

# Multilingualism and Universal Communicative Actions in and beyond Cyberspace: Normative Agenda and Ethical Representation(s) for Global Communications

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As the UNESCO's *Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace* (UNESCO 2003a/b) stimulates a wide range of debates and policy initiatives, this paper attempts to briefly discuss the following issues on multilingualism in and beyond cyberspace: (1) global and transnational situation of cyberspace and the Internet communication in comparative perspective, (2) the politico-evolutionary multilingualism in the (enlarging) European Union, (3) the market driven e-business mode of the mainstreaming of communicative forms and representations, (4) the new form(s) and (re-)presentations of multilingualism in/beyond the cyberspace of the communities, (5) the nation state's e-government initiatives, (6) the normative and ethical aspects of the multilingualism in a globalizing world.

**Key Words :** Cyberspace, European Union, Global Communication, Multilingualism, UNESCO, Universal Access

## 1. Positioning Cyber-Communications in a Differential World

The adoption of the *Recommendation on the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace*,<sup>1</sup> by the UNESCO on 15.October 2003 was a strategic one, as it was timely stimulating the debates at the World Summit on the Information Society (December 2003).<sup>2</sup> The normative calling for universal access is rightly responsive to the high-tech development of the information society. Here, aided by modern information and communication technologies (ICT), we are entering into a new epoch of capitalism. Cyber-linkages are revolutionary in changing the mode of socio-economic interactions locally and globally, behavioral repertoires among

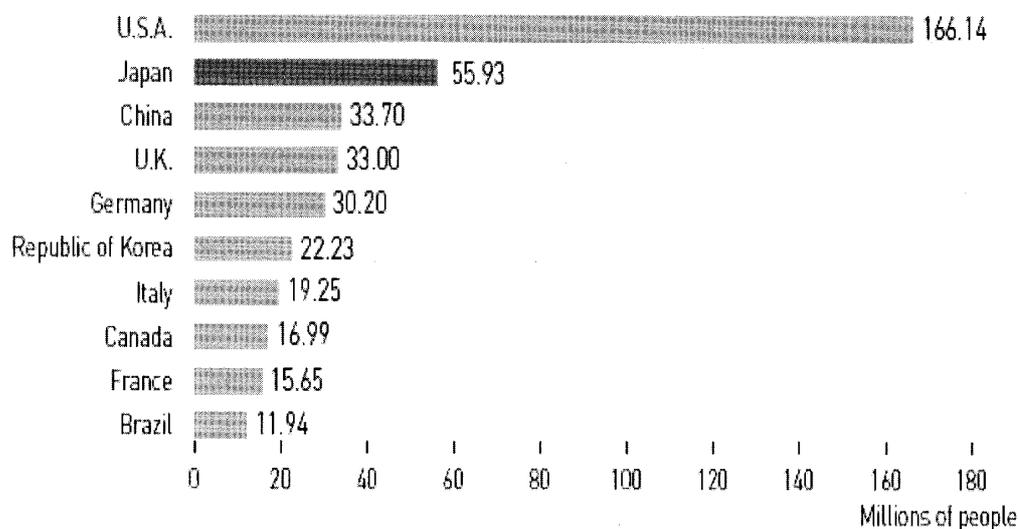
people in different geographical regions and time zones. Socio-economic activities at a global scale seem more and more borderless and just-in-time, allowing most forms of communication: one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one and many-to-many. The key issue here is the opening up of new ways and modes of communications as far as interactivity, timeliness, active participation, and the agenda setting are concerned, both in virtual and real social communities. Communications in cyberspace for both linguistic (text, semantic and phonetic) and visual modes are changing as well.

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

The developed economies account for most of

<sup>1</sup> [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=13475&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html#pdf](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13475&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html#pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://worldsummit2003.org>

**Fig.1: Top 10 Countries in Terms of Number of Internet Users**

Source: *Communications Usage Trend Survey, MPHPT, Survey by Nua.com* (as of March 2002)

the Internet connections and usages (Fig.1). Yet, the developing economies have a different reality. Derived from the ITU-World Bank Database on Telecommunications Policy, containing 86 developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America (details refer to: Fink, Mattoo & Rathindran 2002), below four sub-diagrams highlight the trend and pattern of growth for both wired and wireless communications penetration in the developing world: the increasingly adoption of multi-modal of telecommunications with a liberalizing (privatizing- cum- competitive) market regime. More specifically, it is the increasingly use of mobile communications (as expressed in terms of number of subscribers within the mobile communications market). The telecommunications performance in developing countries over in the last decade, as well as a continuing trend, is that there has been the widespread diffusion of mobile telephony (Fig.2). In 1985, most developing countries had virtually no mobile telephony. By 2000, a number of countries, e.g. Cambodia, Cote d'Ivoire, Paraguay, Uganda and Venezuela, had more mobile subscribers than fixed-line subscribers. Interestingly, the middle-east and northern Africa region leads the developing world in mobile penetration (at 6.8 mobile subscribers per 100 people), followed by Latin & Caribbean America (6.3), Asia (2.4) and Sub-Saharan Africa (1.7).

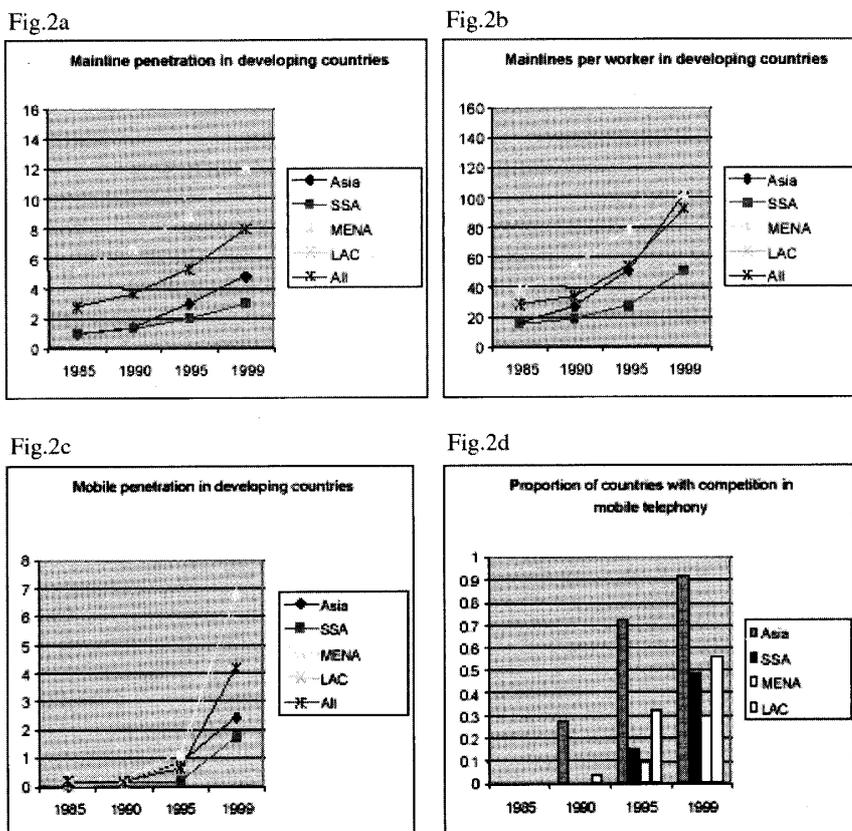
### 1.2 Differential Internet Penetration Pattern

In the highly dynamic East Asian economies,

Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, they all have a very high internet penetration rate (Fig.3). This has to do with the full adoption of the advantageous high-tech (like 3G, ADSL, Cable, DSL and FTTH) framework of the internet communications.

