

# World English(es) and the Multilingual Turn



# World English(es) and the Multilingual Turn:

*Frameworks of Complex  
Phenomena*

By

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*To my son Flavio Giordano, for making me who I am.*



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## INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

The idea of linguistic uniformity and the spread of multilingualism, together with the unconditioned recognition of a privileged status of English, do not solve the problem of communication in all the multilingual domains.

Indeed, English is considered a transcultural resource which facilitates mobility and fosters a wide inter-lingual communication. However, some of the learning policies which involve the use of minority or national languages in education still see English as a risk to their status and corpus planning. Such concerns involve the emergent change of most migration flows, engaged in a longer stabilization in the host country they move to, searching for mediated education too.

Schools and universities thus become real microcosms of the global society, fostering or hindering expectations and cultural conflicts of the new multilingual speakers. Take, for instance, the linguistic complexity of the sub-Saharan African countries and the South-East Asian ones, where there are still some tensions between bilingualism and monolingualism. Interestingly enough, the famous distinction between *additive* and *subtractive* bilingualism by Lambert (1975), matches the contradictory findings about the effects provoked by multilingual education programmes in the twenty-first century; this means that while some multilingual plans add new languages to the intercultural communicative sets, they subtract something from the home languages causing possible clashes.

However, far from prescribing a monolingualistic view of English, its worldwide spread has been described by Pennycook as “an acute problem” because, “while on the one hand, we may want to acknowledge the usefulness of English as a language of global communication, we clearly also need to acknowledge it as the language of global miscommunication, or perhaps, ‘dis-communication’”.<sup>1</sup> Despite the many domains in which English plays the most salient role, it continues to occupy that “in-between

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<sup>1</sup> A. Pennycook, “Beyond Homogeny and Heterogeny. English as a Global and Worldly Language”, in C. Mair (ed.), *The Politics of English as a World Language: New Horizons in Postcolonial Cultural Studies*, Amsterdam, New York, Rodopi, 2003, p. 5, (3–18).

space” beyond homogeneity and heterogeneity which calls for contextual hybridity of the world English patterns.

This book, following the researches which had begun in the last two or three decades, chooses the plurality of English as an intriguing metaphor for the modern world, deconstructed and rebuilt as a complex space where diversity is the norm. Thus, the word “Englishes” works as an umbrella term which can find applications and perspectives in different domains and according to various viewpoints (from historical to regional, from social to functional, but to name a few).

Given the openness of sociolinguistics and taking for granted the importance of studying cultural and language variation according to a hermeneutic dimension, the term Englishes, with its formal and functional multicultural identity, puts the study of English in the spotlight of many ideological and political standpoints. It is English pervasiveness which led to the rise of the paradigm of World Englishes as complex phenomena, widening the famous labels by Kachru’s circles, which have been used to refer to institutionalized second and foreign language varieties of English spoken around the world. The more inclusive view of English in the world today “brings with it new practical challenges—challenges both for those who use the language as part of their everyday life, and for language professionals whose job revolves around English”.<sup>2</sup>

The major objective of *World English(es) and the Multilingual Turn: Frameworks of Complex Phenomena* is to blur the edges of what multilingualism is beyond a good mastery of two or more languages. In other words, non-linearity enters the global function of English as a *lingua franca*; rather than exhibiting English as an imperialist power, the debate about English as a “vehicular leader” or an “obstacle” to the multilingual identity matches the quarrel about a domesticated English in countries like Russia or the Maghreb. Importantly, in order to offer a more nuanced view of the many implications of the multilingual turn in global society, translation, standard and variation have been used as key words of the shift from monolingual to multilingual bias.

Nevertheless, the case studies here reported (African American English and the Gullah variation, American Indian English, Tristan da Cunha English, Nigerian English and Geordie, to name the just most relevant) show how much the sharp line between local dialects and the standard variety has vanished throughout the long journey of pidginization,

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<sup>2</sup> P. Seargeant, *Exploring World Englishes: Language in a Global Context*, London, New York, Routledge, 2012, p. 3.

creolization, assimilation and the melting processes which have gone through the step of codification.

The main question is, of course, how complex such establishing, maintaining and spreading of English varieties may be, and how the new language scenarios will host possible conflicts arising from the new linguistic interactions. According to such a view, language and socio-political struggles relate to each other in different ways, involving peace, education programmes, cohabitation, and mutual understanding of peoples.

As Patricia Friedrich states in her stimulating “World Englishes and Peace Sociolinguistics”:

If war amongst nations has unfortunately been a reality throughout the history of humankind and has required the mediation through diplomacy and negotiation (i.e. the pursuit of negative peace), there have also been many instances of linguistic conflict involving languages, which, in a more metaphorical sense, have been accused, for example, of attempting to take over the world (Phillipson 1992 for English’s alleged imperialism). On the other hand, one can think of a positive peace mediated through language, one which is achieved by the maintenance of linguistic rights, the creation of an inviting ecosystem of linguistic diversity, the empowerment of users of smaller languages/varieties (empowerment which counteracts fears of imperialism), and sound linguistic education. Thus, for example, when we speak of respecting the different Englishes around the world and of recognizing their functional range, we are fostering the linguistic rights of language users.<sup>3</sup>

The goal is to achieve and maintain healthy relationships among language practices and speech convergence/divergence in most social, business—and more generally—human interactions.

