

Colonisation, Globalisation, and the Future of Languages in the Twenty-first Century*

by
Salikoko S. Mufwene
Department of Linguistics
University of Chicago
1010 East 59th Street
Chicago, IL 60637
USA

Abstract

The typical academic discourse on language endangerment has presented languages as anthropomorphic organisms with lives independent of their speakers and capable of negotiating on their own the terms of their coexistence. Not surprisingly it has become commonplace to read about *killer languages* in the same vein as *language wars*, *language murders* and *linguicides*. I argue below that languages are parasitic species whose vitality depends on the communicative behaviours of their speakers, who in turn respond adaptively to changes in their socio-economic ecologies. Language shift, attrition, endangerment and death are all consequences of these adaptations. We must develop a better understanding of the ways in which one ecology differs from another and how these dissimilarities can account for variation in the vitality of individual languages. Globalisation is discussed as part of the relevant language ecology. I submit that only local globalisation has endangered or driven

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most languages to extinction.

0. Introduction

0.1. This article is a general critique of the literature of the past decade on language endangerment, including the following recent major works, which are typically not cited individually here except for peculiarities that warrant singling out any one of them: Mühlhäusler (1996), Dixon (1997), Brenzinger (1998), Grenoble and Whaley (1998), Calvet (1998), Crystal (2000), Fishman (2000), Hagège (2000), Nettle and Romaine (2000), Maffi (2001) and Renard (2001). I exhort linguists to embed the subject matter in a historical perspective longer than European colonisation of the past 400 years, to highlight the competition and selection (Mufwene 2001) that has characterised the coexistence of languages since probably the beginnings of agriculture (Nettle and Romaine 2000), and thus to shed better light than hitherto on natural trends of language shift and loss.¹ Such an approach would make the linguistic enterprise comparable to that of environmentalists concerned with endangered species, who have first sought to understand the conditions that sustain or affect biodiversity in the same econiche.

0.2. I submit that the subject matter of language endangerment will be better understood if discussed in the broader context of language vitality, with more attention paid to factors that have favoured particular languages at the expense of

¹ The dominant trend in the literature has been to discuss languages as agents with lives somewhat autonomous from their speakers. This has led to unfortunate titles such as *Language Wars* (Calvet 1998), which suggest something contrary to the history of language loss. Barring cases of absolute genocide, languages have typically been endangered or driven to extinction under peaceful conditions, through an insidious process of assimilation. Wars and political conflicts have fostered ethnic or national distinctiveness, which has revitalized languages as identity markers. Languages are also parasitic species whose vitality depends on the communicative behaviours of their speakers. Although I speak of them as competing with each other in a multilingual community, the notion of “competition” in this discourse, as in population genetics, means no more than a coexistence set up in which alternate entities are not equally valued. In the same vein, I also use the notion of “selection” to refer to the resolution of the competition in favour of one of the alternatives, with the agency attributed to the “ecology” of the relevant languages. This consists of speakers and the socio-economic systems in which they evolve. Much of the discussion that follows is framed by these

others, factors which lie in the changing socio-economic conditions to which speakers respond adaptively for their survival. Linguists have typically bemoaned the loss of ancestral languages and cultures especially among populations colonised by Europeans, arguing that relevant languages and cultures must be revitalised or preserved by all means. Missing from the same literature are assessments of the costs and benefits that the affected populations have derived from language shift in their particular socio-economic ecologies. Also worth addressing is the question of what actions, if any, can realistically be taken on the relevant ecologies to prevent shift from the ancestral languages. I start by articulating the senses of the notions of “colonisation” and “globalisation” (as in *global/globalised economy*) that have figured prominently in the relevant literature, highlighting how they bear on language vitality.

1. Terminology Matters

1.1. Outside population genetics, *colonisation* conjures up political and economic domination of one population by another. This form of control is often associated with military power, which, based on human history, is the means typically used to effect such domination. This has been made more obvious by the European colonisation of the world over the past four centuries, at least until the independence of African and Asian countries in the mid-twentieth century. Often in alternation with (*neo*)-*colonialism*, the term has also been used to describe the economic relations of less industrialised countries (LICs) with their former colonial metropolises, in which the latter have continued to determine the terms and language of economic exchange. This interpretation of *colonisation* is present in the current debate on language endangerment, in which European languages have been depicted as “killer languages” about to replace all other languages (see for example Crystal 2000; Nettle and Romaine 2000; Hagège 2000). Thus, power has usually been invoked as an important factor that has favoured the language of the powerful over those of the dominated, hence less powerful, populations.

concepts (for details on this approach, see Mufwene 2001, especially Chapters 1 and 6.).

1.2. Exceptions to the above observations include volumes such as Brenzinger (1998), which, by focusing on the competition among languages of the colonised, oppressed or powerless rural populations of Africa, highlight the fact that the vitality of a language often depends on factors other than power. They show that if power has any role to play, basic cost-and-benefit considerations having to do with what a speaker needs a particular language for, or to what extent a particular language facilitates survival in a changing socio-economic ecology, determine what particular languages are given up and doomed to attrition and eventual extinction. Many African languages have recently lost the competition not to languages of economic and/or political power but to peers that have guaranteed a surer economic survival. What such literature shows is that, like the emergence of new language varieties, language endangerment is one of the outcomes of language contact and is also subject to patterns of interaction among the populations in contact.

1.3. In order to understand the above view, it helps to also think of *colonisation* in its population-genetics interpretation, when a population relocates in a new territory, regardless of whether the latter is or is not inhabited by an indigenous population. Thus the eighteenth-century settlement of French colonists on Réunion and Mauritius, then uninhabited, was as much a form of colonisation as the settlement of several Caribbean islands by Europeans during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the establishments of trade forts on the African and Asian coasts in the same period, or the political and economic domination of several African and Asian countries from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. Bearing in mind that even the spread of Indo-European populations in Europe involved as much of settlement colonisation as the domination of North America and Australia by the English, history tells us that colonisation as understood in population genetics has assumed many styles involving different patterns of interaction. The more common, political notion of colonisation rests largely on the more neutral, population-genetics notion.

1.4. From the point of view of language contact, the consequences of colonisation

have not been uniform. Although several languages have died in the process (e.g. Celtic languages in Western Europe and several Native American languages), new ones have also emerged (e.g. English out of the contact of Germanic languages among themselves and with Celtic languages, the Romance languages out of the contact of Vulgar Latin with continental south-western European Celtic languages, and today's pidgins and creoles out of contacts typically of Western European with non-European languages in some extra-European colonies during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. It is not always the colonised populations that have lost their languages. Sometimes it is the colonists and colonisers, as in the case of the Norman French in England, or the Tutsi (formerly speakers of Nilotic languages) in Rwanda and Burundi, or the Peranakan Chinese in the Strait of Malacca.² There are also interesting cases where the old and new languages have coexisted. What is now interpreted as a threat to the more indigenous language (e.g. Basque vis-à-vis Spanish) is only a recent development in a long history.

1.5. It is thus difficult to produce a general and uniform formula of what happens when one population colonises another, no more regarding language vitality than regarding the development of new language varieties. As argued in Mufwene (2001),

² Heeding Hoeningswald (1989), I invoke here an often-neglected aspect of language loss especially among immigrants (invaders, colonists, slavers, or otherwise), who have often lost their languages while resettling in the new land. This loss, which is partial in that only some of the diaspora population is affected, is quite relevant, because it is informative about the impact of ecological changes on the vitality of a language. Just like biological species, language may die in one setting and yet thrive in another (see also Mufwene 2001, Chapter 6). Their fates are not uniform across populations of their speakers, especially when the communities are discontinuous (on the model of what macroecologists identify as metapopulations).

The Peranakans are descendants of male Chinese traders who settled in the Strait of Malacca in the fifteenth century, married local women, and gave up Chinese while preserving some aspects of their Chinese cultural background. Their children, who spoke nothing but Baba Malay, are the Peranakans. (Literally, *Baba Malay* means Malay of the male Peranakans, based on the fact that these Chinese men were instrumental in the divergence of this variety from the local varieties.) They have formed a culturally mixed group distinct from traditional Chinese (who have only reproduced among themselves) and the local Malay and Javanese populations. Today many of them speak English as their first language and learn Chinese in school. Their cuisine, characterized as *nonya* (as female Peranakans are referred to), reflects local Malay influence. Their communities are to be found in cities such as Penang, Melaka, Singapore and Jakarta, the original Chinese trade colonies. I explain the different types of colony below.

the ecology of every case of language contact is somewhat unique. Despite similarities among them, what happens in one setting is not necessarily replicated in another. To be sure, we cannot overlook similarities, such as the fact that language loss has been the most catastrophic in settlement colonies and new language varieties have emerged additively in trade colonies (i.e. without replacing some extant languages). On the other hand, we must still note differences from one colony to another, regardless of whether the members of the relevant subset can all be identified as plantation or non-plantation settlement colonies, or as trade or exploitation colonies. Settlement colonies of North America still differ from those of Latin America, plantation colonies of the Atlantic and Indian oceans were not quite the same as those of the Pacific, and exploitation colonies of Africa were not quite the same as those of Asia.

