

A cost-and-benefit approach to language loss

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Endangered Languages and Languages in Danger: Issues of documentation, policy, and language rights

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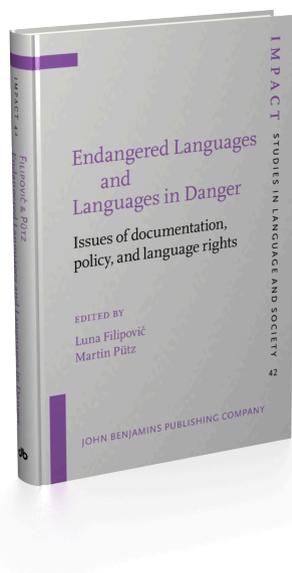
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A cost-and-benefit approach to language loss*

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The linguistics discourse on language endangerment and loss has been marked by a number of disputable assumptions about what languages are and about the terrible price humanity incurs in losing linguistic and cultural diversity as some of them die. I dispute some of those assumptions, including the claim that there are language rights. I also raise issues about the notions HERITAGE and ANCESTRAL languages, which should not be confused with MOTHER TONGUE. I argue that language loss is a consequence of the communicative habits of speakers, influenced in the here and now by their particular socioeconomic ecologies. The notion of POPULATION STRUCTURE, which has to do with whether a population is integrated or segregated, who gets to interact regularly with whom, and who has to accommodate whom linguistically, plays an important role in my arguments.

Keywords: adaptation, benefit, colonization, ecology, globalization, heritage language, language rights, population structure

1. Introduction

Typically driven more by a righting rather than an explanatory spirit, the linguistics discourse on language endangerment and loss has been marked by a number of disputable assumptions about what languages are and about the terrible price humanity incurs in losing linguistic and cultural diversity as some of them die. To be sure, this characterization is more typical of language advocates (e.g., Nettle & Romaine 2002; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000; Mühlhäusler 1996, 2003; Crystal 2004) than of those who have engaged in language documentation (as in Austin & Sallabank 2015). Below, I dispute some of those assumptions, including the

* I am grateful to my anonymous reviewer for several comments that have helped me improve the wording of my arguments in this essay. I am alone responsible for all the remaining shortcomings.

claim that there are language rights putatively distinct from human rights and the implicit message that any attempt to save a language really serves the needs of the population associated with the language in question (which is more present in the literature on language revitalization).

Toward the end of this essay, I also problematize notions such as HERITAGE and ANCESTRAL languages as they intersect with that of MOTHER TONGUE. This raises the question of whether an individual or a population is expected to be wedded to their heritage or ancestral culture in the same way they are to a particular race or ethnicity, as socially defined as these constructs are. These considerations should help us understand how and why languages die and whether the loss of a language necessarily makes the relevant population of speakers maladaptive or less competitive in the face of ever-changing socioeconomic ecologies. They prompt us to identify what particular ecological factors roll the dice on the vitality of particular languages and what particular actions it would take to revitalize endangered languages if linguists had the power to do so in the first place.¹

2. Some disputable assumptions about language endangerment and loss

2.1 The cost of decreasing or losing linguistic diversity in the world

A common argument articulated by language advocates is that loss of linguistic diversity impoverishes our collective knowledge of the world, because it deprives us of one particular way in which the relevant language categorizes the world of experience and/or representation or how its speakers package chunks of information about it and/or about their experiences. Languages are thus seen primarily as representation systems (e.g., Mühlhäusler 2003 and other self-professed “ecolinguists”) rather than as technologies for communication.² They consider the

1. Useful references on the subject matter of revitalization include Fishman (1991) and Grenoble & Whaley (2006). As a general policy in this essay, which is a broad critique of the literature on language loss and generally negative about most of it, I will refrain from singling out particular authors while ignoring a host of others that assume similar positions. I will thus be meager on negative citations and will identify specific authors only when there is something that justifies singling them out. I happen to agree with some of the courses of action proposed by the above cited authors, although I doubt that those initiatives alone will revitalize moribund languages or just succeed in producing knowledges that particular individuals can boast about but do not use practically in their daily lives.

2. I argue in Mufwene (2013a, in press) that the knowledge-representation aspect of language is a consequence of how a particular population has shaped their communicative technology, especially how the relevant speakers have chosen to package information in particular chunks

particular ways in which different languages categorize the world, or break it up into jigsaw-puzzle-style categories (especially through their vocabularies but also through their grammatical categories), as immutable. Languages are thus considered as repositories of several generations of accumulated knowledge, which the populations associated with them would lose if they died. Languages putatively serve as some sort of external collective memories (comparable to external drives of computers, Logan 2007) for the collective knowledges of the relevant populations. Although this population-specific knowledge is not wholly accessible to any speaker of the relevant language, it is presumably well stored in the language for any speaker to discover at some point. Faithful to the spirit of museums, languages encapsulate the histories of the populations they are associated with and should be maintained.

True to the conception of language by Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) as a social institution to which speakers are born and which they must pass on intact to later generations, the discourse sounds as if languages were anterior to the populations speaking them. Structural change is treated as the accumulation of accidental mis-productions by some speakers (showing how performance may forge divergent competence) or the consequence of materials or structures introduced from other languages. Little note has been taken of the fact that languages are actually produced and reshaped several times over by their speakers during their speech acts and in response to their current communicative needs (Mufwene 2001). Some needs die (and with them some ways of expressing ideas or feelings) and new ones arise, while some others just change, as a population's communicative ecology evolves. The latter may change when the relevant population comes in contact with another and exchanges experiences and knowledge with the other, which sometimes trigger borrowing terms or phrases that come along with the new experience or knowledge (what Bloomfield 1933 identifies as "cultural borrowings").

In some cases, it is the other population's language that is adopted. In doing this, members of the relevant population do not necessarily intend to give up their heritage language, which they have traditionally spoken. Rather, the changing ecology of their economic activities and/or social interactions makes it necessary for them to learn the language associated with the new socio-economic world order and spoken by their more influential new neighbors. Such practice of communicating increasingly in the other population's language is an adaptive response to

corresponding to words and phrases during their communicative acts. Knowledge can be acquired and stored without a language, but the latter is needed for those who bear it to share it explicitly with each other. Evolutionarily, this practice helps knowledge grow faster in a population.

an important ecological pressure that the individuals experience. Whether or not the changing ecology ultimately leads to the loss of the language that they have traditionally spoken, by a process of atrophy or attrition (caused by gradual and cumulative language shift, affecting the overall population), is another story to which I return below.

I submit that languages change and sometimes are replaced by others as part of their (potential) speakers' adaptive responses to pressures from the relevant communicative ecologies. Although languages also function as social identity markers and embody cross-cultural variation, they are really like other cultural tools, shaped and adapted by those who need and use them. As I explain below, knowledge of them may become rusty, when members of the relevant populations have not used them for a while, which is what language atrophy or attrition is. The experience is indeed comparable to a metallic tool becoming rusty and potentially less useful.

