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Language Endangerment: An Embarrassment for Linguistics

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1. Introduction

Disturbed by the indifference of most linguists to the rapid endangerment and loss of languages around the world, 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. Curiously, this call for (re)actions to the disappearance of languages around the world, especially in the Americas and Australia, sounded as if the primary, if not the only, reason why ecologists are interested in endangered species and the preservation of the environment is to study the biodiversity that the relevant ecologies contain. We will see below what is wrong with both this position and an argument dominant in linguistics, viz., that current linguistic diversity must be maintained or preserved because it will give us a richer window into patterns of language universals and typology, therefore into the structure of Universal Grammar (see, e.g., Hale 1992).

Ladefoged (1992), chastised later by Dorian (1993), responded that linguists' intervention against evolutions that reflect legitimate choices of their (would-be) speakers was a paternalistic response. However, this position, which amounts to letting nature take its course (because it is not clear that all is lost, at least from the point of view of the relevant populations), has been also criticized as amounting to "benign neglect" (e.g., Nettle & Romaine 2000). Many linguists, most of them formalists with no knowledge of what it takes to keep a language alive, have engaged in campaigns to revitalize and/or preserve endangered languages (very often without even making a notional distinction between "revitalization," "maintenance," and "preservation")¹ in the sole interest of preserving linguistic diversity.

¹ The term *revitalization* has not been problematic, having to do basically with 'pumping life back into a dying animate entity'. Issues arise from usage of *maintenance* and *preservation* virtually in free alternation. While the former suggests that the relevant entity is in good standing and efforts are directed toward keeping this condition up, the latter conjures up images of

As noted above, a central argument has been that current linguistic diversity is useful to research on language universals and typology and therefore to that on Universal Grammar. However, nothing has been (clearly) articulated about the specific ways in which linguistic diversity can benefit mankind, contrary to the practice among environmentalists to justify their activities with benefits that mankind can derive from the preservation of the environment. Foundations such as Terra Lingua which advocate the preservation of linguistic diversity, UNESCO, and linguists such as Skuttnap-Kangas (2000) have talked about "language rights," by analogy to human rights, but they have not said much about the right of particular populations to speak the language they find more useful to them. Nor have they said much about cases, certainly not rare, when "language rights," as articulated by linguists, clash with speakers' "human rights."

Publications such as Mühlhäusler (2003) have advocated for some version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (based on the conception of languages as systems rather than as practices) to become the central concern of linguistics. However, they have not explained why conceiving of languages as systems is more adequate or important than thinking of them as practices that generate patterns or as tools that should help their speakers and makers adapt to current socio-economic ecologies (see Komtova, to appear). There has generally been a promotion of the "Paradise Lost" attitude, according to which the loss of traditional representational systems is disadvantageous to the relevant populations (e.g., Nettle & Romaine 2000; Crystal 2000, 2004; Harmon 2002, and Maffi 2001). Unfortunately, nobody has explained why the old systems were better than the new ones, whether those culture-specific world views were necessarily lost with the language shift, and, more fundamentally, whether there is any reason to conceive of cultures as static rather than as dynamic and co-evolving with their practitioners and creators.

This paper discusses a wide range of questions arising from the above observations. I invite linguists to address them, in addition to those having to do with the role of colonization and globalization in language loss. For instance, are English and other colonial languages really "killer languages"? What is the importance of literacy in attempts to prevent language loss, especially since linguists have typically claimed languages to be primarily spoken and only secondarily written? Interestingly, not all societies have developed writing systems and the list of dead and dying languages

preserving, for instance, fruits or plants in jars, in life-like but actually lifeless conditions. This is precisely what one does when enshrining performances of a language in written form, e.g., novels and treatises. It is not clear whether grammars and dictionaries as written texts do the same thing about language preservation, but linguists claim they do. I return to this below. There is no problem with efforts to either maintain or preserve a language, as long as the activist knows which is which and what he/she can actually do (competently). More problematic may even be the idea that these written documents really preserve a language, defined in linguistics as a system consisting of units and rules but not as texts or descriptions thereof.

includes many prestigious written ones such as Ancient Greek, Classical Latin,² Hittite, Sanskrit, and Gaelic (Mufwene 2003). My sense is that linguistics as a profession should be embarrassed by the way we have approached the subject matter, more as amateurs guided first by our morality concerns (see also Whiteley 2003) than by our scholarship on the subject matter.

For example, no research area has emerged that specializes on the subject matter of the ecology of language evolution, which includes the subject matters of language birth and death, as well as language speciation, despite the call for this in Mufwene (2001). Both on its page about "Language Rights" and on that of the Committee on "Endangered Languages and Their Preservation," the Linguistic Society of America advocates the documentation of dying and endangered languages, the desirability of maintaining or preserving linguistic diversity, and the benefits of the enterprise to linguistics. However, it says nothing, really nothing, about the need for linguists to undertake research that should help us better understand the social dynamics and mechanisms that have produced language loss. The website of Terralingua, which emphasizes the study of the correlation between linguistic and biological diversity, also says nothing about improving our knowledge of the processes of language and species endangerment. Might the owners of the site assume that explanations provided by ecologists about the endangerment of endemic species apply literally to the endangerment of "indigenous languages"? It is striking that foundations such as the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project, which award grants to study endangered languages, give priority to documentation and show no interest in funding research that should shed light on how this evolution is proceeding and why it is affecting only some languages but not others.

I start below with a discussion of how language loss occurs, not by a collective decision of its speakers to give it up, and certainly not by what Swaan (2001) describes as "stampede" toward a language with a higher "Q-value," a notion determined by the potential a language has to satisfy more communicative needs, including providing the ability to talk to more people.

2. How a language gets endangered and how language loss occurs

Linguists have typically given the impression that speakers give up their heritage language consciously, if not deliberately. Swaan (2001) even dramatizes the process by speaking of some populations as "stampeding from their language" for an alternative with a higher "Q-value," as if speakers consulted with each other and collectively decided to shift suddenly to another language. He also gives the impression that speakers actually

² There are some scholars, like myself, who believe that Latin and Greek have gradually evolved into modern languages, just like Old English ultimately into modern English varieties; they have actually not died in the same way as Hittite, for instance, did. However, note that only Vulgar Latin and Colloquial Greek have experienced this evolution, not the standard varieties immortalized by Cicero or Homer. This is one more reason why linguists should explain why they think literacy is critical to maintaining languages alive.

assess which particular language is spoken by more people, as if they all had a sense of the demographic statistics associated with different languages. His discourse sounds as if the primary consideration on the speakers' minds was to use a language that enables them to interact with the largest population possible.³ One must indeed wonder why Chinese has not yet prevailed as a world language.⁴

Communal language shift occurs more or less like structural change, gradually and most often insidiously, being noticed only after the process is complete or just quite advanced. First of all, not all speakers are engaged in the process at the same time or at the same speed, although communal shift is the convergence of similar behaviors by the (would-be) speakers of the relevant language. For every individual speaker involved in the process, permanent shift occurs by the cumulation of occasions where they do not get to speak the relevant language. The shift is total for them when no more occasions arise in their interactions with others when they need to, or can, speak the language. Not being able to speak the language has to do with "atrophy" if, by analogy to pathology, I can so describe what is known in linguistics as "attrition," i.e., the loss of competence in the language, due to lack of practice. Atrophy is individual and affects only a particular idiolect. When it is experienced by all the relevant (would-be) speakers of a language and this cannot be learned by other people, especially by children, the language can be characterized as dying or dead.

Speakers do not always decide consciously which language they must speak on specific occasions. In many cases, there is selection only to the extent that they can or must use a language available in their repertoire. Otherwise, the situations in which they interact often constrain their choices. In many places, one can speak only a specific language at the market, with the local administration or government, at church, at school, or even with their neighbors. The pressure grows when the population of a particular

³ I certainly do not want to throw the baby with the bathwater in this case. The general cost-and-benefit approach that underlies Swaan (2001) and reflects the economist background of the author has a great deal of merits. I think that it correctly applies to the would-be-speakers of the dead and dying languages (Mufwene 2002), only in the day-to-day communicative and adaptation-to-situation concerns that he unfortunately does not focus on. I return to these below.

