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Positioning Cultural Idiosyncrasy and Identity in Multicultural Cyberspaces: Interfacing Languages and Cross-Cultural Virtual Encounters in a Globalizing World

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1. POSITIONING CYBER-COMMUNICATION IN A DIFFERENTIAL-GLOBALIZING WORLD

Human communication takes a paradigmatic change in the information age, not least is the new media enhanced real and virtual communicative encounters. Thanks to modern information and communication technologies (ICT), we are entering into a new epoch of capitalism. Cyber-linkages are revolutionary in changing the mode of socio-economic interactions locally and globally, behavioral repertoires among people in different geographical regions and time zones. Socio-economic activities at a global scale seem more and more borderless and just-in-time, allowing most forms of communication: one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one and many-to-many. The key issue here is the opening up of new ways and modes of communications as far as interactivity, timeliness, active participation, and the agenda setting are concerned, both in virtual and real social communities

Communication in cyberspace for both linguistic (text, semantic and phonetic) and visual modes are changing as well. Yet, the normative calling for universal access is critical for ensuring an equitable and just development for high-tech development in the information society. It is rightly that the adoption of the *Recommendation on the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace*, by the UNESCO on 15 October 2003 has been a strategic one (UNESCO 2003a/b), as it was timely stimulating the debates at the World Summit on the Information Society, December 2003 (WSIS, 2003).



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More specific, the UNESCO's recommendation has four major pillars: Development of Multilingual Content & Systems, Facilitating Access to Network & Services, Development of Public Domain Content, and Reaffirming the Equitable Balance between the Interests of Right-Holders & Public Interest (Fig.1):

Fig.1: UNESCO's Promotion for the Use of Multilingualism. Insert Here

How far is the project for promoting universal access and multilingualism, and in what way will inter-cultural communication, and multilingualism evolve in 21st century? In the following sections we discuss the issues and contradictions for the inter-cultural, linguistic future.

1.1 Global Access to the Internet: Market-Led Development?

Historically, the developed economies account for most of the Internet connections and usages. Yet, the developing economies have a different reality that the growth for both wired and wireless communication has been resulting from the increasingly adoption of multi-modal of telecommunications with a liberalizing (privatizing –cum- competitive) market regime; the increasingly use of mobile communication in particular. In 1985, most developing countries had virtually no mobile telephony. By 2000, a number of countries, e.g. Cambodia, Cote d'Ivoire, Paraguay, Uganda and Venezuela, had more mobile subscribers than fixed- line subscribers. Interestingly, the middle-east and northern Africa region leads the developing world in mobile penetration (at 6.8 mobile subscribers per 100 inhabitants), followed by Latin & Caribbean America (6.3), Asia (2.4) and Sub-Saharan Africa (1.7) (see Fink, Mattoo & Rathindran 2002).

In June 2009, out of the estimated total 1,668 millions world internet users, Asia accounts for 42.2%, followed by European (24.2%) and North Americans (15.1%). What important here is the strong momentum for the cyber-dynamism in the newly industrializing economies (NIEs); for instance, in the East Asia's NIEs, China and India, the Four Little Dragons (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and



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Singapore), they are challenging the earliest development of Japan (see Fig.2), and the growth rates are substantial for the less developed regions (see Fig.3).

Fig.2: World Internet Usage and Population Statistics. Insert Here

Fig.3: Internet Users Growth in the World. Insert Here

The exponential growth of the ICT-enhanced communication reflects market dynamism, as well as the power structure, under the globalization forces. Here, the market shaping of the symbolic value of cultural goods and practices – the theory of cultural production of language by Pierre Bourdieu (1991, 1993, 2007), is important particularly the linguistic exchanges which are embedded in, and derived from, the power relations between different socio-economic (the powerful versus the powerless) groups. Taking his interpretation on (the use of) language, the temporal and spatial domains of the communication situations are instrumental in defining the mode and essence of communication in 21st Century. The linguistic practices, of language production, reception and reproduction, in turns define socio-cultural institutions in making the establishment, consolidation, and maintenance of social roles and relationships (Tange 2007).

