Studies on translation and multilingualism

Lingua franca Lingua franca

Lingua Franca: Chimera or Reality?

LINGUA FRANCA: CHIMERA OR REALITY?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

The present study is published by the Directorate-General for Translation (DGT) of the European Commission in the framework of its new strategy aimed at exploring the multiple facets of the translation profession and its implications, both on a practical and a more theoretical level.

Globalisation is drastically changing the world as we have known it, and every day new challenges come up in all domains, notably in the field of communication. The dramatic increase in mobility and contacts of all kinds has turned communication into *the* big issue and languages play a major role to guarantee effective communication. Though often ignored, languages and language policy are instrumental in shaping the society we want for the future.

To be up to these new challenges, translation cannot be reduced to the rank of a technical skill. A wide and deep understanding of the political and conceptual implications of any choice we make in the field of languages has become essential, as essential is the clear understanding that linguistic policy always has a strong impact on policy in general.

This is the context for the ambitious programme of studies launched by the DGT and this is the rationale for the study on the lingua franca. The use and implications of a lingua franca have never been officially addressed at the level of DGT or of the EU at large. Yet, this phenomenon, though widely controversial, has acquired such dimensions that it cannot be ignored. It is an inescapable reality to be approached with an open attitude. The aim is not to accept it as a panacea or to reject is as a scourge, but to see whether and how it can contribute to improve the work of the European institutions, promoting participation and inclusion.

To fully grasp the significance of this phenomenon, it is important to examine it both in a diachronic and in a synchronic perspective. On the one hand, a wide-ranging overview of various *lingue franche* in different historical periods and geographical areas can help us to better understand the present situation with English spreading as a privileged medium for cultural intercommunication at unprecedented pace. On the other hand, the new dimension of English as an international language raises increasing interest among scholars — both linguists and political scientists or philosophers. A clear understanding of their different — and often conflicting — positions is a precondition to try and define the advantages, if any, and possible uses of a *lingua franca* at European level.

I am convinced that this study, together with the others promoted by DGT, will stimulate the debate on the various facets of translation and the challenges it faces at present, thus contributing to further promote the profession and its effectiveness at the service of the European citizens.

Piet Verleysen

INTRODUCTION

The intensification of exchanges in our globalised world has dramatically increased the need for a common language. More and more often this common language is English, considered by many to be today's *lingua franca* and only secondarily the mother tongue of specific communities of speakers. The issue, however, is extremely controversial and raises as many questions as it tries to answer. English is not the first language to play this role, other languages have been used as *lingue franche* in the past and others may therefore acquire this status in the future. Moreover, the concept of *lingua franca* itself is often questioned.

Before examining the status of English in order to see whether it can be considered a *lingua franca* or, more precisely, today's *lingua franca*, the very concept of *lingua franca* needs to be defined more precisely. In addition, a review of other *lingue franche* can provide a clearer image of how they develop and disappear, as well as the needs they are supposed to meet, in relation to the present situation.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines the term *lingua franca* as follows:

> Language used as a means of communication between populations speaking vernaculars that are not mutually intelligible. The term was first used during the middle Ages to describe a French — and Italian — based jargon, or pidgin, that was developed by Crusaders and traders in the eastern Mediterranean and characterized by the invariant forms of its nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

In the *Larousse* we find:

> Sabir utilisé dans les ports de la Méditerranée entre l'époque des croisades et la fin du XXe s.

> Langue auxiliaire de relation utilisée par des groupes ayant des langues maternelles différentes. (C'est par exemple le français et l'anglais dans leurs usages diplomatiques, le swahili dans l'est de l'Afrique, l'anglais en Inde, etc.)

Whereas these two definitions largely overlap, the *Oxford English Dictionary* stresses the hybrid character:

> A mixed language or jargon used in the Levant, consisting largely of Italian words deprived of their inflexions. Also transf. any mixed jargon formed as a medium of intercourse between people speaking different languages.

Jocelyne Dakhlia in her inspiring work *Lingua franca* lists three different meanings:

> Dans une acception assez communément répandue, … une langue franque nous parait synonyme de "lieu consensuel", au sens où l'on parle de "*lingua franca* rituelle", par exemple, ou de langue franque musicale…
> Dans un deuxième sens, strictement linguistique, on définit comme langue franque une langue "nationale", ou la langue d'un groupe, lorsque celle-ci devient une langue véhiculaire, une "langue de contact" comme l'est aujourd'hui l'anglais ….

Dans une troisième acception, en effet, qui est l'acception originelle, mais la moins connue, les linguistes désignent comme "langues franques" des mixtes de langues usités entre des locuteurs que n'unit aucune autre langue commune et dont l'existence est limitée dans le temps; les langues franques ... ne deviennent pas la langue maternelle, la langue en propre d'un groupe particulier. (pp. 14-15)

Based on the above definition, this study will focus on the *lingua franca* as a vehicular language which allows inter-comprehension among people speaking different mother tongues, as a neutral language or jargon of which nobody can claim ownership, but also as the mother tongue of one of the parties in the exchange. It will be examined from three different perspectives:

- an overview of the languages which have acquired the status of *lingue franche* in different periods and areas;
- a closer look at the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean, the *lingua franca stricto sensu*, which was current in the Mediterranean Basin from the Middle Ages until the 19th century and allowed communication between the people living, fighting or trading in the area without becoming the vernacular language of any of them;
- finally, reference will be made to constructed languages. Up to now they have all proved transient and none has actually achieved the status of *lingua franca* with a large community of fluent speakers. However, they surface throughout history and respond to a deeply felt need. In particular, in the 19th and 20th centuries numerous attempts of this kind were made in the belief that a common language would ensure effective and fair communication among all human beings, thus contributing to overcoming misunderstandings and promoting consensus and universal peace.

Based on this analysis, the second part of the study will be devoted to English to try and define more precisely its new status as a global language and to explore the implications of this new role.

LINGUA FRANCA AND LINGUE FRANCHE

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Aramaic

The need for a medium for inter-comprehension wherever exchanges or great political structures bring people speaking different languages into contact remains constant over time. The first example of *lingua franca* in the ancient world, before Greek and Latin, was Aramaic, the language of the Persian Empire and the original language of large sections of the Bible and the Talmud. Aramaic, the first traces of which date back to the 12th century BC and which was originally spoken by the Middle Eastern Aramaeans, is a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew, Syriac and Phoenician. Its script, derived from the Phoenician alphabet, has formed the basis for many other alphabets such as the Arabic and Hebrew ones.

The settlement of great numbers of Aramaeans in Mesopotamia and the use of Aramaic by Babylonian merchants from 700 BC turned Aramaic into the second language of the big Assyrian and Babylonian empires, where it began to be used as the language of diplomacy. Around 600 BC, after Darius I's conquest of Mesopotamia, Aramaic was adopted as the official language of the whole empire and from that period on a very uniform standardised variety known as imperial Aramaic was in use, which showed the typical features of a *lingua franca*. It was clearly distinguished from the local varieties and was a powerful weapon for the strong administrative apparatus which held the empire under control. Several texts from Egypt and the so-called Persepolis fortification tablets unearthed in 1933, which are the sources for our knowledge of the language, clearly demonstrate this.

Persepolis tablets: Aramaic as
a lingua franca
(source: Wikipedia)

After Alexander the Great's conquest, Aramaic slowly gave way to Greek, which finally overtook it as the common language in Egypt and Syria in the early 2nd century BC. Aramaic, however, continued to be spoken widely, from Judea down into Arabia and Parthia, and is generally believed to have been the first language of the Jews in Judea in the 1st century AD, alongside Hebrew — the liturgical language and the language of the

higher classes —, Greek and Latin — the language of the Roman army with little impact on the linguistic landscape of the area. The spread of Christianity in the Semitic speaking world and the flourishing of commerce along the Silk Road boosted the influence of Aramaic in its Syriac form (a variety which acquired importance as a literary language in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD) across a vast area which reached as far as China. The penetration of Aramaic in the East is demonstrated by its influence on the Mongolic script at the time of Genghis Khan in the 12th century as well as by artefacts like the so-called Nestorian stele (781 AD), a bilingual Chinese Syriac text discovered in Sian which documents the presence of early Christianity in China.

Since then Aramaic has lost its status as a *lingua franca*, but it is still spoken by a small community of about 400 000 people with different religious adherences, scattered throughout the Middle East.

The Nestorian monument at
Siganfu (His-an-fu)
(source: Wikipedia)

Greek

As has been mentioned, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD Greek started to emerge as the second great *lingua franca* of the ancient world, which would acquire an undisputed role as the language of literature and philosophy and the original language of the New Testament. Before Alexander, Greek did not exist as a uniform standardised language, but when he launched his campaigns with armies composed of people of different origins, speaking different Greek dialects, a common language allowing for inter-comprehension became essential. Under Alexander's leadership the κοινή γλῶσσα, the common language, was extensively spoken by his armies and throughout the empire from Egypt to India. However, it was after his death that it became established in the various Hellenistic kingdoms which flourished on the territory of the former Macedonian Empire. The Hellenistic koine, based on the Attic dialect spoken in Athens, continued to be spoken in the Roman Empire and subsequently developed into the Medieval Greek of the Byzantine Empire.

Alexander fighting the
Persian King Darius III,
Mosaic, Museo
Archeologico, Naples
(source: Wikipedia)

Throughout the Roman period, Greek kept its role as *lingua franca* in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the Near East, where Latin was confined to the Roman army and administration without any significant impact on the linguistic landscape of the area.

Its influence on cultural life in the empire never dwindled: Horace's *"Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit"* (Captive Greece took captive her rude conqueror) epitomizes Latin intellectuals' awareness of the Greek influence in Rome. An educational journey to Greece was a must for all Roman nobles, who spent long periods there attracted by its prestigious past and still flourishing cultural life. Athens, though reduced to a peripheral town in the empire, remained the main destination for those wishing to complete their education. In the 1st century AD Greek literary and philosophical works were massively translated into Latin, which reveals the widespread interest in and strong influence of the Greek language and culture. Major scholars of Greek origin like Plutarch and Polybius or Strabo moved to Rome and used the Greek language to celebrate the capital of the empire. In turn, Latin authors like Seneca the Younger wrote using Greek styles, and Roman heroes such as Scipio Africanus studied Greek philosophy and regarded Greek culture and science as an example to be followed. Among philhellene Roman emperors two deserve a special mention: Hadrian, who spent long periods in Greece and greatly contributed to the development and embellishment of Greek towns, and Marcus Aurelius, one of the main Roman Stoic philosophers, who used Greek for his philosophical works.

Following the dissolution of the Roman Empire in the 4th century AD, Greek became the official language of the new Byzantine Empire. For almost a thousand years it ensured the functioning of the empire and communication among its subjects. When the Byzantine Empire was swept aside by the Ottomans in the 15th century, the status of Greek changed radically. It lost definitively its status as official language but it survived as the language of the Christian Orthodox Church and population, tolerated by the Ottomans as all the other languages spoken in their empire. Its revival came in the 19th and 20th centuries, when the movement for national independence made the Greek language one of the pillars of the Greek nation: no longer a *lingua franca*, Greek has, on the contrary, played a major role in shaping the Greek national identity and consolidating the bond between the nation-state and its citizens.

Latin

For several centuries Greek shared the role of *lingua franca* with Latin. The expansion of the Roman Empire, together with its administrative and educational policies, made Latin the dominant language in continental Western Europe, exerting a strong influence also in Southern Britain, the Balkans, and Northern Africa, and the language of civil servants and the army in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

The destiny of Latin is particularly interesting in the perspective of this study. Besides being the common language of the most powerful and extended state of classical antiquity, it kept its role as a *lingua franca* for centuries after the collapse of the Roman Empire and remained the rule in academic and scientific domains well into the 17th and 18th centuries. Its function as a strong cohesive force was further reinforced by its being adopted as the language of the new Catholic Church and the vehicular language of the scholarly community in Western Europe. As concerns the Catholic Church, in particular, it was not until the 1960s that it officially recognised the use of vernacular languages in liturgy. Latin, however, has never been abolished and today it is still the official language of the Holy See, together with Italian.

After the end of the empire, the literary language, which had by then developed into Medieval Latin, remained close to the old classical Latin. Gradually, however, another language developed along completely different lines. Vulgar Latin, the oral speech of common people which was not under the control of any school guaranteeing its uniformity, began to diverge into various dialects which gradually gave birth to the Romance languages. Vernacular languages became established as the languages of literature and communication in most areas of everyday life, such as commerce and diplomacy, acquiring at times the status of *lingue franche* for specific purposes. In the 16th and 17th centuries, for example, a particular form of Italian developed which was widely used as a *lingua franca* for diplomatic contacts, even when the Italian states were not involved, as show the letters written in Italian by Soliman to the King of Poland in 1533.

Over time these new languages started to be used in domains where the supremacy of Latin had never been questioned, without however completely replacing it. In the 16th and 17th centuries many scholars started to use both Latin and the local languages, as well as to translate their works from Latin into them: the French philosopher Descartes wrote both in French and Latin, and Isaac Newton still used Latin for his works in the 18th century, while his posthumous works appeared in English. In 17th-century Holland, Grotius used Latin, whereas Baruch Spinoza used both Latin and Dutch. In the 18th century Latin was still used by Linnaeus and Swedenborg in Sweden and the Swedish Kingdom insisted on using Latin as the language of diplomacy in an effort to resist the influence of France and of the French language. In 1833 Latin was still the academic language of the faculty of medicine in Edinburgh, while it was the official language of the Kingdom of Hungary until 1844.

The endurance of Latin as the language of science and scholarship allowed for the circulation of ideas throughout Europe within a community of learning which was not fragmented along national lines and did not identify with a specific country or state. The language was not a mark of ethnic identity, but rather an instrument of communication which allowed exchanges among people belonging to the same cultural milieu. John Milton's use of Italian for his poems reflected a common practice and the case of scholars exiled from their countries who participated actively in the cultural life of the country hosting them was not rare. Though not widely known, the Italian jurist Alberico

Gentili (1552-1608) is an interesting example of this free circulation of scholars. Being accused of heresy, he left Italy for England where he held important functions as counsellor for Queen Elizabeth I and the King of Spain and, as a scholar of international law, pursued his academic career in Oxford where he held the same teaching post he had had in Italy. Other telling examples are Copernicus and Paracelsus. Copernicus, born in Poland, spoke fluent Polish, German and Latin, as well as Italian and Greek, and travelled extensively throughout Europe, studying and teaching in famous universities like Krakow, Padua and Bologna, before settling permanently in Germany. Paracelsus, a Swiss astrologer, alchemist and physician from the 16th century, spent his life wandering through Europe, Africa and Asia Minor in search of hidden knowledge, but also fleeing persecution for his unorthodox ideas.

Alberico Gentili
(source: Wikipedia)

French

In the 18th century, however, the perception of language was changing. That Sweden had to stubbornly insist on the use of Latin in diplomacy indicates the radical shift from Latin to national languages which was taking place, with French imposing itself as the new *lingua franca*. In that period the rise and consolidation of nation-states required the consolidation of national identity and the identification of one national language through which the values, traditions, and culture of the people could be transmitted. On a political level, the end of the 18th century also marked the beginning of colonial expansion. It is in this context of great changes, political as much as social and cultural, that Latin definitively gave way to the various national languages and in particular to French as the new *lingua franca* of politics and diplomacy.

This evolution of French had already begun in the 17th century when France had established itself as one of the main political powers and the centre of intellectual life in Europe. The rise of the Enlightenment marked a turning point in this development. The French Enlightenment exerted a strong influence on the major European courts: figures like Voltaire, who spent long periods in Berlin as a counsellor to the Prussian King Friedrich II, or Diderot, who was in Russia at Catherine II's court, are cases in point. The influence of French culture was such that in many areas French became the language of the educated: in Russia the aristocracy adopted French as the language of conversation and correspondence, reserving Russian for communication with the lower

classes, and the Polish author Jan Potocki chose French for his *Manuscript Found in Saragossa*.

Following the colonial wars, French spread in Africa and the Middle East, as well as in the Far East — though in Indochina its penetration did not prove as lasting as in the other colonies. Its international role remained unquestioned for centuries: it was the only language of international institutions and diplomatic exchanges until the creation of the League of Nations at the end of World War I, when the USA emerged as a world power and President Wilson was able to impose the use of English, together with French and Spanish.

Since the end of World War II French has progressively lost ground to English in the international arena. However, it is still used as a working or official language in all main international institutions and in some cases, like the European Court of Justice or the Union Postale Internationale, work is carried out solely in French.

Besides France, Switzerland, Belgium, Quebec and Luxembourg, French is still widely used — often as an official language — in the former colonies which belong to the *Francophonie*, the organisation of French speaking countries created in 1970 with the aim of *"promouvoir la langue française et la diversité culturelle et linguistique"*. The lively debate which has arisen in this context concerning the role of French as compared to that of local languages indicates the tensions currently affecting the French language: the language of the former colonisers is transformed and appropriated by the populations of the former colonies to create new varieties. A few years ago this evolution found theoretical expression in the manifesto published by a group of French-speaking Caribbean writers who stated that the French language has been appropriated following decolonisation, and, through creolisation, allows for the invention of something new and innovative. For them, this regeneration of the French language through Creole literatures marks the re-empowerment of these populations. It is a process which recalls the destiny of Latin at the end of the Roman era, when the new vulgar languages started to erode its supremacy.

Map of the
Francophonie
in 2008
(source: Wikipedia)

Other European *lingue franche*

Although the predominance of French was undisputed for centuries, other languages emerged as *lingue franche* in limited areas or to fulfil specific needs, only to be abandoned when those needs or the balance of power in the area concerned changed. German, for example, was widespread in much of Central and Eastern Europe, where it

remained an important second language after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while being a prerequisite language in the scientific community at the beginning of the 20th century. Later on, political developments in Germany had a strong impact on the adoption of German as a language of choice: during World War II it became a major foreign language throughout the territories under German influence, where many people made an effort to learn and use it but abandoned it immediately after the end of the war. Similarly in the Far East Japanese became a cultural language and a *lingua franca* in the territories occupied from the end of the 19th century, only to be rejected by the local populations after Japan's defeat. In this sense, another telling example is Russian, which was imposed as the *lingua franca* of the Communist block and a compulsory subject in all schools, but aroused strong resentment in the people who rejected it after the dissolution of the USSR and replaced it with English, perceived rather as a symbol of freedom.

Voyages of discovery were the starting point for the creation of the first two great colonial empires: the Spanish and the Portuguese. As well as imposing their rule, they brought their religion and their language to the peoples they colonised. After centuries of domination, these became a lasting heritage and nowadays the regions in question are experiencing linguistic trends similar to those occurring in the former French colonies which are described above.

Spanish has established itself as the first, if not the only, language in all Latin American countries except Brazil, and as the official language — in a few cases alongside local languages. Furthermore, Spanish is now the second most spoken language in the USA and is formally recognised in some states. While it has always been present on US territory, particularly in the South-Western states which once belonged to Spain and Mexico, the sharp increase in its use in recent decades is primarily due to the massive migration from Spanish-speaking countries to, above all, the great metropolitan areas where bilingualism is now the rule.

As for Portuguese, colonisers took it with them to the four corners of the globe, from Brazil in South America to Goa, Macau and Timor in Asia, as well as to the PALOP countries (Portuguese-speaking African countries: Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique and São Tomé and Príncipe). It was also used as a *lingua franca* in Sri Lanka for centuries. Today it is evolving in a similar way to other colonial languages: it is still used as the official language in the former colonies, it is the basis of several Creole languages around the world and new varieties are emerging which gain prestige as the embodiment of independent cultures. Brazilian Portuguese is the best example of this. As the language of about half the Latin American population and of an emerging economic giant, Brazilian Portuguese is asserting itself as a separate language on an equal footing with Standard Portuguese.

Finally, another country deserves to be mentioned in the context of colonial powers as it followed a different linguistic policy which had a radically different impact. In the 17th century, the Netherlands established itself as one of the most important worldwide commercial powers. Rather than creating a structured empire, however, the Dutch administered their dominions through the Dutch East and West India Companies, thus emphasising the importance of these territories as commercial bases as opposed to provinces of a far-reaching political entity. In the East, the Dutch never encouraged the local populations to learn their language, which vanished after decolonisation, leaving hardly a trace. In the Dutch West Indies, however, from the 19th century on a policy of

language expansion was followed, which may explain why Dutch is still present in the region. Nowadays, besides the Netherlands and Belgium, Dutch is the official language of Aruba, Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles. In connection with Dutch, Afrikaans should also be mentioned, even though it is now recognised as a distinct language and not a dialect or local variety. Developed from the 17th-century Dutch brought to the Cape by the first settlers, it is still an official language in South Africa, staunchly defended by its speakers as a fundamental mark of identity.

Arabic

Among non-European languages, the lingua franca with which the Western world has always entertained the strongest, though not always the most peaceful, contacts is Arabic. It spread rapidly in the Middle East and North Africa starting from the 7th century, following Mohammed's preaching of the new Islamic faith and the religious wars which accompanied it. The Arabic speaking areas are characterised by the coexistence of numerous dialects side by side with the standard language: Modern Standard Arabic, derived from Classical Arabic, is used throughout the area, whereas different dialects or regional or national varieties, typically unwritten and often mutually unintelligible, have evolved from it and constitute the everyday spoken language. This diglossia is due to a large extent to the intimate link between religion and language in the Islamic world: as the language of Qur'ân, Classical Arabic is a revealed language, as sacred as the contents of the Holy Book. As a consequence, it is normative and is not supposed to evolve and change. Arabic bears interesting resemblances to Latin after the fall of the Roman Empire, in that both became the languages of great revealed religions practised across vast regions, with strong tensions between the original language and the different varieties deriving from it. The outcome of this shared dynamic, however, has been antithetical. While Latin, which was not so closely associated with religion and revelation, evolved freely and over time gave way to vulgar languages in all contexts and for all uses, Arabic has been preserved in more or less its original form, and the varieties that have naturally evolved from it have never acquired the status of fully-fledged languages or enjoyed the same prestige as the Classical form. This also explains the differing destinies of the Bible and the Qur'ân when it comes to translation. While translation has been a central issue in the history of the former from the very beginning, the latter is translated merely for comprehension purposes, with only the Arabic text being officially recognised in Islam.

Qur'an manuscript from Al-Andalus,
12th century
(source: Wikipedia)

This polarisation, however, should be qualified. There are continuous contacts and exchanges between Standard Arabic and its various dialects. On the one hand, if the structure of Arabic is fixed, its vocabulary evolves freely. It integrates words from the various dialects which are appropriated by all speakers regardless of their dialect, as well as new words necessary to express new concepts or objects. On the other hand, the survival of Arabic as a common language understood by all Arabic speakers and as today's language of education and the media means that it offers all its speakers a powerful tool for communication, capable of rousing in them a strong sense of belonging to one and the same group.

Lingue franche in America

In Latin America, Quechua and Nahuatl should be mentioned. They are the languages of the Inca and Aztec empires respectively, still in use although losing ground to Spanish. The term "Nahuatl" is used today to refer to many different dialects spoken by indigenous communities in Mexico. Quechua, the most common language in the Andes after the Spanish Conquest, was adopted by the Spaniards to communicate with the indigenous populations and by the Catholic Church to propagate the Christian faith, and is nowadays the language of some 10 million people and an official language in several Andean countries.

