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## **The role of mother-tongue schooling in eradicating poverty: A response to Language and poverty**

Salikoko S. Mufwene

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## REVIEW ARTICLE

### **The role of mother-tongue schooling in eradicating poverty: A response to *Language and poverty***

SALIKOKO S. MUFWENE

*University of Chicago*

*Language and poverty*, ed. by WAYNE HARBERT, with help from SALLY MCCONNELL-GINET, AMANDA MILLER, and JOHN WHITMAN. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2008. Pp. xiii, 225. ISBN 9781847691194. \$44.95.

During the past two decades, field linguists have expressed serious concerns over the unprecedented rapid loss of 'indigenous languages', the endangerment of many others, and the implications of these processes for the education and economic development of 'indigenous populations', among other matters. The book to which this article responds is a rare volume that focuses on the use of 'minority languages' in education and national economies to eradicate poverty, as well as on socioeconomic hardships the poor experience in shifting to the 'dominant language'. I explain how complex the subject matter is and how little prepared linguistics still is for it. I show that our profession has no empirically grounded and ecology-specific advice to provide to economists and politicians who are concerned with societal multilingualism (mis)construed as an obstacle to economic development. Nor does the field appear to have determined under what ideal socioeconomic conditions a language can be maintained without being a liability or an unnecessary burden to its speakers.\*

*Keywords:* poverty, minority language/population, dominant language/population, ecology, formal/informal economy, language/human rights, mother-tongue education

1. INTRODUCTION. *Language and poverty (L&P)* is a title that I could not resist the invitation to review, chiefly because it invokes, among others, the following topics that have needed (more) attention in linguistics over the past two decades of increasing concern with language endangerment and loss: language and power, human rights and language rights, the right of citizens to the language of modern economy and/or the State, the language of education and the right to education in one's mother tongue, language and socioeconomic inequality, language and economic development, poverty and linguistic competence, and affluence and linguistic diversity. Equally enticing is the fact that the book carries almost the same title as one edited in 1970 by Frederick Williams, which included the subtitle 'Perspectives on a theme'. Both are rare productions, although a few articles and book chapters have since been published on this subject matter that appears to have interested educators, sociologists, and economists more than it has linguists. Worth mentioning here is Djité 2008, to which I return below, though its focus is national economic development.<sup>1</sup> Overall, the title *Language and poverty* calls

\* I am grateful to Lenore Grenoble for encouraging me to ask the editors of *Language* to consider this extensive response to *Language and poverty* as a review article instead of the short review I had been invited to write. I thank the editors for showing so much flexibility regarding a small book that could otherwise pass as unproblematic because it promotes the received doctrine about the endangerment and loss of 'indigenous languages'. I am equally indebted to Cécile B. Vigouroux for feedback on a draft of this essay and to an anonymous referee for constructive and encouraging comments on my submission. I am solely responsible for all the remaining shortcomings.

<sup>1</sup> Inspired apparently by Williams 1970, a special issue of the *Journal of Negro Education* (vol. 43, no. 3) was devoted in 1974 to the question of how to deal particularly with the language variety of the African American pupil in the classroom. It thus contributed to setting up a trend that has recurred in linguistics and language education to date, as is evident from several reactions by linguists to the uproar aroused by the Oak-

for an assessment of how much progress linguistics has made on the subject matter since 1970, which I attempt to provide at the end of this essay. I then focus on whether, based on the present volume, one can claim that linguists now have a better sense of how they can help eradicate poverty through particular language policies or practices.

The table of contents was critical in my decision to review this book. It covers a wide range of titles that, consistent with the above list of interesting topics, promises to inform the reader on various aspects of the relation between language and poverty in various parts of the world: Ch. 2, 'Poverty as a crucial factor in language maintenance and language death: Case studies from Africa', by HERMAN M. BATIBO (23–36); Ch. 3, 'Language diversity and poverty in Africa', by MATTHIAS BRENZINGER (37–49); Ch. 4, 'The impact of the hegemony of English on access to and quality of education with special reference to South Africa', by NEVILLE ALEXANDER (53–66); Ch. 5, 'Econolinguistics in the USA', by JOHN BAUGH (67–77); Ch. 6, 'Where in the world is US Spanish? Creating a space of opportunity for US Latinos', by OFELIA GARCÍA and LEAH MASON (78–101); Ch. 7, 'Perpetuating inequality: Language disadvantage and capability deprivation of tribal mother tongue speakers in India', by AJIT K. MOHANTY (102–24); Ch. 8, 'Biodiversity, linguistic diversity and poverty: Some global patterns and missing links', by SUZANNE ROMAINE (127–46); Ch. 9, 'Language and poverty: Measurements, determinants, and policy responses', by FRANÇOIS VAILLANCOURT (147–60); Ch. 10, 'Losing the names: Native languages, identity and the state', by PETER WHITELEY (161–79); Ch. 11, 'The role of linguists in language maintenance and revitalization: Documentation, training and materials development', by LENORE A. GRENOBLE, KEREN D. RICE, and NORVIN RICHARDS (183–201); and Ch. 12, 'Preserving digital language materials: Some considerations for community initiatives', by HELEN ARISTAR DRY (202–22). These chapters are bracketed by an introductory chapter (1–19) and a brief conclusion (223–25), both written by the editors.

By design or by accident, the contributions also complement each other regionally.<sup>2</sup> This feature of the book makes it difficult to discuss the chapters in an integrated manner, since even the POVERTY AND LANGUAGE theme ties them together only to the extent that the vitality of a language or access to it as an asset is affected by the condition of poverty. To be sure, most of the essays present important perspectives on the vitality or endangerment of language varieties spoken by poor and/or marginalized populations. As becomes evident below, however, this theme does not run through all of them. I highlight the common thread where it obtains between some chapters, which I otherwise discuss individually, focusing on their strongest contributions to the subject matter. For the sake of convenience, I start with the two essays by the editors.

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land School District's decision in the Fall of 1996 to use Ebonics/AAVE (African American Vernacular English) in the classroom and the subsequent position statement of the LSA on this language variety in January 1997. But while the special issue sheds light on how a school child can be disadvantaged by his/her home language variety, characterized as 'poverty language', it offers no more concrete solutions toward eradicating poverty than Williams 1970 did. I thus restrict my comparisons to: (i) the latter book, the first milestone publication; (ii) Djité 2008, since it deals with poverty; and (iii) the present volume that prompted my response.

<sup>2</sup> One may wish that more parts of the world were covered, which would have made the book bigger and perhaps more informative, especially about situational diversity. Thus, one could learn, for instance, whether the connection between language and poverty in monolingual societies is different in kind from that in multilingual societies, or whether the nature of the connection is as significant in developed as in developing nations. No particular reason is given in the introduction for the editors' choice of topics or parts of the world covered in *L&P*. The editors might have preferred depth over breadth in the discussions of poverty and some ways that it affects the vitality of many languages. We see what they have accomplished in the discussion below.

2. DISCUSSION. The introduction identifies two particular foci for the book: (i) ‘how poverty affects language survival’, and (ii) ‘the role of language in determining the economic status of speakers’ (1). The second is an important theme in Williams 1970. Discussing the various contributions, especially Brenzinger’s chapter, the editors highlight the fact that poverty can contribute as much to the maintenance of linguistic diversity as to its loss. Linguistic diversity may be sustained through the economic and social marginalization of the poor, while language loss may be a consequence of pressures exerted on the poor to assimilate to the dominant socioeconomic structure and to shift to the language associated with it. Whether a language is maintained or lost under these conditions highlights the role that language plays in people’s lives, either facilitating or impeding access to financial resources (therefore to economically comfortable living conditions), to education, and to health services. Thus, in many places, poverty reflects the extent to which ‘indigenous languages’ act as barriers to the basic welfare of some people, although Djité (2008) may think this is a pretext for not empowering such languages economically.<sup>3</sup> The editors do not miss this point, as they explain that language often serves as a tool of discrimination against some people, as also noted in several contributions to Williams 1970.