In the attempt to describe existing language relationships which spring up from the multilingual turn, many intricate issues must be taken into account. Thus, language policies, education plans, domains, use, status and identity of language patterns are all different facets of an effective communication between English speakers from all around the world. Far from formulating the myth of an “unmarked” English which is suitable for all occasions, speaking of World Englishes according to a *complex*

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<sup>3</sup> P. Friedrich, “World Englishes and Peace Sociolinguistics. Towards a common goal of linguistic understanding”, in T. Hoffmann, L. Siebers (eds.), *World Englishes. Problems, Properties and Prospects: Selected Papers from the 13th IAWC Conference*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2009, p. 409, (407–14).

paradigm may help to achieve considerable findings that variation is one of the most useful pieces of evidence of the good health of a language, its status, its prestige.

When we say “complex” here and throughout the book, we will refer to the meaning of “complexity” as commented on and theorized by the French philosopher Edgar Morin.

According to Morin:

Society is more than a context, it is an organizing whole of which we are part (...). Complex unities such as human beings or societies are multidimensional: a human being is a biological, psychological, social, emotional, rational being. Society includes historical, economic, sociological, religious dimensions. Pertinent knowledge must recognize this multidimensionality and insert its data within it.<sup>4</sup>

This is also an intriguing perspective that is arising in language matters. The use of complexity in language evolution and language description designates a real turn in the descriptive approach which assumes a new “non-finite state of English”, different from the one postulated by Chomsky who searched for a “more powerful type of grammar and some more ‘abstract’ form of linguistic theory”.<sup>5</sup>

Complexity may become a challenging bond between descriptivism, logical positivism, semantics, cognitive studies and prescriptivism. Indeed, isolating structures and collecting data without the multidimensionality of our planetary era may sound out of date, and this may also work in language studies. According to such a perspective, what is “complex” means what is woven together in a “non-finite” texture; it does not mean something difficult or particularly obscure. It is the result of inseparable elements which make a global view necessary.

In the same fashion, multilingualism as something more than an accumulation of languages, *is* a complex framework according to which the circles of world Englishes become crucially relevant in the question of “linguistic ownership” and its various implications.

The matter of ownership is to be taken into account in commenting on English models and their levels of norms, standard, and variation.

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<sup>4</sup> E. Morin, *Seven Complex Lessons in Education for the Future*, Paris, Unesco Publishing, 2001, pp. 30–31.

<sup>5</sup> R. Penhallurick, *Studying the English Language*, Second Edition, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 272.

However—as Hackert asks—“what does ownership mean with regard to language?”<sup>6</sup>

In principle, the answer is the following:

To claim ownership of a language implies a relationship of possession and control between a particular speaker group and that language. This relationship is metaphorical but obviously has real world consequences, which have to do with authority in and power over the language and may or may not be controversial and contested (...). A different approach to linguistic ownership is outlined by Wee (2002:284), who views the concept not in terms of linguistic competence or performance but in terms of ethnicity and historicity.<sup>7</sup>

Such an attitude takes the concept of “ownership” beyond the acceptability of particular usage items typical of a prescriptive enterprise; the result is an expanded circle of variability which shows how “language debates are very rarely simply debates about language; they are, more often than not, intertwined with questions of *value*”.<sup>8</sup>

Now, if complexity includes references to concepts of “*multiple agents, complex interactions, ‘on the verge of chaotic’, ‘sensitivity to initial conditions’, and emergent properties*”,<sup>9</sup> their applications to language matters assess new concepts of language change and allow different possible questions of “values” as promising opportunities of shaping new cultural and political framework in the twenty-first century.

According to Aronin and Singleton, “parallels between the concepts of complexity and recent findings in multilingualism shed important light on the nature of multilingualism”.<sup>10</sup>

The whole history of multilingualism studies indicates that multilingualism cannot be understood simply by breaking phenomena down into their component parts and cannot be reduced to clear-cut rules, forms, and explanations. Rather, multilingualism has been shown to be a dynamic and self-organizing system, displaying *emergent* qualities. It is not only the

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<sup>6</sup> S. Hackert, *The Emergence of the English Native Speaker*, Boston, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 2012, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–2.

<sup>8</sup> T. Crowley, “Standardization: the complaint tradition”, in A. Bergs, L.J. Brinton (eds.), *English Historical Linguistics*, Vol. 1, Boston, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 2012, p. 981, (980–94).

