Guest blog post by Vyvyan Evans: May 1 2023 at Westveil Publishing

Topic: The future of language: neural implants

The Babel Apocalypse describes a near-future in which language is no longer learned, it's streamed to neural implants in our heads from Wi-Fi in space. The premise is based on the current research trajectory of neural implants.

Elon Musk has said that neural implants will make language learning obsolete. Hence, The Babel Apocalypse, basically poses the question: What would be lost if languages are treated as simply data?

And this is the answer: In a future era of language-as-commodity, it is inevitable that whether a language lives or dies would be based on economics. In other words, those languages with little demand on streaming services would cease to exist.

As language would be stored entirely on servers, language would, in effect, be controlled by the big tech companies that lease it back to human populations that have undergone language chipping.

The Babel Apocalypse imagines a system where language is controlled by a body based in California, called Unilanguage. This is modelled on the very system in place for vetting new emojis, which are controlled and approved by Unicode (also based in California, controlled by just a few of the world's leading tech firms).

One consequence would be that as languages fall out of demand, there would be little incentive for big tech firms to continue to store them, tying up valuable server space. And as populations undergo language chipping, native speakers would cease to exist. Hence, lesser-used languages would simply die out—a consequence of lack of demand, which is simple economics at work. If there is no demand, it doesn't pay. Hence, providers stop offering it.

The Babel Apocalypse imagines a future in which there are just 250 surviving languages (compared to around 7,000 today).

National governments would, inevitably, try to preserve cultural unity, while ensuring subscriptions are affordable for the poorest citizens. Hence, The Babel Apocalypse posits a situation in which (most) states require all public security systems (referred to as VirDas—short for Virtual Digital Assistants) to run on a single state language. For context, VirDas are the mechanisms for processing voice commands, and hence the main security portals for accessing everything from grocery stores to offices, from vehicles to homes.

As an example, the national state language in France, on which all public VirDas would run, would be French. In the US, it would likely be English. In practice, this would mean that in France, say, it would be sufficient to only need to pay for a single language streaming package. And to gain entry to a supermarket, for instance, the language user would identify at the store entrance, using voice commands, by

speaking into the VirDa. Incidentally, this technology would also mean that stores and supermarkets are fully automated (no need for human clerks or cashiers). Label sensor fusion tech, already being trialed, would mean that a shopper's groceries can be located with each individual shopper, who would use their voice command authorization to pay for their purchase at self-checkout, prior to being "allowed" to leave the store.

Of course, there are multiple consequences of all this for language. Regional accents and dialects, being non-standard, would require more expensive streaming subscriptions—this entails that regional accents would become status symbols. The working classes would be, in effect, priced out of their own local language varieties.

The range and variety of human language would be erased at a stroke. This, self-evidently, has implications for identity, ethnicity, and so on. It also has consequences for who controls language, and how new words are coined, or come to fall out of use. These would become decisions for big tech and government, not individual speakers of languages.

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