Languages vary as representational systems by virtue of how differently their respective speakers shape them, just like different populations manufacture technologies that are functionally equivalent in different ways (Mufwene 2013a, in press). Thus, for instance, different populations do not dress, cook or process foods, build and decorate their dwellings, organize their social groups, or practice their religions identically, even when they experience similar ecological constraints. When populations come in contact, they are likely to influence each other (though not in identical ways), with some often giving up their traditional ways and adopting those of the other populations. This is how several populations have, for instance, become Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist; have aspired at democracy, and dress more and more in the Western style, thus adopting cultural practices that are not part of their ancestral heritages. The point is that, as cultural artifacts, languages have been subject to similar adaptation pressures in human history. Despite our love for museum traditions, language advocates should make a more convincing case for saving particular endangered languages, bearing in mind that contact situations and their impacts on the relevant populations vary one from the other.

2.2 Does losing a language entail losing the culture associated with it?

A concomitant of the above is the claim that losing one's language is losing one's culture, which is allegedly disadvantageous to the individuals or population undergoing the process. How to react to this claim depends largely on how one interprets the relationship between LANGUAGE and CULTURE. I conceive of the latter notion as the particular ways members of a population behave (towards each other

and with the non-human world), how they do things, what particular beliefs they hold, and what assumptions underlie their behaviors. If one assumes that culture is separate from language, then one must consider Sapir's (1921) observation that the two do not necessarily go hand in hand. Thus, for instance, Portuguese has prevailed as the dominant vernacular of Brazil, at least among the non- or less-indigenous populations (those that are not Native Americans or are of mixed Native and non-Native descent), but Brazilian culture is different from that of Portugal, despite being impregnated in part by a Portuguese cultural legacy. The same may be said not only of polities such as the United States, Canada, and Australia but also of Romance countries in Europe where the indigenous Celts first shifted to Vulgar Latin, before this language evolved into local neo-Latin varieties, which would ultimately become the modern Romance languages.

In places where a European colonial language has prevailed as the or an official language, European cultural influence is typically minimal and often superficial, as speakers of the language have typically retained most of their cultural traditions, even though these have also changed over time. And, because the larger segments of the relevant populations bear some cultural influence from Europe, such as in dressing conventions and long-distance transportation, but do not speak the European official language inherited from the colonial rule, it is evident that language and culture do not go hand in hand.

However, if one assumes that language is one of the several aspects of culture and constitutes the particular technology used by a population to communicate within itself (Mufwene, in press), then the historical evidence generally shows that those who have shifted languages have typically also indigenized the language they have appropriated (Mufwene 2009). The literature on the indigenization of English in former British exploitation colonies (typically in Africa and Asia) speaks loud and clear about structural, semantic, and pragmatic differences between the so-called "native" and "indigenized Englishes." A closer look at the "native Englishes" spoken in former English settlement colonies also reveals an important amount of indigenization interpreted as adaptation to the communicative habits of the new populations of users (some of whom had shifted from different heritage languages) and to the new physical and non-physical ecologies in which they have evolved (Mufwene 2009). This explains why we can now speak of American, Canadian, and Australian Englishes, among others, and can even identify dialects thereof with the respective polities.

Then arises the question of whether cultures are meant to be static or adapt naturally to the changing physical and social ecologies of their practitioners, who actually shape them. A correlate is whether the populations associated with particular cultures are wedded to the latter in the way they are permanently associated with particular races or ethnicities, or whether they can adapt by adopting the

culture of another population they have been in contact with. As noted above, the history of mankind provides numerous examples of cultural shifts. For instance, the Frankish population invaded Gaul but adopted the Roman style of administration that the Roman Empire had bequeathed to the region and ultimately shifted to Latin as their vernacular (as this was evolving into the Romance languages). The Romans themselves had borrowed democracy and apparently part of their mythology from the Ancient Greeks, before their leadership Christianized and helped spread Christianity to the Roman Empire. Europeans learned mathematics and much of the modern banking system (such as minting coins and usage of checks) from North African Muslims during the Middle Ages.

The number of examples can be multiplied. What is evident is that sometimes a culture was adopted with its language and at some other times only it was adopted. When a culture was adopted, it has usually also been indigenized and thus transformed into a new culture. For instance, Christianity in Europe has been impregnated with some indigenous Pagan practices, just like Catholicism has indigenized in South America, in the Philippines, and in Africa and is not practiced exactly like in Europe. We cannot ignore the emergence of “syncretisms” such as Voodoo in Haiti and Candomblé in Brazil, both being blends of Catholicism and African religious traditions during the colonial period.

The bottom line is that populations are culturally adaptive, reshaping their traditions in response to changing social and physical ecological pressures. The extent of divergence from particular traditions varies from one ecology to the other. Language shift and culture shift may thus be considered normal paths of adaptation in human cultural evolution. What is worth noting is that nobody plans on giving up their traditions, nor are most of the people who participate in the process aware of what is happening. The shift is noticed in hindsight, typically too late to do anything about it. In many cases, members of the relevant population intend to be bilingual or bicultural, but they evolve in ecologies where bilingualism and biculturalism are not sustainable simply because there is increasing shortage of occasions to practice the traditional language or culture.

It is of course legitimate to stand against such evolutions, in the same way that campaigns have been undertaken to eradicate epidemics, which are deleterious to humans, and to protect our physical ecologies when they undergo changes that endanger our future. If we think that language and culture endangerment among some populations are comparable to epidemics, the question is what can be done to protect them without making the relevant populations maladaptive to their changing socioeconomic ecologies or creating more problems in the polities in which they evolve?

2.3 Were there (many) more languages spoken at the dawn of modern civilizations?

It has often been claimed that the number of languages spoken in the past, before the colonization of the rest of the world by Europe since the 15th century was much larger than today; and languages have been dying at an unprecedented fast rate. Linguists have not addressed the question of the disconnect between, on the one hand, the cladograms of genetic linguistics, which illustrate speciation (therefore the emergence of new language varieties) and the concurrent increase in the number of languages, and, on the other hand, the claims of continuous decrease of number of languages over the past half millennium.³ I am not denying the fact that numerous languages have died as a consequence of European colonization, which is the trigger of language contact and competition. I want to direct attention to the fact that similar events have occurred several times in human history.

For instance, a concomitant of geographical and demographic expansion of Latin and of the subsequent emergence of the Romance languages in southwestern Europe is the loss of an unknown number of Celtic languages. A consequence of the colonization of England by some Germanic tribes in the 5th century has been not only the emergence of Old English by the 7th century but also the subsequent gradual loss of most of the Celtic languages of the British Isles, notwithstanding that of the handful of Germanic languages that were imported along with that of the Angles and competed with it.⁴ The territorial expansion of the Arabs in North Africa and parts of the Middle East during the 7th century has spread Arabic as a vernacular at the expense of more indigenous languages survived today by Amazigh and Tuareg, for instance. At the same time, distinct national varieties of Arabic have emerged in North Africa that reflect contact with the more indigenous languages. Something similar seems to have happened with

3. Note also that generally these claims have not factored in the speciation of European colonial languages, especially with the emergence of creoles and pidgins, though their numbers are certainly smaller than those of the dead and endangered languages. What I want to show below is that the evolution of language vitality has been differential and we need a more accurate picture.

