



# Is English a Killer Language or an International Auxiliary? Its Use and Function in a Globalised World

Nick Ceramella, *University of Trento*

*"When we lose a language, we lose a worldview, a unique identity, and a storehouse of knowledge." (Akira. Y. Yamamoto, 2009: 34).*

## Abstract

In the Introduction to this article, I deal with the importance of speaking one's own language as a way to assert one's identity. Then I pass on to the evolution of the English language from its start as Old English, spoken by only a few thousand Angles and Saxons. I remark how, at first, it was contaminated by thousands of Latin, French and Scandinavian words, of which contemporary English still bears many clear traces, but nobody has ever thought that English was ever in danger of disappearing. By contrast, in the long run, it became the mother tongue of the speakers in comparatively newly founded countries, such as the USA, Australia, and New Zealand, and owing to the spread of the British Empire, it has dramatically increased its appeal becoming the most spoken and influential language in the world. Thus, according to some linguists, it has led several languages virtually to the verge of disappearance. Therefore, I argue whether English has really vampirised them, or has simply contributed to make people understand each other, sometimes even in the same country where lots of different tongues are spoken (e.g. Nigeria).

It is self-evident that English has gradually been taking the role of a common unifying factor in our globalised world. In this view, I envisage a scenario where English may even become the official language of the EU with the contributions coming, though in varying doses, from all the speakers of the other EU languages.

**Keywords:** Languages, identity, globalisation, English, varieties, Europe.

---

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 *Our languages: ourselves*

It is possible that somewhere on earth, the last speaker of an ancient language is dying right now and is thus taking away forever a most precious and irreplaceable treasure: the language that for centuries has been spoken by his/her ancestors. I am afraid this is not an unfounded catastrophic vision of the global situation because we know this has been happening over and over again in the history of mankind. For example, the last speaker of Manx, Ned Mandrell, passed away on the Isle of Man in 1974, while the last aborigine speaking Jiwarli died in Australia

in 1976, where most of the 250 aboriginal languages have vanished. Likewise, it is far from widely known that in California, about 50 of the languages still left, from the 100 once spoken by various Indian tribes, are “endangered” and may soon end up like Shasta, which is already no longer spoken, or Chinook, once used as a second language in the Pacific Northwest by many tribes, and now practically not even spoken by the Chinook Indians themselves.

These are just some examples in North America, but let’s face it, the problem involves the whole planet. According to a UNESCO report, out of the 6,000 languages, which are currently spoken in the world, about 50-90% may be superseded by the dominating ones by the end of this century. There are those who welcome this as good news, for two main reasons, because the people who speak them are joining the civilised world, and because fewer languages mean more and more human beings speaking the same one. Hence, they will make communication easier and faster with all the benefits that can derive from that in a world heading fast towards globalisation in every field.

Naturally, there are many linguists who object strongly to what they consider an over-simplistic view, saying that when a language passes away a whole culture will be gone, which implies that a particular perspective and knowledge of the world will vanish with them. A good example is represented by the Haunò, 12,000 people living on a mountainous island, Mindoro, in the Philippines, who are able to distinguish 450 different kinds of animals, 1,500 plants (400 more than those catalogued by western botanists). Similarly, it is not difficult then to imagine how much we can learn about the Arctic from the Inuits, who have twenty words for different kinds of snow. Needless to say this is the outcome of their long-life experience in those extreme climate conditions which they felt the need to express orally and codify in linguistic terms. It follows there are certain concepts, marking your cultural background, you can express naturally only in your mother tongue.

As a person who grew up bilingual in a small Calabrian town (Santa Sofia d’Epiro), in southern Italy, whose inhabitants, besides Italian, have been speaking Albanian for over five centuries,<sup>1</sup> I consider myself lucky because I know how enriching such an experience is. It allows you to catch the many-sidedness of existence, an invaluable privilege which, also thanks to my kind of studies, has led me to master, through the years, five more languages: English, French, Spanish and Portuguese, and, obviously, Italian. Consequently, I am not surprised to hear why people resist losing their mother tongue in favour of another one, despite the fact that the other language may be more functional for getting along in the world. And it could not be otherwise since one’s mother tongue does much more than make everyday communication possible, it is the very means enabling each one of us to think in a unique way, reflecting both our inner selves and our socio-cultural background. This goes well beyond vocabulary, it involves the whole deep structure of a language; in brief, thinking and language are so closely connected that we can say they are intertwined.<sup>2</sup> I believe that one’s own language has the power to bring out a sense of belonging and true identity. Again, a good case in point is my personal experience. When we, Italo-Albanians (Arbrëshët) meet, we usually say to each other, with a mixed tone of surprise and pride, “*ti fjetë si na!*?” (“you speak like us!” i.e. “do you speak our language?”), meaning implicitly, ‘you are one of us’. (Indeed, a further instance of the traditional social pattern of the *us vs them* opposition).

