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# Taking account of the linguistic revolution

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New agendas and policies must keep pace with contemporary linguistic trends – not an easy task, at present, in view of the fundamental changes in the world linguistic scene which became apparent during the 1990s. A book on agenda setting in 2003 is particularly timely, therefore, following a decade of dramatic and unprecedented linguistic revolution. I do not believe that this is too strong a word. A ‘revolution’ is any combination of events which produces a radical shift in consciousness or behaviour over a relatively short period of time, and this is what is currently taking place. In the context of a language, revolutions do not appear very often. In the history of English, for example, we might identify two revolutions, since the arrival of the language in Britain in the fifth century. First, in the early Middle Ages, there was the combination of linguistic developments and socio-political factors which changed Old English to Middle English, with very different grammar, and an admixture of Romance elements that profoundly affected spelling and vocabulary – a revolution which took us, in effect, from Beowulf to Chaucer. Then there was the period which took us from Chaucer to Shakespeare, resulting in an Early Modern English which was very different from its Middle English predecessor in grammar, sounds and spelling, and characterised especially by the standardising effect of printing and the cumulative impact of the Renaissance, with its vast influx of classical vocabulary. Since Shakespeare, the language has developed steadily, but its character has not been radically altered – as is evidenced by the fact that we can go to a Shakespeare play and understand most of what we encounter. It is patently ‘the same’ language – an intuition we do not have so comfortably when we encounter Chaucer, and not at all when we try to read Beowulf.

Many other languages have displayed their own periods of revolutionary change, but these have occurred at different times and for different reasons. The wars, alliances, and political revolutions that cause massive social (and thus linguistic) change do not

follow any shared or predictable timetable. It is unusual to find changes which are so broad in their implications that they affect groups of languages, and extremely rare to find changes which are so global that they affect all languages. Indeed, to illustrate the last point we have to alter the level of the illustration and refer to the arrival of new media – such as writing, printing, telephony, broadcasting – whose influence on the character of languages has been pervasive. What makes the second half of the twentieth century – and the 1990s in particular – a highly significant period in the history of language is that we can find there a coming together of three major trends, each global in its implications, which cumulatively have fundamentally altered the world's linguistic ecology. First, there has been the emergence of English as a genuinely global language, and the accompanying development of new varieties of English around the world, which unexpectedly has begun to produce a novel domain of plurilingualism. Second, there is the realisation that huge numbers of languages are endangered or dying, which has resulted in a sense of crisis and fresh initiatives towards preservation and regeneration. And third, there is the ground-breaking arrival of Internet technology, which has supplemented spoken and written language with a linguistically novel medium of communication, and added a further dimension of variety to our linguistic experience.

The facts of the matter have been well reviewed elsewhere, and I need to recapitulate them only briefly. In my case, I have a trilogy of books, each of which deals with one of these trends, and it would be otiose to repeat what can be found there. But a paraphrase of each book's position will perhaps make my contention clear. To begin with, in *English as a global language* (1997) I discuss the reasons for the arrival of English as a genuine world language in the twentieth century. Chief among them is the growth in the number of countries wanting to talk to each other, for political, commercial, or cultural reasons. The membership of the main political forum, the UN, grew in the second half of the twentieth century from some 50 members to its current level of 191, and there has been corresponding growth in many international bodies. Other global trends in the use of English, in such domains as air transportation, advertising, science, technology and broadcasting, have been repeatedly documented. It is possible to assert with confidence that every major twentieth century cultural trend was either initiated in an English-speaking country or (as in the case of cinema) quickly facilitated by one. The result has been a global spread of English which, although sometimes exaggerated, is unprecedented. Current statistical wisdom suggests that about one in four of the world's population (c.1.5 billion) use English to some degree. This remarkable figure is not of course on account of its mother-tongue speakers (which account for only some 400 million people, behind several other mother-tongue populations, notably Mandarin Chinese), but because of its use by people as a second or foreign language, who outnumber native speakers in a ratio of some 3:1.