<sup>9</sup> L. Aronin, D. Singleton, *Multilingualism*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2012, p. 183.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

*multiple agents*—e.g. number of languages, modes of use, variety of speakers, origins of speakers, linguistic abilities and needs of speakers, political and historical nuances, etc.—that make multilingual contact complex. What makes of something merely complicated (having many elements) something truly complex are the *interactions* between those many elements.<sup>11</sup>

The increasing awareness and some explicit recognition of such a complex paradigm will be the key points of all the “Englishes” discussed in this book. A narrow view of what is good or bad English has been abandoned to exhibit variation and pluricentricity of English as legitimate and colourful manifestations of its complexity.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

*The problem with defending the purity of the English language is that English is about as pure as a cribhouse whore. We don't just borrow words; on occasion, English has pursued other languages down alleyways to beat them unconscious and rifle their pockets for new vocabulary.*

—James D. Nicoll

*Being exposed to the existence of other languages increases the perception that the world is populated by people who not only speak differently from oneself but whose cultures and philosophies are other than one's own. Perhaps travel cannot prevent bigotry but by demonstrating that all people cry, laugh, eat, worry and die, it can introduce the idea that if we try to understand each other, we may even become friends.*

—Maya Angelou

*I am always sorry when any language is lost, because languages are the pedigrees of nations.*

—Samuel Johnson





# PART I

## THE OTHER TONGUE

### **1. Towards the multilingual turn: theories and perspectives of a complex phenomenon**

The number of languages spoken in the world is growing day by day, and the system of interrelationship between native, second, and foreign languages increases active communication in the intercultural perspective; but who is the multilingual speaker today? According to Kemp: “complexity is a characteristic of the nature of multilingual participants’ use of their languages (...). Multilinguals may use a number of languages on account of many different social, cultural and economic reasons”.<sup>1</sup> In such a play, the science of language confirms the practical preoccupations which concern human communication as Bloomfield argued in 1935.

Thus, apart from the wide-ranging possible definitions of what multilingualism is, one of the major issues of such debate is how unstable the balance between context and co-text can be, and how demanding it can be in multicultural education. Looking back to Bloomfield’s “practical preoccupations”, and according to multidisciplinary perspectives of the matter, cultures are given the task of stirring a new turn in language sciences about the complexity of a non-elite multilingualism;<sup>2</sup> in other words, apart from the traditional diplomacy and the social agencies to which multilingual communication has been always matched, the new translational network, and the frequent language contacts—or code-switching experiences—result in a more “popular” multilingualism, which enhances new transfer experiences<sup>3</sup> peculiar of a challenging multilingual education.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Kemp, “Defining Multilingualism”, in L. Aronin, B. Hufeisen (eds.), *The Exploration of Multilingualism*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2009, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> J. Edwards, *Multilingualism*, London, New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> According to Aronin and Singleton the term “transfer” allows some distinction between a *negative transfer* (i.e. *interference*) and a *positive transfer* (i.e.

Recursivity, functioning and language awareness—which have marked the Romantic view of the language as concerned with only its culture—give way to different linguistic evolutions which move from cultures as in-between spaces. Indeed, according to the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, “culture takes diverse forms across time and space and that this diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities and cultural expressions of the peoples and societies making up humanities”.<sup>4</sup>

It is between “uniqueness” and “plurality” that culture plays a strong role in creating identity. Through culture you feel part of a specific community, but every culture is organized hierarchically (recalling Hall’s famous Iceberg Theory<sup>5</sup>). Thus, social status, meanings of power and different ways of thinking influence human behaviour and communication as well.

Moreover, each cultural dimension works according to its own internal dynamics. Such interrelations are fundamental in understanding the idea of “contexting”<sup>6</sup> as proposed by Hall, musing on how much information is shared in communication, and on how such a process—contexting—is double faced in which *text* and *context* play mutual roles. On the one hand, contexting improves our understanding of the *text* (considered as the very new information we ignored before); on the other hand, the *context* takes us away from the essential part of the information we are trying to convey, widening the spectrum of what is happening between the interlocutors.

Therefore, if “contexting” assumes that different cultures may consider given information more or less important, it is quite clear how some cultures give more prominence to context and others to text; in addition to this, as the Soviet semiotician Lotman affirms: “No language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which

*facilitation*); see L. Aronin, D. Singleton, *Multilingualism*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2012, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup>See [www.portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php](http://www.portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php)

<sup>5</sup>For interesting references to Hall’s Iceberg Theory see D. Katan, *Translating Cultures: An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators*, Manchester, UK & Northampton MA, St. Jerome Publishing, 2004, pp. 230–43.

<sup>6</sup>For further references to Hall see, E. Hall, *The Silent Language*, New York, Doubleday, 1959; E. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, New York, Doubleday, 1966; E. Hall, *Beyond Culture*, New York, Doubleday, 1976; E. Hall, *The Dance of Life. The Other Dimension of Time*, New York, Doubleday, 1983; E. Hall, M. Hall, *Understanding Cultural Differences: Germans, French and Americans*, Yarmouth, Intercultural Press, 1990.

does not have at its centre the structure of natural language”.<sup>7</sup> Such a statement can be a good starting point to discuss how language reflects culture, how culture is influenced by language and how this combination affects translators’ choices and the spread of some languages instead of others.

