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## **MYTHS OF GLOBALIZATION: WHAT AFRICAN DEMOLINGUISTICS REVEALS**

**Salikoko S. Mufwene**  
*University of Chicago*

### **1. Introduction**

This paper is really about language endangerment and loss, focusing on how “globalization” has traditionally been invoked in linguistics to account for these processes world-wide. The main reason why “language endangerment” and “language loss” (also known as “language death”) are not included in the title is that I don’t raise as many issues about their understanding as I do about misconceptions of “globalization” in traditional accounts of these phenomena. I do, however, explain the particular ways in which language endangerment and loss proceed, at the mercy of the communicative acts of speakers, without any agency that may be attributed to the languages that prevail.

I have borrowed the term *demolinguistics* from French linguistics, to situate the discourse on language endangerment and loss where it really belongs, viz., at the level of ‘population’ and ‘society’ conceived of as constructs from individuals who interact with each other or have the potential to do so in particular geographical settings. This is indeed the level at which language evolution, which these processes are aspects of and which results from the cumulation of the behaviors of individual speakers, must also be situated. I also focus on the instrumental function of ‘language’, thus on the agency of speakers assessing their languages as tools intended to help them adapt to changing socio-economic ecologies rather than on the “systems of units and rules” that enable them to function as means of communication (Mufwene 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005).

Multilingual speakers constantly determine which language is more appropriate on every particular occasion of interaction. Ultimately, they develop “market values” of the languages or language varieties in their repertoires, based on the choices they are repeatedly forced to make in various communicative settings. In a way they realize which language is more useful to them, although in reality they only notice retrospectively that, by some sort of atrophy, (former) multilingual adults are less, or no longer, competent in one or more of the languages or language varieties. Others simply realize that they are hardly invested in some other language they could have learned in their multilingual setting. None of this resolution of the competition among coexistent languages has anything to do with their structural features. All languages are adequately equipped to serve the traditional communicative needs of their speakers. It is simply a matter of whether a language is deemed to serve not only a speaker’s communicative needs but also his/her rapport with other speakers more successfully than (an)other alternatives in various interaction settings.

Using Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of “linguistic market” at its fullest, one can consider language choice in terms of “costs” and “benefits” to the user. This sort of “language economics” approach makes it more justified to invoke “globalization” as a possible reason for language endangerment and loss, although the question is which of the many interpretations of “globalization” matters and how. Since most of the limited theorizing on the subject matter has been based on the particular experiences of especially the Americas and Australia, I thought it would be rewarding to question some of the relevant generalizations with facts from sub-Saharan Africa.

The demolinguistics perspective also helps me validate a position of mine about language evolution since Mufwene (2001), viz., that linguistics will shed better light on the mechanisms of language evolution by conceiving of languages as species rather than as organisms and by approaching the subject matter as in population genetics. Thus, one must realize that notions such as ‘population’, ‘species’, ‘society’, and ‘community’ are constructs standing for aggregate extrapolations from individuals. These constructed entities never act or behave in the same ways as individuals or organisms do. Experiences of change, such as endangerment, attrition, and loss that can be associated with them only reflect the cumulation of experiences of individuals they are extrapolated from. Therefore, one must understand the activities and experiences of individuals in order to understand those attributed to populations, including communal language varieties (as opposed to idiolects) to really understand what is going on. With regard to the ecologies of the endangered, dying, or dead languages, where the causation of these processes are to be situated, my position remains that ecology works directly on individuals and it is patterns of interaction among individuals (part of what I call “population structure” below) that account for how changes spread, typically discriminately and at varying speeds, within the overall population or language.

## **2. What ‘globalization’ means and what it does not**

I will start my discussion with Krauss’s (1992) seminal article in *Language*, in which he urges linguists not to be indifferent to the demise of the subject matter of their research: languages. Since then, globalization has often been invoked (too casually, I must observe) as the main cause of the ongoing and imminent death of “indigenous

languages.”<sup>1</sup> It has been blamed as the mechanism that has transformed English into a “killer language” par excellence, as if languages had agency of their own, independent of their speakers, and could mobilize armies and weapons (e.g., literacy and the media) to wage wars against them.

What ‘globalization’ actually is, with its many facets, has hardly been explained by the linguists who invoke it. Contexts of its invocation suggest, however, that they mean by it the fact that various and sometimes very distant parts of the world today are interconnected by complex networks of rapid international telecommunication and transportation, national boundaries between neighboring countries are apparently fading thanks to the emergence of multinational companies that have developed webs of economic interdependencies, and their industrial goods can now be found almost everywhere, giving us the illusion that the world has become culturally less and less diverse, thus more and more uniform.<sup>2</sup> They have routinely adduced evidence for this process from the wider and wider diffusion of Hollywood movies and the increasing presence of McDonald stores around the world, a process identified as *McDonaldization*. Often enough, they have equated globalization with Americanization but failed to note that, like the spread of English around the world, both McDonaldization and the world-

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<sup>1</sup> Representative reference books on this subject matter include Nettle & Romaine (2000), Crystal (2000, 2004), and Dalby (2002), among numerous others. See Mufwene (2004) for an extensive list of books alone. Curiously, the same literature has derelativized the term *indigenous*, making it more or less synonymous with *Native* in places where European languages have been exported, as if Europe did not have indigenous languages. We will return briefly to the role of colonization in language endangerment and loss below.

<sup>2</sup> This view of course betrays ignorance of better informed literature on globalization that has exposed the fact that the world is developing new forms of diversity but not eliminating it altogether (e.g., John Tomlinson 1999 and, more recently, Marling 2006) or that inequities and the economic gap between the developed and developing countries are increasing (e.g., Stiglitz 2002, Steger 2003).

wide diffusion of Hollywood movies are results of the globalization of process itself (under the above interpretation of world-wide network of communication and transportation), not the means of its implementation.