Because no language has ever been spoken by so many people in so many places before, it is difficult to predict the consequences of having a global language. There will be both internal and external effects. Internally, we have already begun to see new varieties of the language emerging all over the world, as communities adopt English as their lingua franca and immediately adapt it to meet their communicative needs. Commonly mentioned are the many '-lishes' which have emerged into public view in recent decades, going by such names as 'Singlish' (in Singapore), 'Japlish', 'Chinglish', and 'Spanglish', which in terms of their structure are now very different from standard English and in some cases are already so distinctive (and, from a standard English point of view, so unintelligible) that we would have to recognise them as different languages. Distinctive international regional dialects of English have always developed, of course, as English spread to the Americas, Australasia and Africa, and distinctive regional pronunciations and vocabularies have been the consequence. But the changes introduced into these 'Englishes' have been minor, compared with the kinds of change currently taking place – changes which (some have argued) are making English develop at a popular level in ways comparable to the emergence of the Romance languages out of Vulgar Latin a millennium ago. And with the centre of gravity now firmly located under the feet of the non-native speakers of English, the future character of the language becomes more unpredictable now than at any time since the Renaissance.

As a language changes its identity there are inevitable consequences; in particular there is a more intimate encounter between language and culture. This is well illustrated by the way increasing global variation within English has begun to affect the way teachers approach the language. We need only look at the range of 'New English' dictionaries which has emerged in recent years, containing in some cases between ten and twenty thousand locally distinctive items – dictionaries of South African English, Canadian English, Jamaican English, Singaporean English, and so on – to provide the evidence, if evidence were needed, that the language is becoming increasingly diversified. In practice, what happens can be illustrated by a sentence like the following, taken from the *South African Sunday Times* – an English language paper:

*It is interesting to recall that some verkrampte Nationalists, who pose now as super Afrikaners, were once bittereinder bloedsappe. [verkrampt: 'bigoted'; bittereinder: 'die-hard of the Anglo-Boer war'; bloedsappe: 'staunch member of the United Party']*

The sentence makes no sense, with its Afrikaans loanwords, unless of course we are familiar with the relevant background in South African politics. A standard dictionary definition of any one of these words would be of little help: what we need is a sense of how the words fit together into a conceptual pattern – which is more than just an awareness of the semantic relations between the words – and this comes most

naturally by learning as much as we can about the history of South African politics. We take such patterns in our own culture completely for granted: “‘Blairite MP in New Labour Sleaze Trap”, say Tories’, would be a home-grown example, largely unintelligible to outsiders. But my point is a general one: it applies to all areas of cultural difference, and to any language which is developing an international dimension. The growth in a language’s diversity arises out of a community’s motivation to express its cultural identity. Cultural studies – under its various labels, British Studies, American Studies, South African Studies, and so on – will need to become increasingly centre-stage in twenty-first century agendas, as a result.

The chief external consequences of any language acquiring global status are bound up with the second component of the revolution, a trend I deal with in *Language death* (2000). Although languages have come into existence and died away throughout human history, it is only in the second half of the twentieth century, and in the 1990s in particular, that we have seen the process of endangerment and death emerge into public view so dramatically. Again, the thrust of the facts is easy to summarise, even though people are understandably tentative over the exact figures involved: of the 6,000 or so languages in the world, it seems probable that about half of these will disappear in the course of the present century – an average of one language dying out every fortnight – and that this rate of loss is significantly greater than at any previous time in recorded history. Professional awareness of the crisis developed only in the 1990s, following the publication of a series of world-wide surveys, and popular awareness is still very limited, and certainly nowhere near the corresponding awareness of biological loss that we associate with the environmental movement. Most people have yet to develop a language conscience. But the extent of the ongoing loss in the world’s linguistic diversity is so cataclysmic that it makes the word ‘revolution’ look like an understatement, when we consider it in this context.

This is not the place to go into the reasons for this state of affairs, or what can be done to reduce the impact of the problem. But it does, I think, help to explain why public interest in language diversity has grown dramatically in the last decade. The global story is being seen repeatedly in the histories of individual languages at risk, many of which are in Europe. Europe is fortunate in having several decades of experience in the management of minority languages, having political and administrative structures to channel the expertise, and a history of decision making which has resulted in important safeguards and recommendations. Indeed, several countries outside Europe look on the European focus with great respect, and with situations like the Welsh language – where there are no less than two protective Language Acts already in place, and ongoing debate about a third – with not a little envy. The local movements in support of Welsh, Gaelic, Catalan, Romansch, and many other local languages have built up a dynamic which reached unprecedented levels in the 1990s, at least if the number of public statements (such as the European Minority Languages Charter and the Barcelona Declaration of Linguistic Rights) are anything to go by.