⁴ I submit that a distinction should be made between, on the one hand, the notion of 'world language' as a lingua franca that is spoken at different places around the world (such as English, French, and Arabic at the religious level) and, on the other, that of 'major language' (Comrie 1990), which is spoken primarily as a vernacular by a large population but need not be spoken at many places around the world. Major languages such as Chinese varieties and Hindi are not necessarily world languages, although they are spoken by Diaspora populations around the world, indeed as in-group vernaculars. The fact that Mandarin and Hindi in this case also function as lingua francas within their national communities and their Diasporas still does not make them world languages. Other major languages such as Swahili and Hausa, which are spoken in several adjacent countries, are only regional but not world languages. This distinction bears on the debate about which particular languages are endangering which other languages, for instance, whether the spread of English as a world language is dangerous to all indigenous languages in its path.

locality, such as a city, is mixed and integrated. It is retrospectively that one realizes how the socio-economic ecology has insidiously disfavored a particular language all the way to its extinction. Just as it is important to understand what particular ecological conditions cause language death, it is necessary to comprehend how language death proceeds, because the knowledge will determine what sound strategies can be deployed to prevent or counteract the process. We can now address the question of whether some languages do actually kill other languages.

3. The myth of "killer languages"

There is certainly a sense in which languages have lives. However, as explained in Mufwene (2004), they evolve more like species than like organisms, especially in the way they are born and in the way they die. As pointed out by Chaudenson (1992) and later works regarding creoles, languages cannot be issued birth certificates because nobody can determine precisely when they were born. This is due largely to the fact that languages have no gestation period that can be observed and anticipated to lead to their births. The birth of a language (variety) can be declared only retrospectively, when its separate existence (determined by what Chaudenson 1992 identifies as "autonomization" and "normalization" of the system) is recognized relative to its proto-variety and/or other related ones. For instance, speakers of the last stages of Old English did not see Middle English come and begin with the Norman Conquest in 1066, though they must have observed Norman French influence on the English of some contemporary speakers. They could not anticipate how many months or years it would take for Middle English to be born. The historic event and the date were chosen later by scholars, retrospectively, as a convenient point in time to associate with the identification of the later variety of English as different from the preceding one and therefore operating on different norms. With perhaps the exception of the original language(s), languages of the known history of mankind have emerged by speciation, thanks to variation in the ways speakers produce them (Mufwene 2001, 2005). Due to various "ecological" factors (especially relocation, during which unusual combinations of structural variants are taken to the colony, and/or contact with other populations), new varieties emerge. Subsequently, these are sometimes identified as separate languages, as in the case of the Romance languages, which are the best documented (Trask 1996), the Bantu languages, on which there is no diachronic documentation at all, or the Indo-European languages, which fall in between.

Likewise, languages cannot be issued death certificates either, not really the kind that can be issued for an organism, a human being for instance. Although we have usually claimed that a language dies when its last speaker is dead, reality also tells us that the process of death itself started long before the death of the last speaker (Thomason 2001), when the population of its speakers lost their critical mass and often also when its structures were seriously eroded by those of the prevailing language, as in the case of Sutherland Gaelic (Dorian 1981).

The dependence on the activities of speakers, highlighted by the above considerations underscores Mufwene's (2001, 2005) position that languages are like viral species in biology. They compete with each other only to the extent that they are weighted differently by their speakers. They spread or contract because more, or fewer, speakers use them, just like their structures change because their speakers modify them or prefer some variants over others. We learn very little about how some languages prevail or are endangered by assigning them agencies they don't have and by speaking about them as if they could wage wars with and kill each other. Languages die because speakers shift away from them, as they would abandon other available tools, with the difference that the shift results from the cumulation of communicative events during which the speakers found it necessary, or more convenient, to use the advantageous language at the expense of the disadvantageous one. The shift is complete when there are no situations in which it is possible to communicate in the disadvantageous languages. If languages were iron tools, we could speak of them during some stage of the shift as rusting and decaying, due to lack of usage. Thus languages do not kill languages; their would-be speakers kill them, by shifting away from them to others that they find more advantageous. This latter part is an oversimplification of a complex of speakers' adaptive responses to demands of their socio-economic ecologies which I need not discuss in this section. I return to some of them in the following sections.

From the point of view of language vitality, there are some heuristic advantages in conceiving of languages as tools for adaptation to changing ecologies, which can be ranked socially in relation to competing alternatives. One of these is the light that the perspective sheds on the question of who is spreading English and other European world languages today. It is the adopters, the new speakers who are benefiting from them and are the tangible evidence of advantages to be derived from speaking the non-ancestral language. English is spreading around the world because there are more and more people who hope to find better jobs, to travel to distant places, to be read by more and more scholars, etc. Successful scholars, businessmen, and bureaucrats in non-Anglophone countries are models that inspire their countrymen to invest time and money in learning it so that they can enjoy the same benefits. Governments are promoting the teaching of English not because Americans, Britons, and Australians require this but because, among other things, they want to have citizens that can handle world trade and diplomatic matters with these powerful partners in the dominant language, at least in the domains that involve them.

A closer look at the way English is spreading today also helps us realize that it is not endangering indigenous languages everywhere, certainly not as it has done in North America and in Australia. In many places around the world, such as Taiwan, Malaysia, and Japan, it is spreading mostly as a lingua franca with restricted prestigious domains of usage, which need not threaten indigenous vernaculars, often spoken by large segments of (majority) populations that either do not have access to it nor have enough

exposure to learn it to their practical advantage.⁵ Broadcasts on the BBC or the Voice of America have no effect on people who have learned English at school if these do not interact with English speakers. Many situations around the world, especially those where English is taught as a foreign, rather than as an official, language, do not motivate learners of English to speak it to each other, especially if they can communicate more successfully in another language they share, their common vernacular or their traditional official language. Thus, linguists should realize that in multilingual communities language competition is ethnographically governed, such that vernaculars compete with other vernaculars and lingua francas with other lingua francas, unless their functions change.

Since their independence, many nations have not produced ecologies that favor such ethnographic changes. For instance, although English has displaced French in Brazil as the favorite foreign language, the shift from one world language to another has not endangered Portuguese, which remains deeply rooted as the dominant vernacular, endangering the local indigenous vernaculars. It also continues to function as the language of the local industry and scholarship. Likewise, in many Francophone countries of Africa, the expansion of English has threatened French, more in its function as an international lingua franca rather than as an official language. In any case, the evolution has not affected the vitality of the indigenous vernaculars. If anything threatens the latter, it is other indigenous languages, not even French (see below).⁶

Thus, one must wonder what Francophone African countries have to gain by engaging in a policy of linguistic "partnership" between French and the indigenous languages. The danger, however insignificant, appears to be coming from French, which more and more children of the elite class are acquiring as a vernacular, not from English which functions only as a lingua franca in a highly select set of ethnographic settings. Why would Calvet (2004) and Swaan (2001, inspired by earlier work of Calvet's) think that languages in diglossic and triglossic countries coexist, like star galaxies, in "gravitational" patterns in which vernaculars depend on the lingua francas (or "central"

⁵ It is noteworthy that in places like Taiwan and Hong Kong, which have held privileged trade relations with both the USA and the United Kingdom for over half a century (the latter a British colony for a century and a half), English has really not yet spread to the grassroots. One cannot capitalize on English to order one's meal in a working class restaurant, get information from a bus driver, or buy goods in a store that does not cater especially to tourists. These politics remind us that much more complexity is involved in the dynamics of language spread and endangerment.

⁶ I also return below to the topic of the endangerment of French in Africa by English, showing that it is only its imperial function that is threatened in this case. This evolution is different from the endangerment of its vernacular function in Louisiana and some time ago in Quebec. Recent publications such as Hagège (2006) overlook this difference, nearly trivializing the central concern regarding language endangerment, viz., several populations around the world have lost, or are losing, their ancestral vernaculars.

languages) to survive the threat of powerful languages? Why would anyone want to assume that, say, Lingala in the Democratic Republic of Congo would be endangered by the possible replacement of French by English as the official language or foreign language? There is certainly empirical counterevidence to his particular conception of the coexistence of languages. In Tanzania, for instance, the replacement of German by English as an official language did not affect the vitality of Swahili and the indigenous ethnic languages. In Mauritius, the replacement of French by English as an official language did not affect the vitality of Mauritian Creole nor even the emotional attachment that Mauritians continue to display to French as an elite "language of culture." Interestingly, in places like Trinidad, where English also replaced French as the acrolect, what killed French Creole is not English but the English creole that came along with, or developed from, it.

