

Critical Polyglot Studies

**Carlos Yebra López and
Usman W. Chohan**

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3 The Polyglot Industry

Experts and Institutions

Understanding the Polyglot Industry: When, Why, and How it Works

We define the *Polyglot Industry* as *the ensemble of four interconnected and mutually reinforcing sectors, namely: social networks, language learning platforms, ‘polyglot’ gatherings, and print media. These four sectors are involved in the mass commercial production and distribution of serial language learning-related products and services by self-appointed ‘linguists’ and ‘(hyper)polyglots’ as code for ‘experts’* (Chomsky, 1988; Herman & O’Sullivan, 1990; Foucault, 1963, 1975; see also Chapter 4), *and are further bound by an ideological matrix* (see Chapter 4) *encompassing a set of interdependent misconceptions about the nature of ‘languages’ and serial language learning.*¹ *The successful functioning of these sectors and their agents is contingent upon capturing, entertaining, and retaining the attention, money, time, and energy of a vast swarm of followers and consumers* (whom we term ‘zombieglots’²) *to drive engagement and monetization* (Goldhaber, 1997; Wu, 2017; Zuboff, 2018). The four sectors are depicted in Figure 3.1, and the remainder of the chapter focuses on their critique.

While allegedly premised on amplifying the Polyglot Community’s utopian mission to make the world a better place through languages (including fostering international friendships, peace, and the reduction of global inequalities), *a significant byproduct of the Polyglot Industry* (but not necessarily its goal) *is the uncritical reproduction of neoliberal and (neo)colonial/ethnonational rationalities, thus reinforcing the global inequalities and hegemonic misconceptions of our time, enroute to producing standardized, formulaic serial language learning products that perpetuate individualism, passivity, and homogeneity, ultimately stifling originality, critical thought, and social understanding* (HYPIA, 2020; The Hyperpolyglot Activist, 2020; The Hyperpolyglot Activist, 2022; Bruzos, 2023).

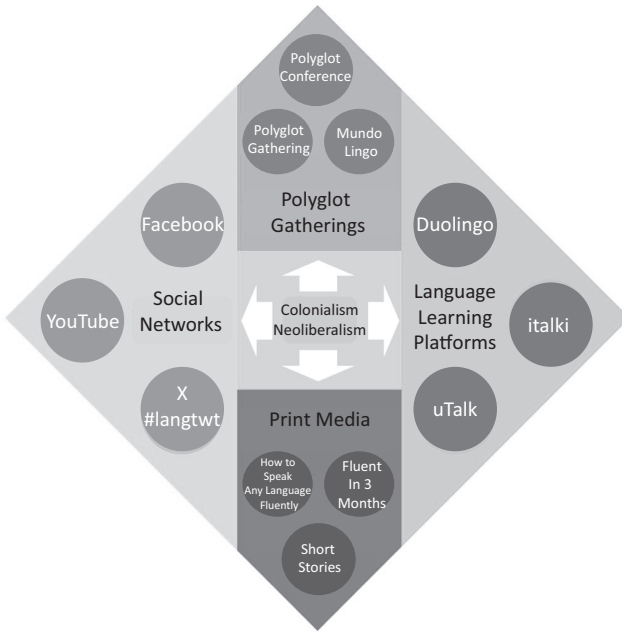


Figure 3.1 The Language Industry Diamond.

Making sense of the emergence, rationale and functioning of the Polyglot Industry constitutes an unprecedented and novel undertaking in the scholarly literature, and it is our contention in this chapter that such an innovative mapping and analytical endeavor *requires us to establish a dialogue between the Polyglot Community (as its forerunner), the culture industry framework outlined by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1944, 1947) and more recently by Slavoj Žižek (1988, 1989, 2009, 2010), and the attention economy of Web 2.0 (Goldhaber, 1997; Wu, 2017; Zuboff, 2018)*. This theoretical framework will allow us to optimize our conceptualization of the partial transition and overlap between, on the one hand, the consolidation of the Polyglot Community as a hybrid ensemble mediated by (neo)colonial/ethnonational and neoliberal rationalities (see Chapter 2), and on the other hand, the emergence and implementation of the Polyglot Industry, understood as the ensemble of the above-mentioned four sectors.

Commercializing the Polyglot Community's Attention

In Chapter 2 we stressed the relevance of the new computer networks and chatrooms of the 1990s for the emergence of the Polyglot Community, as well as that of the Web 2.0 in its consolidation, along with the existence of a strong feedback loop between the online community and the off-line events. In *Attention Merchants: The Epic Struggle to Get Inside Our Heads* (2017), Tim Wu breaks down the different historical stages of media consumption into four screens: the cinema, the TV, the computer, and the smartphone. Each of them, Wu rightly contends, generated their own unique form of attentional habits and economy. Our focus here will be on the third (computer) and fourth (smartphone) screens, and we contend that *only by comprehending the attentional habits and economy engendered by computers and smartphones can we arrive at a fine-grained understanding of the inner structure and material workings of the Polyglot Industry.*

Wu notes that, even though the founders of the Web intended for it to be open, free, and noncommercial, by its own nature it was constantly exposed to privatization and commercialization (Wu, 2017), which is to say, fated to its eventual industrialization. This process would also end up impacting the communities that had emerged on the Internet during the late 1990s and 2000s, turning them into further ‘industries,’ including in the case at hand, the Polyglot Community. Thus, *although in the first decade of the 21st century the emergence and ‘worldwide’ (albeit exceedingly Global North-centric) popularization of computers and the Internet had made possible the rise of the Polyglot Community as an online-first, then hybrid ensemble mediated by (neo)colonial/ethnonational and neo-liberal rationalities (see Chapter 2), the advent of the Web 2.0 effectively heralded the partial transition and overlap of the Polyglot Community into the Polyglot Industry.*

Let us remember the words of Richard Simcott, the mastermind behind the Polyglot Community, apropos this critical juncture:

I think we'd gotten a nice mass of people ... Twitter ... Facebook ... Instagram ... When all those things came together, we started seeing more and more, and more. Now you've got groups with perhaps 100,000 people, and that's crazy, you know? You get these polyglot groups on Facebook ... and there's hundreds of thousands of people who follow these things. It's definitely made a difference when going to a polyglot conference.”

(Simcott and Yebra López, 2024) (see Chapter 2)

Observing this same phenomenon, though from a more critical perspective, Wu reasons that the increase in the space occupied by mass media in our

daily lives since the early 2010s, particularly through platforms like Google, Facebook, X, and Instagram (Chohan, 2022), in conjunction with the critical mass adoption of the smartphone, resulted first and foremost in the exponential expansion of the reservoir of attention available for commercialization (Wu, 2017; D'Souza & Chohan, 2020). Ultimately, the gradual encroachment of commercial exploitation meant that *by the mid-2010s, the devolution of the Internet from concrete utopia à la Bloch (1986; see Chapter 2) into industry was virtually complete, and by extension, so was that of its many communities (including in our case, the Polyglot Community):*

The triumphalism [of early and utopian internet users] would prove premature [because] the commercial forces that would overgrow this paradise came from the web itself ... there was nothing about the web's code that would keep it open, free, and noncommercial, as its architects intended ... In retrospect, the first wave of bloggers and their fellow travelers [the early YouTubers, including the first polyglot influencers] can be likened to a first wave of visitors to some desert island, who erect crude, charming hostels and serve whatever customers come their way, and marvel at the paradise they've discovered. As in nature, so, too, on the web: the tourist traps high and low are soon to follow; commercial exploitation is on its way.

(Wu, 2017, p.275)

To make sense of this process of industrialization, it helps to understand the Polyglot Industry as a subtype of what Frankfurt School scholars Adorno and Horkheimer referred to as "The Culture Industry" [Kulturindustrie] (1944). By this, they meant the mass production of cultural products such as films, music, and literature, among others (and here we would add the products related to serial language learning) which serve the interests of capitalism and reinforce the dominant ideologies of society (in our case - neo-colonial/ethnonational and neoliberal rationalities—see Chapter 2). Adorno and Horkheimer critiqued the culture industry for producing standardized, formulaic cultural products that perpetuate conformity and homogeneity, manipulating societal values and individual consciousness enroute to stifling originality and critical thought. From this perspective, and attesting to the pervasive influence of capitalism on modern society and the ways in which individuals are subjected to its logic across various aspects of their lives (validating our diagnosis in Chapter 2 of neoliberalism as a structural rationality—see also Rojo & Del Percio, 2019) leisure time (of which entertainment represents a salient segment) would be a mere extension of work time (see also The Hyperpolyglot Activist, 2024), because of how the culture industry shapes and controls both spheres of life, imposing its values and structures even on supposedly 'free'

activities. In this vein, we may (and do) think of today's Duolingo or language exchanges (see below) as part of the gradual industrialization of the Polyglot Community.

In the 21st century, Žižek has expanded upon and problematized Adorno and Horkheimer's insights to account for contemporary cultural phenomena, providing a more dialectical and paradoxical understanding of cultural capitalism (1989, 2009) and by extension, of the Polyglot Industry therein contained.

On one hand, Žižek's understanding of the culture industry emphasizes the role of ideology and fantasy in shaping cultural consumption (Žižek, 1989). He argues that cultural products (in our case, those related to serial language learning) serve as ideological tools that perpetuate dominant social norms and narratives. From this view, one may infer that the Polyglot Industry not only produces entertainment but also shapes our beliefs (e.g., that we think or dream *in* languages), desires (wanting to become a 'polyglot' as a newly-found aspiration to microfame), and perceptions of reality (e.g., as divided into 'monolinguals' and 'multilinguals,' ignoring the fact that both categories are underlied by the uncritical acceptance of the principle of lingualism as axiomatic; see Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and Chapter 4).

On the other hand, Žižek's *critique* is often more dialectical and paradoxical than that of Adorno and Horkheimer, drawing attention to the ways in which capitalism can simultaneously produce both conformity *and* rebellion, and how commodified cultural forms can contain elements of critique within them (Žižek, 1989, 2009). This aspect *will help us avoid oversimplifying the nature and modus operandi of the Polyglot Industry as an all-encompassing conspiracy explicitly and consciously designed in top-down fashion to take advantage of aspiring polyglots' energy, time, and attention against their best interest. Rather, it will guide us in our sober critique of the Polyglot Industry as a 21st-century, attention economy iteration of Adorno and Horkheimer's Kulturindustrie, structurally mediated by (neo)colonial/ethnonational and neoliberal rationalities which is always in tension with the explicit ambition to further the Polyglot Community's utopian mission to make the world a better place through 'languages,' including fostering international friendships, peace, and the reduction of global inequalities.*

Assisted by the above theoretical framework, in what follows, we shall break down each of the main stages in the rise and consolidation of the Polyglot Industry and its gradual (if always partial) encroachment on the Polyglot Community.

The Rise of the Attention Economy

In *The Attention Economy and the Net* (1997), Michael Goldhaber prophesied the advent of what he called the 'attention economy,' that

is, an economy no longer centered around material goods, but rather around *attention* as a form of currency, as opposed to information. Seeking attention, Goldhaber noted, was increasingly becoming the incentive for organizing activities in this economy, particularly in the digital age: “because we all need some attention, as competition for it rises, the effort begins to take on still more importance [and it] comes through an increasing variety of media: paperback books, sound recordings, movies, radio, magazines, TV, video, and most recently computer software, CD-ROMs and the Web” (Goldhaber, 1997). He further described the attention economy as being premised on the following characteristics:

1. Transvaluation: In the attention economy, attention-seeking becomes destigmatized, socially acceptable, and even commendable. This observation helps explain the parallel ideological transvaluation of ‘polyglots,’ from their stigmatization as fringe ‘geeks,’ in the late 20th century, to their pedestalization as cool public figures with star power in the early 21st century (see Chapter 2).
2. Individualization: the above transvaluation leads to the overrepresentation of the individual at the expense of the collective. In our case, this means that the attention is increasingly focused on famous ‘polyglots’ (e.g., Simcott) rather than the organizations in/with which they work (The Social Element, the Polyglot Conference).
3. Originality: as the attention economy grows, it becomes increasingly difficult to attract attention, which transforms the latter into a new form of currency, or even property.³ This, in turn, leads influencers to adopt increasingly over-the-top lingo, imagery, and claims pertaining to the supposed originality and innovation of their value proposition (1997). Albert Bruzos has lucidly identified how this attention economy principle translates into the functioning of YouTube ‘polyglots’ in the third decade of the 21st century (2023; see Chapter 2; see also below).
4. Monetization/Branding: attention becomes easily monetizable, particularly by means of effective branding. Consequently, the attention economy lends itself to a *freemium model*, whereby basic aspects are free but a premium needs to be paid if users are to access additional features: “the Internet should now be viewed as a useful and free publicity mechanism. Let passages be freely copied and circulated on the Net, because most of the time, the more copying that takes place, the more customers there will be for the physical printed version. If you have a Website, don’t charge for it, because that will only reduce the attention it gets” (1997). When it comes to YouTube ‘polyglots,’ opening a Patreon⁴ account and promoting it through the YouTube channel in question offers a perfect example of how to successfully implement this freemium model (Bruzos, 2023; see below).