It is interesting to note that McDonald's menus have diversified around the world and been adapted to local dietary customs, that the menus are no more English than the staff speak the language everywhere in the world, and that Hollywood movies are typically released simultaneously in different languages around the world and sometimes in locally-modified versions (see also Marling 2006). These practices clearly show that businessmen are not language missionaries and their primary interest lies in making profits, which often entails communicating with the local population in their lingua franca, if not in their vernacular. In the "foreign" branches of multinational corporations headed by Americans, Britons, or Australians, English is used only in the top tiers of the administration, alternating with the local official language<sup>3</sup>. The local official language and lingua franca of the masses of the population are used in the other levels of production. This demolinguistic structure applies even in the diplomatic missions of these countries, when local personnel are also employed. Members of the local population learn English for the purpose of moving up in their careers and earning a better living. While we can admit that American, British, and Australian businesses provide motivation for members of the indigenous population to learn English, they are far from making a deliberate effort to spread their language (see also Schneider 2007). Little has changed from the colonial tradition that restricted the colonial language to a restricted, privileged

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<sup>3</sup> According to Marling (2006), there is even increasing preference for local representatives to head the local branches, as they guarantee a more reliable understanding of the local customs, practices, and preferences, as well as more successful communication with the local markets, aside from costing less to the companies.

and elite class of colonial auxiliaries (Brutt-Griffler 2002). Even when their language is widely spoken in a particular territory, the chief operators of the firms still select those that command the language the best and insist on communicating to the masses of the employees in the bottom tiers in a language that they can understand best, a local one.

As explained in Mufwene (2004, 2005), for the local population, the additional, *foreign* language hardly calls for the abandonment of their *local* lingua franca, least of all their ethnic vernaculars, chiefly because they have different ethnographic functions. Local speakers of the European languages, albeit their indigenized varieties, still must participate in the local culture, or buy from the local market, in the local urban vernacular or their regional lingua franca, and they still must interact with their grandparents, parents, and the economically less affluent or less educated members of their families or native places in their ethnic vernaculars. The same applies to recent urbanites who normally do not want to sever their cultural links with childhood friends often left in the rural areas, regardless of whether they now evolve just in the urban vernacular and/or in the European colonial language. Despite the increasing number of inter-ethnic marriages, adults who have recently migrated to the city like to maintain their authenticity by using whatever opportunity they find to speak their ethnic vernacular, however much it may be influenced by the urban vernacular and regardless of the fact that their children may not speak it at all.

If anything endangers the ethnic vernaculars, it is not the “global” languages used at the top echelon of the multinational companies; rather it is the urban vernaculars and regional lingua francas (such as Lingala in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Swahili in East Africa, Town Bemba in Zambia, and Wolof in Senegal) that do. They are the

languages associated with modernity for the masses of the population (Spitulnik 1999), and they are the ones in which the western style economy (outside the white collar sector) is run, and popular culture (epitomized by modern music) is produced. They are the emblems of indigenous nationhood, in opposition with the European intrusion and domination associated with the European languages, regardless of the nationality of their speakers. One must remember that, with the exception of South Africa, sub-Saharan Africa was generally colonized in the exploitation style, which fostered socio-economic segregation between the colonizers and the colonized, typically interfaced with an elite class of colonial auxiliaries, and assigned only a lingua franca function to the European languages.

What linguists have failed to note it is the local form of globalization identified by cultural studies experts as *glocalization* (in reference to local interdependencies that regulate the local, grass-roots economic system everywhere) which has born the most significantly on the vitality of languages. It is the factor that determines which variety of the dominant language will spread (typically not the standard or the most prestigious one) and within which part of the population (first). Within the local *population structure* (which determines, among other things, who interacts with who, who can work where and in what language, and who is expected to accommodate whom), it is this particular form of global economic structure at the local, grassroots level, rather than the world-wide diffusion of goods and people that has retained the attention of linguists, which has endangered indigenous languages. Even in the West, it is the dominant language variety at the level of jobs associated with the masses of the population that has endangered the other vernaculars, indigenous and non-indigenous alike. In the American and Australian

settlement colonies, in which the language of the blue-collar economy has also evolved to be the dominant vernacular, my explanation accounts for the disappearance not only of the Native American and Aboriginal languages, but also of the European vernaculars that once competed with the now dominant language. The timing of the disappearance can be correlated with the time when a particular population was forced by the circumstances to assimilate and function in the dominant economy. Those who were the weakest economically were first to be affected.

Thus, the slaves and indentured servants did it first, as they generally did not have the option of evolving in separate viable economic systems; then it was the turn of the free European immigrants, after their parochial economic systems collapsed (see, e.g., Salmons 2003, Clyne 2003). This explains why in the United States, the Germans were the last Europeans to give up their national language as their ethnic vernacular (Salmons 2003). Native Americans and Australian Aborigines have caught our attention because they are last to have access to the new, Western-style socio-economic world order, having been marginalized during the earlier colonial period.

It is in fact also noteworthy that Native Americans, like African immigrants of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are the only populations without their separate ethnic neighborhoods in North American cities. This reflects both the fact that they trickled relatively late into the city and their children have (fully) assimilated to the now majority populations linguistically and culturally. The same is true of European immigrants who had to shift from their ancestral languages to the dominant one, despite current belated efforts among some to revive their ethnic cultures. What linguists have poorly understood is that the shift has usually been an adaptive response of the populations that are economically

weaker, which is precisely why the slaves and indentured servants were first to give up their ancestral languages, although the scenario was much more complex, as explained in Mufwene (2004, 2005) and below.

