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"Global English, Minimal English:

Towards better intercultural communication"

This is a Position Statement prepared by Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka for the Symposium "Global English, Minimal English: Towards better intercultural communication", to be held at Australian National University, Canberra, 2-3 July 2015. [This version: November 11, 2014]

Global English needs "Minimal English"

There may be many conferences these days, in many countries, devoted partly or wholly to the topic of "Global English". This symposium, however, is unique in linking the theme of Global English with that of Minimal English as a tool for achieving better intercultural understanding. The organisers of this symposium are linguists, as are most of the presenters, but we don't see it as a meeting of linguists talking to linguists. Rather, we see it as an occasion for interdisciplinary dialogue, and we are delighted to have among our speakers representatives of the fields of diplomacy, politics, international relations, law, education, anthropology, history and literary studies, as well as linguistics.

   As well as supporting an interdisciplinary dialogue, we see this symposium as an exercise in outreach: the global spread of English is now something that concerns millions of people, in fact, mega-millions, and it creates challenges that, we believe, cross-linguistic semantics has something useful to say about. We want to bring the experience of cross-linguistic semantics into the public arena and to discuss ways in which it can be helpful in fostering better intercultural communication. Underlying this symposium is the idea that Global English is not an unmixed blessing as far as intercultural understanding is concerned. Yes, it facilitates international and intercultural communication – but it can also create an impression that effective intercultural understanding is occurring when in fact it is not. The purpose of this symposium is to explore ways in which the use of Minimal English can improve intercultural communication and cross-linguistic understanding in the era of Global English.

What is Minimal English?

Minimal English is an English version of the common core of all (or nearly all) languages which has come to light through a decades-long program of cross-linguistic and intra-linguistic investigations undertaken in the NSM approach to language and culture. It is a version of English cut to the bone, so that the only words and constructions left are those that match in meaning words and constructions in most, if not all, other languages. For example, there are no words like 'right' and 'wrong' in Minimal English (words which have no semantic equivalents in most languages of the world), but the words 'good' and 'bad', which do have semantic equivalents in other languages, are part of the lexicon of Minimal English (cf. Goddard and Wierzbicka 1994, 2002, 2004, 2014; Goddard 2008, 2011; Wierzbicka 1996, 2006, 2014; Gladkova 2010; Levisen 2012; Peeters 2006; Wong 2014; Ye, In press; Yoon 2006; Goddard and Ye, 2014).

Minimal English, in its 'pure' or "basic" form, includes not much more than a hundred words: fewer than seventy semantic primes, which can be regarded as "hardwired" in the human mind (such as 'someone' and 'something', 'do' and 'happen', and 'good' and 'bad'), and, on present estimates, no more than thirty universal semantic molecules (such as 'man', 'woman', and 'child', 'mother' and 'father', 'hands', 'water', and 'fire'). All these words have been located through extensive cross-linguistic investigations.

For some purposes, it may be useful to use extended or augmented versions of Minimal English. As well as the "basic" form, it may be useful to recognise an "intermediate" version augmented with another hundred or so words, which are borrowings from (Global) English and which have become important international words. Such "intermediate" words may include, for example, *country*, *money*, *number*, *paper*, *school*, *The Earth*, and *God*. The question of what the optimal number of such "intermediate words" is remains to be fully explored and will no doubt be discussed at the Symposium. In any case, it would be important to keep track of them and to have them explained, as necessary, through words of the basic version of Minimal English.

What Minimal English is not

The notion of Minimal English is contrastive. It presupposes a distinction between several forms of English: Global English, which is anchored in Anglo English, as opposed to Minimal English. The first has been shaped by the history and culture of one particular part of the world, and still bears the imprints its origins. The second is derived from the first, but being radically reduced, it can match the shared core of all

languages. It has been built not only by systematic reduction of English, but also by decades of empirical cross-linguistic investigations, aimed at identifying that common core.

Accordingly, Minimal English is not another simplified version of English analogous to Ogden's 1930 "Basic English" or Jean-Paul Nerrière's "Globish" (2004), both pruned for practical purposes but not reduced to the bare essentials. Building a mini-language that matches the common denominator of all languages is an entirely different undertaking. Essentially, Minimal English is the English version of "Basic Human," with its minimal vocabulary including the full repertoire of shared human concepts. Neither Ogden nor Nerrière aimed at identifying a minimal set of words with counterparts in many (let alone all) languages, and in fact they were not looking at English from a cross-linguistic perspective at all.

