From Englishization to Imposed Multilingualism: Globalization, the Internet, and the Political Economy of the Linguistic Code

Dor, Danny, 1951-

Public Culture, Volume 16, Number 1, Winter 2004, pp. 97-118 (Article)

Published by Duke University Press

From Englishization to Imposed Multilingualism: Globalization, the Internet, and the Political Economy of the Linguistic Code

Daniel Dor

Current debates on the possible linguistic consequences of the process of globalization concentrate on the complementary issues of *Englishization* and *language loss*. Most writers view today's linguistic world as a site of contestation between the *global* and the *local*: the spread of English as the lingua franca of the information age is viewed as the linguistic counterpart to the process of economic globalization; the causal factors working against the process of Englishization are thought of as locally bound and are equated with patterns of local resistance to economic (and cultural) globalization. This conception also determines the structure of the discourse on linguistic human rights: the need for *negotiated multilingualism* and the rights of speakers to resist global pressures and to use, maintain, and develop their local languages. In this essay, I suggest that this conceptual framework misses out on a critical aspect of the linguistic dynamics of our time. The process of globalization undoubtedly has far-reaching linguistic consequences, but these, I claim, have less to do with the spread of

A major part of the research for this essay was done in the context of the Agora project, the Institute for Advanced Study, Berlin, 1998–2000. I would like to thank the members of the group for their help and support. I am also grateful for the valuable suggestions and criticisms of *Public Culture*'s reviewers and editors.

Public Culture 16(1): 97–118

English and the reduction of linguistic variability as such and much more to do with the general social function of language and the relationships among languages, speakers, nation-states, and the global market. As these relationships are gradually changing, most dramatically on the Internet, we already witness the global emergence of novel patterns of linguistic usage, standardization, maintenance, and variability—patterns that more than anything else meet the needs of the evolving global *consumers market*. In this new state of affairs, the forces of economic globalization do not have a vested interest in the global spread of English. They have a short-term interest in penetrating local markets through local languages and a long-term interest in turning these languages into commodified tools of communication. Indeed, some of the major players in the global economy—most importantly the software industry—already understand this and are working to achieve that goal. Thus, the very same global economic pressures that are traditionally assumed to push the global expansion of English may actually be working to strengthen a significant set of other languages—at the expense of English. The potential result of this process is neither imposed Englishization nor negotiated multilingualism but a specific pattern of *imposed multilingualism*: local linguistic variability imposed and controlled by the economic center. This possible development raises serious questions regarding the political economy of language, most prominently the question of the future ownership of languages as tools for communication and as global and local commodities.

The Internet and Its Languages

In the formative years of the Internet as a global phenomenon, the complete dominance of English on the Net was regularly viewed as the ultimate demonstration of just how pervasive the process of global Englishization is (Crystal 1997, 2001). In 1997, for example, 45 million English speakers were using the Net, whereas the number of non-English-speaking users was 16 million (Global Reach n.d.). In 1999, sociolinguist Joshua Fishman (1998–99: 26) referred to such statistics in asserting that "There are . . . reasons to believe that the English language will eventually wane in influence," but "[its] expansive reach is undeniable and, for the time being, unstoppable":

> [English is the language] of the lion's share of the world's books, academic papers, newspapers, and magazines. American radio, television, and blockbuster films export English-language pop culture worldwide. More than 80 percent of the content posted on the Internet is in English,

> even though an estimated 44 percent of online users speak another language in the home. . . . Predominantly English-speaking countries account for approximately 40 percent of the world's total gross domestic product. More and more companies worldwide are making English competency a prerequisite for promotions or appointments. The success of politicians around the world also increasingly depends on their facility in English. When newly elected German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and French president Jacques Chirac met in September to discuss future cooperation, they spoke neither French nor German, but English. And English is the official language of the European Central Bank, despite the fact that the United Kingdom has not joined the European Monetary Union, the bank is located in Frankfurt, and only 10 percent of the bank's staff are British.

Since then, however, some things seem to have changed. The Internet has developed into a much more multilingual arena, in direct contradiction to the early predictions of total Englishization. According to estimates provided by Global Reach (n.d.), an online marketing firm, in 2003 the English-based Internet community comprised around 230 million users, whereas the non-English-speaking community comprised 403 million users. More important, the estimates for 2004 are 280 million English users and *no less than 657 million non-English users*. The Net is going to be a predominantly non-English-language medium. According to the same estimates, non-English-speaking users will then represent 67 percent of the world's economy—in comparison with the 33 percent represented by English speakers. Moreover, the sheer number of languages used on the Web is growing rapidly: current statistics identify twenty-seven languages that are heavily represented on the Net, accompanied by quite a few additional languages that are trying to join the club (Crystal 2001).

Preliminary sociolinguistic and ethnographic research demonstrates the extent to which Internet activity has become an important component of the lives of non-English speakers around the globe. In case after case, it turns out that the (full or partial) move from English to another language has been not only possible and mostly effortless, it has also allowed for fascinating new developments in the assertion of identity on the Net. Thus, for example, Mark Warschauer (2002) and Warschauer, Ghada R. El Said, and Ayman Zohry (2002) tell the story of the development and spread of a new form of Romanized colloquial Egyptian Arabic in informal e-mail and chat room communication among Egyptian users. In Egypt, as in other Arab nation-states, classical Arabic has long been the formal dialect of books, newspapers, television news broadcasts, and speeches. Colloquial Arabic has been used in informal speech and only rarely in writing (for example, in

comic strips). According to Warschauer (2002: 7), Egyptian Arabic is now represented on the Net in an unprecedented written form: online communication features "a new and unusual diglossia between a foreign language, English, and a Romanized, predominately colloquial form of Arabic that had very limited use for these informants prior to the development of the Internet." A similar story is told by John Paolillo (1996) about code-switching between English and Punjabi in an Internet forum.