5. Illusory attention: also called ‘illusion of intimacy’ by Wu, drawing upon psychologists Donald Horton and Richard Wohl (1956, cited in 2017, p.225). Illusory attention describes the impression of receiving tailored focus from a speaker or writer, despite the communication being one-way and lacking genuine personalization. This phenomenon occurs when the speaker or writer creates expectations and cues that suggest individualized attention, fostering a sense of connection and obligation in the audience (e.g., as part of the advice offered by YouTube ‘polyglots’ in their videos, or during the main presentations taking place at major ‘polyglot’ gatherings—see below).

As a result of the power exerted by illusory attention, existing and aspiring ‘polyglots’ do not have to be friends with them in order to identify Luca Lampariello, Lydia Machová, Alex Rawlings, or Xiaoma, to mention a few of the most recognizable name-brands. These are known to them in the same way that they might know the names of major cities which they have never visited. More active participants engaging in the kind of microfame worship facilitated by social media are able to recognize and recall the names and faces of dozens of online ‘polyglots,’ storing extensive personal details and relationship histories in their minds. This process may or may not result eventually in the ‘starstruck’ phenomenon whenever these (aspiring) ‘polyglots’ eventually get to meet said microcelebrities within the context of a ‘polyglot’ gathering, as time stands still and the (aspiring) ‘polyglot’ enters a new dimension: “The strength of these feelings is one reason why our celebrity culture is so frequently linked with older traditions of worship,” for “transcendence of the mundane condition has since ancient times been identified with heroes, demigods, and saints, humans who occupy a somewhat exalted position yet also remain accessible, allowing us some taste of another realm” (Wu, 2017, p.224).

6. Passing on attention: the ability to pass attention, from one influencer (or famous ‘polyglot’) to the next one is critical, much like goods or services were exchanged in the traditional economy (Goldhaber, 1997, p.8; Chohan, 2021c).
7. Self-Referentiality: the ability to pass attention leads to a form of endogamy whereby a dense network of interconnected attention-rich agents operate as part of the economy (in our case, famous ‘polyglots’ partaking in one or more of the four sectors the Polyglot Industry) and generously refer to each other (i.e., circulate that attention from one cog of the machine to the next one) in a self-enriching dynamic of mutual legitimation. Additionally, the charitable ethos that underlies most of the discourse surrounding the products and services of the Polyglot Industry (see Chapter 2) leads to a culture of ‘safe spaces’ and critique

aversion where established (ideological) norms and conventions are often perpetuated to minimize uncertainty and maximize success.⁵ Furthermore, systemic issues such as implicit (economic, geographic) bias and discrimination (see Chapter 2) can and do contribute to the perpetuation of endogamy within the Polyglot Industry, crystalizing into an ever-greater divide between insiders and outsiders, where the latter can only aspire to become the former upon receiving a referral from an inside agent of the Industry, ultimately skewing the latter away from meritocracy and towards nepotism.

In what follows, we shall establish a fruitful dialogue between the attention economy as characterized by the above-discussed aspects, on the one hand, and the four sectors of the Polyglot Industry, on the other.

The Fourth Screen: Web 2.0 and the Smartphones (2010s to Present)

Web 2.0 represents a paradigm shift towards a more interactive, participatory, and interconnected Web environment, enabling users to engage with content, collaborate with others, and contribute to the collective intelligence of the Internet. This model emerged in the early 2000s, attaining critical mass adoption by 2010. Since then, Web 2.0 principles have continued to influence the development of Internet technologies and online services, notably offering user-generated content, social networking, rich internet applications (RIAs), and semantic Web affordances (see Chapter 2).

As such, the dialogic interaction between the Web 2.0 and the attention economy has shaped much of the emergence and implementation of the Polyglot Industry and its encroachment on the Polyglot Community, from social networks like Facebook, X, and YouTube to language learning platforms like Italki and Duolingo, passing through the digital editions of the Polyglot Conference and the Polyglot Gathering since 2020, and the rise of the polyglot eBook hustle (see below).

Within this context, the irruption and subsequent mass adoption of smartphones, which Wu dubs ‘the fourth screen,’ has had a revolutionizing impact on how we communicate, work, socialize, entertain ourselves, access information, and navigate the world around us since the mid-2010s, inaugurating a new paradigm of habits and social forms, and becoming the “undisputed new frontier of attention harvesting” (Wu, 2017, p.310).

Furthermore, the mass adoption of smartphones has had a significant impact on the language learning industry, leading to several key changes and innovations, especially in connection with the evolution of social networks and the emergence and consolidation of language learning apps.

Social Networks

Since the dawn of mass culture, industries have consistently leveraged the influence of celebrities, particularly for their power to entice audiences to buy what otherwise and oftentimes might well be mediocre products and services (Rojek, 2001). What is specific to the participatory affordances of the Web 2.0 era, in connection with the progressive commercialization and professionalization of YouTube, Facebook, and X, is not so much the existence of these individuals, but *the democratization of fame, and the building of an industry around the public desire to connect with the celebrity in question* (Brooks et al., 2021). In this sense, Wu notes that the Web 2.0 attention industry was always going to lead to the eventual creation and expansion of a new breed of celebrities, as part of which 21st-century ‘polyglot’ influencers are best understood, namely: the ‘microfamous,’ whose rise is tied to the online development of the communities created around them, paramount among which is the Polyglot Community in our case. As intimated by Rex Sorgatz the same year Simcott’s seminal video on YouTube was released, “microfame is its own distinct species of celebrity, one in which both the subject and the ‘fans’ participate directly in the celebrity’s creation,” which then “extends beyond a creator’s body of work to include a community that leaves comments, publishes reaction videos, sends e-mails, and builds Internet reputations with links” (2008, cited in Wu 2017, p.304).

YouTube

In his article ‘*Language hackers’: YouTube polyglots as representative figures of language learning in late capitalism* (2023), Bruzos allows us to better understand the intersection of what we have discussed as (neo) colonial/ethnonational and neoliberal rationalities (Chapter 2) with Goldhaber’s attention economy (see above), and how this convergence has translated into the rise and consolidation of YouTube ‘polyglots.’ Bruzos observes that a major motivation for these content creators is to brand themselves as innovative ‘experts’ in language learning, in order to eventually acquire the status of microcelebrities, as a means to monetize their received attention by selling ‘language’-related products and services (2023; see also Betancor-Falcón, 2023). As part of this mercantilization, ‘language’ is conceptualized as a self-improvement ‘skill’ to be ‘hacked’ (mostly to achieve conversational ‘fluency’ at a ‘native-speaker level’—which presupposes that there even is such a thing in the first place). Additionally, language learning is fashioned as an individual, entrepreneurial journey disembedded from the actual speech communities behind the target language, with the latter being consistently represented as a

flagged, collectable, and decontextualized⁶ discrete unit. Ultimately, however, and as pointed by Bruzos, in direct contradiction to the self-portrayal of YouTube ‘polyglots’ as self-made multilinguals, the vast majority of their videos are in English,⁷ with any other languages reduced to emblematic and/or indexical value (2023, pp.1213–24). Foremost exponents of the YouTube ‘polyglot’ subsector include, in decreasing order of popularity (as of August 2024) the following: Xiaoma (*Xiaomanyc* 小马在纽约; 6.31M subscribers), Moses McCormick[†] (*laoshu505000*; 1.24M subscribers), Steve Kaufmann (*lingosteve*; 1.21M subscribers), Olly Richards (storylearning, 483k subscribers), Lindie Botes (*LindieBotes*; 337k subscribers), Luca Lampariello (*LucaLampariello*; 246k subscribers), and Benny Lewis (*irishpolyglot*; 121k subscribers).

Bruzos is also right to observe that “the evolution of YouTube polyglot videos mirrors the platform’s transition from amateurism to professionalization at the expense of originality” (2023, p.1218), with modern videos showcasing deliberate branding efforts through consistent formats, catchy titles, and professionally-designed thumbnail covers. In turn, such professionalization and modernization enhances the YouTube polyglot’s perceived value, thus resulting in their positive transvaluation as ‘linguists’ (notwithstanding their consistent lack of formal training in this field) and ‘experts’ with a shot at becoming microcelebrities: “YouTube polyglots are proud autodidacts; they develop their own methods and curate their language material. They can speak many languages and, more importantly, they conspicuously present themselves as experts in language learning” (2023, p.1213).

On the contrary, as Bruzos stresses, YouTube polyglot’s common claims linked to originality, revolutionary methods, ‘hacks,’⁸ and unheard-of shortcuts that defy traditional learning (TL) should be best understood as desperate attempts to escape an opposite reality which defines the attention economy (see above), namely, lack of originality: “the techniques, principles and routines promoted by YouTube polyglots are far from innovative ... they are essentially bundles of common practices and techniques,” which is precisely why “this is obscured by their suggestive names (‘LingQ,’ ‘FLR [Foreign Language Roadrunning] Method,’ ‘More-with-Less method,’ ‘StoryLearning@,’ ‘Fluent in 3 Months (Fi3M)’),” all of which are, “above all, branding devices” (Bruzos, 2023, p.1216).

Similarly, there is a glaring contradiction between YouTube polyglots’ advocacy for self-directed language learning and their rejection of traditional language teaching methods, on the one hand, and their engagement in the commercial aspect of selling language courses, on the other. Within this context, Bruzos has argued that new age lingo such as ‘language coach,’ which is frequently deployed in the Polyglot Industry, serves to obscure the abject similarity between the roles of YouTube ‘polyglots’ and that of

traditional teachers: “no matter that some YouTube polyglots try to distance themselves from teachers by calling themselves ‘language coaches,’ ‘language mentors,’ ‘language managers,’ or ‘linguistic designers’; when it comes to helping others succeed as language learners, what both YouTube polyglots and language teachers have to offer is strikingly similar” (Bruzos, 2023, p.1218).

Consequently, *the widespread use of enhancing self-descriptors and insinuating method labels among YouTube ‘polyglots’ is best understood as a symptom of the pivotal importance of branding as a perceived catalyst for the monetization of attention:*

Polyglots are well aware of the business opportunities opened to them as influencers ... they carefully cultivate their YouTube identity as a sellable personal brand ... with the exception of Richard Simcott, all the polyglots included in my sample use their channel and website to sell diverse language learning products and services: books (Lewis, Richards, van der Aa and Bighetti), coaching (Lampariello, McCormick), speaking gigs (Lewis, Richards), t-shirts (McCormick, Kaufmann), and a wide variety of courses in many languages and levels (Lewis, McCormick, Kauffman, Richards, van der Aa and Bighetti).

(Bruzos 2023, pp.1216–7)

Additionally, for the overwhelming majority of YouTube ‘polyglots’, their self-representation is carefully crafted to create the aforementioned illusory attention. Common techniques include: scripted spontaneity, recourse to small talk, shout-outs, close-ups, exclusive content under a Patreon paywall, use of first names and lists of Patreon supporters, Q&As and AMAs (Ask me Anything), giveaways in exchange of the early liking and sharing of their videos, and Super Chats.⁹ Wu discusses how this dynamic “only lends to their illusion of accessibility, and at least for commercial purposes makes them more compelling to follow” (2017, p.225). Conclusive evidence of the YouTube polyglot’s awareness of this commercial ruse can be found in the fact that a significant amount of their premium services (e.g., exclusive content on Patreon) depends on their users paying for the ability to interact with them, either in small groups or one-on-one (i.e., in order to receive actual individualized attention, which exposes the previous one as illusory by opposition).

Moreover, in this combined process of consumption and rapt attention, oftentimes the means (the YouTube ‘polyglot’ as a model of successful serial language learning) become an end (idolatry of the YouTube ‘polyglot’ in question), with the followers demoting their own serial language learning endeavors and priorities, rather than furthering them in congruence with their initial goal. This phenomenon is a textbook example of

what Žižek calls ‘interpassivity’ (1997, p.113), that is, the ability to enjoy or believe (in this case, to learn as well) through others. Thus, *instead of actively participating in serial language learning or experiencing it directly, zombieglots rely on their favorite YouTube ‘polyglot(s)’ to do it on their behalf, allowing themselves to vicariously experience learning, pleasure, and/or engagement.*

Furthermore, in their pursuit of microfame, YouTube ‘polyglots’ have grown increasingly fond of clickbait (Bazaco et al., 2019), supplemented by an ever more prattling and superficial ethos, thus “drifting towards tabloid and away from broadsheet” as vividly put by Wu (2017, p.284).

An illustrative example highlighting the Faustian bargain inherent in prioritizing superficial content over substantive intellectual discourse for rapt attention and financial gain can be found in the most popular YouTube channel in the Polyglot Industry, namely: Xiaoma’s (6.31M subscribers, as of August 2024). While his first videos were almost exclusively in Mandarin (including the title and the thumbnail), in the interest of provocation his most recent and popular content often engages in race-baiting discourse entailing various degrees of (non)nativespeakerism and the treatment of languages as properties (see Chapter 4), including ‘Clueless White Guy Orders in Perfect Chinese, Shocks Patrons’ (2020, 89M views), ‘White Guy Shocks Nigerians by Speaking African Language’ (2021, 20M views), ‘I Order at Indian Restaurant in Their Language, Boss is Shocked’ (2021, 12M views), and ‘White Guy Stuns Entire Supermarket With Flawless Japanese’ (2021, 5.5M views).