La Malinche and Hernan Cortes in the city of Xaltelolco,
16th century
(source: Wikipedia)

Besides these living languages, a now dead language served as a *lingua franca* for a period after the discovery of the Americas: Tupi. Tupi was the first contact language of traders and missionaries in their dealings with the Indians along the Atlantic coast of Brazil. On the basis of the various dialects spoken by the indigenous populations, the Jesuits developed a modified, uniform language which enabled communication between the Europeans and the Indians, as well as between Indian groups speaking different languages. This standardised variety even acquired prestige as a literary language. Tupi was in common use until the 18th century, when it became extinct. Guarani, a language very closely related to it, has survived in Paraguay, however, where it is one of the official languages, alongside Spanish.

Lingue franche in Africa

Recourse to a *lingua franca*, often a European language, is the rule in Africa, where hundreds of languages and dialects coexist side by side and multilingualism is the norm. Since decolonisation the languages of the colonisers have been maintained as official languages in many countries where the new elites could not reach an agreement on one domestic language which was politically neutral and acceptable for all ethnic groups. This is what has happened, for example, in Nigeria, part of the British Commonwealth, and in the Democratic Republic of Congo, one of the francophone African countries.

Among the African languages, only Swahili is spoken across a vast territory in Western, Eastern and Southern Africa. The use of Swahili as a regional language and its codification were promoted by the colonial powers in order to facilitate communication with the indigenous populations. The operation proved extremely successful and today Swahili is the only authentic African language among the official working languages of the African Union, the official language in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda and a national language in numerous other countries. Particularly interesting is the case of Tanzania, where Swahili, not being identified with a specific ethnic group or social class, could be easily accepted and is now spoken by the vast majority of the population. In contrast, in the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo, French is the only official language and Swahili is losing ground to another local *lingua franca*, Lingala. Lingala is a newly formed pidgin spoken in the capital Kinshasa and widely identified with the new elite. It is also the language of the media, of music and of show business, so speaking it has positive connotations which induce individuals to choose it instead of Swahili or other local languages, even outside the capital.

Lingue franche in Asia

In Asia too, the linguistic landscape has always been very complex and fluid with many languages and dialects which are not mutually intelligible. Newly independent states had therefore to choose a *lingua franca* ensuring inter-comprehension at state level. The newly formed states, however, followed utterly different linguistic policies. The cases of India and Indonesia are emblematic of these antithetic approaches.

In India some 800 languages are spoken today and the official federal languages are Hindi — the dominant language in the North of the country and the language strongly associated with the nationalist struggle — and English. After independence the ethnic and geographical connotations of Hindi, seen as the language of the privileged elite of the North who controlled the country, hindered its acceptance by the other ethnic groups, who insisted on retaining English. Therefore, although Hindi is presently expanding, its chances of becoming the only official language in India are very low and the compromise solution adopted, though inefficient at Union level, appears the only workable one.

In Indonesia, on the other hand, Malay, in the form of *bahasa* Indonesia, has been adopted by all Indonesians as the medium of communication. *Bahasa* Indonesia was not the language of the elite and was spoken by only 2% of the population at the moment of independence, but it was chosen by the nationalist movement because it did not arouse jealousy and was not perceived as a sign of the domination of one group over the others. Thanks to the wide acceptance of *bahasa* Indonesia, no European language, not even Dutch, the language of former colonisers, has managed to impose itself.

Last but not least, Chinese must be mentioned. In China, 7 to 13 main regional groups of Chinese are spoken, most of them mutually unintelligible. Until the early 20th

century, a written form of Chinese, Classical Chinese, was used as a written *lingua franca* not only in China but also in wide areas of the Far East, such as Japan, Korea and Vietnam. Outside China the influence of Classical Chinese declined as a consequence of European penetration, whereas in China it was replaced by modern standard Chinese, the written *lingua franca* which now allows communication between speakers of the different varieties. As for oral communication the new *lingua franca* is Mandarin Chinese. In the past its use was limited to officials and civil servants, but in the mid-20th century it was chosen as the language of the compulsory education system, which boosted its diffusion. Today it is spoken by virtually all young and middle-aged citizens in mainland China. Though the role of Mandarin Chinese is not called into question, Cantonese stands out because of its wide diffusion and its prestige. While the other regional varieties are rarely used outside their well-delimited native areas, Cantonese is widely used in South-Eastern China and is the only variety of Chinese other than Standard Mandarin to be used in official contexts. It is also one of the official languages in Hong Kong and Macau.

Owing to the explosive growth of the Chinese economy, Chinese is rapidly expanding outside China in parts of the Far East inhabited by Chinese populations and throughout the world the number of people learning Chinese as a second language is growing rapidly, leading some to envision Chinese, not English, as the future global *lingua franca*.

THE *LINGUA FRANCA* OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

A special case of contact language, different from the ones we have looked at so far, is the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean, the *lingua franca stricto sensu*, widely used in the Mediterranean until the beginning of the 20th century. While among scholars and literates ideas circulated in Latin, merchants, soldiers, and pirates — who were very active in the Mediterranean and also needed a common language — communicated in *lingua franca*, a "low language", mainly oral and therefore sparsely documented. It is mentioned by travellers in their memoirs when they relate exchanges and contacts for which the *lingua franca* was the only means of communication and give examples. The most famous passages in *lingua franca*, however, are to be found in literature, where it is employed mainly as a comic device, notably in Moliere's *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, in Goldoni's *L'impresario delle Smirne* or in Mozart's *Il ratto dal serraglio*, when so-called *turqueries* were the fashion of the day.

From these testimonies we can gather that the *lingua franca* was a sort of corrupted Italian, with loan words from other Romance languages, as well as from the other languages spoken in the Mediterranean, like Arabic, Ottoman Turkish and Greek. Being a very fluid tool, adapted to the contingent needs of the speakers, it varied from one place to the other, Spanish being a stronger influence in the Western version, Italian more evident in Tunisia, and Greek loans more numerous in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The origins of the *lingua franca* are shrouded in mystery but it is usually thought to date back to the Crusades, when it came into use as the only means of communication between the Crusaders and the peoples they came into contact with on their journey to the Holy Land. Later on the *lingua franca* spread widely in the Western Mediterranean

and reached its maximum development in the 16th century, the heyday of piracy and a period of intense commercial exchanges, including slave trade.

The term *lingua franca* — the "language of the Francs", "Francs" being the term used to refer to all Western Europeans as opposed to the Greeks — is considered to be a translation of the Arab *lûghat al-Ifranj*, which appears for the first time in an Arabic text from the 9th century. However, Western speakers and their contemporaries only began to use the term *"lingua franca"* to describe this phenomenon at the beginning of the 16th century. At the other end of the timeline, the last document in *lingua franca* we possess is a sort of glossary of terms in *Petit Mauresque* (the name by which *lingua franca* was known in France) translated into French, which was published in 1831 for the French soldiers fighting in the colonial wars in Algeria. And indeed, the colonial wars gave a mortal blow to the *lingua franca*. It was replaced by French for all official uses, while utilitarian everyday exchanges between the colonisers and the local populations were conducted in Sabir, a degraded version of the *lingua franca* which reflected the asymmetric relations imposed by the colonial rule.

As concerns the linguistic features of the *lingua franca*, all scholars agree on the following aspects: its oral character, its very simplified structure, the use of the verb in the infinitive, the absence of inflection, the lack of concord between noun and adjective, and the lack of person, gender, number and case for nouns and pronouns. Although lexically quite poor (the use of the *lingua franca* was mainly restricted to specific fields), synonymity was well developed, with the same concept being expressed through words of different origins.

The foremost feature of the *lingua franca*, effectively pointed out by Jocelyne Dakhlia in her *Lingua franca*, is its "non-territoriality": the *lingua franca* is a "language for communication" and not a "language for identification", to use Juliane House's terminology, a language of compromise which helped overcome otherness while at the same time underlining it. Having recourse to the *lingua franca* meant recognizing the lack of a common language and striving to find a means of communicating without intermediaries in a neutral space. Yet, at the same time, it was used to underline a difference. It was conceived not as a common language but as the language of the other, which did not belong to the speaker and therefore naturally belonged to the interlocutor.

Ahmed III receiving the embassy of Charles de Ferriol in 1699; painting by Jean-Baptiste van Mour (source: Wikipedia)

It was widely used, especially in the Maghreb, as the language of diplomacy in order to avoid the use of interpreters, except in the most formal situations. A part of the diplomatic work was, however, conducted in *lingua franca* even when interpreters were present. In the Ottoman provinces of Maghreb the official correspondence with the European powers was in Turkish or often in Italian. However, since the local rulers' knowledge of Turkish was flawed, the *lingua franca* functioned as a sort of working language, as shows the case of a French diplomat who in 1757 handed in official letters in Turkish to the Bey of Tunis and was asked to explain their content in *lingua franca*.

The Enlightenment and the start of the European campaigns in Northern Africa and the Middle East marked the beginning of a new interest in and awareness of the languages of the people living on the other side of the Mediterranean. These languages came to be seen as "pure" languages embodying the ethnic identity and rich cultures of their speakers. Owing to their prestige, they gradually replaced the *lingua franca*, which, on the contrary, was never perceived as a pure language, never enjoyed high prestige and was used by all kinds of people belonging to all social classes. It was a good reflection of the social mobility of those days, which entailed complex contacts, both hostile and peaceful but always between equals, with the *lingua franca* as a "third space", a sort of "buffer" space.

With the rise of both colonialism, which brought about the end of symmetrical relations, and nationalism, which identifies the national language as an essential pillar of the nation itself, the *lingua franca*, intrinsically corrupted, was degraded to the language of the dominated people. After decolonisation, the newly independent states held a similar attitude toward the language: they held the local "pure" languages up against the languages of the colonisers as the sign of a strong ethnic identity, while the *lingua franca* continued to be seen as a symptom of corruption and therefore neglected.

To conclude, it is worth stressing the divergence between language and identity in the *lingua franca* highlighted by Dakhlia, from which interesting stimuli can be drawn:

> Or, c'est ce décrochement au moins partiel de la langue et de l'identité que donne à voir la *lingua franca*. En tant que produit d'un rapport plus paritaire dans l'histoire des sociétés méditerranéennes (ce qui ne signifie pas plus harmonieux ni serein), elle témoigne d'une relation à la langue moins lourde et chargée d'affect qu'il ne sera de règle à l'ère des impérialismes ou des apologies nationales. (p. 475)

On the other hand, the *lingua franca* should not be idealised: it does not carry any ethical values, nor should it be immediately associated with the notion of consensus and peaceful exchange, as is often the case in social sciences today: *"la* lingua franca *n'est porteuse d'aucune valeur, d'aucun message irénique; ce n'est pas un espéranto."* (p. 481)

ARTIFICIAL LANGUAGES

What do we mean by saying that the *lingua franca* is not an Esperanto? To answer this question, another approach to language has to be taken into account: the quest for a perfect language to overcome the confusion after Babel. While it surfaces regularly throughout history, the utopia of a common language to promote mutual understanding and global peace largely came to the fore in the 19th century, when the triumph of national languages destroyed the previous situation characterised by great fluidity and multilingualism.

In those years a large number of constructed languages, based on extremely diverse criteria, were proposed. The first to raise attention, even though it never acquired fluent speakers, was Solresol, devised by Francois Sudre in 1817 and based on musical notes. Other attempts followed without gaining wide acceptance until Volapük appeared in the 1880s. However, being largely based on German and English, after initial success it disappeared to be replaced by other constructed languages, more genuinely international and easier to learn outside the German-speaking area. Among these attempts it is worth mentioning Latino sine Flexione, proposed in 1903 by the Italian mathematician Giuseppe Peano, who argued that new auxiliary languages were unnecessary since Latin was already established as the world's international language. He therefore developed a simplified form of Latin, with the same vocabulary but regularised grammar and no inflection.

Among all these experiments, undisputedly the most successful is Esperanto, invented in the late 1870s by Dr. Zamenhof, a Jewish Polish ophthalmologist and linguist. Esperanto is highly regular, uses a modified Latin alphabet, a predominantly Romanic vocabulary, and makes extensive use of prefixes and suffixes. Zamenhof's declared intention was to foster harmony among the peoples. This irenic goal and the international character of Esperanto, not to mention Zamenhof's Jewish background, attracted the suspicion of many totalitarian regimes during the 20th century and Esperantists were persecuted in Nazi Germany as well as in Japan, in the Soviet Union under Stalin, and by Franco in Spain, where Esperanto was widespread among anarchists and regional nationalists.

Up to now Esperanto has not succeeded in attracting a wide community of users (according to estimates the number of its speakers ranges from 10 000 to 2 million, about 1 000 of whom would consider it one of their native languages). However, there is a well organised network of convinced supporters actively promoting the language: the World Esperanto Association has official relationships with the UN and UNESCO, and in San Marino one university uses Esperanto as its first language of teaching and administration. International conferences and congresses are regularly organised, literary works have been composed in Esperanto and the major works of world literature have been translated into it. The search engine Google supports Esperanto as one of its search languages. So far, however, efforts in favour of the adoption of Esperanto as an official language in international contexts have never been successful.

By way of conclusion, two main differences should be highlighted between the Mediterranean *lingua franca* and other natural languages used as *lingue franche* on the one hand, and constructed languages on the other. The first is their genesis — the

former develop spontaneously while the latter are consciously devised — and the second their purpose — the former are meant to fulfil a contingent and concrete need for communication, while the aim of the latter is to facilitate mutual understanding as a condition for universal peace. Yet, although they are easy to learn and politically fair, no constructed language has ever gained wide acceptance. Even Esperanto, the most successful among them, is confined to a restricted community of staunch supporters, without any real impact on political, cultural or economic exchanges at a wider level. On the contrary, the actual communication among people not sharing the same language has always been ensured by natural languages or their *ad hoc* varieties. Today is no exception. In the past decades English has spread as the vehicular language in our globalised world in all domains at an unprecedented pace, although it is not as regular or as easy to learn as constructed languages, nor does it guarantee a level playing field for all parties in all speech situations.

ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA

Throughout history, whenever and wherever different groups have come into contact, there has been a constant need for a common language enabling communities with different mother tongues to communicate. What is new is the scale of international communication today. The past few decades have witnessed unparalleled increases, emphasising the need for one or more vehicular languages that can overcome language barriers. That this role is mainly played by English at the moment can scarcely be disputed. It is against this backdrop that labels such as "World English", "International English", "English as a Lingua Franca", "Global English", or "Globish" have been coined.

English is the working language or one of the working languages of all international organisations. Besides the United Kingdom, Ireland, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, most countries belonging to the former British Empire have adopted it as their — at times sole — official language and new countries are promoting its use (e.g. Rwanda designated English as the official language of education in 2008 and English is gaining ground on French as the chief foreign language even in former French colonies like Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco). It is also the main language of international business and is chosen ever more frequently as the corporate language in multinational corporations and in academic, technological and scientific contexts or in sports events. Its prestige is unchallenged in the media and the entertainment industry worldwide: the number of music bands singing in English instead of their mother tongue clearly shows the appeal of English, as does the number of people drawn to it as the language of their idols.

Thus English has become a symbol of modernity and speaking it means sharing and being part of a global culture through which local barriers can be overcome. Starting mainly from the 1960s and 1970s, through popular music, English has become in many countries a symbol of freedom and rebellion and in serious crises it still proves a powerful weapon against censorship. As the main language of new communication channels, such as blogs and social networks, it has often allowed the opponents of totalitarian regimes to make their voices heard worldwide in spite of the harsh censorship put in place by such governments to crush and silence them. The events which followed the Iranian presidential elections in 2009 very clearly showed the importance of a vehicular language to break isolation and circulate information. The official media did not cover the protests and manifestations which spontaneously broke out in the days immediately after the official results were announced, but news of the riots and casualties could reach the outside world thanks to these new tools, and universal use of English meant that the news spread rapidly and afar.

Even those who fight its supremacy recognise it as a powerful medium to make themselves heard. A few years ago during a march in support of Hindi against English organised in India, demonstrators carried banners in English to reach a wider public. Another interesting example is the protest of fundamentalist Muslims after satirical cartoons making fun of Muhammad were published in Denmark: they protested against the Western world, but did so using slogans in English, even though it is the language of "the Great Satan" and is perceived as the very symbol of Western predominance.

However, whilst the phenomenon is widely acknowledged, it is far from being unanimously welcomed given the perceived risk of serious dangers not only for the survival of other languages, and as a consequence of other cultures, but also for English itself. On the one hand, the more English develops, the more fears are voiced that it propagates a new form of imperialism. According to this view, together with their language, English speaking countries (notably the US) impose their cultures and values, as well as their economic and political supremacy, the final outcome being global uniformity and homogenisation. Therefore, positive and clear action is called for to counter this trend and promote cultural diversity by protecting smaller languages and cultures, endangered by the advance of English. On the other hand, the global reach of English is claimed to have a negative impact on English itself, as standards fall and mistakes and local idiosyncrasies increase, leaving native speakers feeling dispossessed of their own language.

LINGUISTIC AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC FEATURES

A new polycentric world

Both those who favour the adoption of English as the global language and those who oppose it acknowledge that English is currently the main world language. It is spoken as a first language by a declining portion of the world population but by an increasing number of second language speakers and even more by speakers of English as a foreign language (EFL)[1], rising at an unprecedented speed. According to *Ethnologue*'s data, English is used by about 330 million native speakers (behind Mandarin Chinese, at approximately the same level as Spanish). The number of speakers of English as a second language (ESL)[2] is estimated at between 300 and 500 million, while the number of those who speak English in some form as a foreign language, though extremely difficult to estimate, is believed to range between 500 million and 1 billion. Some, however, estimate it to reach as many as 4 billion people.

To address this situation, where native speakers are a minority, new variations are consolidating and new communities of speakers assert their right to appropriate the language, a new 'polycentric' approach has become necessary. The most successful model to describe English as a world language was devised by the Indian linguist Raj Kachru, who also coined the term "World English". Kachru classified English as a world language consisting of three circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer or Expanded Circle, and the Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle refers to the traditional bases of English where it is spoken as the mother tongue, and includes the USA, UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The Outer Circle includes nations where English has a key role in institutions, plays an important function in multilingual settings and may be adopted as an official language; it includes about 50 territories, mainly belonging to the former British Empire, notably India and Singapore, Malawi and Nigeria. Lastly, the Expanding Circle denotes nations where English is acknowledged as an important international language, but does not compete for the role of official

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[1] English as a foreign language indicates the use of English in a non-English-speaking region, where study normally occurs as part of the normal school curriculum.
[2] English as a second language is normally used with reference to non-native speakers of English living in Anglophone countries.

language. This includes countries which have not been colonised by speakers of the Inner Circle and where English is taught as a foreign language, from Mexico to Germany, Brazil to Japan.
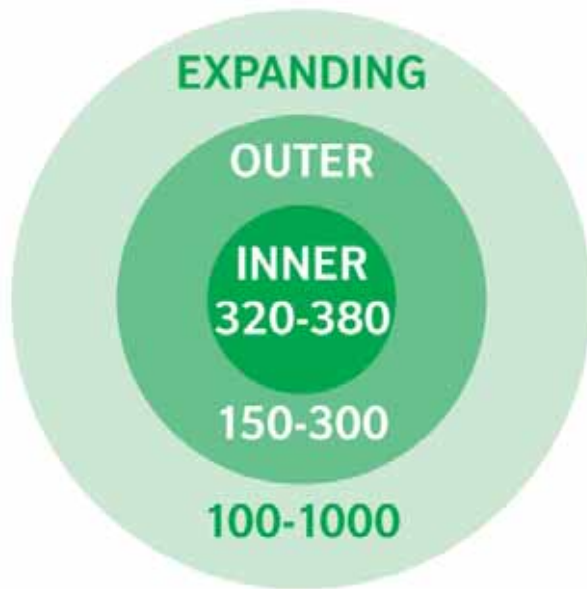
The three circles of English as conceived by Kachru
(source: Graddol, *English Next*)

According to this model, Inner Circle communities are norm providing, i.e. they have their own varieties of English that are traditionally regarded as the correct ones. Outer Circle communities are norm developing, meaning that they are now developing their own varieties on the basis of the conflict between linguistic norm and linguistic behaviour which characterises these communities. Speakers in the Expanding Circle are norm-dependent, i.e. they are not recognised the right to develop new varieties, since all deviations from native speaker standard are regarded as mistakes.

Though Kachru's classification and terminology remain the starting point when studying English in international contexts, his model is often criticised as being outdated and unsuitable to account for the transformations English is currently undergoing. In particular, the distinction between the three circles is getting blurred. Radical changes are transforming the Inner Circle as a result of a massive influx of immigrants, while speakers in the Outer Circle are becoming functionally native speakers, and people in the Expanding Circle use intelligible and fit-for-purpose forms of English, which are becoming linguistically and culturally de-Anglo-Americanised. Furthermore, while in Kachru's model Expanding Circle communities learn English mainly to communicate with speakers in the other two circles, it is now clear that it has become predominantly a tool for intercultural communication between the three circles, but mainly within the Expanding Circle.

Representing the community of English speakers as including a wide range of proficiencies (source: Graddol, *English Next*)

To reflect this new situation, the concept of "English as a lingua franca" (ELF) has emerged, mainly to replace the concept of "English as a foreign language". In this context, ELF is generally defined as "a 'contact language' between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen *foreign* language of communication" (Firth, 1996). In Kachru's model, EFL concerns exclusively speakers in the Expanding Circle who learn English with the goal to acquire native speaker competence. This inevitably arouses frustration in the learners, who will never attain their target level and waste precious energy in order to master difficult features which are regarded as quintessentially "English", but are not essential for mutual understanding nor do they help communication with other non-native speakers.

The concept of English as a lingua franca, on the contrary, "dethrones" the native speaker (NS) and defines the goal of English learning as the ability to communicate successfully with other non-native speakers (NNS). This new theoretical approach places speakers in the Expanding Circle on the same level as speakers in the Inner and Outer Circles, and grants prestige to international English, estimated at around 75 % of all exchanges in English. It is better adapted to the current status of English as international language and takes into account its implications, firstly that, "as a consequence of its international use, English is being shaped at least as much by its non-native speakers as by its native speakers" (Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 339). It recognises that we are facing a completely new phenomenon, which must be tackled with new and specific means, notably in terms of language teaching and learning. As David Graddol asserts in his recent study on the future of English, *English Next*, "teaching and learning English as a lingua franca (ELF) is probably the most radical and controversial approach to emerge in recent years. It squarely addresses some of the issues which global English raises" (p. 87). He calls for a redefinition of the traditional tenets in this field and, in particular, of the issue of "ownership", i.e. who is entitled to set norms and pass judgements on language usage. If the distinction between native and non-native speakers fades into the background, the right of native speakers to claim ownership of the language is also called into question. Under the EFL approach, English becomes a global asset belonging to all users, regardless of whether it is their mother tongue. As a consequence, native speakers have lost the right to control the language and should acknowledge that "as ever increasing numbers of people learn English around the

world, it is not just 'more of the same'. There is a new model. English is no longer being learned as a foreign language, in recognition of the hegemonic power of native English speakers" (p. 19). It belongs to everybody and to nobody at the same time and no longer embodies a single culture, the Western Judaeo-Christian culture.
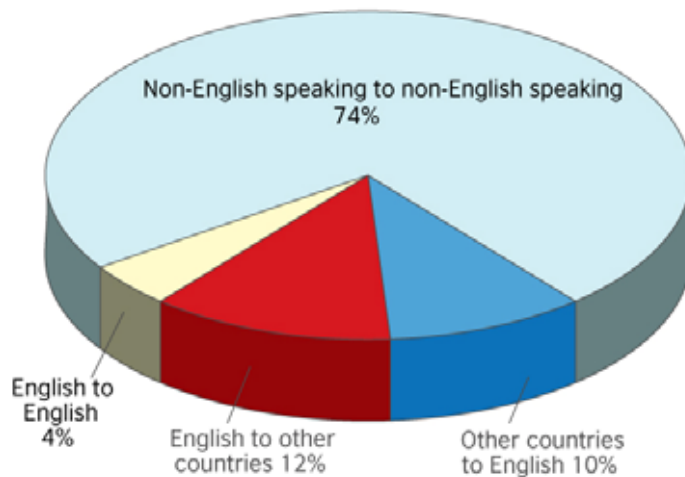
Tourism is growing but the majority of human interaction do not involve an English native speaker (Data derived form world Tourism Organisation)
(source: Graddol, *English Next*)

The first step in the transformation of English into an international language was similar to the process undergone by the French language, with various Englishes developing in the territories of the former British Empire as varieties in their own right. As in the case of French, in the English-speaking world the language of the colonisers has not been radically rejected. On the contrary, influential voices support the idea that the populations of the former colonies can attain final liberation only by appropriating it: "conquer English is the only way to make us free" declared the British-Indian writer Salman Rushdie.