1.6. Like *colonisation*, the terms *globalisation* in English and *mondialisation* in French have figured prominently in the literature on language endangerment.³ *Globalisation* and *mondialisation* have typically been assumed to be cross-linguistic equivalents and therefore synonymous. Actually, they do not express the same meanings. They reflect different perspectives on the present socio-economic state of the world, which do not bear equally on language vitality. A more adequate English translation of *mondialisation* seems to be *universalisation*, having to do with worldwide distribution of some institutions such as McDonald's (hence the terms *McDonaldisation* and *macdonaldisation* in both languages), of cultural products such as Hollywood movies, American toys and pop music, and the spread of English in several parts of the world. I show below that this interpretation, related to the spread of English and other colonial European languages around the world, does not help to articulate the differential ways in which language shift and loss have proceeded around the world.

³ Rare are books on globalization that bother to define the term and lead the reader to some understanding of the different ways in which it can be interpreted, depending on context. Yeung Yue-man (2000) is rather exceptional in providing a discussion that makes it possible for the alert reader to identify the wide range of interpretations of the term *globalization*.

1.7. *Globalisation* need not be universal, as in *global warming*, or regional, as in *global war* (involving several countries but not necessarily the whole world). The most relevant interpretation on which I wish to capitalise is local (as in *global taxation*), meaning “comprehensive” and having to do with interconnectedness of parts of a complex system, as is more common in local or regional uses of the phrase *global economy* in North America or Western Europe. In fact, in the debate on language vitality, it becomes critical to address the question of whether the worldwide interpretation of *global economy* (*économie mondiale* in French) bears on the life of a language in the same way as does the local interpretation of the same phrase. I show below that the phenomena are not the same and therefore do not have the same linguistic effects. (For an informative discussion of these distinctions, see Yue-man Yeung 2000.)

1.8. Not all countries have developed (significant) local global economies. Not all of them participate equally in the worldwide global economic system. Although places like Singapore and Hong Kong depend largely on worldwide globalisation, many LICs in especially Africa participate only marginally in this networking. When a particular common language, such as English or French, is required for communication among the different branches of multinational companies that foster worldwide globalisation, not all employees of these companies are expected to be fluent in the lingua franca, especially where most of the labour is involved in the production of raw materials to be processed outside the country, or a large proportion of the adult population is unemployed and thus seriously disfranchised from the economic system. In such places, the vast majority of the populations continue to function in their ancestral or other local vernaculars, which they in fact adopt as their identity marker to distinguish themselves from the affluent minority.

1.9. To my knowledge, Caribbean territories reflect some of the earliest experiences of loss of ancestral languages by the enslaved Africans and by the Arawakans and Caribs in European settlement colonies since the sixteenth century. In

Another author coming close to this is Friedman (1999).

most of them, the creole vernaculars that later replaced these languages (through shifts to European colonial vernaculars) have become identity markers for the present mass of disfranchised proletarians who function only in the local and low sectors of their economies.⁴ They stand in contrast with the acrolectal varieties spoken by minorities of the more affluent members of their societies. Creole speakers have either resisted shifting to the acrolects, or have seldom faced opportunities and real pressure to do so, despite a long history of stigmatisation of their own vernaculars.

1.10. Things are not necessarily so different in economically more affluent former colonies where English or other Western European languages appear to play an important function and have been claimed to endanger the indigenous languages. For example, as much as the participation of Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan in such multinational production networks depends on usage of English as a worldwide lingua franca, the proportion of employees that must be fluent in it is quite small. The English used by many not highly educated local people has often been described as pidgin. The reason is that locally, or nationally, the low sector of the economy is run in a local language (Cantonese, Malay or Putonghua) and English is only an interface among countries that use different vernaculars or local lingua francas. While in most parts of the United States and Canada, it would be difficult to travel and communicate with the local population without speaking English, knowledge of only English can be frustrating while travelling in Taiwan, Malaysia and Hong Kong. A visitor often comes across locals who speak no English at all, especially in less-affluent neighbourhoods. Anyone who claims that the spread of English around the world endangers indigenous languages should explain how this is possible in countries where it is only a lingua franca of an elite minority but is barely spoken by the vast majority, or a large proportion, of the population.

⁴ While it is obvious that the Arawakan and Carib languages were lost because their speakers were killed or driven out, it is an oversimplification to assume that the African languages were lost because of the pressures exerted on their speakers by slavery. As explained towards the end of Section 2, it is the particular form of assimilation exerted on the slaves of the homestead phase that, by the founder principle, doomed the vitality of African languages early in the history of settlement colonies.

1.11. The above observations do not of course demonstrate that these territories have not suffered any language loss, nor that local globalisation has played no role in this process. In becoming the major business language of Taiwan, Chinese has seriously endangered the more indigenous, Formosan languages in much the same way that Japanese has caused the attrition of Ainu – just as English and the Romance languages have driven to extinction most of the Celtic languages that preceded them in Europe. The prevalence of Malay as the vernacular of Malaysia has certainly been at the expense of several other indigenous languages. Usage of these equally indigenous languages in wide and diverse sectors of the national economies has nurtured their vitality by providing them some *raison d'être* in what Bourdieu (1991) identifies as the “language market”. In terms of costs and benefits relative to English as a global language, their association with lucrative functions in local, national and/or regional economies has limited the need for English for most Asian populations, and it has thus been confined to the role of elite supra-regional lingua franca. The division of labour is such that the threat of English to indigenous languages in Asia, as in other former European exploitation colonies, is exaggerated.

2. Importance of Distinguishing Different Colonisation Styles

2.1. It is helpful to start this section with my observation that European colonial languages have endangered other languages, or driven them to extinction, typically in settlement colonies, not in exploitation nor in trade colonies. It is also important to bear in mind that globalisation is not as recent a phenomenon as may be assumed. It is in some ways as old as colonisation in its population-genetics interpretation, to the extent that when a population relocates and/or dominates another, it more or less imposes a form of geographical globalisation by connecting the political and economic structure of the colony to that of the homeland. The colonists may import into the new territory production techniques that are more typical of the metropole, they may make the colony part of the same industrial network, and they often adopt the same business language at least for some level of the socio-economic and political

system. So, even the use of European languages as the official varieties in some former colonies is a form of globalisation, to the extent that they represent some uniformity or unity (as partial as it is) in the way that business is conducted in the metropole and the colony. Thus, today's globalisation differs from its earliest ancestors, say of the time of the Roman Empire, particularly in complexity and speed of communication rather than in the fact of interconnectedness and uniformity of economic systems, technology and production of goods.

2.2. In the context of this article, in which socio-economic ecology is invoked to explain variation in the vitality of languages, the distinction between different colonisation styles sheds some light on why local globalisation is not equally extensive or integrated everywhere. Each colonisation style has determined particular patterns of interaction between the colonisers and the indigenous populations as well as the particular kind of economic structure that is now in place. The categorisation is far from being clear-cut, and there are mixed cases. However, this rough distinction, which needs refining in future work, will help to make more sense than has been suggested in most of the literature of how languages have been vanishing over the past 400 years of Western European hegemony.

2.3. Mufwene (2001) distinguishes between trade, settlement and exploitation colonies. Trade colonies (such on the west coast of Africa from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries) were the first to develop. This typically happened soon after Europeans explored new territories and established trade relations with the local people on more or less egalitarian terms, although the terms of interaction changed later, at the expense of indigenous populations (see below). The relationships were sporadic and generally led to the development of new language varieties called pidgins, typically lexified by a European language on the west coast of Africa but by a Native American language in the Americas.

2.4. In the latter part of the world, the trade colonisation was concurrent with settlement colonisation. Europeans settled to build new homes, or better Europes than

what they had left behind (Crosby 1986). The nature of regular interactions among different populations in these new colonies often led to protracted competition and selection among the languages and dialects they brought with them, leading to shifts from some to others and to the loss of several of them, as well as to the emergence of new language varieties typically lexified by European languages. Some of these have been identified as creoles (typically in plantation settlement colonies), but others have been identified as new, colonial dialects of the European lexifiers, such as American English(es) and Québécois French (in non-plantation colonies).⁵ No significant language loss has so far been associated with trade colonisation, even when trade was abused to enslave and deport some of the indigenous populations.