Nevertheless, how many languages are there in the world? According to *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*<sup>8</sup> (a printed and online encyclopaedia published by the Summer Institute of Linguistics) there are 7,097 known living languages around the world, and every different language implies a different and ever-changing cultural frame, the product of a “complex system which includes the knowledge, beliefs, art, moral, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”.<sup>9</sup> Another central issue—as Haugen argues—is that society “uses [the] language as one of its codes”.<sup>10</sup> More specifically, “Language exists only in the minds of its users, and it only functions in relating these users to one another and to nature, i.e. their social and natural environment, part of its ecology is therefore psychological: its interaction with other languages in the minds of bi-and multilingual speakers”.<sup>11</sup>

The new map of contacts between different codes and communities overcomes the Romantic view of languages as the unique mirrors of their cultures we mentioned above; consequently, both native speakers and language learners are pieces of a multi-facet puzzle of an international socio-cognitive dimension such as the one represented by multilingualism and its spread. After all, “multilingualism is the topic *du jour*—at least in critical applied linguistics”.<sup>12</sup>

However, there is a classifying mania provoked by what May calls “the turn towards multilingualism”:

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<sup>7</sup> J. Lotman, B. Uspensky, G. Mihaychuk, “On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture”, *New Literary History*, Vol. 9, No. 2, in *Soviet Semiotics and Criticism: An Anthology* (Winter, 1978), (211–32), qtd. by S. Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, London, New York, Routledge, 2002, p.21.

<sup>8</sup> M.P. Lewis (ed.), *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Sixteenth Edition, Dallas, SIL International, online version: [www.ethnologue.com/](http://www.ethnologue.com/).

<sup>9</sup> E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, New York, Harper, 1958 qtd. by D. Katan, *Translating Cultures: An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators*, p.25

<sup>10</sup>E. Haugen, “The ecology of language”, in A. Fill, P. Mühlhäusler (eds.), *The Ecolinguistics Reader: Language, Ecology and Environment*, London, New York, Continuum, 2001, p. 57, (57–66).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>12</sup>S. May (ed.), *The Multilingual Turn: Implications for SLA, TESOL, and Bilingual Education*, London, New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 1.

The terminological proliferation notwithstanding the increasing focus on super diverse linguistic contexts is welcome. It has usefully foregrounded multilingualism, rather than monolingualism, as the new norm of applied linguistic and sociolinguistic analysis. It has increasingly challenged bounded, unitary, and reified conceptions of languages and related notions of “native speaker” and “mother tongue”, arguing instead for the more complex fluid understandings of “voice” (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007, 2012), “languages as social practice” (Heller 2007), and a related “sociolinguistics of mobile resources”.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, grammar also has to cope with the evolutionary nature of languages and the cultural environment which affects them. Considering grammar as a cognitive process makes the communicative function more than a monolingual bias.

After all, as Radden and Dirven argue:

Grammar reflects and presents generalizations about phenomena in the world as its speakers experience them. For example, tense as a grammatical form is used to express general notions of time (present, past and future) but not specific notions such as years, hours or days, which are expressed by lexical material (...).

The grammar of a language is usage-based in that it provides speakers with a variety of structural options to present their view of a given scene. For example, I might describe the same scene as *I'm running out of time*, or *Time is running out*.<sup>14</sup>

It seems evident that concepts like interlanguage (as introduced by Selinker in 1972) and language competence must be re-settled for successful language learning in multilingual contexts. In fact, if every language builds up a system which—as in an integrated approach—provides an essential and useful framework, it implies greater insights about its evolution or, as Ingold argues, “particular and unique coming together and an integration of a number of distinguishable components or capacities”.<sup>15</sup>

For this reason, concepts like “standard/non-standard”, and “developed/undeveloped” varieties are not so easy to disentangle since

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> G. Radden, R. Dirven, *Cognitive English Grammar*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2007, p. XII.

<sup>15</sup> K.R. Gibson, T. Ingold (eds.), *Tools, Language and Cognition in Human Evolution*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 41.

socio-political motivations can be involved in the matter. The Nigerian context is a case in point.

In Nigeria, for instance, the inclusion in the Constitution of three languages, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo as “the three major languages” has partly contributed to the increasing attention they have received over the years. It has also influenced the esteem and the prestige they have commanded or enjoyed in the national scheme of things, and their perceived importance among Nigerians.<sup>16</sup>

How the number of languages spoken in a country, such as Nigeria is determined has been “a speculation or a guessing game”.<sup>17</sup> Apart from the number of languages assumed to be spoken in the country (up to 400, or even more), what is interesting is the coexistence of the three provincial languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) with English, which is *de facto* the national language by now.