Ayisigi B. Sevdik and Varol Akman (2002) describe the impact of the Internet on the lives of women in Turkey, mostly in the metropolitan area of Ankara. Two-thirds of the participants in their study, most of whom were university graduates, indicated that they use the Internet. Twenty-six percent of the users reported that they could *always* "find information on the Net in Turkish," and another 57 percent said that they *sometimes* found what they were looking for in Turkish. Thirty-two percent felt that "language is a barrier in Net use"; 45 percent said that "language is sometimes a barrier"; and 23 percent felt that it is not a barrier at all. According to estimates, the number of users in Turkey grew from 600,000 in 1997 to 2 million in 2000 and is still rapidly growing. A full-scale Internet space in Turkish is thus becoming a reality.

Preliminary accounts of this type are becoming increasingly commonplace: Dotan Blais (2001) describes rituals of status and identity in Hebrew-language chat rooms in Israel; Joanne Tay-Yap and Suliman Al-Hawamdeh (2001) discuss the impact of Internet communication in English, Chinese, and Tamil on health care in Singapore; Wenzhao Tao (2001) deals with issues of control and autonomy in a Chinese-language bulletin board system (BBS) in China; and Warschauer (1998, 2002) tells the story of Internet-based attempts to revitalize the Hawaiian language in Hawaii.

Englishization, Economic Globalization, and the Multilingual Strategy

How can we account for these developments? What do they teach us? Researchers usually refer to them as locally driven counterreactions to the process of economic and cultural globalization, which is still associated with the spread of English. Warschauer, El Said, and Zohry (2002) sum up this view in the following paragraph:

> Economic and social globalization, pushed along by the rapid diffusion of the Internet, creates a strong demand for an international lingua franca, thus furthering English's presence as a global language. . . . On the other hand, the same dynamics that gave rise to globalization, and global

> English, also give rise to a backlash against both, and that gets expressed, in one form, through a strengthened attachment to local dialects and languages. This tension—between Internet-led globalization and an increased need for local culture and language—has pushed Singaporeans to cling closely to their own highly colloquial dialect (Singlish) even as the government pushes them to adapt standard English in order to market their goods more effectively. . . . It has also given a push to movements in defense of other languages, such as French.

Note that this view is shared by those scholars who see the spread of English as natural, neutral, market driven, and even beneficial and those who view it as linguistic imperialism, aimed at maintaining and reproducing economic and political inequalities between nations (Pennycook 1994). Ronald Judy (1999: 4) speaks for the former when he writes that "English as a global language poses a most vexing problem precisely because it does not indicate any particular national culture. It is neither English nor British, neither North American nor Australian, neither South African nor Indian, neither Jamaican nor Singaporean, nor does it stand for anything like a cultural aggregate of all these. We simply have no idea what English stands for except the global market—itself a vague reference—which is to say, we have no idea what it stands for culturally."

Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) has presented the most detailed exposition of the second view, but Robert Phillipson's (1992: 52–53) original formulation is probably still the clearest:

> In the early colonial phase of imperialism, the elites in the Periphery consisted of the colonizers themselves, whether settlers or administrators. In present-day neo-colonialism, the elites are to a large extent indigenous, but most of them have strong links with the Centre. . . . In the next phase of imperialism, neo-neo-colonialism, Centre-Periphery interaction will be increasingly by means of international communications. Computer technology will obviate the need for the physical presence of the exploiters. New communications technology will step up the Centre's attempt to control people's consciousness. . . . For this to be effective requires the Centre's cultural and linguistic penetration of the Periphery. . . . An increased linguistic penetration of the Periphery is essential for completing the move away from crude means, the sticks of colonial times, and even the more discreet means of the neo-colonialist phase of asymmetrical bargaining, to neo-neo-colonialist control by means of ideas.

The deep differences between these two perspectives notwithstanding, both sides seem to agree on the general formulation of the question of Englishization in

terms of the struggle between the global and the local: the process of Englishization is equated with the process of economic globalization (however conceptualized); the driving forces behind the spread of English are equated with those pushing economic globalization; and the "interests" of English (and English speakers) are equated with those of the beneficiaries of economic globalization.

This conceptual framework, however, misses out on what is probably the most crucial feature of current linguistic reality—both in and outside the Net: the fact that the very process of economic globalization has by now detached itself from the dynamics of Englishization and has adopted a much more sophisticated, *multilingual* strategy. This new strategy follows from the assumption that adapting to the local culture and language—releasing local markets from the task of translation and providing translation services as part of the product—is a necessary component in the penetration of, and competition over, local markets. Searching the Internet for such keyword combinations as "globalization, language," or "globalization, knowledge," we find that more than 90 percent of the relevant Web sites belong to Western businesses that buy and sell products of linguistic and cultural relativism. Linguistic and cultural relativism is a popular commodity within the business community. Researching linguistic and cultural variability, and selling the results of this research, is a flourishing business. Companies sell directories, databases, reports, translation services, automatic translation software, and guidebooks for doing business away from home, which, in some cases, look much like simplified textbooks for Anthropology 101. The World Bureau (www.worldbureau.com), for example, "produces databases, reports, directories, and other information services that give corporations a competitive advantage in the international marketplace." Uniscape, an application service provider (ASP) specializing in translation services, recently unveiled its Globalization Infrastructure for eBusiness, a software platform aimed at creating multilingual, multicultural e-businesses in forty-two languages. The platform includes the Global Content Manager, which monitors changes on corporate Web sites and helps localize their contents for the different markets. Indeed, there are a growing number of companies that, as Pat Wehner (2001: 759) says, "have set about redefining their goals: from uncovering the universal predictive laws of the market to understanding the multiple, overlapping, and often contradictory identities of consumers themselves."