2.5. Especially noteworthy about settlement colonies is the fact that they gradually produced local or regional monolingualism, favouring the language of the colonising nation but dooming to extinction the languages brought by the Africans (who were first to lose theirs, as explained below) and Europeans originating from countries other than the colonising one (the case of Gaelic/Irish, German, Italian, French, Dutch and Swedish in North America, except in Quebec and Ontario). Native Americans lost their languages either because they were decimated by diseases and wars, or because they were forced to relocate to places where they could not continue to speak their languages, or because they eventually got to function in the new, European-style economic world order which imposed a new language of business and industry. Unlike trade colonies, settlement colonies everywhere gradually evolved to some form of economic (and social) integration that has endangered languages other than those of the colonising European nation, or one adopted by it.⁶

⁵ As explained in Mufwene (2000, 2001), the criteria for the distinction are social, not structural. The geographical or socio-economic distinction simply serves to identify places that coincide with the spurious opposition widely accepted to date in linguistics between creole and non-creole languages. We need not discuss this question here. Suffice it to note the emergence of new language varieties, regardless of whether they are considered as new dialects of the same European colonial languages or as separate languages.

⁶ The latter was the case for English in Suriname, which evolved into creoles such as Saramaccan, Sranan and Ndjuka. Dutch serves as the language of the elite in this former plantation settlement colony, not as a vernacular. Almost the same is true of the Netherlands

2.6. The balance sheet has of course involved more losses than gains, but we must always remember that the outcome of the contacts of population and of languages in settlement colonies anywhere, including Australia and New Zealand, has not consisted of losses only. This is especially important because we do not know what the future of creoles is, nor whether American and Australian Englishes will be considered as new dialects of English or as separate languages a couple of centuries from now, if nothing changes in the present world order and in the dynamics of the coexistence of languages.

2.7. The question of the future of creoles is relevant, because the former plantation settlement colonies in which they developed have had an economic history different from those of non-plantation settlement colonies, which are more industrialised. After the abolition of slavery, plantation settlement colonies evolved economically on a hybrid model between the non-plantation settlement colonies and the exploitation colonies (explained below). With the exception of those that have become French overseas *départements*, most of the former plantation settlement colonies have not industrialised and belong in the LIC bloc of nations, marginally engaged in the recent trend of world or regional global economy. The mass of their populations is under hardly any pressure to speak a language (variety) other than Creole. Jamaica is a good example, with Patois gaining in vitality.

2.8. The above considerations are simply a reminder that, just as colonisation has not been uniform worldwide, the vitality of languages has not been uniformly affected everywhere, not even in former settlement colonies. In future research, it will help to examine the social structures of these former colonies in terms of which have majority European populations and which do not, whether this has some correlation with economic development, and to what extent particular patterns of interaction across language or dialect boundaries are linked to the process of language endangerment.

2.9. It is also worth determining the extent to which settlement is advanced in a

Antilles, where Papiamentu, a creole largely lexified by Portuguese, functions as a vernacular.

particular territory and what can be learned about the factors that bring about language endangerment. If the documentation provided by Nettle and Romaine (2000) is accurate, why are there proportionally more Native American languages surviving in Canada than in the USA, and why are there more indigenous languages still spoken in Latin America than in North America? Are these differences a consequence of variation in colonisation patterns within the settlement style (including patterns of interaction with the indigenous populations), are they a consequence of variation in the physical ecologies of the settlement colonies, or do they reflect a combination of both factors? For example, can the size and density of the Amazon forest be overlooked as a factor in the survival of indigenous languages in a large part of South America – any more than the role of rain forests in the preservation of linguistic diversity elsewhere? Is this phenomenon entirely different from Nettle's (1999) and Nettle and Romaine's (2000) observation that the greatest linguistic diversity obtains along the equatorial forest, in a worldwide belt between the tropics?

2.10. We cannot be shocked by the fact that indigenous languages have survived the most in exploitation colonies, which have typically replaced and expanded former trade colonies of Africa and Asia since the mid- or late-nineteenth century. Even those languages that have died or are moribund in these territories have suffered not from European colonial languages but from other indigenous languages that have been favoured by the new socio-economic ecologies implemented by European colonisers (e.g. Swahili in East Africa, Wolof in Senegal, and Town Bemba in Zambia).

2.11. Although both settlement and exploitation colonies developed from trade colonies, in part as the consequence of European commercial greed in wanting to control the sources of raw materials and other products needed in Europe, very few colonisers planned or decided to build new homes in the exploitation colonies. As the term *exploitation colony* suggests, these colonies were intended to be exploited for the enrichment of the European metropole. The colonisers were generally civil servants or companies' employees who served limited terms and had to retire back in Europe.

With the help of missionaries and their schools, they generally developed an intermediary class of indigenous bureaucrats or low-level administrators through which they communicated with the local populations or they themselves learned the most important of the local languages, but they encouraged no more than this local colonial elite to learn scholastic varieties of their languages (Brutt-Griffler 2002).

2.12. Instituting economic systems that generally reaped raw materials to be processed in metropolitan industry, the colonisers fostered a two-tiered economic system in which the overwhelming mass of the population continues to communicate in the ethnic languages or in the (new) locally-based lingua francas, such as Lingala in the Congo Basin, Sango along the Ubangi River, Swahili in East Africa, Wolof in Senegal, Songhay in parts of West Africa east of Senegal (along Arab north-south trade routes), Hausa in Nigeria, Fanagalo in the Copper Belt extending from South Africa to Zambia, and Bazaar Malay in South-East Asia. In a few places, such as Nigeria, Cameroon and Papua New Guinea, pidgins based on European languages were developing from naturalistic, trial-and-error attempts to communicate in these languages (without a teacher) by the mass of the population who participated in the lower sector of the colonial economy. The expansion of these pidgins into major lingua francas sometimes competed with, but did not eliminate (the development of), other indigenous-based lingua francas, such as Pidgin Ewondo in Cameroon or Police Motu in Papua New Guinea.

2.13. Overall, as in the case of trade colonisation, these colonial languages were just additions to local repertoires of languages and constituted little threat to the more indigenous ones, which were protected by clear divisions of labour in their functions – with the more indigenous languages functioning as vernaculars and the colonial languages, including the few indigenous ones favoured by the colonial regimes, used as lingua francas. Socio-economic changes of the late colonial and post-colonial periods, with many of the new lingua francas becoming urban vernaculars and with relatively more lucrative jobs based in urban centres and operating in them gave a competitive edge to the new indigenous lingua francas. Ethnic vernaculars fell into

attrition in the cities, and the trend is expanding to some rural areas. The collapse of LIC economies and the increasing relative economic importance and lure of urban centres, which led to rural exodus, compounded to further erode the beneficial significance of rural indigenous languages. Still, these have been eroded not by the European languages but by the indigenous lingua francas be they traditional (such as Swahili, according to Nurse and Spear 1985) or new (such as Lingala).

2.14. We really must remember that in the evolution of languages, the balance sheets from European contact with other countries look very different in settlement colonies than in their exploitation counterparts. An important reason is that the colonial agents were less socially and psychologically invested in the exploitation colonies than were the colonists in settlement colonies. The latter considered their colonies as their homes (Crosby 1986) and the patterns of their interactions with the indigenous populations gradually moved from sporadic to regular, with the involvement of the indigenous populations in the local economy growing from marginal to engaged. Also, unlike in exploitation colonies, where the European colonisers remained a small, though powerful, minority, the colonists in non-plantation settlement colonies (the continental Americas, Australia and New Zealand) became the overwhelming majorities and instituted socio-economic systems that function totally in their own dominant language.

2.15. Once demarginalised and now relatively absorbed minorities, the indigenous populations in former settlement colonies have felt more and more pressure on them to also speak the majority languages for their economic survival, especially after the transformation of their physical ecologies made it impossible for them to continue their traditional economic systems. Their gradual assimilation to the mainstream made it less and less necessary for their children to learn their ancestral language or even stick to their traditions. Demographics have played a more important role in language loss than has been highlighted in the relevant literature. In most former exploitation colonies, the local people did not even feel the same pressure to shift, because they remained the overwhelming majorities who in the rural areas have barely been

affected by the economic and political transformations undergone by their territories, including the formation of nation-states. Most of them have not even had options other than to continue operating in their traditional world or, at best, to work in the low-cost colonial and post-colonial labour system that does not require a European language.

2.16. In fact, the new world order in former exploitation colonies is such that even the elite participating in the interfacing sector of the economy have had no pressure, except from their own personal attitudes, to give up their indigenous languages. If anything, unless they decided to sever links with their ancestral customs, the pressure has been just the opposite: to preserve competence in the ancestral languages in order to continue interacting with relatives in the rural areas.

2.17. The closest approximation of European values is evident in the development of urban societies, in which traditional and colonial ways have mixed and the new indigenous lingua francas (such as Wolof, Swahili and Lingala) have gained economic power and prestige, and have gradually displaced (other) ancestral ethnic languages. It is these that can be said to have endangered indigenous languages, to the extent that some rural populations have been shifting to the urban vernaculars, abandoning some of their traditional cultural values for those practised in the city. On the other hand, the city has also been perceived as the source of some negative transformations and the main beneficiary of economic progress at the expense of the rural environment. Negative attitudes towards it have often been concurrent with resistance to its language, thus providing the ethnic languages an identity function that has slowed down their demise.