International and national organisations concerned with language death (such as the UK's Foundation for Endangered Languages, or the UNESCO clearing house at Tokyo) date from 1995. It is the recency of the movement which explains why it has so far had relatively little public presence, by comparison with the green movement in general. But there is no doubt about the seriousness of the situation, which is proportionately much greater than in the case of zoological and botanical endangerment. Nobody is suggesting that half the world's species are going to die out in the next century.

The connection between these first two revolutionary trends needs to be recognised, but not oversimplified. The impact of dominant languages on minority languages is a matter of universal concern, and the role of English is especially implicated. But it is important to stress that all majority languages are involved: the growth of English as a global language is not the sole factor in explaining language endangerment. Although it is English that has been the critical factor in the disappearance of languages in such parts of the world as Australia and North America, this language is of little relevance when we consider the corresponding losses that have taken place in South America or in many parts of Asia, where such languages as Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Arabic, and Chinese have replaced local languages. Nor, for that matter, is it always the chief factor in colonial Africa, where inter-ethnic and inter-religious rivalries at a local level are often the reason for the endangerment of a particular language. The thrust of the point is a general one: we are having to deal with the consequences of a globalisation trend in which unprecedented market and cultural forces have been unleashed, steadily eroding the balance of linguistic power and involving all major languages.

Terms such as 'global village', which became ubiquitous during the 1990s, were reinforced in that decade by the third component of my revolution, which I have dealt with in *Language and the Internet* (2001). Although the Internet as a technology has been around for several decades, very few of the people reading this chapter would have had access to it ten years ago. Most people came on-line for e-mails and chat during the 1990s, and mostly since the mid-90s. The World Wide Web itself only came into existence in 1991. And what we now have is a new medium – computer-mediated communication – which is undeniably a revolution technologically and socially, and which I argue is just as much a revolution linguistically. Netspeak – my term for the features of language on the Internet unique to that medium – is remarkable not just because it has introduced new vocabulary and jargon, or because of the speed at which innovation in language can be circulated worldwide (though this latter point is itself an important revolutionary feature), but because it has provided us with new alternatives to the way in which human communication can take place. It is neither speech nor writing. The absence of immediate feedback distances Netspeak from face-to-face conversation, and demands new ways of expressing rapport and anticipating reaction (the invention of emoticons, or smileys, are an early primitive attempt at solving this

problem). The process of e-mail framing (in which we routinely cut and paste bits of messages and add comments to produce new messages indistinguishable in form from their originals) is without precedent in written and spoken language. Netspeak is unlike writing in its impermanence: pages on screen can change as we watch (through animation, text movement, and so on), and be refreshed in ways that written language, with its stability, cannot match. Chatroom conversations are unlike speech in that they enable us to participate in many conversations simultaneously. Netspeak is neither spoken language nor written language: it has adapted features of speech and of writing to suit the new medium, and added other features that neither speech nor writing could ever convey. This if nothing else confers on it revolutionary status in the history of human communication.

But for languages – and especially for minority and endangered languages – its effect is also nothing short of revolutionary. The Internet began as an exclusively English-language medium, for obvious reasons to do with its point of origin in the USA; but by the mid-1990s it had already attracted a significant other-language use. The statistic most often cited at that time was that up to 20% of the Internet – by which people generally meant Web pages – were in languages other than English. By 2000 this figure had risen to 30%, and some service providers were already anticipating an increase to 50% by the middle of the decade. Much of this increase was the result of the larger languages coming increasingly on-line – German and Japanese, for example – but the opportunity the Net provides for minority and endangered languages had also not gone unnoticed. The number of languages present on the Internet now must be in the region of 1,500. Many of these languages have only a few sites, but the more resourceful (and resources-available) minority languages are represented by thousands of sites. Moreover, the arrival of chatroom technology has meant the emergence of virtual speech communities, in which people who had previously found it impossible to use a language because separated by distance can now join a chat-group in that language, and experience the immediate benefits that routine interaction can bring. The convenience, economy, and reach of the medium makes it a godsend to language communities which previously would have found the public expression of their language (through broadcasting or the press) beyond their resources. And it is the sudden availability of this language-reinforcing technology which yields the third element in my revolutionary decade. It should perhaps be added that the medium is one which intrinsically privileges diversity, because of its lack of centralised ownership. Although standards of expression, presentation, and design are emerging, the overriding impression of the Net is its variety of language and style. The Net holds a mirror up to our linguistic natures, and all aspects of our traditional linguistic expression may be found there, as well as several new styles.