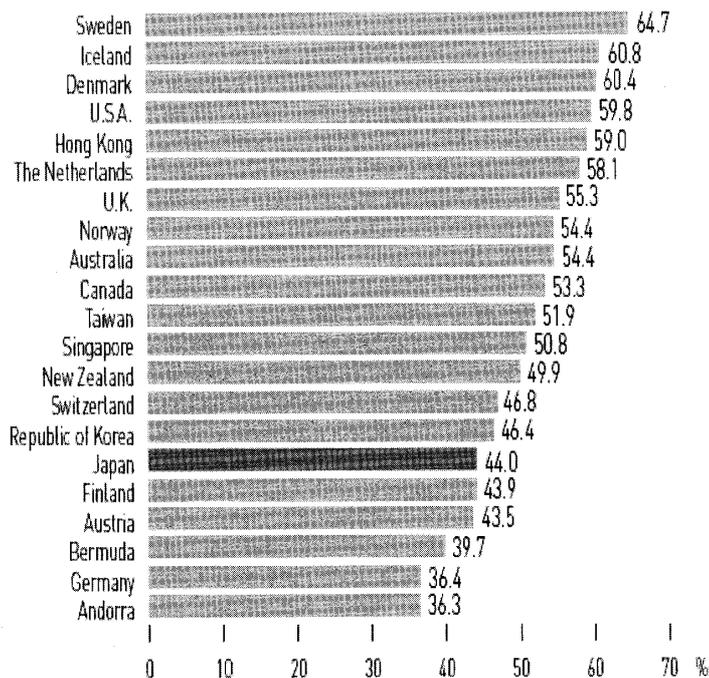
Perhaps, the Japanese case needs some more specification. In 2001, though Japan has the highest ratio (72.3%) of cell phone internet compatibility rate among OECD countries (Fig.4), the actual internet penetration rate was just around 44% (Fig.3). What is more enigmatic is the under-performance in terms of the Internet penetration rate: Japan's ranking is outside the first top-15 group – only 44%; following the Asian Newly Industrializing Economies (NIEs): South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong (Fig.4). The likely explanation of this mis-match is that there is a strong discrepancy between the high tech (export-production) sector and the low utilization rate (at household and societal level). On the other hand, despite its mono-lingualism, the high rate of the Internet compatibility of cellular phone system has two major implications for the mediascape. First, mobile communications are coupling with information technologies: the WAP technology, shaping the MMS (multi-media sending), frees the locational-bound communications, and second, the size of communicative tools is smaller and handy. If this high-tech built up could be further coupled with the existing high rate of cell phone ownership rate (75.6% of the population has cell

**Fig.2: Wired and Wireless Penetration in Developing Countries, 1985-1999**



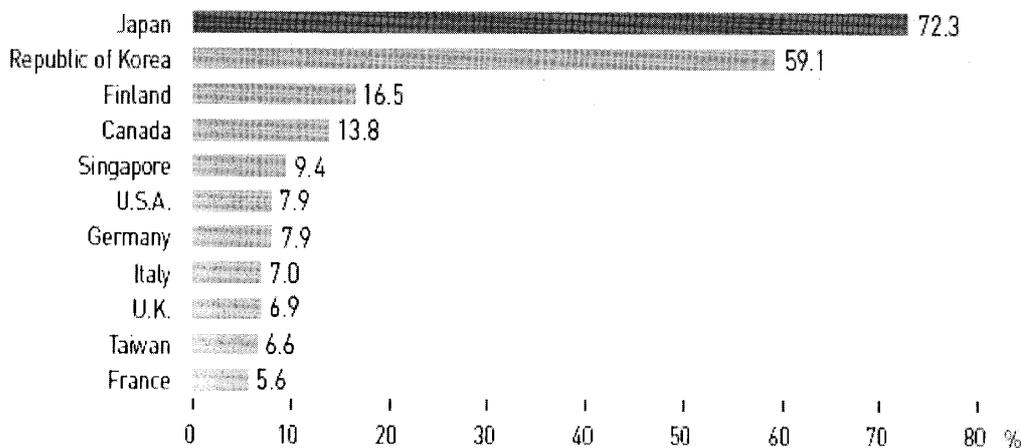
Source: Fink et al. 2002

**Fig.3: Countries and Regions with an Internet Penetration Rate of 35% or More**



Source: Communications Usage Trend Survey, MPHPT, Survey by Nua.com (as of March 2002)

**Fig.4: Cell Phone Internet Compatibility Rate (Ratio of the Number of Subscribers to the Mobile Internet to the Number of Subscribers to Cell Phones) in the Major Countries and Regions (as of 2001)**



Source: MPHPT 2002a

phone), the full vision of information society can be realized. What more important in web-linguistic terms is the heavily use (over 80%) of Japanese in the cyber-communications.

Japanese in its tri-textual form (Kanji, Katakana, Hiragana) is still predominantly use in SMS (Short-Message-Sending) in mobile-telegraphy, as well as the daily, printed form of, communications – don't be surprise that Japanese society is still a paper-based and personal-to-person direct contact communicative one; this can be seen from the very slightly increase of 0.7% (as compared with 1999) for total mailing volume in 2000, despite strong competitions from couriers and e-mailing.

### 1.3 Digital Divides and Inequality of Life Chance

There are various forms of digital divides and inequalities in our globalizing world. First and foremost, the Internet backbone is still controlled by developed economies: 50% of the Internet communications among Asian countries are routed via US because the infrastructure. Second, the ratio of the Internet population in Asia Pacific and South East Asia compared with the total of the population in the above area is about 0.5%, East Asia (0.4%), South Asia (0.04%), whilst OECD except US is 6.9% and US is 26.3% (UNDP 1999). Last but not least, the gap within the developing economies is very wide and deep, for instance in Asian countries: around 20% of the adults in the rich part of Asia are online but less than 1% of the people in the poor part using Internet (ITU 2000). These figures confirm

the digital divides inside and between countries in different geographical regions: overwhelming majority, especially poor people, in poor countries are the victims of globalization cannot receive the benefit of the Internet as their rich counterparts.

The appropriate use of ICT in social development is critical. Two recent reports recently released by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) noted the important role of ICT in solving some of the social and economic ills of developing economies. The UNDP Annual Report (2001) noted that ICT can help solve poverty worldwide. The second report (in July 2001) under the *Digital Opportunity Initiative of the G8 Dot Force* thrust, further noted that ICT solve social ills of health, education and the environment ([http://itmatters.worldonline.com/news/news\\_07242001b.html](http://itmatters.worldonline.com/news/news_07242001b.html)). How to build up the linkages between ICT and better cross-cultural communication is critical for global sustainability. For this, the rest of this paper will address to various manifestations of multilingual communications in/beyond the cyberspace: the politico-evolutionary multilingualism of the EU, the new forms of e-Business communications, socio-interactive text-messaging and its impact, and the e-government initiatives, plus some normative final remarks.

## 2. Evolutionary Multilingual Communications: Political Will and Mandate

The move towards transnational communications

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

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

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

Since the 1950s' six member states (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands), then having four official languages (Dutch, French, German and Italian), the European Union has been on an expansion of new official languages, whenever new members are admitted. In 1995, when the most recent accessions of new members to the EU, fifteen member states in total (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom), the official languages and the working languages of the EU institutions were again expanded to eleven languages: Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish. (See Fig.5)

Multilingualism is a political (for the member states), as well as practical (for the citizens), necessity for the (further) multicultural identity of Europe and the expansion of the European Union, as the ultimate goal of the European Union is "an

*ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen"* (Article 1 of the Treaty on European Union). In addition, as the EU has to respect the national identities of its member states (Article 6 of the Treaty on European Union), the European Commission and the other institutions of the European Union exist to serve the EU and its citizens, a community of peoples with a fascinating variety of customs, characteristics and languages.