2.18. In the same vein, unemployment in cities and the ever-growing size of the proletariat in African and other LICs have also disfavoured the usage of European languages. There are fewer and fewer incentives for speaking these languages which have sometimes been interpreted as a means of exploitation by indigenous rulers. Even in more prosperous former exploitation colonies such as Singapore and

Malaysia, European languages have continued to function primarily as bridges with the world outside the home, or outside the ethnic group or neighbourhood, or outside the country.⁷ Otherwise, it remains natural to communicate with members of an inner group in an indigenous, or non-European, language.

2.19. We should thus not overrate the importance of European languages regarding language endangerment. The experience in former exploitation colonies has certainly not been the same as in former settlement colonies, although European colonisation has undeniably spread European languages to territories where they were not spoken 400 years ago. Moreover, former plantation settlement colonies reveal features of both exploitation and settlement colonies. They are like the latter in that the indigenous languages have generally disappeared, due to the rapid and dramatic deaths of their speakers or to the relocations of indigenous populations to places where they discontinued speaking their languages.

2.20. The settlement colonies are also similar in that several immigrants lost the languages of their homeland. The homestead period in these settlement colonies must have exerted a serious negative founder effect on the languages of the enslaved Africans. They were originally integrated as small minorities in the homesteads, which were isolated from each other. They had nobody with whom to speak their languages within the homestead, and in the rare events that they happened to know somebody on another homestead who spoke the same language, there was not enough regular interaction to have permitted the active retention of that common language. Attrition and loss were simply caused by lack of opportunities to interact in the African languages.⁸ Their Creole children learned to speak the colonial languages as

⁷ As noted above, my categories of colonization styles are not perfect and need refining. Singapore is definitely not a typical former exploitation colony. To date, the Malays, the most indigenous of its current almost fully Asian population, represent less than 15 per cent of the total, as opposed to more than 75 per cent of Chinese. However, neither is Singapore a European-dominant settlement colony and it developed its present socio-economic structure after independence. Time will determine whether its ethnolinguistic diversity will survive the promotion of English as their common language by its political leaders.

⁸ This does not mean that the African languages died soon after their speakers arrived in the colonies. In Haiti, some African languages were apparently used as secret codes during the

their vernaculars and they would in fact become the models emulated by the mass of bozal slaves of the plantation period, those slaves who had recently arrived from Africa and were most likely to work in the field.

2.21. While the colonies were growing from homestead societies to plantation societies, Creole slaves were typically preferred to bozal slaves, as they were generally more familiar with the local customs and vernaculars (see, for example, Berlin 1998). They were often spared the hardship of working as field hands, and they thought of themselves as superior to the bozal slaves, whom they had the responsibility of seasoning. This process entailed acculturating the bozal slaves to the local vernacular. The constant decrease in opportunities to speak African languages, especially in socio-economic settings marked by high societal multilingualism, fostered more and more erosion of the African languages, and eventually their loss. The situation is somewhat reminiscent of how rural populations have been absorbed over the past century in sub-Saharan African cities, except that here the existence of ethnic neighbourhoods has slowed down the process of language shift.

2.22. As in sub-Saharan African cities, the African slaves formed the overwhelming majority of the plantation societies. People of European descent have been small minorities, with small subsets of them emerging as affluent. Yet, the countries that evolved from such plantation societies still contain large proletarian majorities that speak Creole and identify socio-economically with it. Because of lack of incentives in an economic system depending on foreign markets and industry, participating only marginally in the world's global economy, and becoming poorer and poorer, Creole

Revolution wars (Ans 1996, Manessy 1996). The fact that Voodoo and Kumina rituals contain remnants of African languages is also evidence that some African languages continued to be spoken up to the nineteenth, or perhaps the early twentieth, century, although they did not function as vernaculars. The few languages that seem to have assumed this function were reintroduced with the importation of indentured labourers from specific ethnic groups that remained segregated from the mainstream of slave descendants, who speak European-based languages. This was the case of Trinidad Yoruba, which was spoken up to the mid-twentieth century (Warner-Lewis 1996). However, the gradual integration of speakers of such languages eventually led to their demise. Usage of some African languages in nineteenth-century Haiti can certainly be associated with the bozal slaves who arrived soon before the Haitian Revolution.

has gained more vitality in relation to the acrolectal language varieties spoken by the upper class. In places such as Jamaica and Haiti, it is also clear that the overt prestige of a language does not necessarily guarantee its vitality. The underprivileged do not necessarily aspire to the varieties spoken by the more affluent members of their societies, especially if these varieties will not improve their conditions. The fact of being economically disfranchised is often a good reason for despising supposedly prestigious varieties.

3. Why Speakers Shift Languages: What Linguists Should Not Ignore

3.1. As argued in Mufwene (in press), prestige alone will not favour a particular language (variety) over others. Shifting to a particular language is typically associated with particular benefits to be derived from its usage, especially economic benefits. Otherwise, speakers stick to the languages they have traditionally spoken, although they may learn another one for interaction with outsiders. However, even this behaviour is benefit-driven. Most LIC populations will not shift to European languages, because the alternatives are not likely to improve their conditions. In the first place, the division of labour that relies on indigenous lingua francas in the lower sectors of the economy (in which most of the workforce are engaged) even makes it unnecessary to target a European language, because the jobs associated with them are very few.

3.2. Immigrants to the New World and Australia shifted to the dominant languages because they had emerged as the only languages of the colonies' economic systems and they had something to gain from the shift, or at least they avoided the danger of not being able to compete at all in the new labour markets. Although slaves gave up their languages because they often had nobody else to speak them with, an important reason why their children never bothered to learn their parents' languages (just like children in African cities) is that they had everything to gain in speaking the colonial languages as fluently as they could.

3.3. Now the question arises of whether linguists can help some languages to thrive by encouraging their speakers to have pride in their ancestral heritage, even if they lack control over situations that have led them to give up their languages. Over the past decade language endangerment has become a major preoccupation among linguists. In a seminal article (1992), Michael Krauss instilled a certain amount of guilt among linguists, accusing them of negligence to the vitality of the subject matter of their own research: languages. The number of publications has increased since then. They have typically blamed the European colonisation of the past 400 years and today's global economy for this state of affairs. Some linguists have even spoken of "killer languages", which are held guilty of linguicide (by analogy with homicide) as if languages had independent lives and weapons of their own.

3.4. The issues have sometimes become confusing, especially when language preservation and language maintenance are confused as one and the same (see below), and the very linguists whose party line is that language is primarily oral and spoken have privileged the school system and the written medium as ways of saving the endangered languages. Very little scholarship has been invested in understanding the ecology of language and what it takes to sustain the vitality of a language, especially in territories where several languages have coexisted apparently happily with one another under an efficient division of labour in the repertoires that contain them. As explained in note 1, languages have no lives that are independent of their speakers. Therefore, languages do not kill languages; their own speakers do, in giving them up, although they themselves are victims of changes in the socio-economic ecologies in which they evolve. Solutions that focus on the victims rather than on the causes of their plights are just as bad as environmental solutions that would focus on affected species rather than on the ecologies that affect the species.

3.5. European colonisation of the past four centuries has certainly contributed to the predicament of languages around the world, as it has introduced new socio-economic world orders that have pre-empted the usefulness of some languages.

However, it is helpful to put things in historical perspective too. Language shift and language loss are neither new nor recent phenomena, as evidenced by the curious fact that only 3 per cent of the world's languages are spoken in Europe (Mayor and Bindé 2001), although it is one of the most densely populated parts of the world. Today's prevalence of English (a Germanic language) in the United Kingdom and of Romance languages in south-western Europe has been accomplished at the expense of Celtic languages, only a handful of which are still spoken today. Likewise, the Indo-European languages have spread and prevailed in territories where other languages, survived today by Basque and Finnish, for example, used to be spoken.

3.6. The *Stammbaums* ('family trees') of genetic linguistics, which illustrate language diversification and therefore an increase in the number of languages, have masked the concomitant loss of indigenous languages replaced by the new, Indo-European languages. Things seem to have proceeded in the same way as they have recently, with some languages prevailing at the expense of others and being transformed in the process, becoming new varieties and eventually being recognised as separate languages. It would be informative to learn why and how Basque and Finnish survived the dispersal of Indo-European languages, while the majority of others vanished. We could then investigate similarities and differences between what happened then and what is happening now, and why some populations just cannot preserve their languages against the invaders while some invaders (e.g. the Norse and Norman French in England and the Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi) have actually given up their own languages.

3.7. Linguists have typically bemoaned loss of linguistic, especially typological, diversity. Rarely have they focused on speakers themselves in terms of motivation and costs and benefits to them in giving up their languages. Seldom have they addressed the question of whether the survival of a language would entail more adequate adaptations of its speakers to the changing socio-economic ecologies. They have decried the loss of ancestral cultures as if cultures were static systems and the emergence of new ones in response to changing ecologies was necessarily

maladaptive. The following questions arise from this particular approach to change: Are the ancestral cultures more adaptive to the current world order than the new ones? Are the peculiarities of the lost or endangered languages more informative about the nature of universal grammar as a biological endowment for language than are those that have survived and the new ones that have emerged? None of the treatises cited at the outset of this article addresses these questions.