It is notable how each of these three trends – the emergence of a global language, the phenomenon of language endangerment, and the arrival of the Internet – have had consequences for our developing notions of linguistic diversity. Global English has

given extra purpose to a variety of standard English, in the way it guarantees a medium of international intelligibility; but it has also fostered the growth of local varieties as a means of expressing regional identity, and some of these new varieties will, in due course, evolve into new languages. The Internet has provided us with fresh dimensions of linguistic and stylistic variation, and provided new ways of focusing on language use. There is even an upside to language endangerment: the manifestation of language death on such a scale has sharpened the minds of minority language users wonderfully, and fresh initiatives are now everywhere – not least the one which led to the European Year of Languages (EYL2001) – to influence public opinion about what linguistic identity means and how it can be fostered. We know that such initiatives are having some success, ironically not least by the growth of organisations designed to protect English – US English in the USA, for example, which in recent decades has been trying to give English official status there. It is a remarkable scenario, certainly, when the world's most dominant language is felt to be in need of official protection. So the potential is present for great things to happen. But, as always with revolutions, it is up to individuals to capitalise on them. And to do this we have to rethink several of our long-established notions about the nature of language. It is not always a comfortable process.

The most important rethinking arises out of what happens if we take the axiom of EYL2001 seriously and really think it through. I take this axiom to be the recognition that multilingualism (or plurilingualism) in general, and bilingualism in particular, is an intrinsic good (the reasons for which have been well rehearsed elsewhere). I relate this axiom to the postulate that multilingualism is the normal human condition. Depending on what one means by bilingualism, which I discuss below, estimates for the number of people in the world who are bilingual range from 50% (for a high-level competence) to 80% (for some level of competence). A significant number use three or more languages. This seems to be *prima facie* evidence for the view that children are born not just with a Language Acquisition Device (LAD), as Chomsky argued, but with a Multilingual Acquisition Device (MAD), the new acronym avoiding the ambiguity that it is just one language that children are ready to acquire. Rather, the reality seems to be that there is no limit to the number of languages that a child will pick up once exposed to them. From the young child's point of view, of course, the fact that they are different languages is immaterial. They are simply different ways of speaking. We adults know they are different languages, but it is not until the child is in the fourth year of life that it becomes aware of this and starts to manipulate the different languages to personal advantage.

Thinking through the notion of multilingualism means, first of all, recognising that it is not a homogeneous notion. Learning a language is a multi-tasking experience, involving in its fullest form four modes – listening, speaking, reading and writing (deaf signing, of course, is a fifth mode in certain circumstances). It is perfectly possible to develop a multilingual competence in only the first two of these modes –

indeed, in some 40% of the world's languages the users have no choice, because their languages have never been written down. It is also possible to develop just a 'reading' knowledge of a language. And differentials between the active and passive modes within spoken and written language are also common: people who listen better than they speak, and who read better than they write. The notion of multilingualism cannot be restricted to people who are fluent in all four modes, as this would exclude a significant proportion of the world's population whose lives actually function through the use of more than one language. Rather, multilingualism has to allow for ability in any subset of the modes.

It also has to allow for varying levels of ability within a mode. Learning a language involves minimally the learning of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary (to restrict the point to just these three traditional domains). Let us call the total acquisition of each of these domains '100% fluency' – that is, a speaker can pronounce all the sounds, use all the grammatical constructions, and know all the vocabulary available in a (dialect of a) language. On that basis, of course, no one is totally fluent, for no one knows the million or so words in English, for example; and even some of its 3,500 or so grammatical constructions will not be comfortably used by everyone (e.g. some of the more complex instructions of literary or legal English), nor will some of the more sophisticated non-segmental sound effects (such as those used by actors). Plainly we make all kinds of allowances, in talking about fluency, and operate with a notional scale from 0% to 100% within each of these areas. We then (also notionally) synthesise a combined total for the language as a whole, so that we are prepared to rate Mr X as being 'more fluent' than Mr Y. But there is no way of evaluating whether Mr A, who is strong in grammar and weak in vocabulary, is 'more' or 'less' fluent than Mr B, who is weak in grammar and strong in vocabulary. The number of possibilities is immense. Both Mr A and Mr B are bilingual, to an extent – and are certainly 'more bilingual' than Mr C, who has no ability in any area. Only this relativistic conception of bilingualism makes sense of what we actually see in the world.

