

## 2. FRENCH AS A LINGUA FRANCA

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French was a prestige lingua franca for centuries. Although it is now declining in this role, the French government and French elites have mounted a campaign to promote and defend French in international settings. This chapter examines three basic misconceptions in the arguments advanced in this campaign: (1) The intrinsic qualities of a language are factors in the promotion of a language as a lingua franca; (2) language policy making at national level can affect language practices in international contexts; and (3) language diversity is served by the promotion of another prestige lingua franca. It concludes with a review of some of the pragmatic decisions taken by French nationals to confront the new linguistic situation.

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Notre langue est réputée pour sa clarté, pour la précision de son vocabulaire, pour la richesse de ses verbes et de leur construction, pour la force de sa syntaxe. C'est pour cela que toute l'Europe se l'est approprié il y a trois siècles. (Carrère d'Encausse, 2002).

[Our language is renowned for its clarity, for the precision of its lexis, for the range of its verbal structures and for the power of its syntax. These are the reasons why the whole of Europe adopted it three centuries ago].

This claim that French has special qualities is not unusual in the francophone world. When the *secrétaire perpétuel* of the Académie française, Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, reiterated it in these remarks at the institution's 2002 public meeting, it is unlikely that any of the audience would have queried her or would have been shocked by the assertion. French speakers will probably find it banal. If they search their memory they will realize they have heard it from various authorities. Perhaps they will remember the famous line from Rivarol's essay on the universality of the French language "Ce qui n'est pas clair n'est pas français" (Rivarol, 1783). Perhaps they will remember the words of Senghor, one of the founding fathers of the Francophone movement, who held French to be the language most fitted to be "la

langue de culture de la civilisation universelle” (Senghor, 1961, p. 363). Perhaps they have just read contemporary scholars in the same vein, Colin arguing that French has “un statut et même un rôle à part” (Colin, 2005) or Druon, claiming that French is a “merveilleuse horlogerie de la pensée” particularly suited to discussion of human rights (Druon, 2005).

These claims seem to me to betray misapprehensions about language in general, and lingua francas in particular. The basic premise, that French possesses certain qualities of clarity, precision, and range, making it more appropriate for certain kinds of communication or thought processes than other languages, would be fiercely contested by many linguists, who would argue that all languages are equally complex and can develop to fit any use to which they are put (Bickerton, 1995; Chomsky, 1968, 1988; Steiner, 1975). But, supposing for the sake of argument that we accepted that French is actually a very useful language for certain international political and judicial purposes, having been used in these domains for generations and having developed the lexis and structures necessary for them (see Déléation générale, 2005), we would still have to challenge the second part of Carrère d’Encausse’s assertion. To posit a cause and effect relationship between any unique linguistic property of the French language and its historical role as a lingua franca completely overlooks the political and economic reasons for which languages spread.

This disregard for social, political and economic factors seems to underpin many contributions to the current debate in France on what the present and future role of French could or should be. In this essay I want to review briefly how French acquired its position of prestige lingua franca of Europe in the 17th to 19th centuries and show how the variables that gave it that role mostly disappeared in the 20th. I will argue that the battle to maintain French as lingua franca is unlikely to succeed in the long term because the social, political, and economic influence that the French once possessed and that made their language a major lingua franca has waned. French can only remain in this role if certain nonlinguistic trends are stemmed, and this is outside the competence of a national government.

A further problem in the promotion of French as a lingua franca is the French establishment’s strategy to link support for French as a lingua franca to the battle to maintain linguistic diversity in general. I hope to show that there is some illogicality and inconsistency here. The final section of the chapter will be concerned with the pragmatists, that part of the French population that tends to disregard establishment efforts to defend French and makes choices about foreign language learning and foreign language use in contradiction to official national policy.

### **French, the European Lingua Franca of the Modern Period**

It is usually dangerous to suggest cause and effect in the social and political spheres. It does seem, however, that when use of a language spreads outside the mother tongue group to become a prestige lingua franca, there are always extralinguistic phenomena that precede and accompany the spread. These may be political and military power (one group conquers and rules another), economic power

(one group is the dominant partner in a trading relationship), scholarship and technological superiority (one group has knowledge that others wish to acquire), cultural attractiveness (one group has cultural products that others wish to acquire and/or emulate), religious and ideological leadership (one group develops religious or political ideologies to which others convert), or a mixture of any or all of them. In the historical record of lingua franca spread, we can usually identify several causes. The spread of Latin in the Roman Empire, of Chinese during the Han Dynasty, and of Arabic under the Abbasid Dynasty can be analyzed in this way. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the political, economic, cultural, technological, and ideological dominance of France provides ample reason why others should have either wanted or needed to learn the French language.

First, France was an aggressive and successful military power whose rulers continually pushed back their European frontiers from the end of the Hundred Years War until the first reversal to their policy of expansion in Europe, the loss of Alsace-Lorraine after the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871). France's political and military power was at its height in the long reign of Louis XIV (1643–1715). Louis' wars of expansion took territory from both Spain and the German-speaking world. In the treaties that fixed the new frontiers along the Pyrenees and the Rhine, the king demanded that French be the medium of negotiation. In the Treaty of Rastadt (1714) French replaced Latin as the medium for the written record of diplomacy.<sup>1</sup>

Second, France was the dominant continental economic power. In the early Modern period, France was the largest state in Western Europe, both in terms of population and territory (Braudel, 1986). French trade with European neighbors was important and had linguistic consequences. The academicians who wrote the preface to the 1762 dictionary recognized that not only their countrymen would be using their work but that learners of French as a foreign language would need it too: "La Politique et le Commerce ont rendu notre langue presque aussi nécessaire aux Étrangers que leur langue naturelle" (Académie française, 1762) [Politics and trade have made it almost as necessary for foreigners to know our language as to know their own].

Third, France was a major colonial power in the era of European expansion. French spread as a language of power in all the colonies, acquired at first by a small elite that provided the bilingual class for administration of the empire, and then penetrating vertically into colonized groups as it was adopted as the language of education. In some of France's former colonies, French has remained the official language of state after decolonization.