Let us muse on the following figures:

- Hausa: (Provincial). *De facto* provincial language in northern region. Spoken as L2 in the north. 18,500,000 in Nigeria (1991 SIL). L2 users: 15,000,000 in Nigeria. Total users in all countries: 41,929,000 (as L1: 26,929,000; as L2: 15,000,000).
- Igbo: (Provincial). *De facto* provincial language in southeastern region. Main LWC of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states. 18,000,000 in Nigeria (Wiesenfeld 1999). Total users in all countries: 18,007,950.
- Yoruba: (Provincial). *De facto* provincial language in southwestern region. 18,900,000 in Nigeria (Johnstone 1993). L2 users: 2,000,000 in Nigeria. Ethnic population: 37,000,000 (2015 World Factbook). Total users in all countries: 21,043,700 (as L1: 19,043,700; as L2: 2,000,000).
- English: (National). L2 users: 60,000,000 in Nigeria (Crystal 2003a).<sup>18</sup>

Going beyond the undiscussed role of English and the multiplicity of the languages still present in Nigeria (divided into *educational, dispersed, developing, vigorous, threatened, shifting, moribund, nearly extinct,*

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<sup>16</sup> E. Adegbija, *Multilingualism: A Nigerian Case Study*, Asmara, Africa World Press, 2004, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> See *Ethnologue. Languages of the World*: [www.ethnologue.com/country/ng/status](http://www.ethnologue.com/country/ng/status).

*dormant, second language only, and extinct*<sup>19</sup>), what favours the three provincial languages over the others is the intertwined relationship between language and politics. In other words, “the speakers of those languages are, to a large extent, the political power brokers and decision-makers within the country.”<sup>20</sup>

As Adegbija writes,

In fact, the attempt to maintain a measure of political equilibrium among Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo speakers has resulted in the considerable neglect of the other Nigerian indigenous languages, more so the small population ones, which have become a kind of linguistic shield in the language—a power game of speakers of major languages.<sup>21</sup>

Consequently, due to the dominance of new issues which make interference, codemixing and language contact something more than just language concerns, firstly, bilingualism research (which has always been the starting point of every educational implication in the matter of code-mixing) and, secondly, the new stages in research on multilingualism, should move towards what Herdina and Jessner call “a dynamic model of multilingualism”.<sup>22</sup> As in a system whose parts mutually interact, “at the core of the theory is the understanding of the behavior and organization of living organisms as dynamic systems”.<sup>23</sup> A new frame is delineated, according to which loss and maintenance in languages must be considered as subsystems subjected to variation by their own nature.

What Herdina and Jessner are referring to is a language variation system which postulates complex interdependences between all the factors involved in language acquisition and language learning; and what is interesting is that such changes start on the individual level and only afterwards result in the variation of the cultural frames the individual is part of.

Language change in the individual results from adjusting one’s language system(s) to one’s communicative needs. If, like Grosjean, you look at the bilingual as an integrated whole, you can watch how changes in the language environment, and therefore in language needs, affect her/his competence in one or the other language, not in her/his linguistic competence in general. Speakers may move from monolingualism to

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> E. Adegbija, *Multilingualism: A Nigerian Case Study*, p. 6

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> P. Herdina, U. Jessner, *A Dynamic Model of Multilingualism. Perspectives of Change in Psycholinguistics*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 2002, p. 76.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

bilingualism, from bilingualism to trilingualism, that is different systems (LS1, LS2, LS3, etc.) are transitionally commanded by the same individual. According to the communicative needs, the native speaker has transitional command of different language systems over a period of time, resulting, for instance, in monolingualism, bilingualism, trilingualism, etc.<sup>24</sup>

For this reason, multilingualism can be studied under the lens of what Morin calls “complexity”, or, in other words, in terms of interaction, order-disorder and organizations of the phenomena involved.

Therefore, if we consider multilingualism as a complex set of linguistic systems mutually interacting, what we need today is a “lay” investigation of the “babelization” of the contemporary multiethnic society, where “lay” means overcoming the excessively prescriptive patterns which are usually applied to language studies and which constitute the fatal attack to new language entropies.

This implies a new paradigm of intercultural relationships which calls for linguistics, philosophy, science, sociology and literature, according to a “complex” and an “eco-ethic turn” which moves, as proposed by Morin, towards wider perspectives of the intercultural meeting inside the fragmentation it involves anyway.

The point is strictly connected to the idea of “complexity”. If we pursue a strong and restrictive disciplinary division of the real, complexity will be invisible. That is the reason why the term has been rejected or considered illusory in a lot of fields. On the contrary, as Morin argues: “the first meaning of the word comes from the Latin *complexus*, which means *what is woven together*. The peculiarity, not of the discipline in itself, but of the discipline as it is conceived, non-communicating with other disciplines, closed to itself, naturally disintegrates complexity”.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>25</sup> E. Morin, “Restricted complexity, general complexity”, in C. Gershenson, D. Aerts, B. Edmonds (eds.), *Worldviews, Science and Us: Philosophy and Complexity*, London, World Scientific Publishing, 2007, p. 6, (1–25). Here, as follows, the original quotation by Morin: “*D’une part elle signifie couramment confusion et incertitude; l’expression “c’est complexe” exprime de fait la difficulté à donner une définition ou une explication. D’autre part, comme le critère de vérité de la science classique s’exprime par des lois et des concepts simples, la complexité ne concerne que les apparences superficielles ou illusoirs. Apparemment les phénomènes se présentent de façon confuse et incertaine, mais la mission de la science est de débusquer, derrière ces apparences, l’ordre caché qui est la réalité authentique de l’univers*”, (*Complexité restreinte, complexité générale*, 2006).