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

### 2.2 The Unfinished Business in Central & Eastern Europe

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

Following the Finland and Sweden experience, the logistic for an enlarging multilingualism is somewhat like this (cf. Clark 2000):

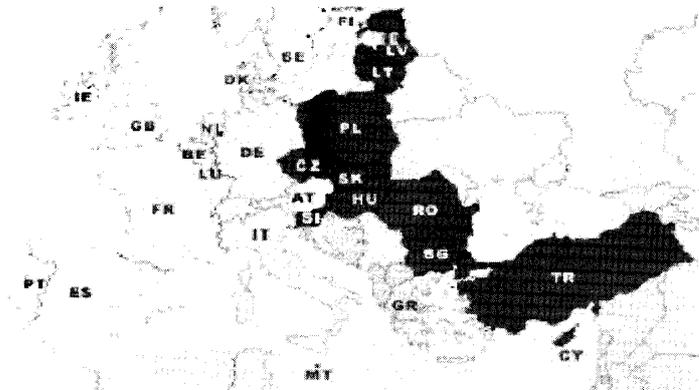
Eighteen months before the date of accession, the translation of the EU legislation into the national language(s) has to be started, with revision centre set up in each new member state's capital. These centres will be staffed by locally recruited Commission employees whose task it will be to check the legal accuracy of the translation work done hitherto. The functional specialization (e.g., law) and bilingual ability (mother-tongue and foreign languages) of the translators are the key for the project. After a

**Fig.5: Language-Regime and Timeline in the EU (1952 - 2004 onward)**

EU language-timeline

1952	1973	1981	1986	1995	2004+
DE	DE	DA	DA	DA	DA
FR	FR	DE	DE	DE	DE
IT	IT	EN	EL	EL	EL
NL	NL	FR	EN	EN	EN
→	DA	IT	FR	ES	ES
	EN	NL	IT	FR	FI
		EL	NL	IT	FR
			ES	NL	IT
			PT	PT	NL
				FI	PT
		→		SV	SV
					BG
			→		CS
					ET
					HU
					LT
					LV
					MT
					PL
				RO	
				SK	
				SL	
				TR	

The EU Enlargement (15+10+2+1)



Source: Clarke 2000

final authentication of at least the most important legislative acts on behalf of the Commission or the Council (for it is these Institutions, rather than the acceding Member State, that are responsible for drafting and publishing) the authenticated version of such legislation in the language of the new Member State will be published in the form of a Special Edition of the Official Journal. In short, even before the date of accession, and particularly afterwards, the EU (and the new member-states) will be required to carry out translation for these new languages.

Perhaps, the challenge is not just in terms of translation and simultaneous interpretations for oral/audio life events, but also the underdevelopment

of ICT in the Central and Eastern European societies. The 'digital divide' between rich developed world and the poor developing world is visible even when comparing the transition economies of Eastern Europe and Central Asia with high-income OECD countries. Over 30% of the inhabitants of high income OECD countries have Internet access in 2002, compared to about 10% of people in Central Europe and the Baltic, and less than 5% people in South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CyberAtlas, 2. May 2003).

From the Internet Penetration Rate for that region we can approximate the difficulties ahead. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, about 33% of

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enterprise reported having access to the Internet (Fig.6). However, there is great disparity between the countries. Enterprises in the early applicants to the EU (i.e., the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia) were most likely to report having Internet access, with highest rate in Slovenia (84.8%), while enterprises in the CIS were less likely to report having access to the Internet than in any other region, only 7.8% in Azerbaijan (Clarke 2001).

Against this context, the **eEurope 2002** initiative, launched (in 2000) by the European Commission to promote 'the information society for all', is a partially successful one. By mid-May 2002, 40.4% of Europeans and 93% of schools were connected to the Internet, 55% of public services were accessible on-line, and more than 35% of doctors were using the web for professional ends. Europe is gradually catching up with its main rival, the United States, where the federal government and venture capitalists have invested massively in information society technologies; but the rest of Europe has been left out!

In June 2002, the European Commission launched a new action plan, known as **eEurope 2005**, designed to fuel the dynamic further. Its objectives, as ratified by the Seville European Council, are to encourage the essential parallelism between the costly implementation of communication

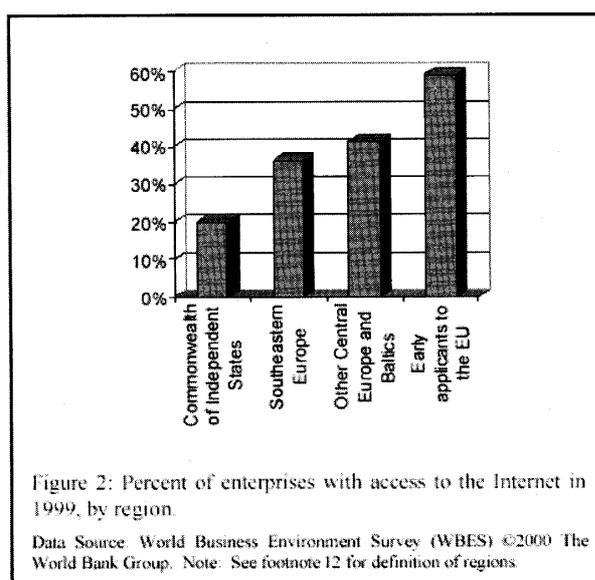
infrastructures and the generation of advanced services – *e-business*, *e-government*, *e-learning*, *e-health*, etc. – which will use them and make them pay. The Sixth Framework Programme plans (2002-2006) to pursue its research priorities in information society technologies. Hopefully, with the enlargement of EU, the rejuvenation of socio-economic development in Central and Eastern European countries, as well as their spillovers to the benefits for the enlarged EU and the rest of the region, multilingualism and eEurope can be further developed in the coming decade.

### 2.3 From European Union(s) to Global Communications: Techno-Lingualism Synergy?

The issue of Multilingualism is important for a globalizing world in general, the further regionalization processes in certain geo-political regions, representing by the inter-Governmental Organizations, like EU, NAFTA, APEC, ASEAN; but there are unresolved issues like:

- The developments and major investments made by the iGOs and RiGOs (like UN and European Commission) in machine translation had failed to deliver the expected results beyond regional and international institutions. Local people are less benefited from the overall global, multilingual

**Fig.6: Percentage of Enterprises with Access to the Internet in Europe (1999)**



The countries in the WBES (2000) sample were: (I) Commonwealth of Independent States: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan; (II) Early Applicants to the EU: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia; (III) Other Central Europe and the Baltics: Lithuania and the Slovak Republic; (IV) Southeastern Europe: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Romania.

initiatives, vis-à-vis, organizational ones.

- There were economic costs associated with a multilingual, globalizing world through the strong prospect that the effective application of ICT could reduce these – like the case in EU.
- There was concern over the threat to the language industries (personal translation / interpretations) arising from ICT and at the same time some prospects that it could be a source of employment.
- There was concern that the increasing use of English (as *lingua franca*?) in international communication would undermine the integrity of all languages and impact on the use and availability of information in less widely spoken languages.
- The application of ICT was seen as having potential for improving access to information held by the public sector in languages other than those in which it already existed.
- Social benefits in the further multilingual applications by regional and international bodies public use, might be paralleling the economic benefits of the development ICT and the translation-machinery by private vendors (Microsoft, for instance) in this sphere so that a more direct controls over users is questionable.
- Resources are required to realize and spread the

benefits from the multilingual investments in the application of ICT to language issues. In short, who pay for the bill: the market, the state and/or society (people at large or on individual basis)?