In the case of Africa, we would be remiss to overlook the effects of interethnic wars and refugeeism on ethnic languages. Like natural disasters, ethnic genocides endanger languages. Fortunately these have not been as devastating as in the colonization of the Caribbean, where Carib languages were “killed” through the extermination of their speakers by the colonists. Refugeeism have led to population contacts in which the migrants are linguistically disadvantaged, being under pressure to interact with the host population in their language and often thinking it more advantageous not be identified as refugees. The longer the relocation lasts, the longer children often find it more convenient or advantageous to speak the host, rather than the ancestral, language. If there is no chance to return home and the children are integrated in the host population, the ancestral language may die with their (grand-)parents. This is in part how the European languages died in settlement colonies, with the children migrating socio-economically, though not necessarily geographically, to the dominant socio-economic system.

More or less the same kind of explanation accounts for the loss of Native American languages. It is often said (e.g., by Crosby 1992), that it is not the European weapons that killed Native Americans during the early stages of colonization, it was the Old World ills that the immigrants brought with them, to which Native Americans were not immuned, which reduced their population sizes. I also submit that it was not the occasional contacts with the European languages before the 19<sup>th</sup> century that “killed” Native American vernaculars and lingua francas; it was the flight from the Old World “ills” which brought

some Native Americans into contact with others that led the assimilated migrants to lose their languages. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, part of the explanation for the reportedly more rapid loss of Native American languages certainly has to do with migrations from the reservations to the city, in which they have not lived segregated, which has taken the same toll on their ancestral languages as on those of immigrants.

My explanations are perhaps too speculative and they certainly do not account for all the reasons why Native American languages are so seriously endangered today, but somebody will have to explain why these factors have typically not been invoked to account for the endangerment and loss of Native American languages. There is more to the story than the alleged lack of pride on the part of Native Americans toward their heritage or the prestige of the western life style and languages. Adaptation to the new socio-economic world order seems to be the bottom line, regardless of whether some individuals find the solution in running away to places and populations less affected by the newcomers and their ills or in seeking to partake in the new socio-economic system. These are all aspects of glocalization, at least when one considers how ancestral tradition is weakened in the competition by the system that prevails.

### **3. Language vitality in Sub-Saharan Africa: A historical perspective**

Black Africa has always been geographically multilingual, due to the multitude of languages, some of them demographically very small, spoken on the continent. Limited geographical mobility, caused by a host of physical ecological factors, did not enable extensive societal multilingualism, restricting this to royal courts, trade centers, adjacent villages (especially in the case of those consisting of a main monoethnic village with an ancillary community from a different ethnic group). While there were trade languages

during the precolonial period, such as Swahili (very much exploited by Arab traders in East Africa; Nurse & Spear 1985, Fabian 1986), Kikongo-Kimanyanga (in the western part of the present Democratic Republic of Congo; Fehderau 1966), Songhay (across the Sahel; Nicolai 1990), Lingala (along the North-South stretch of the Congo River; Hulstaert 1974), and Hausa (in Northern Nigeria and Chad), no regional or nation-wide lingua francas associated with functions of the State or with ordinary cross-ethnic communication seems to have emerged. Kingdoms relied heavily on the service of interpreters, and, as observed by Samarin (1982), travelers just assumed the responsibility of learning the relevant neighboring language, unless they followed a trade route. The socio-economic set up simply did not favor the emergence of individual or societal multilingualism before the colonial period thanks to the emergence of colonial administrative posts, the antecedents of today's cities, where indigenous populations from different backgrounds were brought to serve the colonial administration in different capacities and therefore live with each other. Many so-called "contact varieties," such as Sango, Lingala, Kikongo-Kituba, and Town Bemba, are the products of this colonial expansion, and they have indeed evolved into urban vernaculars and/or regional lingua francas. By today's standards, the precolonial set up was thus very rural, marked by relative isolation of the different ethnic groups surviving on local subsistence economies. It favored the maintenance of ethnolinguistic diversity. The question is whether the colonial rule really disrupted much of this state of affairs.

The European colonizers did indeed modify the African "linguascape" by introducing their own languages or by producing new socio-economic structures that favored the emergence of new language varieties (e.g., Kikongo-Kituba, Kinubi, Cameroon and

Nigerian Pidgin Englishes, Fanakalo, Town Bemba, and Sango). In other cases, the new socio-economic structures transformed some more indigenous languages (such as Wolof, Swahili, Hausa, and Lingala) into urban vernaculars, while also spreading them as regional lingua francas. To the extent that the birth and/or expansion these languages are associated with colonization, one must also understand the way in which the colonial rule of Africa proceeded. Most of the colonial administrators remained in the cities or towns that evolved from their administrative posts. They visited the rural areas occasionally, limiting the visits to the minor administrative posts manned by indigenous colonial auxiliaries. For most administrators, their competence in the indigenous languages was limited to the urban vernaculars and regional lingua francas. Those who did more became the forerunners of African linguistics, totaling very few. Overall they did not use their European languages to communicate with the masses of the indigenous populations, limiting their usage to interactions with the indigenous elite of colonial auxiliaries who functioned as interpreters between the colonizers and the colonized (Brutt-Griffler 2002).

While they expanded the precolonial royal courts' interpreter system, the European colonizers also introduced the practice of language stratification, which was controlled through the school system and through geographical structure. The school system controlled the spread of the European languages (i.e., their scholastic varieties<sup>4</sup>), limiting it to a few that could advance fairly high in the school system and work as certified

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<sup>4</sup> This distinction between the *scholastic* and *nonstandard* varieties of the European languages is an important one. While the former were introduced after the exploitation colonization of Africa, the latter (especially Portuguese and English) were introduced through trade colonization on the mainland and settlement colonization of the sugar islands. From these emerged pidgins and creoles, respectively, which bear the earliest marks of the indigenization of European languages and function, respectively, as lingua francas and vernaculars of masses of populations in the relevant territories (e.g., Nigeria and Cameroon for pidgins; and Cape Verde, the Bight of Biafra islands, and the Mascarene islands of the Indian Ocean for creoles).