4. The names *England* and *English*, modern forms of Old English words closer to *Angle*, suggest that the language of the Angles prevailed at the expense of the competing Germanic languages, though it must have been influenced by them. Some may prefer to characterize the process as a form of koinéization. This process anticipated what can be remarked about European languages in European settlement colonies of especially the Americas and Australia, where only one colonial language has prevailed as a vernacular and the others have disappeared or are buying time, as in the case of French in Louisiana and perhaps also in Quebec (Chaudenson 2008).

the expansion of Chinese Empire, especially during the Ming and Han dynasties. Though Mandarin has not prevailed yet as the universal vernacular of the People's Republic of China, it is its dominant lingua franca and that of the Chinese Diaspora. Also, while there are still demographically important minorities speaking their heritage languages, these groups have experienced relentless ecological pressures to shift to Mandarin (also known as *Potunghua* 'common language', *Guóyǔ* 'national language', or *Huáyǔ* 'Chinese language').

All the above facts, a subset of undoubtedly many more around the world, suggest that the endangerment and loss of several indigenous languages as a consequence of the last leg of the Indo-European expansion during the past half-millennium (Mufwene 2005, 2008) is a repetition of many similar events in the history of mankind.

What I question about the assertions paraphrased above regards the part about the number of languages in the world getting smaller and smaller compared to, say, Antiquity. The claim is related to the question of how many languages were spoken by mankind at the time of the exodus from East Africa or at the beginning of agriculture about 10 kya. If we focus on the time of the dispersal out of East Africa, the question depends in part on whether one assumes monogenesis or polygenesis about the emergence of language(s) in mankind. We may also stipulate that the question is perhaps a moot one, because human populations may have already diversified linguistically and ethnically by that time. However, could there have been more diverse populations than there are today? Isn't linguistic diversity today partly a consequence of layers of mutual colonizations, on the fission-and-fusion model, since the exodus out of East Africa (Mufwene 2013b)?

We can also assume that agriculture led to the emergence of cities as contact settings. However, did the emergent cities necessarily lead to the obliteration of languages in the rural areas? Well, precisely this evolution seems to have happened in the case of the Romance languages, as various neo-Latin vernaculars replaced the Celtic languages before they competed among themselves and some, such as Isle-de-France French (in present-day Paris) displaced their competitors. Ultimately, perhaps the number of Celtic languages displaced was greater than the number of Romance vernaculars that evolved from Latin. It would be informative to find out before language advocates paint too grim a picture of what is going on in the world today.

It appears that what we observe today partly repeats history. The number of languages displaced by English and Spanish in particular in the former settlement colonies of England and Spain respectively appears to exceed that of new vernaculars that have evolved from the colonial varieties of these languages, including English creoles. On the other hand, there are also a few other varieties that are

emerging without displacing some indigenous languages, especially indigenized varieties of English, French, and Portuguese in Africa and Asia.⁵ What we really need is a balance sheet of gains and losses in the language history of the world. We will address below the question of whether language losses have typically disadvantaged the relevant populations in specific territories.

2.4 Are the languages spoken by small populations necessarily endangered today?

Another common claim is that languages spoken by small populations are more endangered than those spoken by larger ones (e.g., Mühlhäusler 1996; Crystal 2000). The claim is certainly true in the Western world, where urbanization is extensive and the dominant vernacular is also the language of the economy.⁶ However, the claim has not taken into account the population structures of parts of the world where small ethnolinguistic groups (not necessarily minorities!) are endemic, where geographical mobility remains difficult, and where communication with economically and/or politically powerful outsiders remains limited, where no particular group aspires at being more important politically or economically than the others, as in sub-Saharan Africa and the mountainous interior of Papua New Guinea. Such populations sustain themselves on the practice of traditional subsistence economy, especially as they remain on the margins of world-wide globalizing economic trends, from which they experience negligible pressures for change.

The claim of the universal natural weakness of “small languages” in relation to the powerful, expanding ones is based on a Western view of the world with locally globalized modern economies which tend to function in one dominant language and where economic success tears down traditional ethnic barriers and spreads the language of the economic system.⁷ It overlooks the fractionalization of many

5. We should not ignore Tryon's (2006) observation that large proportions of Pacific islanders migrating to the city or joining foreign diasporas are shifting to their national expanded pidgins or to the European colonial language, especially in the metropolises, as their vernaculars. Equally noteworthy are the reasons, also articulated by Tryon, why they have been shifting languages.

6. This process must be understood not only as ‘population shift from rural to urban areas’ (Wikipedia, 25 November 2014) but also as the spread of urban living conditions to rural areas. Minorities are quickly being absorbed by both trends.

7. This is especially evident in Anglophone North America and in Australia, where European languages other than English either have “vanished” (to borrow a term from Nettle & Romaine 2002) or are on the verge of dying, for instance, in the latter case, French in the State of Louisiana. The success of the Anglo economic system and racial integration (departing from

parts of the world that keeps several small populations autonomous and isolated from each other, especially where the expanding colonial languages function as elite *lingua francas* of a small minority rather than as a vernacular.

Nor does the claim take into account the fact that several economically weaker parts of the world survive on informal rather than formal economy. The more significant language in this economic practice is typically a local vernacular or a regional indigenous *lingua franca* (Vigouroux 2013). Their ethnographic functions are not in competition with those of either the larger ethnic groups, which are hardly interested in dominating them, or the European *lingua francas* spoken by the small indigenous socioeconomic elite. In this general picture, vernaculars compete with other vernaculars, when they are in regular contact, and *lingua francas* with other *lingua francas* (Mufwene 2008), though, as observed by Hagége (2014), there is a chance that a *lingua franca* may evolve to become a vernacular. This is an evolution that is at the mercy of how the economies of numerous Third World countries will develop, hopefully better than today.

On the other hand, one can identify situations where a major language, spoken by millions of people, may be at risk because its speakers are invested in speaking fluently a major competitor language. This may be the case for Afrikaans in South Africa, where urban affluent Colored people, who had adopted this new indigenous African language as a vernacular but owe no ethnic loyalty to the Afrikaner population, are increasingly raising children with English as the only or dominant vernacular. As more and more urban Afrikaners themselves raise English-speaking children, they may be engaging themselves in the trend of weakening the vitality of their ethnic language to the competition of English (Broeder et al. 2002), which is now rising as a vernacular among affluent urban South Africans of any ethnic background. The trend is comparable to that which spelled the loss of several European languages to the economically and politically dominant one in, for instance, Anglophone North America, Australia, and Brazil, with Portuguese prevailing in the latter case.

The reason why the vitality of Afrikaans may be eroding now is probably to be associated with the following reasons: (1) the stigma of the Apartheid regime (1948–1994) against which non-White South Africans had fought; (2) the change of political regime which in 1994 put a predominantly Black group (through the African National Congress) in political power; (3) the implicit adoption of English as the dominant official and the only international language in wide currency;

the earlier nationally segregated population structure of European colonists and immigrants) had the consequence of eroding the vitality of the European national languages (Mufwene 2009). Cajun French in Louisiana may be compared to Pennsylvania Dutch, both protected by the social isolation from the mainstream socioeconomic structures.

and (4) the association of the economy's white collar sector with English only. Equally important, from the point of view of world-wide economic globalization, is the selection of English by foreign investors as the work language, notwithstanding the total large size of the Anglophone countries as the primary destinations of those who consider a better political and economic climate outside the country. As much as they want to protect their cultural heritage, Afrikaners too want to maintain the economic advantages they had enjoyed during the Apartheid regime. They cannot secure them without being competitive in English. As a matter of fact, they, more than members of other ethnic groups of non-British descent, may feel more ecological pressure to be fluent in English, in urban centers, in order to remain competitive linguistically.

