

What Inspired Me to Write My Book?

Guest post by Vyvyan Evans @archaeolibrarian (May 20th 2023)

The Babel Apocalypse was conceived as a warning, given the advent of smart AI and neuro-prosthetic technology, that, in the near future might render language learning obsolete—language is the hallmark of what it means to be human. Hence, when we lose language, we all lose. The Babel Apocalypse presents an apocalyptic event, in the near future, in which when language is no longer learned but streamed to neural implants, making human communication entirely dependent on big tech corporations.

The mouthpiece for the warning, in the novel, comes in the form of Professor Ebba Black, the last native speaker of language in the automated world. In her words: “They who control language control everything.” And within a landscape where entire populations have given up on language learning, for reasons of convenience, and hence must lease it back for monthly streaming subs, then these populations really are entirely dependent on big tech.

The book’s warning comes in several forms, given language streaming technology would have significant societal, ethical and civil liberty implications.

The first warning relates to the consequences for language itself. And that is, in just one generation there would no longer be any native speakers of language left—The Babel Apocalypse imagines a near future in which language is streamed from internet in space, direct to neural implants; hence, there could be no going back to how it was before.

This entails that individuals become constrained by decisions made by big tech and governments, in terms of words and lexical choice. As one example, imagine a particular state that outlaws abortion under all circumstances. Such a government might then proscribe the word “abortion” itself. Hence, say in the US, someone might stream English and not be able to describe the concept, using the word. This, in effect, also outlaws the very concept itself.

There would then be the Kafkaesque situation whereby in another English-speaking territory, where abortion remains legal, language streaming providers censor the word in one state, but not in another.

But this kind of potential for censorship of thought, by permanently cancelling words, might also lead to a situation where autocratic regimes can abuse the technology for their own ends. The concerns are perhaps obvious, and even worse than imagined in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Thought itself can be controlled at a stroke, for entire populations, by limiting freedom of expression in language.

In terms of population registration, this would become a de facto consequence of language streaming technology. A language chip would be assigned a unique serial number, encoded in metadata every few seconds as the individual's language chip connects and communicates with the language streaming servers (via the ear implant transceiver). This means that every individual is instantly identifiable 24/7, by virtue of being linked to internet-in-space language servers. What this means, in practical terms, is that the concept of privacy is gone forever. Everyone's location, whom they interact with, is identifiable; and with permanent records stored on file, this ensures that everyone's lives are being recorded in real time, providing a 'forever record' of where they have ever been.

While such technology would inevitably reduce crime, it would come at a huge cost in terms of civil liberties. And it obviously means that overreach by the state is a significant danger, given how easy it would be for governments to spy on all its citizens all the time.

And of course, technology that makes most people in the world wholly dependent on big tech is at risk of exactly the global disaster predicted in *The Babel Apocalypse*. A global language outage, in such a future, should be viewed very much as a warning, and certainly not a roadmap for overreach by big tech and a big state.