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Article abstract

Since the end of World War II, English has become the virtual lingua franca of the planet. However, this development carries significant ethical and educational questions: What are the consequences of the worldwide dominance of the English language? How has it affected and how will it affect the fortunes of other languages? What can and should we as educators to do to minimize or eliminate the harmful effects on some of the endangered languages of the world? This paper will invite educators into a philosophical discussion of the ethical complexities of teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language.

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"If English Was Good Enough for Jesus, It's Good Enough for Me"

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Since the end of World War II, English has become the virtual lingua franca of the planet. However, this development carries significant ethical and educational questions: What are the consequences of the worldwide dominance of the English language? How has it affected and how will it affect the fortunes of other languages? What can and should we as educators to do to minimize or eliminate the harmful effects on some of the endangered languages of the world? This paper will invite educators into a philosophical discussion of the ethical complexities of teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language.

Introduction

On the fifth day of September, 1977, the American spacecraft Voyager One blasted off into space from the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral, Florida. Sent on its journey to the outer solar system and beyond in search of other life-inhabited galaxies, the unmanned Voyager One carries five science instruments that study the solar wind, energetic particles, magnetic fields, and radio waves in the hitherto unexplored regions of deep space. The 722-kilogram robotic space probe also carries a twelve-inch gold-plated copper disc, one side of which contains 117 pictures and diagrams explaining planet Earth and our solar system and showing images of people performing a variety of activities. On the disc's other side are samples of music from different cultures and eras, the sounds of animals and weather phenomena, as well as greetings from Earth people in nearly sixty languages to anyone who might be listening out there in space (McCrum, 1987, p. 19). The two longer messages are those of U.S. President Jimmy Carter and the U.N. General Secretary Kurt Waldheim. What is noteworthy is that Mr. Waldheim, the head of an international organization representing some 150 countries, gives his greeting not in his native German but in English—the language that was fast becoming the global *lingua franca*[1] of planet Earth.

What is it about this particular language that propelled it to its current leadership position? After all, just forty years prior to the launch of Voyager, any notion of English as a true world language was but a faint, theoretical possibility.

Otto Jespersen (1968) estimated that there were roughly four million English speakers in the year 1500—all confined to a relatively small island in northwestern Europe. There were six million English

[1] The term *lingua franca* refers to a "common language" – a language of communication between speakers of other languages who cannot communicate in each other's language.

speakers in 1600, around 8.5 million in 1700, somewhere between 20 and 40 million in 1800, and approximately 120 million in 1900. Another century later, the number of English-speakers appears to have increased six- to tenfold! The "best" estimates put the total number of English speakers in the world today between 700 million and 1.4 billion (Pennycook, 1994, pp. 7-8).[2] The above figure can be divided into three groups, following Kachru's (1986) distinction: native speakers of English; speakers of English as a second language; and speakers of English as a foreign language.[3] There are an estimated 380 million people worldwide who speak English as their native tongue. Another 200 to 300 million or so speak it almost daily as a second language, and between 200 and 500 million use it occasionally as a foreign language. Whatever the exact figures, however, the prominent position of English among the world's languages is readily apparent. English is second only to Mandarin Chinese in terms of the number of people who speak it, but in terms of international prestige and significance, it far outweighs its Chinese counterpart. Even though over a billion people on the planet speak Mandarin Chinese either as their native tongue or have a good proficiency in it as second-language speakers, Mandarin is not (yet) a global language. Or take Hindi, for example. The number of Hindi native speakers is only marginally lower than those speaking English as their mother tongue, yet Hindi has nowhere near the international prestige that English enjoys. Spanish is an official language of many more countries than English is, yet Spanish is not the de facto international language of communication in the world today.

In the six decades since the end of World War II, English has become the virtual *lingua franca* of the planet. What makes English suitable to be *the* international language of communication? Is it inherently more logical, more beautiful, easier to learn, or in any other way better equipped to be used in international transactions than other languages? The sheer size of a language's speaker population is a fairly good indicator of its relative importance among the world's languages, but having hundreds of millions of first- and second-language speakers is insufficient to grant a language "world language" status. What is also needed is "language prestige" or "language charisma"—something that comes as a result of tremendous economic and political power, or derives from the international popularity of the cultural products of a language community.

