

DO YOU SPEAK ENGLISH OR GLOBISH?

English-speakers, who make up only 11,3% of humanity, are proud to speak the language supposedly used in the global village. However, many other people seem to speak an odd version of English, called Globish by the author. Non-English-speakers are often fluent in it, whereas English-speakers pain to speak and understand it. Might it not be time to recognize Globish as the world village's official language? This would free non-English-speakers from their complexes and force English-speakers to recognize how much effort they should make to be understood. And French would have a chance to thrive, along with many other national tongues that have difficulty maintaining a presence.(1)

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By definition, English is a language spoken in a country called England and, by extension, in the adjacent areas (Scotland and Wales) that form Great Britain or, to complete the picture, the United Kingdom (with Northern Ireland). Forty-five other nations have proclaimed English as their official language: in all, 480 million people – at most 11,3 % of humanity according to newspapers. All these peoples have inflicted so many adjustments upon this language that it is profitable for William Gates to issue Microsoft software in nineteen debased versions, each with its own speller, for: South Africa, Australia, Belize, Canada, the Caribbean, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Malaysia, the Philippines, Trinidad and Tobago, Hong Kong, the

United States, Ireland, Singapore, Zimbabwe, Jamaica and New Zealand in addition, naturally, to the irreproachable United Kingdom.

We are forced to draw the conclusion that English is neither a single language, nor a unified one. What to say then about this language resembling it that peoples as multifarious as the French, Italians, Koreans, Brazilians, Russians, Chinese, and so forth, strive to speak? We form, in fact, the majority – 88,7% – of the planet's population.

Besides, international communication is even more biased in our favor. The findings of the British Council, the highest authority on learning and speaking English, agree with us. According to *English next*, a major study commissioned by the British Council

(1) This article, published in *Revue de l'Association des Membres de l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques* under the title "English ou Globish, le paradoxal et fabuleux déclin of the English language", attracted our

attention. The author sent us an amplified French version. After circulating it among colleagues, we received so many reactions that we published it in the March 2003 issue of *Gérer & comprendre* along with excerpts from written reactions [editor's note].

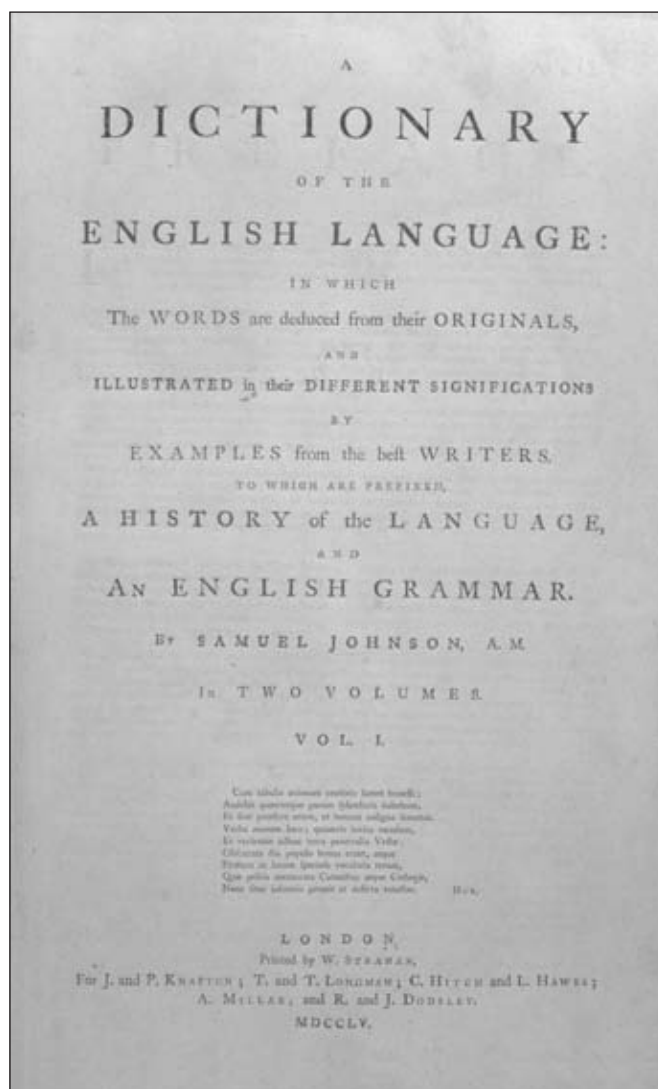


and written by David Graddol(2), 96% of international communication involves at least one nonnative English-speaker, and 74% occurs between nonnative English-speakers.