And what we see, when we look around, is a world where different levels of linguistic demand are made on people. A commonplace notion, for example, includes 'survival ability' in a language, or a notion of 'getting by'. Those people who have filled in their European Language Portfolio use these notions all the time, assessing their strengths as greater or weaker in certain areas and languages. We all know how difficult it is to answer the question, 'How many languages do you speak?' or '... do you know?' We all want to hedge straight away. This is to recognise the reality of bilingualism, that it is not an all-or-none phenomenon, but a dynamic mixture of different levels of ability, constantly changing as we change our circumstances, gain or lose our opportunities to use a language, or, quite simply, grow old. When we hear everyone hedging in this way when asked apparently straightforward questions such as 'Do you speak X?' or 'Are you bilingual?', then we must be asking the wrong questions. Any theory of bilingualism that wants to be taken seriously has to



recognise this indeterminacy. But incorporating indeterminacy into an educational agenda is very difficult.

The recognition of indeterminacy brings into centre stage a notion that has been much neglected – semilingualism. The term has been used in several ways. It can mean people who have not achieved high levels of native fluency in any language – one is reminded of Salvatore, in Umberto Eco's *The name of the rose*, who spoke 'all languages and no language' – usually because they have been extremely mobile as children, and never lived long enough in a place to have a stable family or community background. Thousands of migrant families, travellers, and refugees fall into this category. They must not be excluded from our notion of multilingualism just because their linguistic world is different. More common are those people who live their lives in a multilingual community but who for some reason are unable (or unwilling) to achieve high levels of achievement in all the languages of that community. A common situation is a youngster who learns a second language (L2) at home or in primary school, then leaves home to find work in an area where L2 is not used, and returns in later life with a semilingual command of L2. This is a form of bilingualism too. A third situation is illustrated by the typical scenario in Africa, where a community may make routine use of several languages, but the use of each is related to a particular social situation. One language might be used at home, another in the market-place, a third in church, a fourth in school, and so on. However, the point is that the 'amount' of language someone might need to 'survive' or 'perform' in any one of these contexts might be very different from the corresponding amount needed in the others. Indeed it may be very little – as in the days when a very restricted range of Latin expressions was actively used in the Roman Catholic Church. But someone who competently uses a language in a restricted way cannot be excluded from our multilingualism tally. Quite considerable levels of language ability may be present – but still a long way from what we would count as 100% fluency. Such limited levels would not have much survival value in a context like the European Union, for example, where there is a demand for total translation equivalence. But the European situation is a rather special case.

This demand for total translation equivalence – the principle that everything which can be said in one language should be available in another – also needs some rethinking. It is common for someone to have an experience in one language which they are unable to talk about in another, because they do not know the relevant vocabulary or idiom. In the African case previously discussed, people who routinely experience the market-place context might have a strongly developed vegetable vocabulary, for example, which they lack in the language that they encounter in church. It simply would not be possible for the people to carry on a sophisticated conversation in their church language about fruit – nor, one imagines, would they ever need to. Only in certain circumstances – where there are certain legal constraints, for example, or where people are worried about competition between languages in a

public arena – does the demand for total translational equivalence make sense. The idea of ‘translating everything’ is an unusual one. Multilingualism has not evolved to enable us to translate everything into everything else. It has evolved to meet the pragmatic communicative needs of individual people and communities. Sometimes translation is useful; sometimes it is unnecessary; sometimes it is positively undesirable; and sometimes it is absolutely impracticable. It is the last criterion, of course, which produces the dilemma faced by the European Union, as its membership grows. There is no solution to such dilemmas, if one’s mindset is conditioned by a ‘translate everything’ paradigm. Solutions can be found only if this paradigm is replaced by one which recognises some sort of pragmatically guided selectivity in the context of a lingua franca. A pragmatic paradigm asserts that we translate when it is useful to do so, and not because ‘everything must be translated’. The various criteria for defining ‘useful’ need to be thought about, of course. Some items (documents, speeches) will be crucial because they relate to a country’s perception of its identity. Some will be crucial because they encapsulate legal content which needs to be present in every language. Some will be useful only to certain countries, e.g. a document about coastal defences is presumably of limited interest to countries which have no coastline. It is an axiom that every country has the status of its language respected. But it does not follow from this that everything has to be translated. As a theoretical case: if there are twenty documents, and four language communities (who share a lingua franca, of course), and documents 1–5 are translated into L1, documents 6–10 into L2, and so on, then everyone is being treated equally and respect is shared, though none have all documents translated. How far such a model can be implemented in practice into a twenty-first century agenda, I do not know; but it is plain that respect, like translation, is a pragmatic notion.