Incidentally, this is why languages are sometimes “killed” by rulers who do not know the languages spoken by their subjects. Among the most important examples, I would like to cite two: that of the British Government which outlawed Gaelic in Ireland in the 19th century, and that of the Spaniards, in South and Central America, who killed the Indios that spoke their mother tongue. No wonder this made most of them drop it fearing to be punished by death. (Although the situation was by far not as extreme as that, I too remember my teachers telling us off when we spoke Albanian in class in the early sixties.)

For completeness’ sake, before closing this introduction, another aspect deserving attention is what the English anthropologist Daniel Nettle and the linguist Suzanne Romaine remark in their book, *Vanishing Voices*, concerning the close relationship between the richest areas in biological terms and the wide variety of languages spoken there. They stress the link between language survival and environmental issues, and argue that the death of languages is part of the collapse of the worldwide ecosystem. Moreover, they contend that the struggle to preserve precious environmental resources (e.g. rainforests) cannot be separated from the struggle to maintain diverse cultures and the languages through which they express themselves. In fact, Nettle and Romaine assert that about 4% of the world population speak almost 60% of the languages in the world, located in the very heart of Africa, South East Asia, Brazil, Central America and Australia, where, as chance would have it, there are the most luxuriant forests on the planet. An excellent example is Papua New Guinea, hosting 22,000 plant species, of which 90% cannot be found anywhere else on earth, vis a vis a 0,1 % of the world population speaking 13% of the languages. Such a low percentage of people are the guardians of a huge natural patrimony and everything related to it. Thus, in a sense, their taking care of their languages is in effect taking care of all of us. However, it must be stressed that people at large are becoming more and more aware that the loss of a language is not to be underestimated. Finally, the world has woken up and realised that, according to this UNESCO report,

The extinction of each language results in the irrecoverable loss of a unique cultural, historical and ecological knowledge. Each language is a unique expression of the human experience of the world. *Every time a language dies, we have less evidence for understanding patterns in the structure and function of human language, human prehistory, and the maintenance of the world’s diverse ecosystems.* Above all, speakers of these languages may experience the loss of their language as a loss of their original ethnic and cultural identity.

(AA. VV., 2003: 2).

## 2. The Worldwide Appeal of English

**A**lthough language diversity is a mirror of cultural differences – one of the wonderful things about mankind – there is a growing utilitarian trend supposing that one language may be all the world needs. Consequently, the variety of languages spoken is seen as an obstacle to progress and the modernisation process which makes more and more people say, “Why not accept and encourage the spread of English as a world

language?" Indeed, it is true that there is no end to the things that can be expressed in English, perhaps more than in any other language. Therefore one may be tempted to jump to the conclusion that, if one language carries all the messages related to our daily needs, other languages become useless. After all, adults learn to speak in a foreign tongue only if they have to, which happens either to socialise or to work. Similarly, children refuse to pick a foreign language up until they realise they cannot do without it. If you extend this concept to society at large, you will find that a language reflects underlying specific social needs and realities as well as historical events. As a matter of fact, history has shown that if people blend and merge, so do their languages, but as a result of an inevitable process. This was the case with the Romans, whose language spread all over their Empire, generating many dialects which flourished as autonomous new languages in Italy, France, Spain, Portugal and Romania, let alone other "minor" languages including Catalan, Breton, Sardinian, Ladin, etc. (Russian itself was born in this way too, when the Vikings invaded the Slavic-speaking areas.)

Likewise, the origins of English lead back to the Angles and Saxons who, on invading the British Isles, subjugated the Celtic populations and ended up speaking the same new language, Old English. Later, in 1066, the Normans conquered England, but, although many thousands of French words became part of their vocabulary, they did not manage to impose their language on the Anglo-Saxons, thus originating Middle English. A further foreign influence was that of the Vikings when they invaded England in the ninth century, as testified by the many Old Norse and Old Danish words currently used in English.

Then the time came, when the English conquest of the world was triggered with the colonisation of America in the 17th century. Thus started an irresistible expansion of the English language, which reached its apex with the foundation of the British Empire, when English was imposed over the countries that were conquered and began to 'devour' other languages while enriching itself. It is not incidental that, among the assets of English, David Crystal includes its power to "suck[s] in vocabulary from any language it can get." So, though all languages naturally continue to change, English, without taking into account the historic and economic reasons involved, is just seen as a "vampire" language, both for the way it feeds on other tongues and contaminates them in turn. If you look up an etymological English dictionary, you will find words either deriving or borrowed from a wide number of languages, mainly German, French, Latin, Old Norse and Danish. There are now words from more than 150 other languages embodied into English, reflecting many centuries of history, seeing the British both as conquered or conquerors. It is not surprising then to see that the British National Corpus consists of about 100 million words, of which 10 % are speech and 90 % writing, while the North American News Text Corpus is even bigger. This results in an extremely wide and expressive vocabulary consisting of 850,000 words, continuously springing off from new ones, compared with 600,000 used in French and 550,000 in Italian.