Far from being a synonym for “difficult”, “demanding”, “challenging” or “complicated”, being “complex” means “strictly intertwined” or “entangled in a thought-provoking way”. The revolution Morin refers to is not by chance associated to the ecological dimension of the natural relations between living beings.

According to such an “ecological” perspective, it is necessary to understand that every event, information or knowledge is connected inseparably with its own cultural, social, economic, political, natural and linguistic environment and that every study of multilingualism as a product of this complexity should start from an idea of a “multiple society” which calls for localizations rethought according to a new idea of “the general”.

However, “re-enchanting the world”—according to Bauman—or “enhancing relativism”—according to Gellner—the relationship between complexity and postmodernism does not lead to the conclusion that anything goes, as noted by Cilliers in his *Complexity and Postmodernism*. It just means that in a system there are more possibilities that can be actualized. He writes:

Let us then examine some truly complex systems. The human brain is considered by many to be the most complex object known. Similarly, the language with which we communicate daily does not yield to analytical descriptions (...). In order to frame our description, we have to decide what our “distance” from the system will be: in other words, what level of detail are we going to consider?<sup>26</sup>

Accordingly, it is impossible to focus on multilingualism only in terms of a conscious development of different languages. It means to cope with a “liquid society” which, as in a riddle, cannot find out a unique definition of multilingualism because of the “discontinuities” international communication is made up of.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the assumed spread of English as the backbone of contemporary multilingualism in the world entails different paradoxical non-linear feedbacks between languages and cultures in contact; such feedback may work as an ethical resource, or as a cognitive effort. Taking into account the centripetal force of society and the centrifugal effort of the languages,

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<sup>26</sup> P. Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism. Understanding Complex Systems*, London, New York, Routledge, 1998, p. 5. About Gellner, see J.A. Hall, I.C. Jarvie (eds.), *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner*, Amsterdam, Atlanta, Rodopi, 1996.

<sup>27</sup> For further interesting references see R. De Rosa, *Riflessioni sul plurilinguismo*, Bellinzona, Casagrande, 2009.



the complex view of multilingualism represents the actual possibility of a *reductio ad unum*, through which the international dimensions of languages translate a wider knowledge of the world, favoured by mass-communication and fostered by translation and intercultural mediation.

In such instances, the combination of multilingual phenomena along with the chaos theory and the metaphor of complexity reveals interesting variables of the international language environments and local spheres.

As Kemp wrote in 2009, “multilinguals may live in a multilingual community, or overlapping bilingual communities, or be in contact with several monolingual communities. Their proficiency in each of their languages is likely to differ, and may fluctuate over time”.<sup>28</sup> However, in order to concentrate our attention on the facets of multilingual learning, we should know what a “language” is in such a frame and what do we mean by “cultural diversities and multination states”.

According to Kymlicka (1995), the actual idea of “nation” has remarkably changed. Today we live in what he calls “Multination States and Polyethnic States” where nation means “historical communities, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and culture. But in this sociological sense it is closely related to the idea of a ‘people’ or a ‘culture’ which are often defined in terms of each other”.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, teaching foreign languages and multilingual educational policies involve giving the younger generations the necessary coordinates of what Byram calls “tertiary socialization”, thought of as “a concept invented to emphasize the ways in which learning a foreign language can take learners beyond a focus on their own society, into experience of otherness, or other cultural beliefs, values and behaviours”.<sup>30</sup> As he explains:

Foreign language teaching can be a major factor in what might be called—as an extension of the notions of primary and secondary socialization—the process of tertiary socialization, in which young people acquire an intercultural communicative competence: the ability to establish a community of meanings across cultural boundaries (...) this involves both cognitive and affective processes.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> C. Kemp, “Defining Multilingualism”, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> M. Byram, *From Foreign Language Education to Education for Intercultural Citizenship*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 2008, p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> M. Byram, *Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Education*, Clevedon, Philadelphia, Multilingual Matters, 1989, p. 5.

As is evident, far from being a formal system that could be isolated from the rest of society, “one of the most pervasive social activities that human beings engage is *talk*”.<sup>32</sup> This means rethinking the idea of context in which multilingualism is embedded and which it starts from.