4. The role of colonization

Linguists have often noted that the colonization of the world by Europe since the 15th century is largely responsible for the speed at which languages are endangered or dying today outside Europe. Unfortunately they have also suggested that these processes have been taking place uniformly around the world. There is no doubt that contact with European culture, primarily their economic system (if I can so generalize), is the ultimate trigger of population movements and contacts within the indigenous populations and has created new dynamics of language coexistence. However, it is not evident that the results of European colonization have been the same everywhere. To understand all this, it is useful not to see colonization primarily in terms of economic and political domination, but rather in terms of relocation and reterritorialization, the more fundamental processes that made possible the domination of some populations in distant territories by others. Also, the Europeans were not invested in the same ways everywhere they went. Due to geographical ecological variation, differences arise between, on the one hand, places where they wanted to settle new homes or, in the words of Crosby (1986), "build better Europes" and, on the other, those territories they only came to exploit in order to make their metropolises richer. They were more interested in imposing their customs, including languages, in the former colonies than in the latter, where they used indigenous languages (rather than their own) to communicate, through colonial auxiliaries, with masses of the indigenous populations. This distinction already shows that it is not always the European languages that would become the dominant vernaculars and endanger the indigenous ones.

It is difficult to provide an accurate typology of colonization styles that accounts exhaustively for the differential ways language coexistence has evolved in different parts of the world. What was proposed in Mufwene (2001) and improved in Mufwene (2002, 2004) remains very tentative, waiting to be refined by a better understanding of older forms of colonization, such as during the Roman Empire (from the first century BC to the fifth century AD in Western Europe) or the colonization of England by the Germanics

since the 5th century. I will still use that rudimentary typology here to invite more reasoning on language birth and death. I focus here on the world since the 15th century. Comparisons with earlier colonial history are provided in Mufwene (2005).

Trade colonization produced trade forts along the coasts of Africa and Asia, and on the Pacific islands. From these forts the Europeans traded with the Natives in the interior through indigenous middlemen who also served as interpreters. Pidgins emerged from the European languages spoken by the middlemen (under conditions of network expansion described in Mufwene 2005). In the Americas, the Europeans traded from their coastal concessions, initial settlement colonies, with the Native Americans, in their languages. New, pidgin varieties also evolved from the languages spoken in these trade contacts. Silverstein (1996) provides a fairly exhaustive list of them, including Chinook, Mobilian, and Delaware Jargons in North America, *Lingua Geral* in Brazil, and *Media Lengua* in Ecuador.

Most pidgins, especially those based on European languages (the trend in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, contrary to the Americas) have died by now. Those that have survived have also evolved into expanded pidgins, such as Pidgin English in Nigeria and Cameroon, and Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea, where they function today as urban vernaculars and regional *lingua francas*. From the perspective of language vitality, trade colonization has, overall, introduced new language varieties without affecting the vitality of the indigenous languages negatively. Where it has caused some languages to die, such as in North America, the causation has been indirect, through the relocation of the Natives (Nichols 1993), who were running away from the newcomers and their ills. Resettlement among other ethnolinguistic groups sometimes caused them to shift to the languages of the host populations, unless they failed to adapt and died.

The true pidgins from trade colonization since the 15th century (i.e., reduced contact-based means of communication serving only as *lingua francas*) have died or evolved into vernaculars and/or more complex regional *lingua francas*, because the ecologies that produced and sustained them for a while changed. The relevant territories gradually evolved into settlement colonies in the Americas and exploitation colonies in most of Africa and Asia. (The main exceptions in the latter cases are South Africa, settled by the Boer ancestors of present-day Afrikaners; Algeria, settled by the French *Pieds-Noirs*; Liberia, settled by American former-slaves; and mainland China, the Koreas, and Japan, which were not colonized by Europeans/Westerners.)

As noted above in reference to Crosby (1986), *settlement colonies* were planned as new homes for the European colonists, which they developed economically on the European model. The European languages gradually evolved into dominant vernaculars, especially in the colonies where the Europeans became demographic majorities, as in most of the Americas (minus the Caribbean) and in Australia and New Zealand. Competing among themselves, some European languages were gradually replaced by those supported by more successful socio-economic systems, such as English in North America in relation to Dutch, French, German, Italian, Swedish, and Norwegian, which

once functioned as national vernaculars among European settlers in various parts of the United States. Typically those immigrants who were the weakest socio-economically and were integrated the earliest in the colonial system shifted the earliest, especially because they did not have a critical mass or enough freedom to develop their own separate economic sub-communities. Such populations included both the African slaves (discussed separately below) and the European indentured servants speaking vernaculars other than their masters'.⁷ The free immigrants speaking minority languages shifted from them when they found it more advantageous to function in the economically dominant language. Their heritage vernaculars were endangered when their children found no point in learning and/or speaking them. The bozal slaves had no choice but to adapt, as the local colonial vernacular was the only linguistic tool they had to adapt, albeit through painful and hopeless struggles, to their new living conditions. Overall, free European minorities would lose their heritage languages before the Natives, because they were integrated before the latter in the dominant socio-economic system.

The foregoing tells us a great deal about why the Native languages have either died or are now endangered in the former settlement colonies. For about the last two centuries, the advantageous colonial systems have been expanding, driving competing economic systems out of business, starting with those run by other European colonists. The marginalization of the Natives could not continue forever; neither can the Natives continue to resist the lure of the new socio-economic world order, especially when living conditions on the marginalized lands are becoming increasingly harsher. The exit from these economically disadvantageous conditions has typically been migration to the city, where, incidentally, there are no Native ethnic neighborhoods. Socio-economic integration has exerted on the Natives the same pressure it has on the minority immigrants and former slaves. So, adaptation to the new socio-economic world order accounts for the endangerment and loss of the indigenous languages, as of those of many immigrants, not lack of pride in their heritage, nor the prestige of the dominant colonial language, nor the pressure of the school system.⁸ As we should remember from the

⁷ The Founder Principle applies here, with the later immigrants/slaves following the footsteps of those who preceded them. In the beginning the slaves and indentured servants were a minority and were integrated in the homestead of their masters. Segregation was a later institution. By then, a European colonial language had already become the vernacular of the Creole slaves, who served as cultural (including linguistic) models to the African-born, bozal slaves and to the locally-born children. As explained in Mufwene (2001, 2004, 2005), what happened during the earliest, homestead phase had far-reaching consequences in the way colonial societies' languages evolved.

⁸ The school system alone could not do the job of spreading the economically dominant language. Society must valorize the language by making its knowledge rewarding economically or otherwise. Although English had been introduced to Ireland as early as the 9th century, through trade and the school system, it was not until after Oliver Cromwell introduced the potato plantation system in the 17th century that English gained lucrative value and started spreading

evolution of Latin into the Romance languages, it is actually the non-prestigious, nonstandard varieties that spread and displace other vernaculars, not those transmitted through school.

Plantation settlement colonies (especially those of the Caribbean, of the northern coast of South America, of coastal South Carolina and Georgia, and of the Mascarene Islands of the Indian Ocean⁹) must be discussed separately. The slaves were generally the overwhelming majority populations in them, especially those associated with rice, coffee, or sugar cane cultivation. Paying no attention to the above comment about their weak economic position, one might ask why they did not develop African-based vernaculars, say, like residents of most African cities today. As explained in Mufwene (2004, 2005), language loss among them had to do with the way the plantation colonies grew, having started with small homesteads in which the first Africans were minorities and integrated in European family units. Although multilingualism among the slaves was a contributing factor, the most important one seems to be the fact that the creole slaves of the homestead phase grew up as native speakers of the European colonial languages and may not have spoken the African languages of their parents. By the time these colonies evolved into the plantation phase, the colonial languages functioned as the plantation vernaculars and part of "seasoning" the bozal slaves involved having them learn these vernaculars from the Creole population. By the time the African-born slaves became the majority, the plantation vernaculars had prevailed through the seasoning process. The possibility of seeing some African languages survive long enough, when there were slaves from the same linguistic region, was offset by the fact that the plantation population grew incrementally and the children were forced by the circumstances to acquire the colonial language as their vernacular. This particular tendency became more evident when, at the wake of the slave emancipation, contract laborers from the same ethnolinguistic areas (such as the Yoruba in Trinidad) were brought to replace the rebelling former slaves on

faster though migrant workers. Jesuit boarding schools alone would not have spread English among Native Americans if the latter found no use for it in the new socio-economic world order spreading in their land. This is in fact what spread it earlier among the European immigrants, as their children found it advantageous to acquire English as the dominant or the only vernacular and certainly useful to move out of the community. Social integration, gradual as it was even among Europeans, facilitated this evolution.