By contrast, the editors beat about the bush regarding the interpretation of POVERTY, a key concept in the title of the book. They reproduce from Vaillancourt a distinction between ‘monetary and nonmonetary measures of poverty’ (4) and entertain ideas such as ‘language of poverty’ (associated with Romaine) and ‘indigenous languages [being] themselves a form of wealth’ (associated with Whiteley). Unfortunately, these notions are not elaborated in any particularly (more) informative ways in the relevant chapters. It seems to me that both the editors and the contributors confuse the issues here, since it is intuitively clear that poverty first means some form of material deprivation. It is defined straightforwardly in, for instance, Wikipedia as ‘the condition of not having the means to afford basic human needs such as clean water, nutrition, health care, clothing and shelter’ or ‘the condition of having fewer resources or less income than others within a society or country, or compared to worldwide averages’.<sup>4</sup> These definitions should be able to provide the foundation for all of the questions I listed above and nurture discussions relevant to the principal theme of the book.

Interestingly, the editors underscore the partial correlation between biological and linguistic diversity in different parts of the world (discussed by Romaine).<sup>5</sup> This obser-

<sup>3</sup> With its focus on Africa, Djité 2008 is an informative discussion on this subject matter from the point of view of engaging indigenous populations in the economic development of their nations. I often use scare quotes around ‘indigenous languages’ simply because I am concerned about how the word *indigenous* is typically used in the literature. It is as if only territories outside of Europe have indigenous languages, and as if indigenous languages were endangered only by those of the powerful immigrant populations. I would like to think that every part of the world has languages indigenous to itself. In some cases, as in South Africa, languages can be stratified diachronically on the scale of indigeneity, with the Khoisan languages being more indigenous than the Bantu languages and both of these being more indigenous than Afrikaans, to the extent that their diversification into their present structures is subsequent to the migrations of the relevant populations into the region. As a variety that emerged in South Africa, Afrikaans certainly has a claim to indigeneity, just like, for example, creoles and indigenized Englishes all over the world.

<sup>4</sup> I found these Wikipedia definitions to be more informative and straightforward than the corresponding article of *Encyclopedia Britannica*. They are also close to Djité’s (2008) discussion of poverty in relation to economic development and in fact quite in agreement with the following characterization of poverty given by Williams: ‘economic disadvantage ... “lack of necessary resources”’ (1970:3). According to the latter, concepts such as ‘cultural disadvantage’ and ‘deficit’ that are attested in the literature on language in education are extrapolations from the economic concept of poverty. One can hardly dispute this interpretation.

<sup>5</sup> Moore and colleagues (2002), however, point out that the correlation is only partial. First, it depends on the particular kinds of biological species one focuses on. Second, focusing on vertebrates, there is no such

vation enables them to highlight the fact that many of the regions that are rich in both forms of diversity are also those with the highest proportions of poor people (also pointed out by Romaine). Still, there are not many ways of interpreting poverty in this case, though there are communicative contexts in which one can speak derivatively of intellectual poverty, for example, or those in which some scholars have perversely equated linguistic differences with 'deficit' on the part of the poor or the underprivileged (Williams 1970). The basic idea remains that of the condition under which one is deprived of basic assets that the average person is expected to have in his or her socio-economic environment. Starting from this understanding, one can assess, for instance, what kind of impact poverty exerts on individual speakers' linguistic behaviors (especially regarding language choice) and, consequently, on language vitality in a particular population.

The reader may now be (more) curious about the extent to which the chapters will inform him/her about how the interactions of economic and linguistic factors can enhance or impede the fitness of a particular population in a polity, socially, economically, and healthwise. (One can of course also argue that these are all facets of the same complex reality, life in society, especially since these parameters are interrelated.) Will the book be informative about the role that language choice can play, directly or indirectly, in either keeping some people in poverty (thus, decreasing their fitness in their socioeconomic ecology) or pulling them out of it (thus, becoming an asset to them and enhancing their fitness)? The question is relevant because both the title of the book and its table of contents suggest somewhat of an interdisciplinary approach, as underscored decades earlier by especially Roger Shuy in Williams 1970. Indeed, as in *L&P*, there are some nonlinguists out there, especially educators and economists, who are hoping that linguists, the experts on various aspects of language, will advise them on how to deal with, for instance, multilingualism in poor countries. Often enough, multilingualism is perceived as an obstacle to economic development (e.g. Alesina et al. 2003, Klasen et al. 2005), though Djité (2008) characterizes this view as a 'myth'.

In the short, three-page conclusion, the editors rightly underscore the need to approach the theme of language and poverty from multidisciplinary perspectives, a desideratum that is partly met in this book by the inclusion of chapters by an economist, Vaillancourt, and an anthropologist cum ethnographer, Whiteley. They also claim that there is no uniform definition of poverty across different disciplines, an assertion obviously disputed by my comments above. They invoke Brenzinger, Batibo, Romaine, and García and Mason to entertain the idea of 'turn[ing] minority languages into economic assets' (224). We see below whether the book shows us how. The editors themselves do not have much to say about this, indeed reflecting the average linguist's preoccupation with languages as knowledge and/or representation systems and as markers of social identity (see also Williams 1970), hardly as economic assets in some cases or liabilities in others.

I personally think that in the context of language coexistence and competition (in the sense that linguistic variants or alternative language varieties are not equally rated socially or economically) it is important not to disregard the role of language as a tool that speakers can capitalize on when it is advantageous to them or possibly discard when it

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match in the Central African plateau region, where there is less linguistic richness, perhaps as a consequence of diseases (due to the tsetse fly in the present case) affecting the indigenous populations. Moreover, one should not overlook population movements and the ways that they have affected biological diversity in the host habitat.

is perceived as no longer useful (Mufwene 2008, part 3). We must remember that nobody lives in an immutable (material) culture and that memories of the past may best be kept in libraries and museums and not necessarily in the populations that we think are naturally bound to them.<sup>6</sup> Otherwise, linguists must explicitly articulate ways in which indigenous populations can live both in the present and in the past without considering this particular past as an unnecessary burden. Likewise, linguists must be clear about how countries that are rich in ecological, cultural, and linguistic diversity but are economically poor can, with their limited financial means, satisfy both the human rights of their populations to evolve out of poverty and the alleged rights of their languages to each be used in the education system and/or other cultural domains.<sup>7</sup> I show below that the contributions that address this question are not informative enough.

Ch. 2, by Herman Batibo, focuses largely on the fact that in southern Africa the Khoisans and Pygmies have become minorities next to Bantu populations (described as 'majority' or 'dominant'), who have settled in (one may also say 'colonized') their traditional homelands. Together with the European colonizers, who came later, the Bantu have modified the geographical ecologies that both the colonizing and indigenous populations now all share. In particular, the Bantu have instituted or adopted new socioeconomic world orders that have made it difficult for the Khoisans and Pygmies to continue their hunter-gatherer lifestyles. Forced to shift to the economic practices of the newcomers in order to survive, they have also been under pressure to adopt the 'dominant languages' of their Bantu neighbors as their vernaculars.<sup>8</sup>

Batibo argues that it is still possible to revitalize the endangered languages of some Khoisan minorities. He illustrates his point with the Naro people, of Western Botswana, whose language has been saved by the Kuru Development Trust (set up by the Dutch Reformed Church), which helped them develop an independent economic system based on traditional knowledge. The Trust has provided them with education and literacy in their own language, and set up a community political council that oversees their politi-

<sup>6</sup> The fate of several European languages in North America, which have been supplanted by English as the White American vernacular, illustrates this particular evolutionary trajectory whereby speakers give up a language that is socioeconomically less useful to them in favor of another, thereby enhancing their socioeconomic fitness. It can also be illustrated with various cultural practices that have likewise been replaced by others, explaining why White North American cultures have diverged in many ways from European traditions (see e.g. Richerson & Boyd 2005).

<sup>7</sup> As well documented as Djité 2008 is on the situation in Africa, the author does not articulate how the universal economic empowerment of all 'indigenous languages' can work if there is no money to fund the relevant education programs. I return to this question below. To be fair, he leaves open the possibility of investing only in the languages of wider communication already used by the Africans themselves. The confusion in his work arises from his reference to 'local' languages even when he simply means 'indigenous' languages, some of which are regional. Indeed the regional *lingua francas* are the ones most commonly used in the African informal economy. See also Mufwene 2008:Ch. 13.

