



# EDUCATIONS

and Their Purposes

A CONVERSATION AMONG CULTURES

Edited by **ROGER T. AMES** and **PETER D. HERSHOCK**

## Educations and Their Purposes

*A Conversation among Cultures*

*Edited by*

ROGER T. AMES and PETER D. HERSHOCK

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and

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### 3 The Overdominance of English in Global Education

#### *Is an Alternative Scenario Thinkable?*

In the course of human history, language has played a remarkably important role. Intellectually speaking, language constitutes the core of mental activities. It is the formative force of consciousness and culture, and the means of individual expression and interpersonal communication. As a social institution, language unites as well as divides, integrates as well as segregates. Language has much to do with the identity and solidarity of a people; it is at once the subject matter and the carrier of cultural traditions. On the other hand, languages compete with each other and can be a source of conflict. In the age of globalization, these aspects of language have become more complex than ever with the rise of English as a truly global language.

Historically speaking, mankind has witnessed the coming and going of many lingua francas. In the West, there was Greek in antiquity, Latin in the Middle Ages, and French and to some extent German in modern times. In the East, there was Chinese, especially in its written form. In Africa, there was Swahili, and in South America Quechua and Spanish, to mention just the most prominent examples. However, in terms of scope and impact, it seems that English has become the truly first global lingua franca, “global” not merely in a geographical sense, but in the sense that its diffusion has become an inseparable part of what we now call globalization.<sup>1</sup> It is for this reason that Robert Philipson and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, two proponents of linguistic human rights, have coined the term “englishisation,” which they define as “one dimension of globalization.”<sup>2</sup>

From a pragmatic point of view, the world has always been in need of a lingua franca. In fact the term “lingua franca,” originally referring to “language of the Franks (Europeans),” was invented in the European Middle Ages, when there was a need for different peoples in the Mediter-

anean and throughout the Middle East to have a common language that could be used “freely” to facilitate multilateral trade and diplomacy as well as scholarly exchange. In our globalized world today, the urgency of the need for international communication has reached an unprecedented level. Think of the various economic summits, of organizations such as the UN or UNESCO, of the many international academic conferences held from day to day around the globe. Nowadays, peoples of the world can hardly afford to disregard the importance of English, in whatever walk of life, if they do not want to be marginalized by the global community.

#### **Dominance versus Overdominance**

Language is power. This much-expressed dictum<sup>3</sup> takes on a new meaning with the upsurge of English as a global language. Like many lingua francas in history, including Greek and Latin, the power of English was first backed up by military and economic force. Now, whether we like it or not, proficiency in English has become in many societies not only a matter of practical competence but also a yardstick of social prestige, or “cultural capital” as depicted by Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the power of English expanded greatly when it became the most important vehicle of new knowledge.<sup>5</sup> It is also through this means that the dominance of English poses a challenge to global education. Whoever wants to be well informed, whoever wants to be globally heard or read, finds reading or publishing in English a necessity.

Yet, while this dominance of English is unavoidable, the world today is facing an additional challenge—the *overdominance* of English. By *overdominance* of English, I mean the danger of individual languages being self-estranged through an overemphasis on English at the cost of the mother tongue. While dominance is an externally imposed challenge, *overdominance* is largely a self-inflicted endangerment of the mother tongue through self-neglect and self-degradation on the part of the people of various linguistic communities. In education, one serious consequence of the *overdominance* of English is the “crowding out”<sup>6</sup> of the native tongue from school curricula and from higher education, a scenario that is not uncommon around the globe today.

One reason we need to draw a distinction between the dominance and *overdominance* of English is that the two issues allow for different reactions. As a result of globalization, the dominance of English is a brute fact from which some nations benefit and others have to tolerate. It is a global issue that is now under no nation’s direct control. As a danger to native languages, however, the *overdominance* of English is a matter of domestic language policies or attitudes, which are under the control of members of the respective linguistic communities—whether they be government policy makers, university administrators, or the general public. This essay seeks to stimulate reflection on, and constructive responses to, this problem.



### The Experience of Germany through Four Centuries

To exemplify how far-reaching the problem of “overdominance” can become, let us examine the experience of the Germans. In terms of influence, the German language was at its prime during the nineteenth century, reaching its pinnacle just before the outbreak of the First World War. During that period, German was the most important scholarly language for academic disciplines ranging from astrophysics to art history, from mathematics to sociology, and from economics to philosophy. But before and after this heyday, the situation was quite different.

Being a language with a traceable history, German in the time of Leibniz and Bach was very much neglected, even by Germans themselves. One remarkable story tells us that Frederick the Great, when introduced to J. S. Bach, tried to speak to him in French. Another story relates that Voltaire felt so at home in the Prussian court that he wrote his countrymen saying, “It is just like in France, people here just speak our language, German is used only when they are talking to soldiers and horses.” And this *schwarzmererei* for French was not confined to royals or nobles. Peter von Polenz, a historian of German, tells us that, at the turn of the eighteenth century, it was common for middle-class German families to require their children to speak French to their parents and friends, while German was spoken only to the helpers or maids.<sup>7</sup> In academia, too, German had at that time a very low status. We only need to recall that most of Leibniz’s own writings were either in Latin or in French, the two leading lingua francas of that time.