3.8. It should help to recall that much of the concern for language endangerment has been modelled on environmentalists' concern about the degradation of our physical ecology due to modern industry. Like linguists, environmentalists are ecologists, scholars who have specialised in the co-evolution of species and their environments. We would really be their counterparts if there were a research area in linguistics specialising in the coevolution of speakers, their socio-economic ecologies, and their languages. The concern for language endangerment seems to have caught linguists off guard and we have been prescribing remedies without the requisite understanding of the socio-economic dynamics that have affected the vitality of languages negatively or positively in different parts of the world throughout human history.

3.9. There is another important point of difference. Environmentalists are concerned with the environment relative to humans, with the way we have coexisted with other species, and with how we have been affected by what affects them and vice versa. Their case for the preservation of biodiversity has been less for the benefit of their discipline than for various residents of our planet. However, things are not so similar in the literature on language endangerment. If languages are there to serve their speakers, it is strange that the costs and benefits to the latter have been overlooked for so long! Because languages do not have independent lives from their speakers, it is bizarre that the hosts, whose socio-economic behaviours affect them, have been ignored.

3.10. Such literature could likewise have bemoaned language change, as this

process substitutes one kind of (sub)system for another. The literature has ignored the fact that speakers make their languages as they speak; and cultures are being shaped as members of particular communities behave in specific ways. These are dynamic systems that keep evolving as people behave linguistically and otherwise and as they keep adapting these systems to new situations. That is, languages co-evolve with their speakers. Language shift, which is the main cause of language endangerment and death, is part of this adaptive co-evolution, as speakers endeavour to meet their day-to-day communicative needs. It is not so much that linguistic changes are bringing about cultural changes, but that linguistic changes echo cultural changes. That is, language shift is no more than an adaptive response to changes in a particular culture, most of which I have identified as a socio-economic ecology. Arguments for language maintenance without arguments for concurrent changes in the present socio-economic ecologies of speakers seem to ignore the centrality of native speakers to the whole situation.

3.11. To suggest that native speakers will maintain or preserve their cultures if they continue speaking their language is to ignore the fact that in the first place they would not stop speaking it if they valued its association with their ancestral culture over their necessary adaptation to the current world order – a simple matter of prioritising things in their struggle for survival. The position in the average literature on the subject is also tantamount to assuming that language and culture go hand in hand, that only one language can best mirror or convey a particular culture, and that another language cannot be adapted to convey it. Sapir (1921) argues convincingly for decoupling language and culture as separate systems.⁹ The literature of indigenised English and African French, for example, have made it quite obvious that a language can be adapted to a different culture – which gives more meaning to the notion of “language

⁹ See especially Chapter 8: “Language, culture, and race” (207–20 in the 1949 printing). In the particular case of Athabaskan, Sapir states: “The cultural adaptability of the Athabaskan-speaking peoples is in the strangest contrast to the inaccessibility to foreign influences of the languages themselves” (214). Invoking factors that are subsumed by what I have identified here as *socio-economic ecology*, he writes: “A common language cannot indefinitely set the seal on a common culture when the geographical, political, and economic determinants of the culture are no longer the same throughout its area” (215). Much of my discussion capitalizes

appropriation” (so much preferred by Chaudenson (2001) over those of “language learning” or “language acquisition”). So populations shifting to another language have always had the option of adapting the new language to their ancestral culture. After all, it is generally influenced by their substrate systems and typically develops into a new variety.

3.12. We can perhaps argue that a language mirrors a culture because it is itself part of a culture. Changes affecting it reflect changes in a particular culture. Arguing for its maintenance when the population of its speakers behaves differently reflects a value judgement on the part of the linguist, who rates the ancestral culture more highly than the one that is being fashioned by the speakers’ linguistic behaviour. A problem then arises when nothing is being done or advocated to change the ecology, to which speakers adapt. Linguists are thus different from environmentalists, who have realised that the survival of a particular species depends largely on restoring the ecology in which it thrives. Curiously, linguists’ proposal for rescuing endangered languages (as articulated in, for example, Crystal 2000; Nettle and Romaine 2000) suggests that speakers must continue their traditional communicative behaviours regardless of changing socio-economic ecologies. Somebody should explain how adaptive such resistance to changing ecologies is or how a language can continue to be spoken as a vernacular when the ecological structures that used to support it barely survive.

3.13. As there are countries such as Taiwan which have succeeded in appropriating the Western capitalist economic system without losing much of the Chinese culture and language, it is obviously clear that other countries could have taken that path. It should help to know why they did not choose to do so. And the following question also remains: Can the process be reversed in nations whose cultural and linguistic experiences have been different, and under what realistic conditions?

3.14. In this context, it becomes important to distinguish between *language*

on this view.

maintenance (sustaining an ecology in which a population can continue to speak their language) and *language preservation* (recording texts from a particular language graphically or mechanically). If the current ecology cannot be changed, should not linguists be more realistic and focus on language preservation (Paul Newman 1998 and forthcoming) rather than on maintenance? Such a response would of course also entail investing more time into understanding natural laws that since the beginnings of humanity, and through colonisation, have regulated language shift, the loss of some languages, the emergence of new ones, and the balance sheets of losses and gains at different states in history. Then we would be able to deal with language endangerment with justifications other than benefits and costs to linguistics. My position remains that costs and benefits to speakers as individuals adapting to socio-economic changes that affect them should have played a more central role than is evident from the literature to date. Even from an environmentalist perspective, in which all members of an economic matter, speakers are far more important to our planet than their languages, which are being lost through their own communicative practices.

3.15. Scholars such as Nettle and Romaine (2000, cited here because they have the most explicit discussion of all publications on this subject in 2000 and 2001) argue that a certain amount of traditional folk knowledge of their environments is lost with dying languages. The observation is undeniably true, but it fails to note that the environment itself is changing and this particular knowledge may be becoming quite irrelevant to it. Moreover, the culture and this specific knowledge must have been eroding concurrently with the language itself, if not before it; otherwise they would be transferred to the new language. One way or another, insisting on the utility of the endangered language and on bilingualism, when the socio-economic ecology can no longer sustain them, suggests that a language can be sustained regardless of whether or not it really contributes to the socialisation of the young into new realities. Yet experience everywhere suggests that linguistic behaviour is profit-driven (Bourdieu 1991). Speakers would like to invest not only in forms and structures that maximise their linguistic capital but also in a language that is beneficial to them. Individual multilingualism is possible typically when it is advantageous to the speaker. It is

perhaps not by accident that in highly stratified societies multilinguals seem to be the most numerous in the lower classes. In societies that are typically monolingual, multilingualism is practised by those who can travel outside their communities and interact with outsiders. Not everyone has a vested interest in speaking more than one language. A profile of individuals or communities that give up their languages in favour of others should be informative in future research.

4. Colonisation and Globalisation: Not Such New Phenomena

4.1. The current literature on language endangerment has presented the phenomenon primarily as one of the negative side-effects of European expansion and colonisation of most of the non-European world over the past half millennium. It is true that the geographical and political extent of European expansion has been unprecedented, for example when the size of the British Commonwealth, as discontinuous as it has been, is compared with that of the Roman Empire a millennium earlier. However, putting things in perspective, the difference in size is also seen to be a function of differences in modes of communication. About 1,500 years ago, the size of the Roman Empire was certainly also unprecedented, in fact it was too large to have central control over, at least under the conditions of the time. Easier and faster transportation systems since the fifteenth century have allowed the European conquest of territories much farther away from the metropole. Easier and faster means of communication (especially with the invention of the telegraph and telephone, of the radio and television, and now of the Internet) have facilitated the political, military and economic controls of larger and larger colonies, making the world look even smaller. Improvements in control techniques have also facilitated the control of more and more aspects of the colonies.

4.2. However, today's colonisation differs from that of earlier times more in size and complexity than in kind. It is not so common to refer to the dispersal of the Bantu populations from the southern Nigeria and western Cameroon area into central and

southern Africa as colonisation. The same applies to the spread of Indo-Europeans from Asia Minor to Europe. In reality, these are instances of colonisation, at least in the population-genetics sense of relocation to a new territory. As Nettle and Romaine (2000) point out, agriculturalists generally colonised hunter-gatherers and imposed their economic systems on them. Thus the Bantu populations have largely assimilated or decimated the Pygmies and Khoisans in central and southern Africa, and only a few of these latter populations remain today as distinct minorities in a wide area considered to be Bantu. Of the non-Indo-European languages that preceded the European languages, Basque, Finnish, and Lap are notorious exceptions whose survival conditions need uncovering. Basque is an especially interesting case, because it has survived both the Indo-European and Roman colonisations, although it has lost a lot of its geographical space. Much of the present linguistic map of Western Europe represents consequences of language shift, under colonisation, for Roman or Germanic languages. Celtic languages have become moribund minorities in a wide territory, from Germany to the British Isles, that used to be dominated by the Celts (Green 1998).