1.2 Digital Divides: Reflecting or Reinforcing the Inequality of Life Chance?

There are various forms of digital divides and inequalities in our globalizing world. First and foremost, the Internet backbone is still controlled by developed economies: 50% of the Internet communications among Asian countries are routed via US because the infrastructure. Second, the ratio of the Internet population in Asia Pacific and South East Asia compared with the total of the population in the above area is about 0.5%, East Asia (0.4%), South Asia (0.04%), whilst OECD except US is 6.9% and US is



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26.3%. (UNDP 1999). Last but not least, the gap within the developing economies is very wide and deep, for instance in Asian countries: around 20% of the adults in the rich part of Asia are online but less than 1% of the people in the poor part using Internet (ITU 2000). Recent data also suggest confirm the digital divides inside and between countries in different geographical regions: overwhelming majority, especially poor people, in poor countries are the victims of globalization cannot receive the benefit of the Internet as their rich counterparts (see Fig.4, Fig.5, Fig.6 and Fig.7).

Fig.4: Global Digital Divides. Insert Here

Fig.5: Internet per 100. Insert Here

Fig.6: Mobile Phone per 100. Insert Here

Fig.7: Fixed Line per 100. Insert Here

Hence, the digital divides, embedded in the pre-existing socio-economic and cultural fault lines, if not well dealt with, will likely reinforce the dualistic and polarizing global-local development at various geo-socio-political scales.



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Contrasting the digital divides, the benefits of ICT for social development are critical. Advocated for more than a decade, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) noted the important role of ICT in solving some of the social and economic ills of developing economies, not least their poverty alleviation (UNDP 2001). Another report (in July 2001) under the *Digital Opportunity Initiative of the G8 Dot Force* thrust, further noted that ICT solve socio-eco problems (G8 Dot Force 2000). How to build up the linkages between ICT and better cross-cultural communication is critical for global sustainability. For this, the rest of this paper will address to various manifestations of multilingual communications in/beyond the cyberspace: the politico-evolutionary multilingualism of the EU, the new forms of e-communications, socio-interactive text-messaging and its impact, and the e-government initiatives, plus some normative final remarks.

2. THE EVOLUTIONARY MULTILINGUAL COMMUNICATION

The move towards transnational communications in the last decade of 20th Century has been much shaped not just by the economic globalization (liberalization of markets) which usually required one, two or three *lingua franca* (like English, French, Espanol), but also the intensification of geo-regional cooperation and integration initiatives, like the EU, MERCOSUR, NAFTA, APEC and ASEAN. The geo-regionalization processes and the formation of regional inter-government organizations (RiGOs) have been instrumental for the rejuvenation of linguistic-efficiency concern not just on the official *lingua franca*, but also the essence of national linguistic communications across the multilingual environments of the regional institutions. For this, the most elaborated example of multilingualism in RiGOs, vis-à-vis, the global iGOs like the UN, World Bank, IMF and WTO (in which only a few official languages are adopted as *lingua franca*), is the EU system. Below is a brief note on the specificity of the multilingualism in the EU.

2.1 European Union(s) as a Testing Case for (23+) Multilingualism

Coupled with multicultural- genesis, multilingualism is the foundation of the present day European Union (EU), which is fundamentally a necessity - and will continue to be so as the gigantic project of creating a united Europe goes in to its next historical stage (Cunningham 2001, McCluskey 2001).



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Since 1952 six member states (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands), then having four official languages (Dutch, French, German and Italian), the European Union has been on an expansion of new official languages, whenever new members are admitted. In 1995, when the most recent accessions of new members to the EU, fifteen member states in total (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom), the official languages and the working languages of the EU institutions were again expanded to eleven languages: Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish.... In 2009, there are 23 official languages used in the EU (with 27 member states); and more will come as it enlarges into Eastern European countries (See Fig.8, Fig.9 and Fig.10).