Given this natural tendency of languages to merge, the current disappearance of many so-called minority languages, that are in most cases absorbed - "killed" - by English, seems like one of those unavoidable side effects of globalisation. Today, the remotest parts of the world have access to satellite TV, BBC World TV, Sky, or CNN, and the Internet: the linking language is invariably English. It seems

inevitable then that this global language stream be dominated by English, thus leading the entire world to speak this language, which at the moment is spoken by 1,500 million people worldwide. The only snag though, as shown in the next section on the situation in the European Union, is that English is bound to have unpleasing nationalistic associations which would make it not really suitable as a world auxiliary language, let alone a European one.

Therefore, one may legitimately wonder, why is English so irresistibly appealing? Certainly not for its “eccentric” and very unstable pronunciation (cf. George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*), but for a variety of other reasons. An extrinsic and most important one is related to the colonialist/imperialist policy of Britain first, and to the military, technological and economic hegemony of the USA afterwards; two countries which, by imposing their presence in the whole world, exported their language too. Nowadays, in fact, English is either a first language or a main second one, allowing communication which otherwise would be impossible. An interesting point in case is Nigeria where, together with the three main languages Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo, about 521 more languages are spoken. Another good example is represented by the 500,000 inhabitants of Suriname (in South America) who speak more than twelve languages, of which the main one comes from a combination between Dutch and English with African grammar.<sup>3</sup>

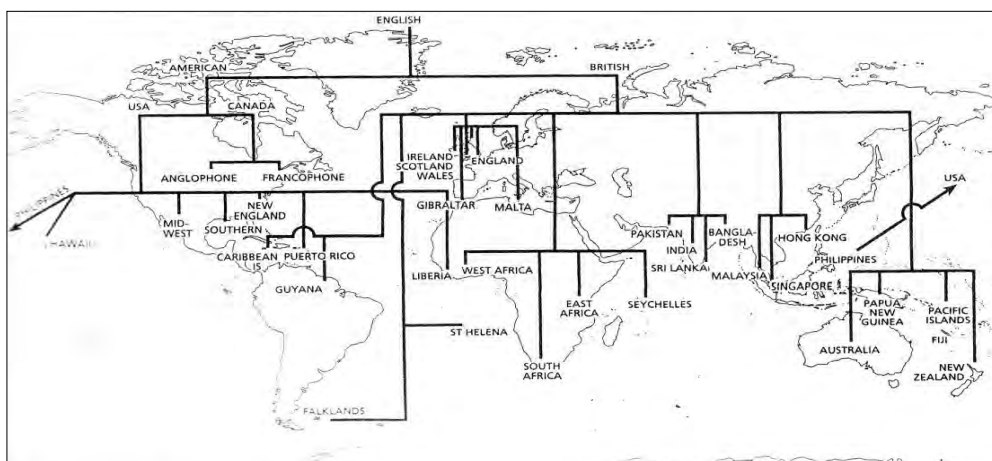


Figure 2. Family tree representation of how English has spread around the world.  
(Crystal. 2003, 70)

But there is also an intrinsic aspect of English itself supporting the common conviction that it is a relatively easy language from the grammatical point of view. Curiously enough, as early as 1848, in *The Athenaeum*, a weekly magazine of literary and miscellaneous news, appeared an article which explained why that was a common idea even in those days. But what is even more striking is that, due to its supposed easiness, English is ‘prophetically’ seen as the future ‘language of the world’.

In its easiness of grammatical construction, in its paucity of inflection, in its almost total disregard of the distinctions of gender excepting those of nature, in the simplicity and precision of its temptations and auxiliary verbs, not less than in the majesty vigour and copiousness of its expression, our mother-tongue seems well adapted by *organization* to become the language of the world.

(Crystal. 2003, 8)

Yet, it must be said that, whoever is familiar with *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* by R. Quirk, consisting of 1,800 pages, which deal with as many as 3,500 grammatical items, will not agree with the idea that there is no English grammar. But there are also those, like C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, who have stretched this notion and devised what they call “Basic English”. In their book, *The Meaning of Meaning*, they asserted that about 800 words are all you need to define all the words in a dictionary. This made them come to the conclusion that English naturally lends itself to become an auxiliary world-language that can be learnt in a few months.

To support this point, however provocative it may sound, I worked out the following description of a possible daily routine, where by using the verb “get” only (which as a phrasal verb can have as many as 150 different combinations), you can give a thorough and coherent description of a whole daily routine:

I usually *get to bed* late but *get up* at 6 am, *get ready*, *get* a little breakfast, *get on* the train, and *get to* the university at 7.45. I *get my* books *out* of a drawer and *get down* to work. *Get* a sandwich at ten, then I *get my* students to do some work with me first, and on their own after. I *get out* to lunch at one. I often *get* a decent meal at a nearby restaurant. I *get back* to the university at three and *get on* with my work. Then I *get away* after a couple of hours.