As far as beauty is concerned, it is, according to the clichéd phrase, in the eyes of the beholder. Under normal circumstances very few people would consider their own mother tongue to be less than beautiful. Years of exposure to a language and the culture it embodies, nurtures, and is surrounded by, virtually guarantees that its speakers begin to notice "beautiful" patterns in their language: they will begin to discover beauty in its grammar, the genius in its syntax, and the philosophical wisdoms hidden in its etymology—something that a "casual" second- or foreign-language observer not fully immersed or not sufficiently experienced in that language will probably miss and, therefore, will most likely be unable to appreciate.

In terms of learnability, it is often pointed out by linguists that any human language is, by definition, learnable by children with normal mental faculties. A child exposed to a particular language in a "natural" linguistic and cultural environment, surrounded by speakers of that language as well as its cultural artifacts, will, in due time, automatically pick up that language's phonetic system, will master its syntax and grammar, and will slowly but surely learn thousands upon thousands of that language's words, phrases, and idioms. In other words, no single language is more inherently "learnable" than any other. Of course, certain languages can still be learnt more easily by adults as a second or foreign tongue than others. But this has to do with the relative "distance" between one's mother tongue and

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[2] This huge discrepancy, or "large margin of error," is due to the difficulty of defining who counts as a "speaker" of a language—or, more precisely, what level of language proficiency and knowledge must a person have in order to be included in the count.

[3] Somewhat simplified, the distinction between English as a second language and English as a foreign language is as follows: English is a "second language" to someone if that person resides in a country where English is the official language or one of the official languages. English is considered a "foreign language" when its speaker lives outside an Anglophone language environment.

the "target language": if one is studying a second or foreign language which is completely dissimilar to one's mother tongue (in terms of the lexicon, the sounds, the syntax, and the grammar), then there is, of course, more difficulty to be had, more things to unlearn and relearn than would be the case if the first and second languages had more features in common. And, since people in various parts of the world speak different languages as their mother tongue, there isn't a single universally "easy" language to learn for everyone.[4]

What are the consequences of the apparent worldwide popularity of the English language? How does it and will it affect the fortunes of other languages? What is the future of English as an international language? What is the future of English in general? What are the ethical and moral implications of teaching ESL/EFL (English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language)? What can and should we as teachers of ESL/EFL do to minimize or eliminate the harmful effects English might be having on some of the endangered languages of the world? This essay is meant to shed light on some of the hereto mostly ignored aspects of the position of English in the world, and to offer fellow ESL/EFL teachers a novel way of understanding the nature of our work, because there appears to be an urgent need for sensitive discussion of the subject.

English as the World's "Most Important" Language

As Crystal (2003, p. 4) explains, "a language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in almost every country." Firstly, it can either be made the official language of a country, or used as a medium of communication in a country with a large number of ethnic groups, each with its own language, in which case a single language is chosen as a lingua franca for the purposes of government, law courts, the media, and the educational system. English is the official language (or one of the official languages) of about a dozen countries great and small, with a combined total population of about 500 million. In some newly independent nations in Africa and some former British colonies in the rest of the world, English is a lingua franca of government.

Another way in which a language can gain a global status is by becoming the top priority in several countries' foreign-language teaching curricula. It then becomes the foreign language which most children will study in school. Throughout the world, English has now become the most widely taught foreign language: in over a hundred countries it is the chief foreign language to be encountered in schools, often displacing another foreign language in the process. In 1996, for instance, English replaced French as the main foreign language taught in the schools of Algeria, a former French colony (Crystal, 2003, p. 5).

