

PERSPECTIVES

It's still worth theorizing on LEL, despite the heterogeneity and complexity of the processes (Response to commentators)*

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1. INTRODUCTION. I am grateful for the generally thought-provoking commentaries on my target article (Mufwene 2017), which reveal how multifaceted and complex the subject matter of LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT AND LOSS (LEL) is. They also show how difficult it is to develop a position that addresses all of the issues. Because of space limitations, my responses focus on the most critical ones.

The respondents fall into three groups: (1) those who have worked on LEL mostly in former settlement colonies, viz., Lyle Campbell, Claire Bowerman, and Colleen Fitzgerald; (2) those who have investigated them in former exploitation colonies, viz., Pierpaolo Di Carlo & Jeff Good, Friederike Lüpke, and Fiona Willans & Anthony Jukes; and (3) those who want to highlight the contributions that creolistics can make to the subject matter, viz., Marlyse Baptista and Nala H. Lee. The first group expresses the most reservations about the need to theorize on LEL, joined surprisingly by Willans & Jukes, while the second agrees with me that LEL have not proceeded uniformly around the world. They confirm that indigenous vernaculars in former European exploitation colonies have generally not been endangered by the European colonial languages. The third group draws attention to lessons that can be learned from the vitality of creoles and pidgins, rather differently from how I have invoked the same language varieties in Mufwene 2004, 2008 in order to show the occasional concomitance of language birth and death. My responses are structured according to these categories.

2. REGARDING THEORIZING ON LEL AND THE OVEREMPHASIS ON SETTLEMENT COLONIES. Lyle Campbell observes that:

The sort of theorizing Mufwene calls for would take us way beyond linguistics into the vicissitudes of human choice, whims of society, and presumably into the contentious approaches to the explanation of social change, with all of its random and unique factors along with some putative systematic ones. (2017:e225)

It would be contradictory for linguists to become involved with SOCIAL experiences such as LEL and yet refrain from theorizing on the nonlinguistic aspects of the processes. Adequate theorizing entails grounding LEL historically in their contact ecologies, shedding light on how what has occurred recently compares with what occurred in the more distant past regarding costs and benefits to the affected populations. For instance, if the effects of LEL in the more distant past were deleterious, the theorizing should tell us whether the older processes could have been prevented, what would have changed the fates of the affected populations and how, and whether language advocates are reacting adequately to recent cases of LEL.

I fully agree with Campbell: the causes of LEL are nonlinguistic. This is why linguists should not dodge the onus of explaining how nonlinguistic factors can both actuate struc-

* I am grateful to Cécile B. Vigouroux for feedback on this response. I am solely responsible for all remaining shortcomings.

tural changes and favor some languages at the expense of others. What I have highlighted is the fact that the current discourse on LEL has provided little information about the local political or socioeconomic dynamics that, in history, drove languages such as Hittite, Dacian, and Thracian to extinction. From a comparative perspective (see below), we may learn a great deal from these earlier evolutions. Regarding the recent past, the typical allusions to colonization and globalization are too vague to be informative.

Pace Campbell, explanations do not necessarily entail generalizations, especially where diversity is observable in the outcomes. They also involve telling why things have not evolved uniformly in different cases (Diamond 2005). The dominant discourse on LEL has typically accounted for various situations around the world based largely on knowledge of former European settlement colonies and less on that of former exploitation colonies. While the statistics provided by Claire Bowerman show indeed that endangered languages of Africa or Asia have been discussed too, they do not answer the question of whether the accounts provided are consistent with the history of population and language contacts in these parts of the world. Nor do they explain why there are fewer cases of vernacular shifts to European languages in Africa than in the Americas.

According to Bowerman,

there ALREADY EXISTS an important literature on theories of language loss, language revitalization, and reclamation that looks at these questions from both general modeling perspectives and anthropological/ethnographic ones. (2017:e243)

Unfortunately, those theories do not (sufficiently) address the issues I raise. I begin with an anecdote. I once joined a modeling project on the emergence of creoles (Tria et al. 2015). Although it produced acceptable results regarding where these vernaculars emerged and where they did not in the Americas and the Caribbean, it was based on anachronistic information, viz., census data from the nineteenth century. We devoted most of the ‘Supporting information’ for the publication to explaining the actual historical facts that the modelers had not included.