This kind of reasoning scares people, because the brave new world it points towards is unfamiliar and untested. But it is the nature of revolutions to present people with the need for new paradigms. And currently we are experiencing a linguistic revolution in which old models are being replaced by new ones, and a transitional period which is inevitably one of great uncertainty. People are unclear about the role of a truly global lingua franca, because they have never experienced one before. They are seeing the loss of languages around the world, and are not sure what to do. And they are faced with new and unexplored technologies which they have limited experience in handling. Teachers, at the cutting edge of language work, routinely bemoan their plight. A typical remark: ‘In the old days there was American English and British English, and I knew where I was; now, I’ve no idea where I am’. But everyone, not just teachers, is faced with the uncertainties of a rapidly changing linguistic world, and agenda setters in particular. As a result there is an understandable tendency to dig the heels in, to take up extreme positions, and to make traditional notions (such as the notion of a language having ‘official status’) bear a weight which they were never designed to carry. The result is what we see: huge quantities of unread translations;

vast amounts of time wasted and points left unsaid because people feel the need to say everything twice in a speech (once in their own language and again in the *lingua franca*); and the covert use of 'relay languages' and 'working languages' to make sure jobs get done (which insidiously eats away at the principle of respecting linguistic diversity). Far better, it seems to me, to work towards replacing absolutist conceptions by relativistic ones – the concept of 'official language', for example, being replaced by 'official for a particular purpose', and to spend the time trying to work out what these purposes might be.

These directions of thinking are uncomfortable, also, because it is the nature of linguistic reality to be uncomfortable, especially in a revolutionary era, where change is so rapid and universal. Relativistic notions bear little resemblance to the black-and-white world that linguistic purists inhabit. And the world of multilingualism is full of purists – people who believe that there exists some form of a language which is intrinsically superior to all others and which it is their duty to protect against change, especially against the influence of other languages (and most especially against English). There is an element of the purist in all of us, but it is an element which we have to control, for the historical reality is clear: that all languages change, that all borrow from each other, and that there is no such thing as a 'pure' language, and never has been. English, indeed, is the borrower par excellence, as it were, having taken in words from over 350 languages in the course of its history, resulting in a lexicon that is 80% Classical or Romance. But borrowing is often viewed as anathema by puristically minded supporters of a language, because they feel that their language is somehow debased if it uses words from other languages. Purists have a very short community memory: they forget that, a generation before, several forms of the language that they now accept as standard were contentious.

The point is especially sensitive between old and young generations, the former insisting on 'correctness' and the latter wishing to make use of 'cool' loanwords (often from English). In a 'healthy' language, with millions of speakers, purist attitudes cause no harm, because they are swallowed up in the myriad of opinions which comprise the speech community. Indeed, they probably have an important role to play, identifying one pole of a spectrum of opinion which allows other positions to be more clearly seen by contrast. The 'descriptive' position in linguistics, for instance, becomes more sharply defined when it is seen in contradistinction to the 'prescriptive' view. But when we are dealing with minority and endangered languages, purism becomes harmful. My view is unequivocal: any speech community which allows the purist mentality to dominate its linguistic policy is signing the death warrant for its language. The teenagers are the parents of the next generation of children, and if the language is to be passed on, they must be persuaded that there is a point. But each time 'their' language is rejected by community elders because it is 'incorrect' this vitality is reduced. It is another nail in the coffin.