### 3. The Market Driven e-Business Communicative Representations

We are in global, digital capitalism! ICT are controlling most if not all aspects of our society, under the domination of the neoliberal, pro-market, profit-driven policies, which in turn reinforce socio-economic and political inequalities in the advanced capitalist world - this is the very essence of digital capitalism. Digital capitalism further enables and hence reinforces the globalization of capitalist governance and corporate-led rule, particularly in the deepening of (e-)consumerism on a transnational scale with both virtual and real encounters in and beyond the cyberspace (Schiller 1999). The linguistic turn since then is setting in with more simple and short-form of text and speedy message cyber-communications.

#### 3.1 e-Business Turns to Techno- Linguistic Cul-de-sac: Mixed Multilingual Domain

In terms of coverage, e-Business and its ramifications (in terms of e-marketing and e-branding, e-shopping and e-retailing) amount to over 70% of the all forms of cyber-communications. For instance, Online Banking has reached more than 30% of the web population in the developed economies (Fig.7). Up-to-now, most of the online

Fig.7: Online Banking in Selected Economies (November 2002)

Table 1. Full Service Commercial Banks & Credit Unions, November 2002, At-Home

Country	Reach: % Active	Unique Audience	Visits per Person	Time per Person
Sweden	51.3	1,984,000	6.04	1:05:23
Australia	39.6	2,470,000	5.89	0:52:48
France	38.7	3,647,000	6.82	0:44:47
Netherlands	38.5	2,278,000	4.88	0:46:45
Brazil	36.2	2,585,000	7.45	0:59:31
United Kingdom	28.7	4,862,000	5.95	0:41:09
Hong Kong	21.2	454,000	5.01	0:34:27
Switzerland	19.4	482,000	4.44	0:39:44
Germany	19.3	4,036,000	5.42	0:38:14
Spain	18.6	1,107,000	5.2	0:44:58
US	12.5	14,929,000	4.72	0:42:47
Japan	9.6	2,418,000	2.82	0:19:24
Italy	8.3	876,000	5.57	1:21:26

Source: Nielsen//NetRatings, November 2002

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e-business models are based on a common language within a nation state, plus a very detailed, official language(s), meta-legal documentation (contract) for all the concerned contracting parties. As e-Business model grows, more multilingual requirements set in. The earliest challenge of all is the (de-)codification system for mutual communications: the so-called: mixed multilingual codification.

The unfinished project for a workable system for the mixed multilingual ASCII domain highlights the techno, linguistic and administrative complexity in and outside the cyber-informatics (ITU 2001). Though a number of national organizations are already operating to offer and coordinating the non-ASCII-string domain naming, in the case for Chinese-string and Japanese-string with respective to their linguistic characters, they are far from good beyond their territorial boundaries. For example, some Japanese-characters (Kanji) are identical with Chinese-characters but different meanings and codifications in the cyber-informatics.

The present system of codification for non-ASCII string is still very much a national specific one, though coordinated with ICANN, there may not be a problem regarding authority decisions as long as there is no dispute as to that organization being the legitimate authority for one country with one language(s). The problems arise when the character-mix (same character having different meanings and forms) in different language(s), the same Japanese characters “日本” are also used in the Chinese character set and their glyphs are identical. More idiosyncratic is the case when the national language, like the Japanese, uses two other scripts, namely Katakana and Hiragana, as other countries do not use these scripts, they are unlikely to give rise to complications. On the other hand, “企業” is a traditional Chinese character string meaning ‘a company’, that in multilingualism, but it may share a differentiated characters-meaning with the Japanese one. In short, multilingual domain names may confuse people in spite of the stated goal to make domain names more memorable. It is very difficult to decide who should be designated to manage these kinds of top-level domains (and in which country). Given the difficulties experienced for simply introducing new ASCII top-level domains, it is not hard to imagine the challenges that will be involved when introducing multilingual top-level domains.

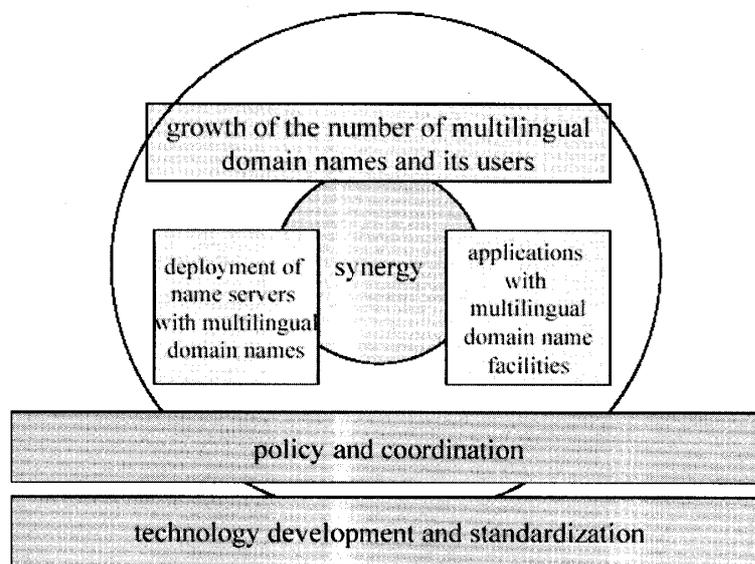
For other languages, the issues will be much more complex. If a country or region corresponding

to a country code has two or more official languages, it may need to decide in which language is used to represent its country “code” (non-ASCII-string), assuming that “country code” has an equivalent in that language. Even if a rule is established that two or more non-ASCII-strings can be assigned to one country or region, the issue arises as to the number of non-ASCII-string to be assigned to the country or region for however many languages are official or used in that jurisdiction. For example, in the case of India, there are more than 20 commonly used languages, each with their own script.

In addition, local customization of the linguistic characters-sets will need to be addressed (Chinese Big5 and GB2312). It is extremely difficult if not impossible, for those whose language is not concerned by this discussion to comprehend the sensitivities involved. Understanding whether the above issues just are code problems or protocol problems is very difficult. But this understanding is necessary to lead to an acceptable decision as to what extent such issues need to be standardized internationally. Someone must decide which issues exist and how they are to be resolved. Perhaps a pragmatic first step is resolving who is the likely relevant decision-making authority and then ask those agencies in concerned to make a regional-global coordination (a bottom-up strategy).

The good practice of the Japanese Domain Names Association (JDNA), established in July 2001, highlights a bottom-up strategy. With Japan-based members such as application vendors, network service providers, and domain name registries, the JDNA, facilitates the local necessary specifications such as detailed representation of URLs and e-mail addresses can be determined.

Taking the case of multilingual domain (name) for the Internet-addressing, to make multilingual domain names fully usable on the Internet, technical standardization will be but the tip of the iceberg. To meet user requirements, the ITU (2001) recommended that it will be necessary to also complete the following steps: standardization of technology, policy and coordination of registration and management rules, and the deployment of applications and name servers. The relationship between these steps, necessary for deployment of multilingual domain names, is illustrated in Figure 8. For the urgency of policy and coordination, national, regional and international cooperation for solution has to be found.

**Fig.8: The Basis of Multilingual Domain Name Growth**

(Source: ITU 2001)

Given the globalization trend, there is substantial market and user demand for multilingualism in general and firstly expressed in terms of different domain names. To satisfy this demand, the entire environment will need to be developed taking into account technology standardization, policy and administrative arrangements, as well as new applications. The future of multilingual Internet names and content is imminent. We should not underestimate the significance of this activity, as it is part of a far nobler goal: the ongoing internationalization and multilingualism of the Internet.

### 3.2 From *Lingua Franca* to Acronymization of Communications

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

and marketing themselves.

Taking the following txt.msg on mobile phone:

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

Literally it means

“use the solutions-software package marketed by [My]SAP (the world largest for Supply Chain Management [SCM], plus SAP’s Enterprise Resource Planning [ERP], running on Microsoft’s Operation System of Windows NT, it lowers TCO [Total Cost of Ownership].”