<sup>8</sup> That they are shifting to Bantu rather than to the colonial European languages is a consequence of the fact that European colonization just added another layer to the social stratification instituted earlier by the Bantu settlement colonization of southern Africa (Mufwene 2008, part 3). The Khoisans and Pygmies have been in more regular contact with the Bantu populations, and historically for a longer period of time, than with the Europeans. (The latter are in fact the other minorities, as powerful as they have been economically.) The particular way in which the shift has proceeded is also a consequence of the fact that most of the minority of Africans who speak the European colonial languages regularly and fluently use them typically as *lingua francas*, not as vernaculars (as has been made evident from the growing literature on indigenized Englishes and 'les français africains'). In addition, most of the modern economy that developed during the colonial and postcolonial periods has employed blue-collar labor and operated in indigenous African languages, Bantu in southern Africa. As Djité (2008) articulates so clearly, the greatest part of African economies is informal and operates in the indigenous, rather than the European, languages.

cal interests. Given the current economic condition of sub-Saharan Africa (except in South Africa), don't we wish there were a similar development trust for every economically destitute ethnolinguistic group!

There are, however, a host of questions that arise from this chapter. For instance, under what condition does a population, and by extension their language, become a minority X? Why have languages spoken by small Bantu groups not experienced the same fate as the Khoisan and Pygmy languages? Does their maintenance turn them ipso facto into 'majority languages'? Also, does the fact that a particular language evolved into an important lingua franca in some part of the world automatically reduce the other languages to the status of minority languages? For instance, have Swahili, Hausa, and Lingala, which are used as major regional lingua francas in East Africa, West Africa, and Central Africa, respectively, automatically reduced the vernaculars spoken in the same regions to the status of minority languages? Is it really true that speakers of languages other than the major ones are all disadvantaged 'because they happen not to have sufficient proficiency in the widely used language' (31)? This would make it difficult to account for the fact that the present economic and/or political elite in sub-Saharan Africa are not all native speakers of the 'majority' languages they use professionally or of the European languages that have become emblematic of their power. In fact, the proficiency of large proportions of these elite groups leaves much to be desired, at least by native speakers' standards.<sup>9</sup>

Urbanization in Africa has also been blamed for the endangerment of ethnic languages. This is a position that I myself also assumed without nuance in Mufwene 2004, 2008, until I paid more attention to a peculiarity of the relevant cities. Many of the cities' huge peripheries of (new) neighborhoods have expanded without an urbanization plan and without economic growth. They amount to mega-villages that lack the requisite urban infrastructure, especially in roads and transportation, to sustain even the informal economy. Many, if not most, of the newcomers live with relatives or friends and are forced to socialize along ethnolinguistic lines, using their own ethnic vernaculars most of the time, interacting little with members of other ethnolinguistic groups, and only occasionally practicing the urban vernaculars as lingua francas. It is indeed true that children of such populations typically adopt the urban vernacular as their mother tongue (contrary to Batibo's claim that they have no 'reasonable proficiency in their mother tongues',<sup>10</sup> p. 26). But the supply of ethnic languages from the rural areas, thanks to continuous rural exodus, does not appear to have abated.

Although the fact that urban children do not learn their ancestral languages as vernaculars can be interpreted as a symptom of language endangerment, there are many more children in rural areas who are not actually giving up these vernaculars, especially nowadays, when there are no significant economic pressures that would favor other languages. As I explain below, even (boarding) schools have not exerted on ethnic lan-

<sup>9</sup> Such facts indeed mitigate Djité's (2008) central argument that Africa's modern formal economies have not grown largely because its 'local languages' have not been recruited to 'drive economic growth'. Ironically, many, if not most, of the people involved in the few jobs that are found in the 'formal' sector are multilinguals who do not operate in the European languages (Mufwene 2008). They use indigenous lingua francas in business. To be sure, Djité himself notes that most Africans are naturally multilingual, though their repertoires do not necessarily include the European languages. I return to this point below.

<sup>10</sup> As far as I know, MOTHER TONGUE does not mean 'mother's language', and there are many children of immigrants whose mother tongues are definitely not the ones that their parents brought with them from the homeland but are simply the vernaculars spoken by the host population. I am sure Batibo must have intended to decry the children's poor command of their parents' or ethnic vernaculars. Because the wording says something quite different from this, however, one wonders how none of the editors caught the misstatement.

guages the negative effect that has usually been associated with these institutions in the literature.

Regardless of whether urban centers endanger ethnic languages, I am rather disappointed that the suggested solution repeats the need for literacy, which is more for preservation than for maintenance. I would have expected a suggestion for some way of stopping or decreasing rural exodus and/or empowering the ethnic languages economically, as is in fact the case with the Naro people. If the 'pride and self-esteem' (32) associated with literacy are factors as critical in language maintenance as Batibo suggests, note that it is actually economic empowerment that made literacy relevant to the Naro and apparently restored these positive ethnic feelings.

Lastly, I am happy that Batibo mentions refugees as a factor in language endangerment. One must also remember, however, that in many cases refugees have not been assimilated by the host populations. They have often been kept in camps on the periphery of the host populations and have therefore interacted very little with them. In addition, they have sometimes had to return home when violence arose in the host country. The long-term impact of wars on sub-Saharan African languages cannot be predicted, especially since it is typically just a few affluent people who manage to resettle elsewhere, while the poorest majority run back and forth from one war-torn territory to another. Refugeeism (a term I am happy to see confirmed by *Webster's Online!*) certainly contributes to poverty, since it subjects the refugees to destitution. Functioning as ethnic identity markers, the languages spoken by the refugees actually function as barriers to their assimilation by the host populations, especially when the latter's poor economic conditions can hardly sustain any demographic increase and more competition for the already limited resources. Antagonism sometimes arises when the refugees receive economic assistance that the host population also feels entitled to.

If the refugees could be assimilated, provided they overcame a barrier in speaking the host population's language at the expense of their own, then the question arises of whether there are any language rights worth discussing. This is certainly the kind of situation that makes it difficult to consider the right of languages on a par with the human right to safety, sanitation, education in any language, and economic comfort. This is, in fact, a topic that could have deserved a separate chapter in this book, compared to one or two others that were included (see below).

In a nutshell, Ch. 3 by Matthias Brenzinger correctly points out that the reason that so many languages have survived in Africa, especially in the rural environments, is because this continent has been left on the margins of worldwide modern economic development. I submit that this African peculiarity is largely also a consequence of the fact that the continent has been colonized on the exploitation model, in which the colonizers showed little interest in either Europeanizing the indigenous populations culturally, or in setting up economic systems that would be competitive with those of the European settlement colonies of the Americas and Australia (Mufwene 2008).<sup>11</sup> African

<sup>11</sup> This observation is not an apology for the fact that the African political leadership has generally driven the economic infrastructure inherited from the colonial regime into the ground, as well noted by Djité (2008). My intention is only to note that the current systems were not set up to produce identical socioeconomic results in the first place. I am also deliberately oversimplifying things here regarding the colonization of Africa. For instance, I am overlooking the earlier settlement colonization of North Africa by the Arabs that began in the seventh century. This was a case of population movements, settlement colonization (like in the Americas and Australia), and language contacts that appears to have driven to extinction several indigenous languages survived today by the varieties identified here and there as Berber, Amazigh, or Tuareg, among other names (Mufwene 2001).



countries generally became politically independent at a time when urbanization was minimal and the rural interior was culturally as traditional (as in the late nineteenth century) as when the European colonization (in the sense of acquiring control of both people and the natural resources of a territory) really started.

As highlighted in my discussion of the introduction, Brenzinger also notes, again correctly, that the same poverty that has contributed to the maintenance of linguistic diversity is a factor that can likewise threaten it. The reason is that populations that consider their ancestral languages to be obstacles to economic development can just as easily give them up for the dominant language of the available economic opportunities. What may be more peculiar to Africa than to Europe, the Americas, and Australia is that the threat is typically felt or feared from major indigenous languages (urban vernaculars and/or regional *lingua francas*) rather than from the European languages associated with colonization and globalization, notwithstanding the discussion above about urbanization and economic development.

Allegedly, 'minority languages' in Africa have been threatened especially by the fact that mother-tongue education means education in an indigenous *lingua franca* rather than necessarily in the child's own ethnic language. Brenzinger fears that the child may become more fluent in the language of education than in his/her ancestral language. I think one should refrain from generalizing too hastily here. A lot depends on whether the child proceeds past elementary or high school and whether he/she returns to the village after attending high school away from home. The absence of books and print media in rural areas, if these were affordable in the first place, makes it difficult for many to sustain literacy. Brenzinger identifies other threats to indigenous languages, for example, in wars, in the now-increasing urbanization (in the sense of increasing rural exodus to the city, which allegedly brings ethnic languages into contact with urban vernaculars), and in changes in economic lifestyles.