Compared to French and the other former colonial languages, however, English has gone one step further. Besides undergoing this process of creolisation, it has also become the preferred language for international exchange among people who use it as a vehicular language. It is now the world's most multicultural language. This multiculturalism and the new approach to language ownership mean that the language community must be defined along completely different lines because "unlike speakers of most contact languages that have been generally studied, ELF speakers represent highly diverse linguistic backgrounds — in principle all of the world's languages — therefore the language contact is extremely complex. This stands in clear contrast to the two-language contact, which has been the common object of study in language contact studies" (Mauranen, p. 273).

English as a lingua franca: a new discipline

In the 1980s linguists and sociolinguists started to focus on English as used in international contexts by people for whom it is not the mother tongue, as a separate field of study. They redefined basic concepts such as norm, correctness, NS vs. NNS competence. In this new approach, "ELF talk cannot be conceived with a view to an ideal English norm, and the ELF speaker cannot be measured in his/her competence vis-à-vis 'the native speaker'. A lingua franca speaker is not *per definitionem* not fully competent in the part of his/her linguistic knowledge under study" (House, 2003, p.

557). This definition reverses the balance of power between native speakers and non-native speakers and has a major impact on the teaching of English, one of the main fields of interest for ELF scholars. Research to develop new and clearly targeted methods and objectives and invest in essential competences is crucial to raise awareness of this new form of English and promote its use.

Before defining new teaching methods and curricula, however, the features of ELF and its pragmatic implications must be clearly defined. Though most issues are still strongly debated — e.g. whether ELF should be regarded as a distinct variety or rather as a specific way of using the language, the latter option being preferred at present — numerous studies have highlighted recurrent features in ELF speech acts. Among the earliest such works is Joan Jenkins' research on the phonological features of ELF, which led her to identify the so-called "Lingua Franca Core", i.e. items which are essential for intelligible pronunciation. In particular, her work showed how certain sounds regarded as "particularly English" but also particularly difficult for learners, like the "th" sounds /θ/ or /ð/, are very often dropped by ELF speakers, without any impact on the success of communication, and should therefore not be included in the Lingua Franca Core.

Similar studies have been conducted on morphology and syntax with similar results. "Errors" which appear regularly in ELF communication often comprise deviations from features regarded as "most typically English", such as 3rd person -s, tags, phrasal verbs and idioms, tense use with a preference for -ing forms. Since, however, these deviant uses do not detract from successful communication, they should not be regarded as "errors" in the ELF context.

The studies undertaken on pragmatics in the ELF context, in particular, offer precious indicators to evaluate the impact of the use of English in intercultural communication. They show that in ELF communication, speakers tend to apply specific strategies which open completely new perspectives. First of all, based on the assumption that ELF communication occurs between non-native speakers, the great shift in perspective is "from treating …'non-nativeness as problem' to viewing 'non-nativeness' as a resource or 'non-nativeness' as unattended [because irrelevant]" (Seidlhofer, 2001, p. 142).

Secondly, ELF scholars focus on the communicative efficiency of English in ELF communication. Seidlhofer argues that "the intellectual battles which are being fought over issues rooted in ideological position, commercial interests, ecological concerns and social identities go largely unnoticed by the largest group of users of 'English': those to whom 'English' serves on a daily basis as a lingua franca for conducting their affairs … as the most useful instrument … for communication that cannot be conducted in the mother tongue, be it in business, casual conversation, science or politics — in conversation, in print, on television, or on the internet" (2001, pp. 140-141). In particular, she points to the fact that such speakers "are not primarily concerned with emulating the way native speakers use their mother tongue within their own communities, nor with socio-psychological and ideological meta-level discussions. Instead, the central concerns for this domain are efficiency, relevance and economy in language learning and language use … people need and want to acquire the instrument 'English' whatever the ideological baggage that comes with it" (2001, p. 141).

This stance, which is widely shared by ELF scholars, first calls into question the concept of correctness. When English is taught as a foreign language, the correctness of any utterance is established by reference to native speaker norms. In ELF, where native competence is no longer the goal and the focus is on functional effectiveness rather than

on formal correctness, the concept of correctness should be replaced by that of appropriateness, that is the ability to attain "global inclusiveness and egalitarian licence to speak in ways that meet diverse local needs" (Seidlhofer, 2001, p. 135).

Academics perceived the need to conduct well-grounded, empirical research to found ELF on sound bases. An essential step was to compile corpora, notably the Vienna ELF corpus compiled at Vienna University as part of the Voice project, which focuses on "unscripted (though partly pre-structured), largely face-to-face communication among fairly fluent adult speakers from a wide range of first language backgrounds whose primary and secondary education and socialisation did not take place in English" and includes private and public dialogues, private and public group discussions, casual conversations and one-to-one interviews, with speakers making use of ELF "in a largely unselfconscious, instrumental (as opposed to identificatory) way" (Seidlhofer, 2001, p. 146). A second example is the ELFA corpus, the corpus of English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings, developed at the Universities of Helsinki and Tampere.

One of the most interesting conclusions drawn from studies using these data is the goal-oriented and cooperative attitude of ELF speakers, who strive to attain their communicative goal and create meaning together, offering mutual help and encouragement when faced with linguistic deficiencies. To this end, several techniques were found to be regularly employed: co-construction of meaning, negotiation, code-switching to exploit all linguistic resources at hand, "let-it-pass" (i.e. not signalling obscure or incorrect utterances, unless it is considered essential for understanding), simplification at certain levels (e.g. dropping the 3rd person -s the subject being already clear, or frequent use of generic verbs) matched by complexification at other levels (e.g. higher rate of repetition and reformulation).

Goal-orientedness and creativity in ELF

The goal-focus of ELF and the fact that it is used to fulfil specific communicative needs may lead to perceive it as an artificial and dry tool for communication on specific subjects, stripped of any personal contributions. Contrary to expectations, however, the available data show that it can be a supple and creative tool through which speakers express their personality, culture and emotions. This seems to counter one of the main concerns regarding the global reach of English, i.e. that the language imposes a single system of values and a whole *Weltanschauung* globally, weakening and swallowing up other cultures until cultural uniformity is achieved.

Most research on ELF interactions appears to show that these concerns are unfounded. As Juliane House argues, "speakers of L1s as Korean, German, Indonesian and Chinese in my data are, when using ELF, individuals who tend to transfer their L1 discourse conventions into their ELF talk — while at the same time constructing something as fluid and immaterial as the 'community of ELF speakers', a consortium that is always constituted anew in any ongoing talk". Her hypothesis, based on case studies, is that "ELF users' native culture-conditioned ways of interacting are 'alive' in the medium of the English language" (2003, p. 569). Through their cooperative attitude and personal contribution, therefore, speakers tend to create communities which develop their own norms according to their needs, and in which participants share their linguaculture and vision of the world with their interlocutors. In this way they contribute to the development of an international form of English which, according to its supporters, cannot be blamed of "imperialism". English as a lingua franca is a hybrid tool for communication which develops through the participation of all interactants on an equal footing, as was the case for the lingua franca of the Mediterranean mentioned above.

In this context, the creative use of English can be seen as a sign of the confidence acquired by speakers, who have appropriated the language and feel entitled to and capable of reformulating and recreating it outside the confines of the NS model. Idioms are an interesting indicator here. They are usually one of the worst stumbling blocks for English learners, but mastering them is traditionally regarded as an essential step in attaining NS competence. However, for ELF, idioms are superfluous because learning them demands a great deal of time and energy without substantially improving communicative efficiency. On the contrary, they may actually hamper mutual understanding when non-native speakers are involved, and in contacts among native speakers of different origins. Idioms are not entirely absent from ELF exchanges, though. Relevant case studies show that ELF speakers do use idioms, at times even more creatively than native speakers, adapting them to their needs or linguistic resources. Either they revive dead metaphors or slightly diverge from set expressions or transfer idioms from their mother tongue into ELF, explaining where necessary. Thus they create new turns of phrases which may prove more vivid than the original ones and acceptable for their interlocutors, who often absorb and re-use them during the exchange.

Communities of practice

Given the complexity of language contact in ELF and the diverse linguistic backgrounds, abilities and cultures of ELF speakers, they cannot be studied as members of one community with common lingua-cultural references, as is normally the case in sociolinguistics. It is more appropriate to use the concept of "community of practice". Defined by Etienne Wenger in 1998, it has gained wide currency in ELF literature because the three features identified by Wenger to characterise a community of practice — mutual engagement, co-negotiated enterprise, shared repertoire of negotiable resources — can all be applied to ELF. In this context, "communities of practice" are groups composed of members who get together for a specific purpose, be it business, study, or other, and build clearly targeted relationships. The joint enterprise, the second criterion for a community of practice, implies some common goal or purpose, implicitly or explicitly stated, which creates "relations of mutual accountability", using Susanne Ehrenreich's words, and a common idea of what is relevant and what is not. Lastly, the shared repertoire is a consequence of the shared goal which brings together the people in question and is needed to negotiate meaning within the community. In this context, the guiding principle to shape the repertoire and evaluate the success of the communicative strategies is appropriateness, i.e. whether they serve the purpose for which they are intended.

These elements highlight the extreme fluidity of communities of practice which gather around a specific goal, compared with speech communities that are based on common cultural values and linguistic references. House, who was the first to apply the concept of "community of practice" in ELF research, declared that "the activity-based concept of community of practice with its diffuse alliances and communities of imagination and alignment fits ELF interactions well because ELF participants have heterogeneous backgrounds and diverse social and linguistic expectations. Rather than being characterised by fixed social categories and stable identities, ELF users are agentively involved in the construction of event-specific, interactional styles and frameworks" (2003, p. 573).

The shift from the speech community, as a stable and homogenous community where beliefs are shared, to the fluid and activity-based community of practice as the context of ELF interactions justifies the distinction (introduced by House and widely accepted

in ELF literature) between "language for identification" and "language for communication". The former — the language of a speech community as usually defined in sociolinguistics — carries with it a whole culture and marks the belonging to a community with shared beliefs and affective-emotive qualities which allow for identification. The latter — the language as used in a community of practice — is merely "a useful instrument for making oneself understood in international encounters" (2003, p. 559).

Defined in this way as a "language for communication", ELF is not meant to compete with national or local languages, nor endanger their survival or integrity. On the contrary, the use of ELF may encourage speakers of minority languages to use their local language "for emotional binding to their own culture, history and tradition".

On the basis of this model, House concludes that "using ELF as a medium of border-crossing to set up as many expert communities as necessary in science, economics, education, etc. cannot be seen as encroaching on established 'roots'". She takes Europe as a particularly good example of this situation because "a diglossia situation is now developing in Europe — English for various 'pockets of expertise' and non-private communication on the one hand and national and local varieties for affective, identification purposes on the other hand". (House, 2003, p. 561). For this reason she advocates English as the "stateless language that Europe must embrace", because "using English as a lingua franca in Europe does not inhibit linguistic diversity, and it unites more than it divides, simply because it may be 'owned' by all Europeans — not as a cultural symbol, but a means of enabling understanding" (2001).

Collaboration vs. competition

These features attributed to ELF communication, notably a cooperative attitude and the effort to co-construct meaning within a community of practice where all participants strive to attain a common goal as efficiently and as effectively as possible, are endorsed by numerous case studies conducted in businesses and academic settings. Some scholars have concluded that "capacity for accommodation is likely to emerge as a crucial factor for communicative success" and that "the communication process is based on collaboration in which all the interlocutors are continuously and actively involved" (Hülmbauer, p. 32). In particular, in international business circles, most managers appear to have "successfully developed into skilful and self-confident users of English as a business lingua franca, for whom (in most cases) *what* they say in ELF is by far more relevant than *how* they say something" (Ehrenreich, p. 147).

However this cooperative attitude has been observed primarily in external communication, where participants negotiate, each trying to obtain the best outcome for themselves, but share the common goal of concluding their transaction, which requires smooth and satisfactory linguistic communication. Studies conducted in more competitive situations usually lead to very different conclusions and show that command of the language remains a powerful tool for leverage over less fluent speakers.

An interesting study was conducted by Karlfried Knapp with students taking part in an international conference simulating the work of a UN General Assembly. Among Knapp's informants, non-native speakers complained that they were at a disadvantage and had difficulties in getting their suggestions through or were not chosen to present group work. In the end, they appeared to be almost completely silenced by native speakers and even more strikingly by quasi-native speakers. He concludes therefore that

"this picture of co-operation, consensus and unproblematicality is in contrast to practical experience from other areas of intercultural communication" (p. 219) and that "the co-operative style that characterizes non-native/non-native speaker interactions and ELF-interactions in a more informal context can be regarded as an ingroup marker by which participants signal to each other that they share common ground, even if it is only for shared incompetence in the language", whereas "in more formal and competitive situations, the nns' deficiencies in English competence can trigger a shift to a more unco-operative style by the more fluent speakers as a resource to set up boundaries against the outgroup" (pp. 240-241).

Knapp's conclusions are confirmed by other studies conducted in international businesses with English as the corporate language. For Marina Vollestedt, "corporate culture influences the selection of a company language", and therefore "in the management's eyes the language becomes a tool to influence the employees' thoughts and to make them think of their company as an international one" (pp. 93-94). This means that the company is not a community of practice where all the members strive to co-construct meaning together, but, on the contrary, "language in many areas of the business world, consciously or unconsciously, is used as an instrument of power: language policy and language planning are power related and may be invoked to ensure social control" (p. 96). In her study, Vollestedt also draws attention to serious communication problems often connected with the use of English as corporate language: impaired information flow, feeling of uncertainty on the part of the staff forced to use a foreign language, loss of information not available in the corporate language.

The same type of problems was observed by a group of Harvard scholars coordinated by Tsedal Beyene in a multinational company based in Germany after English was adopted as the corporate language. In their paper *Walking through jelly* published in 2009, they emphasise the stress and frustration of their German informants when interacting with English native speakers, which, in some cases, led them to the decision to withdraw from discussion or even to refuse to attend meetings when non-German speakers were present. On the other hand, this study shows that difficulties and frustration are not only felt by non-native speakers: the interviews with native English speakers working for the company also highlighted deep frustration because they felt excluded from information their German colleagues exchanged in German. Once again, imposing English resulted in frustration, withdrawal, disruption of joint work and poorer collaboration for all staff. They managed to partly end this negative cycle only by taking voluntary steps to change their perspective and understand the experiences and constraints faced by their colleagues.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

De Swaan and Van Parijs: an English-only world?

Abram De Swaan

Most literature on ELF tends to take the role of English as today's vehicular language for granted, as an undisputed and indisputable reality. It does not deny that other linguistic tools besides ELF can be effective in international communication and

recognises the importance of local languages as markers of identity (especially in Europe where the citizens' attachment to their mother tongues is still strong and national languages are not endangered). However the focus tends to be on describing ELF from a linguistic and pragmatic point of view, without questioning the wider implications of accepting English as today's lingua franca. The adoption of English is thus seen as a natural development driven by economic, political and cultural forces outside the control of a single body or group. It is perceived as a free choice on the part of the learners, who make their decision on the basis of what is more useful and beneficial to them.

This "liberalistic" approach is very often voiced outside linguists' circles too. In less scientific terms, this new, global English, Globish (from global and English) makes the headlines in the press and in talk shows and language programmes worldwide. The term was coined by Jean-Paul Narrière, a French executive who, while posted in Asia, observed that this new form of English was successfully and spontaneously employed in intercultural communication and British and American executives had more difficulties than their non-native counterparts when dealing with non-native clients. Since then he has actively promoted this newly globalised lingua franca, which is a simplified version of English consisting of 1500 words and combines basic English and the terminology of the digital age and of the international media.

On the more academic scene, similar ideas are endorsed by scholars like Abram De Swaan and Philippe Van Parijs, who investigate in depth the political and economic impacts of this issue. They both separate the communicative aspect of language from issues of culture and power and, despite starting from different assumptions, reach quite similar conclusions, notably the inevitability of English as a lingua franca and an instrument for fostering democracy and progress, which would actually be hampered by artificially sustained multilingualism.

De Swaan argues that it is only rational and natural that people want to learn English since it has the highest potential for communication, which he defines as the Q-value of language, i.e. the product of its centrality — the proportion of multilingual speakers who speak it — and its prevalence — the proportion of its speakers in the overall language constellation. De Swaan warns against what he defines a "sentimental" attitude to languages that aims to protect all endangered languages, regardless of their communication value. He argues that "a language only exists through the use that people make of it with one another" (2004, p. 568) and, while supporting the study and description of endangered languages for scientific purposes, he rejects the idea of keeping them artificially alive. Indeed, he rejects the concept of languages as living organisms which can die or be murdered, as suggested by other linguists like David Crystal. In his view, languages are simply tools which are abandoned when they no longer fulfil the needs of the community using it.

Furthermore, he rejects the link between linguistic and cultural diversity. History shows that violent and bloody wars have been fought by groups speaking the same language (e.g. the war of independence or the civil war in America), while communities with different mother tongues manage to coexist peacefully and harmoniously, as Switzerland does, for example. As a consequence, adopting a common language does not, in his view, automatically entail imposing cultural homogeneity, specifically the Anglo-American model. He stresses that about 90% of students in Europe choose English as their second language and, though he recognises that "English is also attractive to adolescents as an identity marker, as an indicator of cosmopolitanism and

youth", he regards this choice primarily as rational, justified by the fact that "within any particular constellation, people opt for the language that will enable them to communicate with the largest number of people (prevalence) and that has the highest percentage of multilingual speakers (centrality) … When people decide to learn a particular language, they are motivated more by communication functions than by functions of identity" (2004, p. 577).
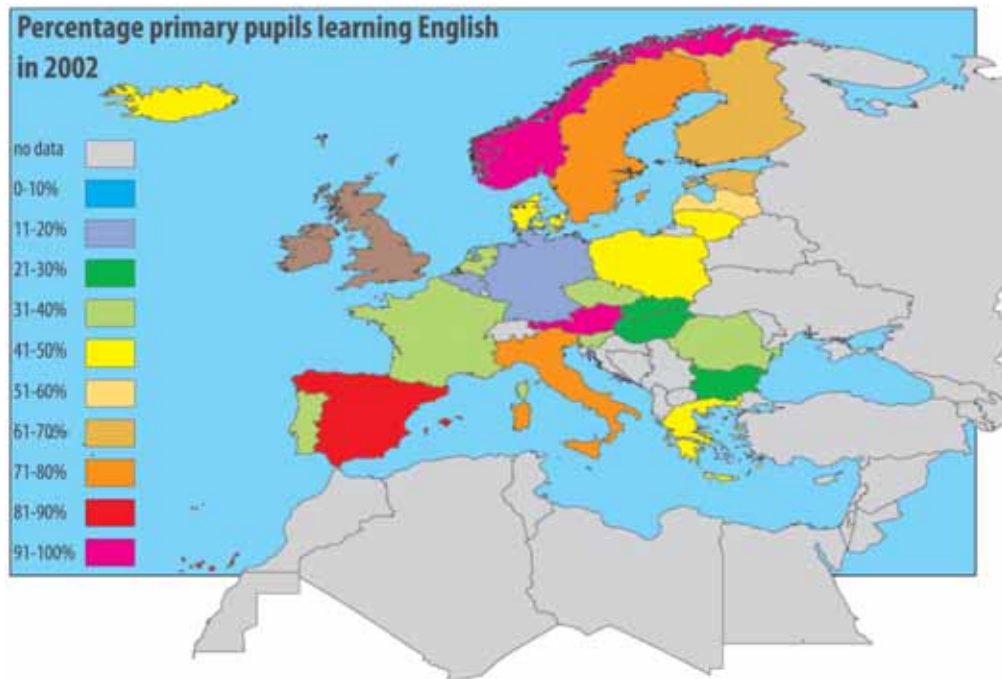
The percentage of primary school pupils learning English in EU countries in 2002 (Based on Eurydice data published in 2005)
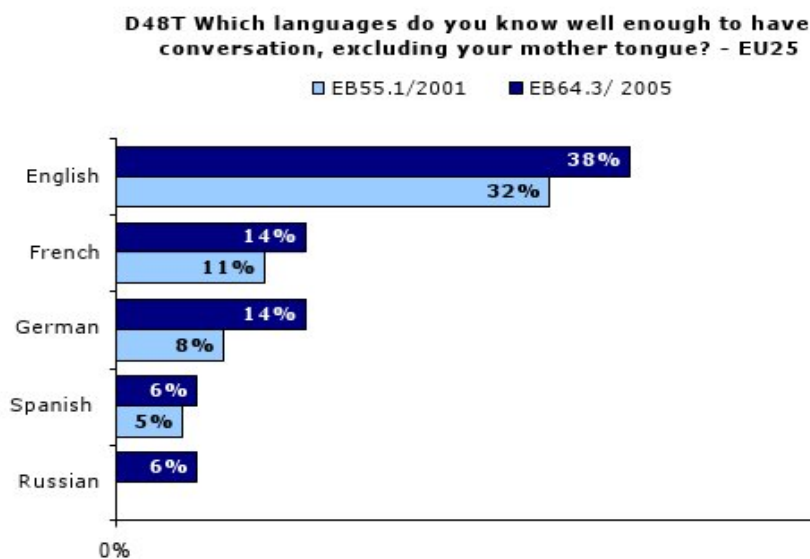(source: Graddol, *English Next*)

Lastly, he criticises radical multilingualism. Based on examples from former colonial countries, notably South Africa with its 11 official languages, but also on the linguistic situation in the European Union with its 23 official languages, he concludes that the outcome of a sentimental defence of multilingualism will simply be the triumph of English: "the more languages, the more English". Granting equal rights to a high number of languages only reinforces the hegemony of English. The more fragmented the linguistic landscape, the greater the need for a common vehicular language, perceived as "neutral" by all speakers. Regions with strong movements in favours of local autonomy or separatism offer good examples of this phenomenon: in Belgium, English is sometimes used in order not to privilege either French or Dutch, while in regions like Catalonia the trend is to promote English side by side with the local language, rather than the national language. When linguistic equilibriums are particularly complex and fragile, as in the new independent states which emerged after the end of the British Empire, English can even become a unifying force, as a Nigerian minister declared: "We are not keen on developing our own languages to replace English. We regard English as a unifying force" (De Swaan, 2001, p. 199).