English is now also the primary language used when representatives from a wide assortment of countries the world over gather to discuss issues of importance to them: most multilateral political discussions and international negotiations about issues of trade and commerce are now conducted in English. English is also the language most prevalent in the world's entertainment industry, and the overwhelming majority of the findings of scientific and technological research are now published exclusively in English. A lion's share of the world's books, newspapers, magazines, and academic

[4] Some writers on language have pointed out that English has a stripped-down grammar: it virtually lacks conjugation and declension, and its nouns have no genders. This relative ease in the grammar department is offset by a seeming inconsistency between spelling and pronunciation, however. Also, the number of verb tenses in English is frustratingly high and quite confusing, viewed from the perspective of some of its second- and foreign-language learners. And its lexicon is a potpourri of words borrowed from a great number of other tongues; sometimes more than one loan word of the same root from the same language had been borrowed at various times in history—and such loan words have slightly different spellings and pronunciation, and often markedly different meanings as a result. Moreover, the sheer size of the English lexicon is in itself a frightening challenge for anyone wishing to master it. In other words, English is no more "learnable" than other languages.

papers are now produced in English.[5] Pennycook (1994) cites Mowlana (1986) and Smith (1980) to demonstrate the reach of the "big four" press agencies:

> of a total of 32,850,000 words per day, Associated Press (AP) produces 17 million; United Press International (UPI) 11 million; Agence France Presse (AFP) 3,350,000; and Reuters 1.5 million. In contrast, the combined German, Italian, Spanish, Yugoslavian, and Inter-Press Service output is about 1,090,000 words per day. (Pennycook, 1994, p. 51)

Chances are that with the development of direct satellite broadcasting, the predominance of the Western media is even greater. It seems that becoming "well-informed" and well-educated nowadays is virtually impossible without having at least a working knowledge of the English language.

ESL Teaching's Practical Problems and Some Ethical Considerations

For better or worse, English is now the most-studied language in the world. The British Council estimated that in the year 2000 over one billion people were learning English (Crystal, 2003, p. 113). National governments the world over have, in recent years, reorganized the foreign-language teaching aspects of their respective education systems and curricula. English is now the first choice as a second language by Ministries of Education in almost every non-English-speaking nation. A much greater emphasis on the English language in the elementary and secondary schools, as well as in universities, means a lessening importance of, and decreasing interest in, other foreign languages. It is, perhaps, not surprising then that the demand for English-language teachers and teaching materials often far exceeds the supply. Witness the tens of thousands of recent college and university graduates mostly from North America who, year after year, flood EFL markets worldwide just months after graduating with a Bachelor's degree in *any* discipline. Only a negligible percentage of them are truly serious about teaching; most are there either "to find themselves," to travel, or to make some quick money to pay off their student loans. To be sure, they are providing an essential service, one for which there is great demand, but at what cost? Parents and governments in these countries spend enormous sums of money in an attempt to have their children learn better English, yet what they receive is far less than what they are paying for. There needs to be longer and higher-quality training for would-be ESL/EFL teachers, and a much more rigorous selection process for the candidates of TESL/TEFL programs in order to weed out the unsuitable ones. No longer should a Bachelor's degree in *any* discipline suffice: at minimum, the candidates should be required to have a certain number of credit hours from a university in some or all of the following subjects: Linguistics, Education, ESL, or any foreign language. Further courses in Sociology and Anthropology might also prove beneficial to would-be ESL/EFL instructors because such courses would raise these would-be EFL teachers' consciousness. It would also help if ESL/EFL certificates were no longer issued to anyone who has not completed at least 200 hours of theory and a minimum of 50 hours of practicum. Right now some so-called "TESL colleges" offer certificate programs that last two or three weeks! It seems that such "diploma mills" are trying to outcompete each other by reducing the length of their programs and by slightly lowering their prices, thereby continuously lowering the standards of TESL training programs in the process. As Phillipson (1992) suggests, the "professional training of English language teachers concentrates on linguistics, psychology and education in a restricted sense. It pays little attention to international relations,

[5] A study of the use of English in scientific periodicals, conducted in 1980, indicated that 85 percent of papers in physics and biology, more than 90% in computer science, and 73 percent of medical papers were written in English at that time, while mathematics and chemistry trailed at a still impressive 69% (Andrew Large. *The Foreign-Language Barrier*. London: Deutsch. Page 18, quoted in Crystal, 111-2). These percentages are likely to have risen in the past quarter century.

development studies, theories of culture or intercultural contact, or the politics or sociology of language education" (Phillipson, 1992, p. 348). Very few TESL school graduates are fully aware of the cultural, moral, and ethical implications of teaching English as a foreign or other language.