Fig.8: The European Union Enlargement (15+10+2+1). Insert Here

Fig.9: Language-Regime and Timeline in the EU (1952 – 2004 onward). Insert Here

Fig.10: 23 Official Languages in EU (in 2009). Insert Here

Multilingualism is a political (for the member states), as well as practical (for the citizens), necessity for the (further) multicultural identity of Europe and the expansion of the European Union, as the ultimate goal of the European Union is "*an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen*" (Article 1 of the Treaty on

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European Union). In addition, as the EU has to respect the national identities of its member states (Article 6 of the Treaty on European Union), the European Commission and the other institutions of the European Union exist to serve the EU and its citizens, a community of peoples with a fascinating variety of customs, characteristics and languages.

The politico-legal foundation for the adoption of national languages into the EU families is the Treaties of Rome (1. January 1958), the very first Regulation adopted by the Council of national ministers (which was - and still is – the supreme law-making body of the European Union) addressed itself to the official languages and working languages to be used. This Council Regulation No.1, which constitutes the legal basis for multilingualism within the EU, has never been changed in substance, only updated with every new accession, as new official languages have been added.

The challenge for an enlarging EU is multi-fold, the widening of multilingualism is foremost the critical one: the increase is from the present 11 official languages to more languages than the Slavonic (Czech, Polish, Slovak, Slovene), but also include the two Baltic languages (Latvian and Lithuanian) and two non-European languages which are not Indo-European (Estonian and Hungarian) – all these are against the not-so-long ago historical myths of the 'monolithic' Soviet Union and its empire. Further challenges are now with Romania, Bulgaria and will be as Turkey (will) join (cf. Clark 2001).

Perhaps, the challenge is not just in terms of translation and simultaneous interpretations for oral/audio life events, but also the underdevelopment of ICT in the Central and Eastern European societies. The 'digital divide' between rich developed world and the poor developing world is visible even when comparing the transition economies of Eastern Europe and Central Asia with high-income OECD countries.

Recently, the EU initiatives for multilingualism, are embedded with the project of **i2020** (following **eEurope 2002** and **eEurope 2005**), aiming to:



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- establish a **single European information space**, i.e. a truly single market for the digital economy so as to fully exploit the economies of scale, offered by Europe's 500 million strong consumer market;
- reinforce innovation and investment in **ICT research**, given that ICT is a major driver of the economy and;
- promote **inclusion, public services and quality of life** – in other words extending the European values of inclusion and quality of life to the information society.

2.2 The Techno-Lingual Synergy towards Multicultural Communication?

Paralleling to national language policy, the issue of multilingualism is important for a globalizing world, particularly for the further regionalization processes in certain geo-political regions, representing by the inter-Governmental Organizations, like EU, NAFTA, APEC, ASEAN; but there are unresolved issues like:

- The developments and major investments made by the iGOs and RiGOs (like UN and European Commission) in machine translation had failed to deliver the expected results beyond regional and international institutions. Local people are less benefited from the overall global, multilingual initiatives, vis-à-vis, organizational ones.
- There were economic costs associated with a multilingual, globalizing world through the strong prospect that the effective application of ICT could reduce these – like the case in EU.
- There was concern over the threat to the language industries (personal translation / interpretations) arising from ICT and at the same time some prospects that it could be a source of employment.
- There was concern that the increasing use of English (*as lingua franca?*) in international communication would undermine the integrity of all languages and impact on the use and availability of information in less widely spoken languages.



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- The application of ICT was seen as having potential for improving access to information held by the public sector in languages other than those in which it already existed.
- Social benefits in the further multilingual applications by regional and international bodies public use, might be paralleling the economic benefits of the development ICT and the translation-machinery by private vendors (Microsoft, for instance) in this sphere so that a more direct controls over users is questionable
- Resources are required to realize and spread the benefits from the multilingual investments in the application of ICT to language issues. In short, who pay for the bill: the market, the state and/or society (people at large or on individual basis)?

3. RE-PRESENTATION OF (MULTI-)LINGUALISM IN THE MARKET AND CYBERSPACES

We are in global, digital capitalism! ICT are controlling most if not all aspects of our society, under the domination of the neoliberal, pro-market, profit-driven policies, which in turn reinforce socio-economic and political inequalities in the advanced capitalist world - this is the very essence of digital capitalism (Schiller 1999). The (multi-)linguistic turn since then is setting in with more simple and short-form of text and speedy message cyber-communications.