In other words, we should go beyond the Bateson’s famous metaphor of the “blind man and his stick”:

Bateson’s metaphor of the blind man and his stick provides a useful point of departure for thinking about some of the issues involved in the study of context (...). In Bateson’s metaphor the blind man is navigating through a world that is solid, fixed and immutable, at least from the perspective of his walking. He does not rebuild the city as part of the activity of conducting his walking. However, within social situations, a key constituent of the environment that participants attend to is other human beings, which are active agents in their own right, with their own plans and agendas.<sup>33</sup>

Taking into account the new asymmetry of the domains of languages defined by power, prestige, and exploitation, the spread of old and new languages may rethink the ground of the analysis of languages as *practical actions*—to quote Malinowski and what he argued in 1923 about the interdisciplinary field of ethno-linguistics.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, some of the following questions are still waiting to be answered:

- How to analyze multilingual communication?
- What is the role played by speakers’ nativeness or non-nativeness?
- To what extent is the number of languages involved in the communicative exchange important or not?

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<sup>32</sup> A. Duranti, C. Goodwin (eds.), *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> See B. Malinowski, “The problem of meaning in primitive languages”, in C.K. Ogden, I.A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning. A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism* (1923), Supplement I, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Fourth Edition, 1936, (296–336); it is also worth mentioning the article by G. Senft, “Bronislaw Malinowski and Linguistic Pragmatics”, in P. Cap (ed.), *Pragmatics Today*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2005, (139–55). About “rethinking contexts” Senft writes: “Rethinking context in Malinowski’s broad definition has shown to be important in studies within the field of Conversation Analysis, in Cognitive Anthropology, in more recent studies within the gradually rising field of gesture studies, and in new lines of research that aim at studying human interaction from both a multi modal and a multidisciplinary field of research”. (p. 150).

- What is the value of the power relations between minority languages and prestigious and widely used linguistic codes?

## 2. English as a “vehicular leader” or an “obstacle” to the multilingual identity

The spread of international English is the greatest challenge of cross-cultural interaction. But, as Dovring notes, “if it sounds as a gift to mankind, when it comes to science and technology, civil aviation and the postal service, (...) in international relations of politics and culture, *information soon turns into communication* by the use of various communities’ social values”,<sup>35</sup> so, the extent of the impact and the cultural dimension of the language spread as the accomplishments shared by English as a new tool of talent and education, have been extended, as Dovring stated in 1997, shifting from “a challenge among diplomats and politicians to everybody’s concern, the more so as we become aware of the different voices from global and domestic competing ideologies and goals”.<sup>36</sup>

It is high time we assumed English as a tool to dominate globalization; the outcome of such a statement implies, as Kachru noted, grasping an intricate system of convergence of cultures and languages whose English is one of the most powerful and known manifestations. Considering English as a pluralistic language means “focusing on its layer after layer of extended processes of convergence with other languages and cultures”.<sup>37</sup> And this convergence and contact is unique, since

it has altered the traditional resources for contact, for example, French, German, Italian, and Scandinavian. The language has opened up itself, as it were, to convergence with the non-western world: that part of the world that was traditionally not a resource for English. It is here that, for example, West Africa, East Africa, South Asia, West Asia and the Philippines become relevant and have become contributors to and partners in the pluralism in language.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> K. Dovring, *English as a Lingua Franca: Double Talk in Global Persuasion*, Westport, Praeger Publishing, 1997, p. XI.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> B.B. Kachru, “The Speaking Tree: A Medium of Plural Canons”, in J.E. Atlatis (ed.), *Georgetown University Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics*, Washington D. C., Georgetown University Press, 1994, p. 8, (6–22).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

Therefore, how clear can the picture of multilingualism be when language diversity is a fact of life of many *inner circle countries too*?<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, and ironically enough, “the same processes of globalization that helped establish English as the world’s pre-eminent language have been responsible for the increasing linguistic diversity of inner-circle countries”.<sup>40</sup> This encourages us to focus less on a new monolith structure for the cross-cultural interaction, and more on what Edwards describes as “an astonishing diversity of languages which lies just beneath the veneer of homogeneity, even in the English-speaking world.”<sup>41</sup>

If, on a global scale, monolingualism still works as a norm today, the dismantling of a new kind of imperialism which sees English as a bearer of political power sheds a new light on its spread and impact in different sectors and contexts. Thus, on the one hand, the existence of a *lingua franca* tries to prevent miscommunication across cultures favouring a global interaction through “the internet/emails and videoconferencing in business and the academic sphere, by global cooperation in politics, academia and administration, increased migration, short and long term, and study abroad”,<sup>42</sup> on the other hand, one of the most intriguing paradoxes of multilingual countries whose language is a language of wider communication is that

no matter how significant linguistic diversity is, as a result of immigration, the monolingual population tends to remain unashamedly monolingual and characterize the tone of the entire nation. This applies especially to

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<sup>39</sup> Kachru divided World Englishes in three concentric circles, introducing a model which is the most known and quoted today about the worldwide spread of English. He named the circles after their distance from the native-speaking varieties. So the “inner circle” included the regions where English is spoken as the first language; the outer circle contained those countries where English was firstly introduced due to colonial or administrative reasons; the “expanding” circle comprised all those countries where English is spoken as a foreign language. For further references see, B.B. Kachru, “Standards, codification, and sociolinguistic realism: the English language in the outer circle”, in R. Quirk, H. Widdowson (eds.), *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and the Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, (11–31); B.B. Kachru, *The Alchemy of English: The Spread, Function, and Models in Non-native English*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986; B.B. Kachru, “World English: Agony and Ecstasy”, in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*. Vol. 30, No. 2, 1996, (135–55).