My responses are similar to those articulated above in my discussion of Batibo's chapter. Perhaps only the last phenomenon, viz., changes in economic styles, deserves a relatively elaborate discussion here, since I can underscore the fact that it is not necessarily the languages of the economically most powerful people that endanger 'weak' languages everywhere. As noted above, European colonial languages are demographically still minority languages in Africa, although the elite minority that speak them the most control national economies and perpetuate the socially exclusionary attitudes practiced earlier by the European colonizers (Mazrui & Mazrui 1998). Most of the economies that employ the masses of Africans involve manual labor and operate in indigenous languages, thus keeping the indigenous ethnic vernaculars generally safe from the alleged devastation by European colonial languages. Refugeism associated with wars is indeed a threat to some languages, but, as noted above, refugees cannot assimilate culturally when they are kept on the margins of the host populations and are sometimes driven back home by inhospitable conditions.

Regarding urbanization, note that there are also many disenchanting (aspiring) urbanites who return to the rural interior and are keen on proving themselves as speakers of their ancestral languages. It is really difficult to anticipate the long-term outcome of the bidirectional human traffic between the urban and rural areas. Note, for instance, that the demographic depletion of Africa through the slave trade did not lead to the extinction of many of the languages spoken in the places where the slaves were captured, although one can speculate that there would now be many more speakers of some of the languages without this wicked chapter in African history. As for education, it would have exerted its negative effect on most ethnic languages a long time ago if it really

could have the kind of impact associated with it. In most cases, it has produced balanced individual bilingualism in the regional lingua franca and in the students' ethnic vernaculars, especially when the children did not attend elementary and/or secondary school too far away from home, which has increasingly been the case.

In any case, assuming that all of Brenzinger's prognostics are accurate, the question is, what solution(s) does linguistics have to offer to populations that are certainly correct in treating their languages foremost as tools for adjustment to their changing socioeconomic ecologies rather than as representational systems? What are the best socioeconomic plans that can help the relevant populations both to get out of poverty and to maintain their languages? Traditional African societies were economically more egalitarian than they are today, when most of Africans are both societally and individually multilingual. Were Africa to develop economically in the Western style (which I take to be the current worldwide yardstick), what particular socioeconomic structure(s) do linguists have to recommend that would help Africa sustain multilingualism (contrary to the trend in Western countries)? Other than bemoaning the loss of linguistic diversity (apparently as part of a museum culture rather than consistent with normal natural evolution through the agency of humans), what concrete advice do linguists have to give politicians and economists who want to develop their countries economically but complain that multilingualism is too expensive for their means?<sup>12</sup> As pointed out by Ladefoged (1992), what do you tell a parent who encourages his/her child to move away from their ancestral land and/or from their language in search of better economic opportunities? Subsequently, how does one advise such migrants to maintain their ethnic languages when they move to a place where they probably will no longer be able to practice the ancestral language with anyone (on a regular basis) and cannot keep in regular contact with their homeland?

In Ch. 4, Neville Alexander also opposes Black Africa's major indigenous languages to the European colonial languages. He articulates the distinction in terms of 'dominant' (indigenous) and 'hegemonic' (European) languages,<sup>13</sup> highlighting the way that the African elite has perpetuated a socioeconomic stratification that has associated the 'hegemonic languages' with 'formal economy' and the 'dominant' ones with 'informal economy'. The 'hegemonic languages' empower their speakers with extensive economic power and social status, while the 'dominant languages', associated with manual labor, wield no, or little, economic and political power. According to Alexander, this ranking reflects the particular social interests of the elite minority. Citing Djité (2005:15; see also Djité 2008), he notes the irony arising from the fact that 'the "infor-

<sup>12</sup> This is, incidentally, the respect in which I am disappointed with Djité (2008), because he offers no concrete, explicit advice beyond arguing that using indigenous languages would involve more of the concerned population in the economic development of their countries. Although he does not say that every ethnic language must be used in the process, he does not address the question of which ones must be favored, which ones can be overlooked at what cost, and under what particular conditions. That is, he has no concrete advice for the political leadership about how to proceed with the economic empowerment of indigenous languages in the formal sector.

<sup>13</sup> Afrikaans is overlooked in this case, for the sake of convenience, simply in order not to complexify our metadiscourse here. Although it is indigenous to Africa (see n. 3), it does not quite fit together with major, relatively more indigenous languages such as Hausa, Wolof, Lingala, and Swahili, which have more lingua franca speakers than vernacular or ethnic speakers. But despite its primarily European ancestry, it is not hegemonic, or no longer is, certainly not in the same way that English is in South Africa. It undeniably wields economic and political power, however, for an important segment of the South African population, more specifically in some parts of the polity where the Afrikaners represent a large proportion of the population. Space considerations force us to overlook Afrikaans here.

mal economy” is often the major contributor to the GDP or the main source of employment’ in African countries (58).<sup>14</sup> Alexander submits that this is the domain for which indigenous African languages should be promoted the most, because the majorities of the national populations participate in it. The hegemonic languages, which have already carved a niche in Africa, can be reserved for ‘global trading’ (apparently the formal sector), consistent with the ‘global ecology of languages’ (56–59).

Alexander does not address the question, however, of the competition that arises between ‘dominant’ languages (such as Swahili and Amharic, cited on p. 57) and vernaculars that are also used in the informal economy. Or, should we infer instead that there are several levels of the ‘informal economy’ in which it would be practical to use more than the ‘dominant languages’?<sup>15</sup> Do the lingua francas and the vernaculars have different markets in the informal economy?

Alexander depicts a geographical area where one must also ask which languages are best suited to eradicate poverty. Note that the mother tongues of most of the collective majorities, the ethnic languages that are treated (perhaps unjustifiably) as ‘minority languages’, do not participate significantly in either the informal or the formal economy, though they have a niche in the traditional subsistence economy. The factors that bear on the vitality of these languages are not necessarily demographic (as in the case of the Pygmy and Khoisan languages discussed by Batibo); in fact, they are primarily economic. It is also not so simple to decide what language children should receive their education in, especially if education is intended to make them competitive in the economic market. This is a serious question of citizens’ rights to particular languages that can empower them economically, to which I return below.

I submit that because in many multilingual countries the major languages are dominant only as lingua francas but not as vernaculars, it is inaccurate to lump all ethnic languages into the category of ‘minority’ languages. The situation in Africa is not quite like that in Western nations where the dominant language is also the vernacular of the majority of the national population.

John Baugh, in Ch. 5, highlights the correlation between poverty and limited access to Standard English, the economically ‘dominant language’ in the US (75). Poverty makes it hard for many African Americans living in segregated neighborhoods to learn Standard English, especially because they do not interact regularly with its users, and thus are more likely to remain in poverty. This is very consistent with the ‘poverty cycle’ articulated by Williams (1970:2). Baugh also explores briefly the extent to which

<sup>14</sup> Vigouroux (2010) argues that it is perhaps the most reliable economic sector in most sub-Saharan African countries.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander may confuse some readers since he invokes in the same breath de Swaan’s (2001) notion of ‘language constellation’ (57) (which is similar to Calvet’s (2004) ‘gravitational model’) in his discussion of the ‘global culture’ that dictates individual speakers’ language choices. Both de Swaan and Calvet coined these notions to explain worldwide patterns of language choice as determined by the settings of interaction. According to them, ‘central’, typically European, languages ensure international communication, and ‘peripheral’, ethnic, languages local communication, while the indigenous lingua francas are used intranationally or regionally. The authors go as far as to suggest, curiously, that languages could form alliances to protect themselves from the expansion of English, the ‘super-central language’, which has generally been claimed to be the ‘killer language’ par excellence. I say ‘curiously’ because the vitality of a language is determined by its (would be) speakers, not by itself! The reality is that in former European exploitation colonies in Africa, the indigenous languages have typically been safe either from the national ‘central’, official, language or from English. We have evidence for this in places such as Cameroon and Tanzania, where the substitution of English for German did not spell a death sentence for Cameroon Pidgin English, trade Ewondo, and Swahili, all ‘dominant’ lingua francas. The ethnic languages are more likely to be endangered by the ‘dominant’ indigenous languages in the intermediate area of the ‘gravitation’.

the American social scheme of exclusion is practiced in other nations, such as South Africa, where 'few South Africans are native speakers of English' (75).