Global businesses are gradually abandoning not only the attempt to "uncover the universal predictive laws of the market" but also the utopia of an "international lingua franca" and are looking at ways to penetrate local markets in their own languages. Here are a few quotations from articles on this topic that exem-

plify the prevailing attitude, selected in the course of the last two years from various business journals:

> By 2003 . . . nearly half of the globe's e-commerce (46%) will be based outside the United States, compared with only 30% today. The key to capturing that increasingly global consumer base is going to be native language-based Web sites. (Heckman and Schmidt 2000: 7)

> The most obvious problem with international trade is the language barrier, which is an issue that even those companies already doing business overseas have yet to address, according to one analyst. "We took a look at the Fortune 100, and we found that only 36 of them had sites in a language other than English," said Forrester's Schmitt. "I'm willing to bet 99% of them do business in other countries." (Shewmake and Sapp 2000: 30)

> Ninety nine per cent of European institutions cite English as their working language. And our native tongue dominates global communication. So why bother to learn another language? There are some very good reasons. No modern company can afford to be parochial. The World Wide Web has accelerated the trend to globalization, and globalization requires companies to form partnerships or more structured alliances with local companies. Cross-border mergers, acquisitions and collaborative projects are increasingly common and their success relies partly on good personal relations and communications between individual participants. Good relations and communications in turn rely partly on the parties being familiar with each other's language. Internal documents or local regulation and practices will be clearer if the language is understood; ideas and inspirations will be more easily shared. Not even attempting to speak the local language could alienate other parties. (Hancock 1999: 35)

The most explicit exposition of this understanding is the following quotation from Chris Potts, chief executive of e-commerce strategy specialist Citria: "As the Internet expands globally, users become less and less sophisticated technologically and in other ways. Their skills and patience are in short supply and they are not going to learn a foreign language just to use the web. To be global, to put it bluntly, you have to go down to their level. You have to provide easy screen navigation and local language" (Gray 2000: 28).

Paradoxically, then, some of the agents of economic (and cultural) globalization seem to have developed sophisticated conceptions of language as a mode of global communication, leaving the sociolinguists one step behind. Note that a similar strategy was adopted a half century ago by another major global agent: the Catholic Church. In 1965, the Second Vatican Council issued the following

decree concerning the proper way to "find more easy access to the minds and the hearts of men":

> Therefore, all missionaries—priests, Brothers, Sisters, and lay folk—each according to their own state, should be prepared and trained, lest they be found unequal to the demands of their future work. From the very beginning, their doctrinal training should be so planned that it takes in both the universality of the Church and the diversity of the world's nations. . . . For anyone who is going to encounter another people should have a great esteem for their patrimony and their language and their customs. . . . Let the missionaries learn the languages to such a degree that they can use them in a fluent and polished manner, and so find more easy access to the minds and the hearts of men. (Ad Gentes: sec. 26)

The new business strategy makes better economic sense than the old one for at least two complementary reasons. First, consumer research indicates that native linguistic identity plays a crucial role in consumers' decision-making processes. A study by Forrester Research, Inc. on electronic commerce states that "shoppers are three times more likely to buy products in their own language" (Scanlan 2001). Sirkka Jarvenpaa and Noam Tractinsky (1999) surveyed Internet consumers in Australia, Israel, and Finland, and they maintain that "participants exhibited a tendency to prefer sites . . . which displayed information in their vernacular language." As Jarvenpaa and Tractinsky indicate, this is probably related to the fact that online shopping depends on consumers' familiarity with and confidence in the online merchant. David Graddol (1999) has claimed that the notion of "native speaker" with respect to English is on the decline, as it is gradually becoming a global language that belongs to everyone. The experience of global business, however, has made it clear that the general notion of "native speaker" as such is still as important as ever.

The second argument for the multilingual business strategy is the sheer complexity of language as an object of learning. The spread of English is sometimes compared to the spread of communication technologies, such as the telephone or the Internet (de Swaan 1993, 1998a, 1998b), but learning to use the telephone or the Internet is not difficult, whereas gaining proficiency in a language is a highly demanding task. A very rudimentary grasp of English—a closed set of key words and phrases—is fairly easy to obtain, especially in the global flooding of American TV broadcasts and movies. Such shallow knowledge, however, does not enable real participation in the English-based global communication scene. As Fishman (1998–99: 28) says, "Just because a wide array of young people around

the world may be able to sing along to a new Madonna song does not mean that they can hold a rudimentary conversation in English, or even understand what Madonna is saying." Moreover, the process of language learning, beyond the elementary level, depends not only on constant motivation and investment on behalf of the learner but also on (1) the constant exposure to the target language *in the speakers' immediate physical environment*, especially in the education system; and (2) the constant practical necessity of actively using the language in daily life. This is a fundamental fact about language learning: it is a *locally bound* phenomenon. The acquisition of language on the basis of passive exposure to a long-distance source is virtually impossible. This is a crucial point, because many of what we think of as sources of global Englishization fit into this category: TV and radio broadcasts, movies, music lyrics, and the Internet. As a recent survey (Naigles and Mayeux 2001) indicates, children occasionally learn new words in their own language through passive exposure to educational TV programs, but they do not seem to be able to acquire other aspects of their language, especially grammar, by this means. As far as exposure to *other* languages is concerned, some evidence shows that the same generalization holds. Such exposure may be useful only if it accompanies active communication and instruction in the foreign language by parents, teachers, or older children. Even as far as dialects of the same language are concerned, TV viewing seems to have limited consequences: According to Annick De Houwer and Kristine Bentzen (personal communication), some scholars have found anecdotal evidence that media exposure to standard Norwegian and standard Dutch has a certain limited influence on the speech of children speaking northern Norwegian and Belgian Dutch, respectively. African American children in the inner cities, on the other hand, acquire and use Black English—despite their massive exposure to Standard American English on television. What all this means is that the impact of the flooding of English through the channels of mass communication may not go beyond the shallow level of knowledge. To get beyond this stage, English would need to be taken up by the *local* educational system, private or public, and important social functions of language would have to be gradually taken over by English—forcing speakers, generation by generation, to develop their skills further, until they reach a level of proficiency that allows for diglossia dynamics to occur. This process, even when it is allowed and encouraged by the nation-state, is likely to take a very long time—at least a few decades. This is why, from the point of view of agents of economic globalization, waiting for the successful termination of the Englishization process is not a viable strategy. The rapid establishment of linguistic communication with consumers-to-be is a prerequisite for successful competition