teachers or colonial auxiliaries. In a colonial system where the rate of scholarization remained very low and a very small proportion of pupils progressed to, or past, high school, mastery of the European languages remained the privilege of a few. That system has almost continued to date, and competence in the European languages has become emblematic of education through high school, if not past it. Moreover, very few acquire them as mother tongues or use them as vernaculars. Used in post-primary education system, in the government and higher echelons of public administration as well as in the white-collar sectors of the new socio-economic world order, the European languages have hardly encroached in the communicative domains of the indigenous ethnic vernaculars. Thus the European lingua francas and the indigenous vernaculars have hardly competed with each other, if at all. The lesson simply is that languages can be in competition only when they share communicative domains, where they would compete for the same speakers and topics, just like species that share the same habitat niche but thrive on different resources (e.g., giraffes and antelopes in the savannah). What has happened in the West, where varieties of the same language have been in usage for all the communicative functions, has hardly occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is thus misguided to extrapolate hastily, without an accurate comparison of the relevant ecologies of language practice, from the Western experience with language competition to another life style. Language coexistence does not unavoidably lead to the extinction of minority ones.

Bearing in mind that vernaculars compete with other vernaculars and lingua francas with other lingua francas, the geographic structure of Africa with poorly developed transportation systems, has not made it possible for the urban vernaculars to endanger the

ethnic languages of the rural areas, where the vast majorities of the populations still live. Outside the city, the urban vernaculars typically function as regional lingua francas, therefore they do not compete for speakers in most of the domains of vernacular communication. Very few affluent urban vernacular speakers return to settle back in the rural areas. When they do, it is often for reasons that make them more likely to communicate with the local/home population in the local ethnic vernacular. Among such reasons is the fear to appear snobbish or disdainful of their ancestral culture. So, speakers of ethnic varieties feel no serious motivation to give them up for the urban vernaculars, though they accommodate outsiders in making an effort to be bilingual (see below).

Outside the city, where ethnic languages are definitely giving way to urban vernaculars, danger for the ethnic languages in rural areas lies in students who attend boarding schools and experience the stigmatization of being rural. Affected by this attitude toward their backgrounds, they often return home showing off and pretending not to be able to speak their ethnic vernaculars. Those who proceed to leave the village and live in the city may give them up altogether, though many grow to keep them as markers of ethnolinguistic identity and as a means by which they can connect more strongly with those who share their ethnic backgrounds. This is, however, no guarantee that their children will learn to speak it, as they face the pressure to blend with the “native” urbanite population whose exclusive or primary linguistic identity is associated with the urban vernacular. Those school graduates or dropouts who remain in the village soon give in to the criticism of being snobbish. They return to the tradition of using their ethnic vernacular for day-to-day communication, reserving their knowledge of the regional lingua franca for communication with outsiders. The fact that the city and the village are

two worlds apart is an important factor that continues to protect the indigenous ethnic languages. In the very least, this factor slows down the threat from the regional lingua franca, especially through the media.

There are a number of reasons why the regional languages used in the media do not necessarily endanger the ethnic vernaculars. The first is that, in the rural areas, they serve only as lingua francas with the occasional outsider (public servant or trader) and therefore do not endanger the local vernaculars. The second reason has to do with economics. The print media is not well developed and does not circulate in the villages. Even if it did, the dominant mode of rural subsistence economy is almost tantamount to unemployment in the modern economic structure and lack of extra cash to afford the media and books. Even literate villagers do not read and therefore cannot be affected by the print media. In several parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the indigenous urban vernaculars and regional lingua francas are allocated only small proportions of time on the radio (and television), which remains quite limited, even when all the programs in the indigenous languages are counted together, compared to the time allocated to the official language. Since this medium is not interactive, there is no reason to fear that the listeners' ability to understand the relevant lingua francas can endanger their communicative competence in their local vernaculars. So, it appears that, on their own, the media cannot endanger other languages. They can if they reinforce usage of the relevant lingua francas in face-to-face interactions in domains that encroach on those of the local vernaculars.

There are a few things that can be learned from this particular interpretation of the dynamics of language coexistence and competition in sub-Saharan Africa. The first has to do with the factors that determine the language choices that speakers make on a day-to-

day basis as they must interact with other people. It is these individual choices that cumulatively wind up biasing the fate of a language toward its maintenance or extinction in a particular community. *Pace* Swaan (2001), they have very little to do with considering a language as a common good/resource that speakers either should look after or can neglect, more or less consciously.

While language choices can be discussed from the perspective of Bourdieu's (1991) *market value*, these have almost nothing to do with a "Q-value" (Swaan 2001) determined by how many other people speak a particular language and what a wider population an individual has the potential to communicate in. If this were the case, the total population of our planet would be aiming at speaking Chinese or Hindi today. Nor do speakers' choices of particular languages have to do with identifying what languages have world-wide or "global" currency as lingua francas (or "central languages," in Swaan's terminology). Most Africans would otherwise be endeavoring to develop some competence in the official languages of their countries. They know how much economic power these lingua francas have, but they also know that even they spoke them, their economic conditions would not necessarily improve, because there aren't that many jobs that are worth the investment that one makes to develop that particular competence.

The decisions which speakers make to speak language L1 or L2 are typically very local and circumstantial. They are determined by the interactive settings in which a speaker finds him- or herself, what language the other participants or potential interlocutors use, what advantages they gain in speaking it, what price one is likely to pay if they did not conform to the local norm, whether the price is worth the alternative gains, what one decides to do economically, and where one decides to live the rest of their life.

The benefits from such language investments are not typically seen in very long term either. Although we must admit that schools have long term visions in providing language courses to students, the value of that investment in time and effort for the student is co-determined by the socio-economic environment of the learner, where they assess in practical terms whether it is worthwhile. In this case, the local job markets bear as much on their decision as their personal ambitions (which remain local for the majority of people) and the particular individuals they interact with. The greatest danger to indigenous African languages lies more in rural exodus toward the city than in the potential any “global” or “colonial” language has to displace them. I explain this below with an example from South Africa.