But, most interestingly, Leibniz did write a few short essays in German, two of which dealt precisely with the future prospect of German as an academic language, namely, (1) “Unvorgreifliche Gedanken, betreffend die Ausübung und Verbesserung der deutschen Sprache” (Some unanticipated thoughts concerning the practice and improvement of the German language; 1697/1704/1709), and (2) “Ermahnung an die Deutschen, ihren Verstand und ihre Sprache besser zu üben, samt beigefügtem Vorschlag einer deutschgesinnten Gesellschaft” (Warning to the Germans, to better exercise their understanding and their language, together with a proposal for a German-minded society; 1682/83).<sup>8</sup> In these two essays, and in some related correspondence, Leibniz introduced two important notions related to the use of the German language, namely *Sprachpflege* (language care) and *deutschgesinnte Gesellschaft* (German-minded society). The concept of language care is quite akin to that of language planning (*Sprachplanung*), for both concepts suggest that we should take measures on behalf of our native language so that it may develop in a favorable direction. The difference is that language planning is more or less a matter of governmental policy, whereas language care has to do mainly with the duty of members of the linguistic community. And Leibniz’s idea of a German-minded society<sup>9</sup> refers precisely to this need of “caring” for the German language through

its active use by the German people so that the strength and vitality of the language might develop and prosper.

According to Leibniz, German exhibited its strength in having a rich vocabulary for sensible and technical objects (metallurgy, mining, etc.), but suffered from a shortfall in terminology in two specific areas—that of “the expression of the emotions” and that of “abstract and subtle cognitive expressions, including those used in logic and metaphysics.” In other words, Leibniz thought German was weak in the areas of literature and philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

For admirers of German culture, this “diagnosis” of Leibniz is hardly comprehensible. A close look at the history of the German language reveals that precisely in the two specified areas the track record of the German language was indeed not a bad one. There was, on the one hand, a long tradition of medieval and baroque German poetry and, on the other, an equally remarkable tradition of German schoolmen and mystics.<sup>11</sup> In other words, Leibniz arguably underestimated his own linguistic heritage. And the fact that an academic as serious as Leibniz could also make such a mistake seems to indicate clearly that the German people of his time, with few exceptions, must have lost confidence in and esteem for their own language and given up on its “care” to the extent that they could even have become unaware of its previous glamour. In any case, with the proposal of “language care” and of a “German-minded society,” Leibniz did point the direction along which the German language might experience a resurrection.

Within a hundred years after Leibniz’s “warning,” German eventually did make enormous progress in both literature and philosophy. In the hands of such literati as Goethe and Schiller and such philosophers as Kant and Hegel, the German language experienced a kind of rebirth. Through the work of these intellectual giants, it reclaimed all its lost territory, becoming one of the most powerful and expressive academic languages of modern Europe.

After another century of development, the power of German reached its climax just before World War I. With the rise of English during the interwar period, however, the influence of German was significantly checked, and during and after World War II, German suffered further due to the negative image and inhumane deeds of the Nazis.<sup>12</sup> Culturally and politically, today’s Germany is very similar to the Germany of Leibniz’s lifetime. First, the continual weakening of the Holy Roman Empire in the decades after the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648) finds a parallel in the lingering memories felt in present-day Germany of the country’s defeat in World War II some fifty years ago. Second, while Leibniz’s Germany came under the influence of the language of France, the final winner of the Thirty Years’ War, the same “Western-influence” is felt by today’s Germany, the difference being that in this case the West wind comes not from France but from the farther shores of the United States. With the upsurge of (American)

English, the future of the German language, which once burdened Leibniz, seems to have become a matter for alarm again.

Out of their great concern for this issue, a group of German professors (thirty-seven in number) wrote an open letter on June 24, 2001, addressed to the ministers of culture, science, and education of all sixteen German states.<sup>13</sup> In this open letter, which bears the caption "Protection and Development of German as the National Academic Language," the authors called the world's attention to two noticeable trends in the use of German on German soil. First, an increasing number of international conferences in Germany use English as the only official language, even when the main target audience is German laypeople. Second, an increasing number of publications in Germany accept only English contributions, and many basic university courses are offered in English rather than German. Seeing the gravity of the issue, the authors made the alarming statement that "[t]he three undersigned together with the 34 countersigned, coming from the most disparate disciplines, observe with great concern how the German language is being expelled from our country's academic enterprise by English. We most politely ask you to take issue with this problem. We also recognize the danger that the primordial language basis for our scientific thinking and for the social exchange of knowledge will be lost within the next five to ten years. This applies also to the significance of Germany as an independent country for academic research."<sup>14</sup>

Looking back at the heyday of Goethe and Kant, when German was so alive, it is hard to imagine that the same language now faces such a decline. The open letter concluded, rather sadly, saying that what is aimed at is not the "upgrading anew of German to an international language for communication," but merely its "protection and development." To put the whole case in Leibniz's words, what the open letter was complaining about was nothing other than the Germans' own abandonment of "language care," which is precisely what should again be strengthened. What if the suggested measures are not followed? Of course, with so many speakers the German language will not easily die out. But it would be bad enough, as depicted in the open letter, if German higher education were to produce a class of "isolated elite" cut off from the rest of society and incapable of using German in academic writing, discussion, or even thinking!<sup>15</sup>

### **How Should the Overdominance of English Be Dealt with?**

The above described trajectory of the German language shows clearly how the globalization of English might affect all other languages. With experience gained from this account, I shall proceed to reflect on a number of topics in the hope that some key issues can be identified and clarified so that peoples in the world may deal with the same problem in a more deliberate manner. In presenting this case, I unavoidably have to occasionally proceed from a "Chinese" perspective. This is necessary, as there are

indications that major universities in China and Hong Kong have considered or are considering major revisions of their language policy in favor of English. But I hope this "Chinese" perspective will not prevent us from seeing that the challenge here is one the whole world is facing. Given the global nature of this challenge, which will intensify in the time to come, some generic reflections might already be timely.