So, regarding the current theoretical literature on LEL, which includes modeling, cases such as mine raise the following question: What is the significance of modeling in the study of LEL? I think of it as a sophisticated tool that, when used adequately, can help investigators conceptualize their research questions more insightfully, especially in determining what parameters or factors may be (more) significant, which ones may have to be either disaggregated or lumped together, and so forth. These include ‘factors that fragment or destroy communities versus those that influence communities’ language use’ (Bowerman, p. e244). Thus, modeling is not theorizing, though it is guided by some theory. It may be considered a substitute for experimentation.

Fiona Willans and Anthony Jukes (2017) characterize my position that language shift is not necessarily maladaptive as ‘dehumanizing’, that is, detached from the plight of the affected people. The goal of discussing LEL from an evolutionary perspective is to explain why and how the processes happen. From this perspective, one can also address the question of whether language shift is necessarily a maladaptive response of particular speakers to the pressures of the changing political and socioeconomic ecologies that affect them. Indeed, the experience can be painful, especially during the initial stages. But we must also ask whether the shift can really be avoided by, for example, sustaining bilingualism in the ancestral and in the dominant language. The respondents in group 2 show that this is possible, though in a contact ecology that is different from that of European settlement colonies. It is not clear to me what is dehumanizing in this approach.

As noted above, part of the theorizing I advocate involves a comparative approach to LEL, which involves being able to tell why things have not evolved uniformly in situa-

tions that appear to be so similar (Diamond 2005). Campbell chose a different interpretation, focusing instead on degrees of language endangerment, whereas I draw attention to why language vitality has evolved differently in the European settlement colonies of the Americas and Australia from in their exploitation counterparts elsewhere, or why LEL are more advanced in the anglophone North America than in Latin America. We may also compare why the Western Roman Empire produced the Romance languages but not the Eastern Empire (although it lasted a millennium longer), and so on. We can add to this Pierpaolo Di Carlo and Jeff Good's (2017) discussion of the differing impacts of Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) and Tok Pisin on the more indigenous languages of Cameroon and Papua New Guinea, respectively.¹ That the former is not endangering the local more indigenous languages while the latter is, in natural and postcolonial socio-economic ecologies that appear to be similar, calls for some explanation.

My claim that the discourse on LEL has not theorized on why and how these processes occur may indeed be overstated. However, the factors typically invoked do not apply universally. The comparative approach should (help) explain why many stigmatized language varieties are still spoken around the world, including here in anglophone North America, for instance, AAVE, Gullah, Amish English, Appalachian English, and Southern English. The answer appears to lie in the segregated population structure that has protected them, although SEGREGATION itself must be understood variously, viz., in terms of residential neighborhoods or regions of a polity.

Colleen Fitzgerald (2017) argues that language revitalization, which, according to her, must also subsume language documentation, should be part of the proposed theorizing on LEL. I respond briefly to aspects of her response that I find disputable. First, I doubt that anyone can engage adequately in language revitalization without the kind of theorizing that I advocate. From my perspective, language revitalization as a response to LEL is the applied consequence of understanding the phenomena.

Also, treating successful language documentation as part of the success of the revitalization endeavor even when the relevant population cannot regain the practice of their heritage language is simply refusing to admit that the investment in ideology, money, time, and energy, among other factors, has not born fruit, as in the case of Irish. Although this language (on which there is ample documentation) has been taught in Ireland's schools for over a century now, it remains endangered.

Linguists and language teachers have no control over the conditions that sustain a language, despite their expertise. That is, revitalization efforts should also address the nonlinguistic factors that produced the socioeconomic ecologies that are disadvantageous to the relevant languages. Just think how unproductive it would be if environmentalists only provided food to an endangered species while keeping it in the same deleterious ecosystem.

Fitzgerald also observes that '[c]urrent educational outcomes for Indigenous students, who typically enter schools speaking English, show that their academic progress trails far behind that of peers from other races' (p. e282). It is debatable whether language is the real or only problem if the children already speak English by the time they begin English-medium schools. Is this case not similar to that of pupils speaking AAVE or Appalachian English whose teachers speak a different variety or whose school does not factor in their different cultural backgrounds? The situation is of course different and disadvantageous to the children if they do not speak the medium of instruction (flu-

¹ Creoles and pidgins are naturally indigenous to the territories where they emerged, although they are less old than the local languages that preceded them there.

ently), as happens in, for instance, Haiti and sub-Saharan Africa, precisely where the foreign medium of education has not endangered the indigenous languages.