According to De Swaan's analysis, therefore, English is the rational choice, which allows small linguistic communities to surmount isolation and individuals to secure the best opportunities on the labour market. According to him, failing to acknowledge this

is short-sighted sentimentalism, to which the European Union falls prey as it follows a language policy based on "metaphors and sentiment" and refuses to face reality as it is and cope with it. And the outcome, according to his analysis, is that, whilst paying lip-service to multilingualism, "English is the primary means of communication in Europe, where the language problem is gradually resolving itself, just as in South Africa. But to say so openly is just as much taboo in the European Union as it is in South Africa", and "by doing nothing, the Commission is actually helping to consolidate the position of English as the only way out of the confusion of tongues" (2004, p. 577).

Philippe Van Parijs

The Belgian economist and philosopher Philippe Van Parijs reaches similar conclusions, though based on different assumptions and motives, in his analysis of the situation in Europe. Starting from the premise that Europe's unification process is justified only if it is an effective instrument in the service of solidarity and manages to create a stronger European democracy, Van Parijs regards a common language as mandatory for the process of European integration: for integration to become a reality, we must be able to communicate. To enable everybody to communicate in a fair and egalitarian way, "it is essential that the EU should adopt a single lingua franca over and above existing national and regional languages" (p. 4). In his view, this strategy alone can grant everybody access to the tools necessary to communicate, in *"tous les étages de la société civile européenne, et cela de la Crète à l'Écosse et de l'Estonie à l'Andalousie"*. All other options would restrict it to *"la petite élite économico-politico-intellectuelle tout au sommet, qui peut se permettre des services de traduction et d'interprétation"*. When it comes to choosing the lingua franca, English is the only adequate tool because the past decades have witnessed such a convergence toward it as the second language of choice that any other alternatives would be *"non seulement irréalisables mais injustifiables, et du reste pour une bonne part irréalisables parce qu'injustifiables"* (p. 10).

D48T Which languages do you know well enough to have conversation, excluding your mother tongue? - EU25

□ EB55.1/2001   ■ EB64.3/ 2005

English — 38% / 32%
French — 14% / 11%
German — 14% / 8%
Spanish — 6% / 5%
Russian — 6%

0%

(source: Eurobarometer 243/2006)

Like De Swaan, Van Parijs also rejects the automatic link between language and culture. The values identifying a "culture", the "ethnos", can be expressed through any language which appears adequate, while, on the other hand, adopting a language for intercultural communication, in this case English, does not mean adopting the values and *Weltanschauung* originally expressed through that language. What he advocates is not *"l'émergence d'un* ethnos *anglophone européen, ce n'est pas une anglicisation du continent analogue à l'anglicisation de l'Irlande, ce n'est pas un peuple unique européen partageant une culture anglophone"*, but rather *"l'émergence d'un* demos *anglophone européen, d'une société politique et civile trans-nationale qui se dote, avec la compétence en anglais, de la condition centrale d'une communication fluide entre toutes ses composantes"* (2004, p. 12).

Even though he advocates adopting English as the European lingua franca in such radical terms, he is well aware that this process is not straightforward nor without obstacles, among others the advantage of native speakers in competitive situations, the overwhelming prestige of contents initially expressed in English, the material profits deriving from a disproportionate amount of translation into this language, the resources for language learning saved in English speaking countries and the parallel profits these countries make from offering language learning services. In spite of this, he suggests that *"on peut néanmoins se demander si ce problème d'iniquité ne va pas se résorber, voire s'inverser rapidement, à condition que les pays non-anglophones se fassent à l'idée qu'il n'y a pas d'alternative à la fuite en avant et prennent un certain nombre de mesures intelligentes en matière d'apprentissage linguistique, à commencer par l'interdiction du doublage des films étrangers"*. If such measures were taken, the outcome would be a complete reversal of the initial disadvantage: *"À mesure que l'anglais se diffuse, l'accès à pareil bilinguisme devient de moins en moins onéreux pour les non-anglophones, et de plus en plus onéreux pour les anglophones"* (p. 14).

In spite of these difficulties, the use of English is justified because the risks of multilingualism are even more serious: an ever increasing brain-drain toward English speaking countries and *"le handicap que le maintien de la diversité linguistique en Europe constitue toujours davantage, dans une économie basée sur la connaissance, à mesure que l'aisance en anglais se diffuse parmi les plus qualifiés"* (p. 16). The asymmetry between English-speaking and non English-speaking countries, between English monolingual and multilingual entities is a fact which must be taken into account, accepted and dealt with, instead of clinging to preconceived abstract ideas, as the EU's language policy is considered to do. Otherwise, the only tangible result will be keeping language experts occupied in a permanent circuit of conferences on the endangered and disadvantaged languages of Europe and creating jobs for language teachers and experts, as De Swaan says (2004, pp. 577-578), or, according to House, maintaining "a time-consuming, expensive and increasingly intractable translation machinery … that is doing its best to translate the illusion of equality into illusions of multilingualism and translatability" (2001).

QA2a Which two languages, apart from your mother tongue do you think are the most useful to know for your personal development and career? - % EU

English 68%
French 25%
German 22%
Spanish 16%
None 10%
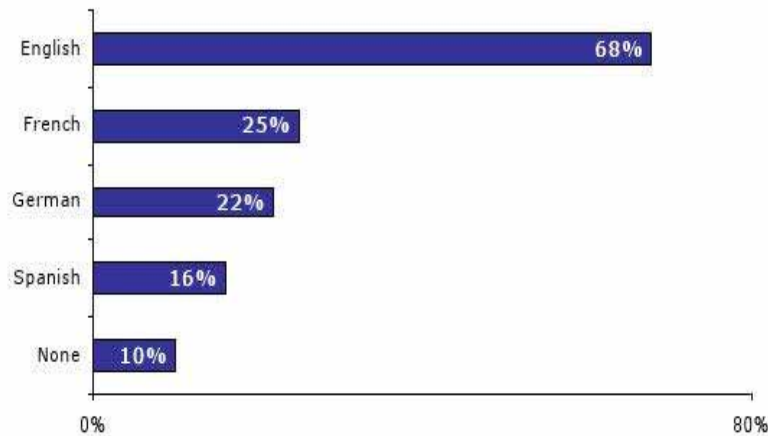
(source: Eurobarometer 243/2006)

Van Parijs lists several options open to European decision-makers: the first is to switch to English to make Europe attractive to highly-qualified workers and stop the present brain drain to English-speaking countries. If, however, we want to keep the principle of linguistic territoriality, he suggests that attractive conditions should be offered to enterprises and highly-qualified workers to encourage them to settle in Europe. Lastly, he acknowledges that in Europe attachment to and identification with the local languages is very strong and that, for the European project to be successful, this attachment must be taken into consideration. However, in order to do this without falling prey to linguistic chaos, Europe cannot rely on the spontaneous action of the market and the free choice of its citizens. Van Parijs advocates therefore the emergence of an *amor patriae* founded on economic solidarity and a common democratic space *"dont le corrélat linguistique amplifie certes le défi, mais sans lequel la mise en œuvre d'un projet européen fortement solidaire est inconcevable"* (p. 20). He does not suggest that national and regional languages be replaced by English. He suggests that they coexist because they serve different purposes in different contexts. However, their different status should also be acknowledged, and the relevant decisions made without wavering.

Grin and Ives: in defence of multilingualism

However, the inevitability of English as a lingua franca and its effectiveness as a tool for improving communication and thus spreading democracy are far from being unanimously welcomed and continue to stir heated debates.

Caveats against the generalised use of English are normally based on assumptions diametrically opposed to those examined so far. In this view, the disappearance of any language, no matter how many people speak it, is an irreparable loss for humanity because with it a whole culture and a whole system of values are lost once and for all. In addition, the adoption of a specific language is not a free choice based exclusively on rational considerations by speakers, but is always a consequence of the political and military power of the peoples speaking it. English is no exception: its use was prompted

first by the power of Great Britain as a colonial empire and then by the rise of the US as the first economical, political and military world power, but also by its undisputed supremacy in areas such as science, technology, the media and show business. This approach underscores the importance of language as an essential component of the culture using it, and that culture and language are inextricably intertwined. At the same time, it strongly emphasises the risks implicit in adopting a single language — today English — at the expense of others, underlining that the choice of a specific linguistic medium is never neutral. In contrast with the utilitarian communicative theories of De Swaan and, to a lesser extent, Van Parijs, which leave linguistic developments to the free play of the market, this approach calls for action to keep endangered languages alive and limit the influence of the predominant language. Protecting linguistic diversity means protecting cultural diversity and, in particular, preventing the disappearance of weaker or smaller local cultures.

In this perspective, the "laisser faire" approach is not as neutral as it may appear at first sight. While advocating that everybody should be free to choose the language they want to learn, and languages should be allowed to develop and spread freely, in reality it spreads the Anglo-American culture and its underlying values, granting English native speakers unfair economic and political advantages.

François Grin

The negative economic repercussions of the global adoption of English on non-English speakers are at the core of the work of François Grin, who draws attention to the enormous benefits Great Britain reaps from language-related services. In his study on the language policy of the European Union, commissioned and published by the French *Haut Conseil de l'évaluation de l'école*, Grin estimates that the teaching sector earns the UK almost £1.3 billion in invisible exports and about £10 million in education-related exports, totalling €17-18 billion per year when taking into account the funds which English speaking countries can invest thanks to the privileged position of their language: more than three times the famous British rebate, or 1% of its GNP. In other words, every one of the 394 million non-English-speaking citizens of the EU, including those from the poorest new Member States, are subsidising the British economy.

Secondly, Grin points out that a language is not merely an economic asset and highlights the symbolic implications of adopting a lingua franca — notably the advantage enjoyed by native speakers in negotiations or conflict management — which also have an economic impact, and should therefore be accounted for when assessing the economic efficiency of English. On this basis, Grin rejects the claim that, economically speaking, the choice of English as a global language is as sound and fair as we are generally led to believe. On the contrary, the distribution of these costs is utterly inequitable and they are disregarded when comparing the costs associated with the various strategies, i.e. multilingualism vs. English only. In Grin's perspective, therefore, multilingualism may even not be more cost-efficient but it does ensure a more equitable distribution of costs and does not make non-English speaking countries pay for English speaking countries. For this reason it appears to be a fairer option, at least in the short- to medium-term.

Robert Phillipson takes a similar stance in favour of multilingualism, and goes as far as to define this unfair advantage of English speakers and English speaking countries as "linguistic imperialism". Convinced that, if nothing is done, the world will be "colonised" once again by the Anglo-Americans, he advocates multilingualism as the only viable strategy to counter this trend and prevent Anglo-American values and

culture from being imposed worldwide together with the English language. To this end he calls for "a sustainable balance between English and other languages, through *processes* that lead to multilingual competence. Additive English for specific purposes is desirable, provided English learning and use are situated in local multilingual ecologies" (p. 338).

Peter Ives

The need to take into due consideration the cultural and symbolic values conveyed through language is at the heart of the work of Peter Ives, who aims to contribute to "debates concerning the politics of 'global English' from within political theory" (2006, p. 123) and has devoted special attention to the issue of language use in the European Union. Challenging supporters of lingua franca English, like De Swaan and Van Parijs, he maintains that "arguments that support the adoption of English as a lingua franca for Europe utilize a rarified notion of language that ignores the history of language within the rise of the modern nation-state and democracy. If the decision to adopt English as a lingua franca results from forces outside democratic will formation, it will only exacerbate the democracy deficit" (2004, p. 2), whereas he notices "a growing trend within the EU to celebrate linguistic diversity and expand its meaning in a direction that does address questions of democratic representation" (2004, p. 4). While acknowledging the importance of these scholars in bringing to the fore language politics and providing important concepts for dealing with language issues, he maintains that "they do not grapple with the actual complexity of what language is and how it relates to democracy" (2004, p. 9). In fact, he believes that "rather than providing insight into how language relates to questions of political community and cultural identity, most political theory treatments side-step these issues by dividing the 'communicative' or instrumental functions of language from what is often labelled the 'expressive' or 'symbolic' dimensions … instrumentalist assumptions seem to be at the heart of the way 'global English' is treated, implicitly or explicitly, by much of political science, the social sciences (outside sociolinguistics, language planning and education) and the media" (2006, p. 125). He stresses, by contrast, the importance of approaching language "as a human institution subject to historical change and open to humans collectively and consciously determining its role in society" and underlines "how the communicative aspect of language must be taken hand in hand with the power relationships and cultural and symbolic effects of language" (2006, pp. 125-126).

Based on these assumptions, he judges the current EU linguistic policy positively, especially its focus on translation, in contrast to the views expressed above, which regard the EU's linguistic policy as a chaotic refusal to make clear and effective, though difficult, decisions. He holds the EU out as a "potential model for other supranational democratic organizations" and "its pronouncements on the importance of linguistic diversity in the face of a globalizing English … more than just 'ritual' or 'symbolic' statements". While linking "this new shift to democracy above the level of the nation-state" to a "different role for language within democratic institutions", he underlines the role of "translation among languages [as] a framework and metaphor for translation among diverse communities with differing values and views of the world, for the very type of 'solidarity' that Van Parijs has written so much about" (2004, p. 10).

A multi-faceted linguistic landscape for a multi-faceted world

The views presented so far either support or reject English as today's lingua franca in rather harsh terms. A more moderate and balanced stance is taken by two other experts

who have investigated the international dimension of English and its relations with other languages: David Crystal and David Graddol.

David Crystal

David Crystal examined in-depth both the status of English as a world language and the risks connected to "language death". Based on assumptions which are diametrically opposed to De Swaan's, he develops an ecological approach according to which languages are like living organisms with unique peculiarities, and, like all endangered species, should be protected in order to prevent their disappearance. Together with a language, a whole world view and system of knowledge are lost. While he underlines that sharing a single language is no guarantee of peace and solidarity, and bloody civil wars fought in monolingual regions prove it, he lists five reasons why we should care about language death: firstly, we need diversity in the field of language as in all other fields, because "the strongest ecosystems are those which are most diverse" (2000, p. 33); secondly, languages are important for shaping identity, because "language is the primary index, or symbol, or register of identity" (2000, p. 40); thirdly, they are repositories of history; fourthly, languages contribute to the sum of human knowledge; and lastly, they are interesting in themselves as a "unique encapsulation of a world view" (2000, p. 54).
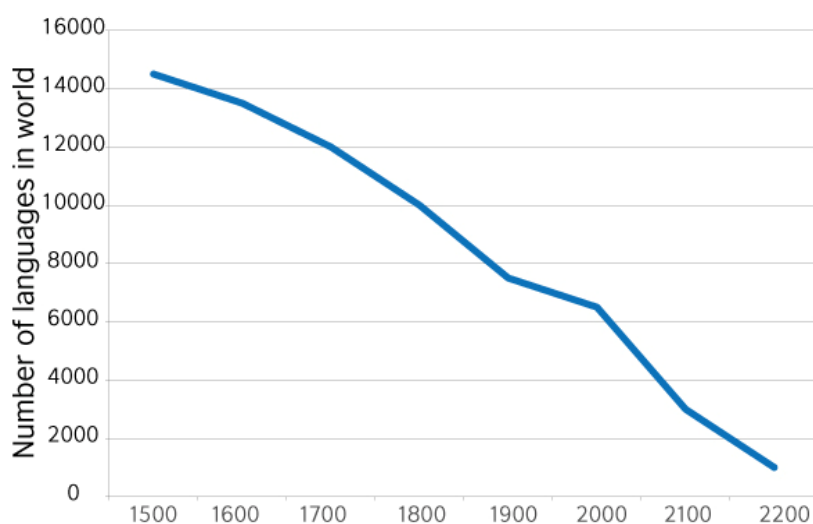

The number of languages in the world has been falling throughout modernity. (source: Graddol, *English Next*)

On the other hand, when he comes to the supremacy of English, he clearly recognises that it is the consequence of the power and prestige enjoyed by the nations speaking it, because "a language does not become a global language because of its intrinsic structural properties, or because of the size of its vocabulary, or because it was associated with a great culture or religion … A language has traditionally become an international language for one chief reason: the power of its people, especially their political and military power" (2003, p. 14). It is a fact we have to live with, and for this reason he does not question the status of English as a world language. For him, it is an "evident reality" which has by now grown independent of any form of social control. It has grown so strong that "it proves impossible for any single group or alliance to stop its growth, or even influence its future" (2003, p. 190). As a consequence, in this context where the role of English has to be accepted and language diversity must be safeguarded for the harmonious and well-balanced development of human society, complementarity, rather than competition, between the world language and the local

languages should be emphasised. Bilingualism should therefore be promoted so as to benefit from the lingua franca as a tool for communication and mutual intelligibility, and from local languages as tools to foster identity and social and historical links.

David Graddol

David Graddol also emphasises the need for flexible and multi-faceted responses to the present hunger for communication tools. In *English Next*, a report commissioned by the British Council in 2006 as a follow-up to a previous report published in 1997, *The Future of English?*, he draws a very detailed and comprehensive picture of the changes affecting English as a global language, without triumphalism nor *a priori* monolithic recipes. The subtitle of this report, *Why global English may mean the end of 'English as a Foreign Language'*, brings us back to the core issue of ownership discussed above. Graddol examines the changes occurred in the period between his two reports. While he observes that enormous changes have taken place in those 10 years, he maintains that "the new language which is rapidly ousting the language of Shakespeare as the world's lingua franca is English itself — English in its new global form … this is not English as we have known it, and have taught it in the past as a foreign language. It is a new phenomenon, and if it represents any kind of triumph it is probably not a cause of celebration by native speakers" (p. 11).
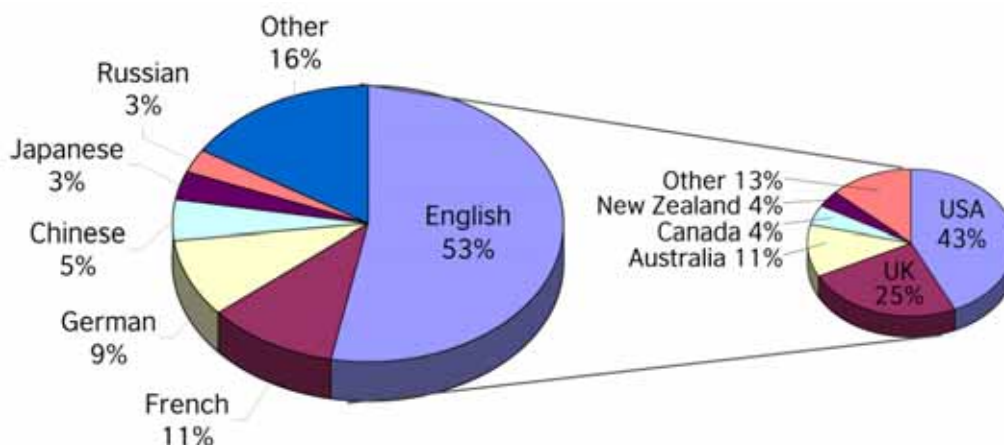
The languages of international education
(source: Graddol, *English Next*)

This new reality is carefully qualified by Graddol. As the number of English learners keeps increasing, their ages decreasing and the popularity of the language keeps growing, a clear understanding of the qualitative change that English is undergoing appears imperative. With native speakers of English losing control of these developments, "it is native speakers who, perhaps, should be the most concerned" (p. 12). They will have to face growing competition from non-native speakers in a world where English, being almost taken for granted, will no longer be an asset. Furthermore, monolingual English speakers will face growing difficulties in learning foreign languages in a world where bilingualism and multilingualism will be more and more the rule.

While predicting an increasing role of English for international communication in its global form, he draws attention to the transitional stage we are living in, which may lead to radical change compared to the situation as we know it today. He suggests that "we

can expect a confusing time for another 10-15 years ... Gradually, the business, political and social environment in which English is learned and used will reflect the realities and dynamics of the emerging new world order" (p. 66). And in this new order, where he estimates that 40 % of the world population will speak English, this language will become a new baseline bringing little or no competitive advantage; as a consequence, more languages will be necessary. Evidence of this trend is already under everybody's eyes. Multilingualism is becoming increasingly the norm, even in traditionally monolingual countries like the US and the UK as a result of immigration, while languages like Mandarin Chinese, Hindi or Spanish start challenging English and threatening its supremacy. Whether it is because English will lose its competitive advantage from being universally known, or because, no matter how much it spreads, a large proportion of the world's population will still be excluded from it, multilingualism is on the rise and spreading in domains once exclusively reserved to English.

A continuous swing of the pendulum between supremacy of English and multilingualism is probably the best metaphor for our current situation. On the one hand, English is set to spread further in the next few years; on the other hand, there are hints that multilingualism and awareness of the importance of learning more languages are on the rise too. In his report Graddol mentions, for example, the success of a language-learning channel on the in-flight audio-visual system introduced by Singapore Airlines in 2005, rapidly followed by other airlines, and the increasing demand for language courses at Indian universities. China is also an interesting case: on the one hand, following its recent economic and political development, the number of people studying Chinese is rapidly increasing (in 2006 a private school in the UK even decided to make Mandarin Chinese a compulsory subject); on the other hand, China is investing massively to stimulate English learning and promote other languages as well (currently there are plans to open courses in all EU languages at Chinese universities, including lesser spoken ones).
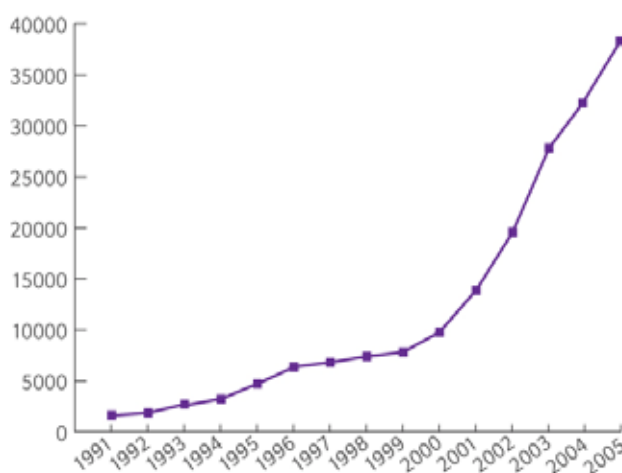
The number of overseas candidates taking the Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK). The exam is China's national standardised test designed and developed by the HSK Centre of Beijing Language and Culture University to assess the Chinese language proficiency of non-native speakers (including foreigners overseas Chinese and students from Chinese national minorities). The exam was launched for overseas candidates in 1991: interest by overseas candidates has grown rapidly since 2000. (source: Graddol, *English Next*)

Another medium where the tension between multilingualism and "Englishisation" is particularly high is on the Internet. The supremacy of English, though still undisputed, is more and more challenged with increasing work to localise content. In 1988, 85 % of Internet pages were in English, but this percentage was estimated to have dropped to 68 % in 2000 and the trend continues. This decline is not due so much to English losing importance, but rather to the increased use of other languages. The recent decision of

ICANN (Internet Corporation for assigned names and numbers), the organisation assigning URL addresses, to introduce URLs in Arabic characters, with Cyrillic and other characters to follow, is revealing. Furthermore, to meet the needs of the increasing proportion of Internet surfers who do not speak English, especially in Africa, localisation and translation efforts proceed at unprecedented speed, which in turn reinforces the use and prestige of local languages. The recent translation of Google in Wolof is a case in point, as is the localisation policy of Microsoft, offering its tools in a growing number of languages.