### ***English as the Indispensable Key to the Global Community***

After decades of self-seclusion, the opening up of China has become an issue of paramount importance both for the Chinese and for would-be partners. Propelled by the enormous opportunities that lie ahead for those who can communicate outside their own borders, it is perfectly understandable that a great interest has arisen among the Chinese population in learning English, which is regarded, not unjustifiably, as the key to the outside world. Besides economic interest, the acquisition of English is also educationally important for contemporary China, because English is now the most important conveyer of new knowledge. For Chinese learners of most disciplines, the mastery of English is educationally much more cost-effective than the mastery of any other foreign language. On the intellectual level, the influx of English into China will in the long run benefit the Chinese population greatly, because learning a foreign language enables the learners to realize that things can be described, formulated, or perceived from different angles. With the correct approaches, obtaining a decent grasp of a foreign language can help develop a more flexible and liberal mind-set, which in turn will even help us to better appreciate our own culture, or to be critical of it if necessary. Goethe once said, "whoever knows no foreign language, knows not even his own."<sup>16</sup> With the increased need for cross-cultural communication, China's further emphasis on English should in the first place be considered in a positive light, as it will bring about positive "capital" for her. For any country in the world, including China, tapping into a globalized language like English is a matter of national interest.

### ***The Need of the World to Have an International Language***

Taking a cosmopolitan point of view, having a language that is globally understood is a matter of practical necessity. It is for this reason that I find expressions like "hegemony" or "imperialism" too emotional, as they might prompt us to indulge in historical animosities and distract us from the many positive roles a global language might play, in areas such as international law and human rights, international rescues and amnesties, academic exchanges, urgent medical consultancies, cross-cultural understanding, interreligious dialogues, and so on. The fact that English rather than French or Esperanto has succeeded in assuming this dominant role should

not prevent us from accepting this truth. Even less should it encourage us to take a “boycotting” attitude toward English, which would be against the interests of individual countries and of the international community. All in all, despite the critical stance I am going to take, I do not believe that any country should undermine the importance of English as a global language. The question is only, given the inevitable need to strengthen the use of English, how should individual countries cope with its dominance while preventing its overdominance?

### *Treating English as OFL and Not as ENL*

In language matters, a rule of thumb is to take linguistic realities seriously. In human societies, the most basic linguistic reality is the acquisition of the mother tongue, an iron fact that should be made the starting point of all sensible language policies. While the learning of English is culturally and politically inevitable, it remains debatable what educational strategy any given nation-state should adopt. A major concern here is that a nation’s strategy for English education can only be part of a more generic language strategy, which has to do mainly with policies regarding the native language, so that measures concerning the former must always be discussed with reference to those concerning the latter. It is in this light that we can differentiate conceptually between two strategies of treating English: “optimized foreign language” (OFL) on the one hand, and “emulated native language” (ENL) on the other:

By “optimized foreign language,” hereafter OFL, I mean fostering English education as a foreign language with all possible resources and measures while paying full attention to mother-tongue literacy (MTL). Of course, the adoption of an OFL policy is not an easy task, especially for nations (like China) whose language is typologically dissimilar to English. How under such circumstances can the learning of English be optimized is the task of research on teaching English as a second (foreign) language (TESL/TEFL). What we need to emphasize is that, regardless of the extent of the resources a nation might inject into the promotion of English, all this has to be done in parallel with a solid education in the native tongue. If this condition is not met, the whole language strategy will cease to be one of OFL and degenerate into one of ENL.

By ENL or “emulated native language” (oxymoron), I mean the strategy of treating English “as if” it were a native language, to the extent that the true native language is severely jeopardized. ENL is so depicted (“emulated”) because it looks away from the linguistic reality of the native tongue and presumptively assumes that, with enough resources, English can be taught and learned as well as if it were a “native language.” Of course, given unlimited resources, ENL is theoretically possible. But taking into consideration the actual linguistic environment and the actual expo-

sure of learners to English, the outcome of ENL is always limited while its price can be enormously high.<sup>17</sup> And the highest price involved here is not just a matter of money, but the alienation of learners from their native tongue, which could have adverse consequences for their intellectual development. Bearing our reference to Leibniz in mind, it is clear that the difference between OFL and ENL lies precisely in their different attitudes toward “language care.”

The distinction between OFL and ENL is meant to single out the former as the more viable and the latter as a self-delusive approach to English education. For a successful implementation of OFL, various issues have to be carefully considered. Besides TESL research as mentioned, we might need to consider other issues such as the integration of an “optimized” English curriculum into a basic scheme of mother-tongue literacy, the full exploitation of educational technologies, and strategies for the implementation of OFL in different segments of the educational system.

