

From Lingua Franca @ E-Learning to Global-Local Multilingualism? Questioning New Social Media for Babelization

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Thanks to the ever upgrading new media in the informational age, the e-learning of new languages becomes a daily practice for everyone: timely shifting one's linguistic worldview from one's mother tongue to acquire foreign language or the *lingua franca* (say, English) to cope with one's survival in a globalizing world. This paper critical examines the socio-linguistics and the new regime of e-learning (the manifestations and underlying contradictions in particular) for new language acquisition; as cyber-activism and virtual linkages are revolutionary in changing the *modi operandi* of socio-cultural communicative actions and interactions, global and locally, behavioural repertoires among people in different geographical regions and time zones. Our discussions focus on the most salient aspect of the new experiential learning discoveries: not just of the multilingual, but also the cross-and-inter-cultural, communication, in both virtual and reality milieus. Critically examining the policy issues on (new) language for e-learning and cross-cultural communication in/beyond cyberspace, it highlights the challenges for multilingualism, and multiculturalism in 21st Century, in a globalizing world.

Key Words : E-Learning, Globalization, Information Society, Lingua Franca, New Media

1. Prelude to multilingualism: *lingua franca* as *overture*?

We are in a new epoch of learning for humanity development! The new regime of e-learning for new languages is seemingly embedded in the ubiquitous information and communication technologies (ICT)-driven mediated (new and highly differentiated cyber-) communication: with the ever-increasingly opening-up -cum- deepening of cyber-experience for "inter-personalized" mediated communication, all facilitate the interactivity, timeliness, active participation, and cross-border / cultural encounters in/beyond virtual and real social communities. Yet the challenges for cross-(or multi-)cultural and temporal-spatial communication in both cyberspace and the real world quest for not just linguistic (text, semantic and phonetic) adaptation but also audio-visual interactive revolution with multiple re-presentations, towards the communicative capacity building for foreign language (L2) and/or *Lingua Franca*, beyond the linguistic spaces of one's mother-tongue (L1): all re-shaping our linguistic adaptive ability and skills, say the least to acquire the basics of foreign

language(s) as the core part of our new cross-cultural encounters in a new communicative borderless world.

Thanks to the ever upgrading new media in the informational age, the e-learning of new languages becomes a daily practice for everyone: timely shifting one's linguistic worldview from one's mother tongue (L1) to acquire foreign language (L2) or the *lingua franca* (say, English) to cope with one's survival in a globalizing world. The new regime of e-learning for new languages is increasingly embedded in the ubiquitous information and communication technologies (ICT)-driven mediated (new and highly differentiated cyber-) communication: with the ever-increasingly opening-up -cum- deepening of cyber-experience for "inter-personalized" mediated communication, all facilitate the interactivity, timeliness, active participation, and cross-border / cultural encounters in/beyond virtual and real social communities.

A new era for communication perhaps defines the 21st Century, thanks to the advanced information and communication technologies (ICT) -- a new epoch of

digital global advanced capitalism. Cyber-linkages and new media dynamics are revolutionizing mode(s) of socio-economic interactions locally and globally, behavioral repertoires among people in different geo-temporal spaces. Socio-economic activities at a global-cum-scale are 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 dramatic informational development can be illustrated by the exponential growth of all ICT usages (Fig.1).

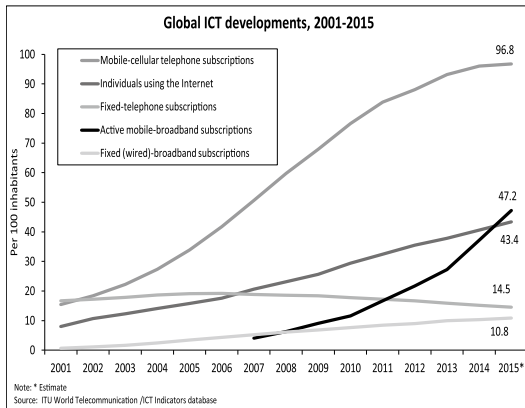


Fig.1: Global ICT Development 2001-2015.