In §3 ‘Defining “language”’, Fitzgerald argues for ‘a broader, holistic, and more functional notion of language’ (p. e286). It is not evident that she has articulated it, especially in a way that responds to the question that I asked in relation to LEL, viz., whether a language should be conceived of as a system or as practice. As I argue in the target article (Mufwene 2017:e205), if a language is thought of as practice, then it should be assumed dead even when there are surviving individuals who know it but do not practice it. If it is conceived of as a system, then it can be claimed to still survive in the minds of the people that know it. But then, Hittite too may be claimed to be alive, in the minds of Hittitologists, although it has no native speakers today!

Fitzgerald’s discussion in §4 of her response underscores the significance of the question that I can reformulate as follows: What should a linguist tell the layperson a language is: a system of units and rules/constraints that enables explicit and high-fidelity communication, a practice, or a representation system and store of knowledge? For the purposes of LEL, I submit that what matters is the practice of communicating in a particular way. I see language revitalization as aimed at restoring this practice when it is endangered. The fact that a language is also a system and reflects a particular worldview is only a consequence of the strategies different populations develop in their communication practices (Mufwene 2013).

Let me now return to some other comments of Bower’s, starting with her response to my remark that the impact of boarding schools on the vitality of indigenous languages has been exaggerated. Like Baptista, Bower overstates the effects of boarding schools on the vitality of indigenous languages. The passage she quotes does not show that the boarding schools succeeded in disrupting the ‘transmission’ of indigenous languages. As a former boarding-schooler myself (although in Africa), I am familiar with derision for losing fluency in one’s mother tongue when returning home on vacation. One can be accused of snobbery, which is associated with speaking the European language or using too many of its words in the wrong setting.² Eventually the pressure to show how loyal one has remained to one’s cultural heritage prevails. There also arises the question of the proportion of children who were enrolled in boarding schools and completed their programs relative to that of those who stayed home. The bilingualism that boarding schools produced did not necessarily lead to language shift among those that did not relocate to the city.

Bower likewise associates the loss of indigenous languages with atrocities inflicted on their speakers by the settlers. Such atrocities were also practiced in some exploitation colonies, such as the Belgian Congo, now the Democratic Republic of Congo. King Leopold II resorted to slave-style forced labor to exploit what has been called ‘red rubber’, to man a portage system, and to develop the transportation infrastructure needed for the trade of this commodity and others. In the same vein, one may also invoke the fact that the Natives were expropriated of most of their lands, driven to reservations or ‘homelands’, and weakened economically, owing largely to the erosion of their traditional economic practices. (See McKenna 2011 for Southern Africa.) However, unlike in the Americas and in Australia, these cruel treatments of the Natives did not produce language

² I learned a similar lesson from a teenage Gullah speaker from Johns Island, South Carolina, who told me that giving up his creole vernacular, simply because it is stigmatized at school in the neighbor city of Charleston, would have left him with no friends on the Island. He would have been treated as a snob (Mufwene 1997).

shifts in sub-Saharan Africa. One must add to the cluster of actuating factors the cultural assimilation disposition of the colonizers, which exploitation colonization excluded.

Regarding the term *indigenous*, the United Nations' usage reflects the language advocates' practice, not the other way around. Bowerman seems also to overlook the colonial bias that goes with the way the term has been used historically, to distinguish the Natives from the colonizers. Indeed, there are publications that still use *indigenous* in the traditional sense of 'native to a particular place'. However, this practice does not dispute the fact that in much of the discourse on LEL, *indigenous* has been used synonymously with *non-European*, as if Europe had no indigenous languages.

I misstated my position in saying that 'Labels such as *Italian-American* or *German-American* today have to do more with genetic ancestry than with cultural retentions' (Mufwene 2017:e206). I should have spoken of 'national ancestry' and 'language retentions'. Nonetheless, all of the examples of cultural retentions cited by Bowerman also show that cultural traditions may be maintained, often with modifications, without the languages traditionally associated with them. Loss of one's language does not necessarily entail loss of one's culture, contrary to frequent claims in the discourse on LEL. Africa, Asia, and the Pacific provide examples of many individuals who have adopted colonial languages as their (dominant) vernaculars but have typically also maintained most of their other cultural traditions, as well as of populations that have changed some of their cultural practices without shifting languages. Could it also be that the knowledge lost is that for which there is no more practical need in the changing ecologies?