over local markets. Such communication, in a language with which the local communicators feel comfortable, is simply a necessity.

Toward a Market-Based Global Linguistic System

What are the possible consequences of this emerging divide between the process of Englishization and the process of economic globalization? First of all, it spells a conceptual change with respect to the question of the future of the world's languages. Current theoretical models (most notably de Swaan 1993, 1998a, 1998b) conceptualize the spread of English in terms of the practical need to form networks of global communication. In Abram de Swaan's model, languages differ with respect to their *prevalence* and *centrality*. A language ranks high on the prevalence scale if it is spoken, as a native or nonnative language, by a large number of people. A language ranks high on the centrality scale if it is used by a large percentage of multilinguals in its region and is thus used for communication between speakers whose native languages are mutually unintelligible. Centrality and prevalence are independent notions: languages may be very prevalent but not that central (e.g., Japanese) or very central but not too prevalent (e.g., Swahili). Some languages, of course, are *both* prevalent and central: Russian, for example, is both the most prevalent and, until recently, the only central language in the linguistic constellation of the former Soviet Union (English threatens this exclusive status of Russian). The multiplication of a language's centrality by its prevalence determines what de Swaan terms the language's *communication value*, or *Q-value*. Obviously, English has the highest Q-value of all (de Swaan 1998a: 65): it is the only language that "allows Arabs to talk with Russian speakers, Francophones with Chinese, Japanese with Spanish, or Lusophones with Malaysians."

Q-value allows de Swaan to conceptualize linguistic knowledge as a commodity. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that speakers make their choices with respect to foreign language learning as free agents, de Swaan claims that a language's Q-value is a good predictor of the demand for the language by foreign language learners. Learning a new language after the first years of childhood requires heavy investment, so, other things being equal, people will prefer to invest in a language that will give them the maximal benefits—not just in terms of what the language facilitates (career advancement, new commercial relationships, navigating state bureaucracy) but also in terms of the sheer number of people, institutions, and businesses they will be able to communicate with.

Interestingly, the utility of a language, in terms of its Q-value, actually *increases* as the number of its users increases. In fact, every speaker who decides to learn a

new language automatically increases both the language's prevalence (there is now an additional speaker of the language) and its centrality (the additional speaker is now, by definition, bilingual and is thus capable of mediating communication between monolingual speakers of his or her native language and speakers of other languages). This property makes language what economists call a "hypercollective good," that is, a good whose value increases in proportion to the number of its users. De Swaan's theoretical considerations, then, suggest that the increase in a language's Q-value, once it is on its way, may be *self-perpetuating*: the more speakers learn to use it, the more valuable it becomes; the higher its Q-value, the more attractive it becomes for additional learners—and so on and so forth. Such self-perpetuating processes, where an efficient communication standard spreads and continuously increases its effectiveness, are very hard to stop. Good examples are telephone and postal delivery systems, but the best example is probably the Internet. Thus, in principle, exactly the same type of process may unfold, gradually and reiteratively, throughout the linguistic global system—resulting in a massive reduction of the world's linguistic variability, with English as the ultimate global language.

What are the forces that are traditionally assumed to resist this powerful, self-perpetuating process? Scholars concentrate on four parameters: First, nation-states traditionally play a central role in promoting and preserving their national languages, by "safeguarding the domains of domestic politics, national culture, education, law and so forth as the preserve of the indigenous language" (de Swaan 1998b: 119). Such activity, to the extent that it is successful, can "avert a stampede out of the national language, even when a high degree of diglossia prevails." Second, the promotion of local identities and the current trend of "ethnic revival" play an important role in preserving local languages and resisting homogenizing forces. In some Western countries, moreover, local languages have also benefited from state sponsorship. As a result, the number of standardized languages today is probably the highest in history: about twelve hundred (Fishman 1998–99). Third, other languages (e.g., Chinese, Spanish, Arabic, and Russian) play the role of Languages of Wider Communication in different parts of the world. As Fishman (1998–99: 27) claims: "For all the enthusiasm and vitriol generated by grand-scale globalization, it is the growth of regional interactions—trade, travel, the spread of religions, interethnic marriages—that touches the widest array of local populations. These interactions promote the spread of regional languages." Finally, as impressive as the global spread of English is, it seems still to spread along class lines, leaving huge populations effectively unexposed to the language. Ironically, this practical inaccessibility of English is a very

efficient barrier to its diffusion. All these parameters, taken together, are usually thought of as the major counterforces to the spread of English.