SAP: founded in 1972, Headquartered in Walldorf, Germany, SAP is the world’s largest inter-enterprise software company, and the world’s third-largest independent software supplier overall. SAP employs over 28,900 people in more than 50 countries.

TEXT (translation) versus Oral-Audio Representation (sound based ‘interpretation’), and the issue of comprehension and understanding in bilingual/multilingual cross-cultural encounters are fundamental for global communications. Yet, comprehension (speed, simple) versus communicative full understanding is the challenge for present mobile

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mediated communications.

Second example in txt.msg:

“BTW (*By the way*)..... ITA (*I Totally Agree*) ...  
EOD (*End of Discussion*)”

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

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

Third example:

ROW - a North American designation for “Rest of the World”, which refers to everything and everyone outside the USA in a dubious category.

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

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

The x-LA is replacing the essence of not just multilingual communication, but also the idiosyncratic (re)presentation of ideas and meanings within a particular culture and ethnic group. As the current language regimes within different

institutions of the iGOs (UN families, World Bank, WTO and IMF) are in favor of a few languages as the *lingua franca*, or using x-LA as an alternative *lingua franca* form(s), but they are confronted by the political sensitivities of nation states. For RiGos like the EU, the tensions of merging into a few ‘working’ languages are also strong, as highlighted by the opposition of French and German governments against the proposal for a single language regime.

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

#### 4. (Re-)Presentations (Multi-)Lingualism in/beyond Socio-Cyberspaces

One of the key manifestations of cyber-communications, the mobile one in particular, is the shared meaning and mutual usage of common characters, words and text. James N. Rosenau is half right when he pointed out that

“The widespread growth of the Internet, the World Wide Web and the other electronic technologies that are shrinking the world offers considerable potential as a source of democracy...by facilitating the continued proliferation of networks that know no boundaries, these technologies have introduced a horizontal dimension to the politics of *Globalized Space*. They enable like-minded people in distant places to converge, share perspectives, protest abuses, provide information and mobilize resources – dynamics that seem bound to constrain vertical structures that sustain governments, corporation and any other hierarchical organizations” (Rosenau 1998: 46).

What most important is the shared meaning, identity and trust derived from the existing social relationship, and with this commonness of sharing, there is an emergence of new linguistic form(s) in the mediated communication in general and the mobile communication in particular. The new linguistic form(s) is fully (re-)presented at the texting, text-messaging (txt.msg) and short message sending (SMS) mode of communications.

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

The enigma, if not the problematic, of present day wired/wireless mediated communications is the re-creation of new text, semantic and symbolism within the given media – the expressed form(s) and manifestation of communications hence is a contingency of technological set up. More often than not, the communications have to customize into the given logics and designs of the communicative tools (e.g., mobile phone and/or PDA with small LCD display screen and miniature buttons) – it ends up into the re-emergence of symbolic code (like the Morse Code in telegraphy).

Below is a quote from a study on the virtual strangers in the Philippines (Ellwood-Clayton, 2003:35):

[Grahic of a kitten] shhh... its me putn a blanket on u so u wont get cold...  
hav a warm n. gud nyt sleep.  
God bless n gud pm. Nino

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

Text-messaging (txt.msg) or the Short-Message Sending (SMS) is become one of the fastest growing value-added services for many Internet Service Providers and/or telecommunication companies, partly because of their pricing regime and partly because of the individual users preference for 'privacy' in (non-verbal) communications in the public sphere when their communications are predominantly 'private' and 'out-of-the-context' they are in. More specifically, txt.msg or SMS is a more superior form of communication for those who 'shared' and 'nurturing' specific social/inter-personal relationship (say, between lovers and spouse, within the familial network). Rightly identified by communication scholars that text message, in spite of its limited number of characters / little animations, is the back door of communication. "Despite its scope, a text message finds its way to times and places where a call would be impossible or at least unsuitable." (Kasesniemi & Rautiainen 2002: 171).

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

#### 4.2 Synergy of x-LA to txt.msg: One Dimensional Multilingualism?

As human communications are shaping by a highly commercialized regime of interaction, under the speedy and efficiency-driven pressure, the x-Letter-Acronyms (x-LA) become a dominant way of expression of, exchange for ideas. This x-LA communicative short-hand (symbolicism?) has been further reinforcing by the txt.msg, SMS, of the mobile and the Internet communications. For example, the following list of x-LA is commonly used in the cyber-coding:

ETD / ETA: Expected Time of Departure / Arrival  
DoNM (Date of Next Meeting)  
FYI (For Your Information).

By the same token, the domination of the x-LA (x-Letter-Acronym), with specific reference to text and/or phoentic becomes a global trend. The x-LA also has its lineage to the phoneticism. For instance, "B2B" (Business-to-Business) and "B2C" (Busines-to-Consumers), the word "to" is being replaced by a numeric "2". Yet, x-LA is not just an English speaking world phenomenon, take the case of the "EKZ" (Einkaufszentrum, in German, meaning Shopping-Centre).

Not just we use x-LA in e-Business and txt.msg (SMS) communications, but also for professional communications and preventive protocols. Even the epidemic now has its x-LA: the SARS: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndromes(!), and the mouth-mask to take as a precaution is: N95 (made by 3M).

Socio-functional differentiation with linguistic-knowledge specialization, coupled with generalization of professional knowledge via informational media, plus the further specialization processes of business life, facilitates the development of acronyms. For instance, the EU's Eurodicautom, the world largest multilingual terminology database with specific reference for its 11 official languages, has over 400,000 abbreviations (<http://>

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[europa.eu.int/eurodicautom/](http://europa.eu.int/eurodicautom/)). The use of acronyms is becoming the default (sub)linguistic requirement for socio-functional communications in our (post)modern world, more particularly it constitutes to the default communications in cyberspace.

At this informational age, we are prompted to learn, as well as using, more and more x-LA and jargons (that are foreign to our culture?) to engaging in a globalizing world. We are becoming the receiving ends, if not victimized by, the reproduction of meanings by the cyber-jargonists (whom the agency representing the larger technological innovation mechanism of modern transnational firms). For this, there are four distinct yet inter-related issues need to be addressed.

First and foremost, x-LA serve similar function of radio/TV 'jingle' that a repetitive pattern of sounds is associated and identified with certain radio/TV program or the commercial advertisement. Here, the text identifier/signifier function of x-LA and txt.msg is more than obvious. Yet, the x-LA becomes the short-cut onto, or short-circuiting of, our new forms of communicative enigma(?).

Second, it is the predominantly use of x-LA which are American English by origin, reflecting a world strongly influenced by American made products and ideas (hence conceptions of daily life and social relations – still remember the ROW?). The question is how real/bias is the (imperialist) Americanized conceptualization / perception about the world reality: x-LA, mostly based upon the Anglo-Saxon (American?) socio-linguistic mode of knowledge reproduction, are likely to create another form of colonial control over other linguistic and communicative re-presentation of the real world – our brain thinks what are programmed in the linguistic ordering.

Third, as we are continue to have more x-LA communicative exchanges, within the cyberspace of mobile communications (using mobile telephony), are we just communicate for a set of acronyms within reaching/touching the very essence of the complexity of human communications? Or, aren't we replacing the sophisticated (perhaps, rather difficult to comprehend in terms of the speedy-efficiency requirements of modern day communication) conceptualization of daily experience, with a set of pre-determined / pre-defined / borrowed / transplanted x-LA from another linguistic world?