E-Learning embraces new social media in the informational age: omnipotent inclusiveness of all forms of social communication; ranging from short-message-sending, chat, blogging, youtube to wikis and forums (see Fig.2) Both linguistic (text, semantic and phonetic) and the non-linguistic (visual and symbolic) modes of communication are changing as well; *lingua franca* is only one of the many possibilities for communication and comprehension of meanings, other than para-linguistic symbols and abbreviations. The key issue for communication for all purposes, including learning and knowledge acquisition 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. All communications, ranging from the core to peripheries, the real vis-a-vis the virtuality, are yet subject to inter-interpretation and exchanges.....



Fig.2: New Social Media for E-Learning

English is an obvious example of the common *lingua franca* (ELF) in recent decades for international communication; the use of ELF has more non-native speakers than native speakers, and it is more than obvious in far more settings where there are no native speakers present than in those between or including native speakers. Seemingly, there is a challenge for *lingua franca* being used beyond its socio-cultural embeddness and settings – many of these settings are beyond contexts of language learning, due to increased transnational mobilities of all walks of life – thanks to the globalization project for enhancing mobility of capital, goods and labours.

Obviously, the role of *lingua franca*, as catalyst of learning new language(s), can be illustrated by e-learning for foreign language(s) with new media. A recent study shows that most students' beliefs about English remain consistent: they cared less about grammar after using English as a *lingua franca* in their written communication; and started to perceive English as a language they may be able to use with greater confidence (Ke & Cahyani 2014).

Furthermore, it has been strongly articulated that an ownership discourse and a maintenance (or cultivation) discourse - for English as *lingua franca*, should be distinguished; whilst the appreciation of *lingua franca* should be cultivated with inter-cultural and linguistic understandings in real life within, and beyond in virtual communication, its socio-cultural contexts (Lai 2014). More specific, socio-cultural context and communicative dynamics yet define the parameters and extends of foreign language learning,

in both traditional and new media-driven learning milieu – it is revealed that English (as *lingua franca*, ELF) users' institutional roles are culturally determined, and are not fixed but vary in different phases of the discourse. More importantly, both identity and power interplay are involved in ELF communications, and the macro linguistic context plays a role in constructing identity and negotiating power relations in ELF conversations. Here, the question is how far, or how strategic-instrumental, is *lingua franca* enabling us to develop multilingualism – engendering multiculturalism?

2. Beyond codified linguistics in cyberspace?

The challenge for new language learning in new media spaces with a particular *lingua franca* is the amplexness of contextual fluidity with new and old varieties and differences – which need to be specified and articulated by learners and instructors in new media spaces and gaps. Hence, the lack of contextual specificity and relational orders in new media poses challenge for the fostering echoed and responsive learning milieu.

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

The cross-(or multi-)cultural and temporal-spatial communications in both cyberspace and the real world quest for not just linguistic (text, semantic and phonetic) adaptation but also audio-visual interactive revolution with multiple re-presentations, towards the communicative capacity building for foreign language (L2) and/or *Lingua Franca*, beyond the linguistic spaces of one's mother-tongue (L1): all re-shaping our linguistic adaptive ability and skills, say the least to acquire the basics of foreign language(s) as the core part of our new cross-cultural encounters in a new communicative borderless world.

People's perceptions, influencing their interpretations, of societal multilingualism are important in shaping, as well as organizing their approach(es) to learn new languages in real and virtual spaces – here is the environmental factors – *linguistic landscape* (Rowland 2015) provides the most important shaping for motivational factors account for many successful, continuing learning experience for foreign languages (Bensoussan 2015). One obvious case is that

Highly successful languages learners, with superior level of proficiency, reported high levels of extrinsic and instrumental motivation, as well as being intrinsically motivated by an interest in linguistics, nearly all being polyglots, some of whom reached near-native levels in more than one foreign language (noted by Ehrman, Leaver and Oxford 2003: 323; cited by Bensoussan 2015: 426).