I *get home* quite early. If my wife comes with a problem, I usually try to *get round* it, but she certainly *gets* her message across. So we *get our* tea together, then I *get out* and walk down to one of the local ‘institutions’, “The Royal Oak”, where my friends and I *get together* once a week. We *get along* very well, and although, we *get tipsy* every now and then, our better halves let us *get away* with it, because they know we *get* a kick *out* of that.

Of course, this brief passage has been created on purpose to make the point. It shows what Anthony Burgess referred to as ‘the huge advantages that the “synthesising powers of English” have for the foreign student.’ (Burgess, 1981: 192)

This is a key reason why there is a big shift towards English within the EU institutions and schools, which, on the other hand, reflects what is happening worldwide. A survey carried out at the end of 2002 by Eurobarometer showed that more than 92% of secondary-school students in the EU’s non-English speaking countries studied English, compared with 33% French and only 13% German. It is a fact, Europeans are becoming ever more polyglot. Some recent surveys carried out by the EU have shown a considerable increase of people speaking a foreign language, especially among the youth. More than half of the European Union nationals maintain they speak one European language other than their mother

tongue. Over 40% of the people have a good enough grasp of English to get along in conversation. Add to this figure about 16% of native speakers of English, and you find that over 50% of the EU can express themselves in English. Moreover, what is news is the fact that the number of Europeans, outside Britain, agreeing English should be learnt by everybody in the Union has been dramatically increasing in the past twenty years or so, reaching over 66% of the French, who are traditionally against English. By contrast, French is spoken only by 15% of EU citizens outside the Francophone area, while 9% speak German (outside Germany). Only 5% speak Spanish (apart from Spaniards themselves). Multilingualism is far more popular in the smaller countries like Luxembourg and Holland. Only 14% of the Dutch admit not knowing a second language, over 80% speak English, two-thirds German, and about one-quarter French. But since everyone else is learning English, what are the British doing meanwhile? They together with the Irish, who are struggling to keep Gaelic alive, perhaps unsurprisingly, are the worst at speaking other tongues and stick to their mother tongue. So two-thirds of the population can express themselves just in English, resulting in 66% as opposed to 47% in the EU able to speak no other language than their own. After all, how could the British possibly have a different attitude, knowing English is well on the way to become the EU's official tongue? In fact, this is what I intend to show through the following "study cases" concerning the impact English has in some of the main EU countries.

## ***2.1 The Scandinavian Case***

England and English have historically been popular with Scandinavians in particular; not surprisingly English is gradually becoming the Nordic countries' lingua franca. This is a process which is widely supported by the teaching of English from elementary school, and, above all, by the fact that English-language television programmes and films are hardly ever dubbed, but subtitled. Moreover, you are unlikely to build up a career in the academic world without a good knowledge of *engelsk*. According to a research carried out at the university of Copenhagen in 1999, 84% of doctoral thesis published in the natural sciences were in English, against only 14% in Danish. Government documents usually carry a synopsis in English on the front.

Curiously enough, although Norwegians, Swedes and Danes can understand each other's language without any major problem, they often use English in their meetings. Let alone the many firms which have adopted English as their official language for a long time (i.e. Finland's Nokia, Denmark's Danisco.) Therefore, because of this situation, it is quite surprising that there are some nationalist parties, such as the Danish People's Party, which oppose the spread of English. But they have no reason to worry because most Scandinavian countries, as for example Sweden, have laws to promote the use of the national language in official publications and broadcasting, as well as programmes to teach it to immigrants in order to help their integration. By contrast, Iceland, the most isolated country in the region, sticks to its language and makes any possible effort to replace any English words with newly coined Icelandic ones. But Iceland has never even had a referendum to test people's opinion to join the European Union; it would certainly show they want to live in their own icy world.



It is obvious that the impact of English is not limited just to these countries. In fact, I cannot possibly ignore the enormous influence it has on Dutch, where you can hear people talking about a *rockdiva*, or a single which has become een grote hit, a handy is a “mobile phone” (cf. German, Handy), and so on. So, if I don’t deal with the Dutch case here, it is simply due to the lack of space.