Fourth, Paris was the major European cultural center for several centuries. In the 17th century, Louis XIII and Louis XIV consciously developed the court as a center of French aristocratic life. Their patronage of the arts, undertaken to confirm their prestige among their own nobility, had immense effect outside France. By the late 17th century, numerous courts had begun to adopt aspects of French culture and to use French within the court (Fumaroli, 2001; Wright, 2004).

Fifth, the French were innovators in the sciences. A number of 18th century French scientists were at the forefront of theoretical advance (e.g., Lavoisier, d'Aubenton, Condillac, d'Alembert, Coulomb, de Lagrange) or innovators in technical applications (e.g., the Montgolfier brothers, Appert, Conté). In the 19th century, France continued to be an important scientific center. For scientists from other countries, the need to follow the work of Niepce and Daguerre, Ampère, Pasteur, the Lumière brothers, Ader, Becquerel and the Curies was a further reason for learning French.

Sixth, the French speaking world was the origin of important philosophical work and the source of a great deal of the new political ideology of the Modern period. Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau paved the way for the concepts of sovereign people and democratic government. Those who wanted to access these ideas in the source texts learned French.

It seems reasonable to see connections here and argue that the use of French as a prestige lingua franca outside the borders of the French state derives principally from these varied reasons that made it useful and profitable for others to learn French. Many were constrained to acquire it because, in their political or economic situations, French speakers were the masters. Others chose to learn it of their own free will, because instrumental reasons abounded: competence in the language was the mark of the learned and the educated, aided social promotion and allowed transnational contact. Of course, the prevalence of French caused some resentment, much as the prevalence of English does today. In 1927, Friedrich Sieburg is reported to have asked with some irritation whether God himself might not be French (quoted in Fumaroli, 2001). Throughout this period there was little overt policy to encourage the use of French outside France. At times, rulers such as Louis XIV and Napoleon III may have insisted on French in meetings to underscore their power. Mostly it spread organically and without any concerted effort to promote it.

### **The Struggle to Resist Change**

We can contrast this with the situation today. In the early 21st century, French is waning as a dominant lingua franca, and it is only since the beginning of its decline that policy initiatives have been launched to promote French as an international lingua franca. Now, if we accept the argument that lingua franca status is a direct result of what is happening in political, economic, cultural, ideological, and technological domains in the society that speaks the language, it is likely that this will be a fruitless enterprise. In all the areas where the balance of power and influence caused French to be the obvious language of international communication, there have been developments which now make that choice of French highly unlikely (Drake, 2004).

First, the political situation has changed. During the 19th century, France's position as the undisputed heavyweight in Europe was challenged. The defeats of Napoleon I and Napoleon III halted territorial expansion. The economic and military strength of the newly unified Germany, Britain at the height of its imperial power

and the growing might and influence of the United States altered the balance of power radically. The realignment of power was confirmed by the political events of the 20th century. By the end of the Second World War, France was no longer politically dominant.

The new balance of power was immediately reflected by new language practices in international diplomacy. The English speakers negotiating the treaties at the end of the First World War had had to argue vigorously for English to be used alongside French. At the end of the Second World War, France, diminished by its defeat and its government's collaboration with Nazi Germany, was not even represented in the discussions at Yalta and Potsdam, and thus there was no reason for French to be a medium of discussion.

The continuous retreat of French as a prestige lingua franca accompanied the continuing decline of French influence in international affairs. Close on the heels of the disaster of the Second World War came the doomed military attempts to maintain the French empire and the notorious instability of France's Fourth Republic (1944–1958). By the mid 20th century, French had ceased to be the automatic choice for the official language of international organizations. French was not proposed as one of the languages of the United Nations when it was set up and the French had to lobby hard to have the language included as one of the six official languages.

Since 1945 there has been a proliferation of authorities that manage the governance of supranational institutions and a globalizing world (GATT/WTO, World Bank, G8, etc.) and it is English rather than French that is the working language of these institutions. One might expect English use in these major economic institutions, both because of their genesis and their ideological underpinning, but the move to English has happened too in other, older associations, which traditionally used French.

The Olympic movement is a good example. With headquarters in Lausanne, the French speaking part of Switzerland, and with French-speaking presidents in its early days, the executive authorities of the Olympic movement conserved a preference for French until very recently. However, there now appears to be a shift to English both within the institution and in its dealings with the wider world. The change was to be noted as representatives of the competing cities to host the 2012 Olympics felt they were not jeopardizing their bids by making them in English.<sup>2</sup> The change is clear at the Games themselves. If the organizers of the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin agreed to the use of French as an official language (Agence France Press, 2005), such a role is not at all assured in the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. Preparations for the Beijing games include language classes, but French is not on the list (Beijing Times, 2001). Hervé Bourges recently reported on the extent of this language shift to the international Francophone movement and called for steps to be taken to reverse it (Fralon, 2004).

The difficulty of taking such steps returns us to the linked nature of lingua franca and power. De Gaulle clearly understood the relationship. In his presidency

he sought to restore France to its former position by offering leadership to the non-aligned countries and an alternative to the blocs led by the United States and the USSR. Efforts to promote French political leadership were accompanied with support for the French language. The Office de la Langue Française became the Haut Comité pour la Défense et l'Expansion de la Langue Française, an institution with the function to promote French abroad and encourage the use of French in international organizations. The determined efforts of de Gaulle to establish France as leader of the nonaligned nations had little long term success. Promotion of the French language was also fairly ineffectual. The lesson here is that the will of a national government and a robust national language policy are not enough on their own to ensure that a national language will continue to play the role of an international *lingua franca*.

Second, the economic situation has changed. In the immediate post World War II era, France maintained economic weight, in part, because of the European Economic Community (EEC). In the EEC of the original six countries, the French government was the natural leader, because Germany and Italy were still working to rehabilitate themselves after the events of the fascist period, and the Benelux countries were comparatively smaller polities. The language practices of the EEC reflected these power relationships. The founding document of the EEC states that all the official languages of participant states will be the official languages of the EEC. However, in the early years, the working language was largely French (Fosty, 1985). Not only were the French the major players, the institutions of the EEC were all sited on territory either wholly or partially French speaking: Strasbourg, Luxembourg, and Brussels.