In former settlement colonies, European languages have endangered their indigenous counterparts simply because the European-style economic system has prevailed and spread geographically and socially, because this structure functions only in the European language, and because gradual geographical and social assimilation (starting among the Europeans themselves) has let it encroach onto their vernacular functions. These developments are not happening in Africa, not only because the European languages have remained sectional but also because what the non-traditional economy has not spread outside the city. Evidence for this may also be found in Latin America, where the western-style economy has not spread as fast, nor as pervasively, as in North America. It is precisely where the European presence is the least felt that Native American languages have survived. See, e.g., Nettle & Romaine (2000) for statistics.

Phillipson (2003) and, more recently, Hagège (2006) express strong concerns that English may be evolving to become the dominant vernacular of continental Western

Europe. Among the main reasons they adduce are the following: 1) English is prevailing as the main working language of the European Union. Despite strong support of multilingualism within (the administration of) the Union, more and more representatives find it more expedient to communicate directly in (non-fluent) English than to wait for the translation. 2) Universities in Scandinavian countries and in Holland allow courses to be taught in English rather than in the local, official language. 3) More and more European academics prefer to publish in English than in their respective national academic language (e.g., French, Dutch, German, and Norwegian), aiming at a wider readership. CNRS, the dominant funding agency for scholarly research in France, encourages its grantees to publish their findings in English, to ensure wider dissemination and the recognition of these in the international market of scholarship. 4) English has become the dominant language of international (academic) conferences, even those held in France and Germany. 5) More and more European private companies are requiring knowledge of English by their senior and/or white collar employees. Consequently, more and more Europeans select English as their second language, over French, German, and Russian.

Although no two situations are identical regarding language coexistence and competition, these authors describe an evolution quite similar to language practice in sub-Saharan Africa since the colonial period. A European colonial language is typically the dominant medium of communication in high school and in higher education, in the government, in the higher echelons of public administration, in the legal system, and in all prestigious white-collar jobs. However, as explained in Mufwene (2004, 2005), the European colonial languages have typically remained *lingua francas*, not vernaculars.

Therefore, as argued above, they have not endangered the vitality of the indigenous languages, though the continued colonial practice of associating them, almost exclusively with these prestigious functions, has prevented the indigenous lingua francas from rising to more or less the same ethnographic status. Even in Tanzania, where Swahili has been promoted for almost half a century as a co-official language, English remains very prestigious (see, e.g., Billings 2006). In Kinshasa (in the Democratic Republic of Congo), where Lingala remains the dominant language of popular culture, French still claims exclusively the status of language of scholarship and world affairs. Despite all this ethnographic stratification, the indigenous languages are generally not endangered by the European colonial languages.

Like most students of language endangerment, both Phillipson (2003) and Hagège (2006) fail to distinguish vernacular and lingua franca functions of languages, as well as the fact that languages are in competition mostly when they are used for the same ethnographic functions, making one or some of the competing languages redundant. In the particular case of the European Union and the other cases discussed above, the European languages are competing in their lingua franca but not their vernacular function. There have been no reported cases of Dutch or French children in Holland and France, respectively, opting not to acquire their national languages as mother tongues, especially if they are speakers of minority languages. If there are some such cases, they are isolated ones that are far from setting a particular trend among the relevant child populations. Note also that in the case of France, Breton activists' children who are raised in their heritage language still must learn French, so that they are not disadvantaged in

comparison to the overwhelming majority of French monolinguals and on the job market (Molly Tomlinson 2006).

Discussions of the potential for language shift such as Phillipson (2003) and Hagège (2006) miss a critical condition for language endangerment, viz., speakers no longer use their language for day-to-day communication or do so less and less routinely. A language is not really endangered unless it loses its vernacular function. There are many languages in the world whose usage has been limited to vernacular communication, the other aspects of communication having been assumed by other languages. In fact, this has always been true of the nonstandard varieties of the same European languages, which have not typically had lingua franca functions but have been quite resilient despite their stigmatization by speakers of the standard varieties and the relentless campaign of the school system against them.

Also worth noting in this particular extension of the concern with language endangerment are invocations by la Francophonie, and to some extent Hagège (2006), that French is endangered by English in Francophone territories other than France (including its overseas departments), Belgium, Switzerland, and Quebec. The truth about this lies in the recent wave of the geographical expansion of English in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially since the independence of former exploitation colonies of Africa and Asia in the 1960s and 1970s, and also since collapse of the Eastern European block. English has been penetrating even former French and Belgian colonies, where it is being taught as a foreign language (as opposed to official language). French has not expanded to the same extent in former English colonies. In places such as Brazil, there has even been a shift from French to English as the preferred foreign language. In Central Europe, English has

made faster and more expansive strides than French has. French may have maintained its status as “language of culture” but it has not been identified with modernity in technology nor with the kind of economic and military might presented by the United States and the United Kingdom, singly or combined.

La Francophonie has reacted to this “threat” by initiating “language partnership” with especially the African former colonies, allegedly so that they can all defend themselves better from the English expansion (Vigouroux, to appear). The theoretical model for this planned resistance to language endangerment is provided by what Calvet (2004) and Swaan (2001, inspired by earlier work of Calvet’s) identify as the “gravitational model” of language coexistence. According to them, languages in different nations or regions can form galaxy-type “constellations” or alliances in which “central,” official languages (typically European) enable them to connect with the world on the international level, while the indigenous languages facilitate contacts within, especially within the majority, masses of the population. La Francophonie more or less uses this model to argue that commitment from speakers of these languages to French would protect it from the expansion of English. La Francophonie can in return fund the promotion of the (demographically more important) indigenous languages nationally, especially in the area of education. As Vigouroux aptly asks, what do African languages really have to gain from this “partnership”?