The reader should be reminded that the situation is actually more complex in the case of South Africa, where English has been in competition with Afrikaans for about two centuries now, and the latter was heavily promoted during the half-century of apartheid rule that began in the mid-twentieth century, though it has been disfavored since this regime ended in the mid-1990s. South Africa is also a place where the competition between the two European languages (at least based on their origins), which are the most empowered economically, was primarily the privilege of non-Blacks, especially the Whites. A new South African Standard English is just emerging now, however, used by a wider, multiethnic, educated elite, a large proportion of whom are nonnative speakers. Some may want to class it as an 'indigenized English'. The criteria used for exclusion, be they social or otherwise, are probably not comparable to those applicable in the US.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, in agreement with Baugh, one must acknowledge that poverty is a factor determining who can attend the kinds of schools that provide the best English teachers and the best technology in their education in South Africa.

It is also important to note that Afrikaans is still a useful asset in Kwazulu Natal and Western Cape provinces, for instance. Thus, because South Africa has experienced several layers of settlement and exploitation colonization (Mufwene 2001, 2008), one must be cautious in comparisons of North America with South Africa. The national language repertoires and the dynamics of language competition are not exactly the same in both countries, especially now that the political leadership is dominated by non-European nonnative speakers of English in South Africa. For many jobs, the question is more one of speaking some intelligible English than of mastering South African Standard English.

Ethnicity receives more attention in Ch. 6 by Ofelia García and Leah Mason. This provides an interesting history of how Spanish in the US has shifted in status from being the language of the conqueror to being that of the conquered. According to them, it is being driven out by English under the current economic pressures. This very interesting chapter is evidently in sharp contrast with the current political climate in the US, as many federal and state politicians have been claiming that Spanish is an increasing threat to English. Although this fear does not appear to be justified in the current socioeconomic ecology of the United States (see below), it arises largely from continued immigration from Latin America since the 1970s and from the ongoing practice of Spanish as the home language in many families. The politicians' focus is on the continuous external supply of Spanish, despite the fact that its consumption may be on the decline.

García and Mason argue that social segregation and racialism have fostered bilingualism among 89% of Hispanics at the expense of Spanish monolingualism (87).<sup>17</sup> They discuss the pressure that Hispanics have experienced to either shift to English or become bilingual in their mother tongue and the host language in order to escape poverty. According to them, English monolingualism has not typically been advanta-

<sup>16</sup> One may also raise an issue with Baugh's claim that Standard American English 'is spoken natively by millions of Americans' (75), since, after all, this is a variety generally taught in school, even if it is close enough to the vernaculars acquired natively by many (urban) White middle-class Americans. His statement acquires more social significance if it is interpreted to refer to the educated White, middle-class vernacular(s), because it suggests, accurately indeed, that one particular race is advantaged linguistically. We are dealing here with a fundamental question of what 'Standard English' is, how to define it, and who speaks it (natively). Its identification varies widely in the linguistics literature.

<sup>17</sup> Other studies such as Lopez & Estrada 2004 argue that few children are really invested in their parents' language and many of them are learning only English, especially by the third generation.

geous to Hispanics, as English monolinguals have often lagged behind their Anglo counterparts in school and on the job market. At the same time, they have been excluded from the asset that English-Spanish bilingualism is increasingly becoming; bilinguals (practitioners of 'selective acculturation', 89) have earned higher incomes than monolinguals in Florida. The authors do not say whether this discrepancy is replicated elsewhere in the US or whether Florida is a special case, owing especially to the way the socioeconomic structure has accommodated Hispanic immigrants to the state, especially the Cubans.

Note also that the ethnographic fate of Spanish in the US is independent of its 'demographic strength' worldwide, because the dynamics that bear on the vitality of a language as a vernacular are primarily local. For instance, the fact that French is demographically still a very strong language in Europe and is vigorously promoted in Quebec has not prevented it from becoming moribund in Louisiana. Thus, García and Mason's invocation of this factor (92ff.) sheds no light on the issue other than drawing attention to the continuous supply of speakers of Spanish to the host country and the 'threat' that, according to some Americans, it presents to English. Whether or not Spanish has a promising future in the US depends on whether most Hispanics continue to use it as a vernacular and non-Hispanics can also acquire it as a vernacular or a useful second language. A key factor in this case, though not the only one, is probably its economic value.

Consistent with the received doctrine in linguistics, García and Mason also advocate the institution of bilingual programs that can enable Hispanics to maintain fluency in their heritage language. What linguists equally owe to the advancement of knowledge in their own discipline is, however, an account of the particular social dynamics that the host country must provide in order for this policy to be sustainable. Such research is important because it will help us explain why other immigrants, including many Europeans, have not been able to maintain their heritage languages. Such scholarship should also help us determine whether, in the first place, teaching a language in the classroom is realistically the kind of practice that is needed to sustain the vitality of a particular language. After all, we know that if Quebec had to rely (only) on the action and/or effect of language teaching in school, French in Quebec would probably be in the same situation it is in now in Louisiana. Note, incidentally, that Irish has really not been revitalized in Ireland, because English has remained the language of the economy, although Irish has been taught in school and has been promoted in *gaeltachts* for quite a long time now. Experience the world over shows that economic empowerment (with a certain dosage of marginalization in the case of minorities) does the trick.

But whether one can expect the shift to the dominant language to solve the problem of poverty is quite another matter. African slaves satisfied this condition early in the colonization of the New World, but their descendants still exhibit among the highest proportions of poverty in the US. One may then raise the question of what particular dialect they speak, though we should know that in many cases the critical factor is really the ethnicity or gender of the speaker. Language is often only an epiphenomenon of a problem that is fundamentally nonlinguistic, notwithstanding the fact that the command of a particular language (variety) helps some individuals break the barriers to some higher socioeconomic spheres.

In Ch. 7, Ajit K. Mohanty paints a grim picture of multilingualism and poverty in India. Like Djité (2008) in the case of economic development in Africa, Mohanty blames most of the status quo in India on the marginalization of languages spoken by 'scheduled tribes' (the most indigenous populations) and by the 'scheduled castes'. Associated with 'more than 900 mother tongues', they represent about 1% of the popula-

tion (105) deprived of their 'linguistic human rights' (121), because their languages are not used at all in education. He reports that '26% of the population of India is below the poverty line', with the more specific distribution corresponding to 44% within the 'scheduled tribes' and 36% within the 'scheduled castes' vs. 16% within the rest of the population (118). The fundamental reason for this state of affairs in which 1% of the population endures the lion's share of poverty is attributed to the fact that their children must attend school in a language other than their own and are less competitive.

It seems to me that there must be reasons other than linguistic discrimination that account for this unequal demographic distribution of poverty. Out of the 300–400 major languages spoken in India, or out of an estimated 3,000–4,000 'mother tongues' (105–6), 'only 41 languages are used [today] in schools either as [media of instruction] or as school subjects' (107), a few more than the twenty-two official indigenous languages. Mohanty lays part of the blame also on the hegemonic status of English. According to him, this preferred language of the elite has 'obliterated the traditional complementary relationship between languages and the strong maintenance norms' (119), whatever this means.

An important facet of this language-competition situation that is not discussed by Mohanty is whether (education in) English is preferred and emulated by many because it is an international and/or former colonial language or because it has economically empowered a substantial proportion of those who use it. Isn't language choice in a multilingual society also a matter of costs and benefits from an economic perspective, viz., whether the benefits to be derived from using a language are worth what is invested (time- and energy-wise, as well as financially in some cases) in learning it?