With the EEC's enlargement, the position of French as the main working language has been challenged. The first accessions did not provoke a significant shift, because, although the admission of the United Kingdom and Ireland brought mother tongue speakers of English into the group, the entry of Greece, Portugal, and Spain reinforced the francophone nature of Common Market institutions. Southern European bureaucrats and politicians in the 1980s were of a generation likely to have had French as their second language (Fosty, 1985, Wright, 2000). However, the accession of Sweden, Austria, Finland (1995), and Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Cyprus, and Malta (2004) altered the linguistic balance substantially. As the French have noted with concern, these countries proved to have a majority of politicians and bureaucrats whose *lingua franca* was English (Leparmentier, 2004). This together with the likelihood that younger generations of Spaniards, Portuguese, and Greeks learned English rather than French is changing the *lingua franca* regime in the European Union (EU; Ginsburgh & Weber, 2005).

The appointment of a new Commission under José Manuel Barroso in October 2004 is a good illustration of changing patterns of political influence and the way language practice interacts with them. The French government was irritated that the three most influential posts had been allocated to Dutch, British, and Irish commissioners, disliking particularly the appointment of the Briton, Peter

Mandelson, to the key role of commissioner for trade in place of the French socialist, Pascal Lamy. It complained, correctly, that these appointments reflected a move to an Anglo-Saxon free market model (Nexon, 2004).

Barely half of the new Commissioners speak any French, and lobbying firms are now rarely francophone. *Le Point*, the French weekly magazine suggests that the effect of the new language regime will be a loss of French influence (Nexon, 2004). This appears to be the case; the French commissioner, Jacques Barrot, was nominated to a second-rank portfolio. Nexon surmises that this was, in part, because he does not speak English. In the Commission for Transport that he heads, he has seen the need to appoint a Brit to a high profile post “pour pratiquer l’anglais.” However, despite giving a number of political and economic reasons for the decline of French influence, Nexon still seems to suggest that language shift is a cause rather than effect. The French press, like French politicians, often imply this, which turns the power relationship on its head.

Even in the European Parliament, the institution with the clearest commitment to maintaining plurilingualism, the acceptance of English as a lingua franca has been growing. One député, Bernard Perrut, complained that the president of the European Central Bank, a Frenchman, had chosen to give his yearly report to the European Parliament in English. Perrut asked the government that French nationals be instructed to use French (*Journal Officiel* 28/06/05).<sup>3</sup>

In the judiciary of the EU, there has also been a language shift. English is being used more and more in the legal domain, an area where French was traditionally the working language (O’Shuibhne, 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Poggeschi, 2005). This has provoked robust attempts to reverse the trend. Three senior French officials, including Maurice Druon of the Académie Française, petitioned Brussels in the winter of 2004–2005 to ask that French be made the official language of the EU justice system and that the French translation of all legal and normative documents be the definitive version. The petitioners<sup>4</sup> make several points, some of which are more defensible than others. Druon (2005) rightly points out that French written law has been the model for many European countries since Napoleon and is still used as a template (e.g., recent legislation in Russia, Vietnam, Brazil). But he also suggests that French is somehow more suitable for legal matters, because it is more precise and better adapted.<sup>5</sup> This is a highly contentious argument as we discussed earlier, and has been dismissed as nonsense in France itself. Professor Jacques Bille is reported in *Time Magazine* as saying:

This is built on a Napoleonic-era pretension that French is somehow more airtight than other languages... A lot of people in France just can’t accept that English is the working language of Europe. (Crumley, 2004)

When Druon presented his case to the Commission des Affaires Étrangères at the National Assembly in February 2005, he evoked the reasons for the pre-eminence of French in the past and recognized that these had disappeared:



Ne nous complaisons pas aux stériles nostalgies des siècles où l'Europe était le continent le plus puissant de la planète, et où le français, étant la langue communément employée par toutes les élites européennes, jouissait d'une incontestable prépondérance. Ces jours-là ne reviendront pas. Par l'effet des deux guerres mondiales, maintes dominations et suprématies sont passées sur un autre continent (Druon, 2005).

[Let us not indulge in sterile nostalgia for those centuries when Europe was the most powerful continent on the planet and when French, the language used by all European elites, enjoyed uncontested supremacy. Those days won't come again. After the two world wars, much influence and preeminence have passed to another continent.]

However, the conclusion that he drew from this was that the French should adopt different policies and strategies to promote their language. It seems perverse that Druon should not understand “cultural capital.” It was, after all, another Frenchman, Pierre Bourdieu, who developed the concept.

### **The Role of Lingua Francas**

Those who supported the petition to make French the judicial language maintained that they were not anti-English, but simply resisting uniformity. The conservative politician Bourg-Broc argued: “This isn't about fighting English, but rather the use and influence of any language at the cost of all others...it's about safeguarding cultural and linguistic diversity by resisting uniformity” (Crumley, 2004). This line of argument which conflates support for French as a lingua franca and backing for diversity/resistance to uniformity appears frequently. There are a number of illogicalities in the arguments to support this position, and it is these that I now want to review.

### Why Have More Than One Lingua Franca?

The first argument that does not hold up is the claim that two lingua francas are better than one. The advantage of a lingua franca must be that it permits interaction among speakers of various languages and that the more people who speak it, the greater the number of available interlocutors. Language is one of the few resources which is inexhaustible, where, the more it is used, the greater the utility. The case for dividing a community of communication and having two lingua francas is not self-evident. If it were in fact possible to control lingua franca use and have two languages fulfilling the function, how would that benefit non-French and non-English speaking groups? They would still be disadvantaged by not being mother tongue speakers of the lingua francas, but, in the new scenario, would have two additional languages to acquire rather than one, with all the financial and opportunity costs this would incur. There would, of course, be some counterbalance to the



advantage that now accrues to mother tongue English speakers. The advantage would be shared between them and mother tongue French speakers. This does not, however, make the situation fairer for the vast majority, who are neither.

On the question of fairness, Jonathan Pool (1991) and Philippe van Parijs (2002) have written trenchant analyses of language choice from a Rawlsian perspective. They argue that a common language is a common good that benefits all. However, when a common language is the mother tongue of one of the groups benefiting, this is unfair, because its members do not need to pay for the common good. Van Parijs suggests a solution; that anglophones pay the costs (or some of them) for the *teaching* of the lingua franca and that nonanglophones continue to contribute the effort of *learning*. This division of costs is, of course, an ideal solution, unlikely to gain acceptance in the anglophone world, which currently profits enormously from the world wide English teaching industry rather than paying for it (Phillipson, 1992).