⁹ These are not at all the only settlement colonies where the African slaves became majority populations. There are quite a few islands in the Atlantic where the plantation industry was not particularly successful but where today's majority populations descend from the African slaves, for instance, Cape Verde, São Tomé, Príncipe, and the Netherlands Antilles. We can also add the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean. They all tell us why the development of creoles need not be associated with the plantation industry. We learn the same lesson from Brazil, which developed the first and largest sugarcane plantations, gained a black-majority population, but produced no creole. I just selected a convenient category to highlight variation and diversity in the way languages evolved in the European colonies since the 15th century.

the plantations. Despite segregation from the latter, these new immigrants eventually shifted from their ancestral languages to the colonial language, which was associated with income-earning. Needless to say the children were the decisive factor. By selecting the local, European-based colonial language as their exclusive or dominant vernacular, they rolled the dice against their ancestral languages, dooming them to gradual extinction along with the deaths of their parents and/or grand-parents.

Language loss among the slaves had little to do with their allegedly being prohibited by the masters to speak their ancestral languages. The repression by the masters could not have been that efficient, especially since they could not check how the slaves communicated among themselves in their cabins. However modest the economic gains were within this population, necessity to function in the best way they could under the oppressive conditions they experienced made it difficult for them to preserve their languages. Recall that speakers lose their language mostly because they find themselves in situations in which it is more advantageous or practical to speak the dominant language rather than their ancestral vernacular.

There is also evidence that the slaves did not lose their languages abruptly. This comes from the fact that the Haitian Slave Revolution apparently relied on some African languages as military codes (Ans 1996). Some African languages have also survived as ritual languages (not necessarily in their intact forms) in religious cults such as *Kumina* in Jamaica, *Santeria* in Cuba, and *Candomblé* in Brazil. It also appears that the relevant languages used in the Haitian Revolution must have been those spoken by the last bozal slaves. Bilby (2003) also acknowledges that African ritual languages are probably those spoken by contract laborers who came after Emancipation. This conclusion is made plausible by the fact that the conditions of the contract laborers' immigration were more favorable to the retention of African traditions, especially if we factor in the fact that they would mix only gradually with the former slaves, whose jobs they took. Nonetheless, they lost their African languages as vernaculars, as gradually as they were integrated in the black, or non-European, population. By the Founder Principle, gradual integration in the preceding population drove language loss, just like the contraction of ethnic languages in Black African cities today.

One of the trademarks of *exploitation colonization* is the fact that the colonial agents did not want to mix with the Natives, preferring to isolate themselves and use colonial auxiliaries, an elite class among the Natives, as a buffer of interpreters between the colonizers and the colonized. This is evident even in the physical structures of Black African cities, where the colonizers' residential neighborhoods, now used by the Native rulers, are isolated from the Natives' residential communities by golf courts, zoos, military and police bases, and other kinds of institutions that would keep the Natives as far away from them as possible. The European colonial languages were initially introduced in elite schools. Even after they were widely taught, only the elite schools facilitated the development of fluent competence in them among the Natives. The maintenance of a highly selective school system with important rates of dropouts,

combined with low rates of scholarization, just helped keep the European colonial languages as the privilege of a chosen few. School children developed greater competence in the regional lingua franca than in the European language, which they often do not get to practice outside the school environment until after they graduate from high school, if they go that far. The only exceptions are apparently places such as Libreville (Gabon) and Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), where no indigenous language has emerged as the dominant vernacular. According to Van den Avenne (1998), Abidjan breaks down into neighborhoods where Dioula prevails as the vernacular and those where either French or *le français populaire ivoirien* functions as the vernacular.

In the rest of Black Africa, an indigenous language has typically emerged as the urban vernacular and regional lingua franca for the masses of the population, i.e., the overwhelming majorities of the national populations. These are settings in which, contrary to the dominant literature on language endangerment, the European languages do certainly not endanger the indigenous vernaculars, the vast majority in the total number of languages spoken around the world. For the vast majority of speakers there is no competition for particular communicative domains and/or functions between the European languages, spoken typically as lingua francas for high communicative functions, and the indigenous languages, spoken in popular spheres of life. The threat to the ethnic languages comes from the urban vernaculars and lingua francas, such as Lingala in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Swahili in East Africa, in which popular urban culture is also expressed. Noteworthy in these Third World countries is also the fact that, generally, their economies have hardly grown since their independence half a century ago, most of the modern industry is contained in the few cities there are, the majorities of their populations are still rural (despite important rural exoduses since independence), therefore there is no motivation for the rural populations to shift from their ancestral languages.¹⁰ The ethnic languages are endangered primarily in the city.

5. The role of globalization

All major publications on language endangerment around the world blame this aspect of language evolution on globalization, especially books such as Nettle & Romaine (2000), Crystal (2000, 2004), Skuttnab-Kangas (2000), Dalby (2002), and Maurais & Morris (2003), which have covered the subject matter very broadly. The aspect of globalization that has retained the most attention is the world-wide network of rapid transportation and communication that has emerged around the world and the ensuing networks of economic interdependencies and world-wide diffusion of industrial and other cultural commodities. The fact that usage of English has also spread much wider even in countries that had not been colonized by England (later the United Kingdom) or dominated militarily by the

¹⁰ As Abley (2003) clearly shows, the rural and the urban settings are literally worlds apart, economically, linguistically, and in other cultural ways.

United States (such as those of the former USSR) has also been pointed out as a correlate of globalization in the present sense.

Many things have gone wrong in this particular discourse, revealing that linguists have focused on (epi)phenomena which are mere by-products of globalization in the sense of world-wide economic interdependencies rather than on the more probable causes of the language endangerment phenomenon. For instance, there have been frequent mentions of *McDonaldization* and the world-diffusion of Hollywood movies not only as signs of the Americanization of the world but also as evidence that the world is allegedly becoming more and more uniform. McDonaldization and these other aspects of *Americanization* as 'the world-wide diffusion of American culture' (including technology and its brand of Capitalism) have been cited as manifestations of globalization.

What has not been interpreted adequately is the fact that it is the "global (world-wide) economy" phenomenon that has facilitated the Americanization process, not the other way around. It is the world-wide network of rapid and long-distance transportation and communication (which in turn facilitate the mobility of people and goods) that has made it possible for American businesses to spread and sell their products around the world. On the other hand, the process has not always promoted the spread of English. McDonald stores in non-Anglophone countries are not operating in English, just like their menus have not normally replicated the American menu. Nowadays, Hollywood movies are usually released concurrently in many major languages, because the industry is more interested in making money than in spreading English and/or American values. The literature accompanying American computers in non-Anglophone countries is not in English. As a matter of fact, the user, non-technical language on the machines themselves is not English, either, just like the keyboard is adjusted to local conventions inherited from the old typewriter systems, and just like American cars sold in Europe are adapted to the local market. BBC and Voice of America radio programs also broadcast in a wide range of foreign languages, which suggests that even at such a national ideological outreach level, the spread of English is not the main goal.