Note, however, that the actual future contribution of the first two forces—nation-states and local identities—to averting the stampede toward English is a much more complex question than it might seem at first glance. For one thing, the future role of nation-states (especially weaker ones) in determining processes of global dimensions, including the Englishization process, is itself an open question. In the Tunisian case, for example, it seems that the new Englishization policy actually followed a highly critical report on educational reform, prepared by the World Bank for the Ministry of Higher Education, which called for developing "tracks of study more in line with the demands of the global economy" (Judy 1999: 9). As devoted as it was to its own Arabicization policy, the government seemed quite helpless when confronted with this report. To take another example, some of the post-Soviet states, such as Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, have recently passed strict laws "placing education, science, and culture within the exclusive purview of their national languages" (Fishman 1998–99: 31). These laws may be efficient tools for reducing the power of Russian in these states, but they may not prove as strong with respect to the spread of English. As far as the stronger, Western nation-states are concerned, we seem to witness an almost paradoxical situation: as Western nation-states move, slowly but consistently, toward a more liberal policy vis-à-vis minority languages and local dialects, they gradually strip themselves of the power to control linguistic change—a process that facilitates the penetration of English. In this sense, the move toward multilingualism, and the "ethnic revival" as a whole, creates a strange pact between English and subnational varieties against national languages. With Catalan as their local language and English as the global one, for example, native Barcelonians may rationally decide, at least in principle, to abandon Spanish. Such processes as mass immigration, urbanization, and the privatization of the mass media contribute to this state of affairs in even more complicated ways. Take the Israeli case, for example (cf. Spolsky and Shohamy 1999): From the 1950s to the 1980s, the Israeli state controlled linguistic change in a variety of ways. First, it imposed a Hebrew-only policy with respect to Jewish immigrants, who were encouraged to give up their native languages. Modern Hebrew was, of course, one of the most important symbols in the formation of Israeli nationality. Second, although Arabic was maintained as the language of instruction in Arab schools, pupils were supposed to learn Hebrew. Third, the number of migrant workers speaking a language other than Arabic was small. Fourth, the state had complete control over the educational system, the electronic media, and so on and was thus

able to effectively control different linguistic processes. In this state of affairs, Hebrew enjoyed an uncontested degree of centrality: it was the only language that native speakers of Hebrew, native speakers of Arabic, and new immigrants could use to communicate with one another. Since the 1990s, however, a few changes have occurred: First, the state has abandoned its strict policy of Jewish immigrants' Hebrewization in favor of a "hands-off" policy. As a result, the most recent waves of immigrants, especially the 600,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union, tend to form their own closed linguistic communities, with their own newspapers, TV channels, and schools. Second, around 300,000 overseas workers are presently living in Israel, and they form their own communities, speaking mainly Romanian, Thai, and Filipino. Third, the government has adopted a policy that takes multilingualism and multiculturalism to be educational goals (a policy that nevertheless applies only to citizens of the state and ignores overseas workers). As a result, the number of hours of Arabic instruction in Hebrew schools has increased. Fourth, as a result of the privatization of the electronic media, state-controlled promotion of the formal standard is virtually impossible. Fifth, a private industry of teaching English has developed in the country. In this evolving multilingual context, the prevalence and centrality of Hebrew may, in principle, gradually decline, allowing English to penetrate even deeper: sometime in the future, speakers of Hebrew, Russian, Thai, and Arabic may find that English has increased its centrality beyond that of Hebrew *on the local level*, because (1) speakers of all languages have some command of English, but not all of them speak Hebrew; and (2) the great majority of Jewish speakers of Hebrew have a fair command of English. In this state of affairs, speakers of minority languages may, in principle, decide to skip the Israeli national language and invest in their children's English education—thus joining the global self-perpetuating process of Englishization.

Crucially, however, this theoretical framework changes considerably if we take into account the multilingual strategy adopted by global businesses. This strategy not only works directly against the process of Englishization by strengthening those languages that are gradually establishing their virtual space on the Internet. Much more importantly, the strategy *reduces the urgency*, on the part of local speakers, of learning English as a high Q-value language. In other words, it deals directly with the self-perpetuating nature of the Englishization process. The establishment of business Web sites, search engines, and portals in languages other than English opens up opportunities for global communication, exchange of knowledge, commerce, and consumption among speakers of different languages—where the translation function is provided as part of the architecture of the com-

munication space and does not require knowledge of a high Q-value language. As learning English becomes a less pressing need, more speakers around the globe may remain at the shallow proficiency level ("singing along to a new Madonna song," as it were). Many professions may still require extensive use of English, and the language may remain, for example, the uncontested language of science, but the fact that most people will not need more than a shallow level of proficiency may actually prevent unstable states of diglossia from emerging.

Which languages have a real chance of erecting this business-based fence and stopping the deep penetration of English into their communities? The number of such languages may be, at least in principle, surprisingly large. As a first approximation, we may hypothesize that a language should be safe if it proves capable of *sustaining a virtual market*. This capacity, in turn, would probably be a direct function of the economic potential of the language community (the number of speakers and their economic statuses) and an inverse function of the financial investment needed for the establishment of the market. As far as the inverse function is concerned, it should be noted that the establishment of a virtual market for any language community is, to a large extent, based on universal technologies, which are already in use elsewhere. These technologies significantly reduce the investment needed for the establishment of virtual spaces for additional languages. Moreover, major software companies are currently investing hundreds of millions of dollars in the research and development of machine translation technologies. Most of the products currently on the market are not very accurate (cf. Silberman 2000), and I doubt whether automatic translation will ever be able to handle literature or poetry. However, I do not see any real reason to doubt that technology will develop that can easily and accurately deal with business and technical texts (probably with some human editing, fine-tuning conversational styles, cultural niceties, and so on). At this future point, the establishment of a virtual market for each additional language may require, at least in principle, very little financial investment. Consequently, such markets may be established for languages with lower Q-values.