Additionally, in terms of attention-passing and self-referentiality, Bruzos is right to observe that YouTube ‘polyglots’ are “interconnected in different ways: they comment on each other’s videos, they review and promote each other methods and products and we often can see them talk to each other in video interviews and conversations” (2023, p.1212). As a result, YouTube in general and apropos the Polyglot Community/Industry in particular, is not a level playing field where all voices are equal. Instead, a small number of channels attract a large audience, while the majority of sites have very few followers, thus forming a long-tail distribution (see also Cheng et al., 2008). In other words, as discussed by Wu (2017), after a brief mirage of horizontality in the mid-to-late 2000s, the pre-social network’s prevalent hierarchical structure has reemerged all over again.

Last, but certainly not least, illustrating Žižek’s insight that the culture industry can simultaneously produce conformity and rebellion, there are backlash YouTube videos against (famous) ‘polyglots’ (e.g. ‘Top 10 FAKE Polyglot Tricks EXPOSED!!! You won’t believe number 3’—Jones 2022; ‘Why I HATE the term POLYGLOT and you should too’—Jones, 2022), and even parodies of them (‘Day in the Life of a Hyperpolyglot Gigachad’—Language Simp, 2022), including entire channels thriving on

their satirization (Language Simp, 1.52M subscribers, that is, more than any YouTube ‘polyglot’ channel, with the exception of Xiaoma’s).

Facebook

On the one hand, Facebook serves as a very valuable platform for ‘polyglots’ to maintain connections with fellow language learners and/or international friends, enabling continuous interaction beyond occasional in-person gatherings (see below). Additionally, by facilitating regular communication in multiple ‘languages,’ Facebook helps polyglots sustain their language skills and cultural ties across borders. On the other hand, the platform is rife with self-promotion and advertising, plus it heavily relies on the exploitation of the free data and content provided by users.

While the idea of individuals viewing themselves as brands is not novel, it did become more prominent with the emergence of the Facebook/YouTube generation, influenced by neoliberal ‘rationalities’, where a portion of these users perceive themselves as products that must be managed and promoted professionally and socially, akin to celebrities. In this sense, the sociologist Zeynep Tüfekci has made the case that Facebook “should be seen as both a bonding activity and a competitive activity: it is a means to improve one’s reputation and status as well as access to resources and social and practical solidarity” (cited in Wu, 2017, p.299).

However, in contrast to YouTube, Facebook’s founder Mark Zuckerberg has aimed from the very beginning to create advertising that users actually wanted to see, utilizing ‘nanotargeting’ to achieve this goal. In other words, Facebook enabled advertisers to target specific demographics through newsfeed advertisements, enhancing the relevance of their promotions. This transformation made the public akin to digital tenants voluntarily enhancing their virtual landlord’s property (i.e., providing free data and content), all the while being exposed to advertisements. Discussing this devolution through the lenses of technofeudalism (Varoufakis, 2024)¹⁰ and the Frankfurt School’s psychoanalytical interpretation of the Culture Industry, Wu denounces Facebook’s current functioning as a pyramid scheme and an exploitative virtual plantation of attention (2017, p.301):

Originally drawn to Facebook with the lure of finding friends, no one seemed to notice that this new attention merchant had inverted the industry’s usual terms of agreement. Its billions of users worldwide were simply handing over a treasure trove of detailed demographic data and exposing themselves to highly targeted advertising in return for what, exactly? ... One is reminded of Marcuse’s observation that people in the

industrialized West had “made their mutilation into their own liberty and satisfaction.”

(2017, p.301)

The Facebook private group *Polyglots (The Community)* is particularly emblematic of the use of Facebook to engage in serial language learning. Created by ‘polyglot’ Jimmy Mello in 2015, the group is based in Brazil and also administered and moderated by common-cause entities and individuals. As of August 2024, it featured 70.3k members and an average of 50 posts per day. In the *About* section, Mello seeks to establish his legitimacy by claiming that he has, since the beginning, partaken in the Polyglot Community, where the latter is once again presented as a hybrid ensemble of people who are ‘passionate’ about languages (which is juxtaposed with profit), and wish to connect with like-minded individuals (see Chapter 2): “An active and addictive member of the Polyglot Community ... I’m not here for money, but for real passion!” (Mello, 2015).

The About section further reveals the explicit acceptance of commercial content as part of the community, including self-promoting efforts (Mello, 2015). Whereas the group does feature a number of pedagogical materials under the Files section (mostly language learning books on .pdf), much of its content is banal and/or amateur in the sense of focusing on memes, self-promotion and the routinary implicit dissemination of language ideologies such as (non)nativespeakerism, the treatment of languages as properties, and talk of ‘foreign’ languages (Chapter 4).

Italki

The ultimate commercialization of the social network element as presented apropos YouTube and Facebook, and its integration with the language learning/teaching industry was arguably accomplished in the late 2000s by Italki.

At the time of its creation (2006), Italki defined itself as a social network for (free) language exchange. By 2008, however, it had turned into a community marketplace (i.e., it had been commercialized). Consequently, while Italki incorporates some traditional social networking elements, such as community fora and the ability to connect with language exchange partners, its main function is to connect language learners with language teachers for one-on-one online lessons, making it a language learning equivalent of the popular app Uber. On Italki, service providers (language teachers) are matched with users (language learners), offering flexible working opportunities for service providers as freelancers (they can decide their schedule, plus their lesson pricing and learning methodology), and

rating and review systems. Already from the lingo on Italki's home page, the platforms' own self-perception as primarily a business focused on the teaching/acquisition of 'fluency' can be easily discerned (Italki, 2020):

Become fluent in any language:

- Take customizable 1-on-1 lessons trusted by millions of users.
- Learn from certified teachers that fit your budget and schedule.
- Connect with a global community of language learners (emphasis in the original).

Upon logging into Italki, users have access to five sections: 'Learn' (Personal Dashboard), 'Find a Teacher' (see below), 'Group Class,' 'Community' (similar to a Facebook feed), and 'More.' Under 'More,' users can access the subsections 'My lessons,' 'My Lesson Summary,' 'My teachers,' 'My Tests,' 'My calendar,' and 'My wallet.'

The 'Find a Teacher' section provides access to professional teachers (certified, specializing in advanced classes and official test preparation) and community tutors ("native," deemed useful for informal practice or conversation). This binary reveals a credentialist position, that is, the assumption that because a language instructor is certified, they are different from and better than those that are not, as reflected in the higher prices professional teachers charge on average. Additionally, it implies an equivalence between 'community' and 'amateur' (as community tutors are, according to Italki's classification, not certified), and by extension, a conflation between 'industry' and 'professional.' Ultimately, this chain of equivalences makes it seem as though *the communitarian aspect of 'polyglossia' is irreconcilable with professional expertise on serial language learning* (not unlike the contradiction spotted in Chapter 2 by Usman Chohan apropos the communitarian ethos and individualistic performance of YouTube 'polyglots').

In addition to their preferred type of instructor, language learners can filter by lesson price (typically \$0–100 per hour), place of birth (featuring clear nativist implications), spoken languages (including whether the instructor is "native" or not, thus presupposing-non-native speaker is an empirical category—see Chapter 4) and lesson category, the latter featuring over 15 variables.

Signing up, applying as a teacher, setting availability, and creating courses incur no charges. However, upon completion of a lesson or package, Italki imposes a 15% commission fee, calculated based on the teacher's listed lesson price, plus an extra fee for withdrawing or transferring money.

As such, on the one hand, Italki boasts a truly global reach that matches its universal ethos (allowing VK and WeChat users to partake), and while

emphasizing ‘fluency’ (just like YouTube ‘polyglots’), it is also premised on a granular understanding of the complexity of language learning, as reflected in the plethora of lesson categories, covering a wide variety of registers and skills. On the other hand, this platform also manifests some of the most egregious examples of (non)nativespeakerism, credentialism and technofeudalism (e.g., concentration of power, dependency of users, control over information, economic extraction), as well as the commercialization of the Polyglot Community (thus turning it primarily into an industry to which the communitarian aspect is ancillary).

X (Twitter)

Last, in parallel with the rise and consolidation of Italki, throughout the 2010s X (back then called *Twitter*) continued to grow in popularity as a social media platform. Its role in language learning expanded in the mid-2010s, as more language learners discovered its potential for practice and immersion. Originally designed as a less taxing form of blogging, X allows users to keep their following engaged by posting status updates limited to 280 characters (initially just 140), with those who attain a certain degree of fame often relying on ghostwriters.

Its main innovation, the introduction of the ‘followers’ system, rapidly became the new gauge of popularity by indicating interest in individuals, all of which are allowed to further curate an image and identity for themselves, which is to say, to engage in self-branding (see also Chohan & D’Souza, 2020):

Everyone felt compelled to tweet, and everyone thus submitted to being weighed in the balance: microlevels of fame could now be ascribed to print journalists, some scientists and professors, cable television pundits, minor politicians, outspoken venture capitalists—essentially anyone willing to shoot their mouth off to their micropublic ... Twitter thus sparked microfame, measured it, and threw fuel on the fire.

(Wu, 2017, p.307)

Surely in the 2010s, “anyone willing to shoot their mouth off to their micropublic,” as per the above quote, included of course microfamous ‘polyglots’ (e.g., YouTubers), as well as ‘polyglots’ who aspired to obtain microfame on Twitter.

By the mid-2010s, coinciding (and intersecting) with the establishment of Duolingo as a dominant force in the language learning market (see below), Twitter’s user base had grown significantly, and its role in language learning had expanded. Aspiring ‘polyglots’ increasingly utilized this platform to follow language-related accounts for vocabulary and

cultural insights, participate in ‘language challenges’ and hashtags, engage in conversations with L1 speakers, and share language learning resources, Twitter’s real-time nature and character limit encourage concise language practice and communication (Chohan & D’Souza, 2020).

Eventually, in 2018 the Twitter hashtag *#langtwit* gained mainstream popularity, becoming increasingly prevalent as a way for ‘polyglots’ to connect, share resources, and engage in discussions related to ‘languages,’ as well as to discover new resources, such as language learning websites, apps, podcasts, and YouTube channels.

The popularity of #langtwit, around which the Polyglot Community/ Industry gathers nowadays, reflects the growing community of ‘polyglots’ on X, which as of August 2024 boasts around 350 million monthly active users globally (particularly in the US, Japan, and India) as well as the platform’s ongoing role as a hub for language-related discussions and networking.

Language Learning Platforms

The proliferation of language learning applications as Web 2.0 platforms focused on developing (basic) listening and, above all, speaking skills through either self-teaching or one-on-one language exchanges with ‘native speakers’ in ten major languages (usually English, Chinese, Spanish, French, Portuguese, German, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, and Russian) on a freemium model, which had begun in the late 2000s (see YouTube and Italki above), reached mass adoption in the early to mid-2010s, coinciding with (and mutually reinforcing) the explosion of social networks and ‘polyglot’ gatherings, as well as the attention economy at large.

Language learning apps have radically transformed the traditional methods of learning new ‘languages.’ First, they de-emphasize grammar and focus on vocabulary and flashy/cute audiovisual content, thus gamifying the language learning process (i.e., making it more entertaining) but also infantilizing it. Second, they offer convenient and accessible platforms for learners worldwide, but precisely because of this, often users struggle to stay focused on their language learning goals when constantly tempted by other apps and notifications on their devices. Third, on the one hand, they foster community and social learning, connecting with fellow learners, practicing with other speakers, and receiving peer support and encouragement, thus promoting engagement with a ‘global’ (albeit Global North-centric) community of ‘polyglots’ and educators (e.g., see HYPIA’s WhatsApp groups in Chapter 6). On the other hand, this often translates into reduced interaction in real-life settings and limited cultural immersion. Lastly, language learning apps play a pivotal role in the uncritical, in-mass

dissemination of several inaccurate and pernicious language ideologies, including Standard Language Ideology (SLI) (see Chapter 2), (non) nativespeakerism, language ownership, and flaggism (see below), all of which undermine their putatively inclusive ethos, as well as that of the original Polyglot Community (see Chapter 4) (Reinhardt & Thorne, 2020).

Duolingo

Created in 2011 by Luis von Ahn and Severin Hacker, *Duolingo is by far the most successful language learning app in the world* with over 575 million users (Team SignHouse, 2024) and over 40 ‘languages’ offered (for a total of over 100 courses), as of August 2024. *It relies heavily on gamification*, including plenty of visuals, uplifting feedback, interactive exercises, and ‘language proficiency’ assessments, as well as a unique and addictive system of streaks and rewards.