It is not obvious that the indigenous African languages have anything to gain from the proposed “partnership.” The level of funding is usually only symbolic and too small to solve practical issues associated with the teaching of even a privileged subset of the indigenous languages and with the production of linguistic teaching materials. Insofar as

the maintenance of the indigenous languages is concerned, schools have had a marginal role to play, although adequate education in indigenous languages would produce qualitatively more fluent literacy and perhaps increase it demographically. The ethnographic marginalization of the indigenous languages during the colonial rule and by most of the post-independence administrations has not reduced their vitality. Any threat to them has come from elsewhere and, as shown above, potentially no more from English as an imperial lingua franca than it has come from French the official language.

The “gravitational model” itself has been conceived of on a fundamental ignorance of important cases in Africa itself that speak against it. Two such counterexamples can be found in Tanzania and Cameroon, where English and French (in Eastern Cameroon in the latter case) replaced German as the “central language” but the shift has affected neither the vitality of the indigenous languages nor the geographical and demographic expansion of Swahili in Tanzania. One may also want to consider Mauritius, where English replaced French as the official language, though the latter has maintained its status as the language of culture. Here too, the shift has had no impact of the adoption of Mauritian Creole as the national, multiethnic vernacular. Language coexistence and competition are certainly complex states of affairs and such oversimplified approaches to them do very little that sheds light on the process of language endangerment as one of the possible outcomes, least of all about the conditions that produce it.

#### **4. Lessons from South Africa**

With an overwhelming black majority, 76.7% of the total population according to the 1996 census, which is largely disenfranchised from the modern economic system, South Africa is very similar to other sub-Saharan African countries. Yet, it is also so different

from the same nations, not only because it now has the most prosperous economic system in sub-Saharan Africa and is emerging as a major player in international politics but also because it has had a different kind of colonial history. Unlike the other black African countries, which evolved from trade to exploitation colonies and hosted a moderate size of European colonizers, South Africa experienced an overlay of settlement and exploitation colonization, which introduced a sizeable proportion of Europeans (close to 10%) and Asians (as slaves or contract laborers).

Quite early in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, Dutch migrants came to settle, joined later on by some French Huguenots and Germans, and together they would later identify themselves, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Afrikaners. This self-identification was in resistance to the British exploitation colonization since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, under which they felt disenfranchised politically, economically, and linguistically and decided to distinguish themselves more clearly as African Whites from the European Whites. Toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they would also declare the political and structural autonomy of their language variety, henceforth known as Afrikaans, from metropolitan Dutch.<sup>5</sup> The British colonizers also introduced English, which the Afrikaners felt obliged to acquire as a lingua franca, while keeping Dutch as an exclusionary vernacular and the dominant business language in parts of South Africa where they became the demographic majority or economically the most powerful ones (i.e., in the Cape provinces and in Gauteng). To be sure, it also became the vernacular of many Khoisan populations who, also facing the southwards expansion of the Bantu populations, were apparently the first to be enslaved by the European colonists (those who would become the Boers and, later, the Afrikaners),

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<sup>5</sup> This is what Chaudenson (1992, 2001) identifies, in the case of creoles, as a linguistic *autonomization* process, concurrent with a *normalization* process, which makes divergences from the metropolitan norms normal and produces a new local, colonial norm.

working mostly as their domestics. It was likewise appropriated as a vernacular by most of the Coloreds (products of mixed unions between the Europeans and the non-Europeans). Equally limited in access to the Bantu population until the collapse of the apartheid system, English remained the vernacular of a minority of British colonizers/settlers and South African Indians.

Under the apartheid regime, the Bantu languages remained largely contained in the rural areas, since their speakers were prohibited by the law of the land to live near the urban white populations. Those who worked there lived in the neighboring townships, the home of most Colored and Asian populations. The most destitute of them lived in the squatter camps which are still part of the huge South African urban periphery today. The country thus entered the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a unique population structure that defines the dynamics of language coexistence and competition differently from elsewhere, with peculiarities that are nonetheless quite informative about ecological factors that bear on the processes of language endangerment and loss.

The first Asian populations brought to South Africa were Malay speakers. They came as slaves and, like African slaves in the New World and Indian Ocean, they too lost their language to the masters' language: the colonial Dutch now identified as Afrikaans. Living conditions, under which they did not form critical masses locally, must have prevented them from maintaining their language. Those populations are nowadays included among the Coloreds.

The contract laborers from the Indian Peninsula had an experience similar to those who were taken to the Caribbean (as in Guyana and Trinidad, where they became creole speakers). Multilingualism among them and the work conditions in the mines forced

them to shift from their ancestral languages. Isolation from the Bantu populations and the economic destitution of the latter kept the newcomers from investing in any of the Bantu languages, none of which is widely spoken throughout the country. They appropriated Fanakalo, a new contact-based variety based primarily on Zulu, for work in the mines and nonstandard English as a vernacular, which has evolved into what Mesthrie (1992) calls South African Indian English. It is to this new English vernacular that Indic languages have been losing the competition in South Africa, as children have found it less competitive to stick to their parents' language traditions.

As noted above, most the Khoisan populations, whose land was being settled by both the Bantu and the Boers populations (Dutch and other Europeans before the British colonization), lost their languages to those of the colonists. As the Bantu populations were barred from living in the city and from socializing with the Europeans, few of them learned either English or Afrikaans as vernaculars, although the better educated of these Natives acquired these European languages as *lingua francas*. Anti-apartheid riots had a lot to do with how Black South Africans claimed their rights to the European languages, which held one of the keys to the modern economic world order.<sup>6</sup> The containment of the Bantu languages in the rural areas, where they have also remained geographically and socially separate from each other as vernaculars has kept them from competing with each other and as a group with the European languages, although these are now gaining more currency in the city even among Bantu populations. The fact that at least half of the South African Bantu populations are still rural is the best protection that their languages have

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<sup>6</sup> The Afrikaners, who once had kept Blacks from learning their language (from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century), now imposed it on them as the European language in the school system but prevented them from learning English, the language that would open the doors of economic success and the outside world to them.

got, though it sadly also reflects the extent to which the same populations continue to be marginalized economically.<sup>7</sup> South African Blacks are still where Native Americans were in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century United States, when isolation on the reservations protected their languages while marginalizing them from the economic prosperity enjoyed by the majority of the European immigrants.