Mohanty must definitely be praised for speaking on the behalf of the marginalized populations. I wonder, however, whether in the context of the extensive societal multilingualism in India it is unfair to remark that he has too narrowly addressed what is a general problem experienced in many developing nations, and is not limited to marginalized populations. Let us use his own example: Oriya, his mother tongue (104). Although it is spoken by a total of about thirty-two million people (according to Ethnologue.com, based on information collected in 1997), it is a minority language in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, with a combined total of 300,000 speakers. So the following question crossed my mind: How likely is it for an Oriya child growing up in the latter states to be monolingual? If he/she is not, how well would he/she be served in receiving education in Oriya when he/she must compete in a different language on the job market? An important factor is, of course, whether education is provided to children in one of the languages spoken in their social environment or in a language completely strange to them. Shouldn't we make a distinction between those cases in which a language completely unfamiliar to the child is exclusively used in school (thus violating the child's right to education) and those cases in which one of the languages in the child's social environment is used although it is not his/her ancestral language?<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> I admit that there are some remote monolingual rural areas in Black Africa where the only language acquired by the child before school is his/her ethnic language, while school starts in the regional lingua franca. In this particular case, all children beginning school are equally disadvantaged because the first few months involve a challenging immersion experience in the lingua franca, with the environment consisting primarily, if not exclusively, of the teacher. To what extent this factor alone disadvantages them in the long term relative to their counterparts who are bilingual in both their ethnic language and the lingua franca before beginning school is yet to be determined. Whether the disadvantage lasts forever is another question. These considerations probably apply to parts of India and other places around the world too, but they are not the complete picture of language in education in societally multilingual populations.

Although there are many studies that have argued convincingly that children do better in school when their mother tongue serves as the medium of instruction, can we deny the fact that many children have more than one mother tongue (having grown up bilingual) and therefore have a choice? What do we make of the success of those who have been educated in a foreign language or any language other than their own and are now controlling the economic markets or political systems of their countries? I am deliberately playing a necessary devil's advocate here because economists have been reminding us of the enormous economic costs involved in dispensing education to every child in his/her mother tongue and the inability of developing nations' governments to assume the relevant costs.

It is also noteworthy that mother-tongue education does not guarantee the survival of many endangered languages. In many cases, what is endangering some languages is not so much the fact that children are receiving formal education in a language different from their ethnic language. Rather, it is the fact that, independent of the education system, they have mother tongues that are different from those of their parents. As we are reminded of in Batibo's chapter, we must consistently distinguish between 'mother tongue', the child's L1, and 'mother's tongue/language', which need not be the child's L1.

The focus of Suzanne Romaine's chapter (Ch. 8) differs little from that of Mohanty's; the editors must be thanked for positioning them next to each other. Romaine provides the following interesting facts, among others: 60% of the world's languages are spoken by 4% of the world's population, most of whom reside in 'sub-Saharan Africa, the Andean and Central American highlands, ... landlocked nations of central Asia' (129), and Papua New Guinea. They are also the populations that are the poorest economically. As if to pervert the common interpretation of poverty, she argues that there are various measures of poverty: 'Whoever controls the language of poverty controls the agenda on poverty' (128), and 'four fifths of the world's resources [are consumed] by one fifth of its population and the production methods of the powerful continue to undermine the livelihood of the poor' (134). The latter 'may be poor in economic terms, but they do not lack the means to support themselves', as they live in ecologies rich in plants and animals.

I cannot help retorting that people can hardly feed themselves (sufficiently) in many of these places. According to Romaine's discourse, the reason for this lies in an education practice in which 'fewer than 10% of the world's languages are used' and in the fact that assistance to the poor countries is typically provided in languages that their populations cannot understand. Following the logic of this discourse, one can expect the situation to improve once education is provided in each person's mother tongue and foreign assistance is provided in indigenous languages! In Romaine's own words, 'There can be no true [economic] development without linguistic development' (132). I wonder what formal education has got to do with feeding oneself on plants and animals in one's own ecological niche. Populations had done this long before the colonization of the world by Europe over the past half millennium and before the establishment of the present economic world order. Either the reported facts are inaccurate or there must be some other nonlinguistic reason.

I also wonder what 'linguistic development' means in the context of economic poverty, especially in a context that suggests it is a precondition to economic development. I doubt that it is anything close to 'language development' in the child language literature. I agree with Djité (2008) and Romaine that governments and financial organizations should implement their development plans in languages that the relevant populations understand. However, for obvious economic reasons (discussed above), governments may not be able

to use ALL of the indigenous languages. I maintain that linguistic reasons alone do not account for the kind of abject poverty found in some parts of the world, some of which are in fact nominally monolingual, such as Somalia, where only an elite class speaks English or Italian; or Rwanda and Burundi, where all nationals speak Kinyarwanda and Kirundi, respectively, regardless of their ethnic affiliation.

One must try to understand the enormous gap (which has been increasing since the colonial period) between the haves (who generally also speak a European language with variable levels of fluency) and the have-nots (who generally do not) in the relevant nations. The reasons for the current economic inequities and for increasing poverty in these nations, especially among those who do not speak a European language, are not necessarily linguistic. People prefer education in the European languages because common sense dictates it for them, since they hope that their children will be more competitive than themselves on the current job market. Using the languages of marginalized populations will not necessarily empower the latter economically if the political system continues to exploit or ignore them economically. As a matter of fact, the colonizers and the apartheid regime in South Africa adopted exclusionary language policies, according to which indigenous children were taught in indigenous languages, which excluded them from the competition for better-paying jobs. In India, the 'MacCaulay Minute' of 1835 was intended for education in English only for a small elite of colonial auxiliaries, leaving the rest of the population to receive either no education or some education in indigenous languages. Preference for education in English is an attempt to defeat this marginalization practice.

If we linguists are going to advise economists and politicians about the best language policies that can help eradicate poverty, we should also have some realistic understanding of how economists are articulating the problems. It is thus appropriate to read the only economist in the volume, François Vaillancourt (Ch. 9), according to whom 'Language is [only] one of various factors that influence poverty' (158). A population can be poor because they live in a part of the world or country that is poor in resources (being ecologically disfavored, a partial explanation that Diamond 1997 provides for Africa's underdevelopment) or is economically underdeveloped. Another population may be poor because it has been discriminated against, especially when language serves as an ethnicity marker and is used against a particular group. Yet another may be poor because it does not have access to a good education system (presumably in any language), which makes it difficult for its members to compete on a par with other groups in their economic market of (lucrative) employment. It appears that language can play a role in each of these situations but in different ways. Thus no uniform solution can be recommended to address all of them.

Vaillancourt is correct in observing that one's mother tongue can be 'seen as an ethnic attribute and a form of human capital' (162) but also one whose market value can decrease or increase depending on where it is used. Minority populations that are not segregated and have to compete for job opportunities with dominant populations may not value their heritage languages in the same ways as minority populations that are spatially and/or socially isolated from the majority populations and seldom socialize with the latter. Even if their language is not empowered economically, those who are isolated from the demographically and economically dominant population may feel more pressure to become bilingual than to give up their heritage language. Population structure, which is often invoked in Mufwene 2008, is thus a factor that bears significantly on the vitality of languages, and linguists should definitely factor it into their accounts of diverse outcomes of language competition.



As noted above, languages are not just representation systems, but they are also tools that should help their speakers respond adaptively to the current socioeconomic conditions. Here is where I think it makes little sense to speak of ‘language rights’ as if they were separate from and could compete with human rights. While we would want everybody to have a fair choice, the reality of the ever-changing natural and socioeconomic ecologies in which we evolve suggests that, regrettably, some of us give up the linguistic tools that we no longer find useful. Why should the relevant populations maintain the languages if they are not going to return to the socioeconomic ecologies in which they can be used? Because the relevant languages may be valuable as museum artifacts, however, linguists should really be clear on the distinction between LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE and LANGUAGE PRESERVATION, the latter being within our expertise, hence the laudable commitment of some of us to language documentation.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the best way to interpret Peter Whiteley’s chapter (Ch. 10) as fitting into this volume is to conclude that the Hopi are now losing their language because some of them think that speaking English and participating in the dominant Anglo socioeconomic structure will help them escape poverty. According to Whiteley, the Hopi of northeast Arizona are a conservative people, faithful to their tradition of subsistence economy, proud of land ownership, and resistant to wage work. Resisting the earlier ‘attempts ... by the Federal Government to obliterate [Hopi] in Indian day schools and boarding schools’ (162–63), they have maintained their language and other cultural traditions until recently, when the youth started showing more interest in the prevailing Anglo culture. Believing that writing is good only for the Whiteman’s language, the Hopi do not want to write theirs down; this would allegedly violate their social and cultural privacy. Likewise, they apparently resist using other technology to record their language, subscribing to the position (not inaccurate in fact) that the natural way to maintain a language is through oral transmission (175–76).