*While this platform provides valuable language learning resources to users for ‘free’, its business model relies on the collection of user data and engagement to refine algorithms and sustain its operations, as well as on the user’s crowdsourced translation efforts,*¹¹ raising ethical considerations about the power dynamics between itself and other language learning companies and their user communities.¹² Or to say it with Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, “users of Internet services began to realize that when an online service is free, you’re not the customer. You’re the product” (cited in Asthana, 2014; cf. Rawlings’ uncritical account of Duolingo in his language learning book—see below).

Duolingo embodies several aspects of Adorno and Horkheimer’s, as well as Žižek’s, critique of the culture industry. First, it offers standardized language learning content to a mass audience, which contributes to the homogenization of language learning experiences. Additionally, its gamification elements, infantilizing discourse, and focus on achieving ‘streaks’ or completing levels (in whose absence, users receive daily emotional reminders and prods where its green strigine mascot Duo, tongue-in-cheek, stalks and threatens them), encourage conformity and cursory consumption of language learning materials. Moreover, through flaggism and the oversimplified portrayal of ‘languages’ as self-contained entities, the platform serves as a site where dominant ideologies about language, culture, and identity are reinforced, thus perpetuating hegemonic cultural norms and stereotypes, which ultimately further global inequalities to which the Polyglot Community (let alone the Industry) is hardly alien.

While Duolingo has not sponsored any major ‘polyglot’ gathering, further language learning apps of lesser popularity, such as Glossika and uTalk, often do. It is to these that we shall now turn our attention.

Glossika

Founded in 2013 by ‘polyglot’ Michael Campbell and located in Taipei (Taiwan), its method emphasizes sentence patterns and spaced repetition to help learners internalize language structures and improve fluency.

Although Glossika primarily focuses on widely spoken ‘languages,’ it occasionally includes courses in less common or endangered linguistic varieties to promote diversity and preservation efforts. These include Thao, Icelandic, Cebuano, Kazakh, and Uyghur, plus several ‘languages’ that can be learned free of monetary charge, such as Wenzhounese, Manx, Welsh, Hakka (Sixian), and Hakka (Hailu). This is a commendable practice, plus in principle, Glossika’s origin in and focus on Asia helps make the Polyglot Community/Industry a more inclusive environment.

Additionally, in early 2024 Glossika launched the content development platform ‘Glossika Viva,’ which aims at creating language learning content revolving around sentence patterns and recordings in collaboration with many associates around the world, particularly those that speak endangered ‘languages.’ Nevertheless, this networking and revitalizing initiative is also mediated by several commercial incentives and language ideologies, including the promise for associates to get a “cut of revenue” in exchange for their collaboration, further enabling them to “build ... [their] personal brand,” as well as the treatment of ‘languages’ as properties (“help the world learn *your* language”—emphasis added).

Lastly, Glossika’s methodology reproduces many pernicious language ideologies, paramount among which are anti-traditional teaching, learning a ‘language’ ‘naturally’ and ‘like a child,’ accentism, and (non)nativespeakerism (see Chapter 4). Thus, the subtitle of its website’s homepage reads “A five-year-old child has spoken nearly a million sentences. This repetition, not textbooks or grammar exercises, is what leads to natural speech.” A few paragraphs later, under the title “Natural Audio from Native Speakers” we can read that “Every single sentence on Glossika has been reviewed and recorded by a native speaker. Listen carefully and repeat after the natives—then record yourself so that you can hear your accent improve over time. At Glossika, you’ll speak from day one.”

uTalk

Founded in 1991 by Richard Howeson and Andrew Ashe, as *Eurotalk*, it originally specialized in interactive language learning software for European ‘languages’ through the use of computer games. The company rebranded as ‘uTalk’ in 2016, launching a multi-platform app that integrated new technologies and trends in language education. Since the rebranding, uTalk has incorporated features such as speech recognition for pronunciation

practice, augmented reality for immersive learning experiences, and adaptive learning algorithms to create personalized learning paths.

uTalk prioritizes vocabulary acquisition, offering a comprehensive selection of words and phrases (2,500 items) pertinent to everyday conversations and practical contexts. To enhance vocabulary retention and engage users, uTalk includes interactive exercises and games that leverage both visual and verbal memory.

Given its focus on oral skills, audio content plays a crucial role in uTalk's functionality. This includes recordings of words and phrases by L1 speakers, which users can listen to and repeat in order to practice speaking, thereby improving both their listening and speaking abilities.

As outlined in the initial paragraph of uTalk's Guidance Notes, and despite the explicit presence of (non)nativespeakerism and the treatment of 'languages' as mere properties,

the beauty of the EuroTalk system is that for each new language we cover (now yours), the app that you prepare for us will be instantly available to learners all over the world, no matter what their own native language is. The people who will use this app to learn your language could be speakers of Arabic, Turkish, Hindi, Mandarin, Swahili, French, German, Russian, Greek ..., whatever.

This feature renders uTalk's courses particularly well-suited for speakers of minoritized linguistic varieties, eliminating the necessity of having any knowledge of English. In a private Zoom interview conducted on March 11, 2024, Howeson observed that the inclusion of endangered 'languages' on this platform is, to some degree, driven by a commitment to 'passion' rather than 'profit': "Although we obviously want to be profitable and make money, we also love what we do. We believe in what we do, we believe in what we can do for languages, and we see ourselves in a unique position in the world because of the approach we take" (Howeson & Yebra López, 2024).

Furthermore, each 'language' on the platform features a unique section of entries specifically tailored to the cultural context of its speech community. For example, the French learning app includes entries related to notable landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower and Paris, as well as cultural staples like baguettes and croissants. This section is maintained independently from the standard translation system. In this regard, the document 'uTalk Guidance Notes' for corpus translators highlights the significance of sociocultural relevance as assessed by "native speakers":

Very occasionally in the corpus, you may come across an entry that you may judge not to be socially and/or culturally appropriate for many

native speakers of your language ... You may need to use euphemisms for some of your entries, when the English equivalents would be too direct. This can be especially the case in languages with elaborate systems of politeness (like Japanese), or cultures that would take different moral stances on some issues.

(Howeson & Yebra López, 2024)

As of 2024, uTalk's catalog encompasses more than 150 'languages,' with a focus on endangered and lesser-known ones like Kinyarwanda, Chibemba, Greenlandic, Oromo, and Cockney.

On the one hand, uTalk is part and parcel of the mainstream functioning of language learning apps within the Polyglot Industry, including gamification, the sociopolitical disembedding of 'languages,' the focus on audiovisuals and 'fluency,' and language ideologies such as (non)nativespeakerism and the treatment of languages as properties. On the other hand, uTalk is innovative vis-à-vis the vast majority of language learning apps (including Duolingo and Glossika) in that profit is not its focus, it does not rely on the exploitation of user data (unlike Duolingo), it is not steeped into as many language ideologies (unlike Glossika), even transcending some of them (e.g., flaggism) and it circumvents the centrality of English in 'global' language learning while being culturally sensitive to each speech community, ultimately establishing itself as arguably the world's current best option to learn, reclaim, reinvigorate, and revitalize endangered 'languages' though language learning apps (see also Chapter 6).

How Language Learning Platforms and Social Networks Converge

Overall, *YouTube, Facebook, Italki, X, and Duolingo (and to a lesser extent, Glossika and uTalk) form a digital ecosystem which is critical to the smooth functioning of the (digital side of the) Polyglot Industry.*

On one hand, we have shown that this tangled web has resulted in the technological transvaluation of the 'polyglot' from an analogical *nerd* of the late 20th century to a glamorous digital microcelebrity of the early 21st century, while it has also been able to offer a vast amount of language learning resources, foster 'language communities,' and facilitate collaboration among multilingual individuals.

On the other hand, we have likewise demonstrated that such a language-industrial complex reproduces and promotes (neo)colonial/ethnonational and neoliberal rationalities by which it is deeply mediated (and to which the Polyglot Community is hardly alien), while also being shaped by them in cyclical fashion.

As a result, aspiring 'polyglots' in the digital landscape are often spoon-fed standardized materials, discouraged from questioning or innovating,

pressured to conform to rigid linguistic norms, and subjected to damaging notions, such as the superiority of ‘standard languages’, the fetishization of ‘native speakers,’ and the commodification of ‘languages’ as discrete and collectable entities, with content largely driven by profit and user data exploitation, including YouTube prerolls, Facebook ads, Italki’s commissions, X’s sponsored tweets and paid-for blue checks, and Duolingo’s adds and premium subscriptions.

Consequently, and at a macro-level, *the partial devolution and overlap of the Polyglot Community into the Polyglot Industry can be said to mirror the devolution of the Web at large*. By the mid-2010s, both of them had been largely transmuted:

Once a commons that fostered the amateur eccentric in every area of interest, the web, by 2015, was thoroughly overrun by commercial junk, much of it directed at the very basest human impulses of voyeurism and titillation, engineered for no purpose but to keep a public mindlessly clicking and sharing away, spreading the accompanying ads ... And that was just the content; the advertising, meanwhile, was epically worse. ... While promising to be “helpful” or “thoughtful,” what was delivered was often experienced as “intrusive” and worse.

(Wu, 2017, pp.322–3)

Since then, social media and language learning apps have continued to grow steadily, with the former surpassing the figure of 5 billion users and Duolingo alone surpassing 100 million monthly active users, as of August 2024.

‘Polyglot’ Gatherings

In tandem with the advent of online communities and social networking platforms, many language exchange events and gatherings began to gain popularity in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The result was the proliferation of polyglot meetings across the globe, in the Marxian sense of overproduction and overconsumption (see Chapter 1; Marx, 1867, 1894), including five major annual gatherings and further weekly language exchanges (see below).

On one hand, these events have played a crucial role in facilitating language learning, cultural exchange, and social interaction. By providing a space for language practice, cultural immersion, and community building, they empower individuals to become more confident and proficient communicators in their target ‘languages’ while forging meaningful connections with others around the world. However, from a critical perspective, *the emergence, consolidation, and rutinary functioning*

of these events is also mediated by (neo)colonial and ethnonational rationalities that ought to be addressed if we are to avoid reducing these gatherings to banal meetings rife with contradictions between their ethos and praxis. Paramount among these are the use of unintended yet markedly exclusionary discourse (-non-nativespeakerism, foreign languages, mothertonguism—see Chapter 4) and practices (North Atlantic universalization, unequal geographical, economical, and gender access) in the name of explicitly inclusive and emancipatory goals such as global harmony, intercultural understanding, and social justice.

Polyglot Events (Annual)

The Polyglot Conference (2013–present). Inaugurated by Simcott in Budapest, Hungary (see Chapter 2), the first edition of the Polyglot Conference gathered 140 international ‘polyglots’ over a weekend, drawing participants from diverse regions and various continents, including America, Europe, and Asia.¹³

The Polyglot Conference’s slogan is “for everyone who loves language,” where a ‘language’ alone is understood to contain a number of influences from other ‘languages,’ thus counting even ‘monolingual’ speakers as ‘polyglots’ (see Gramling, 2016; see also Chapter 1 and Chapter 2). The conference’s website features a section entitled “Our History,” which covers until 2021. While congruent with major aspects of our genealogy of the Polyglot Community in Chapter 2, this section also reveals a clear lack of critical awareness vis-à-vis some of the most problematic elements we have identified and discussed as concomitant to the Community’s origin and functioning, notably the reproduction of language ideologies and global inequalities:

Before the web and social media, polyglots tended to be solitary creatures studying on their own and pursuing what were often viewed as eccentric or inexplicable pursuits. The internet changed that, by making geography irrelevant and uniting language lovers across great distances ... they now had direct access to native speakers and polyglots representing hundreds of languages. New language sites and social media brought about the formation of a self-conscious, collaborative online community. The 2015 conference was the largest and most high profile event ever held in polyglot history ... in 2017 ... [we took] the conference to Reykjavík, Iceland—the perfect place to meet between Europe and North America. The themes of the conference celebrated the languages, literatures and cultures of the North, highlight the pressures of globalization on smaller and indigenous languages as well as exploring multilingualism and autism. In 2018 ... We celebrated ...

‘Diversity in Language’. In 2019 we took the Polyglot Conference to Fukuoka, Japan ... We joined in the UN’s goal of making 2019 all about being the “International Year of Indigenous Languages”. In 2020 the global pandemic hit and ... We created Polyglot Conference Global [online edition], which is ... a part of the conference that will endure for years to come to complement any future physical conferences.

This narrative incurs a number of problematic notions, including the claim that the Internet made geography irrelevant (thus obfuscating the digital gap), as well as ideologemes such as (non)nativespeakerism, lingualism, and the treatment of languages as countable entities (see Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 3, and Chapter 4). Particularly pervasive is the use of North Atlantic universalization, that is, speaking of a ‘global community’ which is nonetheless overwhelmingly rooted in the Global North in terms of membership and representation, engaging in the prophylactic ‘celebration’ of ‘diversity’ from a safe distance.

Lastly, recent sponsors and partners of the Polyglot Conference include notable agents of the social network, language learning and print media sectors of the Polyglot Industry, including Glossika (see above), uTalk (idem), Italki (idem), and Teach Yourself (see below).