What linguists working on language endangerment have typically not articulated explicitly regarding language loss in especially the Anglophone North America is the fact that one must be integrated either as a tool or as a competitor in the current socioeconomic world order to experience the pressure to shift languages (Mufwene 2008, 2009). Although Native Americans lost many of their languages owing to the extermination of masses of them by Old World ills (Crosby 1992) and by especially the genocides committed by the Spaniard conquistadors, the first people to shift to the dominant European languages were the African slaves and European indentured servants that immigrated from European nations other than the dominant colonizer. These were the human tools of the colonists' economic success and hardly had the choice of keeping their heritage languages as vernaculars.

In Anglophone North America, most other European colonists lived in their national enclaves (sorts of mini-colonies within the English colonies), functioned in their national languages, and did not feel the pressure to shift to English until after the American Revolution, especially during the 19th century, after the Anglo economic system (aided by the Anglo political dominance) prevailed over the competing economic system (Mufwene 2009). It is also during this period that Native Americans started losing more of their languages, as they were losing more and more land to the expanding European invaders in the 19th century and started getting mixed on the reservations (Banner 2005). It is after this second wave of invasion that, in a third wave of disaster, Native Americans, unable to sustain themselves economically on the barren reservations, had to jump on the bandwagon of the European invaders and experience the socioeconomic pressure that African slaves and non-English Europeans have undergone before them (Mufwene & Vigouroux 2008). They saw the advantage of speaking English in order to be competitive in the new socio-economic world order.

Although we cannot deny that demographics played an important role in this process (after all, the English colonists were the majority in the wake of the

American Revolution and had chosen the term *American*, the counterpart of *Creole*, to distinguish themselves from the English in the British Isles), history had to wait till the gradual socioeconomic integration of White America to see English spread as the dominant vernacular of the United States and Canada. Other ethnic groups not associated with slavery or indentured servitude just followed suit, including Native Americans, on whom the literature on language endangerment has chosen to focus exclusively, as if their experience were unique to them.

2.5 Are less prestigious languages being replaced by more prestigious ones everywhere?

Prestige, often associated with pride, has often been invoked as a cause of language shift. The usual claim is that speakers of less prestigious languages tend to give them up for the (more) prestigious ones, or that indigenous peoples shift typically to the vernaculars of the invaders or colonists because they have lost pride in their cultural, hence linguistic heritages.⁸

An issue about this claim is how to interpret PRESTIGE, especially whether it is derived from the political, economic, or military status, or even the level of education of its speakers, bearing in mind that these factors are not mutually exclusive. Noteworthy is also the fact that they do not draw the same kind of esteem from (different) members of a population, as the less prestigious members of a population may hate everything associated with the more prestigious group. Nonetheless, here are some relevant questions: Are prestigious languages necessarily those associated with the elite segments of a population or those associated with some power, political, economic or military in particular? And when it comes to the elite class, are the intellectual elite, for instance, coextensive with the political elite? Do all powerful politicians or administrators, for instance, constitute an elite segment of a population, say, from the point of view of level of education? For some people a language (variety) is prestigious simply because it is written and functions as the standard and/or official language (variety) in a polity, regardless of whether or not it is also used in the economic sector or in the military. What may matter the most is that it has been chosen for the school system, which sustains and spreads it. Yet for many people around the world, the language of the school system is just that, for that particular domain; it is of no use for them, because they are precluded from the socioeconomic domains in which it would be

8. To cite a more recent reference, this is one of the reasons cited by at least three contributors to *The Cambridge Handbook of Endangered Languages* (2011), edited by Peter Austin and Julia Sallabank.

required or expected. Many are people around the world who have accepted the service of interpreters in the courts of law and offices of the public administration and do not mind this state of affairs.

History provides a host of counterexamples to the alleged preference for the prestigious language (variety), though in many cases one may also argue that it is a question of conflict of kinds of prestige.⁹ For instance, the Franks invaded Gaul in the fifth century but shifted to Latin and the Roman-style administration the latter had inherited from Roman colonization. (Interestingly, this adaptation is contrary to what the Germanic invaders of England did, as one of their languages, Anglian, evolved into Old English, the ancestor of today's foremost world-wide *lingua franca*.) Both the Scandinavians and the Norman French ruled England respectively from the late 8th to the early 11th centuries and from the 11th to 13th centuries but both conquerors eventually shifted to the less prestigious indigenous language, English, though they influenced it.

Also, of the two varieties of Latin that were exported outside Rome, it is Vulgar Latin, the less prestigious variety, rather than the more prestigious Classic Latin, which evolved into the Romance languages. Neither of these Roman language varieties displaced the indigenous languages in England and in the Eastern Roman Empire, although the latter even lasted one thousand years longer than the Western Roman Empire. Even Greek (either the classical or the *koiné* variety), which kept Latin in its shadow in the Eastern Roman Empire, did not displace the indigenous languages. As a matter of fact, it was easily displaced by Turkish as a *lingua franca* during the Ottoman Empire. Likewise, Arabic spread easily as the dominant vernacular of the Middle East and North Africa but did not impose itself in Iberia even after seven centuries of colonization or prestigious coexistence with Latin in Iberia. Noteworthy is also the case of Hittite, which was also written but was replaced by languages that do not appear to have had more prestige.

The superiority of economic practices appears to account for the spread of Indo-European languages in Europe and South Asia, as well as that of Bantu languages, at the expense of Pygmy and Khoisan languages, in most of sub-Saharan Africa, although military superiority need not be ruled out in both of the latter

9. Sociolinguists are (more) familiar with the notion of "covert prestige" (Trudgill 1972), which accounts for why nonstandard language varieties, considered as bad by the socioeconomically more affluent members of several linguistic communities, do not necessarily lose grounds to the varieties promoted by institutions such as schools, public administration, and the white collar sector of economies. In fact, some of them thrive as important social identity markers and conveyers of public culture. The association of Jamaican Creole with Reggae music and the Rastafarian culture is a case in point, both of which have started in the grassroots of the population. Some of us also know very well how members of the working class sometimes ridicule the way members of the upper class speak.

cases. In light of the discussion in the previous sections, economic pressures (probably in combination with other factors in some cases), rather than lack of prestige on the part of the dying language, appear to account more convincingly for the present endangerment of Native American languages to the benefit of European languages.¹⁰

History also provides numerous examples of populations that have maintained their less or non-prestigious languages, or varieties thereof, because of their function as social identity markers and/or as indexes of particular cultural values, notwithstanding the fact that they are considered more adequate for vernacular communication.¹¹ In many multilingual places around the world where speakers of different languages live in separate communities but maintain egalitarian socioeconomic relations, individuals who interact with people outside their ethnic groups learn to accommodate each other in the other's language or use a regional or urban lingua franca; they find no reason to shift vernaculars. When interethnic marriages occur, relocation generally determines which language may prevail as the only or dominant vernacular in the home. If the two ethnic groups are adjacent and interact regularly with each other, nobody finds issues with being bilingual, which probably facilitated the interethnic marriage in the first place, and children are easily raised as bilinguals.