4.3. We stand to learn a lot by trying to understand similarities and differences between those earlier forms of colonisation, and between them and the recent European phenomenon of the past 400 years. For example, both the British Isles and the southern part of Western Europe were colonised by the Romans. In both places Latin was the colonial language, but the Romance languages have developed only in the latter. The subsequent colonisation of the British Isles by the Germanics can perhaps be invoked to explain this difference. However, we cannot ignore the fact that following Roman colonisation, Iberia was dominated first by the Arabs and then by the Visigoths, and France was dominated by the Frankish. Also noteworthy in this context is the fact that the colonisation of England by the Norman French caused no language shift of the kind that would produce a new language from that of the colonisers. Its main consequence was the development of the ancestor of today's Standard English varieties.

4.4. Also significant is the fact that, as in former exploitation colonies of Asia and Africa, it was after the colonisers had left that the important proportions of the indigenous populations adopted the coloniser's language in today's Romance Europe. Can we assume that if the Germanics had not settled permanently in the British Isles, these territories would have become Romance too? Or should other factors be taken into account? Why did the Arab, Visigoth, Frankish and Norman colonisations of Iberia, France and England not have the same effects regarding the vitality of indigenous and colonial languages as did the Roman and Germanic colonisations of the same territories? Did all these cases involve colonisation of the same style, such as settlement or exploitation? If so, how did they vary?

4.5. There are nevertheless similarities between England and North America in the styles of their settlement colonisation by outsiders and in the fates of their indigenous languages. When the Germanics settled in England, they drove the Celts westwards and later they assimilated the survivors. So did the Europeans in North America, obtaining concessions on the eastern coast of North America and driving the indigenous populations westwards. Eventually, they assimilated the survivors, after the American Revolution (which was primarily the independence of European colonists from England) and the present United States had been formed.

4.6. Native Americans were really not brought into American politics and recognised as American citizens until late in the nineteenth century, and this assimilation process in itself was quite reminiscent of the gradual absorption of the Celts in the British Isles by the Germanic invaders. Colonised since the fifth century, some Celts such as the Irish did not become subjects of the United Kingdom and have to speak English as a vernacular until the nineteenth century, long after Oliver Cromwell had initiated the settlement colonisation of Ireland in the seventeenth century and potato plantations had become one of its major industries. In both cases, the loss of indigenous languages did not start until the assimilation of the local people to the current socio-economic system.¹⁰

¹⁰ The case of Scotland is different because this was more a merger of kingdoms than regular

4.7. Noteworthy in all such cases is the fact that absorption of the indigenous population by the colonisers has generally led to the loss of indigenous languages, especially when the colonised are kept in a subordinate position. The critical factor is their involvement in an economic system in which they must use the language of the new ruler in order to compete in the labour force and function adaptively. This is an aspect of globalisation as homogenisation, requiring that things work more or less the same way in the colony as in the metropole, especially in the exercise of power and control of the working class. Here similarities may be seen between the Germanicisation of England and the rest of the British Isles, the Islamicisation of North Africa and Iberia, and the Romanisation of south-western Europe. To the questions asked above about differential impacts of colonisation, the following can be added: Why did the eastern Roman Empire, which was colonised for longer, not undergo the same kind of language shift as did the western empire?

4.8. Did the Romans colonise territories of their empire on the exploitation model and is their departure comparable to the recent independence of European exploitation colonies? If so, what are the specific ecological factors that account for language shift in their western empire? Why has a similar evolution not taken place in sub-Saharan Africa, where any serious danger to minor indigenous ethnic languages arises more from the expansion of the indigenous lingua francas than from the European colonial languages (Mufwene 2001)?¹¹

4.9. One noteworthy social ecological factor here is that Roman soldiers and administrators married into the local communities and obviously transmitted their language to their children. The latter, who shared power with their parents, also used their Romance languages (i.e. Celticised Vulgar Latin, such as today's Africanised

colonisation. English was not imposed by the English (thus Germanic) refugees but adopted by an enthusiastic Scottish monarch who loved both an English princess and her language.

¹¹ Exceptions to this observation appear to be Gabon, where French is spoken by the urban population, and Mozambique, where the protracted liberation war promoted Portuguese as the lingua franca of the liberation fighters and the major lingua franca of the post-independence state.

French) in ruling their countries, continuing basically the same Roman administrative style. In sub-Saharan Africa, segregation was the rule and cross-race unions were relatively rare. Most such unions occurred between the European merchants with African women, but the merchants had no political or administrative power and were more disposed to speaking indigenous languages. Their children had barely more advantages than the more indigenous colonial elite, who had the same kind of colonial education and, as noted above, have not given up the indigenous languages.

4.10. Overall, as auxiliaries to colonial rule, the African elite were just intermediaries between, on the one hand, the indigenous populations and, on the other, the European colonisers. They worked for the latter but socialised more with the less-privileged indigenous mass than with their rulers. Thus, their usage of European colonial languages was highly circumscribed, despite their additional function as lingua francas between those from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds who did not share an indigenous lingua franca. Even the few mulattoes that were to be found were still under pressure to speak African languages in order to be integrated in the majority populations.

4.11. While running post-independence Africa, the elite have generally tried to maintain the socio-economic structure of colonial sub-Saharan Africa, although they have had more success in maintaining the linguistic division of labour than in sustaining the colonial economic (infra)structure. The decline of their nations' economies has in fact favoured the indigenous lingua francas over the European official languages. In the United Republic of Tanzania, Swahili has been promoted at the expense of English (although it is debatable how successful the policy has been), and in cities such as Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of the Congo) Lingala has gained more prestige than French in modern popular culture, where French is often derided.

4.12. Former plantation settlement colonies are somewhat like sub-Saharan African countries in that language varieties of the proletarian masses are far from being

endangered by the acrolects that were privileged by the colonial systems. As a matter of fact, former English and French plantation settlement colonies were, to all intents and purposes, converted into exploitation colonies after emancipation. They were assigned administrators from the colonial metropolises. The economic systems of all these territories, which are still in the LIC group, have remained generally the same as those of sub-Saharan African countries, with the exception of French overseas *départements* whose economic discrepancies from the metropole are just being addressed now. Haiti, which became independent in 1804, before emancipation in the remaining colonies, shows perhaps the highest proportion of creole speakers. As Dejean (1993) points out, the only vernacular of the overwhelming majority of the Haitian population is far from being threatened by French.¹²

4.13. Yet students of language endangerment cannot continue to dodge interesting questions that arise from variation in colonisation styles. These linguistic developments are like natural evolution in population genetics, where it is absolutely imperative to understand what ecological factors bring about particular consequences for varying species in an *ecochêne*. The non-uniform linguistic consequences of colonisation over the world makes it compelling for linguists to have to investigate and better understand the socio-economic factors that affect language vitality, favouring colonial languages in some settings but indigenous ones in others.

4.14. It is also obvious that many of the developments today have antecedents in earlier history, especially in the colonisation of England by the Germanics and of south-western Europe by the Romans. Adequate interpretations of those earlier cases

¹² According to Dejean, 95 per cent of Haitians are monolingual in creole (77), many of them do not interact with French speakers (78), and members of the French-speaking elite also speak creole (76). The latter situation is similar to that of the African elite explained above. Moreover, the proletarian mass of creole speakers does not even aspire to speaking French (79). Although the size of the proletariat is apparently much greater in Haiti than other Caribbean islands, the situation described by Dejean has counterparts in them. It may in fact develop in the direction of the same Haitian extreme if their economies do not improve. In places such as Jamaica, patois seems to have gained more vitality over the past few decades, or perhaps acrolectal speakers have become more uncomfortable with speaking their variety in domains where patois is becoming the norm and where the acrolect carries no particular prestige, such as in music and local cuisine.

depend partly on how well we understand recent developments and what parallels we find between the latter and the former. In turn, our understanding of the past will shed new light on different aspects of what we thought we already understood about the present.

5. Imperial Languages and Language Endangerment: A Myth that Cannot Go On

5.1. As noted in Section 1, *globalisation* also applies to “the emergence of international and regional economic networks with blurred national boundaries” as well as to “the economic monopoly that highly industrialised countries have exercised over LICs for raw materials and as outlets of their technology”. It has thus led world languages such as English and French to compete with each other as imperial or hegemonic languages. These are languages that need not serve as *lingua francas* among the elite of the indigenous populations (although they often do) but are primarily needed to interface local economies (regardless of how globalised they are) with foreign and more globalised systems. For example, French in Haiti is needed to maintain some economic ties with France, although the elite also use it to isolate themselves from the proletarian masses (DeGraff 2002). Taiwan and Hong Kong could apparently manage locally with their Chinese varieties and without English, but they use this language to maintain their global associations with the United States and the United Kingdom. Malaysia and Singapore could probably also do without English and use only Malay as their national *lingua franca* if their economies did not depend so largely on American and British markets. More and more LICs, especially in Africa, have become arenas where English and French are competing with each other for monopoly.