It is important to remember that *despite people’s best efforts to the contrary, perceptions of ‘linguistic diversity’ frequently perpetuate marginalization and exclusion, instead of reducing them* (Wolfram et al. 2023, p.8; Flores & Rosa, 2023). Advocating for linguistic and social justice requires not just ‘celebrating’ ‘linguistic diversity,’ but also critically examining the colonial and imperial origins of prevailing notions about the latter, which connects language advocacy to larger political battles (in the case at hand, the -neo-colonial/ethnonational and neoliberal rationalities that mediate the functioning of the Polyglot Community and its partial devolution into an Industry). Consequently, *initiatives for social justice should integrate affirmations of ‘linguistic diversity’ with calls for the establishment of societal systems that support the collective welfare and grassroots activism* (Wolfram et al. 2023, p.8; Flores and Rosa, 2023), *thus defying the hegemony of (neo)colonial/ethnonational and neoliberal rationalities.*

As the founder and leading organizer of the Polyglot Conference, Simcott has demonstrated a rare, remarkable, and admirable degree of self-reflexivity, revisiting various organizational decisions over the years and altering some of them enroute to a more inclusive ‘global’ community of language enthusiasts (though as remarked above *per se*, this process is compatible with the reproduction of -neo-colonial/ethnonational and neoliberal rationalities): “I think that it is very important that we make everyone feel welcome ... I am always open to understanding ... why ... maybe we should choose an alternative” (The Hyperpolyglot Activist, 2021a).

First, Simcott has admitted that if he had to create the Polyglot Conference all over again in the 2020s, he would not dub it ‘Polyglot,’ for the label is often interpreted as elitist, as it is not a frequent word in English (as opposed to the same term in French—see below). In fact, his subsequent ‘polyglot’ gathering brand, *The Language Event*, which was created in 2019¹⁴ as a pocket version of the Polyglot Conference (lasting a weekend, rather than almost a week), no longer features the label ‘polyglot,’ instead centering around ‘language’ (in the singular; see above). In this sense, Simcott has acknowledged that “how you measure [hyper]polyglot is difficult” (The Hyperpolyglot Activist, 2021a).

Second, he has stressed that the use of the inclusive slogan “for everybody who loves language” ought to be (and has been, in his case) supplemented by reaching out to underrepresented voices that might not always have the means or encouragement they need to speak up on their own behalf: “Sometimes as an organizer you do have to reach out ... actually offer in a more active way this olive branch of ‘you’re welcome too, we want you to speak too, we need to hear more of the voices from your communities as well’ ... this is for everyone” (The Hyperpolyglot Activist, 2021a).

Third, as discussed in Chapter 2, Simcott is certainly mindful of the geographical imbalance that underlies the Polyglot Community/Industry, particularly concerning Africa: “There are definitely groups that are underrepresented. Africa is an entire continent that is extremely underrepresented in the language learning community generally, let alone in the Polyglot Conference event” (Simcott and Yebra López, 2024). In this sense, arguably Simcott’s most critical contribution to addressing the shortcomings of the Polyglot Community/Industry is the fact that *he supports indigenous, endangered and vulnerable languages by learning (and even teaching) them himself*: “We can all learn some of these languages to a degree and share information about them, and also highlighting the language as existing in the first instance” (Simcott and Yebra López, 2024) (see also Chapter 5). *This personal policy implies a shift from integrating marginalized voices into a partially industrialized and ideologized environment at the intersection between the Polyglot Community and the Polyglot Industry-cum-Matrix, on the one hand, and integrating oneself into those marginalized speech communities, thus accessing to some extent their worldview and struggles* (that is, without falling prey to the siren songs of neo-Whorfianism—Chapter 4). In this sense, the Polyglot Conference website features free access to oral and written stories in Kurdish (Sorani), Ladino, and Nahuatl, all of which Simcott has studied, plus many other endangered linguistic varieties, notably Cornish, which he is also teaching, as of August 2024.

Fourth, Simcott has expressed awareness concerning (non)native-speakerism, noting that such practice is actually illegal in the UK job

market (The Hyperpolyglot Activist, 2021a). At the same time, it would seem as though he *still believes in the supposed empirical (as opposed to ideological) value of the label ‘(non)nativespeaker’* (cf. Chapter 4), which is congruent with his defense of its use as a matter of free speech: “I don’t have a problem with somebody saying that they’re a native speaker of a language, because I think people are entitled to say that if they want to” (idem). In contrast, Dewaele et al. (2022) have highlighted the problematic nature of stating so, arguing that it reflects a (neo)racist ideology that perpetuates a deficit view of a subset of language learners and teachers (i.e., non-L1 speakers) (see Chapter 4).

Lastly, in 2023 Simcott implemented two important changes in the Polyglot Conference: going flagless (instead representing languages via their names in the ‘language’ in question, thus effectively detaching the event from the ‘one nation, one state, one language’ ideology¹⁵—see also Polyglot Club below), and releasing a code of conduct focused on preventing sexual harassment (which helps remedy the Polyglot Community/Industry as a male-dominated space, including in-person events—see Chapter 2).

The Polyglot Gathering (2014–present): An informal offshoot of the Polyglot Conference, the *Polyglot Gathering* emerged from Judith Meyer’s idea (see below) of creating a casual language event akin to those organized by the Esperanto community. Its first edition was held in Berlin (2014–2016), moved to Bratislava (2017–2019), adopted online formats during 2020 and 2021, and was held hybridly for the editions organized in Teresin, Poland (2022, 2023) and Prague, Czech Republic (2024). Initially coordinated by Meyer, Chuck Smith, and Martin Sawitzki, since 2017 the Polyglot Gathering has been managed by a Slovakia-based youth non-profit organization called *Education@Internet* (led by Peter Baláž). Overall, the Polyglot Gathering offers less academic talks, more cooperative-collaborative activities among a younger crowd, and emphasizes international auxiliary languages such as Esperanto and Interslavic, as well as English-free zones.

Recent sponsors of the Polyglot Gathering include Glossika (official sponsor—see above), the Universala Esperanto-Asocio (exclusive partner), and the language learning platforms *Taalhammer*, *Skapago*, and *uTalk* (see above), to which one has to add partners such as *Tandem*, *slovae.eu*, and *deutsch.info*.

On its website the Polyglot Gathering presents itself as “the world’s biggest international event for polyglots and language lovers,” revolving around the cultivation of an allegedly disembedded and free-floating “passion for ... languages”:

During the event, the participants spread their love and exercise their passion for cultures and languages, share tips and experiences, and

most importantly use and practice many languages to discuss, listen, learn, and socialize with one another. Learners, teachers, enthusiasts, beginners, professionals, scientists, educators, Polyglot Gathering is here for all of us! Are you ready to join?

(PolyGath, 2023a)

Once again, on the one hand, ‘passion’ (rather than skills) about ‘languages’ and the desire to connect with like-minded individuals are presented as both necessary and sufficient conditions to belong to the community of ‘polyglots’ reflected and fostered by the event (see also Meyer, 2014). On the other hand, such inclusive ethos is fundamentally at odds with the infrastructural and superstructural (ideological) elements that mediate the event itself, namely: Eurocentrism (all gatherings have been organized in central Europe, not to mention that the blueprint, i.e., Esperanto itself, is deeply Eurocentric), lingualism (treating ‘languages’ as discrete units), and mothertonguism¹⁶ (see Chapter 4).

On the one hand, the Polyglot Gathering has consistently put together highly successful and affordable events each year, managing to gather a sizable and consistent community of language enthusiasts, as well as combining rigorous academic talks with informal language practice in a safe and ‘inclusive’ environment that has also brought attention to internationally auxiliary languages and the importance of communicating in ‘languages’ other than English. On the other hand, for all the talk about world harmony, the Polyglot Gathering is overwhelmingly an event by, of and for (English-speaking) Europeans sharing ‘languages’ understood as collectables among which one can (and often does) ‘switch’ (cf. Chapter 4): “The range of languages spoken by our participants goes from 1 to >30, with a median of 6 ... It is not uncommon to change the language in the middle of a conversation or when another person joins in. The most frequent languages are English, Spanish, German, French, Russian and Esperanto ... Most talks are in English, but other languages are used as well” (PolyGath, 2023b).

Crucially, *unlike the Polyglot Conference, the Polyglot Gathering lacks the former’s self-reflexivity.* For instance, as part of the concluding remarks to its 2024 edition, Peter Baláž, a renowned Esperantist and head organizer of the event claimed, admittedly with a smile and the best of intentions, that “here your political interests do not matter, because what we care about is languages and understanding.” While the statement appeals to a broad audience by emphasizing a shared ‘passion’ for ‘languages’ and understanding, which is a unifying and non-controversial stance, ultimately this populist appeal (which is recurring in further ‘polyglot’ events and editions) is highly problematic: it simplifies complex issues and avoids addressing the deeper, often uncomfortable, realities

of language politics and global power dynamics that we are addressing in this volume from the perspective of Critical Polyglot Studies. Since language is inherently political and shaped by power dynamics, colonial histories, and global inequalities (affecting who can participate in such events, whose ‘languages’ are represented, whose linguistic experiences are validated, and even whose speech is heard at the end of the event), by ignoring the political dimensions of language, the Polyglot Gathering downplays the significance of these factors (including the fact that the promotion of certain ‘languages’ like Esperanto over others reflects broader sociopolitical agendas—Gobbo 2017) and presents a superficial unity that obscures the combination of (neo)colonial/ethnonational and neoliberal rationalities and global inequalities upon which it rests and which it helps reproduce, however inadvertently.

Further annual language gatherings of lesser attendance and/or more recent creation include, but are not limited to, *LangFest* (see Chapter 2), *Polyglotar*¹⁷ and *The Language Event* (see above).

Polyglot Meetings (Weekly)

Polyglot Club (2003). Originally created as a website by Vincent Scheidecker, since 2005 it has been implemented offline by Patrick Rousseau in Paris, France. As acknowledged on its website, Polyglot Club was born as a result of the hybridity of the Polyglot Community/Industry: “Basic principles: Virtual Contacts (I) lead to Real Activities (II). In turn, Real Activities CAN lead to Virtual Contacts to maintain and further develop your language skills, your networks with other members, and ultimately the growth of the PolyglotClub community as a whole” (Polyglot Club [PolyClub], 2023).

Polyglot Club boasts 1,051,065 members, its seemingly unproblematic slogan being “learn languages and make friends.” Polyglot Club presents itself as a language exchange social network that allows participants to practice any ‘language’ for free¹⁸ both online and offline, from language enthusiasts to “real polyglots”: “if you want to meet international friends, you are an expat, an Erasmus student, a globe or business traveler, a real polyglot, or simply curious to discover new cultures...Then, you are at the right place!”

Given *the Polyglot Club’s French origin and functioning* (as it derives the totality of its offline revenue from events held almost daily in Paris), the above quote is *highly symptomatic of its functioning as a North Atlantic universal, that is, while adopting the discourse of universalism, these events are fundamentally by, of and for the Global North, particularly Europeans. Moreover, through the Eurocentric references to Erasmus and above all, ‘expats’* (as opposed to ‘migrants’), the paragraph in question

reveals an added layer of privilege: white, middle class. As explained by Mawuna Remarque Koutonin,

In the lexicon of human migration there are still hierarchical words, created with the purpose of putting white people above everyone else. One of those remnants is the word “expat” ... [which] is a term reserved exclusively for western white people going to work abroad. Africans are immigrants. Arabs are immigrants. Asians are immigrants. However, Europeans are expats because they can’t be at the same level as other ethnicities. They are superior. Immigrants is a term set aside for ‘inferior races’.

(2015)

In congruence with the above conceptualization and *modus operandi*, The Polyglot Club incurs a number of pernicious linguistic ideologies, including (non)nativespeakerism,¹⁹ mothertonguism,²⁰ flaggism,²¹ and the category ‘foreign languages’ (see Chapter 4).²² The tension between the Polyglot Club’s explicitly ‘inclusive’ embrace and its reproduction of exclusionary language ideologies in the name of ‘language awareness’ becomes almost comical in the rubric “What is PolyglotClub approach?”:

At PolyglotClub, we believe that a language exchange between non-native speakers of any language is at least AS valuable as an exchange featuring one or more native speakers. Think global! Nowadays, a language like English is more in use among non-natives than natives. And the same goes for other commonly used languages. A foreign language learner should develop “language awareness”, that is, a foreign language education that is broad and deep. Native speakers do not have the monopoly of their mother tongue, nor of their culture ... Many non-native speakers who are well acquainted with the target language and culture can teach them as well as a native. PolyglotClub encourages you to investigate your beliefs and attitudes about foreign languages, and the effects they have on your language use, learning, and teaching. These perceptions are essential, as they all have repercussions on people’s everyday lives and their interpersonal and intergroup relationships. During a language exchange, if your partner knows your native language, we insist that your mother tongue should only be allowed to clarify single/isolated words.

Mundo Lingo (2012–present). Originally created by Richard Dempsey in Buenos Aires (Argentina), its name derives (or at least it coincides with) a constructed auxiliary ‘language’ created by Daniel Tammet which aims to be simple and efficient for international communication.