### *Medium of Instruction of the University Curriculum*

For university education in non-English-speaking countries, the holding of more international conferences, symposia, lectures, and so forth and the delivery of some courses in English can no doubt increase students’ exposure to English. But introducing more English is one thing; changing the language of instruction to English completely or to any extent that might jeopardize the future prospects of the native tongue as an academic language is quite another. We must understand that the university lecture hall is the main platform of “language care” for any nation-state. It is often the place where the intellectual endeavors of the teacher become consolidated and creative. And, most important, university teaching is the device through which the culture, knowledge, and values of a nation are transmitted from one generation to the next. In a word, as far as “language care” is concerned, university teaching in the mother tongue is a bulwark that no nation can afford to give up without serious cultural and educational consequences.

Besides Germany, one might argue, there are many countries in Europe, such as the Netherlands and the Nordic states, that have started much earlier and gone much further in switching their language of university instruction to English. But we must bear in mind that these countries have much smaller populations than Germany or China, which might have left them with little real choice in the matter.<sup>18</sup> It is well known that the people of these countries tend to speak English extremely well as a second language. Some even say that for these peoples English has become a “second first language” rather than a “first second language.” But this “success” in English comes at a high price, for it is obvious that Dutch, Norwegian, or Danish belong to those national languages that have long been “overdominated” by English, at least in academia.<sup>19</sup> In recent years, there has been a



strong tendency for universities in China to adopt more English, which is understandable. But the crucial question is: how far should we go?

***Language Care as an Unshirkable Duty of the Entire Linguistic Community, and of Academics in Particular***

The German philosopher Herder was of the opinion that, if a language is to develop healthily, it has to be supported by a group of well-educated linguistic users.<sup>20</sup> For any nation-state, university teachers and students are, so to speak, the cream of society. As intellectuals and academics, they have a duty to learn new knowledge in their respective disciplines. But whether the knowledge thus acquired can be successfully “retained” and transmitted to the school (secondary and primary) and public sectors depends to a large extent on whether these university people can use their native language to recapitulate, reflect on, criticize, apply, and debate the new knowledge gained. It is only thus that new knowledge from the outside world can be assimilated and internalized into the mother tongue and eventually become a common intellectual asset of the nation and the basis for further conceptual innovation. For academia worldwide, it would be a great humiliation if progress in thought and scholarship could be made only in English!

Therefore, university academics, especially those who have acquired training abroad, should require themselves to publish at least occasionally in their mother tongue, despite a possibly smaller and localized readership. Here, I am referring to both the publication of advanced-level research papers and to more basic-level educational materials such as textbooks. This is the most important way the abstract notion of “language care” can be realized.

***The Role of Language in Natural Sciences and in the Humanities***

The question of how much English and how much native language should be used in academic research has always been a matter of dispute. Regarding this problem, there has been much discussion on the need to treat natural-science subjects and humanistic or social-scientific subjects differently. One general observation is that natural sciences deal with universal phenomena that are quite independent of the cultural identity of the researcher, and for that reason English alone would best serve as a universal medium of communication. On the other hand, it has been emphasized that, in the case of research on the humanities and social sciences, the objects and concepts of study are in fact not “objective” and “universal” in a natural-scientific sense, but are significantly motivated by the cultural heritage from which they derive. Thus, in handling humanistic issues, approaches from different linguistic formulations often provide important contrasts and nuances that lead to deeper and more genuine understanding of the

issues.<sup>21</sup> It is for this reason that such researches should not be confined to or rely on one global language alone. Along this line of thought, Wolfgang Frühwald, president of the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung of Germany, once remarked that “all cultural and human sciences (in a broader sense all theoretical sciences) have to do with language. Whereas the concept of science in modern natural sciences is a result-oriented one, the concept of science in the human sciences is always process-related. This means that the results of the human sciences are not lying there prior to the process of their description. They are bound to language and style and are therefore not readily transferable to one *lingua franca*.”<sup>22</sup> By the same token, Maurice Godé, a famous French Germanist, once opined that “knowledge of the respective national languages is a basic prerequisite for meaningful study in the humanities.”<sup>23</sup>

In short, humanities studies rely on linguistic diversity and on cultural traditions to a much greater extent than do the natural sciences. For the humanities in general and for philosophy in particular, proficiency in one single *lingua franca* is very often a sign of inadequacy, if not of impoverishment. While this might not apply to Kongzi or Plato, it is certainly true of today’s humanities scholar, for whom intercultural understanding and a global outlook have become necessary. As for researchers in the natural sciences, although they do not need a multiplicity of languages to operate, their countries and peoples do need them to fulfill the duty of “language care,” which should apply to all disciplines, although to varying degrees.