Ironically, the best examples Bowerman gives of Native American neighborhoods is that of a reservation being absorbed by an expanding city. It remains that no major American city includes a Native American neighborhood, while they all have had residential-segregation histories containing, for instance, German, Italian, Jewish, Hungarian, or Polish neighborhoods now superseded by African-American, Hispanic, Cuban, and Puerto Rican neighborhoods. There is little indication in American history that the cities, associated with the new, originally European socioeconomic world order, were ever intended to include Native Americans as part of their demographic landscapes. Because cities have been the primary contact ecologies where language shift has been experienced by post-American Revolution immigrants, we can understand why Native Americans are indeed (among) the last, other than recent immigrants, to have joined the bandwagon of language shifters. They have been lured to city life late, like the Francophones in the Louisiana bayous.

Regarding where agency lies in driving LEL, it is not that 'factors at an individual level ... may ... play a role in language maintenance and shift' (Bowerman, p. e246); they DO play an important role. As already explained in the target article, it is individuals who respond to ecological pressures, and eventually the convergence of their responses determines whether a language is maintained or given up. I am not sure Bowerman and I disagree on the matter of choice.

3. WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND THE PACIFIC ISLANDS. All three commentaries in the second category appear to support an approach to LEL that is also comparative and pays more attention to the evolution of language vitality in former exploitation colonies. Di Carlo & Good make the case more compelling by focusing on languages spoken by small populations, as does Friederike Lüpke. The overall population structures of both Cameroon and Casamance, Senegal, are not culturally assimilationist, which keeps every village loyal to its language while its residents are motivated to learn other neighboring languages they find useful.

Lüpke underscores the need to complement the study of Western urban environments as contact settings with those of rural areas in Africa as linguistic ecosystems involving different interactional dynamics, as also noted by Willans & Jukes in the context of the Pacific islands. The following passages from Lüpke's (2017) commentary underscore the differential role of population structure as an ecological factor: 'the high linguistic diversity on [the African] continent is directly associated with the existence of small groups, whose members are bi- and multilingual in small languages and use languages of wider communication in their broader networks' (p. e277); 'we need to acknowledge that [in this case] small speaker numbers are in fact an index of linguistic vitality, rather than of endangerment' (p. e277), given their resilience in the (post)colonial political and economic regimes; and 'bi- and multilingualism in these communities are not always an indicator of ongoing language shift and linguistic oppression, leading to language shift and loss' (p. e277).

Di Carlo & Good also show how local language ideologies can vary even within the same polity, with the Montagnards and the populations of Fungom organizing the values of the languages in their repertoires rather horizontally, while the Wandala stratify them. Differences in economic power also account for these differing ideologies, which prompt the former to be as plurilingual as is useful to their interactions, while the latter are more interested in French and Arabic, which are more empowered economically, than in other indigenous languages. Nonetheless, the Wandala too have remained loyal to their heritage language, despite ranking French and Arabic as more prestigious. It is not evident what role ethnic identity contributes to the maintenance of Wandala, because there are cases that can dispute such a claim. For instance, as discussed in the target article, the Pygmies have shifted to the neighboring Bantu languages but have not lost their separate ethnic identities, although cultural borrowings have been mutual between the two populations.

Willans & Jukes argue that my 'search for an all-encompassing theory that could account for all instances of LEL appears to be another endeavor carried out in the service of academia rather than communities of speakers' (p. e264). I advocate just the opposite! My position is that all evolution is local, subject to the specificities of the ecology that influences it. The target article underscores the significance of variation across the ecosystems of language contact, in which the discourse of LEL must be grounded. Part of my response to their comment is articulated below in my discussion of the agency of speakers in (not) maintaining their heritage languages.

Willans & Jukes also note the following:

The linguistic ecologies of the colonial encounters were clearly influenced by a wide range of factors. Different powers had different approaches to ruling—notably French direct rule in contrast to British indirect rule (Miles 1998)—which had an influence on the proportion of a population exposed to the colonizers' language. (p. e268)

I could not have illustrated better than they do how even exploitation colonization has varied from one polity to another, even under the rule of the same colonizing nation, owing to various local ecological factors.

I also agree with Willans & Jukes's statement that emigration is likely to affect negatively the vitality of languages spoken by small populations. I argued in Mufwene 1997 that a real threat to Gullah's survival has been out-migration to places such as New York and Washington, DC. However, those who have returned home, disenchanted with living in these places, are among those who speak Gullah 'with a vengeance' and value their traditions. If one ever wants to hear basilectal Gullah that approximates the construction of the basilect by linguists and some writers, these are the ones who can produce it.