### A Single Lingua Franca and a Single World View?

If we accept that a single lingua franca is more useful in global terms than a plurality of lingua francas, what are the problems that could result from this? President Chirac has enumerated several that are currency in the defense of French movement. In speeches during a visit to Vietnam in October 2004, he advanced the very Sapir-Whorfian idea that one language must entail a single world view.

Et rien ne serait pire, je crois, pour l'humanité, que de progresser vers une situation où il y aurait une seule langue. Parce que cela conduit forcément à une espèce de rétrécissement de la pensée. Une langue, c'est également l'expression d'une pensée. Parler tous la même langue, c'est forcément rétrécir la pensée, et cela finirait par avoir des conséquences graves (Chirac, 2004a).

[Nothing would be worse, I think, for humanity than to move to a situation where there were to be only one language. Because that would lead inevitably to a kind of restriction of thought. A language is the expression of thought. If we all spoke the same language that would inevitably constrain thought processes and would have grave consequences.]

The first thing to question is whether it is likely that we shall all come to speak one language. If English spreads in traditional prestige lingua franca fashion then the monolingual scenario will be most improbable. A prestige lingua franca produces circumstances that resemble Ferguson's (1959) description of diglossic situations. Speakers have clear domains for each language. Those who are working in a call center using English or writing scientific papers in English are not likely to start using English in the home, in their neighbourhoods, with their social group, in their moments of intimacy.

The next presumption that needs to be challenged is that the spread of English is an “end of history” scenario. A monoglot planet seems unlikely. Why should we think that the spread of English will not be reversed in the future? Why should English be the first lingua franca that is not eclipsed by the language of the next political and economic power? We cannot yet know what this will be, but we can imagine scenarios where Arabic or Chinese extend their lingua franca function. Lingua francas are learned for instrumental not integrative reasons. People will switch to another lingua franca if it promises more cultural capital. Shift in a second language, acquired in education, happens much less painfully and more quickly than shift in a first language, acquired in socialization.

Others argue, however, that there may indeed be something different about English, because of the scale of the language spread. Commentators (e.g., Phillipson, 2003, Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) have noted that the language has penetrated vertically into populations. It is not just elites that learn and use this lingua franca. So we might wonder whether the scale of this second language learning could perhaps lead to a critical mass, which could change the rules and cause a large scale shift to English.

However, such a development would be likely to cause another phenomenon that will prevent convergence. From past experience we know that, as large numbers of speakers acquire a language, heteroglossia increases. This appears to be already happening within the English-speaking world. Three decades ago Braj Kachru founded the journal *World Englishes*, which recognized the plurality of varieties under the umbrella of English. Since the 1980s there has been a wealth of scholarship on the divergence occurring among communities of mother tongue English speakers (e.g., Canagarajah, 1999, this volume). There are also new varieties of English developing among those who use the language as an additional language. Some very interesting work is being carried out in the Universities of Vienna and London on this phenomenon in Europe (Jenkins, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2001; Seidlhofer, Breiteneder, & Pitzl, this volume). Whether appropriation and the development of new varieties are positive or negative is of course debatable. On the negative side, a lingua franca that did not maintain mutual comprehensibility among its speakers would lose some of its utility. On the positive side, the development shows that the danger of the world becoming a monotonous, monolingual space is highly unlikely, and that, as George Steiner (1975) has ably argued, language is always the property of those who use it and will always develop as an expression of their meanings.

### **Is Promotion of a Lingua Franca Compatible with Cultural Diversity?**

#### In the World at Large

One of the strategies employed in the promotion of French as a lingua franca is to link support for French to the general defence of cultural diversity. This link is prominent in many policy documents and appears in a very clear form in the statutes of the language planning institutions. The role of the Délégation à la Langue Française is stated as : « de veiller à la promotion et l'emploi du français sur le

territoire national, de favoriser son utilisation comme langue de communication internationale et de développer le plurilinguisme, garant de la diversité culturelle. » [to oversee the promotion and use of French on national territory, to encourage its use as a language of international communication and to develop plurilingualism, the guarantee of cultural diversity].

These two aims are difficult to reconcile. How could the success of another lingua franca serve the cause of diversity any better than the spread of English? The contradiction inherent in promoting one's own language as a lingua franca alongside support for general linguistic diversity arises frequently. In President Chirac's visit to Vietnam in October 2004, the conflict was clear. The president reaffirmed the French government's commitment to working with Vietnam to defend the right of groups to subsidize their own culture and to protect cultural diversity: "(N)ous sommes heureux du travail accompli avec le Vietnam au sein de la francophonie et à l'UNESCO, pour faire aboutir le projet de Convention sur la diversité culturelle" (Chirac, 2004b) [We are pleased with the work we have undertaken with Vietnam within the francophone world and with UNESCO to bring about the Convention on Cultural Diversity].

But, in the same speech, Chirac also spoke of his pleasure at the success of policies, which have made French a medium of the Vietnamese secondary and higher education systems. He pledged to extend the possibility of studying through French at university level: "La France a la volonté de rester un pôle de référence pour la formation des élites vietnamiennes. Nous allons ainsi créer à Hanoi et Ho Chi Min ville des pôles universitaires français au sein de l'université internationale du Vietnam" (Chirac, 2004b). [France wants to continue to be a center which Vietnam can turn to for the education of its elites. We are thus going to create French university centers within the International University of Vietnam in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City].

The issue here is whether these two aims are compatible. The movements of support for cultural diversity usually see protection of scholarship in national languages as part of the struggle. And, if secondary and tertiary education in English is a threat to linguistic and cultural diversity, why does French medium education not have the same effect? I am not suggesting that the Francophone movement's support for the cash-strapped Vietnamese education service is a bad thing. Far from it. French help has supported the Vietnamese desire for greater contact and exchange with the outside world. I simply wonder why moving to French instead of English is not also a danger for cultural diversity, and can be promoted alongside reiteration of pledges to diversity. Lingua francas always oust other languages from certain domains.