Mundo Lingo hosts free weekly language exchange events across five continents,²³ including: Oceania, Asia, North America, South America, and Europe. Hybridity and intercultural communication are at the heart of this organization: “Our Mission: Build community and solidarity in-real-life, online and around the world” (Mundo Lingo, 2024). Moreover, Mundo Lingo does not use its members’ data to incur commercial transactions (cf. Duolingo), this policy being framed as a matter of ‘integrity’: “Mundo Lingo Promise: ‘Integrity – We do not sell your data, nor sell you as advertising space. Dignity – Personal space respected, on and offline. Community – We don’t interfere, build your community freely” (idem).

On the one hand, these events feature many commendable aspects, such as an inclusive and panglobal name (‘Mundo Lingo,’ nonetheless created by a British white male), friendly ethos, non-profit functioning, and encompassing geographical reach (notwithstanding the exclusion of Africa, the overrepresentation of Europe and North America, and conversely, the underrepresentation of Asia and Oceania), including their foundation and strong presence in South America.

On the other hand, these positive aspects are to some extent undermined by the uncritical reproduction and celebration of a number of Eurocentric language ideologies whose identification and critique is a necessary step towards the articulation of a more emancipatory Polyglot Community. Mundo Lingo’s offline events are exclusively held in major cities around the world (which have a higher cost of living than their surrounding rural areas, thus implying an economic and demographic divide) and are famous for its flashy flaggism, with flags being ordered by degree of user ‘proficiency,’ featuring the speaker’s ‘native language’ on top (thus fallaciously equating L1 with utmost ‘proficiency’; see Chapter 4).

The above tension places Mundo Lingo events at the intersection between the Polyglot Community and the Polyglot Industry-cum-Matrix.

In sum, *on the one hand additional efforts in line with those adopted so far by Simcott and MundoLingo need to be implemented across the board by organizers and sponsors, as well as by attendants themselves, to prevent the encroachment of the Polyglot Industry-cum-Matrix on the utopian potential contained within the Polyglot Community. The focus on these endeavors should be to address the tension between predicating belongingness to the Polyglot Community exclusively on being ‘passionate about language(s)’/‘wanting to connect,’ on the one hand, and adopting conceptualizations and/or functioning rooted in (neo)/postcolonial and neoliberal rationalities, on the other (ultimately disavowing accessibility and inequality issues based on geographical location, race, gender, and economic disparities).*

On the other hand, *even if these efforts were to be successful, per se they do not guarantee the formation of an emancipatory global Polyglot Community, as some of the above referred inequalities and power imbalances might be endemic to the running of ‘polyglot’ gatherings and meetings.* If so, even in the best case scenario, ‘polyglot’ rendezvous might only function as a form of what Fraser has called ‘affirmative remedy’ (1995), that is, a seemingly effective solution that nonetheless maintains and reproduces that which it seeks to fight. Consequently, as long as the progressive stance advocated by an increasing number of ‘polyglot’ conclaves cannot be consistently accompanied by a decolonial overcoming of their postcolonial continuity vis-à-vis traditional ‘language’ (neo)colonialism/ethnonationalism and neoliberalism (see Chapter 6), *we should only endorse these gatherings strategically, rather than coherently* (see Chapter 5).

How ‘Polyglot’ Gatherings Converge with Social Networks, Language Learning Apps, and Print Media

The rise of social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and X, coupled with ‘polyglot’ gatherings since the early 2010s, has created a new type of language interaction that allows individuals in the Polyglot Community/Industry to engage online extensively without meeting in person, but also often leads to face-to-face meetings, as part of which social networks like Italki feature their own stand and promotional materials (e.g., at the Polyglot Conference 2021). In turn, relationships formed at ‘polyglot’ gatherings are frequently sustained through social media, enhancing visibility and monitoring within the ‘global’ Polyglot Community/Industry. Additionally, language learning platforms often sponsor and/or partner with these gatherings (notably Glossika and uTalk, in the case of annual ‘polyglot’ events). Lastly, as we will see in the below section, ‘polyglot’ gatherings often include stands and tailored-made promotions (and even partnerships and sponsorships), such as the one offered by Coffee Break book series as part of The Language Event 2023 held at Edinburgh.

Print Media

The evolution of print media coverage of ‘polyglossia’ has mirrored broader societal trends towards globalization, digitalization, commercialization, professionalization, and multiculturalism, as undergirded by (neo)colonial/ethnonational and neoliberal rationalities. From its early recognition as a rather obscure concept occasionally discussed by academics, and now to its current status as a mainstream phenomenon facilitated by technology, the print media sector related to ‘polyglossia’ has played a vital role in shaping

public perceptions and discourse surrounding serial language learning in a multilingual world. We can disaggregate its evolution into four approximately discrete periods: 1950 to 1995, mid-1990s–2005, 2005–2015, and 2015–to present.

1950 to 1995: Polyglossia avant la lettre

Before the rise of the Polyglot Community (let alone the Industry), print media already featured works containing the label ‘polyglot’ and outlining the author’s language learning methodologies, with Kató Lomb’s *Polyglot: How I Learn Languages* (1970, translated into English in 2008, coinciding with the coming of age of the Polyglot Community being arguably the most recognizable example). Lomb’s emphasis on her own biographical journey, personal motivation, immersion, and engagement with ‘native speakers’ as a means to achieving ‘fluency’ provided a useful blueprint for subsequent popularizers, despite her emphasis on reading (which is seldom emphasized in the products and services of the Polyglot Industry) and above all, her aim to demystify language learning and remove its heroic status (Erard, 2012, p.102).

Similarly, Frederick Bodmer’s *The Loom of Language* (1985) advocated for a holistic approach, dismissing simplistic paradigms like the direct method (which focuses on conversations and pictures at the expense of grammar—e.g. uTalk, see above) and the perceived need to learn like children do (Bodmer, 1985, p.37—see also Glossika above), issuing an ominous warning to the subsequent Polyglot Industry (notwithstanding its -non-nativespeakerism and talk about ‘foreign languages’—see Chapter 4): “No one who wants to speak a foreign language like a native can rely upon this book or any other. Its aim is to lighten the burden of learning for the home student who is less ambitious” (1985, p.20).

In sum, both Lomb and Bodmer preempted core elements of what would become decades later the print media sector of the Polyglot Industry. Consequently, *not only are today’s Polyglot Industry (e)books not telling readers anything novel or disruptive, but they are actually purporting ideas that were debunked long before being concocted by these influencers.*

Mid-1990s–2005: Early Recognition and Exploration

In the mid- to late 1990s, there was a growing recognition of ‘polyglossia’ as a concept, particularly in academic circles focused on linguistics and cognitive science. However, *until the 2000s, entrepreneurial serial language learning was often seen as a personal interest or hobby, rather than a well-established mainstream trend* (see Chapter 2). Accordingly, print

media coverage of ‘polyglossia’ was sporadic and targeted towards specific language learning communities, rather than the wider public.

Towards the end of the century, two academic books, *Language Myths* (Bauer & Trudgill, 1998) and *How Languages are Learned* (Lightbrown & Spada, 1999), provided a critical and empirical examination of popular ideas about language learning, effectively bridging the gap between academia and industry. Current ‘polyglot’ influencers would greatly benefit from reading these publications, as they offer valuable insights into widespread language learning myths that have become axiomatic in the Polyglot Industry, such as “some languages are harder than others,” “Italian is beautiful, German is ugly,” “everyone has an accent except me” (Bauer & Trudgill, 1998), “the best predictor of success in second language acquisition is motivation,” “most of the mistakes that second language learners make are due to interference from their first language,” and “teachers should use materials that expose students only to language structures they have already been taught [comprehensible input]” (Lightbrown & Spada, 1999 pp.203–205).

2005–2015: The Rise and Consolidation of Print Media as a Polyglot Industry Sector

With the advent of online language learning platforms like Duolingo, the accessibility and popularity of language learning surged (Marketscreener, 2024). *Print media began to cover ‘polyglossia’ more extensively, reflecting a growing interest among the general public.* This trend included popular news and blog articles focused on the benefits of learning multiple ‘languages’ sequentially, such as cognitive advantages, career opportunities, and cultural enrichment. Likewise, stories of individuals achieving ‘fluency’ in multiple ‘languages’ garnered significant attention, eventually becoming viral and inspiring others to embark on similar journeys. *This period crystallized into the democratization of ‘polyglossia,’ making serial language learning accessible to a wider audience while also leaving content creation in the hands of amateurs lacking formal training in linguistics but heavily invested in professional branding* (Bruzos, 2023).

For instance, *The Art of Mastering Many Tongues* (Constantine, 2012), draws upon the positive transvaluation of serial language learning since the early 21st century to glamorize (hyper)polyglossia into an artform. Such pedestalization was further reinforced by the publication of Michael Erard’s *Babel No More: The Search for the World’s Most Extraordinary Language Learners* (2012), though some of its arguments show commendable critical awareness (such as the debunking on the idea that we literally think, or dream *in* languages—see Chapter 4).²⁴ The same year The New York Times published the article *Adventures of a Teenage Polyglot*

(Leland, 2012) featuring Tim Doner, hailed as a “prodigy hyperpolyglot” in a subsequent YouTube video entitled *Teen Speaks Over 20 Languages* (12 M views; THNKR, 2013).

In *The Way of the Linguist: A Language Learning Odyssey* (2005), Steve Kaufmann, YouTube influencer (*lingosteve*; see above) and co-founder of the language learning platform LingQ, tells the story of his own language learning journey enroute to showcasing his ‘own’ methodology (cf. Bruzos 2023). On the one hand, the book has been praised as inspirational (particularly when it comes to developing and positive mindset apropos learning ‘languages’), and it offers concrete proof that it is never too late to become a successful learner (Kaufmann was born in 1945). On the other hand, the title of this self-published volume equivocates commonsense definitions of ‘polyglot’ and ‘linguist,’ conveniently implying that Kaufmann has been formally trained in linguistics (therefore enhancing his perceived expertise). The loosening of the meaning of ‘linguist’ becomes further apparent in his subsequent assertion that becoming a ‘linguist’ (much like becoming a ‘polyglot’ for Coppola—see below) “is a matter of choice, and requires a certain state of mind” (ix), thus attesting to the Web 2.0 democratization of the ‘polyglot’ as a microcelebrity to which to aspire.

Moreover, the subtitle portrays his own journey as an epic ‘odyssey,’ connoting heroism and entrepreneurship (*pace* Lomb’s warning). In a telling sign of North Atlantic universal literature (Trouillot, 2002), the book blurb reveals a deeply entrenched Anglocentric perspective, that is, that of the ‘expat’ (see above) adventurer who can afford (literally and metaphorically) to learn ‘languages’ out of pleasure:

Do we not lose something by relying on the widespread use of English rather than discovering other languages and cultures? As citizens of this shrunken world, would we not be better off if we were able to speak a few languages other than our own? The answer is obviously yes. In his busy life as a diplomat and businessman, Kaufmann managed to learn to speak nine languages fluently and observe first hand some of the dominant cultures of Europe and Asia. Why don’t more people do the same? Steve feels anyone can learn a language if they want to.

While the above paragraph presupposes a number of unacknowledged forms of privilege (e.g., in terms of time, financial position, and first language), in the Introduction Kaufmann admits that self-reflexivity is not a priority (cf. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6), insisting that since globalization is an “inevitable” and “irresistible trend,” “it is more useful to invest time and energy in being able to enjoy and profit from globalization” (Kaufmann, 2005, p.xi).

His (non)nativespeakerist condescension as an L1 English speaker is hard to ignore and further supplemented by the ideologeme of ‘languages’ as ownership items:

I recommend you read this book in your own language first to become familiar with the contents and principles of language learning ... If you are not a native speaker of English, then I encourage you to read this book in English. This may be the first book that you read in English, but you can do it ... Perhaps the thought of reading a whole book in English is intimidating to you. It should not be.

(2005, pp.xi–xii)

Lastly, Kaufmann’s methodology to learn languages includes the predictable emphasis on comprehensible input above grammar and the postmodern injunction to ‘have fun’ above all: “most of all, just enjoy yourself!” (vii). In his work, Žižek has discussed how the neoliberal rationalities which underlie the contemporary form of the Culture Industry (inclusive in our case, of the Polyglot Industry) enforces a compulsive pursuit of enjoyment and pleasure as part of its ideological control, imbuing the importance of enjoyment and offering solutions to its own oppression through consumerism (1989).

In alignment with the strong emphasis placed by language learning platforms on the development of conversational ‘fluency’ (at the expense of almost every other linguistic skill—see above), we find two major best-sellers in this period: *Fluent Forever: How to Learn Any Language Fast and Never Forget It* (Wyner, 2014) and *Fluent in 3 Months: How Anyone at Any Age Can Learn to Speak Any Language from Anywhere in the World* (Lewis, 2014).