Given such a skeletal lexicon, Minimal English cannot of course be an all-purpose practical global means of communication. It can be, however, a global minimal lingua franca for the elucidation of ideas and explanation of meanings—and not only in scholarship but also in international relations, politics, business, law, ethics, education, and indeed in any context where it is important to explain precisely what one means.

In his introduction to a volume entitled *Universals of Human Thought,* philosopher Ernest Gellner (1981) wrote: "Unconvertible currencies are not suitable for trade." A key characteristic of Minimal English is that (unlike Ogden's Basic English or any other reduced form of English) it is fully convertible.

There is no escape from using a metalanguage

Opponents of Minimal English as an auxiliary lingua franca in the humanities and in sciences say some times, "I don't believe in a metalanguage". Like Molière's Mr Jourdain, who didn't know that he was speaking prose all his life, they don't realize that they themselves are using a metalanguage in all their English-language publications and conference presentations. The metalanguage they use is Global English anchored in Anglo English. The organisers of this symposium are not trying to oppose Global English. Rather, they are suggesting that at times – particularly in the context of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural education – some elements of Global English need to be deconstructed through, or even replaced with, some elements of Minimal English.

To illustrate, some key concepts of Anglo English which are now spreading with Global English, are *mind*, *communication* and *relations*. These concepts are usually taken

for granted by speakers of English, even though they do not have their equivalents outside the Anglosphere. When these concepts press themselves, through the internet, travel, and the study of English, upon, say, speakers of Russian, they compete with key Russian concepts such as *dusha, obshchenie* and *otnoshenija*. For both mutual understanding and self-understanding of people from these different conceptual worlds, all these concepts – the Russian and the English ones – need to be comprehended through their shared conceptual ingredients, such as KNOW, THINK, FEEL, SAY, DO WITH, and FEEL TOWARDS (in Russian, ZNAT', DUMAT', CHUVSTVOVAT', SKAZAT', DELAT' (CHTO-TO) S (KEM-TO), CHUVSTVOVAT' (CHTO-TO) K (KOMU-TO).

"Nothing is neutral, there are no neutral words ..."

There is a widespread view among Western intellectuals, including many writers in the humanities, that "nothing is neutral", that every word we use is deeply touched by culture. Many adherents of this view dismiss the very idea of empirically-evidenced conceptual universals, such as, for example, GOOD and BAD, KNOW and THINK, DO and HAPPEN, or SOMEONE and SOMETHING – and go on to rely in their own thinking and writing, instead, on English concepts dripping with history and culture, such as 'right' and 'wrong', 'mind', 'agency', 'reality', and 'cooperation' (cf. Wierzbicka 2006, 2014; Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014).

By contrasting Global English with Minimal English, the organisers of this symposium are not aiming at attaining some theoretical conceptual purity but at putting into practical use empirical findings about concepts that, evidence suggests, recur in a verifiable lexical form, in languages from all the continents of our planet. They aim at human understanding that can be shared globally, through simple words of intelligible, ordinary English. Needless to say, Minimal English has no privileged status as a conceptual mini-language of human understanding. From a conceptual point of view, Minimal Spanish, Minimal Chinese, or Minimal Arabic would of course do just as well. Whether we like it or not, however, from a practical point of view, Minimal English can be a particularly useful tool in the 21st century's globalising world.

Language diversity and Minimal English

In linguistics and anthropology, there is at the moment a great deal of emphasis on the diversity of languages. We are deeply in sympathy with this emphasis and we are particularly interested in conceptual diversity. We also share the distrust of false

language universals. Paradoxically, however, languages very different from English are often described using a conceptual language, a theoretical vocabulary, that is tied to, and dependent on, Anglo English (cf. Wierzbicka 2012). In this mode of description, culture-specific English words (whether 'ordinary' or technical) are largely taken for granted, while the meanings shared by speakers of other languages are re-formulated in terms of English words that embed English-specific concepts and perspectives. As a result, the conceptual diversity of the world's languages is underestimated – "glossed over" with English words. In short, as we see it, studies into language diversity needs to seriously confront the challenges of Anglocentrism, including the unintentional Anglocentrism that is often implicit our own practices and discourses.

The organisers of this symposium are not, of course, proposing that a ban should be placed on all Anglo English concepts in scholarship and in education. What they do propose is that – in some contexts – it would be useful to problematise and de-naturalise such English concepts, and to try to think "outside English". When this needs to be done, Minimal English is a valuable tool.

It can also be expected that "small cultures" will find ways to use Minimal English for purposes of their own, and equally that there will be other applications that we are not yet able to foresee.

