

**THE FUTURE OF LANGUAGE:
HOW TECHNOLOGY, POLITICS AND UTOPIANISM ARE
TRANSFORMING THE WAY WE COMMUNICATE¹**

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ABSTRAK

Tulisan ini merupakan ulasan buku yang mengacu pada referensi tunggal, ditulis oleh Philip Seargeant dengan judul '*the future of language: how technology, politics and utopianism are transforming the way we communicate*'. Buku ini menarik, karena, sebagai pembaca, kita diajak pergi pada sejarah masa lalu terkait evolusi bahasa, dan juga mengantarkan kita untuk melihat bagaimana komunikasi manusia masa kini dan akan datang berubah karena pengaruh teknologi, politik dan utopianisme. Secara spesifik, Philip Seargeant mengajukan hipotesis tentang masa depan bahasa dan komunikasi manusia di era teknologi, perubahan sosial, dan pengaruh politik. Buku ini juga menyoroti peran budaya dan identitas bahasa, debat seputar dominasi bahasa global, serta tantangan seperti "cyborg speech" atau manusia yang separuh mesin, dan potensi komunikasi dengan makhluk luar angkasa. Ia menekankan pentingnya memahami secara proaktif dan mempertimbangkan secara etis dalam menghadapi evolusi bahasa di era digital, serta menyerukan perlindungan terhadap keragaman bahasa dan kebebasan berkomunikasi.

Kata kunci: masa depan bahasa, politik, utopia,

ABSTRACT

This writing refers to a single reference written by Philip Seargeant titled 'The Future of Language: How Technology, Politics, and Utopianism Are Transforming the Way We Communicate.' As a reader, the book is fascinating as it takes us through the history of language evolution and leads us to see how present and future human communication is changing due to the influence of technology, politics, and utopianism. Specifically, the book also explores the future of human language and communication amidst technological advancements, societal changes, and political influences. It examines language's cultural and identity roles, debates over global language dominance, and challenges like cyborg speech or human machine and potential extraterrestrial communication. Seargeant emphasizes on the understanding and ethical considerations in navigating language's evolution amid digital transformations, urging safeguards for linguistic diversity and communicative freedoms.

¹ *The Future of Language: How Technology, Politics and Utopianism Are Transforming the Way We Communicate*, by Philip Seargeant, first published in Great Britain 2024, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, ISBN: HB: 978-1-3502-7885-1. Book Review

Key Words: *the future of language; politics; utopianism*

INTRODUCTION

This writing begins by stating the classical definition of language that it's a system of communication and social phenomenon (Raymond, 2010). Furthermore it's also a natural and mental phenomenon (Coulmas, 2017). These mean that language serves as the foundation of human interaction, functioning as the primary tool for conveying ideas, values, and culture from one generation to the next. However, with advancements in technology, shifts in politics, and evolving utopian ideals, the way we communicate is undergoing significant transformation. This transformation not only affects communication styles and mediums but also redefines the very essence of language itself. This also affects the teaching of language—our dissemination theme today, and many aspects of language use (Chapelle, 2003).

The key point of this issue is that technology is an unreliable activity which is absolutely undenied. The technology of the future will be transforming the way we communicate and to whom we speak more advanced than today. Graddol (1997) in *'the future of English'* compared the role of technology: in the past and in the future, he said that technological change transforms the space in which we work and live. Shortly, everything is changing. technology is constant: including the language. This idea has been popular since Heraclitus within his memorable dictum *'life is flux'* (Mark, 2020).

In the digital era , it is the technology that has expanded our ability to communicate globally, quickly, and efficiently. Social media platforms, instant messaging apps, and automated translation tools are changing how we interact, enabling the exchange of ideas and information without geographic boundaries. Yet, conversely, technology also raises issues of data security, privacy, and information manipulation that impact trust in communication.

Within this context, this writing explores the impact of technology, politics, and utopian visions on the evolution of language by reviewing the single book written by Seargeant, published 2024. Specifically, those impacts will shape the transformation of our current and future language dynamics.