It has to be accepted that the identity of a language will change – as it always has in the past – even to the extent of fundamentally altering its character. This apparently unpalatable truth can be made less so by pointing to what happens when languages actually do change their character. They do not somehow deteriorate or disappear; rather, their new character becomes a fresh resource which can be used in all kinds of creative directions. English, once again, provides a classic case. An originally Germanic language has, in vocabulary, become a predominantly Latin/Romance language. The result has not been the deterioration of English; on the contrary, what we now have is a lexicon with a hugely increased range of expressiveness – for example, the co-existence of a Germanic, Romance and Latin word (as in *kingly*, *royal* and *regal*) enabling fresh opportunities for creative expression. The language of the next generation is never the same as the language of its predecessor. And accepting the inevitability, if not desirability, of change is an essential part of any realistic agenda for multilingualism. Part of the new mindset of a post-revolutionary era has, accordingly, to be the acceptance of much greater levels of contact effects (such as loanwords), and a preparedness to encounter huge numbers of ‘code-mixed’ languages in which massive intermixing has taken place (as in Singlish’s use of English and Chinese).

Casting the argument in terms of an opposition between ‘old’ and ‘young’, or ‘correct’ and ‘cool’, is itself a distortion. The two positions are not totally exclusive. It is perfectly possible to have a linguistic situation in which a highly colloquial and ‘cool’ level of language use exists alongside a highly formal and ‘correct’ level. This kind of situation is captured by the notion of diglossia and illustrated by such cases as Classical versus Colloquial Arabic or Swiss versus High German. It is likely that languages will become increasingly diglossic as contact effects increase (indeed, new notions of multiglossia may have to evolve to cope), and these will be particularly noticeable in minority languages, where the smaller number of speakers will make the two levels stand out more prominently. Only an inclusive language policy can cope with such developments. Any policy which operates exclusively – that a certain group of speakers does not speak the ‘proper’ language – is on a course of self-destruction. A minority language needs every friend it can get, regardless of the kind or level of language the speakers display. Someone who has just put their foot on the bilingual ladder (with 1% fluency, in the above terms) is to be welcomed and valued – not, as sometimes happens, rejected for inadequacy. (Every time I try to speak French in France, I see a look of pity cross the face of my interlocutor!) Unfortunately, the surprising truth is that historical conceptions of ownership can get in the way of inclusiveness. ‘They have no right to learn our language’ is an attitude often heard by traditionalists faced with incomers. The position is complex, and not entirely without point, but it is ultimately self-defeating.

The more we explore the notion of multilingualism in a post-revolutionary linguistic world, the more we find our cherished notions having to be revised or even jettisoned.

Even such fundamental notions as the distinction between 'native' and 'non-native', or between 'first', 'second' and 'foreign', have to be rethought. To take an example of the latter: babies are now being born all over the world who are being taught language by parents of mixed-language backgrounds, for whom English is an essential lingua franca. In other words the babies are going to be learning 'English as a foreign language' as a mother tongue. Such developments can take even language professionals by surprise. What professionals need to appreciate is the even greater levels of rethinking which have to take place among the general public, where, for example, the notion that monolingualism is the norm is surprisingly pervasive (especially in those countries which have a recent history of colonialism). Among politicians and administrators there is a natural tendency to look for neat and simple solutions – devising formulae, for example, about how many languages it is desirable for a country to teach or work towards. But notions of L1+1, L1+2, or whatever, bear little relationship to the real world, where people operate with as many languages as they need and at a variety of levels. To my mind, the only concept which relates well to the multilingual world I see around me is that of the Language Portfolio, and it is this which needs to be operationalised in school curricula and elsewhere.

To cope with revolutions we need a strategy which is sufficiently flexible to integrate many levels and types of users. Its focus has to be on 'ordinary families' and on children at home, because this is where languages are most solidly acquired, but homes have to be seen in the context of communities (real or virtual) to avoid isolationism, and so local community initiatives need to play their part. It is this local focus which provides a means of integrating the different approaches that people use when they are engaged in language planning. In *Language death* (Crystal 2000) I discuss the role of the arts as a crucial strategy in focusing public attention on linguistic issues, especially in relation to minority languages. In *Language and the Internet* (Crystal 2001) I discuss the corresponding revitalising potential of that medium. The home is the only place where all such factors are routinely present. The appreciation of art begins at home, from the simplest forms of home decor and body art to more advanced forms of music, pictures, storytelling and film. The appreciation of Internet technology is increasingly based in the home, and will significantly grow with the spread of broadband communication. So it is in the home and local community where the effects of the linguistic revolution are going to be most apparent. The traditional focus, of course, has been on the educational system – as reflected in the theme of this book – so it may be on the issue of the context of learning where the greatest amount of rethinking will eventually need to take place.