The aims of this symposium

This symposium aims at exploring the space between Anglo English and Minimal English, in the era of Global English. It aims at better recognising and engaging with the conceptual diversity of the languages of the world, highlighting the dangers of conceptual Anglocentrism associated with the global spread of English, and at exploring the potential of Minimal English as a conceptual lingua franca and as a tool for improved intercultural communication.

As we see it, the use of this minimal version of English can help us to build bridges between different conceptual worlds linked with the world's different languages, using English words and sentences but with a minimum of conceptual "spin" from Anglo history and culture. Or such is the guiding idea which we hope can provide a background, if not a common ground, for the discussions and conversations of this symposium.

WHAT IS MINIMAL ENGLISH
(AND HOW TO USE IT)

A Briefing Paper for the "Global English, Minimal English" Symposium (July 2015, ANU, Canberra). By Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka. [17 March 2015]

In this follow-up article to our Position Statement for the "Global English, Minimal English" Symposium, we set aside the "why question" (dealt with in the earlier paper) and concentrate on what Minimal English is and on how to use it.

§1. What is Minimal English?

Minimal English is an application and extension of several decades of research by linguists in the NSM (Natural Semantic Metalanguage) approach to meaning and language. The NSM approach is well known for its claim to have discovered the fundamental meaning elements of all languages, known as semantic primes, and for producing a large body of studies into how meanings are expressed differently through the words and grammars of different languages (see Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014a, and references therein). It is also (so far) the only contemporary approach to linguistics that takes an explicit stand against Anglocentrism (cf. e.g. Wierzbicka 2014). But although based on extensive research by linguists working in the NSM approach, Minimal English is not NSM. It is different in its purpose, in its composition, and in its "attitude" or spirit.

Purpose. Minimal English is intended for use by non-specialists, and for a wide and open-ended range of functions. It is the result of taking NSM research "out of the lab", so to speak, and into the wider world (not as the sole language of communication, but as an auxiliary or supplementary language).

Minimal English is a tool that can help people put their thoughts into words in a way that makes it easier to discuss them across a language barrier. (Actually, a better metaphor is that Minimal English offers a way of going "under" a language barrier.) Minimal English also helps one to think more clearly. With fewer words to choose from, one is forced to focus on the essential things that one wants to say, without getting distracted by all the available lexical options or being tempted into vague and woolly phrasing. [Note 1]

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1 In a Minimal English text, every word matters, every word counts. This helps counter the vagueness that often comes with an "inflated style", in which, as George Orwell (1946) once put

Composition. In principle, the idea behind Minimal English is simple: to draw on existing linguistic research so as to speak in universal, near-universal or widely-known words (and conversely, to steer clear of known trouble words), using simple grammatical patterns that are known to be easily transposable into other languages (and conversely, to steer clear of known zones of grammatical trouble).

This might sound like the familiar advice to "Use plain language", and in a sense it is – but what is impressionistically "plain" in English isn't necessarily either simple or universal. For example, the words *wrong*, *fair*, *friendly*, and *fact* sound pretty plain and simple to most English speakers, but they lack equivalents in very many languages. Likewise, in the area of grammar, a sentence like *We have to do something about it* sounds like it uses a very simple sentence pattern, but there are many languages of the world into which it cannot be rendered without substantial re-wording or grammatical re-arrangement. Hence the value of the Minimal English project: it provides informed guidelines and guidance, based on linguistic research, about how to say important things in a clear and translatable way.

Briefly (because we are coming back to this in section 3), the starting vocabulary of Minimal English consists of semantic primes and some associated grammatical words, supplemented by additional words of three kinds: (i) words with special importance as semantic building blocks in other concepts, either in all languages, e.g. *water, eyes, sky*, or in major world languages, e.g. *book, sea, buy,* (ii) other useful words that are known to be more-or-less cross-translatable, e.g. *moon, hunger/hungry, dead*, (iii) some words that may be seen as essential in modern and/or international discourse, e.g. *computer, phone, vote*. If any of them are unfamiliar in a given context, they may have to be explained, sufficiently for the purpose at hand, as they are introduced into the discourse. Altogether, we are looking at a Minimal English lexicon of about 400 words, plus guidelines for how it can be expanded to meet the needs of particular situations.

Spirit. We would like to think that there will soon be a "movement" for Minimal English – and we would like to think that the spirit behind this movement will be practical, open to adaptation, improvisation. To thrive and serve its purpose, Minimal English cannot be an exercise in perfectionism or purism, and neither should it be either a target or a vehicle for academic point scoring. Minimal English is a project, a process, to help improve intercultural communication and clarity of thought.

