



## **Darwin and language diversity**

*Towards a global language?*

What of the future for language diversity? With increased migration, mass media and the rise of the Internet, will the global melting pot yield a recipe for language that loses some of its richness and flavour? Mark Pagel.

### **Mark Pagel:**

Well we're going to see this great melding together of languages and we're already seeing this in some ways in that there's a kind of Spanglish, and there's a kind of Franglais and there's a kind of language of the Internet in which English words are used in many, many different languages around the world. But I think what's far more interesting is that the languages are homogenising at a far, far slower rate than they might, given the Internet, given mass communication, we could expect this process of language homogenisation to happen almost overnight but it's not. And so what we see is a great resistance in languages to change from the outside, and we know that people hold their languages very, very dear to their identities. We know that many countries erect ministries to prevent words, foreign words they call them, from coming in from the outside. And it tells us that languages really are these rather discrete entities that protect themselves a little bit like a species protects itself from outside genetic influences.

### **Rissa:**

Even though globalisation isn't changing the major languages as rapidly as we might think, the fact remains that about forty languages are going extinct every year, a rate that vastly exceeds the extinction of biological species.

### **Quentin Atkinson:**

We're losing a lot of languages in the world today. Currently there are about six thousand recognised languages but over half of those are classified as endangered and that means that they're expected to disappear within a couple of generations. So that's a huge loss of language diversity and something that I think a lot of people don't appreciate. There's a lot of emphasis on the species diversity crisis, which is definitely something we should be worried about, but there's also a kind of cultural diversity crisis that also warrants attention I think.

### **Mark Pagel:**

It isn't the case that these languages are inferior languages; they just had the misfortune of being associated with people who've been squeezed out economically or socially or politically in some way. And the question really arises what do we want to do about it. Do we want to save these languages? To the speakers of these languages there's a great cultural tradition and temporal tradition and one associated with their artefacts that is associated with these languages, and so I think really we have to ask the people who speak these languages if they want to preserve them in some way.

### **Rissa:**

Providing the resources to preserve this linguistic diversity is a challenge for all who value our human cultural heritage.