CONCLUSIONS

In our globalised world, where communication is *the* big issue, language strategies, though often ignored, play a major role. The *lingua franca* question is currently at the centre of a heated debate.

Lingue franche, though, are nothing new and, as we have seen, can be seen as a constant in history, as are their essential features. Whether they emerge as mere contact languages or are the mother tongue of a given group, their purpose is to facilitate communication among people who do not share the same mother tongue (as a rule in specific areas). They are transitory and unstable, but they are always connected to power and prestige, and their status invariably changes when the power relations on which they are based change.

The lessons we can learn from studying past *lingue franche* are essential if we want to understand the present situation. The unprecedented penetration of English makes its role as today's *lingua franca* a fact widely accepted by its supporters and detractors alike. There is a general consensus that English has acquired a new dimension, making this one of the most interesting developments of recent decades in terms of language use. Besides the English — or rather 'Englishes' — we traditionally know, used as a mother tongue and a national language in a number of countries, we are also seeing the emergence of a new form of English — English as a *lingua franca* or Global English — which is appropriated by, and belongs to, all its speakers, native and non-native alike. In this new perspective, English is proposed as a hybrid and fluid tool which — like the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean — should not be seen as an instrument of imperialism, or as being associated with the culture of the countries originally speaking it. Its supporters' objective is not to replace local languages through this new English, but to reserve it for specific situations and enrich it through the native languages and cultures of all its speakers.

This change, however, is not yet complete. It still evokes very strong — positive and negative — reactions both among scholars and decision-makers, and in the media. At the one extreme, the development of International English as the new *lingua franca* is seen as an absolute disaster and English, even in its new form, as little more than an imperialistic tool which reflects today's balance of power without adding any value in terms of improving the quality of communication and fostering mutual understanding. At the other extreme, it is seen as the one and only solution to our communication needs, capable of bringing about social justice and equality and overcoming social and political exclusion. The two extremes, though, need to be qualified.

Protesters against the generalised use of English in international contexts would do well to recall that there is widespread agreement on the need for a common language to make direct communication possible in our globalised world. That language is indisputably English. Direct communication is essential when speakers of different languages come together. Generalised and systematic translation and interpretation cannot always be provided, or would make the exchange too lengthy and cumbersome. Inter-comprehension can be useful and effective, but does not work well when the speakers have different non-neighbouring languages. Machine translation and the new technologies in general are admittedly improving rapidly, but they still suffer from serious weaknesses. Even for the future it is hard to imagine that they will be able to

meet all our needs for direct communication — especially not oral communication. This leaves us with the need for one common language which can be widely used with reasonable competence.

The opponents of using English systematically as an international language are fearful that it will displace all other languages and cause a loss of diversity, notably linguistic diversity, which is one of mankind's great assets and a defining feature of European civilisation.

Recent studies, though, indicate that this fear is ungrounded. On the contrary, learning and speaking English as a *lingua franca* can even be an incentive to learning other languages. This is what emerges, for example, from very recent research carried out among Erasmus students under the LINEE Project[3]. These students regard English as an essential tool, giving them access to communities from which they would otherwise have been debarred. Through the Erasmus programme they come into contact with other students speaking different mother tongues, with whom they initially communicate in English. This, however, is only a first step. In order not to feel like strangers in their new countries, these students feel that they have to acquire at least some knowledge of the local language; in addition, the new friendships may encourage them to learn further new languages.

The same dynamics is frequently observed among people who go abroad to work. Many companies choose English as their corporate language; this enables them to secure the services of international staff, with a wide range of mother tongues and places of origin. These people, who are recruited and go to work abroad precisely because they speak English, need to become reasonably competent in the local language quite rapidly if they want to settle and participate in local life: when you go to a bar or a club with a group of people who all speak the local language, English is pretty useless.

In this respect, English does behave as a *lingua franca*, i.e. a contact language. Like the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean, it does not belong to anybody and is a utilitarian tool used mainly to cover a restricted range of subjects pertaining primarily to public life. It is used to create a shared space, but it also underlines the fact that the speakers do not belong to the same community, and neither party in the exchange makes any real effort to accept the other into their community or to be accepted into the other's community. It is important to stress this specialisation as it is the most evident limitation of any *lingua franca*, preventing it from becoming a viable alternative to any natural language. It therefore provides a sound argument against the 'English only' approach.

As all *lingue franche* in history, English as a lingua franca (ELF) is not and cannot become a fully-fledged language. It is a mere tool for communication, and as such limited and unstable. It can easily be abandoned or replaced as soon as it no longer serves its purpose, as Nicholas Ostler underlines in his recent work *The Last Lingua Franca*. Based on a wide-ranging analysis of past *lingue franche*, he acknowledges the international role presently played by English, but believes that this very role is its main weakness: "The decline of English, when it begins, will not seem of great moment. International English is a lingua franca, and by its nature, a lingua franca is a language of convenience. When it ceases to be convenient — however widespread it has been — it will be dropped, without ceremony, and with little emotion" (pp. xv). And for him this is inevitable because, as history teaches us, this is, and has always been, the destiny of all *lingue franche*. Furthermore, the objection that English is here to stay because there

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3   See http://linee.info/index.php?id=388.

is no credible alternative in sight would not be tenable either, because, in his view, we will in future no longer need a single language. We are heading towards a world where technological development will make possible a more multilingual and diverse landscape.

It is clear that, in spite of (or side by side with) the exponential growth of English, multilingualism is not disappearing; on the contrary, it is on the rise. Massive migration, growing mobility and the kind of new technological developments that favour connectivity and communication (ostensibly increasing the need for a common language!) help people to make and keep contact with different linguistic environments and to develop their language skills. Even in traditionally monolingual territory, migration has made bilingualism and multilingualism an everyday reality.

So English as a *lingua franca* is proving an effective linguistic tool in certain contexts, but cannot be the one and only pathway to communication and mutual understanding in our complex world. Its limits and shortcomings should not be overlooked.

First of all, we should not underestimate the risks connected with compartmentalising linguistic functions, which would be a consequence of the generalised adoption of the *lingua franca*: the *lingua franca* would be used for public communication and the local language for more private uses or as a marker of identity. When a language is reserved for specific contexts and functions, it tends to be downgraded, fails to keep up with new developments and becomes unsuitable in a growing number of fields.

This is the concern, for example, that is voiced about the generalised use of English in the sciences at the expense of all other languages. English is generally accepted as the language for written and oral communication in the (hard) sciences. For the time being at least, it is hard to see any radically different language regime in prospect. However, many experts are alarmed at the decline in the use and standard of languages other than English by scientists who are not English native speakers, but who use English as the medium of communication in their working lives. Remedial action is possible, though, and there are authoritative voices proposing more flexible and open practices. The eminent mathematician Jacques Lafforgue (quoted by François Grin in the interview attached to the present study), for example, is convinced that the continued use of French in mathematics does not reflect the strength of mathematics in France, but is an ingredient in its success.

Even if we do not assume that the use of a lingua franca inevitably leads to the death or decline of other languages, we have to be aware that, if one language (in our case it is English, but this danger is inherent in the very concept of a single *lingua franca* acquiring supremacy) spreads massively at the expense of the others, it is not only those languages that risk being downgraded, but also the cultures and values which are expressed through them. After all, language always conveys values, even when it is used as a practical tool and not as a medium for cultural identification — like Global English. The risk of cultural and linguistic uniformity cannot therefore be ruled out and should not be ignored. Diversity is one of the great assets of Europe, nurtured by all those who move to Europe for various reasons, bringing their cultures and values with them. So if we are out to promote genuine integration, we need to foster the idea that multiple identities, including multiple linguistic identities, can and should coexist harmoniously. This does not mean refusing to embrace the kind of common ground represented by a *lingua franca*. The monolithic concept of 'one language, one country', on which the whole history of Europe has been based from the 19th century on, no longer reflects today's situation, characterised — in Europe as elsewhere — by

increasing fluidity and mobility. Against this background, the promotion of multilingualism and individual plurilingualism plays a major role. Besides facilitating social integration, it is important for developing a fully-fledged and flexible personality, capable of facing new challenges, adapting to change, and interacting with a wide range of attitudes. A telling example of the risk of radical monolingualism is the United Kingdom. In recent decades, partly because of the notion that 'English is enough', interest in language learning has declined abruptly, to the point that foreign languages are no longer compulsory in school curricula. The percentage of pupils opting for foreign languages has dropped dramatically (mainly among the lower classes of society, thus accentuating the social divide). The negative consequences of this policy are starting to be perceived, and hardly a day goes by without alarm bells being rung in the media and experts stressing the importance of language learning and the adverse effects of illiteracy in this field, and calling for effective policies to make pupils and their families aware of the importance of language learning and reverse the present trend.

It is becoming ever more evident that the more English spreads — and the more plurilingualism and bilingualism develop at global level — the more native speakers of English are becoming monolingual. In the end, they will be the real losers in this process because they will be the only ones to lack the skills necessary to act and communicate effectively in a globalised world. This will have negative repercussions both on a personal level and, more generally, for the country as a whole. Indeed, in many situations — quite unexpectedly — native speakers are failing to communicate successfully, even in their mother tongue. The lack of language skills already appears to be having a detrimental effect on the competitiveness of British companies on world markets, compared to companies from other countries, which are more aware of the importance of language skills and of being able to conduct business in the languages of their customers, and are therefore more willing to invest in this field.

Lastly, a common justification for 'English is enough' is the spread of English. The champions of this view maintain that virtually everybody knows English, especially among the younger generations, and that this trend will quicken in the future. This claim does not reflect reality. Even at some point in the future English is highly unlikely to penetrate all strata of the world's population, or even of Europe's. This means that, if we want to build an inclusive society — and this is particularly relevant in Europe — we must be careful not to embrace policies and strategies which marginalise large strata of the population. The level of knowledge of English still differs markedly according to age group, geographical location, social class, etc. For this reason, we cannot rely entirely on a *lingua franca* to the detriment of other strategies, like *in primis* translation and interpretation. These remain essential tools in terms of bringing the EU and what it is doing as close as possible to the citizens and to enabling them all to play an active part in the life of the EU, irrespective of their origin and education.

Some of these inputs may be inherently contradictory, but one conclusion we can draw is that we are experiencing right now a transitional phase, marked by extreme fluidity, with the demand for efficient communication tools soaring. This calls for flexible responses, both pragmatic and far-sighted, to cope with the constant tension between localisation and globalisation. Monolithic solutions are no longer viable. On the contrary, a wide panoply of strategies should be used to adapt to the disparate needs and tackle these new challenges efficiently with an open and pragmatic attitude, mindful of issues that impinge on democracy and open and free access to information. To this end,

all the available linguistic resources and strategies should be used with determination and creativity. One of them is the use of English for intercultural communication. It is neither a panacea nor the answer to all our communication needs; but its effectiveness as a first step to enabling speakers with different mother tongues to communicate directly (mostly orally), should not be underestimated. The supremacy of English may be temporary — as all *lingue franche* have been in the past — but it is highly likely to go unquestioned in the short/medium term. English as a *lingua franca* cannot therefore be ignored. We have to come to terms with it without demonising or idealising it, as happens too often today. On the contrary, it should be encouraged, albeit side by side with strategies promoting multilingualism, such as the acquisition of other languages, translation and interpretation, various forms of localisation and the development of innovative tools like inter-comprehension or machine translation.

As Mark Fettes says, "national economies have become far more integrated in the global economy; money and workers have become much more mobile; the pace of technological change has accelerated to an unbelievable extent; and the explosive growth of communication and information networks is on the verge of 'annihilating space' … Increasingly, every language community must become aware of its position in a 'dynamic world system of languages' characterised by vast and expanding differences in status and use … the future evolution of this system depends, in part, on the means used to transmit information and ideas across language borders: these include mediation by human or electronic translators, widespread plurilingualism, and the spread of lingua francas … all of these means might contribute to bringing about a world characterised by high levels of linguistic diversity, integration, equity, efficiency, and sustainability: in our terms an interlingual world." (pp. 37-38). And in this interlingual world, where it is increasingly important to move between different languages and cultures in a flexible way, mediators — notably linguistic mediators like interpreters and translators — continue to play a fundamental role to guarantee fruitful communication and integration.

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ATTACHMENTS

INTERVIEW WITH
PROF. FRANÇOIS GRIN

Today I would like to talk with you about the use of English as a lingua franca and alternatives solutions for intercultural communication. I know that you don't like the expression 'English as a lingua franca'. Could you elaborate a bit on this?

Yes certainly. The notion of the lingua franca is one where a mode of communication emerges between people who have different mother tongues, or different linguistic repertoires. In the technical sense of the word, what emerges as a lingua franca would then be a sort of a mid-point or combination of the languages of the various participants — not necessarily in symmetrical amounts, but still it will be something that combines the inputs of different participants in the exchange.

Nowadays, the term 'lingua franca' tends to be over-used. We should be very careful in applying it to a language like English, which is certainly not a mid-point between several different languages, but essentially one language, even if it is used with some variation.

This is exactly the point that supporters of English as a lingua franca make, saying that English (the English that we speak today) is a new form of English, is no longer British, or Anglo-Saxon English, and does not belong to its native speakers.

Well, precisely not, this isn't what they say. Before I proceed, let me stress that in terms of corpus linguistics, I find much of the research produced by "ELF" specialists very interesting — not to mention that some are personal friends for whom I have a lot of affection in addition to scientific respect. But we disagree on the interpretation and implications of their findings. They argue that "ELF" is radically different from English; I argue that it isn't. The difference between what is labelled as "English as a lingua franca" and simply "English", in terms of their consequences for language status, are superficial, and mostly of little importance. The examples of English as a lingua franca that you usually get don't seem to matter all that much. For example, one thing that keeps coming up is the notion that non-native speakers, or users, of English have a tendency to drop the final -s in the third person singular of a conjugated verb. For example, instead of saying: "He says", one would say "He say". Frankly, for communicative purposes, this is of no importance whatsoever; it is just a little bit of linguistic variation. The other examples are of the same tripe, and the notion that we are dealing with a new language is not very credible.

The people who support the notion of ELF are very ambiguous in this respect, because they sometimes claim that it is another language, but when confronted with the anecdotal character of actual differences in syntax between ELF and native usage, they shift to another claim, namely, that ELF is not another language, but a type of "situation". According to them, the situation is defined by the fact that it is used by non-native speakers. But then they get tangled up in their own argument because they never clearly answer the question: "What happens in the case where you have a few native speakers of English and a few non-native speakers of English talking together? Is this ELF or is it ELF used by some participants and not by other participants?" The question remains unanswered simply because the whole concept is logically flawed. The reality is that English as a language is evolving and diverse — we do have variants of English, in the US, in Canada and in other English-speaking parts of the world. There are different standards, but the notion that ELF is emerging as a distinct standard of its own doesn't hold up to scrutiny.

The second level is that of status, namely, the position of a language with respect to other languages. It is important to point out that non-native speakers of English are interested in learning some form of standard English. People also want to acquire a pronunciation which is relatively close to some form of native-speaker norm. This indicates that they do not identify ELF or "English as a lingua franca" as a variety that they would like to learn *instead* of more or less standard usage.

So, what is the consequence? The consequence is a considerable imbalance of power between native speakers of English, either individually or as a social group, and the rest of humankind. Massive monetary transfers accrue to English-speaking societies because English remains English, even if there is some variation, and even if some non-standard uses are spreading and becoming more common or possibly even accepted. But that does not change anything fundamental to the power relations associated with language.

Now, the last point in relation to this imbalance of power is that, though it is difficult to make a precise estimate, achieving a fluent level of English, if you are not a native speaker of the language, requires several thousands of hours of study, practise and exposure, typically up to 10,000 or 15,000 hours, which is enormous. No school system in the world can afford to devote so much time to this; and if you, as a person, intend to invest that much, you have to be 'embedded' in the language and move to an English-speaking country for some time. However, even with a very heavy investment in the learning of English, many people fail to achieve complete fluency and ease in the language. Some people, like my colleagues who are in favour of ELF, insist that ELF is not quite like English because it is a form of communication that avoids colloquialisms. And there are courses for native speakers of English, teaching them to avoid such expressions when they are talking to non-native speakers. But these courses will typically take something like four hours of instruction. Four hours is much, much less than 10,000-15,000 hours, which is one more reason why I insist that the whole notion that ELF somehow magically changes the power relations is simply untenable. It does not hold up to scrutiny.

Finally, let me stress (and I want to be very clear about this) that the problem is not English. The problem is linguistic hegemony, no matter which language finds itself in the position of the hegemon — I would say the exact same thing if French, or Estonian, or Swahili were in this dominant position. As soon as you have a natural language which is the language of an existing community and finds itself in this internationally

dominant position, you have all of these adverse effects, and ELF makes no difference at all to these problems.

This means that, for you, the whole question of ownership, which these scholars bring up, has no meaning?

The notion of "ownership" is a bit hollow, and therefore is meaningless to a large extent. This is why some people go as far as to say that people who are supporters of the notion of ELF are simply propagating linguistic imperialism — I would stop just short of this, since I don't believe in conspiracy theories and since I believe that people generally mean well.

Do you not think that we need a common means of communication to be able to communicate directly — as some scholars say? For example, Philippe Van Parijs maintains that this is essential for European democracy and European advancement.

Well, let me use an idiom here: 'that's an old chestnut'. It is the sort of thing that political scientists and political philosophers like to say. Van Parijs — whom I personally like very, very much and whose work I admire (we agree on many things, but not on this one) is fundamentally a political philosopher and he belongs to an intellectual tradition in political theory that goes back to John Stuart Mill. John Stuart Mill wrote, as if it were an absolute truth, that in order to develop, a free democratic society needs one common language, and that its development is hampered by the absence of such a language. Now, being Swiss, and coming from a traditionally quadrilingual country (a country that does have some credentials in terms of democratic institutions) I would think: "This claim is simply not true." What you need for democratic institutions to operate is to ensure communication, but ensuring communication does not necessarily mean having one common language. Having one common language can be part of the solution — it can be part of the tools that you use to ensure communication — but the aim is communication. And by the way, it is not the only goal that the society might pursue; a society could have other goals, and Van Parijs himself is extremely sensitive to goals such as social justice. But in order to ensure equality, you would also be led to advocate the preservation of as many languages as possible, and to prevent languages spoken by minorities (who are no less legitimate than members of the majority) from becoming completely obsolete. Now, recalling that what we need (the objective) is communication, let us remember that it may be achieved through different means. What I am currently advocating in some research projects we are working on is a "complex approach" to language policies, in which we assess the combination of different strategies for communication. This means using several different tools to communicate. These tools also include translation and interpretation: unless you decide that everybody in the world must become perfectly fluent in English, there is still going to be a need for translation and interpretation. Another extremely important resource is 'receptive competence' or 'inter-comprehension' (in French we use the word *intercompréhension*). This requires teaching people to understand a language related to their own. Among the Romance languages, for example, this has been developed through instruction programmes that use the close similarities between, say, Spanish, Italian and French. There is also a long-standing tradition of *intercompréhension* among Scandinavian languages. A similar programme is currently under development for the Germanic languages more generally. Then there is a high degree of inter-comprehension among Slavic languages, particularly within the northern and the southern groups (a bit less across groups). The European Commission has

supported programmes to develop the teaching of inter-comprehension: for example, the famous 'EuRom4' project — now 'EuRom5' with the inclusion of Catalan —, which is aimed at people who have one of the Romance languages as a native language and are taught to understand (not to speak or write, but to understand in writing and sometimes also orally) discourse produced in a related language. There are many ways to communicate, and inter-comprehension is just another, under-used strategy. I sometimes find it quite ridiculous to hear native speakers of Spanish and Portuguese trying to speak English together — often with poor results — whereas if they were each to speak their own language slowly, they could converse much more effectively, while also being able to use many of the nuances available to them in their native language.

I have mentioned translation and interpretation. I have mentioned inter-comprehension. I would also suggest making some space for Esperanto as part of the solution — not as *the* solution, but as *part* of the solution — because it is about 7-8 times cheaper and faster to learn than any other language, and it remains a much more balanced solution than any alternative that relies entirely on the language of one of the participants in the exchange, which is the problem with English. I would not exclude English, but I would recommend keeping it only as a part of a more complex solution in which various strategies are combined. We can also develop language technologies, which can bridge lots of gaps in communication, particularly written communication. So, all things considered, I do not believe for one moment that we need "one" language. I would even claim the opposite, and say that precisely in terms of democracy, if what we are looking for is the development of a democratic political space, using only one language is precisely the most undemocratic and inappropriate solution, because it necessarily erases and suppresses, to a greater or lesser degree, all the other languages.

In this respect, how do you judge Abram de Swaan's dictum that the more we promote different languages, the more English will be spoken?

I think that this is true at one level — it is true under a certain set of assumptions. What I mean is that if you do not put in place a consistent language policy, then indeed there is a risk which is captured by a mechanism that Philippe Van Parijs has described very neatly in many of his papers: the probability-sensitive learning of languages (that is, people have a motivation to study the languages that they expect to use most) and what can be called the "minimex" dynamics (that is, in order to minimise exclusion from meetings of people who do not speak a certain code, you select the code that most people know, or claim to know). This increases the probability that a certain code is going to be more useful in the future and therefore it creates a greater incentive for other people to learn it.

I agree with this up to a point. Let me first observe that, in reality, the code that gets chosen is not necessarily the one that excludes the lowest number of participants. The code that gets chosen is usually the one that is associated with power and which is used as a native language by those participants who wield more material or symbolic power. So the concept is not fully convincing.

But more importantly, much depends on what policies you put in place. If you decide that you do want many languages to be used and to be legitimate, for example in political debate as a basic condition for democracy, then it becomes perfectly normal to use translation, interpretation, inter-comprehension, a bit of Esperanto, a bit of English, or perhaps, in the future, some Chinese. It is then no longer obvious that you must converge towards one single and only code — whether you call it "lingua franca" or not

is another matter. The whole point is that we need a set of accompanying measures, which are an absolutely essential part of language policy.

Another important point is the issue of inter-state coordination. In this case we are confronted with a problem that comes up in a very similar way in environmental policy. It makes no sense for one country on its own to adopt very strict environmental standards to prevent pollution if the other countries keep polluting. This particular country would make a great effort with little actual effect. Certain measures are sensible only if they are taken collectively; it is a basic coordination problem. In the case of language, this coordination problem is perhaps even more obvious: it is useless for one country to adopt a policy that aims at preserving multilingualism if the others do nothing of the kind. It makes sense only if all, or at least most, countries adopt such policies together, so that there can be a coordinated response to the problems raised by language dynamics, allowing the different countries to converge towards sustainable multilingualism. The current situation is quite different from what we had in the past because of globalisation. Globalisation creates new problems and we need new policies to address them. This need for coordination is something which is, I believe, particularly evident in the context of the European Union. Within the European Union, it makes little sense for one country on its own to declare: "We are going to push for the learning, by our schoolchildren, of the language spoken in a neighbouring country." For example, encouraging French children living in Toulon to learn Italian, or French children living in Nancy, in the Lorraine region, to learn German, might be a wasted effort, if only the French undertake it while other countries teach only English. It makes sense, however, if you have a similar, reciprocal type of effort in the border regions of the neighbouring countries. Because foreign language learning doesn't necessarily result in perfect fluency for all learners, a reciprocal effort across the border turns communication into a shared enterprise rooted in a shared multilingual ethos. Incidentally, respect for linguistic diversity is brought up in the Lisbon Treaty.