5.2. To be sure, French as an imperial language (not as a vernacular!) has been losing ground to English in many places around the world. Works such as Hagège (2000), joined by Crystal (2000), Nettle and Romaine (2000), and Renard (2001),

decry this English expansionism. They connect it with the McDonaldisation of the world or the worldwide spread of American movies and other cultural products. In fact, as if to trivialise the language endangerment “problem”, *La Francophonie* claims that French is endangered by English. In a March 2002 posting in *The Linguist*, the British Professor Geoffrey Sampson made a similar absurd observation, apparently confusing the French population’s now better disposition to use English as a lingua franca with an unfounded fear of seeing it used as a vernacular in France or francophone Belgium. There is no evidence of such an evolution yet in these strongholds of French as a vernacular, not even in Quebec, where the economic pressure for such a development is stronger.

5.3. Interestingly, McDonald’s outlets around the world operate in the local lingua francas, if not their vernaculars (as in the case of France and Germany). Hollywood films are often translated into local lingua francas/vernaculars, although the music lyrics are not. Those who learn in English to partake in American pop culture do not even dream of using it as a vernacular — which is true of many parts of the world, including France, Germany, Latin America and Russia. What we learn here is that exportation of desirable technology often carries along the language and culture of the powerful manufacturer. However, in the vast majority of places where the imperial languages were not already adopted during the colonial period, the languages are being learned as international lingua francas. An older imperial language may become less attractive if it becomes globally less advantageous to speak it. The competition in such cases is resolved on the basis of costs and benefits to the local population. It makes little sense to characterise the losing imperial language as endangered.

5.4. Practical considerations prevail a great deal more than linguists have acknowledged. Proximity to North America has made English more attractive than French to many Haitians today. Economic or technological aid from the United States (even if only symbolic), rather than ideological drives on the part of France to propagate French culture, has made English more attractive to several LICs. Economic and professional incentives have made English an asset, albeit as a second

lingua franca, even to local francophone professionals. In any case, we cannot lose sight of the fact that imperial languages are far from becoming vernaculars in those places where the elite still use their indigenous languages in domains associated with their local cultures. It is contradictory on the part of linguists to advocate multilingualism as a possible solution for the survival of languages around the world and yet discourage people from appropriating international languages that should allow them to satisfy personal economic and other cultural interests. There would perhaps be a cause to worry if the hegemonic languages were becoming vernaculars, but they are not, except in former settlement colonies, where it is too late to reverse the course of events. Even in places such as Singapore and Hong Kong, where English is widely spoken among Asians of different ethnolinguistic backgrounds, my impression is that the indigenous languages are far from being threatened by it.

5.5. There is an exaggerated view of language endangerment as a uniform problem, based only on numbers of speakers without consideration of history. This is best illustrated with Nettle and Romaine's (2000) inventory of the world's most widely spoken languages, which includes Chinese varieties, Bengali, Hindi, Japanese, Javanese, Korean, Vietnamese and Telugu alongside colonial/imperial languages, viz. English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Russian and Arabic. It is partly corroborated by the following list of "eight most widely spoken languages" produced by Mayor and Bindé (2001, 334): Chinese, English, Hindi, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Portuguese and French.

5.6. There is no doubt that colonisation of one style or another in the distant past accounts for the fact that all these languages are so widely spoken. The history of the world is marked by regular waves of population movement on small and large scales, with the stronger people assimilating or displacing those they did not kill. This is as true of the current distribution of the Bantu languages as it is of Indo-European languages.¹³ Asia is no exception, and the current movement for the independence of

¹³ See, for example, James Newman (1995), Mazrui and Mazrui (1998) and Mufwene (2001) regarding the present linguistic landscape of Africa, Martinet (1986) and Renfrew (1988) for the dispersal of Indo-European, and Cavalli-Sforza (2000) regarding the world overall.

Tibet from China is but an evolution from that old expansionist colonisation which brought together populations speaking different languages.

5.7. To be sure, with the exception of Arabic, all the non-European languages in the above lists function today primarily as vernaculars rather than lingua francas. They are also dispersed worldwide, with diasporic communities that are largely a consequence of European colonisation and its demand for labour. Even when they are spoken outside their homelands, Chinese, Hindi, Bengali, Japanese, Javanese, Korean, Vietnamese and Telugu function primarily as vernaculars among transplanted people from the same ethnolinguistic background. Thus, in North America and Europe, Chinese is spoken typically in Chinatowns (although we cannot even take it for granted that the younger generation is acquiring it in these neighbourhoods).

5.8. The other languages (English, French, Arabic, etc.) are recent hegemonic languages that owe their large numbers of speakers mainly to their lingua franca function. English and French in particular have more non-native than native speakers. While Chinese vernaculars may be a real threat to some Tibetan languages, they hardly compete with English in North America, the United Kingdom or the Caribbean. As noted above, English, French and Arabic are certainly no danger to many languages in the LICs, where they are spoken as second-language varieties, for highly circumscribed functions, and only by small fractions of the indigenous population. Likewise, despite France's present commitment to the economic development of its overseas *départements* (mainly by supporting their infrastructures for tourism), there is no indication that French is a threat to *créole* in these territories. Similar doubt can be cast about all territories where creoles have coexisted with their lexifiers and have derived much vitality from association with the cultures of the disfranchised proletarian majorities.¹⁴

¹⁴ It is fundamentally inaccurate to count Nigeria and India as anglophone countries in the same way as the United States is; or the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the island of Dominica and Viet Nam as francophone in the same way as France, Quebec and Belgium are. Dejean (1993) also finds it problematic to count Haiti, with its overwhelming majority of monolingual creole speakers, as francophone. The only reason for doing so would be in considering Haitian Creole as a French dialect – a position that is

5.9. It is also noteworthy that Spanish and Portuguese are widely spoken today largely thanks to the settlement colonisation of several parts of the world by their European speakers since the fifteenth century. Portugal and Spain have no economic or military hegemonies today that would make them threats to other languages outside those same settlement colonies. In more or less the same vein, note that Arabic has become so much associated with Islam that it can hardly stand up to the competition of English and French for the function of international lingua franca, even in those territories of North Africa and the Middle East where Arabic vernaculars are spoken. Reading Nettle and Romaine's statistics (2000) at their face value leads to a misinterpretation of the dynamics of competition and selection among the world's languages.

5.10. Also, as noted above, the lingua franca function is scarcely a threat to indigenous languages in those territories where the hegemonic languages do not function as vernaculars. In fact, the best lesson here comes from the fact that standard varieties of the same languages have generally not displaced their nonstandard vernaculars, just as acrolectal varieties have not displaced basilectal and mesolectal ones in creole-speaking territories. In the now-celebrated case of Ocracoke Brogue as an endangered dialect (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1995), the dialect has actually been endangered by other vernacular varieties, not by Standard English. Not even highly stigmatised varieties such as African-American English and Appalachian English are at all threatened by Standard English. French patois, as either traditional Celtic languages or rural non-standard French dialects (*français populaires*), have been threatened by urban colloquial French, not by Standard French. Perhaps one of the very reasons why hegemonic languages are a false perceived threat to indigenous languages in several places around the world is that they are not vernaculars in the first place.

defensible diachronically but is likely to be disputed politically, especially by creolists. The same seems to be true of all territories where creoles lexified by European languages have developed.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Language endangerment is a much more complex subject than most of the literature has led us to think. The process is far from being new in human history. It has been a concomitant of language diversification, which is itself a little-acknowledged by-product of language contact, in which a language is influenced by others into whose territory it has been taken or which have been brought into its territory. Such contacts have sometimes caused language shift (instead of sustained bi- or multilingualism). This process is directly related to language loss. The effects of language contact are far from being uniform from one territory to another, being in part correlated with variation in different colonisation styles and in the communicative functions that the new languages have assumed in various territories relative to their indigenous counterparts. They are largely a function of the new economic systems that have replaced the indigenous ones and of the extent to which local people have been absorbed, assimilated or integrated in the current systems.

6.2. Integration happens when populations coexist in some sort of peace. This state of affairs makes it ironical and inadequate to speak of language wars, rather than of competition as a coexistence relation in which alternatives have different ethnographic values to speakers, such that they often must select one or another alternative during their verbal interactions. It also reveals an interesting point about how language loss occurs, viz. the more highly valued language stealthily endangers the less-highly valued one(s) while speakers, unaware of the long-term effects of their repeated selections, are happy simply to be able to communicate (successfully) with others. The procedure is the same even during periods of enslavement, including the most oppressive, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries in the New World and the Indian Ocean.