## 2.2 The Italian case: Itanglish

Once they used to talk about the fatal attraction of Italy for its culture, natural beauty, customs and life style; Italy, a country which, according to historical accounts and as tradition has it, allured flocks of northern Europeans, English in particular. Yet, in the past forty years, the trend has been reversed and many Italians have been travelling over the Channel mainly to learn English. Meanwhile, Italian has been “infested” by the English language. In 2002, the ONLI (Osservatorio Neologico della Lingua Italiana) was established, and one of its leading figures, Giovanni Adamo, a researcher in Italian Studies, declared that, as shown by the incessant growth of new coinages either deriving from Italian itself (i.e. its culture and politics) or from the deformation (Italianisation) of foreign words (especially English ones), Italian lexis is very lively and reactive. Words like ‘mobizzare, killerare, gadgetteria, cliccare’, coming from mobbing, killing, gadget shop, clicking, are good examples of the strong impact English has on the Italian language. So, you may happen to hear or read something like this, full of neologisms (of which a striking example is in tilt = roughly, a seizure, in pre-electronic games):

*Ho chattato tutto il giorno per cercare un farmaco killer che ha scatenato risarcimenti record, ma il mio pc è andato in tilt e l’ho dovuto resettare. Poi ho risposto ad alcune domande sulla fine del baby boom. Ora ti lascio per andare ad un chocoparty in un locale molto trendy: un vero e proprio vippaio. Credimi è un ristorante davvero in, un must, ma per arrivarci devi provare a dribblare il traffico.*

I’ve chatted all day to look for a killer drug which has triggered record reimbursements, but my personal computer has gone haywire and I had to reset it. Then I answered some questions about the end of the baby boom. I’ll leave you now to go to a chocolate-party at a very trendy venue: a truly VIP place. Believe me it is an in restaurant, a must, but to get there you should try to avoid the traffic.

Likewise, advertising, media, shops, and industry tend to use lots of English words. It is quite common that on walking down a street, even in a small town, you see signs like, “phone center”, “sun and fun solarium”, “easy computer”, “hair style dresser”, “cocktail and deli”, “rhythm and sound”, “internet point”, “laundry”. English terms are also normally used when people talk about computers, because they make communication much easier and faster unless you want to call the *software*, “corredo dei linguaggi e dei programmi che permettono di svolgere le elaborazioni di un sistema” or “elementi molli” (Dizionario inglese - italiano / italiano - inglese, il Ragazzini; English - Italian / Italian - English Dictionary, Ragazzini), sounding either long or weird.

Owing to this widespread use of English words, you may think Italians currently speak English, in which case you would be disappointed. Especially politicians, among the people who should really be fluent, in effect, they are still lagging behind their European colleagues. Nevertheless, perhaps just to impress people, they use

lots of English words and expressions. In *Identità e diversità nella lingua e letteratura italiana* (Identity and variety in the Italian language and literature), a conference held in Belgium in July 2002, linguists agreed in condemning the snobbish use of words such as *welfare*, which is unjustified, if for no other reason, because there is a nice short Italian expression for that (*stato sociale*). They also blamed the distorted pronunciation of words in advertisements, like *care free* [pronounce in Italian “kare fre”], which are not only wrong but also set a bad example for students and the average person alike. In my opinion foreign words should be used to fill in any gap that Italian may have in its lexical texture.<sup>4</sup> But, unfortunately, Italians tend to have a slapdash way of doing certain things, especially when the use of a language is involved. If you take billboards, posters, company papers, captions at exhibitions, but even government documents, all of them can contain mistakes which are often hilarious.<sup>5</sup> Signs of all sorts can be very funny too. Let’s take just a few examples around Italy: a doctor’s office in Rome, where a plate on the door reads:

“Specialist in women and other diseases”; a laundry in Milan “Ladies, leave your clothes here and spend the afternoon having a good time.” Or, imagine taking a bus in Naples where once I saw a sign reading, “Do not speak to abusive peddlers” (meant to be “Do not speak to illegal peddlers”; note that *abusivo* in Italian means *illegal*).

This cocktail of Italian and English words has led Giacomo Elliot to write *Parliamo Itangliano - Let’s Speak Itanglish* - (using an ironic coinage *itangliano* which I’ve rendered as *Itanglish*, a book containing, as suggested by its subtitle, “that is the 400 English words for whoever wants to build up a career” (*ovvero le 400 parole inglesi che deve sapere chi vuole fare carriera*). Of course, not every Italian is pleased about this situation, there are many who wonder why people should talk about “break” (pronounced “brek”) meeting”, “team”, “sandwich”, “fashion”, “back office”, “off-records” (meaning “off the record”), “no-tax area”, “fiscal drag” and “ticket”. This last term (supposed to mean, “prescription charge”), is atrocious in its own way, because it forces mainly elderly people, from all walks of life to use such “strange” words which have nothing to do with their language and culture. Let alone music, fashion and sports where many of the terms currently used are English, but at least in these sectors the main consumers are young, so they are familiar with terms such as *disk jockey*, *funk*, *mix*, *compilation*, *hit*, *dance music*; *mini gonna* [mini skirt], *body* [leotard] (a term used also by French and German women), *shopping*, *porno shop*, *t-shirt*; *to score a goal* (invariably spelt and sounding as “gol”), *playoff*, *playout*, *fairplay*, *playmaker*, *offside*, *tackle*, *jolly*, *dribble* (which has been Italianised into *dribblare*, meaning “to avoid an obstacle/problem”), *performante* (“performing well”), *salvato in corner* (when you deflect trouble at the last moment), etc. (is self-evident they use many loans and calques). Of course, all that would be impossible if the press did not play a major role. In Italy, it is normal to see headlines reading: *Giornata antismog: stop al traffico* [“Antismog day: stop the traffic”], or TV news announced as *notizie flesh* [“flash news”, where “flash” is pronounced as /flesh/, which has nothing to do with flash]. There are also those Italians who believe that if this pace continues, their language one day will disappear. This made Umberto Eco declare that it is wrong to see English as the “lethal enemy” of Italian, since Italians, after all, still use their grammar