4. WHAT CREOLES AND PIDGINS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE SCHOLARSHIP ON LEL. Creoles instantiate the fact that language shift can be a concomitant of another phenomenon: language birth (Mufwene 2004, 2008). Marlyse Baptista and Nala H. Lee invoke them to show the extent to which creolistics can enrich the study of language vitality. Baptista starts by articulating a position that is implicit in §6.4 of my target article, viz., language shift does not proceed consciously, unless it is ideologically driven. In fact, it also occurs gradually in individual speakers and spreads incrementally across a population.

Despite Baptista's doubts, speaker agency, willful or unwitting, is always involved in determining the trajectory of language vitality, through deciding or having to use one's heritage language or not using it, during the interactions that cumulatively favor or disfavor its vitality. In settlement colonies, the enslaved Africans and indentured European servants obviously had less autonomy than the free European immigrants, who were under less pressure to shift languages, until after the American Revolution in the case of anglophone North America. An important question is whether the indigenous populations assimilating to the new socioeconomic world order have as much freedom. Another is whether the Natives of former exploitation colonies are experiencing similar pressures to shift to the European language. Like me, Di Carlo & Good, Lüpke, and Willans & Jukes answer the question negatively. Their socioeconomic ecologies have not been culturally assimilationist, largely because, in the first place, the colonizers intended to share their languages only with their colonial auxiliaries and developed formal economic systems that have to date operated in indigenous *lingua francas*, except for a small white-collar sector.

It is inaccurate to claim, as Baptista does, that Native Americans 'were actively prevented from speaking their native languages' (2017:e299), despite the pressures that boarding schools exerted on the children. Native Americans have experienced the same kinds of economic and political pressures that had already driven non-Anglo European Americans to shift to English. A question that deserves attention too is why Native Americans did not start shifting concurrently with European immigrants. Another is why even the latter did not all do it at the same time. For instance, Dutch, Danish, Norwegian, and Italian have died in the US, while French is still buying time in Louisiana. For Native Americans, an answer for shifting later lies in their marginalization to the reservations, where, for at least two centuries, they simply did not participate in the new socioeconomic world order and were spared the pressures it exerted on speakers of languages other than English.

Baptista discusses MARGINALIZATION differently from how I invoke it in the target article. She asks 'whether it is always the case that populations shift because they sense that preserving a language can marginalize them' (p. e299). I discuss learning the dominant language as an attempt to overcome the current marginalization from the new socioeconomic world order. It is this reaction to the extant marginalization that drives language shift, once the learners have fewer and fewer opportunities to speak their heritage language. When most of them converge in shifting to the dominant language, their heritage language becomes endangered.

Population structure can account for some cross-polity differences. For instance, to date, only a small Black South African elite, as opposed to the Cape Malays and South African Indians, has shifted to either Afrikaans or English as their vernacular. Still bearing the legacy of the British rule and then the apartheid regime (1948–1990), which availed non-Whites unequal opportunities to partake in the modern economic system, the South African socioeconomic structure continues to marginalize the indigenous Bantu and Khoisans the most.

Baptista also argues that African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has survived because of its function as a social identity marker (as indeed discussed in the target article). Note, first of all, that AAVE is not the only marker of social identity for African Americans who speak it. We must also bear in mind that AAVE is English after all, regardless of its structural differences from other American English varieties. The ancestors of present-day African Americans shifted languages, at the expense of their African substrate languages, early in colonial history, before most continental European immigrants did. In principle, they should not be expected to shift languages again.

The shift that Baptista's question presupposes would have to be homologous to the death of, for example, German, Italian, and Yiddish Englishes, because their speakers have assimilated to the Anglo communities. This is a process that generally has not been open to African Americans. Accordingly, to explain AAVE's vitality exceptionalism, ethnic segregation or discrimination may be a more significant factor than the function of the vernacular as a marker of ethnic identity. More generally, as noted above, segregation also explains why varieties such as Amish and Appalachian Englishes are still spoken. I therefore maintain the position I stated in §5 of the target article: socioeconomic marginalization has played a role in the maintenance of AAVE.³

It is likewise the socioeconomic marginalization of their speakers, although they are the demographic majorities of the relevant polities, that accounts for the vitality of creoles in the Caribbean. Another relevant factor is their use in popular culture. Musicians in the Caribbean often sing in creole, on the behalf of their speakers, themes of socioeconomic woes and satires of abusive or irresponsible politicians. This factor fosters loyalty to these vernaculars, as nonprestigious as they are, contrary to claims in the LEL discourse that invoke prestige as an actuator of language shift. In vernacular interactions, the prestigious language variety is often derided.