Under globalizing forces, English becomes *lingua franca* and/or foreign language (L2) for many non-native speakers who want to pursue international business and cultural exchanges. The challenge is obvious that

Although the use of a corporate *lingua franca* may facilitate global communication in multilingual settings, it may also present linguistic, cultural and organisational challenges for those who are non-native speakers of the corporate language (Van Mulken & Hendriks 2015: 405)

The 21st Century's calling for global communication highlights the most salient aspect of the new experiential learning discoveries: not just of the multilingual, but also the cross-and-inter-cultural, communication, in both virtual and reality milieus. This implies that educational goals for *lingua franca* and/or foreign language(s) L2/L3 should consider facilitating or condoning multilingual practices, in addition to implementing a corporate language such as English as *lingua franca* (ELF):

Not in the least because a policy of multilingualism alone would be too expensive and goes against the wish to control and to coordinate information flows within the company. Other studies have found that in many multinational corporations' multilingualism exists in combination with ELF as the official corporate language in that for the international workforce negotiating language practices is a daily routine (Van Mulken & Hendriks 2015: 419)

In spite of (mostly optimistic) rhetoric on the promising e-learning for foreign language(s)

acquisition, a prelude to multilingualism, the successful experience is still by far a limited one. The most instrumental one is to keep learners engaged and motivated to using new media for positive learning processes – the so-called student “stickiness” (Clark, et al. 2014). Accordingly, eight aspects of learning experience, relevant to active engaging pedagogical approaches (say Task Based language Teaching and Project Based Language Learning), for enhancing learning outcomes:

Taking the case of Form-focused instruction in cross-training and “stickiness”; aspects of form-focused instruction applied to cross-training that promote “stickiness” highlight eight dimensions of new language learning (Clark, et al. 2014: 23), which are all relevant for new media based language learning :

- *Autonomy* (the feeling that learners have control) – veteran language learners develop a sense of autonomy (in control of their learning), giving them decision making power will motivate them to learn continuously and become good facilitators.
- *Appropriate challenge* (too hard = frustrating; too easy = boring) – L3 texts can be selected based on the degree of similarity between L2 and L3; for example, the amount of cognates included in the text to appropriately adjust the challenge – new media provides many new contents for framing the challenge.
- *Variety* (good for learning and preventing burnout) – the offerings of new media can enable the target input can be varied by linguistic context (spoken or written mode, single or multi-media; genre, topic, number of speakers, code switch, complete/incomplete texts, authentic/elaborated texts) and extra-linguistic contexts (time of day, location, emotional state).
- *Feedback on performance* (immediate feedback to improve in the moment) – new media facilitated interactive feedback on performance can be provided automatically responding to comprehension questions, say using chat and texting in the target language.
- *Measureable progress* (visible progress towards longer range goals) – online and real-timing for monitoring and supportive corrective responses in the cyberspace are useful.
- *Feeling of community* (belonging to something greater than yourself; not isolated) – cyberspace offers a sense of larger, international, multilingual community, for example community of

speakers in different languages.

- *Meaningfulness/Relevance/Utility* – new media based communication enhances the optimal language to learn as L3, e.g., closely related to L2, can be viewed as meaningful and productive because less time will be needed to learn it.
- *Usability* (quality user interface, user experience) – praxis of new language(s) is possible for students learn more than grammatical features of language while being engaged in reading and responsive activities. The new media milieu is different from following grammatical syllabus and learning grammar rules as the main focus of the activity and can be motivating for the learners.

Similarly somewhat to the mobile phone’s attachment for many people’s daily life encounters for social activities, to enhance student’s “stickiness,” to learning new language activities– defined as keeping learners engaged and motivated to continue using the platforms of learning, new media is a logical choice for using as new language learning media, beyond the traditional ways of learning in classroom and with textbook alike.

In short, the essence of the “stickiness” is anchored upon the motivational realm of learners and learning community at large; say the expected learning processes and outcomes which are beneficial for the involving parties, the learners in particular.

3. New praxis @ e-learning: fluid exchanges for multilingualism?

New media communication tools and modes like *Facebook, Instagram, Twitters, WhatApp* or the *Line* transform the landscape of inter—cum-cross cultural communication. Obviously shown in the history of cross-cultural communications, the practice for *Lingua Franca* (Espanol/French/German/English) is a consequence of socio-economic necessity under specific geo- political hegemonic influence. English is common used today as business language – in our present global advanced capitalism, a new (post)modernity based upon the highly ubiquitous networking of ICT around the world: the real-time and just-in-time 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; like *Windows 10, the Line and Facebook...*

The new regime of e-learning (the manifestations and underlying contradictions in particular) for new language acquisition poses risk as well as opportunities for educators and learners; as cyber-activism and virtual linkages are revolutionary in changing the *modi operandi* of socio-cultural communicative actions and interactions, global and locally, behavioural repertoires among people in different geographical regions and time zones.