However, regarding the two European languages, the balance of power has also shifted since the end of the apartheid regime. English has emerged as the lingua franca of predilection among South Africans. More and more affluent families of all races in the city are raising their children as native English speakers. Although most Afrikaners are still raising their children as Afrikaans native speakers, more and more of them are also raising them as bilingual native speakers of Afrikaans and English. According to Broeder et al. (2002), there are also a few Afrikaner families who are raising their children as monolingual or dominant-English speakers. Particularly significant in this trend is the fact that Afrikaans seems to be returning to its 19<sup>th</sup>-century status as an ethnic language, especially with more and more affluent Colored parents and members of the Bantu elite are making sure that their children grow to be fluent (native) English speakers ready to compete with other English speakers in the economic sector where English is the dominant language (Giliomee 2003). On TV and the radio, there are more programs in English than in Afrikaans. On TV, many Afrikaans programs are shown with subtitles in English, while the converse is not true. English is definitely growing as the dominant

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<sup>7</sup> The South African road infrastructure also leads to this conclusion. The Bantu villages are far and not easily accessible from the country's first rate highway system. It is as if no particular effort has been made to connect the relevant populations with the modern economy that is still largely controlled by the White population, although not every SA White is affluent.

lingua franca of the educated and/or affluent segment of the population at the expense of Afrikaans.

Overall, Afrikaans was the mother tongue of close to 6 million South Africans (14.4 % of the total population; most of the speakers being Afrikaners and Colored) in 2000, while English was the mother tongue of only 3.5 million (8.6 % of the total population; 40 % of the speakers being Whites; Giliomee 2003). Despite these statistics, the current dynamics of language practice suggest that Afrikaans is being endangered, especially with fewer and fewer Colored children acquiring English only, with fewer and fewer non-Afrikaners showing interest in speaking Afrikaans, and also more and more Afrikaner children acquiring both English and Afrikaans natively or only English. As observed by Giliomee (2003:21), English is emerging as “the only language that is spoken by virtually all the literate people” in South Africa. Loss of protection from the government and the association of English with the more lucrative sectors of the economy may be sounding the toll of the demise of Afrikaans, a process that is already also obvious in the academic selector.

It is generally dangerous to hazard predictions about evolution, as it subject to various ecological factors that may change unpredictably. The main reason why I chose to speculate on the possible demise of Afrikaans is the fact that linguists have relied too heavily on demographics to predict which particular languages were about to die. They have usually claimed that the languages that have few speakers are likely to die soon, despite the fact that the sizes of the relevant populations of speakers are endemic, and the relevant languages may not be threatened by “globalization” as long they remain isolated or marginalized from the dominant cultures of their polities in which they are situated. I

submit that it is the evolutionary trajectory taken by a particular language (rather than the relative demographic size of its speakers compared to that of users of another language) which determines its future. Statistics alone without the history of trends do not mean much. Many indigenous languages in South Africa with fewer speakers (such as siSwati, Tshivenda, and isiNdebele, each spoken by less than one million people) are not following this evolutionary trajectory of Afrikaans, largely because most of their speakers are not in the same situation as those of Afrikaans and they do not experience any particular competition from English. It also appears that speakers do indeed target particular languages locally, in the geographical spaces they share directly with their neighbors (i.e., other people they interact with), and their day-to-day decisions are largely based on the benefits they hope to derive immediately or in the near future, if they must take classes. Economic considerations figure prominently among the relevant factors.

South Africa also draws our attention to the role that urbanization can play in driving language endangerment. As elsewhere in Black Africa, South African cities are contact settings in which languages come into new forms of coexistence and competition. One of the legacies of the apartheid system is that indigenous populations of most cities in South Africa are predominantly from the ethnolinguistic regions where they are located, producing no real competition among the indigenous languages. The competition between the indigenous and Asian languages has also been preempted by the apartheid regime, which has made obvious the fact that the geographical coexistence of languages does not necessarily entail competition among them, especially when the political system has imposed a clearcut social complementary distribution in the practice of the languages. The competition that matters the most in South African cities is that between the

European and the other languages. In the case of the Bantu languages, South Africa makes it obvious that a whole lot depends on how successful and accessible the economic system is. As noted above, the new political and economic regime since the collapse of the apartheid system has made English the most important language in the urban economy, especially outside the squatter camps and the townships. The proportion of non-Whites who speak English in a city such as Cape Town is very high, compared to speakers of French in cities such as Kinshasa, Brazzaville, and Bangui in central Africa. Could the economic “boom” of South Africa herald the spread of English even within the rural population once it spreads to the countryside too and the unemployment rate (now at 33%, lower than elsewhere in Black Africa) drops dramatically?

This particular evolution is actually reminiscent of that of Abidjan, in Côte d’Ivoire, where, as an urban vernacular or lingua franca, Dioula has not spread to the same extent as Lingala in Kinshasa or Wolof in Dakar and *le français populaire ivoirien* (FPI) has emerged as an alternative lingua franca or vernacular among the less educated, in competition with the local standard variety of French used by the more educated and affluent urbanites. Abidjan is one of those few places in colonial Africa (other than Gabon and Mozambique) where no indigenous language has prevailed as the universal vernacular or lingua franca of the masses of the population. It is not clear what the reason is for this and why the differential evolution between Dakar and Abidjan, both of which are capital cities of former French colonies. However, FPI is associated only with informal economy, not with the mainstream sectors of national economy. It is far from playing the role that English is now playing South African cities.