acceptably, while there has even been an increasing demand to learn Italian worldwide. And, another internationally known linguist, such as Tullio de Mauro, in an interview given in February 2003, reassured his compatriots by saying that Italian not only is in good “health”, but paradoxically so, thanks to English:

Owing to tourism and trade there is a great demand for Italian. [...] The supremacy of English, as a *passepourtout* language, has helped us. This has put all the other languages in an equal position. [...] Actually, in some countries, like Japan, Italian language courses are more popular than French. It is considered very interesting, not only, as a language of culture, but also whoever deals with tourism would like to speak it.  
[my translation]

## 2.3 The French Case: *Franglish*

From the Norman conquest of England in 1066, English adopted thousands of French words and phrases, representing an active part of the English vocabulary to our days, but nobody has ever heard British people complaining about that. By contrast, the French have always shown a stubborn and, in most cases, vain resistance to the language of their historic enemies, the English. So, while virtually everywhere in the world they use English terms for computer, spam, bug, AIDS, the French have adopted their own, *ordinateur*, *SIDA*, *arrosage*, *bogue*. It is most interesting to underline how they came to a compromise, satisfying both sides, when they decided to call the jointly made famous, aeroplane *Concorde*.

Protecting the purity of *la langue française* has traditionally been the task of the Académie Française ever since this institution was founded in 1635. But on 4 August 1994, the French Parliament, felt obliged to get involved in such matters by passing the Toubon Act, the first law in defence of French. No wonder then if, in 2003, linguists and high ranking officials encouraged the president of France, Jacques Chirac, with the idea of establishing a French rival to the CNN, but, there again, this project did not take off the ground. Another battle of the same kind was launched by Chirac in 2004 to counterattack Google, when the government made public their plan to swamp cyberspace with millions of texts from American and British university libraries. Chirac responded with the intention to stop the American culture invasion by setting up a French search-engine where people could browse millions of French texts. This spread a Googlephobia all over the country, which even led the French state news agency, Agence France Presse, to sue the American company for copyright infringement in the name of contrasting the idea of a consumeristic market prevailing over culture and good taste.

It is self-evident that, among the European populations, the French are the most conscious of the influence of English, whose onward march has traditionally raised opposition across Europe. But should a language with such an absorbent power as French be afraid of that? Today, paradoxically, it is French that abuses English, without enriching it, whereas most former British colonies have revitalised it languagewise. Let's just consider how people, often with a little knowledge of English, ram French meanings on to English words: *pressing* for *ironing* (from *presser*, but in French); *reticent* may mean *reluctant* in France but not in Britain. Other examples are *dancing*, *lifting* (i.e. an aesthetic surgical operation). It is also

interesting to note that this ability to umpteen words ending in -ing to change the sense of words is shared also with Italians and Spanish. So, an action becomes a noun: *smoking for evening dress* (see also German section below).

## 2.4 The German Case: Denglisch

But if the French are obsessed by Franglais, then they should visit Germany. The language of Goethe and Thomas Mann is full of English words and expressions, resulting in a mish-mash, called Denglisch (but coherently with the dominant trend, pronounced "Dinglish"). Here is a synthesis of that as presented in an article in this article:

Witness Berlin's film festival, where ageing Stars with fading Sexappeal received Standingovations from Fans lucky enough to have got Tickets for their idols' Comebackperformances in Films with the habitual Happyend. After the Show, journalists in their Smokings were invited to the Pressebriefingraum for an Interview with the workaholic Festivalboss, in his trendy Jacket und Jeans, or a Get together with some Producer briefly silencing his Handy, his mobile phone, to put off his latest Jointventure with his Jetset Powerpartner, before dashing off, being, he admitted, a trifle gestresst, to a late-night Fitnessstraining at the Businessportcenter.

### *The Economist (22nd Feb 2001):*

This is some sort of Neudeutsch which the German *Management* in the 1980s, or even earlier, using words from *Bankinshops*, found in supermarkets, to *Buy-out*. Advertisers enjoy playing with Neudeutsch (New German), McDonald's has often used it,. Two cases in point are, *Mäc Love not War* and *You Ess Ey*, which is a pun on the verb *essen*, 'to eat'.