Wealthier parents in countries with higher GDPs often send their children overseas, at great cost to themselves, in order for those children to learn English immersed in an Anglophone environment. But many of these young people end up attending classes all day in poorly run private ESL schools that have mushroomed in the downtown core of the largest Canadian population centres, for example, during the past decade or so. The previously already highly questionable educational standards of most privately owned ESL schools in the province of British Columbia have further worsened as a direct result of the B.C. Liberal government's decision to deregulate the private language-school sector. Unregistered, uninspected, and unqualified ESL schools now proliferate throughout the Lower Mainland, offering poor quality English as a Second Language classes, taught by unlicensed and untrained teachers, at exorbitant prices. It appears as if the majority of these schools hire their teachers primarily based on their attractiveness and on how much they conform to Third World stereotypes about what a "Westerner" should look like: it is as if a pair of blue eyes are a sufficient prerequisite for being hired by such schools.

Another related ethical issue concerns the vast sums of money spent on overseas native English speakers brought over to teach in the school system of various industrializing and newly industrialized nations, and the time invested by students of English hoping to master the language. The enormous amounts of money dished out for the questionable services of these often unqualified and poorly trained teachers might be better spent on other, more worthwhile educational pursuits. If English becomes a mandatory subject in elementary, middle, and high schools throughout most of the world, then some other, "less important" subjects will have to bear the brunt of this executive decision. There are only so many hours in a week students can be expected to attend school, so more English lessons in the curriculum will almost automatically necessitate a reduction by a similar proportion in the number of classes in subjects deemed less valuable by purely utilitarian considerations. It is usually the Fine Arts and Physical Education classes that end up being eliminated from the curriculum (or seeing the number of hours set aside for them in the curriculum), leading to the development of a generation of less fully rounded human beings.

If we train people in Third World countries to speak English only with the intent of ensuring a smoother operation for multinational corporations, then we are treating these people merely as a means to an end, not as ends in themselves; we fail in treating them as intrinsically valuable members of the Kingdom of Ends (Kant, 2001). To the extent that treating our fellow human beings as objects, and not as subjects, is immoral, we English teachers may be accomplices in an immoral enterprise.

It is a cliché to say that language and culture go hand in hand. Above the lower-intermediate level it is virtually impossible to teach a foreign language to students without, deliberately or unintentionally, introducing them to the cultural products of the people whose language one is teaching. Despite the teacher's best intentions, there may be an implicit message of promoting the culture of that foreign language. Seen from another perspective, this may also imply the demotion and devaluation of the students' own culture (or cultures, in case of a multicultural classroom). Even a cursory look at the hundreds of ESL textbooks available will reveal just how obsessed with things British and American the authors of these textbooks are.[6] British and American pride is pervasive in them, while diversity is sadly lacking. The only examples of diversity found in most ESL/EFL textbooks are of the superficial variety, focusing on ethnic foods, traditional costumes, and other quaint aspects of non-English-speaking cultures. As a consequence of not seeing their own cultures validated and, at the same time, constantly hearing, seeing, and reading texts that celebrate "English" culture in their ESL/EFL classes, some young adolescents and teenagers in industrializing nations may decide to

[6] A little more charitably, one could say that this self-fascination may stem from the authors heeding the ancient advice which tells them to write about what they know.

spend their pocket moneys on the products of the multibillion-dollar American entertainment industry, instead of supporting their local artists. In turn, local artists are deprived of much-needed cash to further of their country's culture and traditions. Insufficient funds may mean the local artists are unable to explore and popularize their native cultures, and so future generations will be even less interested in seeing, hearing, or reading their own countries' artists and the stories of their forefathers. Also, English-language proficiency has become one of the most crucial factors when considering a student's scholastic aptitude. All over the world, there are literally hundreds of millions of students huddled over their books late at night, trying to study for the TOEFL or TOEIC exams that may determine the course of their future (Pennycook, 1994, p. 4). So, when an otherwise brilliant student turns out to have an insufficient or unsatisfactory grasp of the English language, he or she will be less likely to gain admittance into prestigious post-secondary institutions. This, in turn, will have a devastating effect on this student's career prospects.