It is also true that, on the one hand, the birth of creoles did not lead to the death of their lexifiers. On the other hand, although the shift that produced these vernaculars is responsible for the loss of the substrate languages that their producers had spoken, the end of the slave trade also contributed to this evolution. It stopped the supply of speakers from Africa that could have maintained some of the languages perhaps as secret codes, as happened during the Haitian Revolution (d'Ans 1996). The abolition of the trade gave more momentum to the current socioeconomic structure to eradicate languages other than the dominant European language.

Hawaii, which Baptista invokes to support her hypothesis, is unfortunately the atypical case that Bickerton (1981) turned into a prototype of the emergence of creoles. It had contract, rather than slave, laborers, who were not ethnically mixed and did not stop using their heritage languages among themselves (Mufwene 2008). They received instructions for work through their foremen, and they produced Pidgin for occasional social interactions across ethnolinguistic lines. Hawai'i Creole English emerged in the city, where there were more contacts between the Asians and other people speaking different languages (Roberts 2005), contrary to the Caribbean and Indian Ocean, where

³ Baptista's question may also be related to the assumption since Schuchardt 1914 that AAVE evolved by decreolization (a.k.a. debasilectalization) from a Gullah-like creole ancestor. This is another possible form of language death, which has remained disputable regarding AAVE, Jamaican Creole, or any other creole, to my knowledge, pace DeCamp's (1971) seminal essay on the subject matter. Due to space limitations, I do not elaborate on this vexed issue here.

these vernaculars emerged on plantations. There has also been continuous immigration of Asians to Hawaii, making it difficult or unnecessary for the contract laborers to lose their national identity, within a segregated population structure. Differences such as these between Hawaii and the Caribbean, for instance, underscore why the comparative approach is useful to theorizing about evolutionary processes.

Lee (2017) argues that many of the creoles that coexist with their lexifiers are endangered. This is what the controversial literature on decreolization has suggested in claiming that basilectal speakers abandon their stigmatized structural features in favor of their acrolectal counterparts. However, even if creole speakers substitute acrolectal features for their basilectal counterparts (which is not always the nature of the changes), they remain creoles. Being creole is determined by the particular contact conditions of the emergence of the relevant vernaculars, not by their particular features.

Independent of all these remarks, creoles have actually shown more resilience than ethnolects such as German, Italian, and Yiddish Englishes in the US. More creoles are safe than Lee suggests. For instance, Guyanese, Trinidadian, Jamaican, Haitian, and Mauritian Creoles, as well as Papiamentu, are still dominant vernaculars in their respective polities. Gullah's demise has been foretold since the late nineteenth century, on the incorrect assumption that it must have been only basilectal in its beginnings and spoken as such by all the enslaved Africans. Thus, decreolization has putatively been killing it. However, it is still spoken to date, as a continuum of lects (Mufwene 1997), like any other language where an acrolect or standard variety has also arisen as the superior variety.

I wonder why a creole should be considered endangered unless it has an official-language status? Based on this criterion, only a handful of the 2,000 or so languages spoken in Africa would be considered safe! In the case of Asia, the reasons why Macanese and Papia Kristang are endangered have nothing to do with their not being official languages but rather with dynamics of changes in socioeconomic structure and power sharing, in more or less the same way that some Afrikaners fear that Afrikaans is threatened by the spread of English in South Africa.

According to the *Encyclopedia of the world's endangered languages* (Moseley 2007), some creoles and expanded pidgins have been spreading as lingua francas. They even acquire more speakers in the diasporas of their respective nations, for instance, Nigerian and Cameroon Pidgin Englishes (Mufwene 2016) and, according to Tyron (2006), some expanded pidgins of the Pacific. As clearly shown by Willans & Jukes, Tok Pisin and Bislama are not about to be displaced soon by English or any indigenous language. The kind of hierarchical, diglossic division of labor between Singlish and English in Singapore that Lee adduces to bear on the subject matter is common around the world and is not necessarily conducive to the loss of the Low variety. From the perspective of diglossia, nonstandard varieties of Arabic are as alive as the nonstandard varieties of European languages, although they are considered less prestigious than their standard counterparts.

5. BY WAY OF CONCLUSION. Willans and Jukes conclude: 'we believe that Mufwene unwittingly exposes an uncomfortable truth: language vitality is such a complicated area that a unified ecologically grounded theory of the type Mufwene is calling for is neither possible nor desirable' (p. e272). That 'language vitality is ... a complicated area', which I have sometimes characterized as a 'wicked problem', is the 'uncomfortable truth' that had to be told. It defies simplistic solutions. I have advocated a comparative approach to LEL, not a unified theory.

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