The answer to this may be that the president is in fact making a different pledge and using a code to maintain diplomatic niceties. It may be resistance to the spread of English and U.S. cultural hegemony rather than cultural diversity that is his true aim. He seemed to be making this point overtly in a speech to Vietnamese students where his attack on the United States was quite blunt:

(L)a France, ainsi d'ailleurs que l'Union européenne, mais aussi la francophonie, et bien d'autres pays, se battent effectivement pour que l'on reconnaisse la spécificité de la création culturelle. C'est ce que nous appelons la diversité culturelle. Alors nous avons à ce titre, c'est vrai, une sorte de combat contre les thèses américaines qui, elles, ayant beaucoup de moyens financiers, peuvent s'imposer sans aides de l'Etat. Mais le résultat c'est que l'on risque d'étouffer la création culturelle de tous les autres et finir par avoir une sous culture générale dans le monde, ce qui serait la pire des situations." (Chirac, 2004a).

[France, the EU, the countries of Francophonie and a good number of others are fighting to have the particular needs of the cultural industries recognized. This is what we call cultural diversity. In this regard we are, it is true, resisting the American point of view. As the Americans are well placed financially they can flourish without state support. But the result is that we are risking that the cultural products of all the other groups will be stifled, and we shall end up with one undifferentiated subculture which would be the worst of all possible outcomes.]

Certainly Chirac is right that adherence to the strict laws of the WTO without 'l'exception culturelle' will mean that national groups cannot subsidize their culture. He is also right that a lingua franca tends to promote a flow of ideas from the originating society to other groups. The export statistics of cultural products (film, television programs, computer games, books, magazine, songs, etc.) demonstrate that it is the United States that exports to the rest of the world in these domains and not the rest of the world that exports to the United States (Wright, 2004). However, to jump from this imbalance to the prediction of one single subculture in the world seems extravagant, and as far-fetched as the threat of a monotone, monolingual planet.

### In the European Union

Further conflation of promotion of French and defence of diversity can be detected in much French discourse about language within the EU. For example, on June 7, 2005, the French member of the European Parliament, Jean Michel, complained that the spread of English within the institutions of the EU was contrary to the right of citizens to interact with the EU in their own national language. He recognized that a multilingual group has to find some means of communication, but feels that diversity should not be lost in the adoption of a single lingua franca:

il n'est pas envisageable que sa diversité culturelle soit sacrifiée par manque de courage au profit d'une seule et même langue" (Questions parlementaires, *Journal Officiel*, June 7, 2005). As the speech progresses it becomes clear, however, that Michel is not defending plurilingualism at all. He is regretting the fact that French is

no longer the main lingua franca and suggesting that the guarantees of diversity can be used to promote French:

La France doit exiger le respect des traités qui prévoient la parité. Il lui demande donc de bien vouloir lui indiquer les initiatives que le Gouvernement entend prendre au niveau communautaire pour régler un problème linguistique majeur qui risquerait d'aboutir à une forme d'uniformité dommageable pour l'Europe, alors que le français a été jusqu'à une période récente la langue de la diplomatie et qu'on ne peut admettre ni sa disparition ni son rabaissement par rapport à la langue des Anglo-Saxons (*Questions parlementaires, Journal Officiel*, June 7, 2005).

[France must insist that the treaties that guarantee equality be respected. What initiatives does the government intend to take at Community level to solve a serious language problem, which could bring about a uniformity harmful for Europe? French has been until recently the language of diplomacy, and we cannot allow its disappearance nor its demotion in relation to the language of the Anglo-Saxons.]

Thus it seems that “plurilingualism” is being hijacked to defend French. There is certainly little evidence that demonstrates how the French are promoting the interests of all linguistic groups. It was the French presidency of the EU (1995) that proposed reducing the working languages in the EU to five (English, German, French, Spanish, and Italian). Speakers of other languages, particularly the Greeks, rejected this angrily. Critics found the proposal illogical. Once the ideal of full plurilingualism in the EU is abandoned, there does seem to be little point in having five official languages unless the aim is simply to protect the status of those languages. Alain Lamassoure, a French MEP, has been open in stating establishment strategy: “Soit on a le courage de dire qu’il faut travailler avec cinq ou six langues, et c’est le seul moyen de sauver le français. Sinon l’anglais s’imposera” (*Le Monde*, 2004, p. 6). [Either we have the courage to say that we must work with five or six languages—and that is the only way to save French—or we let English dominate].

Policy documents consistently reveal the preoccupation with French rather than plurilingualism. A *vade-mecum* is very insistent in its instructions to French members of the European institutions to continue to use French if there are meetings where French documentation and interpreting are not available (Ministère des Affaires étrangères, 2002). There is no mention of action if there is a lack of translation and interpretation into other official languages. A speech by President Chirac just before the last enlargement discusses strategies to ensure that French continue to be a language which is *privilegiée* in European institutions (Chirac, 2003a). To this end the French government has allotted substantial funding to pay for French language classes for the politicians and civil servants of the accession countries (*Journal Officiel*, January 4, 2005).

In the domain of education, arguments have been similar. There has been a promotion of plurilingualism which when analyzed simply appears to be a way of keeping French in the education systems of the member states. In Michel Rocard's 1987 book, the point is overt. He argued that the political unification of Europe would not progress without some kind of linguistic accommodation and that without intervention the linguistic outcome was likely to be the spread of English. To prevent this he argued that the Council should legislate for a plurilingualism that would see the children of Germanic language communities learning a Romance language and the children of Romance language speakers a Germanic language. This would promote French, because: "(S)'il est certain que les pays de langue romane choisiraient majoritairement l'anglais, en revanche la majorité des pays de langue germanique choisirait probablement le français, qui reste la langue romane de prestige en Europe" (Rocard, 1987, p. 279). [Although the majority of Romance language countries would surely choose English, the majority of Germanic language countries would probably choose French, which would then continue to be the prestige Romance language in Europe.] As in so many of the French texts on this topic, Rocard does not explain the premises of this argument. First, why, if understanding and communication is paramount, is it necessary to block the spread of English which seems to be permitting transnational networks in a modest way? Second, why *must* other community members support a policy which is designed to promote French? What do they get out of it? Rocard is not convincing on the advantages of such a policy and of course it never came to pass. The situation where his idea would be theoretically possible is now long past, given the accessions of the past two decades.