Linguistic Imperialism?

A language has traditionally grown to such importance for one chief reason: the military, economic, or religious power of its people (Crystal, 2003, p. 10; Ostler, 2005, p. 21). English is the most widely spoken international language in the world today thanks to the military might of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, and to the military and economic power of the United States of America in the twentieth century. People whose mother tongue is English may feel pride knowing that their native language is so successful and has achieved such an international status. Alternatively, some native speakers of English worry about the purity of their mother tongue which has become such an international commodity and because it is being used and abused by people with only a tenuous grasp of the intricacies of the English language. On the other hand, if you are one of the hundreds of millions whose mother tongue's very existence is threatened by the success of English, you may feel resentful, or even angry, at how fast and pervasive this linguistic trend seems to be. Language is a rather personal issue and a touchy subject for many. The debate about the harmful effects English is having on minor languages has intensified since Robert Phillipson introduced the term "linguistic imperialism" in his influential 1990 book of the same title. (Phillipson defines English linguistic imperialism as "the dominance asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages.") (Phillipson 1992, p.47) Phillipson's theory provides a powerful critique on the historical spread of English as an international language and how it continues to maintain its current dominance—not only in postcolonial contexts like in India, Pakistan, Uganda, etc., but also increasingly in "neo-colonial" contexts such as continental Europe. As Pennycook (1994) points out, English carries a set of ideologies, values, and norms based on the history of its development and use. The spread of English thus privileges certain groups of people and may harm others who have less opportunity to learn it. According to Giddens, globalization "creates a world of winners and losers, a few on the fast track to prosperity, the majority condemned to a life of misery and despair" (Giddens, 2003, p. 15). Cooke (1988) has described English as a Trojan horse, arguing that it is a language of imperialism and of particular class interests. Both he and Judd (1983) draw attention to the moral and political implications of English teaching around the globe in terms of the threat it poses to indigenous languages and the role it plays as a gatekeeper to better jobs in many societies.

According to some linguistic scholars (e.g. Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992), English is a tool of globalization, an agent of imposing Western (usually American) culture and values throughout the world. Following the publication of Robert Phillipson's influential book *Linguistic Imperialism* in the early 1990s, the theory of linguistic imperialism has attracted the attention of scholars in the field of applied linguistics. Harding (1997) goes as far as referring to the current processes of global Americanization as neo-colonialism—and even a new form of slavery. Technological knowledge was

used for controlling the colonized peoples, just as it is now. And "colonialism also systematically destroyed competitive local scientific and technological traditions, resources, and knowledge (and educational systems!), both intentionally and unintentionally—just as globalization does it today" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. 441). The earlier colonization and slavery were legitimated as a "civilizing missions." Neo-colonialism and today's somewhat gentler form of slavery are "rationalized in similar ways, but they are also often presented as beneficial for the victims" (Ibid.).

