encouraged to break their presentation down into clusters and, at the end of each cluster, to provide a condensed summary of a couple of sentences in English. (RR)	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Members recommend a conscious effort to constitute multilingual sessions, which requires a multilingual chair who consciously promotes language diversity. (RR)	Such sessions have existed for the past four years in ISCHE.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Another suggestion is to designate a language chair in each session who ensures communication is facilitated between language groups. (RR)	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Monolingual English speakers could be encouraged to develop presentations for a multilingual audience even if they are entirely in English.	They would be invited to imagine their audience as consisting of non-native speakers and to adapt the level of presentation accordingly (for example: not read their paper, adapt the pace, repeat and summarize key information, avoid using very culture-specific terms, etc.). They could work in tandem with colleagues who could provide short summary slides in another language that the audience could just read.

Social events	<input type="checkbox"/>	For extracurricular activities, the rich resource of multilingualism could be advertised. One member suggested something that one could call 'conceptual cafés'. The history of education is full of culturally embedded concepts which vary in different languages, the complexity of which could be unpacked through talking about these concepts directly. These could, but would not need to, be connected to the topic of the conference, and the theme of the cafés could change accordingly. This suggestion in effect addresses an important aspect of knowledge transfer. (RR)	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Depending on interest, the cafés could be not just conceptual cafés, but perhaps also pedagogical cafés (around different ways of teaching the history of education in different national contexts, for example), or the sharing of experiences of doing research and teaching during the pandemic times in different contexts, or the sharing of writing and presentation tips in multilingual contexts, or grant application cafés (bringing together scholars with a view to a COST action or Marie Curie grants).	
Social media	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have a Twitter/Instagram/social media account that is contributed to multilingually by the participants.	This is an easy way to display the multilingual orientation of ISCHE. Translation tools associated with social media usually make it easy to read messages in a language one does not know.
	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	<input type="checkbox"/>		