In order to develop this multilingual ethos, all countries must pull together. This is why I like the idea of the "PAL" (personal adoptive language), which was proposed by a group of intellectuals led by the novelist Amin Maalouf, who drafted a report for Commissioner Orban a couple of years ago. This approach implies a very far-reaching linguistic and cultural investment by learners into one language, which mustn't necessarily be a language of wider communication. For example, a young German should be encouraged, if he or she so desires, to invest in the learning of Finnish or Greek, or whatever other language he or she finds interesting — I suppose initially within the range of the 23 official and working languages of the Union, but this could be expanded to include regional or minority languages.

This brings us to the fact that, according to many, English has now spread to such an extent that this trend cannot be reversed. In this perspective, we should accept this natural trend and recognise the right of people to choose which language they want to learn.

This is an interesting point. Let me start by saying that we do find ourselves in a situation which is technologically very new. Globalisation has developed to an extent that it makes any comparison between now and earlier times very difficult, very 'iffy'. Let us just think about the development of communication technologies — not so much technical development as the fact that the relative cost of telecommunications as well as of maintaining contact with various parts of the world has declined sharply. Together with globalisation, this creates a situation which is quite unprecedented and makes any

comparison with the past doubtful. Incidentally, the comparison between English and Latin is of limited relevance because English and Latin are spreading under conditions that are completely different, precisely because of globalisation and the development of information and communication technologies.

Now, returning to your question: the extent to which English has spread is of course remarkable. However, it is also, to a large extent, being pushed by deliberate policies and by media discourse. Language is an area where the most hackneyed clichés are going around; a little effort to look a bit closer shows reality to be quite different. Consider first of all the notion that "nowadays everybody speaks English". No, of course not! Not everybody speaks English, not even in parts of Europe where people reputedly have a high level of English. Even in a country like Sweden, where the extent of competence in English is high in international comparison, there are many circumstances where English will not get you very far.

Secondly, consider the general perception that people "want" English. Certainly, in a sense they do, but the reality is more nuanced. Let me take the following example: a few years ago, I carried out a survey with almost all of the 15 year-olds in the canton of Geneva, a relevant unit of analysis because in Switzerland, we have 26 cantons, which means 26 education ministries and therefore 26 education systems for a country of 7.5m inhabitants. Our research team polled all the 15 year-olds in the public education system, which includes the overwhelming majority of the overall school population. They were asked about their skills and attitudes towards foreign languages, particularly English, German and Spanish. The vast majority clearly liked English and enjoyed learning the language. But one questionnaire item was worded as follows (the original was in French, of course): "When someone speaks English, it is not necessary for him/her to learn any other foreign language." Our young respondents were offered the choice to tick: 'fully agree', 'mostly agree', 'mostly disagree', 'fully disagree'. Now, the people who answered 'fully...' or 'mostly agree' with this proposition made up 15% of the sample. 85% of our approximately 4,000 respondents disagreed with the notion that if you speak English, other foreign languages are not necessary. This suggests that media reporting on attitudes towards languages can often be extraordinarily superficial and remain stuck with the correct, but incomplete notion that "young people want English." Of course they want English. English is a language that I use every day; my latest book was written in English, and much of the literature that I read for my pleasure is in English. But what I wish to stress is that there are too many clichés going round. Taking one more example, the whole notion that English is "*the* language of business" is largely irrelevant. English is a language often used in business, but precisely because many people use it, it becomes banal, to the point that what really matters to clinch a deal are skills in other languages. When estimating the monetary rates of return on foreign language skills (in Switzerland, this means the national languages spoken in other parts of the country), we find that in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, the economic profitability of German is higher than that of English. All in all, the picture isn't a simple one. Another issue that I do not wish to discuss in detail now because it would take us too far is this notion that universities in non-English speaking countries absolutely *must* offer courses in English. This trend carries many negative consequences which are only beginning to be identified. Let me just tell you about one very frequent illusion: university authorities are prone to say that they want to attract foreign students and that they want "the best students". For this reason, they push for more teaching in English. What happens then? What happens is that you do get more recruitment from abroad, but the really top students, including some who really want an education through the medium of English, if it is not their native language, will chose to go to the

United States, Britain, or Canada. Therefore, continental European universities will not necessarily recruit the top students they supposedly intend to attract. Rather, they get those who could not secure a place at a university in the US, the UK, or Canada. Continental European universities end up in the role of fall-back options. By contrast, offering degrees taught in French, German, Italian, or Spanish means that you attract the best foreign students, that is, those who are good enough to have learned French, German, Italian or Spanish — often in addition to English.

Many professors are complaining about the fact that the stampede towards English is becoming a real problem, because English is being used in classes by instructors whose first language is not English, to talk to students whose first language is not English, including students who are locals, whose parents pay taxes, and those taxes support the cost of this education. All this for the benefit of pretending to be, somehow, "modern" because you teach in English, whereas you precisely fail to attract the brightest international students. So there are lots of extremely deep clichés, or deeply held views which turn out to be clichés. As one of my professors (in the US) used to say: "Language is an area in which lay people and specialists alike seem to hold extraordinarily stubborn beliefs." And these 'stubborn beliefs' are something which, I believe, we must dismantle.

We also hear growing concern in the countries where English is widespread as a medium of education that the level in the native language of students and scholars is declining. Apparently they are no longer able to speak about their subject in their own languages.

Well, even in Sweden this issue has come to the fore. I remember an article in a Swedish newspaper, probably around 2004 or 2005, where professors of Stockholm University, teaching in scientific fields where the teaching largely takes place in English, were sounding the alarm, complaining that their students (native speakers of Swedish) studying, say, biology or chemistry at the expense of the Swedish taxpayer, were no longer able to discuss their studies and to formulate their expertise through the medium of their native language. I haven't looked into it myself, so I don't know exactly how serious the situation is, but this reminds me of another example that is related directly to academic life, more specifically academic research. Professor Laurent Lafforgue is a French mathematician and a winner of the Fields Medal in Mathematics. In March 2008, we invited him to give a lecture at the University of Geneva. He spoke about the relationship between the vitality of mathematics research in France and the use of French as a language in which it is normal to publish scientific results in mathematics, because there are top-level journals in mathematics in French. Now, some people would claim that French is widely used in fundamental research in mathematics, and that results get published in the language because of the strength of this research in France. But according to Lafforgue, the reciprocal causal link is at least as important. The very fact that the French language is used in mathematics generates creativity and success in research in mathematics in France.

This may be an illustration of the importance of what is called 'linguistic work'. Keeping things simple, 'linguistic work' means 'using a language to do things'. If you no longer use a language to do things, the language and the community (or set of communities) who use this language start performing less well in various endeavours, including scientific research. This is why I think that it is extremely important to maintain the use of different languages in research and teaching. And this for the common good, because it probably nurtures higher aggregate creativity

Research was recently financed by the European Commission on the link between multilingualism and creativity. At this stage, all we have is preliminary, circumstantial evidence, but there seems to be a positive link between multilingualism (embedded in individuals or teams) on the one hand, and creativity and innovation on the other hand. Therefore, preserving this plurality of languages probably contributes to the common good. Doing things through the medium of one language is not the same thing as doing it through the medium of another language.

However, Professor Van Parijs, for example, maintains that English as a lingua franca and multilingualism should go hand in hand because they serve different purposes. In this sense the increased use of English should not contradict multilingualism.

It certainly sounds very positive, and I really believe that Philippe sincerely advocates the notion that multilingualism and the use of English should go hand in hand. But if you look more closely at the proposals he makes on how to implement this convergence, I'm afraid that you'll find that they are often unconvincing. His proposals amount to exposing all the domains of social life to the spread of English (like his injunction to ban the dubbing of US films on television channels in non-English-speaking countries). And the counter-measures he suggests in favour of multilingualism are strikingly weak. I also think that they overlook some fundamental social dynamics — in particular, the fact that, if your native language is, I'm assuming, Italian...

Yes...

... Italian is part of your 'linguistic capital'. It is also part of your 'human capital' (let me use the economic term here). 'Human capital' is an important economic variable. Now if, for whatever reason, Italian stops being used as an important language in research, in literature, banking, commerce, or industry, then the implication is that your linguistic capital (or this component of your human capital) will be worth much less; it will be downgraded and become obsolete. This is why I think that many of the solutions to language problems proposed by Van Parijs are very risky, because they offer no real protection against a drift towards linguistic uniformity. It could potentially lead us to a grossly unfair situation where something like over 90% of the population of the planet would ultimately be completely or partly robbed of their human capital, giving rise to enormous transfers of symbolic and material influence to something like 6% of the population, who happen to speak a language that enjoys a lot of economic clout and a lot of prestige. And once again, let me stress that the problem is not 'English', but linguistic hegemony.

From what you say I gather that for you the distinction Van Parijs makes between *demos* and *ethnos* — in more or less the same way as ELF scholars distinguish between language for communication and language for identification — is very weak.

I don't think that human experience with respect to language is as compartmentalised as this. I believe that there are distinct languages which we use for different purposes, but I also believe that we draw on a linguistic competence which combines our skills in different languages. I sometimes use structures from French when building a sentence in English, and a reverse process may occasionally happen when I import into my French an English word that I find convenient. Even if I try to use received syntax (accepted syntax) in both languages, I also experience my language skills as a continuum of skills that straddles different languages — as apparently most people do, according to

contemporary research in applied linguistics. Therefore, it is difficult to assign languages to separate little boxes or to associate languages with completely separate functions like *ethnos* and *demos*. By the way, this brings us back to the beginning of our conversation, in particular to the question of the conditions for a democratic space — the interconnection between *ethnos* and *demos* is very closely linked to the issue of democracy.

If we broaden this concept a bit, I would imagine that Van Parijs, for example, would consider that, as you suggest, *ethnos* is more closely associated with the identity function of language and *demos* with its communicative function. However, I don't think I want to live in a world in which the language closer to my identity, typically my native language, is confined to local functions; and I suppose that many people feel the same way, even if the notion of 'ethnos' is more fluid than what political philosophers often appear to assume. However, this relegation to local functions is the implication of what Philippe says. In many of these papers, he suggests using our 'ethnic' language, or the language connected to the *ethnos*, for local purposes, while international communication takes place through the medium of another language. I am not entirely certain that this is satisfying, and I rather think it is quite the opposite. Precisely because some functions are linked to the *demos* aspect of language, these functions, or 'domains', to use a sociolinguistic term, would no longer be approached or 'invested' through one's native or 'ethnic' language. I do not like the term 'ethnic' anyway, because I find it very infelicitous, but downgrading this language to secondary status implies that less 'linguistic work' is carried out in this particular language. This causes a progressive downgrading of one's human capital, or that part of one's human capital which is associated with this language. So, the *ethnos-demos* distinction may be very neat in terms of political science. It is useable, and I sometimes use it too when talking about constitutional arrangements to give different languages different roles, in the setting up of a national-level language policy, but I would certainly not rely on it as a general organising principle of the role of different languages in a multilingual sphere.

Now I would like to address a completely different issue: on the one hand, we see (or at least this is the cliché) that English is spreading very rapidly. On the other hand, however, multilingualism is increasing as well and there are domains which were once dominated by English, like the Internet for example, where now we see more and more languages.

This is precisely why I would tend to relativise the notion that English is the alpha and omega of communication in the modern world. Again, I have no problem with the fact that English is there and that it is used in lots of situations. I just don't want English (or any other language) to displace other languages. And I think it is interesting to observe that there are several circumstances in which its role is, in relative terms at least, declining. This is of course connected to another phenomenon which hasn't been brought up in our conversation, namely migration, in connection with the decline in the relative cost of maintaining contact with your country of origin. For example, if your place of origin is in India and you speak Bihari in your family even if you live in Western Europe, you can more easily and more cheaply than ever before maintain contact, directly or indirectly, with Bihari surroundings. This contributes to the maintenance of various forms of multilingualism. What I simply want to stress is that we should avoid what I sometimes call 'Potemkin multilingualism'. Potemkin, as you know, was one of the favourites of the Empress Catherine the Great of Russia, in the late 18th century. She sent him to the southern part of the country — in what is now Ukraine — to set its economic development in motion. Then she visited the region and

(so the story goes), when Potemkin knew that the Empress was going to pass through one particular area in her horse-drawn carriage, he erected only the façades of prosperous-looking villages, to give the impression that the region was growing fast, that peasants were settling there, tilling the land and contributing to its agricultural development. I am wary of artificial, superficial diversity… and this, I think, is a problem for Europe. Let me mention one more anecdote. I was once travelling to Bratislava for a meeting on a European research project. As I was waiting for my luggage to be delivered, I asked someone working at an information booth to teach me a few basic words of Slovak, like 'hello', 'thank you', 'good bye', etc, which unfortunately I had not had the time to look up before leaving. She looked at me and answered, in English of course: "Oh my God, you are the first traveller ever to ask me that!" This suggests that despite all the diversity we have in Europe, and all these opportunities for contact between people with different backgrounds, our actual experience of diversity could turn out to be quite superficial, particularly if it can only be approached through the medium of one hegemonic language. If we are genuinely concerned with diversity, let us adopt policies that favour genuine diversity. I think it is in our collective interest and it is also a just and fair way to address the problems of multilingualism.

To what extent do you think that average Europeans are sensitive to this question and aware of this?

Well, as I said before, it is often the case that they're only asked clichéd questions like: "Do you like English?", leading them to answer: "Oh yes, yes, yes, we like English." But if you ask them more subtle questions like: "Would it not matter at all to you if your language stopped being used?", or "if your language stopped being something through which you can earn a proper living?" or "stopped being a language in which you can get literature, or study, or interact with other people who might have learnt your language?", then you're likely to get a more nuanced picture. People would suddenly look at it quite differently. I sometimes do this with my students: I test their 'willingness to pay' in additional taxes, that is, how much they would be willing to pay, in additional taxes, to ensure that their language remains an official and working language of the European Union. I occasionally teach at the Università della Svizzera italiana in Lugano, where many of my students are Italians — that is, coming from a member state of the EU. When they're asked how much they would be willing to pay in extra taxes in the future to make sure that Italian remains an official working language of the Union, their replies suggest a wide range of monetary expressions of willingness to pay. But the average value this generates is vastly higher than the cost of translation and interpretation in the European institutions. Always. Year in, year out. This suggests that if people are asked more specific questions about multilingualism, and if they are made aware of the alternatives, we end up with a pretty nuanced picture.

Do you see a risk of a sort of provincialism spreading in Europe, and people being willing to pay to protect their own languages, but not as willing to pay to protect multilingualism and to guarantee the same rights to other people?

This is the heart of the matter. Multilingualism is not something that exists of its own right, in a vacuum. It is the result of the presence of all these languages. Therefore, if people are willing to devote resources to the maintenance of their language, I say: "Great!" because through your language, you are contributing to the continued presence of multilingualism. I have limited trust in moral exhortations about virtue and 'being nice to others' — of course I'm in favour of being supportive of larger values, but I

think the effectiveness of such appeals tends to be limited. I would generally encourage people to cultivate their own language. For example, I would encourage Italian speakers to insist that high-level scientific research must take place in Italian, and that university teaching in Italy mainly takes place in Italian at all levels. I would say the same for Swedish, Finnish or Dutch, because in this way, each partner contributes to aggregate multilingualism. Now in addition to this, of course, we need inter-state coordination, along with accompanying measures to ensure that this is compatible with communication. Hence the complex combination of measures that I advocated earlier.

One last question concerning, more specifically, Europe and linguistic policy in the European Union. Many people criticise EU linguistic policy because they say that multilingualism is just a façade strategy and, in reality, English is gaining more and more ground. Moreover, this policy would not be sustainable.

Well there again, it is difficult to address all this in a couple of minutes, because we would have to take a closer look at each aspect of the argument to answer properly. My general impression in this respect, however, is that many of the statements we hear from politicians or in the media are inadequately informed. They often completely ignore language dynamics, and many of the processes that we have talked about in this interview. Now there are, in a sense, two opposite views in the criticism you have just mentioned. On the one hand, I agree that the European Union is in certain ways schizophrenic: it keeps talking about multilingualism, but in their dealings with European authorities (for example, in the sphere of scientific research), Europeans are sometimes requested — and they are not really given a choice — to operate through the medium of English. Sometimes it is a bad idea, because they do not necessarily have the linguistic means to do the same things in English as in their native language. In addition, it places an enormous extra cost on non-native users of English, which is grossly unfair. At this level, at least, I must confess that I do find the European Union a little schizophrenic. I fully support the objective of multilingualism, but if the European Union is to effectively strive for this goal, then I believe it needs to be a bit more internally consistent.

Some of the criticism is therefore levelled against this inconsistency in European policies and some people go as far as to call it a sham. I wouldn't think it is a 'sham'. I believe, for example, that all the work done by translators for the European institutions is definitely not a 'sham', but constitutes, on the contrary, remarkable work. All in all, there needs to be more consistency throughout the operations of the European Union. And for this purpose, I suggest, of course, encouraging multilingualism, but in combination with other instruments to make it viable and sustainable in the long run.

Now the other, opposite criticism comes from those who say: "Well no, multilingualism is useless, unrealistic, and a waste of time and resources." To this, I would reply: "Well, if you really consider what the alternative in the long run is, namely, unilingualism, it would be a distinct loss and a gross injustice. It is not more efficient economically — largely because it simply shifts the cost of communication on some people, for the benefit of a few others." Essentially, if we do everything in one language (whether it is English, or French, or Spanish — again this makes no difference), then it shifts all of the cost onto native speakers of the other languages, unless they all become Anglophones (or Francophones, or Hispanophones, depending on which language is used as 'hegemon'). One might argue that once people have all become uniform, there is no cost any more, but diversity disappears completely: if you think logically about all this, you end up with rather dire consequences.

In addition to this, I would think that the actual outlays on translation and interpretation are very reasonable. I think that we have many extremely effective strategies to develop, using inter-comprehension and using a bit of Esperanto, if only as a propaedeutic step, a preparation for learning other foreign languages (Esperanto learners apparently learn other languages faster). We can also make better use of language technology. Whether in terms of creativity, quality of life, or democracy, there are many reasons why linguistic diversity is preferable to uniformity. It is just that instead of looking at one narrow aspect of the picture, we have to look at the picture as a whole.

By way of conclusion, do you think that we can be rather optimistic, or should we be more pessimistic about the future?

I don't want to answer this question. I believe we'd best remain extremely cautious: 'better safe than sorry'. So let's avoid big mistakes like the generalisation of a linguistic monoculture in higher education and research, for example. Just preventing this drift would be a good start. Let us not throw the baby out with the bath water; let us monitor the situation in language dynamics very closely. Let us think about various ways to secure the type of linguistic environment that we really want, which for all of the reasons I have outlined is probably one which is *diverse*, not one that is *uniform*. All things considered, I don't want to be optimistic or pessimistic, I just want to be cautious.

Thank you very much.

Thank you!

English is turning more and more into 'Globish'. Many consider it as today's lingua franca, and they think that as such it will be the solution to our communication problems. How do you judge this convergence towards English?

If you go in for integration, if you go in for mobility, if you don't want to cut back on internationalisation and globalisation and so on and so forth, then some form of lingua franca is absolutely necessary, because people cannot always be accompanied by interpreters, they cannot always avail themselves of translators, etc.

I think though that we have to see things in context. For example, if you travel and you want to buy a railway ticket, or what not, then you will probably do so in English these days. Twenty years ago that would not have been possible. If you attend international meetings, which are not 'high-level', then obviously more often than before you will end up using English.

There is also something called 'lingua academica', because more and more research publications are in English. Twenty years ago this was true for the hard sciences and medical sciences. Nowadays, even the humanities, even the social sciences and so on and so forth publish in English as a result of the internationalisation of higher education. Southern Europe is different, if you go to Spain and Portugal internationalisation means something else — but in the Nordic states, Germany and the Netherlands, for example, it means that you adopt English as a language of instruction. I'm not saying that this is always satisfying — it is not. In other words, you have to make a tremendous effort; people have to be able to express themselves properly in English, and very often this is not the case. Then English may well end up as a joke. But on the whole, I think the trend is there and it is irreversible.

Many people complain about this phenomenon because they are afraid that if all the instruction is in English, national languages are downgraded; there is a concern that researchers and students will no longer be able to speak about their subjects in their own languages.

Ok, you are absolutely right and this is why, for example, we with the European Language Council say that you have to be 'biliterate'. In other words, you have to be able to communicate to your peers from around the globe in English, but at the same time, when it comes to your own students etc., you also have to do a fair amount of teaching in the language of the home country.

Now what we must not forget is that this is not an altogether 'new' phenomenon. There was a time before the First World War when the academic lingua franca was German. If you went to Norway, Sweden, Denmark, or Finland, people there would publish in German. For reasons which we are all aware of, this then came to an end and English took over.

The problem with English is (this is my personal conviction) that it does not have a complex grammar. In other words, you can pour your own grammar into the language — which is what people do. You can also pour your own lexis into the language, which is what people do. And if you do too much of this, if you don't have a certain level of 'command' of English, you end up with a lot of nonsense. I have this wonderful story: We had a meeting here in Brussels where there was interpreting — in three languages — and the chair said: "Wolfgang, do you need German?" I said "no". And then, a quarter of an hour later, a lady from a country the name of which I am not going to mention here stood up and made a speech, and I couldn't understand anything. She was speaking English. And so I went to the French booth, and the French booth was absolutely perfect. Why? Because of course at the interpretation service of the European institutions they are now training their translators to translate from Polish English, Czech English, Italian English, Spanish English, Portuguese English into French and German.

This is exactly what the supporters of English as a lingua franca maintain, i.e. that the English we speak today in international contexts is no longer the 'British' or 'Anglo-Saxon' English...

Ok, that's absolutely clear... I belong to a generation where culture and literature were an important part of language teaching — English language teaching — to the extent that when I came down from school and met my first native speaker, I was unable to communicate with that person, so it was a case of instant non-communication. We learnt the system, we learnt *about* the language, but we did not learn how to *use* the language. Then we started to teach languages as a means of communication, we started to adopt the 'communicative approach'. Now, in a sense, we don't really have to do this any more. Kids communicate from morning to night. Students at my university code-switch galore, so that is *not* the problem; the problem is that they *mix* all these languages freely. For this reason we are now beginning to teach the system again, and say: "You have to make a proper distinction between the various languages, and particularly when it comes to English, because it *has* a system, and this is good." To my mind, if you look at it properly, English is probably one of the most difficult European languages, because it has a semantic structure. It doesn't have a *formal* structure. That is the problem. I know what people say about international English, and I am not saying that this is all wrong. There may be room for this kind of language teaching and language use in order to facilitate communication between speakers of different languages: that's fine with me. But there are limits. The example that is always held up is the United States of America, because people come to the States and they all end up speaking English. And all the teaching is done in English, and all the research is done in English. What people tend to forget, is that the laboratories are staffed with people who come from all over the world, who have their 'own frames of mind' and these frames of mind are probably reflected in their own languages. Thus you get this rather creative and fruitful mix - it's all done in English. Right? What we need at this stage is some research on the potential and limitations of English as a lingua franca, what you can do in English, if English is not your first (or second) language and what you *cannot* do properly. In other words, as I said before, you have to look at things in context.

But English can become an element of power for people from Anglo-Saxon countries, who consider it as their own asset...