Studies of computer mediated e-learning experience suggest the significant potential of ICT text-based interaction in promoting language learning in general and pragmatic learning in particular (Eslami, et al. 2015); though it is far from conclusive how far and how depth foreign language acquisition via new media *per se*, with respect to multilingualism and multiculturalism. More importantly, learners and teachers account for enhancing the reciprocities of inter-group (novice-expert) partnerships and collaborations. The ICT-coupled initiatives become feasible and cost-effective only when there is institutional agreement or managerial coordination between the EFL learning setting and the cooperating academic context. More specific, the importance of pragmatics and appropriate language use for successful intercultural and cross-cultural communication should be stressed: L2 practitioners should help to make pragmatic similarities and differences perceptually salient to students through explicit feedback and instruction. In short, explicit awareness-raising activities and instruction in L2 pragmatics are becoming more urgent in alien settings where EFL learners are largely deprived of native speaking stimulation: new media and systematic goal oriented partnership with expert users of English can be of great benefit to the development of EFL students' pragmatic competence (Eslami, et al. 2015: 107).

Cross -cum- inter- cultural communication in the cyberspaces is the prelude to multilingualism; becoming the key mode(s) for communicative e-learning; yet national policy for language learning development - with the exception of the EU member states - is still very much historically-bound with the past for the "nation" building project or for specific ethnicity development agenda, which is unintentionally creating more barriers for inter-cultural-diversity understanding. More specific, there is urgent need to revitalize multicultural comprehension as key strategic goal for (new) language e-learning by cross-cultural communication beyond cyberspace in a globalizing world.

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. Roseneau 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." (Roseneau 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.

But the fluidity of new learning dynamics can be shown by the frequent, if not abusive, use of the highly differentiated, not fully 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.

The maximization of the acronymization of official and cyber- communication, with x-Letter Acronym (x-LA), is 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 in a high advanced society 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....

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 24+ official languages, has over 400,000 abbreviations (<http://iate.europa.eu/>). 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.

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 international government organizations (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 regional inter-governmental organizations 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.

Juxtaposing the acronymization of languages, the magical short-handed message texting - txt.msg is also strategic for political communication and social mobilization, recent studies of social movement informatics 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.

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). The above txt.msg example of the simplification of the text form, within a given limited characters, used in the txt.msg (Short-Message-Sending, SMS) sending highlights the emergence

of a new way communication in term of text-and-meaning in linguistic terms – a new linguistic turn conditioned by communicative gadget-modes?

As human communications are shaping by a highly commercialized regime of interaction, under the speedy and efficiency-driven pressure, the x-Letter-Acronyms (x-LA) become a dominant way of expression of, exchange for ideas. This x-LA communicative short-hand (symbolicism?) has been further reinforcing by the txt.msg, SMS, of the mobile and the Internet communications. The domination of the x-LA (x-Letter-Acronym), with specific reference to text and/or phonetic becomes a global trend. The x-LA also has its lineage to the phoneticism. For instance, "B2B" (Business-to-Business) and "B2C" (Business-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).

Socio-culturally speaking, language(s) 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 (of using English as *lingua franca*)?

4. Global *Lingua Franca* embeddedness in differential language landscape

There are at least two aspects of the paradox of making English as global *lingua franca*. Firstly, as "Anglophones are free to benefit from the impressive by-product of the decisions to learn English of all those interested to improve their social and economic prospects" (Robichaud 2015: 1). More specific, we can question the contradictions embedded in the making (English) of *lingua franca*; as David Robichaud rightly put it:

The whole debate about teaching English as a Foreign Language or *Lingua Franca* English helps us understand the different paths EGLF could take. Should we prefer a diluted version of English as spoken in Anglophone nations, or rather a disincarnated version of global English colored by multiple local practices? We don't have time to get into this debate, but one thing is

clear: some coordination is going to be necessary if we want to avoid a more or less damaging babelization of EGLF. Native Anglophones could be tempted to offer to coordinate learning in order to ensure that the final product, EGLF, offers intelligibility and is maximally beneficial for them. Interestingly enough, one efficient way to do so would be to offer cultural products such as movies, music and books, produced in Anglophone nations, to non-Anglophone freely or at low cost (Robichaud 2015: 11).