However, the French did win support for a less radical foreign language initiative. In July 1998 the French proposal that EU children should study two foreign languages in secondary school was accepted as a Council of Europe recommendation. In March 2002, the Barcelona meeting of the European Council recommended that two foreign languages be taught to primary children. This too can be seen as a strategy to ensure that French stays in the curriculum as a foreign language rather than as a policy to promote plurilingualism. Certainly it is regularly interpreted in this way in francophone literature: "Paradoxalement, en proposant l'option du trilinguisme, le Président de la République française, se place, en fait, dans une perspective de défense du français. Car c'est une invitation à ne pas considérer que 'hors de l'anglais, point de salut'" (del Pup, 2004). [Paradoxically, by proposing the the three language option, the French president has actually come to the defence of French, because trilingualism is an invitation to reconsider the assumption that English is the only solution].

### **Plurilingualism at Supranational Level, Monolingualism at National**

The avowed enthusiasm of the French government and elites for plurilingualism at international level has seemed an odd development to many commentators (e.g., Blanchet, Breton, & Schiffman, 1999), because of their poor record on defending diversity within the state. The Republican belief that equality and democracy require a community of communication has led to a resolutely

monolingual polity where there is little space for even the symbolic use of the other languages of France. The history of how French became the language of the French nation has been well documented elsewhere (Ager, 1990; Rickard, 1974), and it will be sufficient here to note simply that the spread and penetration of French as the national language is a remarkable instance of language in the service of nation building. Knowledge of the other languages of France (Basque, Breton, Catalan, Corsican, Flemish, langues d'oc, langues d'oïl, the Germanic dialects of Alsace and Moselle) declined spectacularly in the 20th century (Blanchet et al., 1999). Even where speakers were going against the trend and maintaining some bilingualism, there is now indication of shift to French, as Blackwood (2004) documents in his work on the progressive gallicization of Corsica.

In the late 20th century, state monolingualism has been challenged in much of Western Europe. There has been widespread revitalization of the languages eclipsed by the spread of the national language(s). The Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is the most developed legal instrument for the revitalization and promotion of autochthonous minority languages. Provision for minority linguistic groups has become a requirement for new states wishing to join organizations such as the EU and the Council of Europe.

However, the French government has not committed the French to such accommodation. The French government representative signed the charter in 1999, but it was not ratified. In somewhat mysterious circumstances, urged perhaps by the president, the Constitutional Council ruled it would be unconstitutional to do so. Chirac's apparent stance in this matter is at severe odds with his declarations of support for cultural diversity in general and personal bilingualism in particular. After all it was this president who told young Tunisian Arabic-French bilinguals: "Je crois que le fait d'être bilingue pour quelqu'un et notamment pour un jeune, c'est un grand atout" (Chirac, 2003b, p. 2). [I think that being bilingual is a big advantage for anyone, and particularly for a young person].

Thus recognition of linguistic diversity in France has been much more restrained than in most other European states. And the little that has been achieved has produced a somewhat apoplectic reaction in parts of the establishment. When the language planning agency was renamed the *Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France* so that it could make policy for the other languages of France, Hélène Carrère d'Encausse made this impassioned attack:

Comment aussi ne pas être alarmé par la volonté affirmée, louable certes, d'un haut Responsable politique d'«assurer sur notre territoire la *primauté* du français, langue de la République»? Primauté implique la coexistence du français avec d'autres langues, alors que c'est le principe d'*unicité*, c'est-à-dire qu'elle était unique, qui depuis cinq siècles a défini son statut. . . je lance ici un véritable cri d'alarme. N'ignorons pas ce péril, sauvons notre langue quand il en est encore temps, car ce qui est en cause c'est nous tous, notre



longue histoire, notre vie commune, notre identité. (Carrère d'Encausse, 2002)

[One is bound to be alarmed when a highly placed politician declares his intention to “ensure the primacy of French, the language of the Republic on our national territory.” Primacy implies that French shares that space with other languages, whereas it is the principle of “unicité” (oneness), the fact that French is the sole language of state that has defined its status for the past five centuries. I am raising the alarm! We must not ignore this danger. Let us save our language while there is still time, because what is at stake is “us,” our long history, our communal life and our identity].

The small groups who are fighting for the right to use their languages in France would be most unlikely to agree that there is any “peril” or to see any sign of shift away from French in France.

There thus seems to be intellectual confusion: a significant group in the French elite continues to argue that monolingualism is essential for political well-being at national level, but finds plurilingualism necessary for healthy international development, without explaining the apparent contradiction. If the development of a community of communication serves to widen participation and aids equality and democracy at national level, why does this process become disastrous at supranational level? This seems to me a view that is anchored in the past. Its supporters have a Westphalian view of a concert of nations.

### **Pragmatism and Acceptance of English as a Tool**

Alongside these traditional establishment attitudes, however, there are many instances of a new “postnational” way of thinking. I will mention just three among a number of developments that seem to herald a new departure, a willingness to participate in global developments without seeing the move to English as necessarily a defeat and an acceptance of American dominance of culture and ideology.

#### Flouting the Toubon Laws?

In 1994, Edouard Balladur's government introduced law 94-665, commonly called the loi Toubon. Extending the loi Bas-Lauriol (1975), the 1994 legislation required that French be the language for labelling and instructions for use on packaging, for all contracts and official documents, all public services, for all public signage within France. The possibility of using any other language than French for conferences held in France, for public or private education and on the radio and the television was strictly circumscribed. A number of associations (Association Francophone d'Amitié et de Liaison, Avenir de la Langue Française, Défense de la Langue française etc.) were charged with monitoring any infringement and taking those in breach of the law to court. A small number of offenders have been fined in the intervening decades. The interesting thing, however, is the widespread flouting

of the law. This has happened in all spheres and is widely recognized if not documented and publicized. The contraventions that I report on here concern the rules for the medium of education and the language for scientific conferences.