Well, I do not think that this is true. You have to go to the United Kingdom to realise that the standard of English has declined sharply. Gone are the days in which you could automatically say: "Right, a Brit has this advantage over others." I don't think so....I'll tell you my own story, I will not go into the past. I simply say: "Why have I been reasonably successful in Brussels?" I have a Polish name, I'm German, but I speak English. Now that's it.

However, there is no denying that language related activities are a big source of income for England. Professor François Grin, for example, speaks about a 'big injustice' because, through English, Anglo-Saxon countries make huge profits. The result is a sort of imbalance between English native-speakers and non-native speakers who have to pay and devote a huge amount of time, energy and money to reaching an acceptable level of English.

You have to look at it in a slightly different manner. He is obviously right, in one respect, but when you read the papers in Britain, what you realise is that these days about half of their vacancies are filled with foreigners, and most of them come from the Union. Why? Because, of course, in their schools they learnt English and they have at least one other language, so they are one up on the Brits. In other words, if you wanted to be nasty, you would say: "Right, industry — employers — in the United Kingdom profit from the fact that other Member States spend money on language education." Having said that, the other thing, of course, that goes along with it is that when you learn other languages, you become more flexible; you are able to look at things from different angles and this kind of flexibility of mind is not readily available among British youngsters. In other words, I think it is self-defeating, it's nonsense. In this international, globalised world, it makes all the difference if you can, if you're *used* to looking at other things and noticing the differences. Last year I accompanied Commissioner Orban to Beijing: it was my first visit to China. I was there for four days, and all the time I was watching, listening, taking things in, noticing the differences. But of course, what it means is that you have to be able to *do* that. You have to have that sort of mind. Now I think you get that sort of mind if you learn other languages.

In other words, we could say that multilingualism is an asset because it gives you a more open frame of mind.

This is certainly a very important aspect of it. But of course, multilingualism is important for other reasons as well. I'll give you an example: two of my nephews work for Siemens, and they were both sent to Copenhagen. And they thought: "Ok, the corporate language is English, so therefore we don't have to worry." Now that's ok, but as soon as you leave the company and go to a bar, and so on and so forth, no integration. You have to have Danish. So, the first thing they decided to do was to learn Danish. We know this from the Netherlands, for example, where more and more universities are now offering almost their entire programme in English. But there are limits, because international students find it difficult to mix with their Dutch peers, who, once they are amongst themselves, outside the classroom, speak Dutch. In other words, it is the context, as I said before. If you move to another country, then I'm afraid that within a reasonable period of time you have to have the language of that county.

This means that there is no risk that English will spread to such an extent as to replace other languages?

No, but there is one particular danger in countries where there is not a long tradition in academia or in some Member States, new Member States, where the national language didn't really function as a 'proper' language at that level. There is a danger that these languages will become 'impoverished', that their terminology will not be properly developed, that they will be limited to certain contexts. There is also another danger, a danger of 'populism'. In Denmark, for example, the parties on the left and the right want to stop the use of English as a language of instruction, which is equally silly. In other words, I think there are both these things. Look at the 'Dublin descriptors'[1], for example, they describe generic competences that people in higher education have to have: they have to be able to communicate with their peers, but they also have to be able to communicate with the public. In other words, if you work in chemistry or physics, or whatever, it's one thing to make a presentation at a conference; it's another thing to actually talk to a company. And I think you have to be able to do your job, that is, in two languages. It's as simple as that.

Two languages, you mean your national language and...

Your national language and English. Then of course there is more: if you want to move around...then you have to have other languages as well. This is what is actually happening. Think of these Erasmus babies — father French, mother Swedish, live in Berlin. The problem is that our education systems are not geared to this kind of mobility; things have to change. We have to allow children to become literate in *all* their languages, which is not the case now. I have so many students at my university who come from Russia, or Poland, or whatnot, who went to school in Berlin, have Russian orally — maybe not fully developed, but still — but they cannot read and write: that is what we should really do something about. We have to work on the two fronts: maintaining diversity, but at the same time also allowing people to develop their own linguistic profiles, and those profiles are not just one language plus English. More and more people have very, very diverse profiles. The question is what we can do in order to support them to maintain these profiles.

And, of course, the education system is of basic importance in this respect.

Absolutely. If you want to characterise the current situation, I would put it like this: we now have something like 400 languages that are spoken in Europe — more than ever before. We have more complex language profiles than ever before; a new elite is emerging — people who have three first languages, and if they're lucky, they are literate in all of them, but many of them are not. And then more English is spoken than ever before. This is our strange situation. And then we have all these young people who have half a language only.

The gap is widening...

Absolutely, the social divide is opening. And obviously if you want to 'be with it', you have to have a very good command of English, you can't get around that, because you have to be able to talk about complex issues in English.

This means that English should be present in all curricula...

Well it is...and you know there is no discussion about *removing* it or anything like that. But parents will increasingly insist on other things as well. In Berlin, for example, more

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[1] "Dublin descriptors for Short Cycle, First Cycle, Second Cycle and Third Cycle Awards" are general statements of the expected attributes of a student following completion of a short, first, second or third cycle study. The descriptors have been developed by the Joint Quality Initiative with a focus on general higher education.

and more parents want their children to learn Spanish as well; Spanish is becoming the second most popular language in Berlin. And my university is already engaged in teacher education, and in teacher education Spanish is a big asset now.

This means that there is growing awareness about the need to speak more languages.

Indeed. More and more parents will have spent part of their working lives in another country. Then there is more and more export into Latin America — this Latin American dimension is very, very important for Europe as well. To take the example of Portuguese, Portugal may be a small country, but then Brazil has come through the crisis with flying colours. Brazil is one of the 'new nations' and they also speak some kind of Portuguese. People are aware of all this. At my university, every Bachelor's student is entitled to spend 15 out of 180 credits on language learning. Now when this was introduced, my Dean said to me: "Ok, they will all go for English." Absolutely not. The most popular language is Spanish, the second-most popular language is French — probably because we have so many French students in Berlin. And then they do everything under the sun: Polish, Arabic, Turkish — it's not just English.

That is because they already have English …

I think they think they have English, and this is exactly another problem. Because if they go on and do a Master course taught in English, or do their PhD studies in English, they may well discover that their English is not good enough. For this reason I am now introducing a policy whereby we want to make sure that students who do academic work in English have a sufficiently high level of English; otherwise it becomes a joke. And that is another thing where I have problems with this '1 + 2' formula, because no mention is made about standards. They simply say: "People should have...". Beware, I mean, you can have three languages within a short period of time, but what are you then able to *do* with these languages? The issue of the *standard* at which you have the language is becoming the big issue and it is linked to the 'knowledge society'. In the old days people went into manufacturing and that was it, but now they have to be able to communicate, they have to be able to write e-mail messages in English that other people can understand.

Concerning education and language learning, traditionally — as you said before — to learn a language meant also to learn its culture and literature. Today those who speak about English as a lingua franca maintain that it is just a means of communication, that it has nothing to do with Anglo-Saxon English, or British and American culture and that people just want to master this *tool* for their daily communication with other people, very often with other non-native speakers.

Yes, what can I say? Again, when you teach English at school — in Germany it is still the case — you look at British and American culture through the system and sometimes forget that there are other countries in the world where English is the first language as well, like Australia and New Zealand and so on and so forth. Where does it stop? There is a problem there. And what people are also becoming aware of is the importance of the whole *inter-cultural* dimension. If you communicate with someone else in English, then obviously the cultural background of that person is an important issue. And the fact that two people whose first language is not English talk to each other *in* English does not mean that they automatically understand each other. There may be huge cultural differences and, therefore, instant misunderstandings. For this reason I think the inter-cultural dimension is becoming more and more important, along with this development of English as a lingua franca.

In fact, the other concern which is often voiced is the "imperialism" of English, the risk that if we all speak English, we might end up adopting the cultural values attached to the language.

No, I don't think so. Britain is in some respect my second country, and I'm highly alarmed because the country is becoming more and more inward-looking. People are apparently getting afraid. I don't know how to explain it; it is a very strange attitude and I was really taken aback at the 'Last Night of the Proms' this year, because there were hardly any foreign flags any more. It is just England, Wales, Scotland... I would be at a loss to describe British culture to you these days. What is it?

And what about American culture?

American culture. This is the other thing people tend to forget: that the United States of America is much more diverse than it seems to be. You go to the website of the White House and everything is in two languages, English and Spanish. Now that is a clear indication of the fact that the United States is not an 'English only' country; there are other languages. And what is also becoming clear is that more and more young people in the United States want to learn their heritage languages — there you have this other phenomenon, 'language and identity', but that's something else.

Let me return to the issue of effective communication in a second or third language. Can you communicate effectively without having near native competence?

I do not think this is the way we should put it. If we are honest to ourselves, we have to say that in many Member States, a large number of so-called native speakers are not able to use their national language or regional language properly. So for me, the whole idea of native-speaker competence is beside the point, because, as I said to you before, there are so many native speakers of German whose German is appalling while at the same time there are so many foreigners who have an excellent command of German, or French, or English... In fact I have stopped using the term *native* language, I use the term *first language*...and people can have more than one *first* language.

Then again, the question arises as to the level of competence in these languages. And that, for me, is becoming the real issue.

And obviously in this respect education is essential.

Oh absolutely, absolutely. And my feeling is that in education (because, of course, it has to do with the environment outside school) it is increasingly all pictures. Kids are glued to the computer screen from morning to night. But it's not necessarily a language in the traditional way that they watch or deal with, it is computer games and all the rest. So parents also have a responsibility. They have to encourage their kids to read (if you don't read, you will not learn your first language properly). And then, of course, they could read other languages as well. And that might help them, because we have countries in Europe — Member States — in the North, where people tell you they are bilingual. The whole of Sweden is bilingual. Really? I was once looking for a project manager and a person in Brussels recommended a young lady from Sweden to me who had spent a number of years in Brussels and who wanted to move to Berlin. I talked to her on the phone and it sounded jolly good — that was English, definitely. Then I asked her to send in her letter of application, a motivation letter and her CV. When I received her letters etc., I immediately realised that she may be ok orally, but her written English was a complete mess. If you want to go public on a website, you really need people with a very high command of the language. But it would not necessarily have to be the British way of doing things.

You mean that we should develop a new international way of doing things?

For one thing, you will want to maintain your own identity, and therefore you will probably use English in a way which is typical of your environment, your country, and so on and so forth. However, there is a limit.

Do you think that we are facing a choice and we should concentrate either on improving the learning of English or on encouraging language diversity?

I think you can have both. My association promotes language learning and linguistic diversity; we firmly believe that this is important for Europe. The question is: how can we combine the two needs? There is a need for language learning, there is a need for linguistic diversity, because otherwise there would be chaos, there would be populism, we would return to the 19th century. It is politically wise to maintain linguistic diversity, otherwise I think there would be a legal backlash, plus you would always be that much poorer. Italy is what it is because of its language...and the language has to do with its culture and so on and so forth. And the same goes for France, and many other countries. I don't know all the Member States so well, but that is right for Europe. It is true even for a country like Denmark where people claim "We're all English..." Absolutely not — it is a completely different country.

There is another development, if you look at the issue from a political angle, and that is: the weakening of the Member States. It the regions that are becoming more important...and those regions very often are border-crossing regions. So, for example, there is a region evolving between Milan and Stuttgart — that region is bilingual, German and Italian. Let's take the school system in Austria in Tyrol for example — the first language should be Italian, because of all the Italians living in that area. You go to Kufstein, which is the first town in Tyrol when you come from Bavaria. All the announcements at the station are in two languages, German and Italian, and this is because they have all these Italians there. So it makes a lot of sense for them to have these two languages. If you go to northern Germany, in Schleswig-Holstein, you have so many Danes coming south and going to Hamburg for the weekend. Of course, they have to have German. And Germans who want to move north of the border have to have Danish. I find these things highly encouraging.

And speaking the language of the neighbour works better than having recourse to the lingua franca…

Yes. It may be different if you work in a company — but even if you work in a small or medium-sized enterprise, then obviously, you have to have German and Danish, for example. It is clear to me.

On the other hand, we are also witnessing another development. In areas with strong separatist movements, they advocate the use English side by side with the local language, at the expense of the national language.

There you are. And these are dangerous phenomena. We have a similar situation in Switzerland. In the German-speaking region the first foreign language is High German. Then comes the third language, obviously English, and that's it. They do not learn French any more, and they do not learn Italian. "What is that anyway? What is Italian? Oh yes, down there, there is some Italian spoken." This is very, very unfortunate. The reasons can be very different, I mean, in Cataluña it is political. What they want to do is to assert themselves, but it is a trend which I find most unfortunate.

Let us go back to the problem of language learning and teaching, which, as you said before, is the basis for a new approach to languages and to language diversity

which reflects today's reality. And promoting English as a lingua franca means defining a new way of learning the language.

We have the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference. It is full of 'can do' statements. In other words, we are not really talking about grammar, or anything like that: "At level A1 you can do this, at level A2 you can do that, and so on and so forth." And of course, you can perform these tasks at different quality levels; in other words, if you write a report — it might be an outstanding report or a bad one, but you can write a report. In other words, a complicated system.

As concerns a new approach to English as a lingua franca, it cannot mean that in learning the language, one should limit oneself to the basics, as it were and say: "Ok, the main thing is: forget about the progressive or perfective aspect." Now, I think that if you really want to use a language effectively, that is to say if want to use if for talking/writing about complex issues, then you have to have a proper command of that language. Otherwise, you miss certain facets inherent in the English language, which are there to make subtle distinctions, and so on and so forth. English is a terrible language — for me it is the most difficult language of all, because of the *huge* number of lexical items we have. It has by far the largest vocabulary of any European language. And very often, you have a handful of words which you can use for referring to the same phenomenon (object or idea) and you wouldn't necessarily want to use them in free variation. In other words, you can make subtle distinctions — semantic distinctions — in English, if you have a high command of that language. If you don't, if you simply say: "Ok, we'll go for the basics and this is lingua franca." Well that may be ok for buying tickets and having a basic exchange of ideas, but if you really want to do a proper job, you will probably have to continue learning, learning, learning.

As you know, American English is different from British English and that again is different from Australian English, etc. *But*, what they have in common is a sort of basic semantic structure. When you go to America — to certain areas, to certain high schools — they don't even know what 'modal verbs' are. Those kids normally learn English when they get to college. First year at college is an exercise in language learning. So much for a native speaker... Ok, so you know, it's a tricky thing... and again, I think that for me, the issue is not an *either-or*, but (as I've said so many times before) you have to look at the context. What is it that you want to talk about? What is it that you want to write about? *Can* you do this properly in English or *can't* you? If you *can't*, then you'd better do it in another language and perhaps find someone who can translate. But, of course, then we come to yet another question: translation is a fiendishly difficult thing, and I don't have to tell you that. Our university prides itself of being an international network university. And, of course, we must have an English website as well, like so many other universities. And of course, naïve as sometimes people are, they thought: "Ok, we will simply translate that website word-by-word into English." Now that was a joke. Then, they said: "Ok, we need to do a proper job. We have to call in professional translators — avail ourselves of the services of a translation agency." So they called in a translation agency, and the agency certainly had Brits or Americans, or whatever, but they were totally unaware of what the German university system is like. And so this translation too looks a bit strange. It is English, but it does not reflect German reality. This is where things *really* become difficult.

And this is where localisation...

Yes, but rather than localisation... you should have *globalisation*. You need to present yourself in English in a way which can be understood in China, in Japan, in Australia and so on. In other words, you have to use a different approach when you address

yourself to an international audience. You have to *explain* the structure of your university. You have to *explain* in plain language *how* to apply for a place, and not take anything for granted. If you present yourself as a university inside Germany, you can take so many things for granted which you cannot take for granted when you present yourself outside the borders, because university systems are different all over the world. Now that is where I think the real problem starts.

This is the new challenge.

This is a new challenge. It *is* a challenge — even inside Europe. For example, at Freie Universität Berlin I frequently get phone calls from Polish students, French students, and so on and so forth, who have been to the website — who have German, no problem, but who don't understand what's on the website.

And, in your view, this is mainly a challenge to the education system…

It is. I cannot talk about other sectors of society, but what I can see here is that if you want to operate in an international environment, you have to think very, very carefully how you do this. Localisation is one thing, if you want to *sell*, in a particular region, but if you want to *attract* young people from all over Europe and from around the world, then you have to use a different approach.

What emerges from our conversation is that all these different means — different tools — should be used in combination to ensure that language diversity is not going to disappear. Is it correct?

It's not going to disappear, by no means.

Do you expect it to increase in the future?

Well, all I can say is that because of migration and mobility, the situation has reached a degree of complexity in Europe that we have never had before, which is one of the reasons, of course, why people resort to English, because the more languages you have, the greater the need for *one tool* which you can use. Having said that, there are limits, and these limits — I think we have described them — derive from people's insufficient command of the language. But they also have to do with *identity*. They also have to do with *rights* — you have the right, in the Union, I think (at least as far as our official languages are concerned), to express yourself in your language, or another official language, of course. And the question is: how can we extend these rights? And we have to extend them, because you cannot bring people into the Union (and we need them because we do not have enough young people ourselves), and then say: "Your own language is rubbish."

So, the problem is not simply to protect the 23 official languages that we have in Europe...?

We need to achieve integration in our societies. And I think that language is an important aspect. But we cannot simply expect people coming to Europe to learn the majority language of the country where they happen to end up. It would make a lot of sense if we Europeans started to learn other languages as well — and my students understand that — they learn Chinese, they learn Arabic, etc. because they understand that Europe has changed, the world has changed, and there are other languages — non-European languages — which also matter.

This implies a radical change in the attitude toward language, towards our majority languages and towards the issue of languages in general.

The Barcelona process already indicates a change in policy. The '1+2' formula was first put on the table by the European Commission, not by the Member States, in 1995, in the White Paper on Teaching and Learning. Every EU citizen was to be proficient in three Community languages — but what about non-Community languages? In 2002, the formula became: "Every citizen should have three languages", and there was no talk of 'Community languages' any more. This for me means two things: a) we have regional languages in Europe, and the Parliament has always pushed the regions, as you know; and b) we have migrant languages. I think the Lisbon Strategy, with globalisation and the knowledge-based society and so on and so forth, already pointed in that direction. The problem is that developments have overtaken us; things have moved so fast, and the danger that I see at the moment is that we are discussing policy — economic policy in particular — without taking things like languages into consideration. In Europe 2020, the word 'languages' is not mentioned a single time. Not once. In the Communication 'Youth on the Move', I think it is mentioned twice. And this is the crux. If even at a European level, we decide it does not matter, then how can we expect the Member States to take appropriate action?

In this perspective, would you agree with the claim that while the European Union officially protects and encourages multilingualism, in reality multilingualism has become a mere political label and nothing concrete is done to really promote it?

Well, there is a limit as to what the Union can do...The Union can do two things. The Institutions can issue communications/policy statements, etc., and the EU can encourage mobility and contacts through the Lifelong Learning Programme. And that is what the EU does. That is all. It cannot *interfere*. The Commission cannot give *orders* to the Member States.

So blaming Europe is merely a way of not taking responsibility.

I think the policies are all there, in a sense. Except that — and this is what worries me as I said before — we have suddenly entered a phase, in European integration, where the language issue is not even mentioned any more. And I do not quite understand *why*. My feeling is that people are worried about our economic system, they are worried about falling behind China and Brazil, about what we can do in order to develop our IT industries. This is the main thing, and they forget about other issues. And this could have very negative consequences. Look at Sweden, for example; all of a sudden there is a nationalist party. We have to develop policies which are designed to facilitate integration in Member States, and not just collaboration between Member States. When I was young, it was a matter of reconciliation between France and Germany. Now, we are not going to fight wars at a European level, but we may well have civil war in the *banlieu*. So these are the issues. When we have to deal with such issues, English as a lingua franca is a minor one. In other words — as I said before — we should be happy that young people from around the globe can sit down together and talk to each other and exchange their views on the most different topics, and if they do so in English, then why not? There are worse things in life. What I would like to stress, however, is that even if there is a lingua franca, that does not mean 'pidgin English'.

Thank you very much.

Thank you!

INTERVIEW WITH
PROF. PHILIPPE VAN PARIJS

(Photo: Nick Hannes)

Today I would like to talk with you about the use of English as a lingua franca, which you firmly advocate in your writings.

There is a nice anecdote which I like to recall about English as a lingua franca. Two of my children were attending one of the European schools and one day the director announced that Romano Prodi, then President of the Commission, would visit the school together with Guy Verhofstadt, who was the President of the European Council at the time, and the Swedish Prime Minister, who was going to take over. The meeting took place in the canteen, which was not equipped with interpreting facilities. Prodi said, "Well, we are not going to make speeches, we are going to make it interactive, so the pupils can ask questions."

Several pupils came to the microphone and asked questions, among them a Greek pupil who asked: "Mr Prodi, what is the policy of the European Union, particularly the European Commission, as regards languages?" And Prodi answered, "Well, from the very beginning of the European institutions we have always wanted to assert the equality among all the official languages of the European Union, and we shall keep doing so". But this was happening in a canteen and how could all these kids from all sections of the European schools manage? They could manage because both the pupils and the speakers used only one language — with the exception of a brief intervention by French Commissioner Barnier, who spoke in French. This anecdote summarises, so to say, my view about the language issue: Prodi was right both in what he asserted and in the choice of the language in which he asserted it. We must reconcile a symbolic assertion of equality — which becomes more and more tenuous as the number of languages and the competence in one of them increases — with the pragmatic need to be understood in a cheap way by everyone. There is a convergence that is already going on and must be accelerated towards English as a lingua franca in which all Europeans should be able to communicate.

In your latest book (*Linguistic Justice for Europe and for the World*, Oxford University Press, forthcoming) you establish a connection between the choice of English, on the one side, and democracy and justice, on the other one.

Yes I do, but the connection is not straightforward. If one particular language is privileged, at first sight you should rather speak of injustice, because the people who speak that particular language as their mother tongue are advantaged over all the others. I do believe that there is an issue of injustice and that it needs to be addressed. Indeed, this is precisely what I devoted a whole book to. But there is nonetheless a fundamental

positive connection between the spreading of English and social justice on a European and global scale. If we want our European Union and our world to function better and become more just, we absolutely need to communicate in an effective way. Of course we can find help in the competent and difficult work of translators and interpreters, but it is extremely expensive. Translation and interpretation are available to the powerful and the wealthy, but not to the poorest layers of our society, the people who have most to gain from a more just society, and the associations that represent them. Consequently, in Europe and in the world we need to democratise competence in English as a tool, a weapon that makes it possible to communicate, to disseminate ideas, to mobilize, instead of keeping it as a privilege for the more powerful and the wealthier. This, for me, is the fundamental connection between the spreading of a lingua franca and social justice. Needless to say, this has nothing to do with English "deserving" any privilege. It is simply that we absolutely need a cheap medium of communication and that the best option is the natural language — the language of a particular linguistic community — that is already most widely learned. In today's Europe, this happens to be English. This is the tool we all need to master sufficiently and to use it for our purposes, in particular to argue with each other, to deliberate together about the sort of institutions we want.

It is often maintained that acquiring a good command of English is very expensive and in this perspective the connection between the use of English as a lingua franca and social justice appears problematic.