Secondly, perhaps more relevant for the *lingua franca* based cultural products; as the *lingua franca* as promoted does not necessarily representative for daily (and professional) life. This can be highlighted by the changes of language landscape and dynamics in the midst of foreign language utilization. The studies of language(s) landscape, whereby foreign language(s) is learned and used as *lingua franca*, highlight the dialectics of not just the native, vis-à-vis foreign, language(s), but also the differentiated distinction between local and foreign. For the enigma of *lingua franca*, the case of English use and its learning in globalizing Japan perhaps give us some insights:

‘a high profile discourse of globalisation exists in political debate and in the popular imagination [in Japan]’. Much is made in official policy documents (Kawai 2007), in promotional materials for English language courses at Japanese universities (Yamagami and Tollefson 2011) and in the mass media (Brasor 2013) of the importance for Japan to become more involved in international affairs and for its population to seek a diverse range of cultural experiences outside of Japan and to increase its familiarity with English. However, the motivations behind such exhortations are not always clear....This happens through a process in which everything that is not Japanese is essentialised as the global Other; this Other is defined as the antithesis of being Japanese. Thus, seeking interactions with and studying the ways of the Other actually becomes a way of reinforcing one’s own sociocultural identity (see Billig 1995, Ch. 4). For example, as Kawai (2007, 48) notes, in her analysis of the opinions of Japanese people on whether English should be adopted as an official language in Japan, there exists a view among the populace that studying ‘the English language makes Japanese people more appreciative of the Japanese language and so they become more, not

less Japanese’ (Rowland 2015: 10-11.).

All that said, Japanese Ministry of Education in August 2015 mooted to adopt a new policy of introducing English as foreign language teaching in primary school (as foreign language activities starts at primary 3 and formal teaching from primary 5), doubling learning to 70-hours per year.

Yet, the underlying contradictions, if not the seemingly magical influences (using English as), of *lingua franca* should not be underestimated. More specific, it is the hegemony of English as the only path for internationalization of one’s sphere of influences across borders and cultures – particularly when argument for “the emergence of English as a *lingua franca* globally is “both inevitable and desirable and that it is unfair” is unquestionably accepted as norm in the age of globalization. Moreover, it is the history of imperialist *lingua franca* is ugly that “The impetus towards second language learning may seem now to be taking place under more benign market-like conditions of equality between different language communities, but pre-existing inequalities are an important part of what makes a particular language (Réaume 2015: 3). In other words, the whole-sale for (English as) *lingua franca* should be questionable in terms of its compatibility for international and cross-cultural understandings towards multilingualism and multiculturalism. In a critique against *lingua franca* as hegemonic, Denise Réaume rightly notes that

Van Parijs’ advocacy of a *lingua franca* oversimplifies the range of uses and values that language has for its speakers and then fails to work out the implications of his rational choice model for the long-term viability of language communities. He is alert to the danger of language decline, but because he treats the emergence of a *lingua franca* as inevitable, he undervalues the loss it imposes. Further, he seems insouciant about how the pursuit of social equality through fostering the emergence of a *lingua franca* will exacerbate the conflict between participating in the *lingua franca* conversation and contributing to the vibrancy of one’s native tongue. The costs of the emergence of a *lingua franca* can be counted, first, in the time and effort involved for those who undertake to learn another language. Beyond that is the damage to the viability of one’s own language, assuming widespread success in acquiring the *lingua franca*. (Réaume 2015: 9).

Furthermore, we can learn much from the life

course of *lingua franca* over its geo-historical spaces. It is the specific form of linguistic cosmopolitanism – “acknowledges the limits of the national language/ nation-state model in an increasingly globalized world dominated by English, arguing the need for greater communicative reach (invariably, via English) as a means of enhancing individual social and economic mobility and for achieving group-based social justice aims that extend beyond nation-state borders” (May 2015: 2). In this respect, languages and communicative actions are the operational representations, and integration, of our complex ideas; the embodiment of socio-cultural arrangements for history and contemporary socio reciprocities at large.

Though we use to think that ‘what we think determines what we speak/write/communicate’ but the reality is seemingly the otherwise. For our contemporary, 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. Yet the fluid dynamic processes of socio-linguistic reciprocities towards multilingualism - multiculturalism are uncertain.

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