Fluent Forever has been celebrated as featuring a clear explanation of how memory works (particularly Spaced Repetition System as pertains to the use of flashcards) and how to use well-known techniques within a coherent method. On the other hand, even its most adamant proponents acknowledge that none of the information or techniques presented in the book are original (see Bruzos, 2023). Additionally, its very title implies the treatment of ‘languages’ as properties that, once acquired, one can retain *sine die*. The book further emphasizes ‘fun,’ and ‘self-improvement’ while reproducing (non)nativespeakerism. Thus, concerning vocabulary cards, the author claims, “you’ll discover that they’re a lot of fun to create and a lot of fun to review” (Wyner, 2014), though it is not clear exactly why. Regarding self-improvement, the book features plenty of self-help elements, such as text boxes, bullet points, illustrations, chapter-end reminders and ‘key points.’ As for (non)nativespeakerism, the author emphasizes the (supposed) importance of incorporating sound clips from ‘native

speakers.’ With a healthy dose of skepticism, Kirkus Reviews notes that “as the author well knows, there are no shortcuts to learning anything worthwhile” (2014).

For its part, *Fluent in 3 Months* has been praised as inspiring and motivational, particularly among apprehensive language learners, or those who thought they would never get to speak a second ‘language.’ On the other hand, its title echoes the perceived importance of conversational ‘fluency’ (while promising expediency in achieving that goal), and the book revolves around Benny Lewis’ ‘own’ method, which as discussed by Bruzos (2023—see above) happens to be a rehash of popular techniques (e.g., ‘speaking from day 1’), cross-references to his website, ‘tips’ and ‘hacks,’ conventionalized language ideologies (e.g., interacting with ‘native’ speakers in chat rooms; hanging out with ‘foreign’ friends, and insisting in speaking ‘their’ language), motivational talk points (e.g., language learning as a matter of mindset, rather than skills) and a healthy dose of common sense (e.g., language learners need to be specific with their goals, and to integrate their target language in their daily routines). These ideas are best summarized in the back cover blurb:

Meet the man who makes the mission of learning any language possible! The all-you-need guide to learning a language. Language hacker Benny Lewis shows how anyone anywhere can learn any language without leaving their home, using a simple toolkit and by harnessing the power of the Internet ... Speak from day one: find mother-tongue speaking partners online. Don’t be self-conscious—keep the flow going! Change your mindset: ditch the excuses, you can do it!

(BigIdeasGrowingMinds)

The faux enthusiasm and infantilizing undertones of the above passage can be further ascertained in the animated summary of the book.²⁵

Additionally, *during the 2005–2015 period ebooks became a staple product of the Polyglot Industry*. Initially conceived of as more affordable and portable versions of traditional books, their rise is best understood as an adaptation of the print media sector to the trends and dynamics of the rest of the Polyglot Industry (social networks, ‘polyglot’ gatherings, language learning platforms), with (aspiring) ‘polyglots’ recognizing the potential of ebooks as a convenient and cost-effective form to distribute language learning materials without the overhead costs associated with traditional publishing (e.g., printing, distribution).

The pioneering effort was arguably *The Polyglot Project: How to Learn Multiple Languages: YouTube Polyglots, Hyper-polyglots, Linguists, Language Learners and Language Lovers in their Own Words* (2010), edited by ‘polyglot’ Claude Cartaginense (YouTube name *syzygycc*) and consisting

of a collection of 43 mini-essays written by YouTube ‘polyglots.’ These essays feature their personal stories and language learning tips, including usual suspects of the Polyglot Industry, such as Moses McCormick (laoshu), Steve Kaufmann (lingosteve), Stuart Jay Raj (stujaystujay; see Chapter 2), Benny Lewis (irishpolyglot), and Mike Campbell (Glossika). The introduction, where Cartaginense uncritically reproduces the ideologeme that there are ‘foreign’ ‘languages’ (see Chapter 4), is highly symptomatic of the transvaluation of ‘polyglots’ from atomized, obscure nerds to popular influencers and natural networkers: “What if I invited my favorite YouTube language enthusiasts to contribute a piece for a book? ... If you want to learn how to learn foreign languages, read on to find out how it’s done ...”

Since then, ebooks such as *You Too Can Become a Polyglot* (Coppola, 2015)²⁶ have continued to play a pivotal role as an additional avenue for monetizing attention, engaging YouTube polyglot’s audience (fostering loyalty and increasing their subscriber base), diversifying their content portfolio and enhancing their credibility and authority by association to book authorship as an endeavor conventionally tied to intellectual prowess, education, and cultural refinement. Needless to say, the ‘polyglot’ ebook hustle leaves the door open to the en masse dissemination of low-quality content (generic or rehashed but marketed as substantial and/or original, particularly among self-published products), misleading claims, overpricing (exploiting the consumer’s trust built in other sectors of the industry), lack of accountability (e.g., refunds, customer support), and even pyramid schemes or multi-level marketing (MLM).

By the late 2010s, ebooks had arguably become the new standard or benchmark, in the image of which the main agents of Polyglot Industry would come to author their own books as crossovers of three segments of this Polyglot Industry sector: celebrity autobiographies (verging on narcissism/solipsism), how-to manuals (applied to serial language learning, often combining grandiloquent originality claims with rudimentary linguistics content), and self-improvement books (focused on motivational hype) (Goldhaber, 1997; Bruzos, 2023, pp.1216, 1218).

2015 to Present: Diversity, Inclusion, Hyperpolyglossia, and AI

The most recent period has been characterized by a heightened emphasis in media coverage on ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ (while this is often equated with helping marginalized communities, as discussed above, it is not always the case). At the same time, *the category of ‘hyperpolyglot’ has acquired unprecedented popularity*, which is arguably a symptom of the convergence between the consolidation of discourse surrounding the neo-liberal accumulation of ‘languages’ (Chohan, 2021b, 2021c) and that of embracing multiculturalism and understanding different perspectives

(Chohan, 2021d). In particular, stories featuring individuals from diverse backgrounds mastering multiple ‘languages’ (particularly over ten, which most consider a threshold for ‘hyperpolyglossia’²⁷) have continued to gain traction, emphasizing the importance of language learning in fostering cross-cultural understanding (Thurman, 2018), as have critiques of traditional language learning methods.

Additionally, *this period has witnessed the beginning of an unholy (yet highly profitable) alliance between Teach Yourself, on the one hand, and ‘polyglot’ influencers, on the other.*

Lastly, *the 2020–2022 Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the shift towards online and digital, functioning as learning, including language learning* (Chohan, 2023; Yebra López, 2025), leading to the proliferation of language learning apps and resources (see above), the explosion of ‘polyglot’ ebooks, and heightened eagerness among ‘polyglots’ to explore the intersection of technology and language learning, including the role of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and gamification in making the learning process more engaging and accessible.

Particularly indicative of most of the above trends is Alex Rawling’s book *How to speak any language fluently: Fun, stimulating and effective methods to help anyone learn languages faster* (2017). On the one hand, this volume is much more comprehensive, less banal, and overall more useful and professional than most of its counterparts in the Industry. After all, Rawlings has an Oxford education in German and Russian, and the book was professionally reviewed and edited. On the other hand, despite the author’s best intentions, this how-to volume is insufficiently self-reflective apropos its own biases and language ideologies.

First, the book constitutes a case in point of North Atlantic universalism, as its putatively global perspective (“*How to Speak any Language Fluently ... to help anyone learn languages faster*”) is in stark contrast with its deeply situated (yet largely disavowed) Euro/Anglo-centrism. For instance, most of the cover is occupied by a blue shape in the form of the world’s globe surrounded by speech bubbles combined with some of the planet’s most recognizable landmarks, all of which are depicted springing up from the Earth, functioning as indexicals of cosmopolitanism (see Bruzos, 2023, pp.1213–1224). However, these are overwhelmingly Western and European: the two speech bubbles are in French and Italian, whereas of the 12 milestones, eight are situated in the Global North, out of which seven in Europe and two in London, which is the same amount as in all of America (two), and all of Asia (two), and twice as much as any landmarks from Africa (one).

Additionally, the bulk of the volume’s content is mediated by (neo) colonialism/ethnonationalism and neoliberalism as major (yet often unacknowledged) rationalities which are obfuscated in the name of the

uncritical endorsement of globalization. Particularly salient in this sense, are Chapter 9 and 10, devoted to new technologies, and not sounding ‘foreign,’ respectively.

Rawlings introduces Chapter 9 with a rather naïve statement: “the language learning world is now awash with apps, websites, blogs and software that are all designed to help you learn a language” (p 141). By contrast, in this chapter, we have established that the vast majority of language learning apps are designed to grab your attention and data as a means of monetizing them, with basic language learning benefits being a mere byproduct of this intense focus. Rawlings’ subsequent breakdown of “Top language learning Apps” (p.142), as divided into “free” and “paid,” obfuscates their actual pricing model (freemium; see above), as well as their exploitation of user data. Lastly, the subsection featuring Rawling’s criticisms (‘Why You Shouldn’t Use Technology’ -pp.149—51) fails to mention critical issues such as attention span reduction, addiction, intrusive ads, passive consumerism, social isolation, and the reproduction of harmful ideologies, a number of which are incurred by Rawlings himself.

For instance, in the introduction to Chapter 10, entitled *Sounding Less ‘Foreign,’* Rawlings implies that learning a ‘language’ is at least partially, a performance devoted to concealing who we truly are, instead adopting the accents and mannerisms of an (idealized, non-existent) ‘native’ speaker, and that failure to meet that standard is a problem to be addressed: “You can have studied all the grammar in the world, and have a vocabulary stretching as far as the eye can see. But there is still *something that gives you away*, and it’s not necessarily your accent” (p.154; emphasis added). The “problem,” claims Rawlings, is that “you still sound foreign,” which he juxtaposes to “authentic”: “Even though what you’re saying makes sense and everybody understands you, *you still sound foreign*. That’s because there is something missing. Technically *your language is correct*, but *it still doesn’t sound authentic*” (p.153; emphasis added). The reason, Rawlings contends, is that you think *in* your “*native language*” and then translate it into the target language, and “no *native speaker* would ever say it quite in that way” (p.154; emphasis added), so that “if you can master *sounding less foreign*, it certainly won’t go unnoticed” (idem; emphasis added). This is both empirically inaccurate and ideologically pernicious, as it wrongly presupposes that we think *in* ‘languages,’ that there are ‘native’ ‘languages’ and/or speakers, and that there is such a thing as ‘sounding foreign’ and ‘foreign languages’ (that is, by opposition to ‘native’ ones) (see Chapter 4).

Ultimately, Rawlings offers an unreflective, superficial account of language learning which is itself a symptom of the state of the print media sector of the Polyglot Industry in the late 2010s. This includes his post-ideological portrayal of the Polyglot Community as merely a hybrid,

horizontal, and friendly fellowship of people who are just ‘passionate’ about language learning and want to ‘motivate’ each other to achieve their respective goals (pp.148–9).

Additionally, concerning the unholy (yet high profitable) alliance between the traditional language learning publishing house *Teach Yourself* (itself a habitual sponsor of ‘polyglot’ gatherings—see above) and ‘polyglot’ influencers, as well as online podcasts, the trend started in 2016 and includes the likes of Olly Richards (*StoryLearning.com*).

“I run a \$10M online education business. (Working only 6 days a month),” claims Olly Richards on his personal website, promising to send newsletter subscribers a 117-page ebook entitled *CASE STUDY: Blueprint of A \$10M Online Education Business*. On StoryLearning.com Richards presents himself as the creator of the “revolutionary StoryLearning® method. It’s science-based and endorsed by language experts.” In this bold statement we can already discern some of the usual suspects of the Polyglot Industry: over-the-top claims of originality (“revolutionary ... method”) (Bruzos, 2023), and ‘expert’ scientific legitimization (Foucault, 1975; Chomsky, 1989) from an author otherwise lacking formal training in linguistics (a lack of expertise which he implicitly admits to by claiming that the book is backed by “language experts,” among which Richards does not include himself).

Richards’ *Short Stories*, which he began to re-edit in 2016 courtesy of his partnership with Teach Yourself,²⁸ have become a best-seller and have been widely acclaimed by readers as helpful for improving understanding of the target language structure and listening comprehension, plus featuring a clear and logical chapter sequence. On the other hand, in these books, Richards invariably adopts a Western- and Anglocentric perspective to present a number of short, stereotyped stories²⁹ (2016, 2021).

In the introductory section, Richards makes it clear that reading these stories will not make his readers fluent in the language. In fact, it will only take them to a basic level, which he describes as “equivalent to A1-A2 on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)” (2015, p.8), only to refer to it on his blog as “the high-beginner level (A2-B1 on the CEFR)” (n.d.), which he dubs the “Duolingo level” (in a clear symptom of the interwoven nature of different sectors of the Polyglot Industry). “No need to mess around with apps!” (idem), he concludes, somehow implying that replacing one superficial product with another will do the trick.

Predictably, the main selling point of his short stories is that they are ‘fun’ (cf. Žižek, 1989—see above) providing entertainment, ‘motivation’, and feel-good:

A sense of achievement and a feeling of progress are essential when reading in a foreign language. Without these, there is little motivation

to keep reading. The stories in this book have been designed with this firmly in mind ... Each story belongs to a different genre in order to keep you entertained.

(2015, p.13; emphasis added)

In other words, the emphasis is admittedly on the “sense of achievement” and the “feeling of progress,” rather than on *actual* achievement or progress.