GLOBALISH, THE VEHICLE OF COMMUNICATION FOR 88% OF HUMANITY AND 96% OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

Our universe has recently shrunk owing to progress in communications, both physical (transportation, in particular air traffic) and dematerialized (telecommunications, fax, Internet, etc.). In what remains of it (now called the global village by convention), the inhabitants' common language is not English but a universal vehicle of communication with several distinct characteristics that deserve attention. I shall call this language "Globish". There is no doubt about it: Globish stems from English. But it differs as much from English as Thucydides' Greek from the language spoken by all inhabitants who had the slightest tinge of cosmopolitanism in the Roman Empire at the time when the message of Christ had started spreading. A practitioner of Classical Greek need but immerse himself in Christianity's founding texts to realize how much the language he knows differs from Koine (literally the "common language" with countless improprieties, approximations and simplifi-

(2) English next on <http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning-research-englishnext.htm>. Los Angeles to Boston does not count in the statistics, but Sydney to London does, representing a tiny 4% of all international communication.



"Any white-collar working in a multinational firm has, some time or other, participated in a festive meeting where Argentineans, Finns, Thais and Senegalese were joyously chatting away until a Californian walked into the room. Suddenly, you could hear a pin drop. The only persons who dared continue talking were those who had a long practice in speaking to persons whose mother tongue is English."

cations) and from the purity of the authors he met during a course of study once called the Humanities. As much can be said about Globish. This impure dialect is not intended to lead its speakers to an understanding of a culture or to a proficiency that could make them shine in Oxford. It is spoken in the trivial pursuit of efficiency in all places, at all times and with all people.

The confusion between English and Globish is, in fact, pernicious. Among the French and other Globish-speakers, it quite clearly causes a complex of inferiority in relation to the inhabitants of the 45 nations that have adopted English as official language or one of its official languages.

Any white-collar working in a multinational firm has, some time or other, participated in a festive meeting where Argentineans, Finns, Thais and Senegalese were joyously chatting away until a Californian walked into the room. Suddenly, you could hear a pin drop. The only persons who dared continue talking were those who had a long practice in speaking to persons whose mother tongue is English. The others became all ears, huddled in a corner, they crouched in judgement on their own poor use of the language. A few minutes earlier however, everybody had been happily communicating something that well enough approximated their thoughts. Everybody was enjoying the faults made by others and their accents. Everybody was absolving the other speakers with a zeal that was proof both of the awareness of one's own imperfections and of the indulgent impunity that reigned in this gathering. Who has not, some time or other, let native English-speakers go on talking without understanding what they were saying and without daring to ask them to repeat?





Given their overwhelming numerical majority, nonnative English-speakers should teach native English-speakers a lesson. The latter should learn that, since they speak Globish poorly, they need to make an effort to improve.

Who has not noticed that it not as easy to talk to a Scot as a Portuguese?

Who has not observed that the Japanese prefer talking to us, presumably in English, since the fear of losing face leaves so many speechless in the presence of an American?

Who is wrong? Someone who does not understand native English-speakers, or some-one who does not manage to make himself understood by a straying Vietnamese tourist? The native English-speaker or the inhabitant of the global village who, coming from a peasant family on the banks of the Danube, is doing his best using a faltering tongue?

As vice-president of IBM-USA, I remember my much appreciated colleague Edmund Conrad Gibson – nicknamed Electrocardiogram after his initials, ECG – sporting one of those superb shirts that you order from your hotel room in Hong Kong, which he had just visited. The tailor comes to your room, takes your measurements, notes them on a form where you write your name (“Print please”, which does not mean “print out” but “write in upper-case letters”). He will deliver the order five hours later cut out of the cloth you have chosen. An option is to have your initials placed on the pocket or, less discreetly, on the cuffs. Since ECG was sporting a shirt with the initials

R.E.D. on the cuffs, I teased him about having stolen it. Not at all! He explained at length and in detail his preferences and motives. He had asked the tailor if it were possible to have the initials in red rather than in the customary blue. The tailor repeatedly made positive responses, bowing each time as was befitting. ECG insisted, "I want them red! Understand? red? R! E! D! Goddammit, RED!" "Yes sir, Yes sir, R.E.D." To be clear, ECG had even used a red felt-tip pen to write RED in big letters across the form for jotting down the measurements. Would you believe it? The tailor came back with twelve shirts marked with the initials RED, each initial artistically embroidered in blue! The laborious attempt to get rid of them had left marks that were even funnier than the initials. ECG madly vociferated against the congenital inability of Hong-Kongers to understand English.