Pace Phillipson's (2003) and Hagège's (2006) claims, English has spread in continental Europe, and in post-colonial Africa and Asia typically as a by-product of other primary globalized ventures, which can be accomplished in any other major language. Moreover, it is functioning in these territories primarily as a lingua franca, not as a vernacular. Therefore, it does not endanger their local vernaculars, because it does not compete with them, even while it is being used as the medium of higher education for some subjects and their scholars are encouraged to publish in English. As can be learned from a longer similar experience of former British colonies in Africa and Asia, even in its capacity as an official language, the colonial or imperial language is not likely to endanger the local vernaculars as long as it is the privilege of a particular elite happy to keep the benefits for themselves and it is not used in the popular sectors of the economy. The tourist sector of the economy has no more lethal impact on the local vernaculars than land developments for tourism and vacation resorts have had on Gullah in coastal South

Carolina and Georgia (Mufwene 1997). Likewise, the international tourist industry has exerted no negative impact on the vitality of Caribbean creoles. Actually, it may have boosted its economic value, as the local varieties are promoted through artists, pamphlets and T-shirts. Bilingualism or bidialectalism does not necessarily lead to the loss of the less prestigious varieties.

We should realize that American, British, and Australian businesses do not aim at spreading the English language but in making money. This, they do it best in the local language (variety), both in negotiating with the local political authorities and in outsourcing labor in the production of their goods. Use of English is typically limited to the top administration level, while communication in the rest of the company takes place either in the local official language or in the local vernacular, the language that the employees and customers are expected to understand. The Natives learn English because they want to move up in the management of the business and therefore improve their economic positions, not because they are required to do so by the company. American and British cultural centers have increased English course offerings in non-Anglophone countries not necessarily because they want the Natives to all become Anglophone but because they would be happy to see those who are interested in their ideologies read their propaganda and "spread the word" in any language. At best, they want to make it easier for some ambitious ones to work with them. The people advocating that English be taught as the first foreign language in their countries are typically the Natives themselves, and they do so in order to attract Anglophone business and economic exchanges with the relevant countries, not because they want to stop speaking their local official and indigenous languages. History also shows that the real danger is minimal, unless the foreign language evolves into a vernacular. Most countries today do not provide the ecological conditions for the vernacularization of English.

Again, in all the above cases, English is spreading as a lingua franca, albeit an economically powerful one, but hardly ever as a vernacular or in any way that would place it in competition with the indigenous vernaculars and lingua francas, whose domains of usage do not overlap with those of English. In the typically polyglossic settings in which it is spreading, English is an ethnographically high variety whose domains of usage are not coextensive with those of the indigenous languages. They hardly overlap with those of the lingua francas, because the Natives who learn them hardly ever need to communicate with each other (except perhaps during class practice exercises) in a foreign language other than the official one. The myth of English as a "killer language" par excellence, so much repeated in the linguistics literature on language endangerment, is certainly not supported by the facts.

The same literature has also presented English as essential to globalization. What is certainly true is that, at the upper managerial level, different branches of the multinational companies communicate in English. Natives of non-Anglophone countries who work at that level must know enough English to hold their jobs. However, as noted above about McDonald stores, the production (as opposed to the managerial) levels of these

companies function in the national languages, typically the local official language and/or an indigenous lingua franca or vernacular. Such is the case for, for example, Goodyear and Firestone factories around the world or the Japanese branches of Japanese-American joint automobile and computer corporations. Marling (2006) is very informative on this topic. What has been observed about the outsourced native-like English-speaking debt-collectors in India and the Philippines (e.g., Friedman 2005) is certainly not a universal trend.¹¹ It is not representative of the way English is used in the usual American, British, Australian businesses, and in local branches of multinational corporations, in non-Anglophone countries around the world.

This trend does not support the claim that English is facilitating economic globalization in the sense explained above. On the contrary, it suggests that globalization does not need English preferentially, a fact made more evident by the efforts that American and British businessmen invest in learning something about the languages and customs of their foreign partners before they engage in major negotiations, especially when the meetings are to be held in the foreign country. They also require their representatives to be competent in at least the local official language. Economic domination does not entail linguistic domination, although the language of the economically powerful is targeted by the weaker or wise partner because of the rewards it promises.

What linguists have overlooked is the more lethal form of globalization (at least from the perspective of endangerment) that has operated in former settlement colonies with a European-style economy in which several sectors of the economy are locally interdependent. This is something that can be observed, for instance, in the networks of industries that develop around major airports, or in the interconnections between the food production, transportation, and packaging industries, as well as the electricity industry for refrigeration, to name just a few of the parties involved; or among the different contractors in the building industry (the gas, water, and electricity services, the telephone wiring, and the masons and carpenters). They must all communicate in the same language, which makes it more compelling for everybody in the workforce, or aspiring to work, to command the advantageous language of the industry.

The pressure on the whole population is stronger when the same language has prevailed throughout the country and the interdependencies apply regionally rather than locally only. This is not the situation in many places around the world, especially in former exploitation colonies, where modern-style economy is still less developed. Except in places where the Natives were simply exterminated by the colonists (such as in the

¹¹ The language used by the outsourced labor cannot be construed to threaten the indigenous vernaculars either, although the economic benefits reaped by the employees motivate others to become proficient in this business language. However, recall that this is only a business language for the speakers. The phenomenon highlights the rewards of being a bi- or multilingual. As the language functions as a lingua franca, it does not necessarily affect the speakers' competence in their vernacular(s), especially if no spatial and/or social relocation is involved.

Caribbean), languages have died the most in places where this "glocal(ized)" economy has been the strongest and the language of the industry is also the dominant vernacular. It is not by accident that Europe, which is one of the most densely populated places around the world, has the fewest languages spoken today, just 3% of the world's languages (Mayor & Bindé 2001). May it be for this reason that, strangely enough, Western linguists characterize as "indigenous" only non-European languages outside Europe?¹²

An important factor that bears on language endangerment and loss but has generally been overlooked by linguists is also industrialization, which has often led to urbanization. Cities are important contact settings, where the new industries that have transformed the population structures of various places around the world have developed. They have become magnets for working-age adults in rural areas in search of alternative economic opportunities. They have also produced non-traditional dynamics of competition and selection among the languages in contact, fostering the language of the industry as an urban vernacular and regional lingua franca, while collapsing ethnic boundaries.

The primary agents of the shift are not so much the adults, who become bilingual in their ancestral language and the language variety that then serves as a lingua franca, as the children, who appropriate it as their dominant or exclusive vernacular. If there is a context in which Swaan's (2001) Q-value applies, this is it, at the glocal level, where children quickly determine, in very practical terms, which language is the most advantageous to them. The disadvantageous languages are more endangered when the second generation of children has virtually no more exposure to its ancestral languages, especially in families where parents have different ethnolinguistic backgrounds, and therefore they (the children) are deprived of any motivation to speak it.¹³

¹² This may not be the true reason, but the term *indigenous* has been used in the literature on language endangerment in a rather colonial way, a way that would prompt a Martian visiting our planet to ask whether Europe has no indigenous populations and/or languages. The history of population movements, which has indeed marked the current pattern of language distribution in Europe and elsewhere around the world, also suggests that we speak of degrees of indigeneity, instead. In the case of South Africa, for instance, this perspective would make the Khoisan languages the most indigenous, the Bantu languages more indigenous than Afrikaans, and the latter more indigenous than English. Afrikaans' claim to indigeneity also follows from the fact that it is a local phenomenon, a by-product of the indigenization of Dutch under various contact pressures. If there is such a claim for South African English varieties, they are the latest developments.

¹³ Learning one's ancestral language in school is already a sign that the language is endangered and is hardly functioning as a vernacular in the community. It is doubtful that the school alone will foster the ecology that will enable the learner to use it as a vernacular. Ireland is an unsuccessful example of such an effort, despite the creation of Gaeltachts, which many of the youngsters have been leaving in search of better economic opportunities. Similar language maintenance investments for Breton in Bretagne, France are not more promising. Israeli Hebrew owes its uncommon success to a strong ideological and political commitment behind it and the

Here too one notices variation between former settlement and exploitation colonies. In the former, a European language has emerged as the vernacular whereas in the latter it has evolved primarily into a lingua franca for an indigenous elite minority, whereas an indigenous language has emerged as the urban vernacular and language of the non-bureaucratic sector of the industry. In former settlement colonies, where the majorities of the populations are urban, the blow to the indigenous languages has been swift. In former exploitation colonies, most of the populations are rural, as noted above, and some of these continue to evolve in remote, isolated places poorly connected to the city (Abley 2003). That's where we find evidence that language endangerment and loss are largely correlated with economic development and patterns of communication.