On the other hand, interethnic conflicts tend to strengthen people's loyalty to their heritage language, as this helps strengthen cooperation and solidarity within the group. There are also many cases in the Western world that speak loud and clear against the claim that speakers of stigmatized language varieties give them up for more acceptable ones, especially when the politically and/or economically dominant population is not indiscriminately assimilationist. This explains why Old Amish and African American Englishes, as well as Gullah are still spoken in the United States, as stigmatized as they are. In places like Hilton Head, South Carolina, the intrusion of wealthy property owners, which has undermined land ownership among the more traditional African American residents, has contributed to "revitalizing" Gullah, contrary to repeated claims since the late 19th century that it would die within the next generation or so (Mufwene 1997). In Jamaica, and perhaps elsewhere in Anglophone Caribbean, Creole remains strong (contrary to claims of "decreolization") because it is the identity marker of the majority population that has been marginalized socioeconomically. It is also the

10. See also Harbert (2010) for an elaborate discussion that complements this one.

11. Quite noteworthy is the fact that stand-up comedians often, if not typically, resort to non-standard varieties for comical effects, or to drive a social criticism home, especially if they come from the same social background they are commenting on.

most powerful medium of expression of popular culture, especially in the local reggae and calypso music, which voice the protests of the disenfranchised.

In principle, there has always been a chance for European languages in former European exploitation colonies of Africa to become more widely used as vernaculars, just like the neo-Latin varieties did in today's European Romance countries (a shift that actually occurred after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire!). However, the socioeconomic marginalization of the majority population in all the relevant countries accounts for why in most of them the European languages are seldom used even as lingua francas outside the highly-educated elite class. The indigenous languages function as social identity markers of those that are socioeconomically marginalized; they are also the subset of indigenous languages that function as urban vernaculars in Africa and are associated with modern popular culture.

Even the elite must speak these languages outside their elite circle, for instance, in order to be able to buy goods at reasonable prices at the market, to communicate with relatives that are not as well off materially as they are, to make sure they are well understood by their domestics, and to partake in the joys of popular culture. The African elite have not entirely Europeanized, after all; for the majority of them indigenous languages remain markers of ethnic or cultural identity. The spirits of ancestors are not expected to understand foreign languages, especially when one joins the extended family in engaging in traditional rituals. Family members in the village deride their relatives that have forgotten their traditional languages and/or other cultural practices.

2.6 Have colonization and world-wide globalization uniformly caused the death of languages spoken by the economically weaker populations?

2.6.1 *What colonization does to languages of the dominated populations*

Colonization and globalization have been associated with language endangerment and loss as if they were new and uniform processes that have occurred only in the past half millennium. As noted above, the history of the dispersal of mankind out of East Africa, which continues to date (see below), has been marked by migrations and several layers of mutual colonization. The latter phenomenon is quite evident, for example, from the Hellenic Empire; its replacement and expansion (minus the loss of the Persian part) par the Roman Empire; the colonization of England by Germanic tribes; the invasion of the former Western Empire by the Franks, the Visigoths, and the Vandals; the Arab colonization of North Africa and Iberia; the replacement of the Eastern Roman Empire by the Ottoman Empire (though their borders are not coextensive); the expansion of the Chinese (especially during the

Ming and Han dynasties) into modern day China and Taiwan; and the expansion of the Bantu population. One can surely say that the European colonization of most of the world since the 15th century is a continuation, aided by innovations in modern technology (such as the invention and spread of the compass and the Caravel ship), of the Indo-European expansion, which started about 6 kya (Mufwene 2005, 2008). This process is continuing in places like the Amazon, which has brought our attention to deforestation and species endangerment. Brazilians of European descent had to wait until more efficient technology became available in the 20th century before penetrating the rain forest and beginning its economic exploitation and causing enough ecological damage in the process. The world was quickly informed about how Native Americans whose ecologies were affected suffered the consequences healthwise and culturally.

Although it is true that several cases of colonization have resulted in the replacement of indigenous languages by that of the colonizing power, the same history also shows that this has not been a uniform evolution. In some cases, as in that of the Latinization of part of Europe, the shift actually occurred after the colonizers had left, with the new trend led by a minority of indigenous or other rulers and by the new socioeconomic world order adopted by the emergent post-imperial nations.¹² As well explained by Mufwene (2001, 2008) and Osterhammel (2005), colonization has not been uniform. Its cultural consequences have been diverse, even in cases when one can claim that the same regime, such as settlement colonization, was applied. Several social and political factors influenced the process of colonization differentially. For instance, extensive genocide in the early stages of the colonization of the Americas and the Caribbean by the Spaniards contributed significantly to the numerical decrease of Native American peoples in the former and their extermination on most of the latter. Thus, genocide as a side effect of the

12. What has typically been misinterpreted in the case of the Romance languages is the fact that there was really no single Old French, Old Portuguese, or Old Spanish which emerged first and diversified into so many modern dialects. Instead a multitude of local or regional neo-Latin varieties emerged that would evolve into what have been survived by modern languages such as Sardinian, Sicilian, Italian, Neapolitan, Piedmontese, Venetian, Corsican, Castilian, Catalan, Galician, Provençal, Occitan, Walloon, Picard, Normand, Romansh, Madeirense, and Estremenho, among many others, which individually displaced the more indigenous Celtic languages of their regions. These neo-Latin varieties have also competed with each other, with one variety promoted over others as the national official language. This is most obvious in the case of modern French, for the protection of which the Académie Française was created and for which the whole school system was mobilized, especially in the 20th century, to make sure that no other language would be spoken within the European boundaries of the French Republic. It is also obvious in the fight of Catalonia for its political autonomy and for the recognition of Catalan as a co-official language of Spain, next to Castilian (known to most outsiders as Spanish).

colonization drove some of the indigenous languages out. Planned miscegenation in Latin America also reduced drastically the proportion of pure Native Americans at the expense of indigenous languages; the Mestizos typically Hispanicized linguistically while shaping new, Latin American cultures.

In English and French colonies, it is especially the ills from the Old World, and since the late 19th century, the further incursion into Native American reservations and rapid urbanization (in the sense explained above) which, based on the numbers in Nettle and Romaine (2000), reduced even more extensively the number of Native American languages in the United States and Canada (less drastically in the latter than in the former).¹³ These differences in styles of colonization should keep us from interpreting the differential loss of indigenous languages as being the consequence of the same colonization activities everywhere.