I explained to him that, when he missed the hole in golf, he could blame the ball, the club, his excessive libations or himself (when clear-headed), but that I had never heard him criticize the hole itself. In this situation, the target of communication was the tailor in Hong Kong. If ECG had missed the target, it was surely his own fault, not the target's.

Given their overwhelming numerical majority, non-native English-speakers should teach native English-speakers a lesson. The latter should learn that, since they speak Globish poorly, they need to make an effort to improve. This would be asking so much of native English-speakers that the complex of inferiority would inevitably turn to our advantage. A simple, immediate procedure could be put to use. At the end of a sentence we do not understand, we need but ask, "Could you repeat, please, in Globish this time, if you can?" The effect will be outspoken, "Globish? Whazzat, 'nother Yurpean gimmick?" In the worst of cases, the opportunity will arise to provide educational propaganda about Globish and the speaker's grave lack of proficiency in it.

What makes Globish so different from English? Since the answer requires an explanation incompatible with this article's size limitations, I shall mention but a few characteristics by way of illustration.

GLOBISH IS SPOKEN WITH FEW WORDS

The English language comes in an authentic variety with 615.000 words (in the 1989 *Oxford English Dictionary*). Most educated English-speakers use from ten to fifteen thousand. By way of contrast, Globish is ideally spoken with 1500 words and, if possible, no more. Which words? It would be practical were everyone to

agree on the core vocabulary. In fact, such a list is already available for the public. It has come out of what Alain Rey, a distinguished linguist on the radio, has called the "courageous effort" that the French language has yet to make. The list, which goes under the name of "special English", is even paired with a dictionary on Voice of America's website(3). For forty years now, this radio has intelligently built up its world audience by broadcasting in this deliberately pared-down language. This language is intelligible both to most people in the global village and to native English-speakers, since whoever can do more can do less, at least in general.

A word to the wise about this core vocabulary: it includes the word "wise" but none of the following: discerning, sapient, farseeing, intuitive, judicious, sensible, prudent, sage, learned, shrewd, cunning, crafty, artful, foxy, keen, sharp (in this sense), wary, mindful, cognizant, acquainted with or smart. Whenever you or a Georgian – from Atlanta – picks a word out of this long list, what you say will be more accurate, cogent, precise, but only in the very few situations where you are speaking to a native English-speaker. In the global village however, using a distinguished, overdrawn vocabulary reduces the chances of communicating effectively with 88,7 % of humanity. A choice has to be made: in favor of the presumed elite or of the oppressed majority, in favor of an aristocratic sense of perfection or of successfully performing a speech act (command, order...) that, otherwise, would not be understood by the listener whom the speaker, of course, has not clearly understood...

The playwright Pierre Corneille, it has been said, used 3500 words to write all of his works in French, including the refined description of the feelings of Chimène and Rodrigue for each other. It has also been said that former Prime Minister Laurent Fabius has, on the television or radio, the talent of restricting his vocabulary to 300 words and, thus, increases his chances of having the French public understand him. This fine effort deserves our compliments, unlike Michel Jobert whom we heard on television calling Jacques Chaban Delmas a *coruscant* prime minister. Thinking I was educated, my mason asked me the next day for an explanation of this word (which means brilliant).