As a matter of fact, one of the most effective strategies that ethnic movements can adopt in the struggle for the preservation of their languages is establishing an Internet presence, which is what many such movements are already doing. Obviously, not all languages can follow this route: many minor languages, fatally wounded in the colonial encounter, will not be able to make the necessary move and may eventually perish. Still, I am willing to risk the following prediction: if my general assumptions are correct, the 140–300 major languages of the world,

and quite a few hundred more, have a very good chance of survival. Recall that these languages are spoken by no less than 95 percent of the world's population. In this scenario, then, the dynamics of economic globalization may actually help preserve a significant degree of global linguistic variability.

Beyond the Nation-State: The Move toward Language Zones

Beyond the potential preservation of linguistic variability, the move toward a global market-based linguistic system seems to imply some fundamental changes in the political economy of language—in the relationship between *languages*, *speakers*, *communities*, and *nation-states*. In general, the process of globalization is already making it more and more difficult for nation-states to play their traditional roles vis-à-vis their national languages. In the market-based linguistic system, some of these roles may be taken over by the multinational agents of the software, marketing, and media industries. One of the most important traditional roles played by nation-states with respect to their languages was that of *territorial unification*: national languages have well-demarcated territorial boundaries—the boundaries of the state. Territorial unification has traditionally been the key to national control over languages. It allowed nation-states to set linguistic standards, work out language-planning policies, control the language curricula in the education system, and use language as a major component in the construction of national identity. In the market-based linguistic system, however, territorial unification will probably not be possible—certainly not to the same extent as it was. As I suggested above, the ability of a language to construct its own virtual space is a direct function of the number of its speakers and their socioeconomic statuses. Crucially, this function is "interested," so to speak, in the aggregate of linguistic preferences of groups of individuals, *regardless of their physical location*. As the introduction to the statistics tables in Global Reach (n.d.) demonstrates, territorial unification does not play a role in this new state of affairs: "Here are the latest estimated figures of the number of people online in each language zone (native speakers). We classify by languages instead of by countries, since people speaking the same language form their own online community no matter what country they happen to live in."

The notion of "language zone" is a highly significant element in the new market-based system. Speakers belong to a language zone on account of their linguistic preferences, regardless of whether their language is the national language of the nation-state they live in. The Russian language zone, for example, includes

Russian-speaking immigrants in the United States, Germany, and Israel as well as citizens of the Russian state. The fact that most Russian speakers still reside in Russia loses its constitutive status and becomes a contingent statistical generalization. In other words, languages may follow English to find themselves, in Terry Cochran's words (1999: 67), no longer "linked exclusively to a demarcated territory."

Given that language zones develop as a function of the economic capacities of the language communities, the actual evolution of the different language zones—which languages and dialects will get to have their own zone—may depend to a large extent on global marketing considerations. The global media business is a prime example. As Richard Parker (1995: 68) shows, the language of global broadcasting poses problems of "economic efficiency for advertisers": "Satellites can deliver programming and advertising instantaneously and simultaneously across the more than two dozen languages spoken in Western Europe, but the viewers—as repeated market research shows—want their television delivered in local tongues."

Faced with this fundamental problem, major players in the global media industry are already adopting a strategy that is based, according to Parker (1995: 86), on "the recognition that for the time being global broadcasting will follow a pattern of multilingual corporate expansion and alliance, bringing with it the age-old questions about culture and property and ownership that have marked the capitalist world since its birth."

The Ownership of Language: The Case of Standardization

The new dynamics described above may coincide with the linguistic interests of some nation-states (e.g., by helping the French nation-state in its struggle against English). In other cases, it may make life much harder for nation-states (e.g., by aiding Catalan in its struggle against the Spanish nation-state). Either way, these changes in the political economy of language will most probably weaken the nation-state's ability to control the dynamics of language change, the patterns of language use, and linguistic standardization. In other words, it will change the balance of power over national languages and transfer many of the traditional roles that nation-states played vis-à-vis their languages to the agents of the global market. This is most clearly witnessed in the domain of standardization. Traditionally, setting linguistic standards has been one of the most important linguistic roles of nation-states. Standards were established on different levels: to be a proper speaker of a language, one had to have the proper accent, use the right type

of syntax, spell correctly, and communicate according to a fixed code of politeness. These standards functioned as the demarcating line between the national language and its less-favored dialects and played an especially crucial role in the establishment of an individual's social status. In recent decades, however, linguistic standards have played a much weaker role in the construction of social status, and Western nation-states have gradually adopted a "hands-off" policy with respect to standardization. For example, the literacy curriculum in the first years of grammar school in many Western states now places very little emphasis on correct spelling and grammar—and concentrates on such issues as holistic literacy, general communication and interpretation skills, self-expression, creativity, clarity, logic, narrative construction, and so on.

At the same time, however, the traditional role of standard setting is gradually being taken over by the new designers of the emerging language zones. The language of the media, for example, plays an important role in the development of linguistic standards and patterns of usage. Leighton Peterson (1997), for example, tells the story of the emergence of a formal standard for spoken Navajo at a privately owned Navajo radio station. As the control of media production in local languages is gradually concentrated in the hands of multinational corporations, their ability to develop linguistic standards is also increasing. Even more importantly, the software industry has already provided a substitute for the standardization machinery of the nation-state—the grammar- and spell-checkers in the word-processing software we all use. In Israel, for example, the nation-state established two spelling standards: in the *partial spelling* standard, vowel letters corresponding to *i*, *o*, and *u* are used sparingly; in the *full spelling* standard, they are used wherever possible. These standards were taught in grammar school and were used by the national newspapers, the major publishing houses, and so on. The default setting of Microsoft Word's spell-checker, however, is a totally new compromise between the two standards. As this software is used for the production of virtually all written texts in Hebrew, the new standard has become the default standard.