***Bargaining Power of Various Native Languages in Face of English Dominance***

As English is “the” language of globalization, its influence will continue to grow in the foreseeable future. It also seems inevitable that many languages of the world will succumb to this dominance. The question of how far and how long individual languages can retain their identity and idiosyncrasies is a matter of cultural dynamics. Here, a host of factors are involved, of which two are the most crucial: (1) the size of the linguistic community, which accounts for the multitude of linguistically active authors; and (2) the bulk of the cultural legacy of a language, which accounts for the overall attraction for the recurrent use of the language.<sup>24</sup> Taking these factors into consideration, we can give a rough approximation of the future of some languages. Take German as an example. With 95 million speakers in Europe, the German-speaking community is sizable compared to other EU languages such as Dutch, Danish, or Swedish. In terms of cultural legacy, contemporary German differs greatly from the German of Leibniz’s time because of the richness in literary, philosophical, and other disciplinary classics accumulated over the past two centuries, and this strength or “capital” might remain significant for many centuries to come. With this bargaining power, will German follow the examples of Dutch or Danish

in becoming further marginalized? Or should Germany choose to actively resist such a path?

Take Chinese as another example. Needless to say, the bulk (over 1.3 billion in mainland China) and, to a lesser degree, the spread of Chinese speakers in the world are strengths that no one can ignore. As with cultural tradition, the nearly uninterrupted several-thousand-year legacy of Chinese literature, philosophy, art, and so on, obviously will render the Chinese language extremely competitive into the distant future. In fact, people often speculate that while many languages will be conquered or overdominated by English, Chinese is probably among the very few (with Spanish or probably Arabic being two other such candidates) that might eventually be able truly to withstand the onslaught of English, or in the long run even compete with it. But is the future of Chinese really so assured, despite the great bargaining power it possesses?

While such wild guesses might have some point, they do not represent the complete picture. One important thing to bear in mind is that, in addition to the two main factors we have mentioned, other factors (see note 24) might complicate the picture too, and among these factors we should never ignore two subjective but equally crucial factors: the perseverance of the government in maintaining consistent and favorable language-planning policies, and the readiness of members of the linguistic community to contribute to “language care.”

### *What Should We Aim at When Talking about the Future of a Language? Defending a Native Language as “Object Language” or as “Operative Language”*

In our discussion on the likelihood of a nation defending its language in an “englishized” globe, we left out a very important issue, namely that a native language can be defended merely as an “object language,” or also as an “operative language.” By “object language,” I mean the language in which intellectual subjects such as poetry, philosophy, and history are recorded. By “operative language” I am referring to the language in which we operate when dealing with whatever issues require our attention. Obviously, classical Greek, Latin, or Sanskrit were great languages, but they are nowadays only objects of study because, except for very few users, people no longer operate in them. A pure object language, thanks to the “jewels” it carries, might be “safe” from immediate extinction, but as long as it does not “operate,” it is not vital. In this regard, Wilhelm von Humboldt was perfectly correct when he said, “[l]anguage is one of the fields whence the general mental power of man emerges in constantly active operation.”<sup>25</sup>

Of course, when we talk about operating in a language, we might understand operation loosely as everyday usage. But if it is the academic status of a language that we care about, then we should note that a lan-

guage might remain in use by a sizable population, but lose its esteem as an intellectually operable academic language. So we have to know what we are defending!

All of these reckonings are important insofar as they have much to do with the language policies of universities in Germany and elsewhere, including China and Hong Kong. Let me explain this, taking German again as an example. Up to the present moment, German is obviously still both an object language and an operative language, because Kant, Schiller, Weber, or Simmel are still being discussed in German by scholars in Germany and elsewhere. But suppose the Germans themselves were to decide to stop using German to lecture or publish, what would happen, say, in fifty years, or even ten? The truth is very simple: if an academic language stops operating vigorously, it will quickly degenerate into a mere academic object. And this was exactly the warning expressed in the open letter to the German politicians.

### *Language Not Merely as a Tool of Expression But as the Key to Intellectual Development: The Relevance of the Mother Tongue*

Advocates of English-only policies often adopt a biased, instrumentalistic conception of language, or the view that language is nothing more than an instrument for the expression of what one already clearly has in mind. But a closer look at the development of modern general linguistics shows that, contrary to this “instrumental” view, linguists are readily adopting a “*Bildung* conception” of language, or the view that language is not merely an instrument for the expression of clear, ready-made ideas, but a formative medium through which human intelligence and consciousness can take shape and develop at all. In other words, for many modern linguists, including Humboldt, Saussure, and Jakobson, language competence and intellectual capacity are equiprimordial and inseparable. If language indeed has such an important role in the development of human intelligence, then the part played by the mother tongue should also be accorded special importance, because the mother tongue is precisely “the” language medium through which all human individuals actually acquire their basic intelligence. Since the acquisition of the mother tongue is a process that is irreversible and inevitable, fostering the learning of English at the cost of the mother tongue (as in the case of ENL) is like building an edifice on a sand dune or developing a view from nowhere, which is pedagogically problematic and intellectually against the best interests of the learner. This explains why the overdominance of English is such an important issue. It is along this line of thought that some Neo-Humboldtian researchers on language have studied the role of the mother tongue, which they think is the very basis for human intellectual existence as well as the very link to our social life-world and to our cultural heritage.<sup>26</sup>