France has, unfortunately, failed to conceive of the reality described in the lines of this article. It, therefore, makes its schools teach us English rather than developing our students' ability to enter into a dialog in the global village, and thus boost our exports. As a consequence, considerable effort is put into grasping the subtleties of Oscar Wilde or even Mark Twain; and an illusion of inferiority is fostered toward those

(3) Check out <http://www1.voanews.com/learningenglish/about-us/> for an introductory remark on VOA Special English; and the article by Ted Landphair, "VOA special English at 50 hits the fast lane", 25 August

2009, on [http://author.voanews.com/english/archive/2009-08-25-voa17.cfm](http://author.voanews.com/english/archive/2009-08/2009-08-25-voa17.cfm). For the vocabulary list, see the word book on <http://www.manythings.org/voa/words.htm#H>.

brought up on the language of Buckingham Palace. Nevertheless, the chances of being understood in Ushuaia are slimmer with a highly polished English than with an efficient Globish. Globish deserves attention and should be taught as such in special courses. This effort-sparing simplicity would be justification enough for teaching Globish to all pupils, none excepted.

Éditions Diagonal, a company based at Sophia Antipolis in southern France, has made a software program, Glob-Lexis⁽⁴⁾, which uses a dictionary limited to the 1500 standard words in Globish and words derived from this core list (for instance, not only “child” and “children”, but also “childless” and “childish”). The software flags any word not on this list and automatically proposes synonyms from Globish or a definition using simpler words whenever there is no synonym (for instance, English has no synonym for “nephew”, but you can always say “the son of my brother”... and be more clearly understood in Odessa!). With this program, persons fluent in English, native or not, are able to write texts that everyone else can understand. What is written might be wanting in academic elegance, but it is still perfectly correct English. I exercised using President Obama’s inauguration speech. My Globish version has exactly the same contents, but ten times more people around the world can easily understand it. Although Globish tolerates imperfections as long as the message comes across, it is recommended to use a simple, correct language. This is, at present, the only software whose spell-checking feature accepts both British and American spellings. Being allowed to mix the two makes life easier for nonnative English-speakers, and does not at all impair what readers understand: “center” or “centre”, “gray” or “grey”, makes no difference. Let us take this idea a step farther by imagining that students could sit for examinations in Globish composition to measure the candidate’s aptitude to respond without using words not on the acceptable vocabulary list. Computers (scanners, etc.) could process these exams. The scores would reflect the candidate’s aptitude to stick to the list instead of his ability (very detrimental in Globish) to use a sophisticated, specialized vocabulary.

So much for the ability of candidates to express themselves in Globish, but what about their aptitude to understand the Globish spoken to them? The vaster their vocabulary, the greater their chances of possessing the word hoard necessary for understanding the influential minority made up of British, Americans, Australians, et al., whose efforts to limit themselves to Globish are still less than certain. The difficulty is to recognize many words but only use 1500 of them... But did we not encounter the same difficulty when

learning our mother tongue? After all, each of us recognizes ten times more words than we use.

GLOBISH IS SPOKEN WITH MANY WORDS

If the vocabulary has to stay small, then a larger number of words will have to be used to express concepts, all of them in the intended concept’s vicinity but none of them corresponding exactly to it. Only the words, as they accumulate, intersect the semantic field at the place that best intercepts the intended meaning. To express “cunning”, a proscribed word in Globish, you will first say “wise”, then, in a new sentence “very organized”, and finally “hard to trust”. In this way, you manage to focus in on the target. If only 90 % of listeners understand the first word, the rate of comprehension will rise to 99 % after the second.

You navigate by approximation, no one will have understood everything; but the result will be more satisfactory than resorting to “cunning”, which some listeners will not understand at all. You win by making successive advances in comprehension along the lines of what you want to say while avoiding misunderstandings or total incomprehension.

To effectively express one’s thoughts in Globish calls for an exceptional sense of discipline. Talk a lot, restate the same idea several times in a row while using different words, replace the accurate but seldom used word with a series of terms that end up delimiting the idea and increasing the chances of being understood. This is the very opposite of what happens when we use our mother tongue, where concision and precision are the mainstays of communication.

GLOBISH IS SPOKEN WITH THE HANDS

In multinational circles, we come across ill-intentioned persons who claim that Italians speak English very well but understand it very poorly. Italians naturally use countless gestures to accompany the voice. If only the persons responding to them did as much! However a sense of modesty along with the use of the written language and of the telephone have made gestures lose ground to exact terms chosen out of the vocabulary.

Speaking English to an Englishman does not require gesticulating, but speaking Globish in Osaka is done better with gestures than without. It is necessary to relearn how to use body language (the hands, facial expressions, etc.). To make a long story short: declaim less and perform more – like an actor.