3.1 From *Lingua Franca* to the Acronymization of Communication

Throughout the history of cross-cultural communications, the practice for *Lingua Franca* (Español / French / German / English) is a consequence of socio-economic necessity under certain geo-political hegemonic influence. English is common used today as business language – in our present day global capitalism, a (post)modernity derived from the highly networking of ICT around the world: the global factory and capital-financing networking, as following the Bourdieuan interpretation of power and language. Perhaps, more even so in the ICT development sector and the business inter-activities: more jargons and/or acronyms are used not just for communications between people only, but for the products branding and marketing themselves.

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Taking the following txt.msg on mobile phone:

“use mySAP SCM + mySAP ERP on Windows NT -> it lwr TCO”

Literally it means:

“use the solutions-software package marketed by [My]SAP (the world largest

for Supply Chain Management [SCM], plus SAP’s Enterprise Resource Planning [ERP], running on Microsoft’s Operation System of Windows NT, it lowers TCO [Total Cost of Ownership]

Communications in reality, as well as in cyberspaces require not just the reciprocity of social agencies in terms of networking, but also a parameter for making sense out of the messages in/out codification and de-codification (Katz and Aakhus 2002). The communicative actions and networks imply communities of practice, or epistemic communities, in making sense of textual and semantic meanings within the given context, setting the reciprocal rule(s) of communicative ‘engagement’, as well as (perhaps the most important aspect in) creating new meaning(s) out of the given, limited spaces shaped by the communicative tools (in our case, the Internet for SMS and/or MMS).

The frequent (abusive) use of shared meaning code in txt.msg is a tendency towards standardization of characters, seemingly implying that the standardization of life experience, as well as the harmonization of languages in/beyond cyberspace referring to the simplified English text and ideas.

All the above Three Letter Acronym (TLA), or x-Letter Acronym (x-LA) are more commonly use now a day. Noun / Name – based ABs (abbreviations) and ACs (acronyms) are integral for business communication: LDC (Less Developed Countries), UN, UNDP, UNESCO....

There is virtually no company, department, job role, business process or website that has not got its own x-LA. The EU family (Commission, Parliament, Council of Ministers) has more than several hundreds of acronyms: APEC, ASEAN, EU, EMS, FDI, IMF, NATO, OECD....

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The x-LA is replacing the essence of not just multilingual communication, but also the idiosyncratic (re)presentation of ideas and meanings within a particular culture and ethnic group. As the current language regimes within different institutions of the iGOs (UN families, World Bank, WTO and IMF) are in favor of a few languages as the *lingua franca*, or using x-LA as an alternative *lingua franca* form(s), but they are confronted by the political sensitivities of nation states. For RiGos like the EU, the tensions of merging into a few 'working' languages are also strong, as highlighted by the opposition of French and German governments against the proposal for a single language regime.

Paralleling the movement towards one or two languages as *lingua franca* for multicultural communications, acronyms (x-LA) are being used more often, therefore it is not too early to predict that the further *acronymization* of languages will be the case for business, as well as, social communications in and beyond the cyberspace.

3.2 Magic Texting - txt.msg: New Constellation of Linguistic Meanings

One of the key manifestations of cyber-communication, the mobile one in particular, is the shared meaning and mutual usage of common characters, words and text. James N. Rosenau is half right when he pointed out that "The widespread growth of the Internet, the World Wide Web and the other electronic technologies that are shrinking the world offers considerable potential as a source of democracy." (Rosenau 1998: 46). What most important is the shared meaning, identity and trust derived from the existing social relationship, and with this commonness of sharing, there is an emergence of new linguistic form(s) in the mediated communication in general and the mobile communication in particular. The new linguistic form(s) is fully (re-)presented at the texting, text-messaging (txt.msg) and short message sending (SMS) mode of communications.

The enigma, if not the problematic, of present day wired/wireless mediated communications is the re-creation of new text, semantic and symbolism within the given media – the expressed form(s) and manifestation of communications hence is a contingency of technological set up. More often than not, the communications have to customize into the given logics and designs of the communicative tools



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(e.g., mobile phone and/or PDA with small LCD display screen and miniature buttons) – it ends up into the re-emergence of symbolic code (like the Morse Code in telegraphy).