The book is divided into ten topics of discussion, with each of them focusing on a different tone. All are written in English as follows: *After the fall, Change is the only constant, The three-cornered world, An imaginary guide to the future, Inventing language, Cyborg speech, Is anybody out there, The decay of lying, They who control the past control the future, Future-proofing the world.*

METHOD

This writing refers to a single reference written by Philip Seargeant titled 'The Future of Language: How Technology, Politics, and Utopianism Are Transforming the Way We Communicate.' As a reader, the book is fascinating as it takes us through the history of language evolution and leads us to see how present and future human communication is changing due to the influence of technology, politics, and utopianism. Specifically, the book also explores the

future of human language and communication amidst technological advancements, societal changes, and political influences. It examines language's cultural and identity roles, debates over global language dominance, and challenges like cyborg speech or human machine and potential extraterrestrial communication. Seargeant emphasizes on the understanding and ethical considerations in navigating language's evolution amid digital transformations, urging safeguards for linguistic diversity and communicative freedoms.

This writing aims to review ten main topics regarding the future of language influenced by significant factors such as technology and politics. it is to guide people to gain a better understanding of how humans communicate in real-life and social media contexts amidst the abundance of technology and the tumult of global politics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the Fall

The first sub-topic of the book discusses the general backstory of the predictions for the future of human language and communication. Philip Seargeant, the book's writer, introduces the purpose of this book as to be aware of the impact of future language development upon society. One of the drivers of the future changes is technology. The writer utilizes various instruments to predict what the future of language will be like, mainly modern problems; capitalistic communication technology, the misuse of AI, the declining use of language in society, and political control over communicative media. The centrality of language in society makes languages not immune to changes, as the nature of society is to change over time.

In order to formulate the upcoming future of language, the writer mentions the importance of understanding the human language pattern in the present, also the past. Philip Seargent also mentions music as a universal language. Referencing Jean-Francois Sudre, generating basic language structure from basic musical elements to create a new universal language. The story of “Tower of Babel” is narrated in this chapter, acting as the origin story of his claim that a universal language that isn’t from a pre-existing language (due to political reasons) needs to be developed for global understanding.

In this era of constantly developing technology and globalization, it can be taken from this book that there are moral panics and ethical steps in the revolution of communication technology. Technology can be a double-edged sword for the future of communicative language. Technology can either connect the world closet or deteriorate the way humans communicate. Other than technological influence, the change in how humans communicate in the future will be influenced by the utopian visions of a perfect global language, the decaying eloquent language use, and language restrictions.

Change is the only constant

The main essence of the part lies in metaphorical concept named "cathedral thinking," which illustrates a long-term perspective in current actions, inspired by the construction of cathedrals like Notre-Dame. The text also encourages considering how the values invested today can be preserved and embraced by future generations. Further more, it draws parallels between physical constructions like cathedrals and modern challenges such as climate change and radioactive waste

management, highlighting the need for sustainable planning and action while considering their long-term impacts.

The text, this subheading also explores the enduring nature of language as a cultural binder, drawing parallels between linguistic evolution and the rise and fall of civilizations and monuments. It discusses the historical and ongoing changes in languages, emphasizing how many languages have become extinct and predicting further losses. Despite efforts to preserve linguistic diversity, such as through the work of the Unicode Consortium, the text underscores the challenge of maintaining and understanding ancient writing systems and languages amidst rapid technological and cultural changes.

The three-cornered world

The substance of the text seeks the paradox inherent in language: while nearly all humans possess practical proficiency in using language for communication, defining language in theoretical terms proves complex. The text distinguishes between "knowing how" — the practical ability to use language effortlessly in daily life — and "knowing that" — the analytical understanding of language's properties and functions. It argues that despite our innate proficiency in using language, grasping its theoretical underpinnings, such as its existence and essence beyond individual minds, remains elusive. This theoretical understanding is crucial for studying language systematically, contrasting with the seamless way language operates in everyday communication where its mechanics often fade into the background.

The text also discusses the crucial role of language in human life, both currently and in future speculation. Language serves not only as a tool for communication of ideas but also as an expression of identity, history, emotions, and worldviews. It profoundly influences our thinking and perception of the world, particularly in today's increasingly mediated existence.

Exploring the future of language and communication is deemed important due to its significant impact on societal structures and individual experiences. While the future remains uncertain, understanding potential changes in language usage allows us to anticipate and potentially mitigate negative consequences.

Central to the discussion is the assumption that language holds a pivotal place in human life, encapsulated in three key principles: 1) Language defines human identity, 2) Language shapes civilization and human progress, and 3) Language is a fundamental element in political dynamics, influencing power balances within societies.