6.3. Adding significance to the strength of the founder effect, the homestead societies inflicted a devastating blow on the languages of the enslaved Africans, with the Africans of the homestead phase being forced by circumstances to operate only, or

most often, in colonial European vernaculars and the plantation-phase slaves being seasoned by Creole slaves into the colonial vernaculars (Chaudenson 2001; Mufwene 2001). If a few African languages survived until the mid-twentieth century in places such as Trinidad and Brazil, it is largely thanks to the indentured labour system which replaced slavery and brought Africans from ethnolinguistically more homogeneous areas, keeping them in relative segregation from former slaves. These languages would gradually die, concurrently with the integration of (descendants of) these indentured labourers within the populations that preceded them, by the same process that likewise gradually absorbed Asian indentured labourers in the same plantation communities also at the expense of their indigenous languages. This was the same process that absorbed most later immigrants in the dominant socio-economy of the host countries and led them to lose their languages.

6.4. These relatively recent incidents of language loss also have precedents in older history. Like the enslaved Africans, the Jews enslaved in Babylon and Egypt had lost their language (Hagège 2000), through absorption in the local socio-economic infrastructure, although they had a low social status and were not integrated. On the other hand, as has been made obvious by the linguistic experience of countries with large indigenous or indigenised proletarian populations, economic marginalisation can produce just the opposite effect. The disfranchised proletarians stick to their indigenous or nonstandard vernaculars as markers of their identity and are forced by circumstances to avoid the language associated with their economic exploitation.

6.5. In the big picture of competition and selection among languages, cases of language extinction by genocide remain exceptional. Those due to absorption of demographically or economically less-powerful groups are more typical. The distinction between different colonisation styles was proposed in part to distinguish those territories where peaceful coexistence resulted in language loss from those where it did not.

6.6. Language loss is indeed one of the outcomes of competition and selection among languages sharing the same econiche. Competition and selection among languages, not just between indigenous and non-indigenous ones, is similar to that which obtains among structural features in language evolution (Mufwene 2001). Like structural features, languages or dialects can be a threat to each other only when they compete for the same functions. Languages or dialects that have separate communicative or social functions can coexist quite happily, which has typically been the case with European and indigenous languages in former exploitation colonies. Overall, it is when a language is adopted as a vernacular that it becomes a threat to the speaker's previous vernacular. European languages have been such threats to indigenous languages in former settlement colonies because they have become vernaculars, albeit in new, restructured forms. On the other hand, their status as lingua francas in exploitation colonies has made them primarily economic assets for a chosen few, the educated elite, and of rather marginal significance to the proletarian masses. No colonisation style has proceeded uniformly everywhere and more factors that distinguish one ecology from another need to be understood, in the way advocated by Fishman (2000).

6.7. There is an advantage that follows from the distinction I have proposed between, on the one hand, plantation settlement colonies, where descendants of non-Europeans have constituted demographic majorities (as in the Caribbean and Indian Ocean islands), and, on the other, non-plantation settlement colonies, where descendants of Europeans have become majorities (as in the American mainland and Australia), viz. it becomes possible to explain why creoles are not as endangered as has been suggested by decreolisation hypotheses since DeCamp (1971). In plantation settlement colonies, creoles have functioned as vernaculars of large proletarian masses, assuming an ethnographic function that has not competed with the acrolectal variety spoken by the local elite and required in the white-collar sector of the economy. They have acquired a status similar to that of indigenous vernaculars in former exploitation colonies, also serving as identity markers for their speakers against their economic exploitation by the ruling elite. They are not at all threatened

by the acrolectal varieties. Their ethnographic status is also similar to that of new, likewise restructured vernaculars that have emerged in other settlement colonies but have been identified as nonstandard dialects of the same European languages. These too serve as identity markers for their low-class and rural speakers and are also used in the blue-collar sectors of their economic systems. All these new vernaculars (creole and non-creole) are those that have actually driven to extinction other indigenous and non-indigenous vernaculars.

6.8. Globalisation has been a useful consideration in this essay because it sheds interesting light on the role of socio-economic structure in language vitality. There is at least a partial correlation between, on the one hand, the type and extent of globalisation in a setting and, on the other, whether or not the primary language of the economy is endangering other languages. Generally, language endangerment is most serious where local globalisation is the most advanced and inclusive of virtually all economic sectors. However, we must remember that globalisation is not necessarily implemented in a European language, and the latter may be used only for international interfacing, as in the case of Japan and Taiwan. Thus, major European languages are not necessarily threatening non-European languages everywhere. For this reason, I found it relevant to distinguish between hegemonic lingua-franca status of a European language and its vernacular function in a different territory. English is certainly a threat to other languages in polities where it functions as a vernacular, but not at all in countries where it has been adopted only to help the local economy interface with the worldwide economy. Thus it is not a threat to Japanese nor to Putonghua in Taiwan, although it seems to be a threat to French in francophone African countries, where French also has a hegemonic status.

6.9. The future of languages in the twenty-first century obviously depends on how individual nations will evolve socio-economically during that time. In some parts of the world, globalisation is progressing without any serious obstacles that can stop its effects on disfranchised languages. Then again, the economic future is already so uncertain in some other parts of the world that no indigenous languages and cultures

are being affected by the present course of events, except somewhat by the indigenous lingua francas. In most such polities, numbers matter little in determining whether or not a particular population will carry on their ancestral language, as long as the speakers remain isolated from developments outside their communities, as well noted by Mühlhäusler (1996).

6.10. While we linguists are so concerned with linguistic diversity as a dimension of biodiversity to be maintained (Maffi 2000, 2001; Nettle and Romaine 2000), we cannot ignore a moral dilemma that arises. The socio-economic ecologies of most populations around the world have changed since the recent European colonisation of the world started four centuries ago (especially during the past century), and so have their aspirations for decent living. The changes in these socio-economic ecologies have often included the emergence of new languages in which both the indigenous people and immigrants are expected to develop some competence in order to compete for jobs. Despite their attachment to their pre-globalisation traditions, the pressures of the new socio-economic systems have made it increasingly difficult to practise their ancestral languages and cultures. Lack of practice has stealthily led to attrition and eventually death of the languages. In other words, the loss of ancestral traditions is a consequence of changes in the socio-economic ecologies of speakers. Can linguists advocate the maintenance of cultural heritage without restoring the older ecology? Can it be restored and at what costs and benefits to the relevant populations? I have not seen these issues discussed in the literature.

6.11. Much of the literature on language endangerment has also promoted linguistic rights. To the list presented at the outset of this article may be added, among others, *MOST Journal on Multicultural Societies*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2001). As suggested above, linguistic and human rights are not necessarily congruous. It is certainly not unnecessary to echo Ladefoged (1992) with the following questions: Can we linguists work against the aspirations of the affected populations and exhort them to hold on to their languages and cultures only in the interest of a kind of diversity that should benefit our disciplines? Note that despite Nettle and Romaine's (2000)

characterisation of such questions as the “benign neglect” position, languages and cultures are nurtured by practice.¹⁵ Practice is fostered by various ecological factors. Energy may be wasted when the prescriptions to loss of traditions pays no, or little, attention to these factors.

6.12. Typically, as suggested above, speakers do not consciously give up their languages. Languages die gradually and inconspicuously as a consequence of the communicative practices of the relevant population, in ecologies where the speakers themselves can be considered as victims, as they themselves have adapted to change. We cannot just encourage them to maintain their ancestral languages even if only as home varieties without providing the ecologies that can support our prescriptions.

6.13. From a purely academic perspective, language shift, endangerment and death are all part of language evolution. In order to work on them, linguists should, like environmentalists, better understand the ecology of language evolution and focus on the real factors that have brought the demise of some languages. The work should be on those factors and focus should be on the kind of socio-economic world that can be promoted. In order to convince the parties involved in all these processes to change their behaviours, we must convince them of the benefits that humanity, especially the affected populations, can derive by changing their behaviours. As both languages and cultures are dynamic and constantly (re)shaping themselves through the behaviours of the populations with which they are associated, bemoaning ancestral traditions alone will not do the job. Nor does it sound humanitarian to decry loss of linguistic diversity in the interest of research on the architecture of universal grammar, about which any kind of variation, old or new, is likely to be informative.

¹⁵ As Nettle and Romaine formulate it (153), the “benign neglect” position amounts to the following: “there have always been massive extinctions, so why should we be concerned about the prospect of another?” Speakers of endangered languages “quite reasonably have more pressing concerns, such as improving their economic prospects” than worrying about the fates of their languages (153). This is not of course the position I advocate. We should be concerned with whether linguistically a particular population is adapting adequately to the changed, or changing, socio-economic ecology that affects them.

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About the Author

Salikoko S. Mufwene is a Distinguished Service Professor of Linguistics at the University of Chicago (e-mail: s-mufwene@uchicago.edu). He is the author of *The Ecology of Language Evolution* (Cambridge University Press 2001) and is editor of the series “Cambridge Approaches to Language Contact”. His current primary research area is the development of creoles, which he approaches from a population-genetics perspective – which he has extrapolated to the evolution of other languages. He has (co)-edited several books and authored numerous essays on various linguistic topics. For more information, visit his website at <http://humanities.uchicago.edu/faculty/mufwene/>.

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