Keyboard design is another area where linguistic standardization processes are taken up by the computer industry, with or without the help of the relevant nation-states. Khaver Zia (2000), for example, reports the advances made by "linguists and computer scientists" in the standardization of the character set of Urdu. "With the advent of the computer," writes Zia, "a new dimension was added to the process of standardization. Efforts were made to formulate standards for Urdu similar to those developed for other languages." The desired similarity to "other languages" actually entails a major change in the whole concept of script:

the Urdu writing system involves, among other things, a complex system of diacritics, and "although it employs the basic letters of the language, the rendering of these letters in a word is extremely complex . . . [because] Urdu text has traditionally been composed through calligraphy, a medium whose precepts are based on the aesthetic sense of the calligrapher rather than on any formula." S. Kuppuswami and V. Prasanna Venkatesan (1997) report the recommendations of the Tamil Nadu Standardization Committee. In the conclusion, they write that "for the Tamil people living all over the world, who are using English keyboard to input the Tamil text, Romanized keyboard layout is essential." In these examples, languages are globalizing on the metalevel of the logic of script, producing a "formula" for Urdu script and romanizing the keyboard for Tamil, and this process is heavily constrained by the hardware and software of word processors. Mandarin Chinese provides an even more dramatic example: computer keyboards cannot handle the language's huge number of characters, so one must type the words in Roman letters—sound by sound—for the characters to appear on the screen. Crucially, the software developed for this purpose recognizes only the standardized pronunciation. For speakers of a dialect with a different pronunciation, it will be difficult to make the correct characters appear on the screen. All this achieves what the national standardization project did not even try to accomplish: it forces speakers to learn the standardized pronunciation of the spoken language in order to be able to write. The same phenomenon may occur with the advancement of voice-activated software in other languages.

These developments raise pertinent questions regarding the issues of the ownership and control of languages. With software and hardware design serving as a major site of linguistic standardization (again, with or without the support of nation-states), the computer industry now has unprecedented control over languages at almost every level. In the case of modern Hebrew, as we saw before, the new standard became the norm—although Microsoft's spell-checker has nondefault settings for the older *full* and *partial* standards. These nondefault settings may be used by professional writers: they were able to bypass the standards set by the nation-state when it had control over the language, and they probably will be able to bypass the default standard set by Microsoft. While this option may be advanced by the introduction of "open code" spell-checkers, implementing a different standard for great quantities of written materials can be a difficult task—as editorial managers in major publishing houses are gradually coming to understand. On the other hand, linguistic standards, whether they are set by nation-states or by software companies, have always targeted the masses of nonprofessional writers (and speakers) who would not dream of "arguing with the

machine" when it comes to "correct spelling" and "proper grammar." Moreover, professional writers in the nation-state era had some impact on the standards of their languages: they could push them to their limits or participate in their development. Nonprofessionals had at least some unmediated, personally learned knowledge of the standard. In the currently evolving situation, professional writers may have little influence on the evolution of the standard, and nonprofessionals will gradually get to the point where they simply will have to trust the software to do the standardization work for them—their own knowledge of the standard may be quite limited. Similar developments may take place at the level of grammar, lexical choice, and so on.

Conclusion

In his discussion of freedom and control on the Net, Lawrence Lessig (1999: 6) writes that "the invisible hand of cyberspace is building an architecture that is quite the opposite of what it was at cyberspace's birth. The invisible hand, through commerce, is constructing an architecture that perfects control—an architecture that makes possible highly efficient regulation. . . . In real space we recognize how laws regulate—through constitutions, statutes, and other legal codes. In cyberspace we must understand how code regulates."

Lessig is interested in how cyberspace software may restrict people's basic freedoms—in direct contrast to the utopian vision of the Net. In a way, this essay attempts to provide a novel perspective on the linguistic counterpart of Lessig's formulation. Traditionally, scholars have assumed that "the invisible hand of cyberspace is building an architecture" that speaks English, an architecture that denies people the right to speak and write their own languages. A truly free Internet, it was said, should be multilingual. As I show in this essay, the Internet is indeed on its way to becoming a truly multilingual space, but this development does not necessarily carry the promise of freedom. The Net is growing multilingual mainly because the agents of economic globalization have realized that adapting to local cultures and languages is a necessary component of staying competitive—and because the commodification of language-related materials constitutes a huge global market. This move changes the level at which linguistic contestation occurs, shifts translation responsibilities to the producer, and actually works directly against the process of global Englishization by increasing the chances of many languages to survive. The majority of the world's speakers thus may get to keep their languages and use them for communication purposes.

But the move to a market-based global linguistic system may have other con-

sequences: it may change the basic parameters of the political economy of language and leave much of the control over languages in the hands of the software, media, and advertising industries. This, as we have seen, does not necessarily imply that these agents (the "invisible hand" of the Internet) are competing against the nation-state; in many cases, their interests coincide. Indeed, the combined effect of the dynamics of economic globalization and the decline of the nation-state as the major linguistic agent of the modern era will be neither global Englishization nor multilingual freedom. Most probably, it will result in a state of market-based, imposed multilingualism. In this system, speakers may still speak their languages, but these languages may no longer be "theirs" in the *agentive* sense: speakers (and their communities) will have much less influence on the dynamics of linguistic change, identity, maintenance, and standardization.