However, the youth have been learning more English than Hopi and the language is presently spoken fluently by less than half of the total population of 12,000 (just 5,000, to be exact), with about one third of the population now living outside of the reservation (161). So, regardless of the fact that as a group the Hopi are economically poor, with unemployment ranging from 30% to 60% of the population, what kind of advice can linguistics as a profession provide them to maintain their language? Should the youth be advised to stay on the reservation and continue speaking Hopi while it has few economic advantages to offer them compared to the dominant socioeconomic system? Should they be encouraged to be bilingual while they live in urban settings where they cannot form neighborhoods in which they can socialize among themselves in Hopi? To repeat a question I raised above about Hispanics in North America, why can the bilingualism solution be expected to work with the Hopi, if they assimilate to the dominant populations, when it has failed among European immigrants and other recent ones? Or is this a case where linguists should just be content with learning about one of the ways in which a language can die because the socioeconomic ecology that has sustained it is being eroded?

<sup>19</sup> Perhaps it should also be clarified that preserving texts or recorded discourse from a particular language is not really preserving the language itself. Consistent with the distinction between I-language and E-language, or, more traditionally, between *langue* and *parole* in French, there simply is no longer a language when there are no more speakers of it. Language is an abstraction that just cannot be preserved separate from its speakers. Even grammars produced by the most skilled linguists are models or interpretations that are not the real thing. I speak of museum artifacts because the materials we preserve are interesting products of, and memorabilia from, the defunct languages.

In the particular case of the Hopi, poverty entails their inability to sustain their traditional socioeconomic ways and to remain isolated from the economically and demographically dominant populations. It looks like they have finally lost the ecological factors (apparently the demographics and isolation) that had kept them out of the path of the cultural demise experienced by many other indigenous and immigrant populations in North America. As a matter of fact, it is those that were both the most displaced geographically (being relocated in settings that they could hardly control) and the most destitute economically (the African slaves and several European indentured servants) who were the first to Anglicize in colonial North America. They did not have the choice to resist socioeconomic assimilation, albeit as instruments rather than as beneficiaries of the system. The Hopi may be characterized as among the latest victims of the same Anglo-European socioeconomic expansion and assimilation.

In Ch. 11, Lenore A. Grenoble, Keren Rice, and Norvin Richards articulate clearly how poverty and, more generally, various economic considerations can affect efforts to document and revitalize endangered languages. They invoke many aspects of poverty that bear on the subject matter: 'poverty of the community', 'poverty of the linguist', and 'poverty of technology', which are all economic, as well as 'intellectual poverty' and 'poverty of documentation', each of which can affect the language documentation enterprise. As they show, the linguist as an expert can intervene in a variety of ways, all of which are constrained by factors such as the following: Is the population in a situation where they can worry about their language as much as they do about earning a living (and surviving economically)? Can they afford the training it would require to undertake the documentation of their language, an enterprise that is most likely to succeed if community members are directly involved? Is there a source of funding that can underwrite the costs of the documentation enterprise? If literacy is part of the investment in revitalizing the language, can the community or some other institution create the necessary socioeconomic conditions for sustaining literacy?

I must point out that the last consideration is particularly significant in developing nations, where economic conditions, especially in rural areas, raise the question of why one should be learning to write and read his/her ethnic language when there is nothing to read after all the training that one has received. Note also that the question of domain of usage applies to multilingual communities too, especially where minority populations are integrated within majority populations and reality makes it more practical to socialize in the majority than in a minority language.<sup>20</sup> This is indeed how minority European languages were lost in White American populations. I submit that social integration is an enemy of linguistic diversity, especially when it means that groups that are economically and/or demographically less powerful must adopt the cultural ways of the dominant population.

Linguists who have typically invoked individual multilingualism as a solution to language endangerment should address the question of whether socioeconomic segregation, such as what has enabled AAVE to thrive, is part of the solution package they propose. As Grenoble and colleagues note, poverty may contribute as much to maintaining a language, when the relevant population is geographically and socially isolated, as to defeating language revitalization endeavors, when it appears to the relevant people that language shift may provide a ticket out of poverty (see also Vaillancourt). At the risk of

<sup>20</sup> It is also significant in multilingual societies where it may appear irrelevant to acquire literacy in a minority language when the language of the economy and other literate practices is a major regional lingua franca.

sounding cynical, I think that this chapter also makes evident a fact that linguists should realize and perhaps accept, viz., the ideal world in which (rich) linguistic diversity can be sustained is far from being ours. There are really no language rights. Many people who are struggling to improve their living conditions in the current ever-changing socio-economic ecologies are not concerned with maintaining languages and heritages, which are more properly archived in libraries and museums. The archiving is (to be) done by experts or some nonprofessional 'glossophiles' (if I may suggest the term).

If it is true that particular populations that have lost, or are losing, their cultural heritage also suffer from low self-esteem (188), one must wonder how pervasive this pathological condition must be among the many Americans and Australians of continental European origins who typically have no knowledge of the heritage languages (Italian, Dutch, German, Greek, Irish, Lithuanian, etc.) that their parents or grandparents had spoken. Isn't it rather the case that the lack or loss of self-esteem is a consequence of other social factors that in fact exerted (more) pressure on the relevant populations to give up their heritage languages?

But it is indeed an awful feeling among many minorities to have lost one's traditions and embraced those of the dominant population only to find oneself not (totally) accepted by the same population, discovering oneself in a no-man's land, so to speak. Many of us who have operated professionally and often socially almost exclusively in the economically dominant language have indeed found ourselves short-changed socially and often also professionally—alas, sometimes even in our own homelands—when native speakers of European languages receive selective advantage. Unfortunately, the alternatives proposed by linguists are not realistic ones for us, because the economic underpinnings necessary for the success of these alternatives have typically been omitted.

Linguistics must address issues arising from the real world of socioeconomic inequality more globally and not just from the point of view of languages as maps of world views and illustrations of mental/cognitive variation. The rest of the world happens to see languages as tools at the service of mankind, and this perspective is an equally legitimate one, just as is the view that a language can be an asset or a liability to a person or a population.

As noted above, the language revitalization success story of the Naro people can be attributed to the concurrent economic and linguistic empowerment of the population in a relatively isolated area. Such success also depends on the kind of economy involved, because, as we should know, the economic empowerment of some Native American populations with the casino industry, which depends on the massive clientele of non-Natives, contributes just as much to the endangerment of Native American languages. In many cases, as observed by Ostler (2005), the buyer's language prevails, which is an important factor in the worldwide expansion of English since the decolonization of Africa and Asia. Likewise, the dependence of the United Arab Emirates on massive foreign human expertise and labor is fostering an ecology in which English is thriving at the expense of local Arabic, although the polity is far from being a settlement or exploitation colony (Deina Rabie, p.c. 2008).

Finally comes the challenge of figuring out why Helen Aristar Dry's chapter (Ch. 12) is included in this volume at all. To be sure, it is a very informative essay, advising readers to become (more) aware of 'threats to digital documentation and the lack of knowledge of the practices recommended as countermeasures to these threats' (203). They arise particularly from the fact that later digital technology can often not read texts stored in earlier technology and can render years of precious work useless. This is certainly a chapter that every fieldworker and everyone that has been archiving any kind of

digital corpus should read, since constant technological changes may render some archives obsolete, especially when the equipment used to create the data bank has been discarded or has broken down and cannot be repaired or replaced. The danger is more serious when a language is also endangered or (nearly) extinct and no more data can be collected. The special connection to the book under review lies apparently in the costs involved in the selection of technology, and, for some communities, in the preservation of their own materials. An important question is whether they can afford any adequate technology in the first place. Otherwise, this is certainly an essay that would fit better in a book on field research, since it says very little that bears on how poverty affects access to particular languages or the maintenance or revitalization of some others, in line with the topics discussed above.

**3. CONCLUSIONS.** Overall, I have found *Language and poverty* to be a thought-provoking book, regardless of the variable quality of the individual contributions. It especially reflects the tension between the interests of speakers and those of linguists, which appear to be different in many cases. Speakers of minority languages routinely experience various pressures from their socioeconomic ecologies (to which they must adapt) to communicate in specific languages in particular domains. If the minorities are also assimilated by the majority, these language practices often lead to the loss of their heritage languages, regardless of whether they regret the loss. The speakers are more focused on being equally competitive with members of the dominant population for jobs and/or being accepted as regular citizens of the relevant polities. For such speakers, languages are primarily tools for satisfying these needs rather than storages of particular world views.