This rethinking has hardly begun. The professionalism is not yet in place which can fuel these developments. I conclude by briefly considering the role of the arts in relation to multilingualism, minority languages and other areas of evolving linguistic identity. Here my premise is this: within a country, people do not change their minds, or develop positive attitudes about endangered languages, for example, just by being

given information; the arguments need to capture their emotions, and art forms are the main way in which this can happen. But there are still far too few poems, plays, novels, and other genres in which general notions of language identity and loss provide the theme. (There is rather more in relation to individual language situations, such as Welsh or Irish – Brian Friel's *Translations* is an acclaimed case in point.) I have been collecting material for an anthology of literary work on the general theme, and have so far found very little (examples are listed in Crystal, 2000) – a handful of poems, just one short story by David Malouf, and one twenty-minute play (Pinter's *Mountain language*). I ended up a few years ago writing a play myself on the topic of language death, which at least increased the total to two. Nor should music, painting, sculpture, dance, and other forms of artistic expression be left out of consideration. But I know of no operas, ballets, fantasias, jazz compositions, or pop songs on the theme of language loss. Nor have the visual arts been involved. I know of no paintings.

I have found one sculpture – a piece of work which was displayed in New York and London in the late 1990s. There is a report, probably apocryphal, of an event which took place when the explorer Alexander von Humboldt was searching for the source of the Orinoco, in South America, in 1801. He met some Carib Indians who had recently exterminated a neighbouring tribe (possibly a Maypuré group) and captured some of their domesticated parrots. The parrots still spoke words of the now extinct language and von Humboldt – so the story goes – was able to transcribe some of them. Having heard this story, Rachel Berwick, Professor of Sculpture at Yale University, saw its intriguing possibilities, and constructed an artwork based upon it: she designed a special enclosure in which were displayed two Amazon parrots who had been trained to speak some words from Maypuré, and this was then exhibited at various venues. By all accounts, the venture focused the mind wonderfully. So, if sculpture, why not music? Why is there not yet a symphony for dying languages? Has there been a pop concert in support of Language Aid? It would be good to see some of these initiatives in the opening decades of the new millennium. But they need to be planned for.

Art is of course a major way of boosting linguistic self-esteem, through the promotion of storytelling sessions, drama groups, poetry readings, public-speaking competitions, singing galas and cultural gatherings, such as the eisteddfod tradition in Wales. A strong literary tradition can be a source of great prestige, not only within the indigenous community but also among the society at large. Even in the case of art forms where there is no linguistic element, such as dancing, language can take advantage of their popularity: no dance has yet been invented which has not been given a name or an interpretation, and language then comes to the fore. But, in talking about art forms, I return to one of the main themes of this chapter: it is crucial to include all sectors of society. In a situation of endangerment, there is no room for a misconceived elitism or anti-elitism. There has to be inclusiveness, simply because

not everyone in the endangered community will find everything equally appealing. The critical dimension is, once again, 'age'. The kind of activities promoted by the long-established cultural festivals can appear old-fashioned or parochial to the community's youth. On the other hand, the kind of activity which interests the young can be dismissed by the older generation as involving a lowering of standards. Without mutual interest and tolerance, a community can find itself torn by internal conflict, and energies which should be harnessed in the same direction come to be dissipated.

The three main strands of the linguistic revolution – to do with globalisation, endangerment, and technology – are manifestly present at the heart of the European experience, and one of the undoubted benefits of the European Year of Languages was to focus public attention on what is taking place, to reduce the reluctance and apathy surrounding language awareness, and to promote fresh initiatives celebrating linguistic diversity in all its forms. There is obviously a great deal still to be done. It is crucial now to maintain the momentum that the year has stimulated. The sharing of minority language experience must continue. The strategic potential of the languages portfolio must be exploited. The annual World Languages Day must be well publicised. There has to be a complementarity of 'top-down' strategic planning to complement the 'bottom-up' enthusiasm that has been generated – a relationship which of course requires the mediation of appropriate funding. These options have all been put into sharper perspective by EYL2001, which arrived at a particularly important juncture, following a revolutionary decade and preceding a century of unpredictable consequence. It has given many of us the motivation to start the process of thinking things through in fresh ways. And that is why this book has come not a moment too soon.

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