Informatics, like in most other languages, is a field where English words prevail: instead of 'mouse' the word used is *Maus*, but you still click with it. Then you don't *auslösen* something, you *triggern* it, thus using one of the many Neudeutsch verbs (cf. Italian).

If you talk about shopping, you will find the same thing happening: *blazer*, *pullover*, *shirt*, *trendsetter*, *Boxeshorts*, *cooles T-shirts*, *Bestseller*, *small*, *medium*, *large* (for sizes).

Coming to sports? You find that in football, Germans have rejected any contamination, except for the term *Hooligan*, almost as if they wanted to stress it is a British social issue (especially in the 1980s/90s). You can meet more Neudeutsch in most other sports like tennis, i.e. *Match-Point*, *Tie-Break*. In entertainment you come across the same expressions used in other languages too, such as *Disco*, *Live-Musik*, *Musical*, *Single-Bar* (for single people), *gay club*, *Show*.

The complacency of German has resulted in daring coinages like: *brunchen* (to brunch), *faken* (to fuck), *mobben* (to mob), *outen* (to out), *fighten* (to fight), *jobben* (to work part time), *relaxen* (to relax), *shoppen* (to shop), and many many more, which are verbs inflected in the German-style with the en of the infinitive. However, there is a long history of attempts to "purge" the language in Germany too, leading back to the days of the French Revolution, when Joachim Heinrich Campe tried to protect his country

from the influence of French by introducing about 11,000 German equivalent words. Again, dictionaries, meant to purify the language from that of the French enemy, were published during World War One. And the same thing was done by the Nazis.

At least, Germans in general, from these experiences learnt that such a policy is bound to fail. They have been, in fact, traditionally proud and not bothered that their language absorbs foreign words quite easily. Actually German has always shown a particular tendency to being invaded, ever since the late sixties, a dictionary could list 3,000 recent entries from other languages. Intellectuals in particular think that any intervention by certain politicians, who every now and then come out with ideas like the French, is absurd and Germany should not interfere with a process no language can avoid in today's globalised world. So, while there have been some politicians maintaining that the presence of English is no longer bearable and is swamping everything from advertising to technology, there were also those like the culture minister, Julian Nida-Rümelin, who declared in 2001: "Within 50 years, English will be the common language of Europe. So everyone had better learn it." Meanwhile, it is not surprising if ironical and funny pseudo-official EU announcements as the following have begun to appear on the internet:

## **Euro English**

The European Union Commissioners have announced that agreement has been reached to adopt English as the preferred language for European communications, rather than German, which was the other possibility.

As part of the negotiations, the British government conceded that English spelling had some room for improvement and has accepted a five-year phased plan for what will be known as EuroEnglish (Euro for short).

In the first year, "s" will be used instead of the soft "c". Certainly, sivil servants will reseive this news with joy. Also, the hard "c" will be replaced with "k". Not only will this klear up konfusion, but typewriters kan have one less letter.

There will be growing publik enthusiasm in the sekond year, when the troublesome "ph" will be replaced by "f". This will make words like "fotograf" 20 per sent shorter.

In the third year, publik akseptanse of the new spelling kan be Expekted to reach the stage where more komplikated changes are possible.

Governments will enkorage the removal of double letters, which have always ben a deterrent to akurate speling. Also, al wil agre that the horrible mes of silent "e"s in the languag is disgrasful, and they would go.

By the fourth year, peopl wil be reseptiv to steps such as replasing "th" by "z" and "w" by "v".

During ze fifz year, ze unesesary "o" kan be dropd from vords kontaining "ou", and similar changes vud of kors be aplid to ozer kombinations of leters.

After zis fifz yer, ve vil hav a reli sensibl riten styl. Zer vil be no mor trubls or difikultis and evrivun vil find it ezi tu understand ech ozer.

Ze drem vil finali kum tru.

### 3. Conclusion

#### 3.1 *Euro-English*

Who knows? After visiting the strange EU multicultural/language “curiosity shop”, I feel that what may sound funny, perhaps impossible, today, may become true tomorrow. In the meantime, it is a fact that the overall situation described above has contributed to the rise of one more possible variety of English, though this is still work in progress, which we may call “Euro-English”.

It has been developing within the EU institutions, in the past few years. If you ever have this opportunity, you will be struck to hear the officials, from whatever member country they come from, use a language mix never heard before. Who knows, it may become a widespread phenomenon, some sort of uncontrollable ‘virus’ which could escape out of the Euro language “laboratory” and contaminate the whole Union. Let’s imagine that combined with the various pidgin Englishes spoken around the Union. That is when I envisage that English could come onto the EU “stage” and play an unexpected unifying role, as it were. I know this sounds like a crazy idea, but it would be fantastic if the most Euro skeptical member country of all lent its language to ease communication in the European Babel. If this happened everybody would come to terms with a new linguistic reality that would be accepted as a natural compromise, making Europeans not feel as if they were losing national pride, dignity and identity in favour of the “arrogant” English native speakers. After all, nothing would really be at risk. In fact, as we have hinted, we know for sure that adopting words from other languages didn’t kill English in the past, but made it grow dramatically.