Additionally, Richards incurs a number of pernicious language ideologies. To the idea that what the reader is learning is a ‘foreign’ ‘language’ (see above), one has to add mothertonguism (“reading is a complex skill, and in our mother tongue we employ a variety of micro-skills to help us read”—p.16), as well as the false binary between ‘artificial’ (traditional, grammar-focused learning through textbooks) and ‘natural’ ways of learning a language (his “immersive” method): “One of the main benefits of reading stories is that you gain exposure to large amounts of natural Spanish³⁰ ... while textbooks provide grammar rules and lists of vocabulary for you to learn, stories show you natural language in use” (idem). Similarly, on his website, he juxtaposes stories (through which according to Richards, children acquire their ‘native language’) to ‘rules’ (grammar): “With StoryLearning, you learn languages through stories, not rules. The magic of learning through stories is that you can hardwire the language directly into your brain, through the same *natural learning process* children use to acquire their native language” (emphasis in the original). Implied, of course, is the oversimplification that children are better than adults at language learning (cf. The Hyperpolyglot Activist, 2021a).

Overall, this predictable branding effort is centered around opposing traditional language teaching (TLT), that is, the textbook-based, by-default method of the industrial education system (Betancor-Falcón, 2023), so as to position himself as an outsider, thus concealing his pivotal role within the Polyglot Industry all the more effectively.

Attesting to the self-referentiality of the Polyglot Industry, Lewis has endorsed Richards’ *Short Stories in Spanish*, albeit without providing any argument: “Olly’s advice on language learning is the real deal, and I recommend you pay attention to what he has to say!” In contrast, writing from the United Kingdom, an Amazon reviewer writes: “This is like the emperor’s new clothes of language learning” (Crags, 2023), while a further one highlights the author’s lucrative goal: “What annoys me most ... is the way in which the author tries to make a fast buck. At the end of each story there is a link to the spot where you can buy an expansion pack. It has a ‘value’ of 50\$, but the ‘price today’ is ‘only 20\$’ (merely five times

the price of the book). The ad on Internet is very much like the sites where you buy all kinds of wonderful things which will improve your health, make you lose weight etc. ..." (Huisson, 2016).

Conclusion: Saving the Polyglot Community from the Language-Industrial Complex

In this chapter we have examined the nature of the Polyglot Industry as a partial (d)evolution and overlap with the initial Polyglot Community.

First, drawing upon Adorno, Horkheimer and Žižek's respective analysis of the culture industry, Golhaber and Wu's corresponding examinations of the rise and consolidation of the attention economy, and Chomsky and Foucault's individual critical perspectives on industry and expertise, we have argued that the industrialization of the Polyglot Community since the late 2000s has crystalized into a network of four interconnected and mutually reinforcing sectors: social networks, language learning platforms, 'polyglot' gatherings, and print media.

Second, on the one hand, we have avoided oversimplifying our critique of the Polyglot Industry by acknowledging the occasional inspiration provided by YouTube influencers, the convenience and effectiveness of undertaking classes on Italki and staying connected with fellow 'polyglots' on Facebook and X, the laudable attention provided to endangered languages by uTalk (and to a lesser extent, by Glossika and Duolingo), the commendable self-reflectivity shown by leading figures of major 'polyglot' gatherings such as Simcott, MundoLingo's policies towards 'global' 'inclusivity,' and the practicality of adopting some of Rawlings, Lewis, and Richards' 'methods,' 'tips' and 'hacks' to learn 'languages.'

Third, on the other hand we have conclusively shown that notwithstanding the above, ultimately this system is populated by self-declared experts and institutions characterized by self-referentiality and a significant academic/scientific source opacity that is on average, inversely proportional to their lack of formal training in linguistics. In particular, we have shown that their disavowed North Atlantic universalizations manifest themselves in the Euro-/Anglocentric white, bourgeois framing of the study and accumulation of 'languages' as a self-improvement 'skill' reliant on 'motivation,' disembedded from its sociopolitical framework and focused on the development of 'native-like' conversational 'fluency' that can be 'hacked' through 'tips.' This biased conceptualization and praxis, which is firmly rooted in neoliberal and to a lesser extent (neo)colonial/ethnonational rationalities that mediate serial language learning in the 21st century, underlies and shapes the en masse production of standardized, formulaic serial language learning products that

perpetuate conformity and homogeneity, ultimately stifling originality and critical thought.

Fourth, and as a result of the above, in our attention economy there is a constant risk of the Polyglot Community being superseded and devoured by the ambitions and interests that are structural to the Polyglot Industry. If and when this happens, this hybrid ensemble risks losing its ability to fulfill its original mission, that is, to make the world a better place through ‘languages,’ including fostering international friendships, peace, and the reduction of global inequalities.

In this sense, we would like to conclude this chapter by emphasizing that to the extent to which as noted above, the reproduction and success of the Polyglot Industry is predicated upon capturing, entertaining, and retaining the attention, money, time, and energy of a multimillion ensemble of followers and consumers (i.e., *zombieglots*), the current predicament calls for a renewed reclamation effort. Such endeavor is premised on understanding and respecting the genuine value of our own contributions as language learning enthusiasts enroute to the systematization of best practices and concretization of organizational and institutional alternatives to the Polyglot Industry. The second part of the present volume is entirely devoted to this task (see Chapters 5 and 6). In the prescient words of Wu,

What is needed are more tools that are designed to faithfully serve their owner’s real interests and are less consumed with other agendas. We need technologies that help us focus and think rather than distract and diminish. We should, moreover, patronize the former and boycott the latter. For history also reveals that we are hardly powerless in our dealings with the attention merchants. Individually, we have the power to ignore, tune out, and unplug. We are certainly at an appropriate time to think seriously about what it might mean to reclaim our collective consciousness.

(2017, p.351)

The next chapter deals precisely with the ideological fallacies and inconsistencies that mediate the simulated reality of the Polyglot Industry, the ensemble of which we have labeled *the Polyglot Matrix*. Identifying and exposing these misconceptions will be complementary to our critical understanding of the conceptualization and functioning of the Polyglot Industry as discussed in the present chapter. Only by combining both will we be able to unplug ourselves from the Polyglot Industry-cum-Matrix, understood as an emancipatory effort towards a more genuine concrete (as opposed to theoretical) utopia premised on reclaiming the Polyglot Community away from the language-industrial complex.

Notes

- 1 Both Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault highlight how expertise can be used to manipulate and control individuals and communities, whether through the dissemination of propaganda and misinformation (Chomsky, 1989) or through the exercise of disciplinary mechanisms and normalization (Foucault, 1975). Ultimately, their critiques converge in questioning the legitimacy and neutrality of expertise within systems of power and authority, of which the Polyglot Industry as conceptualized in this chapter is a primary example.
- 2 A portmanteau of ‘zombie’ and ‘polyglots,’ in reference to their passivity, unawareness, and gregariousness.
- 3 “in the new economy attention itself is property ... located in the minds of those who have paid you attention in the past, whether years ago or seconds ago ... attention wealth can apparently decline, only to revive later. It is rarely entirely lost” (1997, p.13).
- 4 Launched in 2013, Patreon lets creators receive direct support from fans, offering exclusive content and diverse income streams beyond ad revenue to sustain content creation while keeping most videos accessible.
- 5 For instance, as part of the Polyglot Conference 2023 (Budapest, Hungary), the conventional Q&A following each individual talk was removed, intentionally relegating debate to the private sphere.
- 6 “In these videos, languages other than English are delocalized and decontextualized. They do not serve a communicative purpose, that is to say, they are not used because of multilingual accommodation (most viewers will not understand what is being said in, say, Georgian, so this language would not be used to accommodate them) but to, indexically, signify the whole language (‘this is Georgian’) and, through a strategy of condescension (Bourdieu 2001), reap symbolic recognition” (Bruzos, 2023, p.1222).
- 7 An exception to this would be in a popular subgenre where polyglots supposedly “code-switch” (see Chapter 4) while maintaining the coherence of the message as a means to showcasing their skills.
- 8 For a detailed analysis concerning the so-called ‘method mythology’ and the ‘language hack’ metaphor, see Bruzos 2021, pp.2014–6.
- 9 Super Chats on YouTube let viewers buy highlighted messages during live streams, boosting visibility and supporting creators financially.
- 10 According to Yanis Varoufakis, ‘technofeudalism’ refers to the modern digital economy’s replication of feudal power structures, where tech giants [e.g., Facebook] wield immense influence akin to medieval lords, exerting control over users’ data and economic transactions, while also reshaping the dimensions of virtual reality that each user uniquely experiences (2024).
- 11 Duolingo’s ‘Incubator’ engages volunteers in translating and creating new language courses, aiming to broaden language learning accessibility. However, questions arise regarding fair compensation and the commodification of linguistic expertise amidst the platform’s reliance on crowdsourced labor.
- 12 “Duolingo’s terms do say they share users’ data with third party advertising networks, marketing analytics service providers and website analysis

- companies (Common Sense Privacy Program, 2024). Recent large-scale data breaches have resulted in the exposure of personal information, including Testing IDs, photos, access credentials, and language test outcomes, belonging to millions of users (Cyber and Fraud Centre Scotland, 2023).
- 13 Subsequent editions took place in Novi Sad, Serbia (2014), New York City, USA (2015), Thessaloniki, Greece (2016), Reykjavik, Iceland (2017), Ljubljana, Slovenia (2018), Fukuoka, Japan (2019), and in adaptation to online formats during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021. Hybrid events, combining online and offline components, occurred in Cholula, Mexico (2022), Budapest Hungary (2023), and Valletta, Malta (2024).
 - 14 At the time of writing, The Language Event editions include Melbourne, Australia (2019), Edinburgh, UK (2020, 2023) and Penang, Malaysia (2023).
 - 15 See Blackledge, 2000; Kohn, 2019.
 - 16 For instance, the FAQ section includes the following excerpt: “HOW MANY LANGUAGES DO I HAVE TO SPEAK TO ATTEND? Your mother tongue! That’s it” (capitalized in the original).
 - 17 Inaugurated in 2016 and held invariably in Brazil, it emphasizes the job market prospects engendered by the acquisition of a new language. These characteristics illustrate our point in Chapter 2 that the Global South tends to focus on the use of ‘languages’ as a means of improving local people’s socio-economic status, whereas in contrast with its seemingly global reach, ‘saving endangered languages’ is by and large the prerogative of the Global North.
 - 18 While the Polyglot Club is not for profit, it generates income from selling advertisements and hosting events in Paris.
 - 19 “native speakers will help you improve with their corrections and comments.”
 - 20 “find members ready to help you learn your favorite language and in return, teach them your mother tongue.”
 - 21 Though not on the website, this last aspect has been amended in in-person exchanges, for whose purpose Polyglot Club has pioneered the adoption of a flagless policy consisting in representing each ‘language’ via their name (and alphabet) in the ‘language’ in question.
 - 22 “we shall strive to enhance PolyglotClub Members’ language skills, and knowledge of foreign cultures” (website).
 - 23 Oceania: Auckland, Brisbane, Melbourne, Wellington; Asia: Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Daegu, Nanjing, Saigon, Singapore, Yangon; Americas: Buenos Aires, Chicago, Cordoba, Florianopolis, La Plata, Lima, Monterrey, Montevideo, Montreal, New York City, Playa del Carmen, Rio de Janeiro, San Salvador, São Paulo, Toronto, Tucumán, Vancouver; Europe: Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Cologne, Copenhagen, Dublin, Geneva, Lisbon, London, Milan, Paris, Porto, Utrecht, Zurich.
 - 24 See also Johnson & Ensslin (2007).
 - 25 BigIdeasGrowingMinds, 2020.
 - 26 The title is further symptomatic of the status of the ‘polyglot’ as a microcelebrity to which one could realistically aspire, hence something “you too, can become” (title). Much in the vein of the Polyglot Industry’s hegemonic discourse, in the book blurb Coppola characterizes himself as an ‘entrepreneur’

- driven by ‘passion,’ and the volume incurs several language ideologies, such as talk about ‘foreign languages’ (subtitle) and flaggism (cover) (see Chapter 4).
- 27 Cf. The International Association of Hyperpolyglots (HYPIA), which has a threshold of six ‘languages’ (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6).
- 28 Announcement: Short Stories for Beginners—New Editions with Teach Yourself! (storylearn in <https://storylearning.com/blog/short-stories-for-beginners-teach-yourself.com>).
- 29 For instance, in the Spanish version (which is only in Peninsular Spanish), the first chapter of Short Stories in Spanish is called ‘*La Paella Loca*,’ even though the content is unrelated to this Spanish dish. The title reads as a combination between *Paella* qua indexical of Peninsular culture and the reproduction of ‘*loca*’ [crazy], in alignment with the Anglosaxon stereotype of Spanish-speakers as passionate, emotional and irrational, by opposition to the proverbial Anglosaxon rationality.
- 30 For a deconstruction of the binary artificial vs. natural languages, see The Hyperpolyglot Activist, 2023 (www.youtube.com/watch?v=a36fbr9Kcs)

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