Below is a quote from a study on the virtual strangers in the Philippines (Ellwood-Clayton, 2003:35):
[Grahic of a kitten] shhh... its me putn a blanket on u so u wont get cold ...hav a warm n. gud nyt sleep. God bless n gud pm. Nino

The above txt.msg example of the simplification of the text form, within a given limited characters, used in the txt.msg (Short-Message-Sending, SMS) sending highlights the emergence of a new way communication in term of text-and-meaning in linguistic terms (Kasesniemi, and Rautiainen, 2002) – a new linguistic turn?

Txt.msg is also strategic for political communication and social mobilization, recent studies of social movement informatics (Lai 2002, 2004a/b; Paragas 2003) highlight that the well chosen (political correct and well articulated) wordings are strategic for the success of social protests and movements at local, regional and global levels.

3.3 Synergy of x-LA to txt.msg: The One Dimensional Multilingualism?

As human communications are shaping by a highly commercialized regime of interaction, under the speedy and efficiency-driven pressure, the x-Letter-Acronyms (x-LA) become a dominant way of expression of, exchange for ideas. This x-LA communicative short-hand (symbolicism?) has been further reinforcing by the txt.msg, SMS, of the mobile and the Internet communications. The domination of the x-LA (x-Letter-Acronym), with specific reference to text and/or phonetic becomes a global trend. The x-LA also has its lineage to the phoneticism. For instance, “B2B” (Business-to-Business) and “B2C” (Busines-to-Consumers), the word “to” is being replaced by a numeric “2”. Yet, x-LA is not just an English speaking world phenomenon, take the case of the “EKZ” (Einkaufszentrum, in German, meaning Shopping-Centre).

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Socio-functional differentiation with linguistic-knowledge specialization, coupled with generalization of professional knowledge via informational media, plus the further specialization processes of business life, facilitates the development of acronyms. For instance, the EU's Eurodicautom, the world largest multilingual terminology database with specific reference for its 23 official languages, has over 400,000 abbreviations (<http://europa.eu.int/eurodicautom/>). The use of acronyms is becoming the default (sub)linguistic requirement for socio-functional communications in our (post)modern world, more particularly it constitutes to the default communications in cyberspace.

Language embodies socio-cultural meanings and orderings, as well as social etiquettes, but the increasing power of x-LA utilization will likely constitute to the normalization/standardization of cultural differences – Languages will become one dimensional. The one dimensional form/way of communications will only reinforce the existing hierarchical power structure - another form of global/regional imperialism?

Languages and communicative actions are the operational representations of our complex ideas. Though we use to think that 'what we think determines what we speak/write/communicate' but the reality is seemingly the otherwise.

For our challenge, against and beyond the techno-limits, and time/space compression which engender certain reductionism towards techno-monolingualistic communications, multilingual encounters and creative (unique cultural specific) interpretations should be promoted. More specifically for cyber-communications, the written (text, txt msg based SMS) and audio-visual (behavioral, MMS) communications should be liberalized from the simple codification of txt.msg and x-LA. The choice for us is between the continuation of the techno-simplicity of the one-dimensional communications and the multi-cultural diversity which enhances linguistic and cultural customization. The call and actions for multilingualism therefore are to embody the essence of multiculturalism and historico-specificity of time and space, hence the highly differentiation of socio-cultural life experience.



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4. THE E-GOVERNMENT DRIVEN MULTI-LINGUISTIC DIFFERENTIATION

The e-government has been, and will be, very important in shaping the cyber-dynamics (Lai 2005, 2008). It is a global trend, if not a fashionable one, that every country, the developing ones in particular, is establishing some form of e-government (see Fig.11). These states' political solution so far for the adoption of ICT into public service is merely serving for better efficiency in administrative terms, but not 'policy-making quality', and the benefits of using ICT are mostly captured by the elitist, powerful, privileged, and selected few of the governing bodies (cf. Andersen, ed. 1995; Margetts 1999; Garson 2000). By default, the e-government initiatives, as well as national language policy, are nation-state building project; therefore their linguistic anchorage is upon the national, official language(s). Promotion of national linguistic usage therefore constitutes the integral parts for multilingualism in a globalizing world. For instance, for the local- customization of technology for e-government projects, the Japanese government is moving towards an open source-code software infrastructure. The Japanese case presents the strength of the market and state power in redefining the open-source code movement.