Third World countries also make it obvious that the form of interethnic communication that can be dangerous to minority languages is face-to-face interaction, not radio nor TV programs, unless these are interactive. All over the world, many people follow radio broadcasts and watch TV programs in languages other than their own without speaking the languages of these programs while perhaps developing a passive competence in them.¹⁴ That basically explains why, as lingua francas that dominate the media, European colonial languages have still not evolved into mass vernaculars in former exploitation colonies. Where they have, albeit partially, such as in Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, and Mozambique, it is not because of the media or the school system (as pointed out in Section 4), but because of the idiosyncratic dynamics of their local market places during the colonial rule and the particular way vernacular varieties of the European languages emerged as trade or militia languages.

That the role of the school systems and the media in driving language endangerment and loss has not been as significant as linguists have claimed can also be noted in the particular ways stigmatized varieties have resisted change all over the world. In North America, stigmatization has had less effect than locality of residence and/or class migration on Gullah, African American Vernacular English, American White Southern English, Appalachian English, Old Amish English, and the like. It is also the progressive end of socio-economic marginalization that has endangered Native American and Aboriginal languages in North America and Australia, respectively, not the boarding schools. It is, conversely, the resistance of the Amazon forest to European colonial penetration that has retarded the endangerment of the indigenous languages of Brazil. And it is ethnic segregation that has helped maintain Asian languages in Hawaii, unlike on the plantations of the New World and the Indian Ocean, although, as pointed out in

involvement of the economic machinery, aside from the misfortune of a history of antagonisms in which the need to define one's ethnic identity is very strong.

¹⁴ This is to some extent also true of what is known as "network English" in the USA, as well as of other language varieties elsewhere in the world that are used in the media but are different from the vernaculars spoken by the masses of the population. Yet the vernacular varieties have proved quite resilient despite the constant bombardment of readers, listeners, and viewers with the media varieties.

Mufwene (2004, 2005), the differing ways in which the colonies evolved has played a very important role.

All in all, globalization has not exerted on language vitality the kind of negative effects linguists have associated with it, at least if it is understood as the world-wide condition of economic interconnectedness and interdependencies which has made human traffic across long distances more common and enabled the world-wide diffusion of industrial products, giving the illusion of a world becoming more and more integrated and uniform. It has certainly helped some languages spread faster but not in the same way as settlement colonization did in spreading some languages as vernaculars. Globalization has spread some dominant languages, notably English, as trade lingua francas with functions that hardly affect the vitality of local vernaculars. The danger to these has come from other vernaculars that have become more important and, here, it is the dynamics of the "glocal" socio-economic systems that played a decisive role.

6. Do languages have rights?

Arguments for the maintenance of linguistic diversity, in the interest of research on Universal Grammar (hence on language universals and typology) have been augmented with discourse on "language rights." Articulated in terms similar to those of human rights, these boil down to languages having the right to be spoken and to continue conveying, through future generations of speakers, the cultural peculiarities encoded in them. An extensive literature can now be read on this, including a special issue of *Language Sciences* (1998), Phillipson (ed. 2000), Skutnab-Kangas (2000), a special issue of the *American Anthropologist* (2003), Hagege (2006), and the website of the Linguistic Society of America. I will not try here to summarize that discourse, some of which is critical of the state of the art. In this section I only wish to complement critical essays such as Coulmas (1998), Chen (1998), Errington (2003), and Whiteley (2003) with some observations that are more consistent with the tenor of the present essay.

A convenient starting point is the question of whether languages are entities that are separate from their speakers and can have rights independent of them, as suggested by advocates of "language rights." Aren't languages overly reified and in fact stripped of their dynamic, non-static, and constantly adaptive dimension in the relevant literature? Since the adaptation is really that of speakers through the way they use and reshape their language, one solution is definitely language shift, which leads to language death. Can anyone argue against the adaptive response of a population to changes in their ethnographic ecology, just in the interest of "language rights"? Anyway, can languages really be assumed to have static structural systems and world views whose integrity must by all means be protected, supposedly because they are the ideal ones for their speakers (Nettle & Romaine 2000, Mühlhäusler 2003)? How can the relevant world views be useful to the survival of their speakers after the material and cultural ecologies with which they are associated have changed already? Wouldn't such languages be maladaptive for their speakers? Is it enough to maintain a language simply so that it can

preserve the history of a population? Or should we in this case make a clear distinction between, on the one hand, *language maintenance*, for those cases where speakers of a particular language would like to continue speaking it because it is suitable to a culture that they still practice, and, on the other hand, *language preservation*, which is good only for the glimpse that the preserved text gives us of the past of the relevant population? In the first place, why would speakers give up a language that serves their communicative needs the best or helps them adapt the best to changing ecological conditions? Why would they prefer to be disadvantaged? Isn't something fundamentally wrong about the way that linguists have assumed language endangerment to happen and linguistic rights to apply?

An important problem with the current discourse lies in the following: linguists have typically ignored the fact that, as practice, languages are constantly being reshaped by their speakers and are not static. Under certain conditions they can be modified to the point of changing into a different language, thus dying by transformation, as has occurred to Sutherland Gaelic (Dorian 1981) and to creoles claimed to have been decreolizing (e.g., Rickford & Handler 1994, Hazaël-Massieux 1999). Death by transformation is one the consequences of another aspect of language as practice, viz., in multilingual settings languages tend to compete with each other for any number of reasons. A particular language can be preferred because it functions both as a vernacular and as a lingua franca, or because it is associated with money-making or better-paying jobs, or because it affords its speakers a better social status, or because it is more widely spoken demographically and/or geographically. Switches from one to the other may affect the disadvantageous one by influencing its structures in the direction of the other, as well as with massive borrowings related to the domains of usage that are not traditional to it.

Bilingualism under the conditions described above often also leads speakers to prefer using the advantageous language, letting it encroach on the traditional domain of the disadvantageous one. Such language practice is known as *language shift*, leading to the gradual demographic and often also structural erosion of the disadvantageous one. This process has affected several European languages in the settlement colonies of the Americas and Australia, accounting for why Dutch, French, German, Italian, and the Scandinavian languages, for instance, are no longer (widely) spoken in the United States. It also continues to endanger numerous indigenous languages whose speakers are being integrated in the new, colonial socio-economic world orders. This is an important difference between, on the one hand, Native American languages, whose (would-be) speakers have increasingly participated in the new, European-style socio-economic world order, and, on the other, the indigenous populations of South Africa, whose speakers have remained largely marginalized from this new socio-economic world order even after the disintegration of the apartheid regime.

From the point of view of human and language rights, there is no doubt that the relevant populations who, so to speak, have given up their languages, in order to take advantage of the doors open to them, have exercised their right to participate

competitively in the new socio-economic structure. These rights include access to the dominant language, though they did not anticipate the fact that increasing practice of the new language would erode their competence in their heritage vernacular and prevent them from "transmitting" it to their children.

They have also exercised the right to speak the language of their choice; after all, the loss of their ancestral languages is the outcome of how they chose to communicate repeatedly in various communicative events, although it can be argued that they are themselves victims of new ecologies that made it more rewarding for them to communicate more in the dominant than in the ancestral language. As far as they are concerned, languages are, for all practical intents and purposes, tools that help speakers adapt to ecological demands. The priority is adaptation and survival, not the maintenance of the traditional world view of the heritage language, which they appear to have found less adaptive.¹⁵ One can argue that linguists' condemnations of language endangerment and loss amount to nothing but nostalgia, which is a natural feeling shared by the concerned segments of the populations who are not happy with the changes, but the alternative is maladaptive as long as the relevant ecologies are not accommodating the victims. In any case, it is difficult in such contexts to imagine languages as having rights that must be protected, independent and regardless of the aspirations of the relevant populations.