An Imaginary guide to the future

The fourth chapter of the book provides an exploration of the potential language changes in the future to predict societal changes, with the implementation of various fields, such as; fictional works (as the prompt for his predictions of the future, which mainly include futuristic genres, such as science-fiction and dystopian), the language system and communication devices in those works (employed as the basic prototype of the future) and humans' understanding and comprehension of language which shape its future forms.

Sergeant also provides some examples for the reader to fully grasp his idea. The “Galactic Basic” language system in “Star Wars” is taken as an example of a universal language. A prototype of a futuristic translation device is taken from the Universal Translator in “Star Trek ” which translates by scanning brain-wave frequencies. The Xenolinguistics study of Hetapod Logograms in the movie “Arrival” shows the relationship between language and how humans perceive it. He also provides a look into the future by presenting the dystopian literature of H. G. Wells’s “The Time Machine”, which envisions the language used as a marker of social class, and George Orwell’s “Nineteen Eighty-Four”, which exhibits abuse of power by removing some words from the dictionaries. And lastly, the “Urban Dictionary ” as a form of crowd-sourced beliefs of language.

To put it in simpler words, this chapter suggests that by studying language change patterns, clues of its future form can be acquired. How it’s shaped can be determined by public beliefs about language. Examining fictional stories, mainly sci-fi and dystopian, can help people understand what future society might look like and serve as new technology prototypes that can further enhance human communication.

Inventing language

In inventing a language of the future, the book's writer takes a look at the Adamic Language, the God-given faculty for humankind, manifested by Adam in the Garden of Eden. Reassembling it is now a challenge. He believes that humans has the capability to create a new language, including for the modern human to create a language of the future. Francis Lodwick’s idea of inventing a new universal

language is mentioned as a reference, including the idea of “universal characters” for mutual international understanding, both spoken and written. But, this system isn’t entirely universal since it adopted a lot of English’s structure. “Cultural neutrality” is one of the most important factors of this new future language.

This chapter also concerns the problem with English as the global language now. First and foremost, the neutrality of English is a major issue, creating a bias, privilege, and dominance of the native speakers and their countries. Its ownership, however, is quite a debate. But that doesn’t mean global English varieties aren’t valid, since it’s a diverse entity. An accent is the biggest marker of all, followed by variety, cultural reference, and syntax. As a result of the ownership debate and variety’s identifiers, another major issue of worsening sociolinguistic inequality has arisen. A believed more “prestige” variety is more likely to be valued than the less-prestige.

To tackle the problems of today’s global language, Seargeant provides two approaches; 1. Provide standardized equal education of the “prestige” language, or 2. Alter attitudes and root systems with no bias to a certain variety. Option number two is seen to be more challenging, involving a change of collective social beliefs about the different values of different varieties. Based on these problems, the writer of the book suggests that the invention of the future language must be culturally neutral and has written universal characters as the visual representation of the spoken language, which is how the internal thought takes its physical shape.

Cyborg speech

"Cyborg Speech " is a specific word which refers to the ideas where human communication is influenced or augmented by technologies, building a fusion of natural human speech with technological devices. Specifically, this term describes how advancements in technology such as artificial intelligence, wearable devices, or other forms of technology can influence how people relate to others in terms of communication in the future.

The idea of "Cyborg Speech" explains the view that humans and technology are increasingly interdependent in the communication process. For instance, with the advent of artificial intelligence, humans may use virtual assistants or something that refers to applications to help organize information or provide instant language translation. On the other hand, wearable devices also are able to provide additional capabilities: recording conversations or providing real-time feedback during speech.

Is anybody out there?

The main discussion of this chapter would be warning our far-off future relatives about the nuclear waste and trying to talk with smart aliens in space. This phenomenon raises a big question concerningt language and how aliens might think, which could make talking hard. In the past, people like Guglielmo marconi thought we could chat with Mars using Radio waves. Today, we can message there, but talking to real aliens is still a mystery of the worlds—nodoby knows. The text also looks at how books and thinking have long wondered if smart aliens exist, which raises hard questions about language and our lives.

After raising the question, the next is about the challenge of communicating with intelligent beings from other planets when we know nothing about them except, they can understand communication. One idea raised is like creating a universal language on earth.