Language Death and Linguistic Diversity

Having a single "common language" for the entire world offers the scintillating possibility of mutual understanding, and it provides us with the opportunity to find new avenues for international cooperation. A common language also fosters a historical identity which mankind may have been on the verge of losing, and, according to Crystal, a common language even "promotes a climate of mutual respect" (Crystal, 2003, p. 3). In one sense, having such a lingua franca greatly facilitates the work of international organizations and regional trading blocs. With the European Community's recent expansion from fifteen to twenty-five member states, there are now countless combinations of language pairs to be translated and interpreted from. The chances of finding adequate interpretation and translation services from Greek to Finnish or from Slovenian to Danish, for example, are sometimes slim—unless an entire army of translators and interpreters are constantly kept at the ready. It would make much more sense to have an "intermediary language" (or "interlingua"). English, for instance, could fill this role: a statement from Greek could be translated into English first, then from English into Finnish. This so-called "relay system," however, poses one problem as it solves another. Yes, it makes translation and interpretation easier as far as finding qualified translators is concerned, but having thoughts transplanted from one language into another through a third language increases the risk of misinterpretation, as, literally, a lot can be "lost in translation." It, thus, makes even more sense to conduct an international meeting among nations with a number of different languages in a lingua franca. And this is exactly what English seems to have become.

Crystal (2003) contemplates the possible negative repercussions of a single language becoming *the* global language. Perhaps a global language will cultivate an elite monolingual linguistic class, which will be more complacent and dismissive in their attitudes towards other languages. Such linguistic elites, whose mother tongue is the global language, would most likely be able to think and work more quickly in that language, and to manipulate it to their advantage at the expense of those who do not speak it that well, thus creating and maintaining the traditional inequalities between rich and poor, based on language. The presence of a global language will most definitely make people the world over much more reluctant to spend the time and money necessary to study other languages—or, at the least, it will reduce their opportunities to do so. Perhaps a global language will hasten the disappearance of minor languages (Crystal, 2003, pp. 14-15).

One of the most troubling and irreversible effects of the phenomenal spread of the English language is language death. Half of the world's 6,000 or so languages are now in serious danger of disappearing forever within the twenty-first century.[7] Adding together the native-speaker communities of the top-twenty languages, we already have 57 percent of the world's population. In fact, the top-twelve alone account for 50% (Ostler 2005, p. 527). The annals of language history are full of languages that have died out. Extinction is a natural process for biological species and, according to

[7] Wurm (2000) and others distinguish between "safe," "endangered," "moribund," and "dead" languages. Dead languages are the ones which are no longer in use. "Moribund" is a language which is still spoken but there are no children learning it. A language is considered "endangered" when 30 percent or more of the children in a particular language community are not schooled in their mother tongue. All other languages are considered "safe" from extinction.

some estimates, some 95% of all species that ever existed on planet Earth are now extinct (Baillie 1998). On the other hand, in the course of the past 3.5 billion years, the general trend has been an increase in the variety of species. This, however, does not hold for human languages: as hundreds of languages disappear forever, very few new ones are ever born. Linguistic and cultural diversity, which have been around for tens of thousands of years, are now being eroded at an alarming rate.

According to one "theory" about language and the relationship between language and the material and non-material elements surrounding its speakers, the world is thought to consist of many parts, and each language provides a different set of labels for the same parts. This theory maintains that the differences between languages are only superficial, and that any one language can fully translate to any other, because they are ultimately saying the same thing with different words. This theory implies that the disappearance of any one language is a minor occurrence—the disappearance of one among many of the same kind (Wurm, 2001, p. 19).

A second theory about language argues that most perceptions of the world and parts of the world are brought into being and sustained by language itself. Therefore, different languages emphasize and filter various aspects of a multifaceted reality in a vast number of different ways. According to this theory, every language reflects a unique worldview and a culture complex, mirroring the manner in which a speech community has resolved its problems in dealing with the world, and has formulated its thinking, its system of philosophy and understanding of the world around it. Each language is the means of expression of the intangible cultural heritage of a people, and it remains a reflection of this culture for some time even after the culture which underlies it decays and crumbles (Wurm, 2001, p. 13). This second theory explains why linguistic diversity is an invaluable asset and resource rather than an obstacle to progress, and why the disappearance of any one language constitutes an irretrievable and tragic loss to valuable and irreplaceable human knowledge (Wurm, 2001, p. 19). The loss of each language means a contraction, reduction, and impoverishment of the sum total of the reservoir of human thought and knowledge as expressible through language (Wurm, 2001, p. 20).