But for human development at the global scale, we do expect the IGOs (UN, World Bank, WTO, WIPO) can usher their powerful influence to making not just a multilingualism calling, but also to facilitating national language(s) promotion with a liberalization regime of ICT development (like the open-source code movement led by the Linux) which helps individual country to adopt and adapt the necessary know-how and skills.

Fig.11: Schematic Overview of E-Government. Insert Here

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As a global trend, the e-government initiatives will likely not just only strengthen the use of national official language(s) for the mandatory reasons, but also as a catalyst for the re-discovery of mother-tongue(s) and ethnic-origins of the citizens – especially for the minority/migrant groups who use the new communicative spaces for their own projects. This is mainly because of two major factors: the techno and the social ones. First, the some specific information- technological set up (say, paging service and/or SMS of mobile phone) within the pricing regime of mobile communication (say, cheaper to send txt msg than audio- or MMS) will limit the full extent of online, real-time communications. ‘Keep the communication short and speedy’ in terms of x-LA (x-Letter-Acronyms) with shared (de-)coding is the essence of this form of communications. Second and perhaps the most important one, mobile communications (or cyber-communication in general) tend to require a ‘shared’ meaning, identity and/or reciprocity as a pre-condition, which is mostly derived from the existing socio-cultural relationship, say, friendship and kinship (i.e., you will not communicate with someone you don’t know via mobile phone or someone you don’t trust in the cyberspace). This twin conditioning of mobile (cyber-) communications will likely bring the all forms of social fabrics of the pre-modernity: ethnicity, gender, age, identity and most of the ascribing status (who you were/are, what you spoke/speak), hence mother-tongue(s) and the ethnic-specific language(s) and dialect(s) will be re-discovered and invented in/beyond the cyberspace (Nyiri, Ed., 2005).

The e-government, and e-society, project has much to do with national development and the preservation of one’s culture, the promotion of national language(s) in particular. Here, home users are important actors. They tend to engage their cyber-communication with their own mother tongue or the national languages. Recent statistics show the geo-linguistic extent of the internet use (see Fig.12). For home users’ access for the Internet, USA accounts for 43.2%, followed by Japan (12.5%), Germany (9.2%), France (7.7%) and the U.K. (7.5%)



Fig.12: Worldwide Active Internet Home Users (June 2009). Insert Here

Here, the dynamics of the linguistic localization (defined as using the nation official languages), vis-à-vis the international of one single, or several, language(s) (like English) as *lingua franca*, are important to note. This is often a twin development with the linguistic clustering process (among different languages) in a globalizing multiculturalism (Blommaert 2003, 2005). Undoubtedly, the (sub-)linguistic diversity (even for a monolingual society) in the e-society is essentially good for communication!

5. NORMATIVE ASPECTS OF MULTILINGUALISM: ENVISIONING GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY?

Thanks to the advanced application of ICT in the information age, the use of different languages (though English has been dominating as the *lingua franca* so far), is paralleling the globalization process. More specific, the globalization of language(s) as an expanding rather than a limiting force, as Blommaert (2003) rightly observes:

It is an important accomplishment if we manage to see sociolinguistic globalization in these terms: as a matter of particular language varieties entering the repertoires of particular groups, creating new semiotic opportunities and commodities for members of such groups and indeed constructing them as groups. We can now move on and focus on mobility as a key feature of sign complexes in globalization: the fact that language varieties, texts, images, travel across time and space, and that this is a journey across repertoires and sets of indexicalities attached to ingredients of repertoires. A sociolinguistics of globalization is necessarily a sociolinguistics of mobility. (2003: 611)

Intra-regional multi-linguistic communications, as shown in the (seemingly ever-enlarging) EU experience highlights two important aspects of multilingualism. First and foremost, there should have very strong institutional support (in terms of legal binding power) to uphold the multilingualism. In other words, multilingualism cannot and will not work purely base upon a market model (the profit making



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force overweight the underprivileged groups) or a societal model (freedom and self-conscious use of certain languages).