When the Europeans reached North America, the natives were speaking more than 500 different languages belonging to 42 families. But they also had a sign language that enabled them to communicate

(4) See <http://www.jpn-globish.com/>

across the continent, despite the incoherent variety of tribal languages. Even the invaders managed to understand them with ease. The explorer Francisco Vasquez Coronado noticed that while questing, in 1540, for the Seven Cities of Gold – an unsuccessful expedition that led him to discover bison and the Grand Canyon instead. The natives had told him in sign language that the canyon was far away, and their indications were clear enough even for a Spaniard (according to the conquistador's account).

To speak Globish, you need to work at controlling the pace of speech, the first physical change to be made. Globish is spoken slowly while articulating as distinctly as possible. The Voice of America programs in “special English” – the radio is not familiar with the neologism “Globish” – are recorded by deliberately pronouncing words at two-thirds of a normal conversation's speed.

We others, the French, have an advantage, since most native English-speakers have an unfortunate habit. When you plead with them to talk more slowly, they try but fail to do so, and then start talking louder. They confuse a sound's volume with its speed. Ours is not to suffer from the failure to make this distinction.

GLOBALISH IS EXPURGATED OF EXPRESSIVENESS AND FIGURES OF SPEECH

Do not commit the grievous mistake of translating figures of speech from your mother tongue. Have you ever tried to make anyone other than a native French speaker understand that your lumbago forces you to sleep *en chien de fusil*, literally in a “dog of a gun” (*i.e.*, curled with knees pulled up in a fetal position) or that it makes it hard for you to take a walk in Manhattan longer than a few *pâtés de maisons* (“loafs of houses”, an odd reference to gastronomy meaning “blocks”). Native English-speakers have their own figures of speech. When they use them, they impair a little more the effectiveness of what they intend to say in Globish. Do not imitate them. What does “touch base with someone” mean? Or “hit a home run”, “cover three bases” or a “pitch” (in place of a “talk”) to someone in Istanbul who has never seen a baseball game?

GLOBALISH IS SPOKEN USING EDUCATIONAL AIDS

Audiovisual aids are indispensable when communicating: skins for overhead projectors, computer presentations, documents distributed before the meeting, drawings and illustrations doodled on a sheet of paper or the whiteboard, etc.

The minutes of meetings should be written live, using

a Dictaphone, in the presence of the persons gathered. In this way, it is possible, once again, to check on how much they have understood.

During a meeting or interview, the level of comprehension should be evaluated frequently by asking questions, summarizing the points made, writing a list of intermediate conclusions on the whiteboard, taking breaks (supposedly for coffee) and watching the body language of the person in the group who says the least so as to gauge his level of comprehension – a thousand small habits that those of us who have frequented multinational circles have acquired through experience and that deserve to be systematized and taught. Although nothing of all this matters in English, it is a matter of course in Globish.

GLOBALISH IS ACCEPTING OF ANY ACCENT

An American from Los Angeles or an Englishman from Birmingham hears his language spoken with an exotic accent many a year after having heard his mother tongue for the first time. In the meantime, during childhood and adolescence, everyone in his environment spoke with the accent that has become his own. Once grown up, native English-speakers spend about 98% of their time talking to compatriots and 2% speaking in Globish with people whose pronunciation is, to say the least, strange and approximate.

What a difference with Globish-speakers! They, too, spend their lives talking in their own language with the people around them. But when they use the vehicle of global communication, it is with Japanese, South Americans, Ukrainians, Arabs from the Gulf... and, inevitably, with the natives of the 45 lands that have adopted English as an official language (the aforementioned minority), each land with its own distinct accent.

These belated students of Globish share a trait that is fully to their advantage. Their ear has developed an unbelievable tolerance for all these incredible accents, which are so often unintelligible to native English-speakers, especially to whoever has landed in the global village after leaving their home in Illinois. It is a superior advantage to be able to understand others well despite their lack of proficiency in the language spoken.