To illustrate this last point, let me refer to the well-known example of some Inuit languages which have over a dozen words to describe and qualify a dozen completely different types of snow—a concept which is expressed in just one word (and a few adjectives) in English. From such an Inuit language English-speakers could come to a new discovery about sharpening their perceptions of natural phenomena. There are hundreds of similar but lesser-known examples, most of them describing natural phenomena, in other indigenous languages on the verge of disappearing forever. The parallel between the dangers of losing indigenous (and other) languages and losing the chance of discovering yet-unclassified plants in the Amazonian rainforest is more than merely allegorical and theoretical; it is quite literal and practical. There have been highly effective medicinal plants that were only known to people in traditional cultures, whose languages possessed specific names for these plants. Curare and quinine are just two examples from South America. Their medicinal properties were well known to the forest tribes long before they came into contact with European explorers. When the language and cultures of some of these small speech communities disappears, the knowledge about these plants and their healing powers are also lost to humanity, unless some interested person has already recorded the names and description of the properties before the languages' disappearance. Though minor languages may not necessarily hold the secret panacea that would heal all that ails humankind and our planet Earth, they may contain some wisdoms which may help us better understand our place in the great scheme of things, and if we followed their advice, we might just find a way to save the environment and find a more meaningful existence—activities that have become the norms of our times.

No language is truly safe from the threat of extinction. The language with the ninth-largest number of native speakers, French, has been trying to protect itself against the perceived encroachment and unwanted influence of English. In official contexts in France, it is now illegal to use an English word where a French word already exists, even if the English loan word enjoys widespread popularity among certain segment of the French people. In Canada's francophone province successive governments in recent decades have tried to stem the tide of English by restricting access to English-

language education to students whose parents both were educated in English and by requiring that on commercial signs the French messages be at least twice as prominent as their English counterparts. One of the first sign of a language's decay and loss of respect among its young is its increasing use of foreign loan words. Similar problems have arisen in countries the world over: older generations decry the young people's abuse of their own native language.

But even English may face troubled times in the future. A significant change in the balance of power—either political, economic, technological, or cultural—could result in another language rising to prominence and English gradually losing worldwide prestige (Crystal, 2003, pp. 123-124). This has happened to Ancient Greek and Latin—just to name the two best-known examples of languages that fell from grace. If the U.S.-led mass culture may lose most of its luster or the U.S. dollar loses its credibility as a result of twenty straight years of record-high trade deficits, or if dozens of nations simply refuse to do business with the United States as a protest against its unfair trade practices or its unilateral actions against some nations it considers as posing a security risk, the whole economic house of cards the U.S.A. is built upon could be brought down with relative ease. Alternatively, English could fragment into mutually unintelligible dialects—the way Latin did fifteen centuries ago—giving birth to a family of English languages. This, however, seems less likely, given the nature and extent of mass media and the worldwide availability and instant access of cultural products. But if this unlikely scenario does unfold, teachers of English will have a whole new set of moral dilemmas and obligations to worry about; for instance, trying to keep the language alive or popular enough worldwide, against tremendous pressure. But until English is thus threatened, teachers of English as a Second or Foreign Language should concern themselves with teaching their language while also acknowledging, respecting, and nurturing other languages and the cultures those languages represent.

Thirty years into its mission (which was originally designed to last four), Voyager One is now some 14.6 light-hours or 9.87 billion miles from our Sun and has thus entered the heliosheath, the termination shock region between the solar system and interstellar space—a vast area where the Sun's influence gives way to the other bodies in the galaxy. Remarkably, Voyager One is powered by three radioisotope thermoelectric generators which produce the 300 watts necessary to keep the spacecraft operating. NASA now expects that Voyager One will continue to communicate with Earth until at least the year 2020 (NASA, 2007).

When will another intelligent life form encounter Voyager One? Will they be able to decipher the messages encoded on its golden record? And when that happens, will English still be the primary lingua franca of our planet or will Chinese, for instance, become an alternative, a competitor? How many of the approximately six thousand languages spoken by the people of Earth today will still be spoken in a hundred years? What can be done to prevent this devastating loss of our collective cultural heritage?

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