



Blog, language and the Mind / By Social / May 15, 2023

## Will Neural Implants Remove the Need to Learn Languages?

There are many benefits to learning a new language. While we grapple with unfamiliar grammar and new vocabulary, we are improving our cognitive ability and could be delaying the onset of dementia.

Learning a new language can also enhance our cultural awareness and even lead to a successful career.

So, how appealing is the thought that at some point in the future, it won't be necessary to learn languages? It is possible that any language could be streamed directly to our brains via neural implants.

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At least that is what a highly respected professor of linguistics has suggested in a new book.



### The Babel Apocalypse

Published 2 May 2023, *The Babel Apocalypse* is the latest book by Dr Vyvan Evans. Although ostensibly a work of science fiction, the book predicts a future that features technology that could be evolved from current developments in neural prosthetics.

In the book, Dr Evans shows us a world in which ChatGPT-Style language chips are routinely implanted into human brains. Language learning has become obsolete as it is possible to stream languages directly to our brains, just as we stream movies to our televisions today. Our minds are so enhanced by new technology that we can communicate fluently in any language we choose.



Dr Evans suggests that these incredible advances in human linguistic capability will become a reality by the end of this century. It won't be necessary to spend years learning a new language. Hybridized human minds will boast incredible linguistic abilities.

This might all seem like great news. **Neural implants** could transform life as we know it, enabling us to live and work wherever we wish to without



language barriers holding us back. We could watch movies from across the globe without the need for subtitles and we will be able to communicate with ease when we travel.

But *The Babel Apocalypse* lays out a less than appealing future. It warns us of the dangers of turning human language into a commodity.

### **We Will Rock You**

*The Babel Apocalypse* imagines a near future when language will be streamed to human brains. This means that languages will be controlled by tech giants and merely leased to humans.

The idea of society being controlled by big tech is nothing new. In his novel *1984*, published in 1949, George Orwell showed us a repressive society with an authoritarian state practising mass surveillance. The ruling party led by Big Brother uses the Thought Police to control minds.



In 2002, the musical *We Will Rock You* opened in London's West End. The show is set 300 years in the future and in an Orwellian world where Earth is called the iPlanet and it is controlled by the Globalsoft Corporation. Conformity reigns: citizens are forced to wear the same clothes, listen to the same music and hold the same opinions. Musical instruments are banned and so creativity is stifled.

*We Will Rock You* delivers a happy ending when an electric guitar is discovered, and rock music is reborn. Things don't work out quite so well in *1984* or *The Babel Apocalypse*!

### **The consequences of totalitarianism**

In *The Babel Apocalypse*, Dr Evans presents us with a dystopian future in which "they who control language control everything." Those who can't afford the language streaming services on offer become social outcasts. It is a world in which language is the most valuable commodity and is totally controlled by tech corporations. A cyberattack causes a global language service outage that threatens to be a global catastrophe.

The book raises many questions about the commoditisation of language. How should language be regulated in such a world? Languages have always evolved organically throughout communities. But if languages were



controlled, who would coin new words and decide which will be used and how? Would societies feature greater divisions than ever seen before? Could any issues with streaming services such as outages of electrical currents result in a total failure of global communication?



If babies were to be chipped at birth, there would be no such thing as a native language. How would that impact child development and cultures around the world? Would language streaming services be used to implant thoughts that enable big tech to control minds?

### **It's life Jim but not as we know it**

The future suggested in *The Babel Apocalypse* may sound like pie in the sky but should not be dismissed as pure fantasy. Technology is advancing rapidly. We already have self-driving cars and ChatGPT, an AI chatbot capable of natural language generation and answering questions. Dr Evans is a leading authority on the evolution of language and boasts both the knowledge and the vision to predict future developments.

Sometimes science fiction does become reality and surprisingly quickly. When the TV series *Star Trek* first aired in the 1960s, it excited audiences with imaginary, futuristic technology that seemed light years away. That tech included hand-held flip-top communication devices, wireless communication headsets, flat screen monitors, machines that could replicate 3D objects and translation software. Sound familiar?

Less than 50 years after the first episode of *Star Trek* was broadcast, many of the futuristic technologies that featured in the show had already become reality. [Manage consent](#)



But what about *The Babel Apocalypse*? Do we really face a future in which our brains will be implanted with chips that enable us to speak any language instantly? How many of us will be able to afford the technology? What proportion of the global population will be living on the fringes, unable to invest in the language streaming services?

How will our language access be manipulated by big tech to exert control over our lives? What will be the impact on languages around the world and could most become obsolete?

### **Do we face an apocalypse?**

Language is a fundamental aspect of what makes us human and of human diversity. Technology can already help us to translate languages and that can be useful in connecting people, but we should be wary of where that technology is heading.

Humans could end up being nothing more than living hosts for artificial intelligence and that certainly isn't an appealing thought.

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