### *Multilingualism*

Having underlined the importance of the mother tongue for the cultivation of human intelligence, nevertheless it is also important for us to limit this emphasis to prevent this position from degenerating into provincialism or ethnocentrism. In fact, we should note that the philosophical justifications that confirm the primary importance of the mother tongue also lend support to the advantage of supplementing mother-tongue learning with the learning of foreign languages. As suggested at the outset, the learning of a foreign language is beneficial because it helps to broaden the linguistic-intellectual horizons of learners by providing contrasts in perspectives, formulation strategies, conceptual networks, and so forth. In general linguistics and in philosophy of language, many major theoretical positions are in fact closely related to this issue—for instance, the concept of linguistic value, lexical field theory (*Wortfeldtheorie*), world-picture (*Weltansicht*), the fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*), and so on. All of these add up to suggest that, as far as education is concerned, the more languages one learns, the better. Emperor Charles V's dictum, "How many languages one speaks, so many times is he a man," is a most drastic formulation of this position.<sup>27</sup> Naturally, with limited time and resources, there are limits to what can be achieved in multilingualism in education. In order to strike a balance, I would suggest that, while bilingualism should be a minimum for preuniversity education, education from the undergraduate program onward should at least aim at trilingualism, which should even be made a requirement at the graduate level. Just one word on the concept of "trilingualism." Instead of being a mere numerical compromise, many linguistic and philosophical studies have pointed out that the learning of at least three languages entails the intellectual advantage of "triangulation," that is, the prevention of premature antagonism or bipolarity in conceptual comparisons, enabling the learner thus to be more receptive to the complexities of our world and better prepared for multilateral discourses.<sup>28</sup>

### *Toward a Glocal Language Policy in the Age of Globalization*

Having underlined the importance of English as a global language, but warned of its overdominance, one general position we arrive at is the adoption of a language policy that is "glocal" in nature. What is a glocal language policy? In brief, it is a language policy that is locally rooted but globally perspectivized. In practical terms, it is the combination of the MTL (mother-tongue literacy) and OFL (optimized foreign language). While the significance of MTL is programmatically self-explanatory and pedagogically fundamental, we must note that OFL should not be confined to mere TESL or English learning, but should include the teaching and learning of any "foreign" language relevant to one's respective disciplines. With the dominance of English, it is certain that English will remain globally the

most popular "foreign language," but this dominance should not lead to monopolization in the world linguistic arena, especially not in academia. Given available resources, foreign languages other than English should not be excluded, for they do make contributions of their own to global civilization, and are valuable cultural "capital" awaiting fruitful investment by every global citizen. If this "glocal" language policy is adopted consistently by a considerable number of nations with the support of their major universities, then every individual language will have a better future, both locally and globally. How popular individual languages can become depends naturally on their "bargaining power." So why shouldn't Chinese scholars, out of disciplinary needs, learn alongside English some Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, German, French, Tibetan, Japanese, or even Tokharian in order to derive the most intellectual benefit? Alternatively, Chinese is obviously a good candidate for peoples in the world.<sup>29</sup> Wilhelm von Humboldt once underlined the idiosyncrasies of the Chinese language with the wonderful remarks that Chinese and Sanskrit, despite their antipodal structures, represent the two "fixed extremes" or "end points" of linguistic perfection,<sup>30</sup> and that the Chinese script has "in a certain manner embraced philosophical work within itself."<sup>31</sup>

Educationally speaking, as long as one learns a foreign language seriously enough, whether English or another language, one will be able to get a great deal from the effort. But whatever the combinations, the most important thing is that in any glocal language program the native tongue should always be in place, for without a solid educational foundation in one's native tongue, which is the fountainhead of human intelligence and thus the "true" key to the outside world, all other linguistic maneuvers will become pointless and ineffective. For any country, any attempt to achieve a "better" standard in a foreign language (say, English) at the expense of the native tongue is intellectual-pedagogically unwise and cultural-politically suicidal.

### **Conclusion**

The dominance of the English language is the result of a long historical process that can hardly be reversed: it is a basic fact that no nation or government can ignore. Unless a nation does not want to connect economically, politically, intellectually, and culturally with the world, strengthening its use of English is unavoidable. Yet, coming to terms with the dominance of English as an international language is one thing; tolerating its overdominance or allowing it to intrude into domestic language matters is quite another. As we have explained, such overdominance amounts to the encroachment upon and endangerment of other native tongues, but whether or not this scenario should be allowed to prevail is to a large extent in the hands of members of individual linguistic communities, be they government policy makers, university administrators, professors, students, or



the general public. What we are dealing with here is our very linguistic human rights, which we might all-too-easily forsake if the overdominance of English is accepted without reflection. In this regard, Leibniz's notions of "language care" and of the establishment of a "[mother-tongue]-minded society" are obviously of great heuristic value.

## Notes

An abridged version of this essay appeared earlier as a chapter in Wm. Theodore de Bary's book *Confucian Tradition and Global Education: Essays in Honor of Tang Junyi* (New York, Hong Kong: Columbia University Press/Chinese University Press, 2007), pp. 75–99. The chapter there bears a slightly different title: "The Overdominance of English in Global Education: A Glocal Response?" This arrangement was made at the suggestion of de Bary with the consent of Roger Ames, organizer of the Ninth East-West Philosophers' Conference. Also with the consent of Ames, a longer version of the essay, with more elaborate discussion on Leibniz's reflections on the German language of his time and with more notes, will appear in the collection *Phenomenology 2005*, to be published electronically by the Organization of Phenomenological Organizations (OPO) of Zeta Books, Bucharest. In the course of writing this paper, the author has had the benefit of discussing the issue with his colleagues at the CUHK as well as with scholars abroad, including Roger Ames, Gerhold Becker, Wm. Theodore de Bary, Elmar Holenstein, Lao Sze-Kwang, Sun Zhouxing, and others.