Last but not least, and at this historical conjuncture, we have to ask: what form / mode / meaning / representation of new language(s) will be the dominant one in the cyberspace, as well as in our real life. One obvious candidate for future agency for the linguistic turn in the cyber-age is the e-Business. Further commercialization of the languages is the direct consequence of the ever-increasingly penetration of business strategy for branding, advertising and marketing, as well as retailing: DOS, EXCEL, GOOGLE, PC, MSWORDS, ORACEL, POWERPOINT, ORACLE, WINDOWS, YAHOO – have their own market price! The well protected (with trade marks and patents rights) brands and branding are going to limit our usage, imagination, if not replacing, our sophisticated linguistic rediscovery of meaning(s) and representation(s) of different socio-cultural experience in real life situation.

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

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

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

## 5. The Nation State e-Government Initiatives

The e-government has been, and will be, very important in shaping the cyber-dynamics as a recent study indicates that, for a mature online society like USA, over one third of all online users log on to government sites (Nielsen//Netratings, Feb.2003; <http://www.nieslsen-netratings.com>, Lai 2005). This is in addition to the fact that government sites are mostly having excellent source of (propaganda?) information for citizens, and in most cases, these sites and the use of information are free for all. More importantly, the linguistic requirement for a national e-government project is critical for its success.

### 5.1 e-Government Initiatives: Limited Gain?

It is a global trend, if not a fashionable one, that every country, the developing ones in particular, is establishing some form of e-government in running the country. These states' political solution so far for the adoption of ICT into public service is merely serving for better efficiency in administrative terms. Though their extent of success or failure is yet known, the best scenarios will be like the one in the North America. Lately, people in the US can pay their local property taxes and parking tickets on commercial sites such [www.govworks.com](http://www.govworks.com) or [www.ezgov.com](http://www.ezgov.com). E-commerce is more flexible and advanced than e-politics or e-policy. Another example illustrates the data-specificity of E-government: recently launched by Imagitas, the web site of HiCitizen.com (<http://www.hicitizen.com>) is designed as a one-stop source for the US government forms and information for consumers. The *FirstGov*, (<http://www.firstgov.gov>), the US government web portal, this user-friendly site is organized by topic (Auto, Business, Moving & Mail, Military & Veterans, etc.) and searchable by keyword. These will make life easier but the sites are probably not much use to anyone seeking detailed or obscure government information or real politicking.

Undoubtedly, the generally positive characterization of the ICT on public administration and politics should be noted (cf. Andersen, ed. 1995; Margetts 1999; Garson 2000). The utilization of ICT is more, if not concentrated, on the enhancement of the 'data quality' for the politico-administrative processes in the (narrowly defined) government but not 'policy-making quality', and the benefits of using ICT are mostly captured by the elitist, powerful, privileged, and selected few of the governing

bodies. Again, this reflects the predominantly production/supply-bias mode of ICT utilization in public policy governance. In other words, the overall performance of ICT on the soft (norms and values), the most critical and controversial aspect of political governance, is far from satisfactory. In many instances, there are identifiable unfavourable consequences of ICT applications against the individuals' privacy and empowerment and their legal rights (Bennett and Grant 1999).

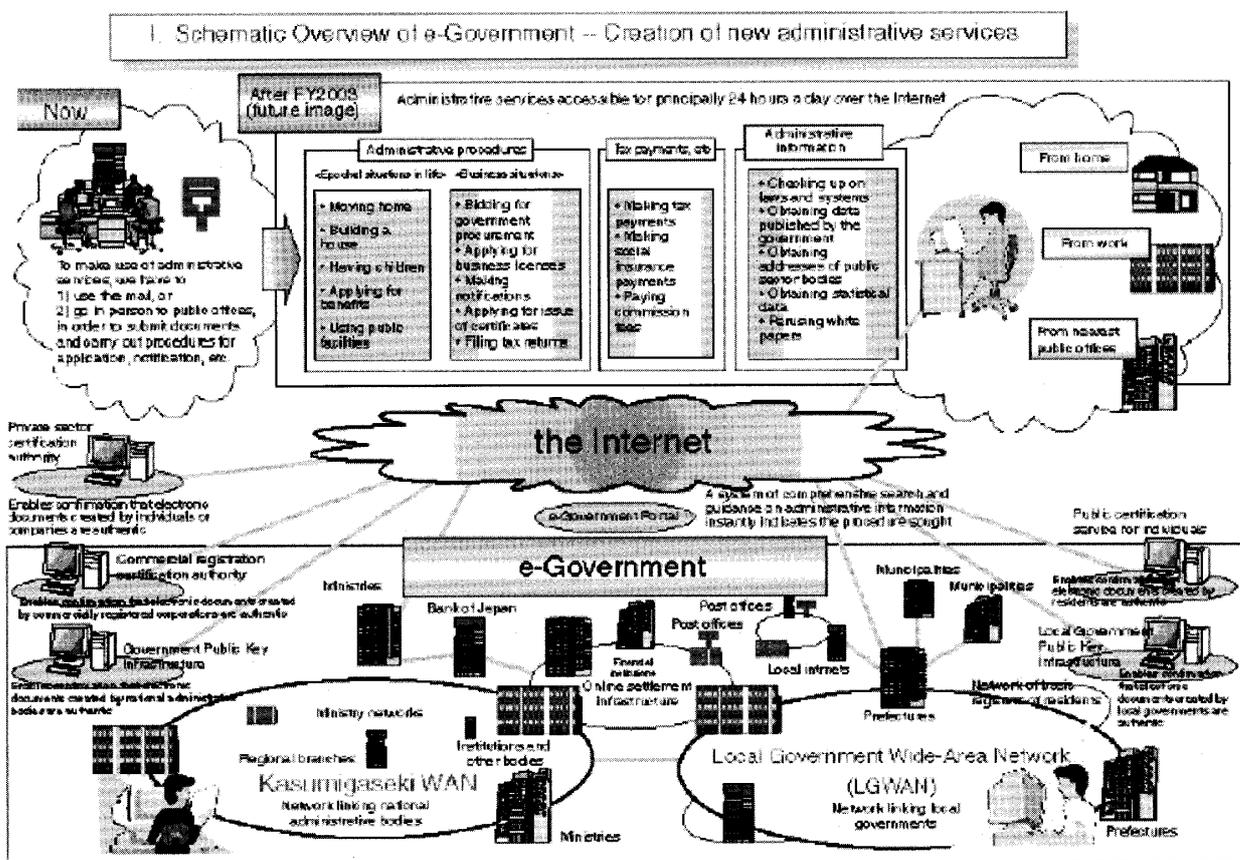
In spite of the sub-optimal consequence for e-politicking, e-government initiatives do help to re-integrating the state-society relationship in terms of offering and promotion of national language(s) in new, expanding media of communications in cyberspaces.

### 5.2 Opening Source-Coding for Language(s)?

By default, the e-government initiatives are nation-state building project, therefore their linguistic anchorage is upon the national, official language(s). Promotion of national linguistic usage therefore constitutes the integral parts for multilingualism in a globalizing world. For instance, for the local-customization of technology for e-government projects, the Japanese government is moving towards an open source-code software infrastructure. The e-Japan project (Jain 2002), launched by Japan in a bid to become an information technology nation by 2005, affects the vendors as well (Fig.9). As Microsoft Windows software is used on most of the Japanese government's servers and personal computers hence the over-dependency on Microsoft products, the national and local governments have been considering switching to open-source operating systems. In response to the possible shift, Microsoft announced in November 2002 that it will make its basic sources code of the Windows operation system, like Linux and Netscape, open, in view of the e-Japan government initiatives. Size and volume of Japanese ICT market matter, plus the calling for open-sourcing, Microsoft said it will push ahead in Japan with its so-called Shared Source Initiative, which is already under way overseas, providing open-source software to governments, universities and companies under individual contracts (*The Japan Times*, 28.Nov.2002).