Languages are assets in some cases or liabilities in others. Thus, they can be maintained or dispensed with, depending on the situation. For linguists interested in language evolution, especially in the ecology-specific dynamics that affect differentially the vitality of languages, it is imperative to understand the particular ecological factors that are associated with particular outcomes. The world will certainly be happy with linguistics if particular researchers can explain why and how languages die, under what specific ecological pressures, in more or less the same way that some others can explain why and how languages speciate (with new ones emerging), or how Language has emerged in mankind. More research is indeed needed to answer these questions satisfactorily.

Some linguists advocate language activism, undoubtedly as good world citizens committed to maintaining biotic diversity in a heterogeneous global ecosystem. For them, languages represent invaluable world views and typological specimens that must be maintained at any cost, almost romantically, or, should I say with some embarrassment, in the interest of linguistics as a discipline (cf. Krauss 1992). Unfortunately, no concrete suggestions have been articulated for the best ecological conditions under which both the linguists' and the speakers' interests can be satisfied. No particular answers are offered by especially the linguists to economists about how to deal with multilingualism in poor countries that are struggling hard to develop economically but cannot afford to empower every single indigenous language. In the case of countries that are not so poor and do not have extensive societal multilingualism, no explicit advice has been articulated so that they can avoid the pitfalls of language competition in the US, for instance. The US is an interesting case, because it may be claimed to instantiate natural evolution in a political context in which no law enjoins all citizens to speak the same language, current activism against usage of Spanish notwithstanding. Perhaps lessons can be learned from New Zealand, where Maori has allegedly been spared (al-

though a referee has reservations on this claim), but someone must explain what the magic is that can be applied in other countries.

An important practical question for linguists who will not let the relevant languages die because the cultures associated with them will also die is whether any particular culture is meant to be static. Are the new cultures created by those who are shifting or have shifted to different languages (often modifying them too) maladaptive or less authentic than the traditional ones? What are a particular heritage language and a corresponding static culture good for if the relevant population feels these disadvantage them? If cultures are meant to be static, what do we make of the emergence of new ones in the New World and in Australia out of the geographical expansion of Europeans, their languages, and their cultures? Should we reach the conclusion that the new cultures and language varieties of the European Diasporas are anomalies?

We know of course that the loss of languages is not a consequence of structural inadequacies in the relevant languages, and we can indeed learn a lot about typological variation by investigating some of the dying languages. But why should populations associated with the moribund languages bear the burden of maintaining data for linguistic research? Based on some of the discourse in *L&P*, multilingualism in one's heritage language and the dominant language must represent some sort of cultural and linguistic wealth. Loss of the heritage language is therefore a form of impoverishment, which causes the victim populations to suffer some low self-esteem. One problem is that many of the Western linguists who are the most vocal about this tragedy have forgotten that their (great(great(great(grand))))parents once spoke languages other than English (which by the same logic is indeed not their heritage language), and they have given no indication of cultural or psychological deprivation/maladjustment ... or have they been particularly skilled at concealing this negative social condition? They do not comment about this part of their own histories, which has perhaps served as a model to populations shifting to dominant languages today, especially when, in the case of North America, there are proportionally fewer members of the dominant race who are of English origin than those who are not. The low self-esteem allegedly suffered by minorities who have lost their heritage languages, especially in their own homeland, appears to have more complex causes. As a cause, may loss of language and culture merely be an epiphenomenon of the general malaise of being dispossessed and marginalized in one's own home?

It should also be interesting to survey speakers of endangered, minority languages according to level of economic affluence and integration into the dominant population in order to find out who are the most vocal about the demise of their languages and their traditions: the poor and marginalized who are fighting for access to or better command of the dominant language, or those who have given it up already and are functioning in the dominant language? This should give us a clearer picture of where the speakers' priorities lie and why Ladefoged (1992) was so cautious about linguists possibly being so paternalistic, if not downright too romantic, about what the role of language is in human/social life.

Let me also clarify that I am not arguing for linguists to be indifferent to the subject of language endangerment and its connection to poverty. I think the world expects us as experts on language(s) to propose solutions that are practicably effective if we think that both our professional interests and the speakers' interests can be reconciled. We should clearly distinguish between what we, as linguists, can do realistically, such as documenting languages, from what we cannot, simply because we have no control over the real-world ecological factors that bear on the vitality of languages. Perhaps, once we

have extricated these factors, we should be talking to those who create or (can) control the conditions that are so disadvantageous to particular languages, such as politicians and industrialists, instead of advising the victims with ineffective defense strategies. The latter strategy would be like keeping an endangered species in the same habitat that has become disadvantageous to it, just feeding it, and hoping the problem will go away.

There is at least one respect in which the endangerment of languages is quite different from that of other species: it is that languages are here to serve our needs. Their rights, if there are any, must morally be subordinated to those of speakers. As much as it has been influenced by geographical expansions, wars, conquests, and dominations, the natural history of mankind has been marked by both the loss of some languages and the emergence of new ones. This is an evolutionary history worth explaining that can inform us on how to advise adequately the nonlinguists who seek our expert advice. We should try to better understand why in the vast majority of cases languages but not the specific populations associated with them have disappeared, how (some of) the people have survived, and whether they would have survived if they had not shifted to the dominant languages. We should likewise find out why in many cases these populations could not both keep their heritage languages and adopt the dominant ones just for the relevant needs, and whether the same ecological pressures for shift that are experienced today can be warded off without further victimizing the relevant populations of speakers.

I have obviously found much to question, or just ponder over, in the chapters of this small book. This critique is largely a reflection of the fact that *L&P* is a rich collection of ideas on many facets of language and poverty, a more complex subject matter than might be expected. I wish more contributors, other than the editors and Baugh, had connected to issues discussed in Williams 1970, though I think this omission reflects linguists' preoccupation with language vitality over the past two decades, whereas the contributors to the earlier volume were more concerned with how to deal with language differences in the classroom (see below). That the contributions to *L&P* are generally thought-provoking is perhaps what the editors wanted, viz., getting linguists to think over various aspects of language and poverty, a complex subject matter that has received less attention than it deserves. Some economists and politicians are eager to receive our expert advice and it is time we came up with some that is consistent with the socioeconomic realities of our world.

Finally, how does *Language and poverty* 2008 compare with *Language and poverty* 1970? How much progress has been made in linguistics regarding the role of language in attempts to eradicate poverty? Contributors to *L&P* 1970 were predominantly concerned with how to help 'poverty children', speakers of nonstandard English, break away from the poverty trap in the US. With nonstandard English, especially AAVE, being socially stigmatized, the question was then whether the child should be treated as suffering from a linguistic deficit he/she had to be cured from, viz., his/her mother tongue ('poverty language'), or whether the teacher and the school system should instead be educated to understand and accept language variation. This was all part of the concern with using knowledge about language and culture differences in American society to help teach the child more efficiently. One paper stood out then in raising pointed questions about the education of Native American children, by Lynn R. Osborn, with regard to whether it was necessary for Native American children to receive education in English and in what kind of English. She noted that Native American children were being taught English more for 'agricultural work' than for adaptation to the wider modern technological society of the new socioeconomic world order developed by the dominant populations of European origins. By contrast, contributors to *L&P* 2008 are more concerned with language endangerment and how to stop it, as well as with em-

powering ‘minority’ populations by using their languages in the classroom and in the economic system. Still, neither book is explicit about specific ways in which accepting ‘minority’ languages or dialects in the classroom and the economic system can contribute to eradicating poverty.

While *L&P* 1970 also dealt with ‘poverty language’ as a stigma, *L&P* 2008 is more focused on speakers of ‘minority languages’ being disadvantaged. It is not even clear with regard to whether poverty is a factor driving language endangerment or whether poverty simply disempowers speakers of the endangered languages. Despite the identity of the books’ titles, their concerns are just complementary. It is hard to assess any kind of progress in the evolutionary trajectory of this research topic; it has just expanded in scope. It is obvious that we linguists must think harder about how research on language in society can contribute to eradicating poverty. This book has the merit of drawing our attention to the subject matter.

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University of Chicago  
Department of Linguistics  
1010 E. 59th Street  
Chicago, IL 60637  
[s-mufwene@uchicago.edu]

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