1. See David Crystal, *English as a Global Language*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

2. See Robert Philipson and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, "Englishisation: One Dimension of Globalisation," in Graddol and Meinhof, eds., *English in a Changing World* (London: AILA, 1999), pp. 19–36.

3. For proponents of this saying, see inter alia, Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980). See also a recent book by John Honey, *Language Is Power: The Story of Standard English and Its Enemies*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1997).

4. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 61; see also Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," ed. J. Richardson, *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York/Greenwich, Conn./London: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 241–258.

5. See Minoru Tsunoda, "Les langues internationales dans les publications scientifiques et techniques," *Sophia Linguistica* 13 (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1983), pp. 144–155, quoted in Ulrich Ammon, ed., *The Dominance of English as a Language of Science. Effects on Other Languages and Language Communities* (Berlin/New York: Mouton-de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 343–362, especially pp. 344, 346.

6. I am borrowing this expression from Richard J. Alexander, "Global Languages Oppress But Are Liberating, Too: The Dialectics of English," in Christian Mair, ed., *The Politics of English as a World Language* (New York: Rodopi, 2003), p. 91.

7. See Peter von Polenz, *Geschichte der deutschen Sprache* (Berlin: Mouton-de Gruyter, 1977), p. 108.

8. The two essays are now available in, Leibniz, *Unvorgreifliche Gedanken... (Zwei Aufsätze)*, ed. Uwe Pörksen (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1983).

9. The expression *deutschgesinnt* has to be understood with great care, because before and since Leibniz the term has been used with a strong nationalistic flavor not in line with Leibniz's largely cosmopolitan standpoint.

10. Leibniz, *Unvorgreifliche Gedanken*, p. 10.

11. For an account of this prehistory of German, see Tze-wan Kwan, "Leibniz and the Development of Modern German: On *Sprachpflege* and the Fate of National Languages" (in Chinese), *Journal of Tongji University*, Social Science Section, vol. 16, no. 1 (Shanghai: Tongji University, 2005), pp. 1–11.

12. On this issue, see George Steiner, "The Hollow Miracle," in *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), pp. 101–109.

13. The open letter was initiated by Professors Dieter, Simonis, and Vilmar, and was countersigned by thirty-four other professionals from various disciplines (including the humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, and technology). The letter was published on July 24, 2001, and triggered a series of discussions. Related papers are now still available at URL: <http://bibliothek.wz-berlin.de/pdf/2001/p01-003.pdf> (latest access on May 26, 2005).

14. Ibid. In the face of such a danger, the open letter suggested a number of measures to be taken, which included: (a) political initiatives (with France as an example) toward designating German (in conjunction with English) the official language of international conferences held in Germany; (b) using public money to translate specially compiled research materials into German to facilitate public access; and (c) ensuring that course offerings in German in university undergraduate programs not be heedlessly suppressed in favor of English.

15. The same scenario holds, for example, for Denmark, one of the most "englishized" countries in Europe. Robert Philipson reported that the editor-in-chief of a major Danish national encyclopedia has written that some contributors who are natural scientists are unable to communicate their scholarship in Danish for a Danish audience; see Graddol and Meinhof, *English in a Changing World*, p. 28.

16. Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*, in *Werke* (Berliner Ausgabe), Band 18 (Berlin: Aufbau, 1960), p. 492. "Wer fremde Sprachen nicht kennt, weiss nichts von seiner eigenen." See also a similar dictum usually ascribed to Rudyard Kipling: "What do they know of England who only England know?"

17. Because of previous colonial influence, the English teaching policy in Hong Kong has been exhibiting strong ENL tendencies for decades, and the great abundance of so-called English secondary schools is the most characteristic outcome. With a Chinese population of more than 95 percent, the linguistic ecology for running ENL in Hong Kong is of course not very favorable.

18. The populations of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands in 2005 are 5.43, 4.62, 9.04, and 16.30 million respectively, compared to Germany's 82.69 and China's 1,315.84 million. See United Nations' World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision Population Database; URL: <http://esa.un.org/unpp/p2kodata.asp>.

19. A few years ago, Philipson and Skutnabb-Kangas reported on the situation in Denmark, relying on questionnaires returned by 83 academics. See Graddol and Meinhof, *English in a Changing World*, pp. 25–29.

20. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität* (1793–1797), 5. Sammlung, §57, *Herders Werke*, Band 5 (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1982), pp. 108–144, especially 112f., 134f.

21. Regarding the objectivity and universality of objects and concepts in the humanities, see the incisive reflections in Ernst Cassirer, *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften* (1942) (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961), especially the first and third chapters.

22. See Wolfgang Frühwald, “Sprachen öffnen die Welt. Zur Funktion der Nationalsprachen als Sprachen der Wissenschaft,” lecture delivered in Budapest, Hungary, in Beijing, China, and elsewhere in 2001. See URL: <http://www.humboldt.hu/HN19/fruhwald.htm> (accessed on May 24, 2005). I am indebted to Professor Feng Jun, vice-president of Renmin University of China, for bringing Frühwald’s lecture to my attention. The English text is my translation of Frühwald’s German text.