Our case study at section 2.1 shows the extent of the full adoption of new member's language(s), as required by the EU constitutions, for the multilingual initiatives (translation and simultaneous interpretation services) over the forty-some years of EU history. Undoubtedly, the EU experience is more extensive, perhaps more successful and effective, than other iGOs like UN, the World Bank and the IMF which only adopt certain key languages as the 'official' ones.

Second, for the project on multilingualism, there is always a price to pay for but the costing, even in the highly bureaucratic system like the EU (to a certain extent the UN family); but it is less than 1% of the operational cost of the total EU administrative system: less than 2 Euro per European citizen in 1999 (Cunningham 2001). Yet, the price here is not monetary but a socio-cultural and normative one, namely, the social tolerance and acceptance for the diversity (sometimes with embedded contradictions) of multicultural expression and (re-)presentations in our living world. In short, information placed by e-business and e-government agencies, as well as civic groups (NGOs) onto websites must be easy for an average user to locate, understand and participate for civic engagements.

5.1 The Quest for (Rediscovering) Cultural Praxis

The emerging global reality of language mixes and the informational mobility has differential consequences for global society (Blommaert 2003, 2005). Here, a new, or a rejuvenated, approach for making linguistic competence is called for.

The problem of cyber-imperialism and cultural domination should be noted here (Ebo, ed. 2001; Main 2001). The United Nation, comprising 192 nation states, but only 6 official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish), whilst for EU, 27 member countries with 23 official languages. And in other regional blocs, English is the modern *lingua franca*, a de facto standard language in the Internet, the domination effects of the English language in global communication once brought about serious crisis to the existence of minority languages. Furthermore, other than language itself, the



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contents and messages for communication are highly charged for commercial and political purposes, not least is the US style of life (cultural imperialism): movie, music, comics and other visual popular culture, as well as news and documentaries (the US version of the War Against Terrorism represents such case) are cultural manifestation and celebration of the Western, global capitalism. In short, as long as the Internet is based on existent social cultural structure, the Internet would also work for reinforcement of such cultural imperialism (Ogura 2001). But it should be pointed out that, with the further diversification of the languages for cyber-communication, there is hope that national languages will be survived (see Fig.13).

Figure13: Web-Languages Statistics. Insert Here

Here the logics of the mediated communication are the bottom-up process: communities and interest groups create and facilitate themselves. We need to enable the deliberative skills (informational personality) people may possess, and look into about what actually happens in public debate spaces. The Net are instrumental in various stages of socio-linguistic (re-)discovery. More often than not, individual's chat room or discussion list enables people to communicate and learning from each other. Obviously, this is the discovery of new knowledge on socio-linguistic issues, and the building up of the group shared meaning – and capacity building process for social agency (see Fig.14 and Fig.15).

Fig.14: Top Ten Languages Used in the Web

Fig.15: Internet Penetration Rate by Regions

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Beyond the Bourdieuan concept on cultural production and its implication, emphasizing the domestic relationship between the institutionalized national norm and any alternative linguistic varieties, recent sociolinguistic comparative studies show the dramatic prospect of the national language's survival against, and not to surrender to, an English *lingua franca* (Tange 2007). In short, there are more diversity and contradictions within a globalizing world of multilingualism.

5.2 Social (In)E-quality, Justice and E-quity with Linguistic Diversity?

The digital divides (especially, in access to compatible information system) reveal a significant knowledge-skills-experience-and-linguistic (the comprehension and right / relevant use of techno-jargons and acronyms) gap exists in the cyber-communications. Research on the digital divides indicates that citizens vary widely in their ability to use technologies and in the level of social support available to remedy these deficiencies (Norris 2001).