Daniel Dor teaches in the Department of Communication at Tel Aviv University. His research interests include the linguistic consequences of globalization, the role of the media in the construction of political hegemony, and the cultural-biological evolution of language. He is the author of *Intifada Hits the Headlines: How the Israeli Press Misreported the Outbreak of the Second Palestinian Uprising* (2003).

References

Ad gentes: Decree on the mission activity of the church. 1965. Second Vatican Council, 7 December.

Blais, Dotan. 2001. "Walla chat": An ethnographic view of an Israeli Internet chat site (in Hebrew). *Kesher* 30: 77–92.

Cochran, Terry. 1999. The linguistic economy of the cosmopolitical. *boundary 2* 26, no. 2: 59–72.

Crystal, David. 1997. *English as a global language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2001. *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

De Swaan, Abram. 1993. The evolving European language system: A theory of communication potential and language competition. *International Political Science Review* 14: 241–55.

———. 1998a. A political sociology of the world language system (1): The dynamics of language spread. *Language Problems & Language Planning* 22: 63–73.

———. 1998b. A political sociology of the world language system (2): The

unequal exchange of texts. *Language Problems & Language Planning* 22: 109–28.

Fishman, Joshua A. 1998–99. The new linguistic order. *Foreign Policy*, no. 113: 26–40.

Global Reach. n.d. Global Internet Statistics. Available online at www.glreach.com/globstats.

Graddol, David. 1999. The decline of the native speaker. In *English in a changing world*, special issue edited by David Graddol and Ulrike H. Meinhof. *AILA Review* 13: 57–68.

Gray, Robert. 2000. Make the most of local differences. *Marketing* 13: 27–28.

Hancock, John. 1999. The language of success. *Director* 53, no. 4: 35–36.

Heckman, James, and Kathleen V. Schmidt. 2000. "International" in Internet closes U.S. lead. *Marketing News* 34, no. 4: 7–8.

Jarvenpaa, Sirkka L., and Noam Tractinksy. 1999. Consumer trust in an Internet store: A cross-cultural validation. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 5, no. 2 (Web publication at www.ascusc.org/jcmc).

Judy, Ronald A. T. 1999. Some notes on the status of global English in Tunisia. *boundary 2* 26, no. 2: 3–44.

Kuppuswami, S., and V. Prasanna Venkatesan. 1997. Selection and standardization of Tamil keyboard layouts: Recommendations of Tamil Nadu standardization committee. Paper presented at the International Symposium for Tamil Information Processing and Resources on the Internet, National University of Singapore, 17–18 May. Available online at www.infitt.org/tamilnet97/paper/html/kuppuswami/kuppuswami.htm.

Lessig, Lawrence. 1999. *Code and other laws of cyberspace*. New York: Basic.

Naigles, Letitia R., and Lara Mayeux. 2001. Television as incidental language teacher. In *Handbook of children and the media*, edited by Dorothy G. Singer and Jerome L. Singer. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.

Paolillo, John C. 1996. Language choice on soc.culture.punjab. Available online at ella.slis.indiana.edu/~paolillo/research/paolillo.publish.txt.

Parker, Richard. 1995. *Mixed signals: The prospects for global television news*. New York: Twentieth Century Fund.

Pennycook, Alastair. 1994. *The cultural politics of English as an international language*. London: Longman.

Peterson, Leighton C. 1997. Tuning in to Navajo: The role of radio in native language maintenance. In *Teaching indigenous languages*, edited by Jon Allan Reyhner. Flagstaff: Northern Arizona University Press.

Phillipson, Robert. 1992. *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sasse, Hans-Jürgen. 1992. Theory of language death. In *Language death: Factual and theoretical explorations, with special reference to East Africa*, edited by Mathias Brensinger. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Scanlan, Phil. 2001. Seamless Translation™—Delivering for the user. *Machine Translation Review* 12 (Web publication at www.bcs.org.uk/siggroup/nalatran/mtreview).

Sevdik, Ayisigi B., and Varol Akman. 2002. Internet in the lives of Turkish women. *First Monday* 7, no. 3 (Web publication at www.firstmonday.dk).

Shewmake, Brad, and Geneva Sapp. 2000. Bringing down the international barriers. *InfoWorld* 22, no. 18: 30.

Silberman, Steve. 2000. Talking to strangers. *Wired*, May.

Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove. 2000. *Linguistic genocide in education or worldwide diversity and human rights?* Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Spolsky, Bernard, and Elana Goldberg Shohamy. 1999. *The languages of Israel: Policy, ideology, and practice*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Tao, Wenzhao. 2001. Censorship and protest: The regulation of BBS in China People Daily. *First Monday* 6, no. 1 (Web publication at www.firstmonday.dk).

Tay-Yap, Joanne, and Suliman Al-Hawamdeh. 2001. The impact of the Internet on healthcare in Singapore. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 6, no. 4 (Web publication at www.ascusc.org/jcmc).

Warschauer, Mark. 1998. Technology and indigenous language revitalization: Analyzing the experience of Hawai'i. *Canadian Modern Language Review* 55, no. 1: 139–59.

———. 2002. Languages.com: The Internet and linguistic pluralism. In *Silicon literacies: Communication, innovation and education in the electronic age*, edited by Ilana Snyder. London: Routledge.

Warschauer, Mark, Ghada R. El Said, and Ayman Zohry. 2002. Language choice online: Globalization and identity in Egypt. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 7, no. 4 (Web publication at www.ascusc.org/jcmc).

Wehner, Pat. 2001. Ivory arches and golden towers: Why we're all consumer researchers now. *College English* 63: 759–68.

Wired. 2000. Special issue. May.

Zia, Khaver. 2000. A survey of standardization in Urdu. Available online at www.cicc.or.jp/english/hyoujyunka/mlit4/71–0Pakistan/Pakistan2.html.