GLOBALISH IS ULTIMATELY A DISADVANTAGE FOR NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKERS

Let us follow this idea a little farther. There is no proof that native English-speakers communicate better in the global village, nor any grounds for such an advantage, even though this assumed superiority

endows them with, alas!, a seldom disputed reputation. It is easy enough to prove this seemingly paradoxical assertion. The story about the tailor in Hong Kong tells more than an anecdote. It sheds light on a widespread mentality that might be put in the following words: “Given the postulate that English is the vehicle of international communication, and given that I speak English since I know how to talk, the onus of proof is not on me but on you. If you don’t understand me, or I don’t understand you, you’re the one lacking in proficiency. It’s up to you to sort things out; I’m blameless by birthright.”

Several years ago in Cannes, I chaired a congress of Europeans who were using a certain major brand of computer. I delivered my introductory speech and personal viewpoint before my American boss (who came from Fort Worth, Texas) made his. The coffee break was deliberately long in order to facilitate informal exchanges. I am still surprised, though wrongly so, by the number of participants of all nationalities who spontaneously complimented me on my speech. Several of them even said, in Globish, “At least, we understand what you say.” My only advantage was that I had tried to express my thoughts in Globish, a language in which my dumbstruck boss was not at all fluent despite his Texan English.

It is a thousand times easier for a Frenchman to express his thoughts in Globish, by restricting his initially poor English vocabulary to 1 500 simple words, than for a native English-speaker to do so, since his current vocabulary has, for years now, run up to ten or fifteen thousand words. Let us cast aside our complexes! Take notice of what is happening on the Internet, where exchanges take place in an elementary language that, though toned down, suffices for the communication at hand. Let us go on improving as much as possible our accent and our knowledge of grammar; and live utteringly happy. The disadvantage from which native English-speakers suffer peaks in written communications. But it rises along with the speaker’s rung on the organization’s hierarchical ladder. Those who receive written correspondence read it later, when they can hide in order to shamelessly look up words in a dictionary, thus making up for what they feel to be their native lack of ability.

However advances on the career ladder lead to awkward situations, since the person signing a correspondence is less and less likely to be the person who has written it. For example, Peter Smith, a vice-president born in London, receives for signature letters prepared by Vincenzo Domani, born in Bari, Apulia, Italy. The letters are riddled with blemishes of the sort still frequent in Globish but that would embarrass a native English-speaker. What to do? Correct Vincenzo’s writing? That would hurt his feelings, even more so since he has sincerely tried and would not like to hear that his English is a pidgin. Or send the letter as is and become the laughingstock of native

English-readers who, receiving the letter, will probably think, “Doesn’t Smith bother to read what he signs?” The worst situation arises when the writer is American and the person signing is British, both proud of their English. They set down on paper two close but not identical languages. How to correct the American’s English? How to avoid being ashamed of signing a letter that merrily mixes “neighbour” and “neighbor”? In this case, it is better to come from La Beauce or Provence. What is unacceptable and degrading in English can then be said to be an exotic, colorful variant in Globish – as long as the message to be conveyed is understood.

GLOBISH IS THE FRENCH LANGUAGE’S BEST CHANCE FOR SURVIVAL AND PROSPERITY

It would, rightly so, be appalling were English to become the world’s language. But that is not at all the language’s foreseeable destiny, as I hope to have shown: 88,7% of humanity is going to start, little by little, speaking an unintelligible but very efficient Globish derived from English. To be understood in the global village’s new dialect, native English-speaking authors are going to have to make the vow of impoverishment in their own language. They will experience the schizophrenia of pairing a lovely and unusually rich native tongue with a lingo that, though pared down, is up to the task outside the land of their ancestors. This second form of speech will inevitably contaminate and impoverish the first.

Being upset because a few French-speakers have preferred writing an article on medicine in English instead of French is acceptable, as long as you believe that they are, indeed, using English. Let us entertain for a minute the idea that it is Globish, whose diffusion can but muffle English. Globish, this minimal language, has no more chances of supplanting French than the Greek used in the Mediterranean basin two thousand years ago had of becoming the language of Europe. Thanks to this entertainment, we come to see that the language preference for the article on medicine does not amount to an attempt to assassinate French. It is purely tactical. If you want to be read everywhere in the world, you have to write in Globish. As a consequence, a letter or report written by a native English-speaker will be less read than one written by a Frenchman, whose Globish, insofar as it is congenitally limited, will increase the article’s diffusion.