## **5. Conclusions**

The experience of language endangerment and language loss has certainly not been the same in Africa as it has been in North America and Australia, which have been constructed as prototypical of these processes around the world. Fewer languages have been endangered or reported dead in Africa than in these “prototypical” parts of the world. Where they have occurred, other indigenous African languages had more to do with the processes than the European languages, with the exception of some of the Khoisan languages in South Africa. These exceptions also show that the African experience has not been uniform everywhere either, which is in fact reminiscent of the fact that the experience of language endangerment and loss has been different in North America than in Latin America, where it is less advanced (Nettle & Romaine 2000).

Although European colonization has been the main trigger of these evolutions around the world over the past half millennium, it did not proceed the same way in North America and Australia as it did in Africa. The consequences of exploitation colonization differ from those of settlement colonization regarding the kinds of economic systems that have developed in the different colonies and the population structures that ensued (Mufwene 2001, 2004, 2005). One important factor to consider is the extent to which the new socio-economic world order replaced the old one. That determined whether or not (most of) the indigenous populations found it necessary to acquire the colonial language in order to adapt to their changing socio-economic ecologies. Regardless of the extent to which the colonial language produced by its new speakers has diverged from the metropolitan varieties, an important question is whether they have found it necessary for their adaptation.

Although it is important to ask whether the colonial system made it accessible and how, the history of anti-apartheid riots in South Africa makes it obvious that the colonized populations can claim their right to important economic languages of their nation; they can fight for access to the relevant languages. Quite important here is the question of whether the indigenous populations speak the colonial languages as vernaculars or as lingua francas. It appears that indigenous languages have been threatened by European colonial languages the most in those places where these have prevailed as cross-ethnic vernaculars, not in places where they have functioned primarily, if not almost only, as lingua francas. This is not to say that no indigenous languages in former European colonies have been threatened by other languages. It only means that while European colonization can be the main reason why the socio-economic world order has changed in many parts of the world, the European languages are not necessarily the ones affecting the vitality of indigenous languages. Sometimes it is some indigenous languages that are displacing/replacing other indigenous languages especially when they share vernacular functions in the same populations.

The variation in the evolutions summarized above can be correlated with differences in colonization style. As noted in Mufwene (2001, 2002, 2004, 2005), trade colonization has generally not disturbed the traditional patterns language practice. For most speakers the repertoires of languages have remained the same. Those involved in the trade with the foreigners learn to speak the foreign lingua franca or developed a special variety of one of their own languages associated with trade.

It can thus be safely observed that trade colonization added new language varieties to the local repertoires. The main reason for this kind of evolution is that the new varieties

did not compete in communicative function with the traditional languages or language varieties. They came along with the new communicative functions that they served. This particular evolutionary pattern can also be recognized in the introduction of scholastic varieties of European colonial languages as elite lingua francas, associated with non-traditional communicative functions and therefore competing not even with the new indigenous lingua francas and certainly not with the indigenous vernaculars. Instead it is the urban vernaculars associated with the dominant, blue-collar sector of the limited modern economy that have become a threat to the indigenous vernaculars, certainly in the city. However, only the future will tell whether they will displace the rural ethnic vernaculars. Exceptions to these observations in Black Africa are to be found in cities like Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), Libreville (Gabon), and Maputo (Mozambique) where European languages have evolved into important urban vernaculars or lingua francas. The future will also tell whether, with the degradation of the modern economy and changes in national language ideologies, the European languages will really spread to rural areas in the way they have in former settlement colonies around the world and therefore displace (most/many of) the indigenous regional lingua francas and/or ethnic vernaculars.

In connection with the above, the (non)uniform future of indigenous languages in South African cities can teach us a great deal, as it can highlight the connection that language spread has with economic development. Although South Africa already underscores, along with other sub-Saharan African countries the significance of variation within a population's geographical and social structure, it is special because it is one of the few places where settlement and exploitation colonization have overlapped. It may

help us articulate more clearly what particular factors make trade, settlement, and exploitation so different from each other with regard to language endangerment.

The discussion in this paper can also help us explain what linguists have misunderstood about the role of globalization in the endangerment of indigenous languages around the world. It can also help us find out why they have been misguided in singling English out as the “killer language” par excellence, aside from the mistake of attributing to it agency that it does not have. If one understands by *globalization* the world-wide diffusion of industrial and other cultural goods from particular parts of the world through a better infrastructure of transportation and telecommunication, then it is noteworthy that European languages, especially English, have not spread around the world to assume the same communicative function. In many places, these languages have spread only as lingua francas and have therefore not affected the indigenous languages that continue to function as vernaculars, especially in rural areas, where the majorities of Third World populations continue to live. Some forms of spatial and societal multilingualism do not necessarily create the kind of situations where one language must prevail at the expense of others. There can thus be multilingualism without competition of vernaculars, therefore without language endangerment, at least not immediately.

If one means by globalization the interdependencies that hold among the different parts and sectors of a territory's or community's economic system, then it is clear that this state of affairs is far from being uniform around the world. The economies of former settlement colonies and Western Europe are more globalized than those of former exploitation colonies. This is where language loss and endangerment are the more advanced. North America is more globalized than Latin America, and more indigenous

languages have survived in the latter than in the former. Overall, the factors determining language endangerment and loss are more complex than has been shown in the literature, and things have certainly not evolved in a uniform way around the world. As argued in Mufwene (2004), we can even learn more by undertaking to understand the causes of language loss in more distant history.

Finally, the impact of wars and refugeeism on the vitality of some languages is still to be explored. In this respect, Africa may be experiencing something that is decreasing elsewhere, but it is an aspect of language endangerment and loss that deserves attention, especially if we care to understand what happened in the past, in the history of mankind.

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