The current discourse on "language rights" also gives the impression that speakers should live for languages, instead of languages being their creations intended to serve their needs, or languages being survival tools like a host of others that can be discarded in favor of alternatives perceived to be more advantageous. Sometimes the question arises of whether linguists are not being overly patronizing (Ladefoged 1992¹⁶), colonial, and almost of oppressive, especially if the would-be-speakers interpret the shift from their heritage language as some form of liberation from a tradition they simply do not like or tolerate any longer. For instance, as observed by Whiteley (2003: 719), what's the point of maintaining a language that has discriminated against or been oppressive of one particular gender or a particular social class? More fundamentally, why should the putative right to linguistic diversity prevail over the right of individuals to speak the

¹⁵ This is clearly adaptation from an ethnographic perspective, not from the structural and typological perspective favored by linguists. It does not seem to matter that much to speakers whether a language is predominantly SVO or OVS, whether the determiner precedes or follows the head noun, or whether the kinship terms distinguish between 'cousin' and 'sibling'. What matters the most is whether the language gives them hope to earn a better living and to improve their social status, among a host of other practical considerations.

¹⁶ Note that while Ladefoged objected to Krauss's (1992) call for the intervention of linguists to save dying languages, he contributed immensely, in collaboration with Ian Maddieson, to their documentation (hence preservation?). He was not indifferent to the interests of linguistics but showed a lot of respect for the right of speakers to choose to speak the language that they found the most advantageous to them in their particular ecologies.

language they find advantageous to them, as unfortunate as the decision may appear to the linguist? Why should the linguist interfere with natural evolution?

Returning to the beginning of this section, are there really "language rights" that are separate from human rights? Is Skuttnap-Kangas (2000) inadvertently correct in speaking of "linguistic human rights," thus suggesting that they are just a fold of human rights? One is relieved to see Grenoble & Whaley (2006: 2) interpret the discourse on "language rights" as a way of "rethinking human rights at a basic level to include the protection of such things as the choice of language," although their focus is the rights of ethnic minorities. It otherwise seems misguided to focus on "language rights" instead of attending to the rights of the disenfranchised populations who cannot cope with the changes undergone by their traditional ecologies. If language shift is one of the best ways to cope with the changes and if things evolve toward monolingualism, isn't it a violation of the relevant population's rights to tell them that sticking to their heritage language or adopting multilingualism is better for them? (Grenoble & Whaley make it clear that linguists should intervene only by invitation, when the affected populations wish to do something about the demise of their language.) Note that the right to speak the language of one's choice does not necessarily amount to denying one's heritage language the right to survive, as there are many cases where members of a population do not behave in a uniform way. The speaker who chooses to speak another language to meet current demands of the ecology need not feel guilty about their behavior. Moreover, the fact that a language is (being) given up can also imply that its would-be-speakers find the other language more adaptive under (the constraints of) the current circumstances. So, can multilingualism be sustained in an ecology that is not favorable to it? Should linguists be opposed to the normal evolution of languages just for the sake of preserving linguistic and cultural diversity, assuming the nature of the diversity should remain constant?

As pointed out by several authors, including Anamalai (1998), Chen (1998), and Klasen et al. (2005), the linguists' rhetoric for the maintenance of linguistic diversity often clashes with politicians' and economists' aspirations at having unified nations in which the citizenry cannot be discriminated or segregated on the basis of language or ethnicity. These individuals and the institutions they represent often struggle sincerely to accumulate more funds to address education problems collectively without having to split too thin the already small pie of their national budgets between different ethnolinguistic groups. In many such situations the choice between human rights and language rights seems to be a diversion from their noble goals. Moreover, the democracy assumed by the same advocates of linguistic diversity operates by majority rule, which entails marginalizing minority languages, especially in countries with hundreds of languages where the State cannot attend to all of them. It would help to assist governments and other relevant agencies in ways that are more concrete and specific, consistent with the aspirations of the relevant populations, however enlightened we linguists assume we are.

However, here too lies another trap. The linguists' discourse suggests that minority languages are endangered because the State has condemned them to this particular

evolution, by excluding them from the public domain. The relevant publications give the wrong impression that in all cases it is the State that determines the domains of usage of the different languages spoken in its territory and it can really get the overall population to follow its stipulations. However, in most cases where the State has an established language policy, this is typically built on particular patterns of usage within the population; it simply endorses particular languages that have already emerged as dominant economically and/or demographically. That is, the reasons for their success have usually preceded their promotion by the State. For instance, Malay spread in Southeast Asia as a trade language before the formation of the nation states that have adopted it as their official language. Such is also the case of Swahili in East Africa. The emergence of English as the dominant vernacular of the United States has to do with the triumph of the English-based economic system over alternatives that European immigrants from other nations brought with them.¹⁷

The displacement of the Celtic languages by Latin (which would evolve into the Romance languages) is correlated with the perpetuation of the Roman economic system, including patterns of urbanization, which was retained by the indigenous monarchs and businessmen after the collapse of the Roman Empire. Modern French would not have spread as the dominant vernacular of France if it had not developed as the vernacular of Paris, the capital city, and had not already emerged as a business language. Cardinal Richelieu exploited this reality when he founded the Académie Française in 1635 and charged it with the mission of promoting and expanding this language, which was also spoken by the monarchy, as the nation's language (see Vigouroux, to appear). The promotion of European colonial languages to the status of official languages in several former exploitation colonies is a legacy of communicative practices in colonial regimes in which the economically powerful segments of the indigenous populations used European languages and these came to be associated with power, wealth, and political control.

Successful government-sponsored language policies typically reflect language practice and trends within the relevant population. Otherwise, they must produce the right socio-economic infrastructure to facilitate the implementation of the language policy, as did the Government of Quebec by requesting all businesses to function in French (too). This is also what the apartheid regime did in South Africa to bolster the status of Afrikaans next to that of English, by which it was endangered in the 19th century. On the

¹⁷ Note that in the United States European free immigrants shifted to English as their vernacular long after the African slaves and European indentured servants, who had no independent economic leverage to evolve in their own separate communities and heritage languages, had already done so. (For the vast majority of former slaves and immediate descendants thereof, segregation was instituted much later, after Emancipation.) Native Americans are now losing their languages because they too are getting integrated in the same socio-economic structure, after being marginalized from it for over two centuries (Mufwene 2004, 2005).

other hand, as much as the present Constitution of South Africa recognizes the demographic and historical importance of Afrikaans, it cannot control how many people really stick to it now as English has emerged as the economically more important language under the new political regime. The Government cannot prevent people from seeing Afrikaans now as an ethnic language blemished by a racist past. In the same vein, as much as the same Constitution proclaims Zulu, Xhosa, and seven other indigenous black African languages as official, it cannot control whether actual practice will make them competitive with English in the white collar sector of the business world, whether speakers of other (non-official) languages will prefer to learn them over English, or whether the status of English as an international lingua franca will endanger the importance of the indigenous languages. Interestingly, on South African TV, the ideology of language purity or integrity applies more to English programs than to those in indigenous languages, marked by extensive code-switching. Lastly, the promotion of Irish as the official language of Ireland has, in over a century, not succeeded in making of it a popular vernacular, because English has remained the language of all levels of industry. In all these cases, the rights of speakers to be competitive within specific socio-economic systems have prevailed over those of their languages, if the latter really have rights of their own for existence.

What I wish to clarify here is that governments cannot really control the day-to-day language practices of their populations, especially regarding what language(s) the latter find the most advantageous in various communicative events. Neither can they prevent, even contrary to their desiderata, the current language practice from driving some languages to extinction, simply because their populations seldom speak those languages in a wide range of domains. It is not clear at all that governments should interfere with normal language evolution in such cases, at least out of respect for the rights of the citizenry to behave linguistically as they wish or find practical. Should the South African government protect Afrikaans from English simply because the relevant socio-economic structure and the world situation implicitly favor the latter and the world view and typological peculiarities of the former are worth maintaining?¹⁸ Do speakers have such considerations on their minds when they decide which language to speak on a particular

¹⁸ I am not suggesting that Afrikaans should be condemned to extinction. It is very much in the right of those who love it and find it useful to maintain it through whatever means are productive, aside from speaking it regularly. Such an endeavor is not a matter of the State. My position also has nothing to do with the moral responsibility of teaching children in their mother tongues. But then one is reminded here that one's mother tongue is not necessarily their ethnic language and the reason for educating children in their mother tongue is not the maintenance of their heritage language. On the other hand, the social dynamics which determine what particular languages children acquire as mother tongues (and will continue speaking throughout their lives) are those that bear the most on the vitality of languages. Ireland is so interesting because one can argue that Irish, the ancestral or heritage language, is losing the competition to the actual mother tongue of school age children: English.

occasion? Wouldn't interference by the State be a violation of the rights of those citizens who want nothing to do with the particular language it promotes or imposes? Shouldn't the State rather focus on attending to, among other things, the improvement of the economic conditions of the underprivileged, such that diverse jobs become available in various lingua francas under conditions that enable individuals to choose where they want to live and which particular language(s) they prefer (to learn) to speak?