Despite the seeming paradox, we should, logically, shift toward a situation where English will be fully discredited in favor of a remote and deliberately underdeveloped variant, Globish. French, as well as all other tongues, will thus maintain its ground as the language of a culture, an art of living, and an intellectual refine-

ment for whoever wants to attain proficiency in something so gratifying and complex. Neapolitans who want to pick their brains and broaden their culture should, no doubt, learn French. The more proficient they are in it, the higher their level of culture and humanity, in all respects. They should also carefully avoid devoting as much effort to English, since too much proficiency in it would put them at a disadvantage in the global village, where it is better to restrict oneself to the 1 500 Globish words – lest the shirts you order come with the wrong initials on them, lest you make an Oriental lose face and lest you have trouble being understood by anyone not belonging to the 11,3% of humanity whose parents learned over the cradle rapturously baby-talking in English. Admitting that English, given its worldwide diffusion, is the biggest threat to the influence of French, let us then imagine that I would write an article claiming to know how to reinstate French as the language of diplomacy and the preferred vehicle for international communication. People, at least in France, would prick up their ears excitedly. Imagine that I then told them, “You have to speak and write French with only 1500 words, in simple sentences of less than thirteen words, while using body language and audiovisual aids.” What would we not read in French newspapers were we forced, for the sake of efficiency, to learn how to use no more than 1500 words to waggle our *belle langue*? Linguists would accuse me of “slaughtering our language”, but they should agree that such a recommendation for the competitor of French amounts to a support of our language, its status and influence.

PRO AND CON

We received several enthusiastic reactions, including a few written ones. As you will see in the excerpts below, J.P. Nerrière’s ideas have also been met with skepticism or disagreement.

I have forwarded this article to all foreign language teachers here. It reassures English teachers about their teaching of English while using the TOIEC to measure the level of students in Globish. And it reassures the teachers of other languages (German, Portuguese, Russian, Chinese, etc. – nearly a hundred of them) about the relevance of their work and about their own occupational prospects! In short, a true message of peace for two groups engaged in ongoing warfare: those who teach languages other than English are jealous of the predominance of English in the curriculum [...] and English teachers are tempted to exercise hegemony.

Professor at an engineering school

This amusing text brought to mind funny memories from my training period in a French multinational firm. The departmental head made me take out a few

words that he deemed too rare from a presentation I was preparing. I also recognize the situation where no one could understand the only American in a group of French, Spaniards, Austrians, Turks, etc. with whom I was working. Some persons said, “As soon as John opens his mouth, I don’t understand anything.” I remember a telephone conference where I was at one end along with a Frenchman who gibbered English with a heavy accent from Toulouse, and the American was at the other end with a few other people. Whenever the American asked the Frenchman a question, the latter did not understand he was being addressed. So I had to elbow him to indicate that it was up to him to answer!

However I don’t really believe what is said about Globish not being a menace for national languages. The very way the text is written in French illustrates this perfectly. The number of Anglicisms to be found in a text on the survival of French in comparison with English is irksome.

Alfred Galichon, a mining engineering student

This is also the theory of Claude Hagège, a professor in linguistics at Collège de France. But it does nothing to exempt us from learning English. Besides, Globish is all the more acceptable insofar as it comes close to English. When you hear the English spoken by Nordics (Swedes, Danes, Norwegians, Germans), it might not be classical English, but it’s very close. And in England, there are local varieties: Cockney in London, Manchester, etc.

What bothers me about this theory is that it often serves as an alibi for laziness. When I was writing my dissertation, I was not allowed to publish it in English, but I soon came to see that those who held this opinion were simply unable to publish in English [...] just as the zealots for publishing in English are often incapable of writing in “good” English. All that is so obvious and ridiculous. In the countries I mentioned, the papers are in good English. Having said that, I know the author whose career was at IBM!

Alumnus of a French “elite” university

An excellent and quite pertinent article. Let us not forget that the characteristic of a living language is [...], for better or worse, to live! What is really the worst is to be petrified, academic, dead. Latin was not created in its standardized form (*De viris illustribus*) till the 19th century as the universal language for the Catholic Church. At the time of the Roman Empire, it thrived. The barbarians did not fail to utter the barbarisms that the French Academy would stamp with its approval as it officially decided what should amount to correct usage [...] We were intellectually swindled in our youth by those who wanted to make us believe that a language is a constant, that the “real language” is found in dictionaries. On the contrary, a language changes over time, it is a mold capable of

coining words for fleeting feelings. Its capacity for innovation sheds light on the evolution of techniques and demonstrates the creativity of its speakers. All great writers, from Victor Hugo to Frédéric Dard, have forged new words.