I would be remiss not to discuss the often-cited impact of boarding schools in various colonies, where indigenous children were educated in the colonizing nation's language and often prepared to function as colonial auxiliaries. For many parts of the world, this impact should not be exaggerated. In the case of Africa and Asia, graduates from these schools became colonial intermediaries and thus interpreters, interfacing between the colonizers and the masses of the unschooled Natives. They did not necessarily stop speaking the indigenous languages, even at a later time when there were also educated women, whom the educated men

13. The contrast I articulate here to distinguish the beginnings of Spanish colonization from those of English and French colonization is not intended to ignore the large numbers of Native Americans that died during confrontations with White Americans during especially the westward expansion of the United States. However, as pointed out by Crosby (1992), ills did a deadlier job than fire weapons in helping Europeans conquer the Americas. Also, I do not mean to suggest that miscegenation with Native Americans did not occur at all in English and French colonies. The evidence for miscegenation is most obvious from the Michif (< French *métis* 'Mestizo'), who are genetically hybrids between the French *courreurs de bois* and Cree Indians. They produced a new, "intertwined" language whose verbal structure is Cree but the nominal one largely French. However, unlike the Latin American Mestizos, the Michifs have, to my knowledge, remained as socioeconomically marginalized as pure Native Americans to date. Notwithstanding cases of individual colonists who married Native American women, it is not clear whether there were no Michif-like communities, albeit dying ones, in English North America. In Northern Alaska, Russian colonists not only formed unions with Native Alaskans but also produced Copper Island Aleut (also known as Mednyj Aleut) with them, which is still spoken by a few of the descendants of the mixed offspring. Overall, these are marginal cases compared to the Latin American hybridization and Hispanicizing phenomena, which have reduced Native American populations to negligible demographics, for instance, 2% in Costa Rica, 17.5% Native Americans vs. 65% Mestizos in Mexico, and 0.4% vs. 43.1% Pardos in Brazil. (The Wikipedia entries of many countries prefer giving linguistic statistics to ethnic or racial ones, but these are not more reassuring, for instance with Quecha spoken only by 13% of the population in Peru).

(who had been favored all along for schooling) could marry. Interethnic marriages between educated men and women did not force them to give up their ethnic languages either, because they continued to interact with members of their respective ethnic groups. The real exceptions were when the spouses had met at a place where the language of neither of them was spoken; but several of them were also likely to have learned the local/regional indigenous lingua franca, which they may have found more natural to speak when they courted each other. The local population structure enabling this absorbed them as different from the European colonial agents, who did not socialize with nor assimilate them in the first place. Inter-ethnic marriages in Africa are also a late, 20th-century phenomenon that has been particularly urban. Children from such unions acquire the indigenous urban vernacular at least as one their mother tongues.

Regarding the relocation of indigenous people as a possible cause of language loss, the British may have accomplished a lot of this, especially in using the educated Indians in the colonization of other Asian territories east of India and transporting large numbers of contract laborers from India to Pacific and Atlantic colonies. Those who went to Trinidad and Guyana, for instance, shifted to the local English creole as their vernacular. In South Africa their descendants have become vernacular speakers of English or Afrikaans. However, as is obvious now in India, what this population relocation practice accomplished was certainly the decrease of a number of learners of heritage languages. Since the proportion of such civil servants was relatively small, the impact of the practice on the vitality of Indian languages is negligible. That of contract laborers may have to be assessed, in the same way one must wonder what the linguistic impact of the slave trade of the 16th–19th centuries was in sub-Saharan Africa, given the depopulation it must have caused in some regions.

A peculiarity of Anglophone North America, colonized on the settlement model, is that Native American children were schooled in English with the intention of deculturating them from their heritages but not necessarily to integrate them and make them economically competitive within the new, White-majority American population structure. They were taught professions that were considered suitable for the reservations. The purpose of Anglicizing the children appears to have been to facilitate communication between the Americans (predominantly of European descent) and the Native Americans, with apparently the interests of the socioeconomically dominant population in mind.

What is not clear is whether graduates from these schools all returned to the reservations and, if they did, whether they were unable to recover competence in their heritage languages to communicate with their relatives who had not been schooled. Could their relatives give up their ancestral languages to speak only English just because the school children had forgotten them? Wouldn't the

schooled children have tried to re-acculturate back by resurrecting some competence in their native languages and being bilingual? Or did this deculturation experiment exert its most negative impact on the vitality of indigenous languages only if the boarding school graduates left the reservations altogether and went to live in the city and thereby permanently adopted English as their vernacular? In the latter case, the school-in-English practice would have contributed to reducing the demographic size of speakers of Native American languages without however spreading the new vernacular among the indigenous peoples. Thus, are Native American languages not endangered primarily for reasons that have more to do with the lure of urban life and the new, European-style socioeconomic world order than with schooling in English, although this facilitated functioning in the city?

Likewise, the (alternative) hypothesis that Native American and Australian Aboriginal languages have been dying because of continuous emigration from reservations to the city brings to mind other cases of language loss associated with massive or successive exoduses from the homeland. A most notable case is that of Biblical Hebrew, a consequence of the dispersal of Jews to various places originally around the Mediterranean and then to various parts of the world, especially Europe, where some of the Diaspora populations became associated with language varieties such as Judeo Spanish and Yiddish. These varieties are consequences of language shift in the host countries where the Jews were not socially integrated, or did not assimilate, with the Natives but did not have the critical mass to maintain their ancestral language, often after several generations of relocation to other places. Later dispersals under similar conditions spread these particular language varieties elsewhere, where they became ethnic markers when the Jewish communities were segregated. Changing political atmospheres in Europe and the ultimate relocation of many of their speakers to Israel, where Israeli Hebrew (different from Biblical Hebrew) had emerged as the national language spelled the death of the Diaspora language varieties, both by demographic attrition in places where they had been spoken and by communal vernacular shift to Israeli Hebrew.

Another case worth considering is that of Irish. Is it endangered just because of the new socioeconomic conditions since especially the 19th century that have favored English as a vernacular? Or did the “Great Famine” that reduced the Irish population by the deaths of about 1 million people and the emigration of another million or so (a total of 20–25% of the population) reduce the resistance of the indigenous language to that of the colonizer? Should we ignore the massive emigration to the United States and to various places in the British Empire after Hiberno English, the national indigenized variety of English, was instituted as the medium of formal education?

Note also that the independence of the Republic of Ireland did not drive English out from the economic life of its citizens. Though most children have been

taught Irish as a subject in school for the past century or longer but have not had to use it in their adult lives, what appears to be a notional commitment does not appear to have helped the vitality of Irish significantly. The effects are thus comparable to those of the teaching of and in French in schools of Francophone Africa since the 1960s. Contrary to expectations, the proportion of actual speakers of French has not exceeded an estimated 20% of the population in most countries. An important reason is that most learners have no reason for speaking French outside the classroom.¹⁴

2.6.2 *Is world-wide globalization that dangerous to languages of the weaker populations?*¹⁵

As for the impact of globalization on the vitality of “indigenous languages,” we must start by clarifying the phenomenon of GLOBALIZATION itself. As a network of interdependencies and interconnected parts in an economic system, it need not be a world-wide phenomenon. It can be observed concretely at the local level within the economic systems of cities, such as when different contractors (for example for masonry, electricity, water/plumbing, and telephone) work together toward the construction of a modern building, as well as when a city depends on an adequate infrastructure of transportation, telecommunication, and sanitation services to function adequately. Non-locally, it is evident for instance when one place depends on materials coming from another place to manufacture a product.