### English as the Medium for Education

Article 11 of the *Loi 94-665 du 4 août 1994 relative à l'emploi de la langue française* says quite clearly that French must be the medium of education:

The language of instruction, examinations and competitive examinations, as well as theses and dissertations in State and private educational institutions shall be French, except for cases justified by the need to teach foreign and regional languages and cultures or where the teachers are associate teachers or guest teachers.<sup>6</sup>

However, it is now common practice for business schools and universities to run programs in English for French nationals. It is difficult to quantify this because it is illegal. My knowledge comes from extensive anecdotal evidence from a large number of people I know involved in doing so. Those I interviewed for this discussion said that they are responding to a demand from French students, who wish to learn English through using it as a medium of study and so prepare themselves for careers where they will be expected to speak the current lingua franca.

The business schools and universities surveyed also run English medium programs designed to attract international students who come either as private individuals or on numerous exchange programs. According to informants, enrollment in French medium programs has been pitifully low in these universities and business schools, and so courses are now offered in English. Interviews with two groups of students on Erasmus exchange programs in universities in the south of France produced a consensus: these students did not see the utility of learning another lingua franca alongside the one that they are already struggling to master. If English medium courses had not been available in France, they would have elected to study in other Erasmus partner countries where they were.

Thus English is becoming a medium of education in France despite the law. This causes problems for the French of which others have been long aware. How can the French heritage be protected at the same time as the society opens up to international exchange? Those ignoring the law justify their actions by arguing that at the present moment English opens doors, equipping French students to participate in the global movement of students and France to welcome a diverse student body from the whole planet. An administrator offered this controversial view:

Proposer des cours en anglais est incontournable si on veut rester parmi les grands. L'anglais n'est plus, à mon avis, la language (sic) des Anglophones, c'est une langue qui m'appartient, moi aussi, si je veux sauvegarder mes relations avec le monde extérieur.... Ce qui a été convenu à Bologne<sup>7</sup> requiert qu'on accepte une seule

lingua franca. De nos jours c'est forcément l'anglais. D'autres solutions n'ont aucun sens (Administrator French Business School, 2004).<sup>8</sup>

[We have to offer courses in English if we want to remain among the best. English is not the language of English speakers. It belongs to me too if I want to keep up my relations with the wider world. What was agreed at Bologna requires us to accept a single lingua franca. At the present time this is English. Other solutions (to the communication problem) don't make sense.]

### Making One's Scientific Work Known

A similar refusal to be limited to the national arena is strong among the research community. The scientific lobby restrained Jacques Toubon from ruling that all research funded by the French government be published in French. Article 7 of the *Loi 94-665 du 4 août 1994 relative à l'emploi de la langue française* only requires that

publications, reviews and papers distributed in France and drafted in a foreign language shall include at least a summary in French when the said publications, reviews and papers are issued by a public corporate body, a private person on a public service assignment or a private person subsidized by public funds.

Even this minimal commitment is often flouted, not least perhaps because younger scientists are now not used to writing scholarly text in French (Chassériaux, 2005). There is a stronger requirement in Article 6, which stipulates that

Any participant in an event, seminar or convention organized in France by natural persons or corporate bodies of French nationality has the right to express himself in French. Documents distributed to participants before and during the meeting for the presentation of the program must be drafted in French and may include translations in one or more foreign languages.

But this too has often been flouted, and groups such as *Défense de la langue française* have used their power to take educational establishments to court. In December, 1999, the Conservatoire national des arts et métiers was fined 6,500 Euros for having run a conference on software systems and engineering entirely in English.

It is understandable why those concerned to defend the use of French in all domains are worried. Durand (2001) gives the reasons why French scientists should not accept the pressure to publish in English. Most importantly he argues that using English means that French does not acquire the vocabulary for the domain and will cease to be a language of cutting-edge science. He worries that francophone

researchers may be at a disadvantage working through their second language. Other reasons are perhaps less self-evident. The argument that French was once the scientific language chosen by many notable scientists, for example, Pasteur and the Curies, seems irrelevant. The fear that publishing in Anglo-American journals means being evaluated by Anglo-Saxons is not borne out by any of the Editorial Board lists in the journals researched. The argument that humans apprehend reality differently depending on their language and that this is useful for diverse creativity is controversial and not proven.

I asked six researchers in a Grande École<sup>9</sup> in different stages of their career (post doc, mid career, and eminent) to respond to this and to comment on the pressure on them to use English. None found the reasons given above sufficient to opt out of the Anglophone scientific community. They contended that their first loyalty was to science and its dissemination, not the promotion of a language, even their own national language. They perceive their dilemma to be the same as that which the EU and other international bodies have encountered. How can the international scientific community communicate if there is no common language? The tradition in academia has always been the acceptance of a language of scholarship which allows exchange; Latin, Greek, German, French, Arabic, Chinese have all been used in this role. The researchers are pragmatic in accepting the historical reasons why it is English at the moment. They do not feel that they are particularly disadvantaged by working through their second language. They have fluency in their domains because of their patterns of working. They submit articles to journals which are English medium but not necessarily Anglo-Saxon. The Dutch are major publishers of English-medium scientific journals and have been for several decades. In these investigators' experience, reviewers are not necessarily Anglo-Saxon but anglophone. The older members of the group themselves review for both English medium and French medium publications. They all refused to comment on the Pasteur/Curie argument, treating it as simply foolish. None believed that a particular language imposes or encourages a particular scientific understanding. One suggested that if this were true, bilingual working practices would help researchers to overcome the tramlines of thought imposed by their mother tongue. They all accepted as a given that they should publicize their work in English. This shift among French natural scientists was first noted in a major conference in Quebec in 1981 (Lapointe & Mercier, 1983). The *Rapport au parlement sur l'emploi de la langue française* (2005) makes clear how this tendency has become normal practice.

Even those who are committed to fighting the dominance of English in science and who argue that research should be published in national journals before being submitted to Anglo-American journals admit the dangers of not publishing in English. Hadoux (2002) cites the case of Maurice Allais who did not receive the Nobel Prize for Economics until 1988, five years after his student, Gérard Debreu. She argues that, because Allais published only in French, he remained relatively unknown and unrecognized by the international community.

Both these sets of interviews are of course anecdotal and do not constitute rigorous scientific inquiry. However, they do provide reasons for behavior which is

apparent and widespread. They indicate that the French public is not always in agreement with official language policy. The mismatch needs further investigation.