The dead languages [...] should be placed in an eco-museum next to hoes and harquebuses. Teaching should focus on language changes, the origin of words, the power of a culture that, by creating new concepts, imposes on the whole planet the words for referring to them to the detriment of the tongues of the peoples who have fallen asleep. A word conveys a culture. Is it reasonable to translate *directeur, encadrement, groupe de travail* or *usager* by “manager”, “CEO”, “task force” and “customer”? The one group belongs to a sedentary, static culture that is defending its territory: what is mine is mine, but what is yours can be negotiated. The other belongs to a nomadic culture of action and movement.

Nor should we forget that, even granted a changeless formalism, words grow old, wear out. Standing up on the left side of the bed, they lie down to die on the right. Besides, a civilization judges itself by its capacity for peacefully assimilating immigrants ranging, in French, from *couscous-mergez* to *bifsteak* (beefsteak), not to forget *feeling* or *blues*, nor the return of its own emigrant words whose meanings have shifted during their sojourn as they rediscovered their French form.

Esperanto was an excellent but technocratic idea. Broken American English (BAE) arises out of the biological need of the peoples of the world to be able to understand each other. The problem is not to judge but to adapt ourselves. It is not the timber work in a mine that is going to hold up a thousand meters of ground for a very long time. You have to advance, or else what has already been done will cave in on you.

PS: Indeed, the English and Texans speak BAE less satisfactorily. Recently, during a conference of European senior researchers, where the two official working languages were French and English, the French president proposed to a cheering audience to dismiss the interpreters, who were an impediment to comprehension, and to switch to English, under condition that the British promise to speak BAE like everyone else. [...] While representing our country on an OECD task force at the Château de la Muette in Paris, I was the only one who used the language of *Astérix*. This put me, I have to admit, at a major disadvantage for being understood! Italians, Belgians, Greeks, representatives from Brussels, all were speaking in BAE [...] Only the Canadian, who (like myself) was caught up in a web of domestic diplomatic requirements, tried to utter one out of two sen-

tences in English. The Belgian was quite happy to not have to choose between Flemish and French.”

Jean-Michel Yolin, member of the Conseil Général des Mines (Today, Conseil général de l'Industrie de l'Energie et des Technologies)

Charming but lacking in realism. It underestimates the impact that the dominant language has simply because it is the dominant power's language. It is the language of foreign elites who are trying to draw closer, a matter of mimesis for everyone else. Incidentally, it could also lead to a vast population of slaves gibbering away in a limited pidgin and to an elite that recognizes itself through the purity of its language. [...] In brief, I am not convinced. But it is well written.

A top civil servant in the French Ministry of Industry.

This discussion of Globish vaunts the merits of French and pokes fun at the poverty of English. The assailants claim that English doesn't have a future while French does. Let's meet ten years from now in the European Union, and we'll see which language will be spoken in all meetings and used for publications.

Globish was something else at the start. The intent was to simplify the spelling so that English could be pronounced by everyone. How to guess the difference in pronunciation between “though”, “through” or “tough”? or, a better example, between “sew” and “new”? Furthermore, the advocates of Globish propose, I believe, doing away with existing accents in favor of a syllabic accentuation as in French.

Gilles Pourbaix, a language trainer

Thanks for sharing with me this humorous text lacking in any nastiness. However our colleague seems not to have heard of *Franglais* during the 1960s! Nor is he aware that Oxford English – which inspires him with dread and awe – is, in fact, a successful pidgin like Koine Greek or kitchen Latin. What we, the French, fail to see is that a language arises out of an erratic process and achieves unity only through economic or political power.

In short, our language is our mother; and a mother can only be a virgin. In no case can she consent to being made pregnant by persons who are not certified grammar teachers or members of the French Academy. Cartesianism is a magnificent fantasy that helps us live; but if you scratch the surface, you soon see that it is an illusion. As for Globish, it is hard to imagine that anyone can fix the rules. So there is no solution; or to be exact, the solution lies in the balance of power. German almost became the official language of the United States, and French has seen its hour of glory.

Jean Kalman, an English teacher. ■