The Japanese case presents the strength of the market and state power in redefining the open-source code movement. But for human development at the global scale, we do expect the IGOs (UN, World

Fig.9: Schematic Overview of E-Government– New Administrative Services



(Source: MPHPT 2002b)

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

### 5.3 e-Government Driven Linguistic Differentiation

As a global trend, the e-government initiatives will likely not just only strengthen the use of national official language(s) for the mandatory reasons, but also as a catalyst for the re-discovery of mother-tongue(s) and ethnic-origins of the citizens – especially for the minority/migrant groups who use the new communicative spaces for their own projects. This is mainly because of two major factors: the techno and the social ones. First, the some specific information- technological set up (say, paging service and/or SMS of mobile phone)

within the pricing regime of mobile communication (say, cheaper to send txt msg than audio- or MMS) will limit the full extent of online, real-time communications. ‘Keep the communication short and speedy’ in terms of x-LA (x-Letter-Acronyms) with shared (de-)coding is the essence of this form of communications. Second and perhaps the most important one, mobile communications (or cyber-communication in general) tend to require a ‘shared’ meaning, identity and/or reciprocity as a pre-condition, which is mostly derived from the existing socio-cultural relationship, say, friendship and kinship (i.e., you will not communicate with someone you don’t know via mobile phone or someone you don’t trust in the cyberspace). This twin conditioning of mobile (cyber-) communications will likely bring the all forms of social fabrics of the pre-modernity: ethnicity, gender, age, identity and most of the ascribing status (who you were/are, what you spoke/speak), hence mother-tongue(s) and the ethnic-specific language(s) and dialect(s) will be re-discovered and invented in/beyond the cyberspace

(Nyiri, Ed. 2005).

On the other hand, greater use of ICT in government organizations implies renewed attention to citizens and their relationship to e-government. All the following issues have linguistic relevance not just in terms of speedy and efficient communication-administration of the government, but also the constitution of a new relationship between citizenship and governance (Fountain 2001):

- What information and power do citizens seek from e-government?
- What do citizens want to do with e-government in terms of transactions and interactivity
- In what way, do/will users get their government information and services now/future?
- What/How minority / under-privileged groups are interfacing with e-government?

Undoubtedly, (sub-)linguistic diversity (even for a monolingual society) in the e-governance is essential for good communications!

## **6. Normative and Ethical Aspects of Multilingualism: For Global Civil Society?**

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

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

Second, for multilingualism there is always a price to pay for but the costing, even in the highly bureaucratic system like the EU (to a certain extent the UN family), is less than 1% of the operational cost of the total EU administrative system: less than

2 Euro per European citizen in 1999 (Cunningham 2001). Yet, the price here is not monetary but a socio-cultural and normative one, namely, the social tolerance and acceptance for the diversity (sometimes with embedded contradictions) of multicultural expression and (re-)presentations in our living world.

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

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

In short, information placed by e-business and e-government agencies, as well as civic groups (NGOs) onto websites must be easy for an average user to locate, understand and participate for civic engagements.

### **6.1 For a Progressive Global Civil Society**

According to Nielsen//Netratings (20.Febuary 2003), the number of people globally with access to the Internet via a home PC increased from 563 million people in 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2002 to 580 million at the end of 2002 (see Fig.10, Fig.11). The U.S. has largest Internet population, accounting for 29% of the global access universe, followed by Europe with 23%, Asia & the Pacific with 13%, and Latin America with 2%. Markets not under Nielsen//NetRatings measurement account for the remaining 33%.

Cyberspace is an embryo for global civil society. Recent militant protests at the venues (the latest one is the G8 in Genoa, Italy, July 2001) of the EU, the G8, the IMF, the WTO, and World Bank summits have been forcefully articulating the fundamental contradictions between the haves and have-nots, and visualizing the exposing socio-economic fault-lines

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**Fig.10: Total Number of People with Internet Access via Home PC**

**Table 2. Total Number of People 2+ with Internet Access via Home PC**

	Number of People with Internet Access (in Millions)	% of World's Internet Population
US	168.1	29
Europe	135.3	23
Asia & Pacific	75.5	13
Latin America	14.3	2
Rest of World	186.8	33
Total	580	100

Source: Nielsen//NetRatings Global Internet Trends Q4 2002

Europe covers: France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom

Asia & Pacific covers: Australia, Hong Kong, Japan

Latin America covers Brazil

Rest of World is based on countries not under Nielsen//NetRatings measurement at end of Q4 2002.

**Fig.11: Number & Percentage of People with Current Internet Access, Selected Location (Q4/2002)**

**Table 1. Number and Percent of People with Current Internet Access, Any Location**

Number of People 16+ with current Internet Access, Any Location* (in millions)				% People 16+ with current Internet Access, Any Location**			
Country	Q4 2001	Q4 2002	Change	Country	Q4 2001	Q4 2002	Change
U.S.	158.9	168.6	9.7	Spain	32	54	22
Spain	10.1	17.0	6.9	UK	62	68	6
Germany	38.7	41.8	3.1	Italy	50	56	6
UK	28.0	30.4	2.4	Germany	59	63	4
Italy	23.0	25.3	2.3	U.S.	76	79	3
Brazil	17.6	19.7	2.1	Netherlands	70	73	3
France	21.9	23.0	1.1	France	52	54	2
Netherlands	8.7	9.2	0.5	Brazil	43	45	2
Sweden	6.0	6.1	0.1	Sweden	84	85	1
Hong Kong	4.1	4.0	(0.1)	Hong Kong	73	70	(3)
Australia	11.1	10.5	(0.6)	Australia	76	72	(4)

\*Among population aged 2+ in all households

\*\*Among population 16+ in households with fixed line telephone(s), in millions

Source: Nielsen//NetRatings Global Internet Trends Q4 2002

For Global Online Populations (149 countries), see CyberAtlas updates (2.May 2003)

[http://cyberatlas.internet.com/big\\_picture/geographics/print/0..5911\\_151151.00.html](http://cyberatlas.internet.com/big_picture/geographics/print/0..5911_151151.00.html)

between the rich and poor, the developed and underdeveloped worlds (Lai 2004a/b). Operating at global level with local activism, these violent scenes have become routine at international summits of the rich and powerful supra-national agencies whom they control the global capital. Though it is highly questionable about the success of these

'anarchist like' campaigns (are these a new form of e-mobilization?), vis-a-vis global capitalism, the actively engaging developmental debates on equitable share of benefits derived from the economic liberalization / globalization project – a forgotten, dark and tragic dimension of the champion of global capitalism – are rejuvenated through

e-mobilization in the post-Cold War era. At the very least, “the protesters have done what public relation departments of the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank and the EU have failed to do in half a century: they have made economics exciting” (*The Economist*, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2001, p.14).

Obviously, e-mobilization also has a communicative aspect for facilitating the speak-up, act-out and alliance formation in socio-economic movements by those being victimized by the mainstream pro-growth development model. The rights to voice! Representing the victims, potential victims, as well as the advocacies for the nature at large, environmental NGOs have sharpened the demands for global sustainability. How to enhance the advantages of cyberactivism, in the global movement of transnational advocacy networking, with differences and diversities will be the testing case for social development (cf. Lai 2004a/b, 2005).