### Grassroots Response

The extent to which the French are making efforts to acquire English show that they do not wholly accept the diversity argument. English is by far the most common modern foreign language learned in both secondary and primary schools (Eurydice, 2000, 2005). The Thélot Commission, which orchestrated a national debate on education in France in its entirety in 2003–2004, found widespread support for English in the primary school and a desire for the education service to improve the levels of competence of older pupils, whose skills compare unfavorably with those of other learners of English in other member states (Bonnet et Levasseur, 2004; Thélot, 2004). The advantages of knowing the current lingua franca are constantly presented to the French public: French political figures discuss how they need to improve their English language skills so that they can operate outside the official (interpreted) sessions of international meetings (Jeudy & Vernet, 2004); companies based in France are moving to English increasingly so that they can communicate with other parts of their organization in other parts of the world (Darriulat, 2004). There is widespread regret that this is happening but also a pragmatic acceptance that it cannot be changed. When he was minister for education, Claude Allègre (1997) told the French to think of English as another skill they had to master, similar to information technology, and not to think in terms of national competition. His views have been attacked (e.g., Cassen, 2000) but seem in the interim to have gained general acceptance.

### **Conclusions**

There is thus a profound dichotomy in present-day France. On the one hand, the French public seems to have a pragmatic view of the current political situation. They may regret that French no longer represents cultural capital, that great effort and resources are needed to acquire the new lingua franca and that English is often the vehicle for an ideology to which they do not subscribe. However, they are aware too that to reject English means to stay outside the global forums, exchanges, and flows that the language permits, and this is a sacrifice they do not appear to be willing to make to pursue a national language policy increasingly seen as untenable and illogical. Most of the French establishment does not yet seem to accept the situation, but it seems unlikely that, in the long term, the policymakers will be able to stem the incremental effect of the linguistic choices of the French people.

What I have analyzed here is a classic situation of Gramscian hegemony. By taking the decision to learn and use English, the French confirm the ascendancy of the language. However, this may be an outdated analysis that belongs to the nation state era. It is interesting that in the national debate, the pragmatists tend to use the phrase “anglais, langue de communication” while the defenders of French call English “la langue de Shakespeare.”

## Notes

1. This treaty actually restored some lands to the Emperor Charles VI at the end of the War of the Spanish Succession, in which France had been defeated. The use of French in such circumstances bears witness to the *general* prestige of the French and their language.
2. Interestingly Tony Blair was one of the few to speak in French in defence of a national bid. This was seen as strategic.
3. Perrut has a record of monitoring French nationals. He has also complained that French nationals used English in Council of Europe meetings (*Journal Officiel*, June 7, 2005).
4. Mario Soares, former president of Portugal, Federico Mayor, former minister of Education in Spain and ex-director general of Unesco, Suzanna Agnelli, former Foreign Secretary in Italy, Adrian Nastase, prime minister of Roumania, Simon de Saxe-Cobourg, prime minister of Bulgaria, Kiro Gligorov, president of Macedonia, Dora Bakoyianni, mayor of Athens, and Bronislaw Geremek, former Foreign secretary of Poland are some of the political figures who are signatories. Authors, such as the Albanian writer Ismail Kadaré, also lent their support.
5. A large number in French legal circles support the petition. Monsieur Barthélemy Mercadal, the vice-president of IDEF, defended the proposal by quoting Rivarol at length. The argument that, in comparison to French, German is too abstract and has too large a vocabulary, English is too synthetic and uses too much inversion, Italian is too wordy and Spanish too imprecise is still being trotted out.
6. Translation is by the French government.
7. In June 1999, European ministers of education met in Bologna and agreed to adopt a system of comparable degrees in undergraduate and postgraduate education and a system of credits, so that students could transfer from universities in one European member state system to another.
8. An administrator in a French Business School who agreed to be interviewed but who asked that given the uncertainty of her legal situation her identity be protected.
9. Again I have been asked to respect the anonymity of the interviewees. The researchers who agreed to be interviewed did so as representatives of their class, not as named individuals. Understandably they do not wish to offend (grant making) national authorities.

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Dennis Ager's study of the French-speaking world is now 10 years old and many of the problems have been resolved or bypassed and the opportunities seized or disregarded. Nevertheless, Ager's work is still highly relevant because of his capacity for seeing past the data to the patterns and the issues. His discussion of the motivation of the French government and elites for their support of the Francophone movement is forensic. A further interest of the book is the wealth of data from remote French-speaking societies; Professor Ager has travelled widely and much in these reports is based on his own extensive field research.

Maurais, J., & Morris, M. (Eds.). (2003). *Languages in a globalising world*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Although this collection of essays deals mainly with the issue of English as a lingua franca, two contributions by well-known scholars from the French-speaking world discuss the case of French. Claude Truchot is a scholar rather than a militant defender of French. His work has provided insightful analyses of how use of French and English has evolved in the institutions of the EU. Here he explains why French has remained a lingua franca in the EU longer than in other settings. Those who cannot read his work in the original can get access to many of his central theses in this essay. Robert Chaudenson takes a more combative approach. His essay has two main themes: first he discusses the great difficulty of assessing numbers of speakers, indeed of defining what a speaker actually is; second he suggests strategies for promoting French. He sees Africa as an area where generous funding for education could be a decisive factor in maintaining French as a lingua franca.

Phillipson, R. (2003). *English-only Europe*. London: Routledge.

Despite the title, Robert Phillipson discusses the French case at length. The author is very knowledgeable and provides a wealth of data about present language practices. He recounts in great detail the way that both English and French speaking states seek to promote and protect their languages, aware of the political, commercial and technical advantages that accrue from being mother tongue speakers of lingua francas. This book permits the reader to see the many parallels between the biographies of the two lingua francas and the positions adopted by their elites. The author's own position is clear and shows that supporters of plurilingualism do not always have nationalist agendas.



Wright, S. (2004). *Language policy and language planning: From nationalism to globalisation*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave.

My latest monograph has two chapters relevant to this subject. One chapter is dedicated to the role of lingua francas and the conditions under which they arise. There is also a chapter on the rise and fall of French as a lingua franca, which gives a more detailed account of the process that I have touched on briefly in this essay.

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