The knowledge-skills gap suggests that equality of participation in online communicative processes requires design(s) that ensures equal access by those with little technological experience, as well as those with less linguistic skills beyond their own mother-tongue (which might not be in textual form) as used by the mainstream linguistic (re-)presentation.

Fueled by market and state forces, ICT development by default brings about the necessity for all people to have access to the Internet. Yet, the same process shape the inevitability of digital divides, along the existing social contours of various fragmentations, segmentations and stratifications such as income, gender, ethnicity and language. The present form of informatization of people's work and societal (-virtual) encounters has reinforced a divided-cum-dual society (Castells 1996). Obviously, there is an urgent need to call for a normative development agenda for the humanization of the ICT – the project of multilingualism: equity, participation and social justice in the system of global/local communications.



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The multilingualism project should therefore be for the reinvention of cultural specificity, promoting social equity and safeguarding people's control over cultural development, the ICT enhanced (wired and wireless, stationary and mobile) communications are a double-edged sword: the Net and ICT can likely be a good facilitating agent for global, cross-cultural communications but at the same time, reinforcing the existing fault-lines between the *lingua franca* and the indigenous languages. Needless to note that there is a normative dimension for the development: equal opportunity, social justice E-equity, e-inclusion. For obvious reasons, the realization of the liberating global communications, the control of the public over ownership and access to airwaves and the information highway, as well as setting their own linguistic agenda.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, the process of globalization adds to the complexity of the contemporary linguistic situation. The challenge for the globalization project is that the recognition of English as the international *lingua franca* (encourages multilingualism?) for non-native speakers, juxtaposing the rejuvenated interest for one's national language to be readily translated into English and vice-versa. Furthermore, the new condition, that the newly positioning of national language(s) into global networks of linguistic variety, demands for their own language production (Blommaert 2005).

5.3 Multilingualism for a Progressive Global Civil Society?

According to our statistics in Fig.2, the number of people globally with access to the Internet increased from 563 million people in 2002 to 1,668 million at June 2009. Here, Asia has overtaken Europe and North Americas' dominance of the global internet access, with over 704 million (42.2% of the total) internet population, followed by Europe with 24.2%, and North Americas (15.1%). The emergence of Asia, a region with the enriched cultural-linguistic diversity, in the cyber-communicative spaces will have strong implication for the future, multiculturalism and intercultural communication in particular.

Cyberspace is an embryo for global civil society. Using ICT for e-mobilization (e.g., cyber-protests or campaigns) has a communicative strength for facilitating the speak-up, act-out and alliance formation in socio-eco-movements, not just by those being victimized by the mainstream pro-growth development

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model. Recent militant protests at the venues (the latest one is the G8 in Genoa, Italy, July 2001) of the EU, the G8, the IMF, the WTO, and World Bank summits have been forcefully articulating the fundamental contradictions between the haves and have-nots, and visualizing the exposing socio-economic fault-lines between the rich and poor, the developed and underdeveloped worlds (Lai 2004a/b). The rights to voice! Representing the victims, potential victims, as well as the advocacies for the nature at large, environmental NGOs have sharpen the demands for global sustainability. How to enhance the advantages of cyberactivism, in the global movement of transnational advocacy networking, with differences and diversities will be the testing case for social development (cf. Lai 2004a/b, 2005, 2008).

For the 20th Century, the predominant development model is a pro-growth and not stainable one, regardless of the politics, capitalist or socialist mode of governance over society and economy. But for the 21st Century, the real challenge for government and society in the post Cold War era is not just the economic crises and ecological sustainable development, but also the survival and rejuvenation of linguistic diversity and multiculturalism in a globalizing world. Here, the ethnics of multilingualism: communicative libertarian versus communitarian approaches for multilingualism, between the individual's free choice model and the 'guaranteed' regime of multilingualism, should be thought through by us. More specifically, people are on the move (migration and transnational job-mobility) – a new form of nomadism, but contradictory fixated in the ethnic-linguistic enclave (Turner 2007). It is therefore meaningful to take the multilingualism as a foundation for socio-equitable development, using languages instead of nation state as the interface for socio-cultural development, since people speaking the same language form their own online community no matter what country they happen to live in.



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15 Figures are Separated from this Text

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