It is not obvious that there are "language rights" that are really separate from human rights. As noted by Chen (1998), it is not clear that claims of "language rights" are not really extensions of arguments for human rights. Otherwise there are bound to be conflicts between "language rights" and human rights (Coulmas 1998), which makes the whole rhetoric for the protection of "language rights" rather intriguing, as these must of necessity be subordinated to human rights.

To begin with, languages do not have any existence that is independent of the activities of their speakers. From an evolutionary perspective (including their birth, maintenance, and death) they are practices and largely reflect how people communicate at a particular time and in a particular geographical space. In places where two or more languages compete for the same communicative functions, their vitality also reflects their speakers' preferences under specific ecological conditions, which determine whether a language can thrive or will die. If particular populations shift from their traditional vernaculars to other languages, it must be because the alternatives appeal more to them or serve their communicative interests "better," for any number of social reasons, or because they find themselves in situations where communication can be established (the most efficiently or faster) only in the other language. It seems that the right remedy lies in restoring the ecological conditions that would be more favorable to the victim languages.

Now the question is whether the action that would respect the "rights of the relevant languages to survive" would be consistent with how the relevant populations want to live relative to the other populations they have been in contact with, especially in settlement colonies such as the Americas and Australia. For instance, would restoring the precolonial socio-economic structure that would be the most favorable to various indigenous languages not violate the desires and rights of the same populations to modernize their living styles now that they have been exposed to different living conditions and requirements? What would be the price of such a reversal of history? Or is it more practical to foster economic conditions that would enable the relevant populations to adapt better to the changing ecologies while new forms of linguistic and cultural diversities are emerging through their adaptations?

A problem here may lie in how linguists prefer to conceive of languages and cultures, typically as systems. We tend to forget that this particular conceptualization reflects our attempts to account for how members of a community manage to communicate. From the point of view of complexity theory, systems "emerge" to the analyst and need not be intrinsic to the subject matter of his/her investigation. This interpretation is also consistent with thinking of languages and cultures as practices, from which patterns

emerge that can be described as systems. One particular advantage from this perspective is that we should not think of the projected systems as static. Our professional practice corresponds to a snapshot of a subject in motion, which freezes it in time simply because the paper print cannot record motion. Just as snapshots do not lead us to forget the moving reality, our analyses need not lead us to forget that languages and cultures are dynamic practices. They are constantly being shaped and reshaped as they are practiced.¹⁹ This leads us to the question of whether at any particular point in time (and space) any particular traditional, rather than current, communicative means is more representative of a population and its culture and must be protected. Don't means of communication co-evolve with the situations in which the relevant populations must communicate, just like the relevant cultures themselves?²⁰

In colonial settings (which is true of about anywhere in the history of mankind), populations have changed their heritage languages, adapting them to their changing communicative needs, or they have simply appropriated a new language which they have also domesticated (i.e., indigenized) to meet their traditions while they also serve their new communicative needs. Thus, they have contributed new forms of linguistic and cultural diversity in the stead of the traditional ones. From an evolutionary perspective, it is hard not to ask whether there is any particular reason why language activists (e.g., Crystal 2000, 2004; Hagège 2002, Maffi 2001, Mühlhäusler 2003, Nettle & Romaine 2000, and Skuttnab-Kangas 2000) suggest that traditional forms of diversity are preferable to new ones if not invaluable to speakers of the dying languages. In a world

¹⁹ This is a perspective that may be hard to accept, especially to a linguist who rightly equates 'practice' with 'performance' and has been trained to see this as the process of putting competence into practice. It is debatable whether one learns a language naturalistically by rules, despite the fact that patterns emerge from how he/she speaks or signs. What is indisputable, however, is that changes have their origins in the practices of speakers, through their innovations or their inability to replicate each other's competence (Mufwene 2001). Saying that languages are practices (not necessarily in the meaning of 'performance' but rather in the meaning of 'being part of communicative activities') is not a negation of patterns, which linguists prefer to identify as rules and are simply inferred from the outputs of the practice (Mufwene 2005).

²⁰ Instead of thinking of culture as a system, why not conceive of it as the particular ways in which members of a population in a particular ecology behave, respond to and affect it, under particular assumptions, all of which can be modified (not concurrently) as time goes by? Patterns emerge of necessity because normal individuals like being consistent in the ways they behave and do things, and, in a population, they copy from and influence each other (see also Richerson & Boyd 2005). In situations where populations come in contact with each other, they learn new adaptive skills from each other to maximize their fitness, which can lead to loss of some languages and cultures. This perspective certainly raises interesting questions about the linguists' discourse for maintaining languages so that particular world views can be preserved. Particular populations have abandoned them apparently because they did not find them as adaptive any more under new ecological conditions. It must be their right to make such choices, if they had no control over changes in the socio-economic ecologies that frame their existence.

that is constantly changing, isn't the literature on language revitalization advocating nostalgia over practical adaptation to changing socio-economic ecologies with new sets of demands for communication? I think these questions must be addressed by advocates of "language rights." They should explain in what ways the maintenance or revitalization of the endangered languages will benefit the concerned populations.

7. Why is language endangerment an embarrassment for linguistics?

The subject matter is an embarrassment for linguistics especially because linguistics has been largely unprepared for the issues that have arisen. This is largely due to the fact that linguistics has not developed a research area comparable with (macro-)ecology in biology that specializes on the vitality of languages, i.e., on questions of language life, birth, and death, something that may be identified as the *ecology of language*. Unlike Haugen (1972), linguists such as Mühlhäusler (1996, 2003) and Mühlhäusler & Fill (2001) who claim to be doing *ecolinguistics* have been more concerned with Whorfianism, thus with languages as representation systems, rather than as tools or practices that must help speakers adapt to their changing socio-economic ecologies. Questions regarding the ecological factors that affect the vitality of languages have not been sufficiently explored, with the emphasis placed more on what can be done to revitalize or preserve endangered languages. One can also add that the general discourse has focused more on sentimentalism than the practicality of factors that bear on day-to-day decisions that speakers must make at various communicative events. Studies such as Coulmas (1998) and Errington (2003) are still too few to help us understand why in many cases language death is a fact of life and the outcome of individual speakers' adaptive responses to novel ecological conditions. The dynamics of the competition and selection processes that affect the coexistence of languages have hardly been explored, and the poorly informed paternalistic attitude of linguists as experts to the results of practical decisions of speakers is embarrassing.

More embarrassment arises from the fact that benefits to linguistics have prevailed over benefits to the affected populations. Issues of possible conflicts between human rights and "language rights," or, to begin with, those regarding whether there are "language rights" independent of human rights, have not been addressed. While the responses to Krauss's (1992) call for actions by linguists against language endangerment have been dramatic, one cannot say that there is very much to be proud of regarding what has been done, except in the domain of language preservation, which is different from language maintenance. Linguistics must face the subject matter in a more scholarly and informed way than has been the case, embedding it in the broader context of language evolution and placing adaptive costs and benefits to speakers at the center of the debate. The focus on lost knowledge and world view, when neither of these is static, is but a camouflaged way of promoting the interests of linguistics over those of speakers. As much as the concern for language endangerment seems to be patterned on ecologists' concern for the preservation of biodiversity, in the interests of human life and the

symbiotic coexistence of different species, linguists have put the benefits to the discipline before the benefits speakers and, worse of all, they have done very little to understand the mechanisms of language endangerment, as well as the ecological dynamics that bring it about. Often enough, the causes are not what and where we think they are.

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