23. See a report on Godé’s speech at the Universitätstage Heidelberg-Montpellier on January 14, 2004, URL: [http://www.innovations-report.de/html/berichte/bildung\\_wissenschaft/bericht-24766.html](http://www.innovations-report.de/html/berichte/bildung_wissenschaft/bericht-24766.html), viewed on May 14, 2005.

24. Besides these two, other important factors determining a language’s potential to withstand the overdominance of English include the prestige of a language in the eyes of other nations; the degree of esteem native speakers have for the language; the amount of new knowledge carried by a language; the average level of literacy of the respective linguistic community; the abundance of educational materials in the respective language, and so on. But these factors will not be discussed in this essay. For some stimulating thoughts on related issues, see Elmar Holenstein, “Ist die viersprachige Schweiz ein Modell für plurikulturelle Staaten?” in his *Kulturphilosophische Perspektiven* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), pp. 11–43. Besides this essay, Holenstein has been highly involved in discussing various linguistic-educational issues with me over the past year, either through e-mail or elaborately in person during my visit to Yokohama in the summer of 2005.

25. See Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts* (1835) (widely and hereafter cited as *Kawi-Schrift*), now included in: *Werke in Fünf Bänden*, Band III. *Schriften zur Sprachphilosophie*, Andreas Flitner and Klaus Giel, eds., (Stuttgart: Cotta’sche Buchhandlung, 1963), p. 391. English translation by Peter Heath, *On Language: The Diversity of Human Language-Structure and Its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 27. Elsewhere, Humboldt made the related statement, “The intellectual merits of language therefore rest exclusively upon the well-ordered, firm and clear mental organization of peoples in the epoch of making or remaking language...” (*Kawi-Schrift*, German ed., p. 464/English, p. 81).

26. Among many Neo-Humboldtians, Leo Weisgerber had, in the fifties, proposed the so-called humanistic law of language (*Menschheitsgesetz der Sprache*), which comprises three constituent laws: the law of linguistically conditioned human existence, the law of linguistic community, and the law of the mother tongue. Although Weisgerber’s theory long ago sank into oblivion due to his overconcentration on German when citing linguistic examples, it seems that the basic insights of his work are still relevant to our concern today. See Weisgerber, *Das Menschheitsgesetz der Sprache als Grundlage der Sprachwissenschaft*, zweite, neubearbeitete Auflage (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer Verlag, 1950), 1964.

27. Quoted from Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga und Paralipomena II* (1859), Zweiter Teilband (Zurich: Diogenes, 1977), p. 616. “So viele Sprachen einer kennt, so viele Male ist er ein Mensch.”

28. For the linguistic and philosophical justification of trilingualism, see *inter alia* the following three texts: (1) Elmar Holenstein, “Ein Dutzend Daumenregeln zur Vermeidung interkultureller Missverständnisse,” in idem, *Kulturphilosophische Perspektiven*, pp. 288–312; English translation, “A Dozen Rules of Thumb for Avoiding Intercultural Misunderstandings,” *Polylog*, URL: <http://them.polylog.org/4/aehen.htm> (Nov. 2, 2004); (2) Joseph H. Greenberg, *On Language: Selected Writings of Joseph H. Greenberg*, ed. Keith Denning and Suzanne Kemmer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), especially the chapters on typology and language universals; (3) William Theodore de Bary, “Asian Classics and Global Education,” lecture delivered in January 2005 on the occasion of the Tang Chun-I Visiting Professorship, organized under the auspices of the Philosophy Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. In this paper, de Bary explicitly used the word “triangulation.” See *Confucian Tradition and Global Education*, *ibid.*, p. 26. Noteworthy is that de Bary, after reading this essay of mine, wrote another paper in reply to it. See “Translating the Classics,” which formed chapter 3 of the same book.

29. Owing to the growing popularity of Chinese, an examination scheme for Chinese proficiency known as HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi, nicknamed the “Chinese TOEFL”) is now in operation in 33 countries (more than 80 cities) around the world. See the HSK main site: <http://www.hsk.org.cn/> for more information.

30. See Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Kawi-Schrift*, p. 676. English translation by Peter Heath, *On Language*, p. 232. For further discussion, see Tze-wan Kwan, “Wilhelm von Humboldt on the Chinese Language,” *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 29, no. 2 (Berkeley, 2001): 169–242.

31. See Wilhelm von Humboldt, “*Lettre à Abel-Rémusat sur la nature des formes grammaticales en général et sur le génie de la langue chinoise en particulier*” (Paris: Librairie Orientale de Dondey-Dupré, 1827); German translation, Christoph Harbsmeier, *Brief an M. Abel-Rémusat. Über die Natur grammatischer Formen im allgemeinen und über den Geist der chinesischen Sprache im besonderen*, which was included in Harbsmeier, *Zur philosophischen Grammatik des Altchinesischen im Anschluß an Humboldts Brief an Abel-Rémusat* (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1979), p. 81. “weil die dort entwickelte Schreibweise schon in sich in gewisser Weise eine philosophische Arbeit beweist.”