It is of course necessary for the different parties involved in such a global economic structure to understand each other, but not everybody need speak the same language for the system to work. Communication can be accomplished through intermediaries/interpreters, although the process may be slower. It so happens that places with a high globalization index have typically evolved toward

14. As noted above, it would certainly be informative to know the extent to which the African slave trade of the 16th through to the early 19th centuries (late 19th century for Brazil, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic) endangered particular languages in Africa or perhaps drove some to extinction. Did enslavement in general impact the vitality of some languages in the history of mankind? Related to this is the diaspora phenomenon of especially the Polynesian and Micronesian islands to which Tryon (2006) perceptively draws attention. Often as many people as, and sometimes more than, those remaining on the islands now live outside and lose competence in their heritage languages. At the same time, on the islands, the lure of modernity in urban centers favors the demographic expansion and further vernacularization of the pidgins which emerged during the 19th century. Tryon rightfully traces the diaspora phenomenon back to the trans-insular recruitment of contract laborers who worked on the sugarcane plantations, where the pidgins emerged.

15. Weakness here has to do primarily with the demographic size of the population. The literature has typically presented small populations as linguistically weaker than larger ones.

monolingualism, especially where almost anybody has the potential to interact with somebody else, such as in buying goods for some work one is doing or for a project one is engaged in. However, on a larger, international scale, intermediaries have interfaced companies to date. Thus, Microsoft operates in the national languages of the countries where they conduct business; and, likewise, Japanese automobile manufactures do not use Japanese to sell their cars outside Japan. So, English is far from driving world-wide globalization; on the contrary, it benefits from the economic phenomenon. To the extent that the “buyer’s language” principle applies (Ostler 2005), the USA and the British Commonwealth represent a huge group of English speakers, while China represents an unbeatable population of potential learners. English is not the only major language to benefit from world-wide globalization either. Western nations doing business in China offer Mandarin courses as an option to their college students specializing in foreign languages, so that some of them may represent national companies in China or serve as interpreters in negotiations of contracts between China and them.

The dynamics of which language benefits the most depend largely on colonial history and the economic powers of the countries involved. A better understanding of the history of the world from the point of view of economic globalization (locally and non-locally) will help us question the myth that English is the “killer language” par excellence, if it had any agency at all in the process. The killers are speakers who, under particular ecological pressures, favor one particular language over others.

I won’t deny that English is the most widely used lingua franca in the world today, though Mandarin and Spanish, for example, have more vernacular speakers. English just happens to have more lingua franca speakers, aided by populous countries such as India and China from the point of view of learners. This is largely a legacy of colonization that spread English as the official language of numerous exploitation colonies, including India and Nigeria, which for the purposes of world trade, count as Anglophone countries, in addition to the UK, the United States, Canada, and Australia. The more countries count as Anglophone, the more other countries find it useful to teach/learn English as an international lingua franca for the purposes of trading with the Anglophone countries. Of course it makes an important difference when some of the Anglophone countries are also the most powerful economically and militarily and, in addition, are leaders in science and technology, which has favored English over Spanish. Although the latter has more native speakers than English and is spoken in about twenty-one countries (including Spain and its former settlement colonies), it has far fewer non-native speakers (Ammon 2010). Besides, the Spanish-speaking countries are weaker economically and militarily, aside from not counting as leaders in science and technology compared to the United States, the UK, Canada, and Australia.

These factors conspire to assign Spanish a lower Q-value (de Swaan 2001, 2010) than English, making it generally less attractive as an international language or disqualifying it as a global one (Ammon 2010).

We should also remember, regarding non-local globalization, that this process is far from being recent and need not be associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dismantling of the Iron Curtain that separated it from Western Europe. The colonization of the rest of the world by Europe was expanding trade networks, which were being reorganized at the end of the Middle Ages, with the Chinese in the Far East, the Arabs around the Mediterranean and in the Indian Ocean, and the Ottomans claiming the eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf around the same time. The Hellenic and Roman Empires had already developed non-local global-economy networks, which help us better understand the saying “All roads lead to Rome.” Even these had been preceded by the Phoenicians around the Mediterranean and the Sumerians along the Persian Gulf, among others, under the constraints of the knowledge of the world and of the technology that could be used for long-distance travel at that time. The fundamental principles remain the same, though the scope is much wider and more complex today (Chanda 2007). As explained above, the impacts on language vitality have varied from one case to another. Overall, it is not world-wide globalization that rolls the dice on the vitality of languages; it is the local population structure, subject also to the kind of local globalization index it has achieved. The higher the local globalization index, the stronger the tendency toward monolingualism.

Population structure also regards the extent of socioeconomic integration and the extent to which the dominant model, such as the Anglo economic system in the USA or the Roman-style administration and economy in Gaul and Iberia, has been assimilationist. A better understanding of POPULATION STRUCTURE will help us understand why Europe and its settlement colonies have evolved toward monolingualism, why parts of Europe are so Balkanized, why some countries risk breaking up (e.g., Spain and the United Kingdom), why European minorities are fighting for the right to operate in their heritage languages, but also why language endangerment in Africa is not only less extensive but not benefiting European colonial languages, with perhaps the exception of South Africa (as explained above).

3. By way of conclusions

Humans are now recognized, from the point of view of evolution, to be engaged in niche-construction (Odling-Smee & Leland 2003). Although our vitality depends on the ecologies in which we evolve, we can also modify these ecologies and then undergo the consequences of the changes we have introduced. In other

words, we need not be passive patients of an evolution that is driven by changing ecologies on which we would have no control. We can influence some of our evolutionary trajectories, and in the case of languages, by modifying some relevant ecological conditions that affect them. To make sense of how our languages influence us and we affect their vitality, we must first understand how languages die and why (Mufwene 2006, 2007).

In a nutshell, languages die, gradually, as speakers practice them less and less, because they have fewer and fewer opportunities to use them, basically in the same way people forget to adequately use technology that they have not often had need for. Since knowledge of a language, as of a particular technology, resides in the mind of practitioner, a language as a communal phenomenon dies when the practices of individual speakers, in not using it, converge. For all intents and purposes a language is dead when there are no more speakers left that communicate in it, even if there are survivors who remember bits and pieces of it. One may argue that a language is not only a communicative system used by a particular population but also the reality of practicing it. It lives in the practices of its speakers not in the knowledge people have of it.

It is thus important to articulate some of the factors that prevent speakers from practicing a particular language in their community. Very simply, they evolve in settings where the relevant language, considered an alternative to another, is not needed any more or is superseded (in the simple sense of being ‘pushed aside’) by another. This may happen when the relevant speakers relocate to a community where they are socially integrated but another language is spoken, or when they have been dominated by another population that imposed a new socioeconomic structure in which a new language provides various advantages that the traditional language does not offer, such as with education, which opens up doors to jobs that offer better incomes and better living conditions (see also Harbert 2010). A key to this is that the dominant population must offer some sort of integration within the new socioeconomic world order, in which everybody can compete for the same or some jobs, although there is no guarantee that everybody is treated equally.¹⁶

There are many other reasons why languages die, but the point is that there are decreasing opportunities for speaking the language that becomes endangered. Things may start with a population structure where members of the population that is politically, economically, and/or militarily weaker use the traditional language at home and in some other private or traditional settings, but those who

16. As is evident from Vaillancourt (2008), a sure way of maintaining the language of a minority population is to keep the latter on the margins of and separate from the dominant population. Once its members participate in the mainstream socioeconomic structure, their language and culture face the competition of its language and culture too.

participate in some activities with the dominant population communicate with the latter in the new language. However, as the population structure changes and more and more members of the weaker population, which may or may not be indigenous, participate in the life style of the dominant population, they not only become more fluent in it but also interact with each other in it, especially in settings where they are ethnolinguistically mixed. The traditional language may become superfluous, especially when the weaker population speaks the dominant population's language even at home, because fluency in it keeps them competitive outside the home. As the older generations die, the survivors become either dominant or monolingual in the dominant population's language, although they may maintain a separate cultural identity. When they are also socially integrated, only some memory of the heritage language survives in their minds.