<sup>40</sup> V. Edwards, *Multilingualism in English-speaking World*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> J. House, J. Rehbein (eds.), *Multilingual Communication*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2004, p. 24.

English-speaking countries which have had a long history of absorbing immigrants of different language backgrounds.<sup>43</sup>

From this perspective, the communicative systems can be rethought as metaphors for chaos and complexity leading to the impossible solution of the riddles above; in other words, the over 1,400 million people who live in countries in which English is the official language prevent English from being the definite squaring of the circle of the debate on multilingualism. The virtues of English as a “vehicular leader” overcome the inevitable success arisen from its hegemony in trade, economy, finance, technology, and politics.

On the contrary, the great potential of a language, so widely spread all around the world, can spring from its ability of being an/the “in-between space”, inside which mediation and translation can play one of the most challenging roles in fostering democracy; it is the multiple contextualization that drives towards new citizenships and to the quintessence of an intercultural education which stirs from intercultural communicative competences. Multilingual communication summarizes the general and the specific, compounding standard and variation, conflict and reconciliation. For this reason, translation studies seem, today, as one of the most inspiring disciplines of a world in rapid expansion. Quoting Tonkin and Esposito:

they can be seen as a product of work in cultural studies and literary theory but also in policy studies and political theory. They have taken on a certain priority because the matter of language, locally, nationally, and globally, has assumed a new urgency. Holding this world together, or keeping it apart, is language. At the boundaries of languages are the translators—mediators of cultures, enablers but also gatekeepers (...). Indeed, the question that language policy makers must face today is above all the management of the vast array of competing linguistic channels. If the management of world affairs demand communication, the maintenance of human identities demands variety. How can we give the cultures of the world enough room to breathe, while working together to deal with the world’s problems? How can we preserve linguistic difference without hindering linguistic communication? Is it even possible?<sup>44</sup>

Such elements work as priorities in translation and it is through language that understanding cultural identities is possible. However, linguistic utopia and language competitions need new language policies

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> H. Tonkin, M. Esposito Frank (eds.), *The Translator as Mediator of Cultures*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2010, p. VIII.

which—on the one hand—encourage centralization in language relationship between cultures; on the other hand, they stir respect for the linguistic and cultural differences of the groups involved in the process.

As an effect of such a balance, the concept of equivalence in translation acquires different meanings and localized perspectives. Since Nida, the balance between science and art of translating or the tension between theory and practice have demanded more consciousness of the importance of “contexts” in defining the translating competence. Today, most translations imply high technologies; anyway, they still deal with a lot of culture-bound elements, and build an intimate relationship between texts and environments (socio-cultural and lexical ones of course); but it is in these “between spaces” that the history of a country begins with its traditions, with its culture(s), with its language. In these spaces the journey of a language starts and in these blurred edges translators need a little bit of “strabismus”, as Scott Doyle suggests:

The notions of strabismus and enterprise lead, respectively, toward a consideration of two heuristic devices which may assist in achieving a better understanding of some of the complexity involved in and flexibility required for felicitous translation. The duality characteristic of a strabismus points toward the importance of binary relationships and /or oppositions; the notion of enterprise points toward a cline representing the choices made and the risks taken by the translator while working from one language toward and into another. (...) The *sine qua non* of translation, the moral operative heart of the enterprise, is the notion of fidelity. (...) Yet the translator’s requisite strabismus—the eyes incessantly focusing on both the text-that-is and the text-to-be—makes adherence to fidelity no simple matter for, as Barbara Johnson has so aptly described it, the translator cannot help but be a “faithful bigamist”.<sup>45</sup>

From the intensified spread of English and its results in some ideological standpoints, new lines of inquiry can therefore be developed, granted by a greater interdisciplinary approach to language issues which may consider code-switching contexts and non-elite multilingualism as the outcomes of an increased international mobility. In other words, as Cruz-Ferreira argues, “multilingualism has nothing to do with particular languages, because languages cannot be multilingual. People can”.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> M. Scott Doyle, “Translation and the space between. Operative parameters of an enterprise”, in M.L. Larson (ed.), *Translation: Theory and Practice, Tension and Interdependence*, Binghamton, State University of New York Press, 1991, p. 13, (13–26).

<sup>46</sup> M. Cruz-Ferreira (ed.), *Multilingual Norms*, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Brussels, New York, Oxford, Wien, Peter Lang, 2010, p.1.