## 6.2 The Quest for Cultural Praxis

The problem of cyber-imperialism and cultural domination should be noted here (Ebo, ed. 2001; Main 2001). There are different estimates about online population and the web languages being used (Fig.10, Fig.11): online populations are amount to 580M (Niedlsen//NetRating 2003), 655M (ITU 2003), according to the CyberAtlas (2.May 2003). We have chosen the estimation in between: of the online language population totally 649 Million (March 2003), English-native speakers account for 35.2%, European (35.5%) and for East Asia: Chinese (11.9%), Japan (10.3%), Korean (4.2%) (Global Reach 2003; Fig.12, Fig.13). In terms of web page's language coverage, out of 313 billion Web page surveyed, English accounts for 68.4%, Japanese 5.9%, German 5.8%, Chinese 3.9%, French 3.0%, Spanish 2.4%, Russian 1.9%, Italian 1.6%, Portuguese 1.4%, Korean 1.3% and Other 4.6% (eMarketer 2001). English is a de facto standard language on the Internet, the domination effects of the English language in global communication brings about serious crisis to the existence of minority languages. Furthermore, other than language itself, the contents and messages for communication are highly charged for commercial and political purposes, not least is the US style of life (cultural imperialism): movie, music, comics and other visual popular culture, as well as news and documentaries (the US version of the War Against Terrorism represents such case) are cultural manifestation and celebration of the Western, global capitalism. In

short, as long as the Internet is based on existent social cultural structure, the Internet would also work for reinforcement of such cultural imperialism (Ogura 2001).

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

## 6.3 Social and Local Demands for Alternative Lingual Information

The Internet enables more alternative forms of global sourcing for news and information for individuals and communities, as well as different perspective on world affairs. During the 'War-Against-Iraq', though CNN and MSNBC, the two biggest online news sources in the U.S. continued their dominance in the overall unique audience rankings, attracting 26.2 and 24.3 and million unique visitors in March 2003, with both sites increasing traffic by nearly a quarter over the previous month, there was a upsurge of demand for alternative lingual – news. According to Nielsen-Netratings (24.April 2003), the Aljazeera.net experienced a 1,208 percent increase in traffic in March 2003, drawing more than one million surfers from the U.S. About a third of these surfers, or 328,000, visited the newly launched English version of the site (Fig.14). British news site, BBC World Service surged 158% to 5.3 million surfers in March, attracting 3.2 million more unique visitors since February 2003. In addition, there is also a gender dimension of the information seeking: both Aljazeera.net and BBC World Service drew predominantly male visitors comprising nearly 70% of the sites' total audience.

The case is clear: multilingualism (hence the diversity of perspective) does have strong presence in the mediated environments, if rightly promoted by people.

#### 6.4 Social (In)E-quality, Justice and E-quity with Linguistic Diversity

Fueled by market and state forces, ICT development by default brings about the necessity for all people to have access to the Internet. Yet, the same process shape the inevitability of digital divides, along the existing social contours of various fragmentations, segmentations and stratifications such as income, gender, ethnicity and language. The multilingualism project should therefore be for the reinvention of cultural specificity, promoting social equity and safeguarding people's control over cultural development, the ICT enhanced (wired and wireless, stationary and mobile) communications are a double-edged sword: the Net and ICT can likely be a good facilitating agent for global, cross-cultural communications but at the same time, reinforcing the existing fault-lines between the *lingua franca* and the indigenous languages. Needless to note that there is a normative dimension for the development: equal opportunity, social justice E-equity, e-inclusion. For obvious reasons, the realization of the liberating global communications, the control of the public over ownership and access to airwaves and the information highway, as well as setting their own

linguistic agenda.

The present form of informatization of people's work and societal (-virtual) encounters has reinforced a divided-cum-dual society: the informational-based formal economy is juxtaposed by a down-graded labor-based informal economy resulting in a spatial structure: a city that combines segregation, diversity, and hierarchy (Castells 1996). The ICT enhance flexible production regime, generating more wealth and global economic activities. Yet, far from developing an equitable and better society, our ICT driven post-material society has produced more social calamity than ever: the digital divide and the formation of the almost permanent under-class, multiple unemployment, early retirement in the forties, within the realm of the advanced high tech and knowledge based new managerialism (manipulation of x-LA!). Not exceptionally, all developing economies have been integrated hierarchically into the global system of capitalism, and the process of integration widens gaps and divides among communities, countries and regions. By exploiting using the socio-economic gaps, global corporations and developed countries promote their further domination over developing localities and

#### Fig.12: Language and Internet Users

##### Chinese:

There are 45.8M people online in mainland China, Hong Kong represents another 4.35M, and 2.3M people in Singapore; 5.7M Malaysians online, where Mandarin Chinese is spoken by one-third of the population (CyberAtlas, 2.May 2003). One must also add 10M in Taiwan (Nielsen/NetRatings, March, 2003) online. There are another 1.9M Americans who access the Internet in Chinese. This gives a total of 65.5M Chinese-speaking people online.

##### Japanese:

There are 55.93M Internet users in Japan, according to MPHPT Survey: March.2002. As there are estimated to be some 430K Japanese living in the U.S. - estimated another 280K Japanese Americans who access the Internet in Japanese. That makes a total of 56.64M Japanese speakers online (not counting those living in Europe).

##### Korean:

The number of Korean Internet users is estimated at 25.6M (CyberAtlas, 2.May 2003), another 400K American access the Internet in Korean, for a total of 26M Korean-speakers online worldwide.

##### Malay:

Malay is spoken by two-third of the 5.7M people online in Malaysia (CyberAtlas, 2.May 2003). Malay is the same language that is spoken in Indonesia, and there are over 2M Indonesians online, according to the Association of Indonesian Internet Service Providers (Jan., 2000). Malay is also spoken by 15% of the 2.12M people in Singapore online (Source: Nielsen NetRatings: Oct., 2001). The total is 7.1M Malay-speakers online worldwide.

##### Thai:

There are 4.6M people in Thailand online (CyberAtlas, 2.May 2003).

Fig.13: Web-Languages Statistics

Languages on the Web	
Language	Speakers (millions)
English*	128
Japanese	19.7
German	14
Spanish	9.4
French	9.3
Chinese	7.0
Dutch	4.4
Korean	4.3
Swedish	3.6
Italian	3.3
Portuguese	2.9
Total non-English	88

\*99 million of English speakers are in US  
Source: Global Reach

Internet Usage According to Language				
	1999	2001	2003	2005
English Speaking (percentage)	91,969,151 54%	108,282,662 51%	124,265,453 46%	147,545,824 43%
Non-English Speaking (percentage)	79,094,449 46%	104,480,528 49%	143,733,527 54%	198,008,511 57%
Total Worldwide	171,168,600	212,889,190	268,150,180	345,735,835

Source: Computer Economics

Source: 2001 INT Media Group, Incorporated. [<http://www.internet.com>]

Fig.14: Fastest Growing Online News Sources for March 2003 (US. Home and Work)

Table 1: Nielsen//NetRatings Fastest Growing General Online News Sources, Ranked by Percent Growth for March 2003 (U.S., Home and Work)

Brand or Channel	Unique Audience ('000)		
	Feb. 2003	Mar. 2003	% Growth
1. Aljazeera net*	791	1,037	1208%
2. BBC World Service	2,053	5,295	158%
3. Reuters	1,223	2,103	72%
4. NewsMax.com	1,203	1,820	51%
5. Fox News	4,343	6,216	43%
6. Drudgereport.com	1,777	2,529	42%
7. News International	1,774	2,470	39%
8. Google News	1,910	2,609	37%
9. NPR Online	1,376	1,771	29%
10. NYP Holdings	2,115	2,663	26%
11. MSNBC	19,640	24,333	24%
12. CNN	21,376	26,249	23%
13. The Boston Globe	2,414	2,812	16%
14. Yahoo! News	16,214	18,724	15%
15. NYTimes.com	8,349	9,546	14%

Source: Nielsen//NetRatings, March 2003

## O-K. Lai, Multilingualism and Universal Communicative Actions in and beyond Cyberspace

causing the destruction of cultural diversity and identity based on community. Obviously, there is an urgent need to call for a normative development agenda for the humanization of the ICT – the project of multilingualism: equity, participation and social justice in the system of global/local communications.

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

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