Whoever wants to revitalize a moribund language should realize that it is not dictionaries and grammar books that will do the job, although they will be helpful, because the knowledge encapsulated in these references is not the language itself. The language can be inferred from the communicative activities of members of the population in forms that may not even correspond to what especially grammar books present. True revitalization entails recreating a population structure in which the relevant language can be practiced, bearing in mind that a population can shift languages while simply adapting their traditional culture to the new socioeconomic structure. Even revitalizing a dying culture, if one believes that every population is wedded to its heritage culture the same way it is permanently associated with its race, entails recreating an environment in which the culture can be practiced. In other words, one should engage in the endeavor in more or less the same way an environmentalist would engage in saving or protecting an endangered species, preferably by restoring the ecology that would be advantageous to it, one in which it can reproduce itself naturally.

As is evident from the contrasting experiences of, on the one hand, French in Québec and Afrikaans in South Africa versus, and on the other hand, Irish in Ireland, it is not enough to teach a language in school to revitalize it. One should invest the socioeconomic machinery into it too. Contrary to the former two cases, a century or so of teaching Irish in the Republic of Ireland's schools or raising children in Gaeltachtaí have produced very few actual speakers of Irish. If Afrikaans may be at risk today, it is because it is losing to English some of the economic advantages, especially the most prestigious ones, which it used to provide to its speakers. It may also suffer the stigma of the exclusionary way in which the Apartheid regime disadvantaged the non-White, especially Black, segment of the South African population. The present political and socioeconomic structure may be having a revenge in disguise.

French has been revitalized in Quebec because the Québécois government engaged all economic sectors in the Province to function in French too. This commitment accounts for what may also be characterized as “the Québécois miracle,” as the Québécois Francophones have exceptionally managed to maintain their language and culture (naturally not really intact!) in a wider North American socioeconomic environment north of Mexico where every (European) language other than English has either died or is moribund.

It appears that the killers of the dead and dying languages are not really the languages that displace them but the speakers who give them up or stop transmitting them to their children under the particular ecological pressures they face (Mufwene 2000). Assuming as I do that languages are communication tools, which fashion their culture-specific world views as a consequence of the particular ways in which their speakers have shaped them (Mufwene 2013a), are there any language rights worth talking about that supersede those of the people who through their communicative behaviors roll the dice on their vitality? For linguists who argue that it is possible for the speakers (who can certainly be construed as victims of the particular ecologies to which they adapt) to remain bilingual in both their heritage language and the new vernacular, what particular ecologies would sustain the proposed bilingualism? Is it deliberately that people favor the same language at home and outside home? How do many bilinguals become more dominant in one than the other? Is this situation different from that which leads to monolingualism, as among many Americans of European descent?

Speaking of heritage languages, which must be maintained (or which language advocates wish to maintain apparently under any conditions), what is the heritage language of a child: that of his/her parents or that of the social ecology in which they grow up and to which they adapt? Does one inherit one’s culture in the same way that one inherits their genotypes? How many generations does one have to count back (ignoring cases of ethnolinguistically mixed unions) to feel free to ignore their ancestral heritage? Otherwise, aren’t we opening a huge can of worms from a cultural evolution perspective? Note that English, claimed to be the foremost “killer language,” is barely a millennium and a half old, which is a very short time relative to the dispersal of *Homo sapiens* out of East Africa. The people that have benefited from its dispersal around the world over the past century, or even over the past half-millennium, may not all legitimately claim it as their heritage language, if they should count many more generations back. They will discover that some of their distant ancestors actually shifted to English from some other European language. As noted above, the dispersal history of *Homo sapiens*, which continues to date (Chanda 2007), has been marked by layers and layers of migrations and occasional mutual colonization, language contact and competition, the displacement of some languages by others, and the emergence

of new language vernaculars or lingua francas. What one claims as their heritage culture or language may be the consequence of language shift, sometimes a recent one, which appears to have been beneficial to their parents or other ancestors.

Let me conclude by reiterating that I don't advocate letting the evolution of languages continue uniformly like in the past, especially when it is evidently adversative to some populations. However, very often, we must be content with solutions that are satisficing rather than optimal. The choice is sometimes between two evils, so to speak. For language advocates, such as those who claim that schooling children in a language other than their ancestral one is "a crime against humanity" (Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar 2010), the question is whether they have a solution that they can offer that is likely to work better. As many parents have feared, in some socioeconomic ecologies, schooling one's child in a language other than that of the dominant economy may disadvantage the child, because it will make him or her less competitive on the job market. If languages have any rights at all (after all they may be considered as tools at the service of their speakers!), there are indeed situations in which conflicts arise between the alleged right of a language to be maintained and the human right of a population to be competitive socioeconomically. To the concerned parents, the choice is quite clear.

As many parents who have relocated to different ethnolinguistic places (towns, cities, or countries) have realized, children can quickly overcome the disadvantage of not knowing the local language, learning it by immersion and becoming competitive in relation to their peers. For adults who relocate, the question is whether they want to adapt to the local socioeconomic structure, claim accommodations that may appear unrealistic to the indigenous population (especially if the newcomers are a small minority they can help integrate), or do violence to the local population by changing the current socioeconomic structure (as is evident from European settlement colonization of the past half-millennium).

The above remarks should not be construed as arguments against educating children in their mother tongue (which need not be the ancestral language ethnically defined), because education in one's mother tongue, in fact in the language that the child is fluent in, offers undisputable advantages to the learner. However, as in many cases the child's mother tongue is not the ancestral language, how does one reconcile the alleged right to maintain one's ancestral or heritage language with that of receiving education in one's mother tongue, especially if the professed goal of the school system is to prepare children to function adequately and to be competitive on the job market in their societies?

Linguists who argue that all living languages must be maintained for the sake of linguistic diversity have to make a more convincing case, especially when the relevant populations feel they are disadvantaged by them. Those who argue that maintaining linguistic diversity is useful to linguistics as a profession should feel

ashamed of themselves if they ignore the odds that the relevant populations are facing. The reason is professionally selfish. Well-intended linguists face ecologically what is literally a wicked problem: what is good for the survival of a particular population in the face of a changing socioeconomic ecology versus what is ideal for the practice of linguistics.

Krauss (1992) warned that, unlike ecologists (popularly identified as environmentalists) linguists may go down in history as the experts that did not care about the disappearance of the subject matter of their discipline, viz., languages. The question is whether linguists should not start by acknowledging what they can (help) change and what they cannot. This can start by acknowledging that dictionaries and grammar books are useful museum artifacts relative to the languages they describe. Although they can certainly also be helpful in efforts to revitalize languages, they will not do the job intended by those engaged in language revitalization outside socioeconomic ecologies that foster speaking the relevant languages among members of the same ethnolinguistic group, even the children, even outside home.

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