The decay of lying

This chapter explores the answer to whether language is deteriorating due to the changing communication environment. Seargeant views the importance of Language and Grammar through the Babel story, and the Seven Liberal Arts is rather unknown. However, the idea of it still lingers in public discourses. The still-standing anxiety about the declining education and language skills is quite exaggerated by the media, but the importance of language education is still upheld. He suggests that technological reliance sets traditional communication forms aside, resulting in language slackness.

The language itself merely changes; it never deteriorates. Seargeant shows how new communication technology and culture influence communication habits. In text messaging, proper grammar and punctuation are sidelined as they may imply coldness and passive aggression, while emojis and writing styles serve as tone indicators. The meaning shifts in they/them pronouns to be singular and gender neutral. The Seargeant perceives these phenomena simply as a change in language use and communication style over being a deterioration. On the other hand, there are concerns about how modern cultures over-simplify the language.

To answer the question, the general answer is “no”, but the language and human communicative state are essentially adaptive. On the other hand, there’s fear

of how easy access to limitless information can be a paradox of knowledge and conspiracy theories, where people can exploit the flexible nature of language, prompting manipulated truth.

They who control the past control the future

The part explores how politics could influence future language use, especially through controlling communication. Today, digital technology mediates most of our communication, allowing for surveillance and speech control. Surveillance analyzes language to predict and manipulate behavior, while censorship directly regulates speech. These practices are already widespread and may become more sophisticated with technological advancements driven by corporate interests. This raises ethical concerns concerning privacy and freedom of speech, pivotal in shaping society amid technological progress and societal pressures.

Another point of discussion is about the current issues with freedom of speech by looking at important historical events and the impact of digital culture. The year 1989 was pivotal due to events like the fall of the Berlin Wall and the global backlash against Salman Rushdie's novel. These events shaped how different countries regulate free speech today. The invention of the world wide web also played a crucial role, laying the groundwork for today's digital era and its influence on freedom of expression.

These historical events still affect global human rights protections today. Countries have varying approaches to free speech, with the US having strong legal

protections under the First Amendment. Key principles include government non-interference in speech, avoiding censorship before publication, understanding harm based on context, and acknowledging human responsibility in speech.

Futureproofing the world

The final chapter of this book tries to discuss how screens and keyboards shape modern life. In the beginning, the function of the screen was to protect, but now it reflects and distorts reality through media. The amount of screen time people spend on their devices shapes the way they think. The media they consume through the screen could either be purposeful or be the source of addiction and moral panic. The keyboard acts as what links the mind and its physical shape in the digital world. It helps people to create and show their digital existence, thus the keyboard is seen as the control panel of modern life. Together, the screen and keyboard have become more than a computer device, it's now an emblem of the digital era; a symbol of benefits and liabilities.

In preparing ourselves for the future of language and communication, Philip Seargeant provides eight principles as a guide; 1. In communicating, people use language as a tool. The tool constantly changes and develops, creating a new way to use it, 2. Prestige amongst varieties and new technologies create unequal opportunities in utilizing linguistic resources as a tool, 3. Language is shaped by the community, thus the meaning is based on historical and cultural context, 4. Above exchanging information, communication establishes and maintains relationships and also shapes sociocultural reality, 5. Language form change isn't as

consequential as changes by technology, 6. New communicative technologies shift the flow of information, 7. These new modes of communication likely alter the traditional system, and 8. It could prompt censorship to limit ideas and opinions being circulated. To survive the revolution of language and communication, society must have a clear vision of the role of language in our lives.

CONCLUSION

This book review paper focused on Philip Seargeant's (2023) *The Future of Language: How Technology, Politics and Utopianism are Transforming the Way We Communicate*. Bloomsbury Academic. Every topic provides great insight into the history and the future of the way humans build communication with others. It brings stories of the past, present-day habits, and futuristic predictions into play to create a guide of what the future of language and communication would be like. Some critiques are also given such as: how modern-day technology can result in language slackness, the ever-changing socio-political state shifting the communicative behavior and language, and the problems of today's global language.

On the other hand, the writers of this article find that one of his ideas of the ideal future of language are too far-fetched, at least for the near future. To be specific, the idea of a new universal language. The idea of it is interesting and understandable, but the establishment is hard to reach. Since language is a complex system; to create, perfect, standardize, teach, study, and finally apply it, it would take years and years to finally happen.

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