However, lots of native English speakers feel their language has been abused and fear that all the languages absorbing words from English may deprive it of its vital sap in the long run, and condemn it to death in turn. If you think about it, it is not a far-fetched idea. It happened to Greek, Latin and Arabic, which were used as a globalising means of communication, just like English nowadays. Again, who knows? Perhaps that is the price a language has to pay once it becomes global and stops belonging only to its native speakers, but it is naturally open to the contribution of all the populations it comes in contact with. Be that as it may, if that is going to be so, and how and what English will actually develop into, only history will tell us. But that is indeed fascinating food for thought for further research for the forthcoming generations.

### Notes

1. My hometown is only one out of many where Old Albanian has been spoken ever since it was founded by a group of Albanians who, following the Turks’ invasion of their country, fled to Italy in eight migration waves (1448-1478). Nowadays the overall Italo-Albanian population reaches about 100,000 who live in some 50 villages scattered in seven regions, mainly in the south of Italy.
2. Turning to the concepts I can express in *arbërisht*, if we take *besa*, for example, I find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to render it into Italian, not for its meaning as such, *word of honour*, but for what it implies in socio-cultural

terms. In fact, whereas it has disappeared in the Italo-Albanian communities, especially among the youth, it still has a strong hold in today's Albania.

3. I would like to remark then that it is not necessarily true that the languages spoken by the people living in poor countries are elementary and unrefined. On the contrary, languages tend to become simpler and simpler as they come in contact with other languages. English, for example, turned from an inflectional into an analytic language, so that a native English speaker finds Old English incomprehensible. Similarly, all the speakers of the neo-Latin language that branched out of Latin cannot either understand or speak it.
4. Not many people know that Alessandro Manzoni and Giacomo Leopardi, two leading figures of 19th century Italian literature, believed that good Italian implies a grasp of foreign languages and said that, especially when you are learning Italian and English, a certain knowledge of Latin helps a lot.
5. One of the most ridiculous attempts to use English was made by the Berlusconi government when they made the biographies of all the ministers available on the Government website in 2001, which was dripping with so many stupid and comical mistakes that one felt ashamed to be Italian. (See my article 'Ceramella, 2004: 73-86).

## References

- Burgess, A. (1981) *Language Made Plain*, London: Fontana/Collins.
- Ceramella, N. (2003) 'Automated Translation: Pros and Cons' in *Il Traduttore Nuovo*, Volume LIX, Napoli: Grafica Flegrea.
- . " 'Exploring Grammar in ELT: the Challenge of 'Standard Englishes' (2009) " in *Riječ (Word)*, *Journal of Studies in Language and Literature*, New Series, N.2, University of Montenegro, Nikšić (pp. 55-78)
- Crystal, D. (2000) *Language Death*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (2003) *English as Global Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Elliot, G. (1977) *Parliamo " itangliano": ovvero le 400 parole inglesi che deve sapere chi vuole fare carriera*, Milano: Rizzoli Editore.
- Nettle, D. & Romaine, S. (2002) *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages*, USA: Oxford University Press.
- Ogden, C. K. & Richards, I. A. (1972) *The Meaning of Meaning*, London: Routledge.
- Quirk, R., Leech G., Svartvik, J. (1989) *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, London: Longman.
- AA.VV. (2003) *Language Vitality and Endangerment* (UNESCO Report), Paris: UNESCO Publishing, p. 2.
- Yamamoto, A.Y. (2009) *Endangered Languages*, *EJournal USA, Indigenous People Today Living in Two Worlds*, Vol. 14, No. 6, p. 34.

**Sitography**

[europa.eu.int/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/index_en.htm)

[europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/translation/bookshelf/brochure\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/translation/bookshelf/brochure_en.pdf)

<http://grammar.about.com/od/e/g/EuroEnglishterm.htm>

<http://www.etni.org.il/farside/euroenglish.htm>

[books.google.com/books/about/English\\_As\\_a\\_Global\\_Language.htm](http://books.google.com/books/about/English_As_a_Global_Language.htm) - -

[www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/case-studies/minority-ethn](http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/case-studies/minority-ethn) - 22k -

[www.ted.com/talks/jay\\_walker\\_on\\_the\\_world\\_s\\_english\\_mania.htm](http://www.ted.com/talks/jay_walker_on_the_world_s_english_mania.htm) - 60k -

[matadornetwork.com/bnt/should-english-be-the-worlds-international-language](http://matadornetwork.com/bnt/should-english-be-the-worlds-international-language) - 537k