Yes, to acquire a good command of English is very expensive, very difficult in several European countries, but only if they keep handicapping their young people by having them watch television and cinema dubbed instead of subtitled. There is a very simple, cheap and effective way of getting the young to learn English at a very early stage, a method that is effectively used by most of the countries that have small languages like Sweden, the Netherlands, Estonia, or Greece. Since it is too expensive to dub American films into their local languages, they subtitle them and, as a result of that, children from all social classes not only learn English better and more quickly than in the countries with big languages, but they also master the written form of their own mother tongue more quickly than in countries with "big" languages such as France, Italy, Spain, or Germany. In these countries, children, especially children whose parents cannot afford to send them to Cambridge or Oxford to improve their English, are handicapped by the dubbing policy.

You have mentioned Greece as an example. However, in a country like Greece, where all films are subtitled, parents still spend a huge amount of money to offer their children a good education, especially in foreign languages. This limits the possibility of spreading English in all layers of the population.

It is true, but, according to the latest Eurobarometer on languages, the young Greeks, by their own assessment, speak and know English better than the young Germans, despite the great linguistic distance between Greek and English, far greater of course than between German and English. Today there is this great opportunity of using modern technologies, notably the Internet, in synergy with the school system. For this to work well, we need schools that do not make kids learn English or other foreign languages in the way in which we learned classic languages. If you have an intelligent school system that uses modern media in an intelligent way, then learning English is not expensive, especially because it triggers off a snowball effect. The better these kids know English, the more they will meet people with different mother tongues and speak English with them, thereby further improving their English.

I really think that we should not over-estimate the difficulty of acquiring a reasonable level of proficiency in the common language: as soon as you are beyond some threshold, you keep learning more and more. We should not be perfectionist and say, "Well, you can only start uttering sentences when you are sure that they are fully grammatical, that you can use the subjunctive and so on". At school languages have always been taught in an inhibiting way which makes people lack the confidence to speak. But you learn the language by speaking it imperfectly as we are doing now, you and I, in this conversation. Nearly every time we speak it, we learn it a little bit better, we correct ourselves, we try new words which we have read but never used and, in order for people to understand what we say, we make an effort to repeat and pronounce them better. In this way there is a massive, constant learning process. What is needed is to lift people, especially young people, beyond some initial threshold and create opportunities to practice the language.

In this perspective the way of teaching the language should change radically. Even though now we tend to use English as a lingua franca, the objective in teaching and learning remains native speaker competence.

I fully agree and I think the European Commission has an important role to play in that respect. In French, English is often referred to as "la langue de Shakespeare". This is crazy. The English we need to learn, and our kids need to learn, is not "la langue de Shakespeare" at all. Of course it is a language that gives us an easier access to the British culture, but this is not the point at all. We don't care about British culture any more — nor less — than about Italian culture or German culture, and so on. It is just a tool for us to be able to communicate in an effective way with each other, mostly non-Anglophones. This must be the purpose of the teaching of English. We don't learn English in order to read Faulkner or Henry James or whatever. We learn it in order to be able to communicate with the Germans and the Swedes, and with the Indians and the Nigerians.

This new approach concerns the purpose but also the methods. The main reason why English is far easier to learn, for our generation or the generation of our children or grandchildren, is that it is so massively accessible in the new media environment, as compared to artificial languages that are theoretically far easier to learn, like Esperanto. You have all that material easily available at the top of your fingers on your keyboard and that must be exploited by schools in order to motivate the kids and to give them the opportunity to constantly use it.

Let's go back to the issue of subtitling. In order to spread English through television and the Internet, we have to promote American and English products even more, instead of offering a wider choice.

This is a legitimate concern. There are several things that need to be said to address it. Firstly, when American culture penetrates our own cultural universe in a dubbed form, it is more pernicious than when it comes in the original language. If you watch an American series spoken in Italian, it is far more corrupting, far more disruptive for the Italian culture than if you have something that is spoken in the original language. Secondly, keeping quality — however understood — constant, people understandably prefer to watch films in their own language. The less you allow dubbed American films, the more people will watch local products. And, of course, the more demand there is for local films, the more local films will be produced. So, getting rid of dubbing would foster the local culture.

Nevertheless, it is true that the spreading of English facilitates direct access to American or British products or to whatever is being produced in English. But, as we can already see at the level of European Union, non-native speakers of English increasingly express themselves in English. It is extremely important that websites, books, publications and other cultural products which, being in English, have the greatest potential of spreading around the world, should not be produced exclusively by Americans, Brits or citizens of other Anglophone countries. We should increasingly see English, or Globish as some prefer to call it, as our own language, as one of the languages we speak and one we should not be ashamed of speaking with our own peculiar accents. We must feel free to transform and to enrich it, and to use it in ways and for purposes decided by us, not by its native speakers.

You mean that we should distinguish two different Englishes, one for information, an English that does not belong to anyone, and an Anglo-Saxon English.

There is already something that can be called an Indian English, a Nigerian English and so on. But there is not a single homogeneous international English. There is a wide variety of ways of speaking the same written language that should all be steered by a concern to be understood, not to speak it the way native speakers do.

Paradoxically — and I am sure you have witnessed it in the European Commission — to speak English as a second language rather than a first language can be a real advantage, if the audience you have to talk to is international. When you have a meeting and interpreting is provided, some non-native English speakers now often use English rather than relying on interpretation in order to communicate directly and most people don't use earphones and listen to them directly. Then a British person starts speaking and immediately part of the audience reaches for their earphones because Brits — unless well adjusted to international environments — tend to speak without making allowance for the fact that they are not talking to other Brits: they make jokes that are only funny for their own folk or use idiomatic expressions that are not understandable for people who don't belong to the same culture.

However, several studies show that in certain situations — mainly competitive situations — the good command of the language remains an important form of power. Non-native speakers do not feel confident — or feel less confident — when forced to speak in English and feel disadvantaged in putting through their ideas.

There are many cases illustrating inequality of that sort. Of course, if there is a job where English is constantly needed for communication, you prefer to recruit someone who can communicate properly in English, rather than someone who speaks English with great difficulty. A similar complaint is often heard among academics — more in the human sciences than in the natural sciences or in mathematics. You can have two articles that are equally good as far as the content goes, but one is turned down simply because it is written in bad English, given that nearly all scientific journals are now in English. There are many situations of that sort but, in my view, there is only one solution: promoting competence in English among non-Anglophones. In the long term, the big losers will be the native speakers of English, not the others. The more opportunities we all have to speak English, the more our English will improve, because the best way of learning a language is not to follow courses but to keep practising it with other people, natives or non-natives. At the same time, the more English is used in all sorts of communication, the more difficult it will be for us to learn and keep languages other than English. In the long term therefore the outcome of this process will be that we all in Europe — where this process is well advanced in the younger

generations — and increasingly in other parts of the world shall be bilingual or more, with English as one of our languages. With one exception: native English speakers, who will be condemned, whatever their goodwill, to speak English and only English, precisely because all the others will know English so well that there will be very few opportunities for Anglophones to use languages other than English. The result is that tomorrow the Anglophones will be the only monolinguals, and therefore those who suffer from a linguistic handicap.

What you imply is that, even if we all use English as a contact language, multilingualism will become the rule and is indeed an asset.

What follows from what I have just said is that bilingualism, rather than multilingualism, will gradually become quasi-universal because of the mechanisms that are at work in what I call the maxi-min dynamics: in any gathering of people with different mother tongues, the language that will tend to be used is the language best known by the person who speaks it less well. In more and more gatherings of this sort, this maxi-min language is English. Being used more often, it keeps spreading more widely, thereby making more and more people competent in a language distinct from their mother tongue. Multilingualism, instead, will be difficult to achieve and maintain. It can only be expected to become and remain the rule rather than the exception in specific contexts. In Belgium, for example, trilingualism can and should be aimed for. The Flemish should maintain the high level of French that they currently have, and more Francophones should become competent in Dutch. But this will not be easy, and is not made easier by competition with English.

Being bilingual for someone who is not an Anglophone will be like being able to write or being able to use the Internet: it will really be the minimal qualification that you need for whatever you want to do in life. In this sense English is more than an asset, it is a precondition for doing practically everything and it will be increasingly so. Though difficult to maintain, multilingualism can of course be an asset too. It will certainly remain an advantage, not only in economic terms but also for the nature of the relationships you can have with other people. Speaking someone's mother tongue makes for a relationship very different from the one you can have if you impose your own language on the other or if you both speak a lingua franca.

In her inspiring book on the lingua franca, Jocelyne Dakhlia maintains that, besides being a common tool, the lingua franca used in the Mediterranean till the 19th century also functioned as a tool to mark a difference and underline that the interlocutor did not belong to the same community. The same may apply for English: if I make an effort, for instance, to speak French with you or you Italian with me, it means that we make an effort to be accepted in the community of the other, whereas if we speak a language which is foreign for both of us, we place the exchange in a sort of no man's land.

A lingua franca may be more impersonal, but it doesn't mean that you can't create personal relationships through it. Indeed, sometimes the use of a lingua franca as an alternative to each speaking their own language can make a great contribution to the quality of personal relationships. In this respect, I am struck, for example, by the experience of the Re-Bel initiative — www.rethinkingbelgium.eu —, an initiative launched in April 2009 in order to get academics from all over Belgium to think and debate together about the future of the country. We decided from the start that we would use English for all our public and less public meetings, as well as for all our publications. This makes pragmatic sense, because the knowledge of English for

Belgians under 50 is on average higher than the knowledge of the second national language and because we want to associate to our debates some of the many non-Belgian EU-linked Brusselers who are not fluent in either Dutch or French yet also have a stake in the future of this part of the world. But in addition the choice of English creates a different relationship between Belgian participants, precisely because of what you said, this neutral ground. The very fact that we accept not to speak our own language, that is either Dutch or French, indicates that we want to talk equally to all and not primarily to our own community. We make the effort of using a language that is more difficult for us to speak and write than our own in order to be better understood by the others.

This should not be understood as denying that it would be a great loss here in Belgium if we could only communicate in English across the language border. To understand well what is going on in the other part of the country, understanding and reading its language is essential. But even with only two languages this is difficult to achieve and maintain. When you have 23 languages, as is the case in the EU, knowing the language of all the others is, of course, impossible. Consequently, the resolute adoption of English, which may make sense under some conditions in the Belgian context, is inescapable in the EU context. As Abram De Swaan puts it, "the more languages, the more English".

Do you see this convergence towards English as a natural development or is it an ideal which you should strive towards?

Both. There is a powerful mechanism at work, to which I have already referred. It is the interaction between what I call probability-sensitive learning — we have both a greater opportunity and a greater motivation to learn a language when there is a high probability of using it — and maxi-min-driven choice — in interactions among multilinguals, we tend to systematically use the language for which the lowest level of competence is higher than for any other, in other words to choose the language that excludes less people than any other would.

So, if there is at least one person who does not know Dutch, at least one person who does not know French or at least one person who does not know Italian, but everyone knows at least some English, you settle on English as the maxi-min language — in this case the only language which everyone knows at least a little bit — even if, say, Italian is the native language for nearly all the participants in the conversation and English for none of them. This is what drives the very quick spreading of English.

In chapter 1 of my *Linguistic Justice* book I have used the database of the latest Eurobarometer on languages and decomposed the data according to age groups. They show a stagnation of the average number of people who say they speak German or French well or very well, some increase for Spanish, stagnation for Italian and explosion for English in the younger generation. This is not the outcome of a plot, a big conspiracy by the CIA, the American government, the British Council or whatever, but the necessary consequence of the micro-mechanisms which I call the "maxi-min dynamics".

This is why English spreads. Moreover, I believe that this spreading should be accelerated. Competence in English should be democratised far more deeply, so that good confidence in English will not be restricted to the people who can pay a lot of money to send their children to good English courses or to spend some time in the US or in Britain. English learning should really be democratised the way in which it is

democratised in Sweden, in the Netherlands, or in Finland. Let's take Finland. There is no country in Europe where the national language is more remote from English than Finland, and yet there you have a very high level of proficiency in English in all social classes. If it is possible for Finland, it must be possible for Italy, for Spain, for France, and so on. This is what we should aim for.

There is a growing concern, precisely in Nordic countries, about young researchers or scientists losing the ability to speak about their areas of study in their own languages.

This concern is understandably expressed in a growing number of countries, as the pressure for more and more English as a medium of higher education gets stronger. As far as scientific developments as such are concerned, I would say "who cares?", or rather "who should care?". It is like in the Middle Ages, when all scholarship was in Latin and the whole community of scholars was involved, whatever their mother tongue. The same is happening now, far more massively, with English. There are great advantages with having a language in which everyone can communicate, explain, discuss, criticise, correct, improve, and so on. However, there are two problems, which echo the reasons why Latin was abandoned in the 18th century. These reasons can provide justifications for the shift to national languages at all levels of education, and not just explanations, on a par with the demands of nation building.

The first reason is that, if you use the language of the people, you can democratise higher education more than would otherwise be the case. As long as it operated in Latin, higher education was restricted to people who had had the opportunity to attend Latin-medium secondary schools, and this was a very small elite. The more you could rely on the national language, the broader the range of people from all social classes you could hope to reach. This argument is used today too. People say: "If we impose English for the master and even bachelor degrees, we will have an even more unacceptable level of social selection that we have now".

The second reason for using national languages is that the knowledge that is developed in universities and in higher education should irrigate society. The more this is done in a language that is not understood by the rest of society, the worse it is in this respect.

These two arguments against the use of Latin in the 18th century and against the use of English in the 21st have some force. The more English spreads from an early age in all social classes, as has been happening in the Nordic countries, the weaker both of these arguments become. But they never become entirely irrelevant.

This brings us back to the connection between more English and more democracy.

There is a connection between the spreading of English and democracy, but democracy in two very different senses. When I speak about the democratisation of competence in English, I simply mean its dissemination through all the social classes. That is what is needed. And what is it needed for? Among other things, it is needed to make the functioning of supranational entities, like the European Union, more democratic. Thanks to this common language, more people can take part in what happens at the European level than would be the case without it.

Don't you think that if English were the only language of the European Union, then people would feel the Union as something even more remote and difficult to accept than if it speaks to them in their own language?

On the contrary. The gap is undeniable. However, the only serious way of bridging it is not by making the institutions function multilingually, at a very high cost, but by spreading competence in the common language. It is an illusion to believe that the institutions can be brought closer to the people by functioning in different languages, just as it is an illusion to believe that Europe can be brought closer to the people by having several capitals. On the contrary, paradoxically, it is linguistic concentration — and similarly the geographical concentration of its political institutions — that will bring Europe closer to the people. If you have a centre that communicates at great expense in 23 languages with the citizens but does not enable all the people on the ground, all the people in the *demos*, to communicate with each other, then you have a vertical relationship. The people still cannot communicate smoothly with each other directly. At the European level, just as happened at national levels in the past, you need this convergence towards a common language, so that all the people can communicate, coordinate, cooperate, mobilize with each other in a cheap and effective way. My view is that something analogous to the acquisition of common national languages in the past must happen at the supranational level in Europe and in the world. But the lingua franca must not supersede the national languages, in the way in which national languages displaced local languages in the past.

What we need — and this is in a nutshell the central claim of my book — is to combine a quick dissemination of the lingua franca with a firm protection of other languages in line with what is commonly called the "linguistic territoriality principle": this principle demands that anyone settling in one place should be expected to learn, if not already known, the official language of the place. In this way English will spread as the lingua franca which we all need to know, but without replacing the national or sub-national languages.

The relation between the lingua franca and the national or local languages is becoming a problematic issue in areas of Europe with strong separatist movements, which may see the spreading of English as a good opportunity to get rid of the national language: "We can get along very well with English and our local language and we no longer need the national language".

There are probably cases like this. Catalonia is probably the region where we come closest to this phenomenon. In Flanders, for example, this does not happen, and in September 2010 a hint in this direction by the current Flemish Minister of Education aroused strong protest. French is still the obligatory second school language before English, even though Flemish pupils end up more proficient in English because of television. Even Catalan nationalists do not seriously want to get rid of Spanish either: it is clearly an advantage for them to know Spanish. In the end, having a common currency is more of pro-secession factor than having a common language: you can secede from Belgium or from Spain, but you still have the euro.

Another issue with an impact on linguistic regimes is machine translation. Machine translation is improving at such a rapid pace that in the future it might prove the best solution for our communication problems, making a lingua franca superfluous.

You could only dispense with the common language if you had two software linked to each other. One recognises the sounds you produce, and associates them with a written text. Another transforms the outcome of the first transformation into sentences in another language. We have software of the first type and we know the difficulties they face. Even in the best acoustic conditions, when there is no background noise, when it is

always the same voice producing the same sounds, when no proper name or foreign word is used, when there are no references to a local culture, voice recognition software is already quite laborious. When instead you have background noises, different voices, different accents, neologisms, etc., the quality of the outcome quickly becomes extremely low. And this poor outcome supplies the input for the second software that translates from one language into another. With a highly standardised language, full sentences, etc. computers can help a lot. But as soon as you have colloquial expressions, cryptic allusions, foreign words, and so on, it becomes extremely unreliable. In addition, both softwares often have to wait for the end of the sentences before proposing interpretations, which means significant delays in addition to significant uncertainties when trying to guess, after these two transformations, what the original might have been.

This applies to oral communication. As for written communication, do you think that machine translation would contribute to keep multilingualism?

Obviously there are less difficulties with written texts, as only one of the two steps is needed, and I am certainly not denying the great help that is already provided and can be further expected from machine translation. But the more stilted, the less casual the writing, the better it works. If you know that the machine is going to translate what you write, you have to constrain the way in which you write, so that the machine can make sense of it. If you write in a spontaneous way, using proper names or neologisms that the machine is not be able to recognise difficulties begin. But I fully agree with you that if humans were more writing beings than speaking beings, it would be far less difficult for the machines to ensure multilingual communication.

One last question. Nowadays, side by side with the massive spreading of English, we witness also a trend to keep and push multilingualism. On the Internet the number of pages in different languages is increasing — the efforts for localisation made by Microsoft, for example, are impressive. Could we say that we are witnessing a two-way development: on the one hand, English is more and more used as a lingua franca and, on the other one, multilingualism keeps developing, even in traditionally monolingual countries like the United States, where Spanish now plays a major role.

The two phenomena you mention are very different. The fact that Spanish is more present than ever in the US, is by no means evidence for the spreading of Spanish to more people. Quite to the contrary, it is a correlate of one of the ways in which English is spreading to more people. All these Hispanics who live in the United States learn far more English than they would have done had they stayed in Mexico and there is very little learning of Spanish in the US by those who do not have Spanish as their mother tongue. The geographical dissemination of Spanish on Anglophone territory is part of a process of substitution of English for Spanish, not the other way around, albeit one that proceeds more slowly than in the past.

Do you not think, however, that this phenomenon forces the Americans to accept the existence of bilingualism, whereas up to now they have been used to living in a monolingual environment?

The US have never been a monolingual country, even irrespective of Spanish. Half the people in the city of New York do not have English as their mother tongue, but speak all sorts of languages. Multilingualism has been the rule in the country since the first settlers. More people went to the US as immigrants from Italy or Germany than from

England, but they all ended up speaking English with each other. With the Hispanics, however, there is a new challenge for a number of reasons. One is that they are far more numerous to come. Secondly, they come from nearby and do not lose touch with their place of origin. And thirdly, they come at a time when all these new media are available which they can develop in their own language locally from the very beginning. So they keep watching Spanish-language television or hearing Spanish-speaking radio in their homes and in their bars, whereas in the past migrants were immersed in the Anglo-Saxon culture more quickly and more fully.

This new situation has forced the US to think about language policy in a way that they have never had to do before. The spreading of the English-only movement and the declaration of English as the official language in an increasing number of states is a reflection of this completely new challenge for the United States. As a consequence we now witness a pressure to give up accommodating policies of a type that never existed in Europe, such as printing voting ballots in many languages as long as there is a sufficient number of people asking for voting ballots in those languages. Firmer signals are being sent to the effect that everybody should learn English. Yes, language policies are changing in the US, I fully agree with that, but it is not due to multilingualism, in the sense of Americans choosing to learn languages other than English.

However multilingualism is spreading rapidly, for example, on the Internet.

Yes, that is true too. When you look at the presence of the various languages on the Internet, you can see that the relative share of English on the Internet is declining, but this is not difficult to understand if we keep in mind that the Internet initially developed in the United States and then spread to many other countries. Hence, it is not surprising that the relative — not the absolute — presence of English on the Internet is shrinking. But the key thing is that the growing content in Japanese is read by Japanese people only, the growing content in Finnish is read by Finnish people only, and so on. On the contrary, the growing content in English is read by people all over the world. What is meant to spread beyond borders is more than ever in English. It is therefore important to distinguish between these two aspects. The lingua franca is of course not the language spoken by people who share the same mother tongue. Its relative overall presence on the internet gradually decreases, while its relative presence *qua* lingua franca in internet communication grows quickly.

By way of conclusion, how do you judge the EU linguistic policy?

As far as language use by the EU institutions themselves is concerned, I believe the largely implicit policy is evolving slowly and cautiously in the right direction. In the years to come it will have to constantly adjust to the fact that English will be further and further democratised even in those countries in which it is least known now. The more and the better people know English, the more often the question will be raised whether it is really necessary to translate documents, even official documents, even directly applicable technical legislation for example, into 23 or more languages. Is it worth paying the cost of checking and double-checking that the job properly done implies, bearing in mind that this legislation may never be read or used, say, in Maltese or in Estonian, and that, even were it to be used, people may still want to go back to the source language in order to make sure they understand what the text actually says? This means that English will gradually replace multilingualism not only on the huge posters that hang from the Berlaymont building, but also in highly sensitive contexts such as directly-applicable legislation or plenary session interventions by members of the European Parliament. It will require some courage to move resolutely in this direction,

and away from the symbolic assertion of the equal worth of all national languages and cultures. But this is the path one must dare to openly tread.

However, the EU's linguistic policy, implicit or explicit, is not confined to the linguistic practices of its own institutions. There is, for example, a significant risk that insensitive interpretations of the honourable principles of free movement or of non-discrimination might undermine the capacity of some member states or regions to protect their own language against the invasion of stronger ones. The EU will have to make sure that national or regional constraints on the medium of education and of public communication do not get overridden by a narrow-minded obsession with the operation of a single market.

At the same time, more can and should be done, in the spirit of the Maalouf Commission's report to Commissioner Orban, to encourage the learning of a variety of other European languages. Far more should be done to ban or tax dubbing and to promote subtitling on TV, on DVDs and in cinemas, so as to use the visual medias more intelligently, all over Europe, to improve competence in English and other foreign languages. Far more should be done to support experiments and mutual learning in multilingual schooling, especially in difficult situations in which immigrant children form a significant part of the school population.

In 2001, the Eco-Koolhaas-Hayek report to Romano Prodi on "Brussels Capital of Europe" had as one of its main recommendations that Brussels should house an "Institute for Multilingualism". More than such an institute, the capital of Europe needs multifarious, carefully monitored experiments in multilingual education. With over half its school population consisting of children of foreign nationality or of recent foreign origin, with two national languages to be learned in order not to be handicapped on the labour market and with English essential at the heart of Europe, there is a formidable and urgent challenge here. But also an opportunity for the EU to invest intelligently in its capital city, with benefits accruing not only to the children of its own employees and of the people working for the countless European civil society organizations present in Brussels, but also, if the experiments are well designed, monitored and publicized, to the language-learning efficiency of every member state.

Thank you very much.

Thank you!

This study is published on http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/publications/studies/index_en.htm