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it: "A mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outline and covering up all the details".

§2 Minimal English: three brief examples

What does it look like in practice? The following examples were composed directly into Minimal English, i.e. they are not translations or explications of other words or texts.

2.1 Example 1: Global ethics

Wierzbicka (forthcoming-a) proposes a "Charter of Global Ethics" composed in Minimal English. Her point is that international discourse about values and ethics is best carried out in terms that are cross-translatable and not "invested" from the beginning with a viewpoint which is tied to any particular language. To illustrate only from the negative side of the lexicon, this means avoiding both sophisticated English words like *violence*, *racism*, and *prejudice*, and plain English words like *murder*, *rape* and *hatred* [Note 2]. We have extracted two of Wierzbicka's 25 proposed principles, from the section titled "Bad ways of thinking about people".

[A1]   (Charter, item 5)
>   It is very bad if people think like this about some people:
>   "People of this kind are not like other people, they are below other people".

[A2]   (Charter, item 8)
>   It is very bad if people think like this about people of one kind:
>   "People of this kind are bad people".

   [A1] and [A2] use only semantic primes. Other items in the proposed Charter use some Minimal English words which are not semantic primes, such as *kill* ('it is very bad if people want to kill other people') and *men*, *women* and *children*. To show a more complex "ethical" text, we finish this section with the last of Wierzbicka's proposed principles, labelled here [A3]. Note the expression *the Earth*, a pivotal term for global consciousness.

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2 For semantic explications of some key English terms in the discourse of anti-discrimination, such as *dehumanisation*, see Stollznow (2008). For an explication of *violence*, see Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014a: 244).

[A3]   (Charter item 25)
    It is good if people think like this about the Earth:
        "There are many people on Earth, they live in many places on Earth.
         If many people do some things in places where they live,
             something very bad can happen to the Earth.
        Because of this, I don't want to do some things in the place where I live."

2.2 Example 2: "Minimal English"

How can our main propositions about "Minimal English" be captured in Minimal English itself? [B1] focuses on the idea of easy intelligibility and [B2] on the idea that whatever is said in Minimal English can be equally well said in non-English words.

[B1]   Minimal English – Part 1
    There are two kinds of English words.
    Words of one kind are like this:
        if someone says something with these English words, many people
            in many places on Earth can know well what this someone wants to say.
    There are not many words of this kind.
    When someone says something with English words of this kind,
        this someone is saying it in "Minimal English".

[B2]   Minimal English – Part 2
    When someone says something in Minimal English,
        people in many places on Earth can know well what this someone wants to say.
    At the same time, people in these places can say the same thing with other words,
        not English words.

    We are not sure that these mini-texts are fully optimal, but we hope that they clear. Note that we are taking the expression 'English words' for granted for present purposes.

2.3 Example 3: Galileo's telescope

The following is an extract from a lengthy Minimal English text telling how Western ideas about the "Universe" have developed over the centuries from Ptolemy, Copernicus, Galileo and into modern times (Wierzbicka forthcoming-b). Much of the material it covers is found in school textbooks as part of the canonical narrative of Western science. The extract in [C1] describes the importance of the telescope.

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[C1]   Galileo's telescope – Part 1

> Galileo looked at the stars not like other people looked at them before.
>
> Because of this, he could see them well, not like people could see them before.
>
> When he was looking at them, he was holding something of one kind near his eyes.
>
> When someone holds something of this kind near the eyes,
>
>   this someone can look at some places very far from the place where this someone is.
>
> A thing of this kind is called "a telescope."
>
> When Galileo looked at the sky at night like this, he could see some places very far
>
>   from the Earth well.

This passage uses no less than seven non-primitive Minimal English words: *stars*, *look at*, *hold*, *eyes*, *be called*, *sky* and *night*. Elsewhere in the same text, other non-primitive words like *the Sun*, *the Earth* and *Moon* are used, as one would expect.

Two other notable points about [C1] are as follows. First, the wording in line 2 is a way of avoiding the untranslatable "comparative construction". It would have been easy to say that, using his telescope, Galileo could see the stars *better than* other people before him, but some languages don't have "comparative" words like *better* (*bigger*, *faster*, etc.) Second, in line 8 a "new" word, i.e. *telescope*, is introduced by using the important Minimal English expression *is called*. Earlier, the word *planets* was introduced in a similar fashion, explained (partly) as stars that appear to change their positions in the sky relative to the other stars.

Shortly after extract [C1] in the "Universe" text, the following passage occurs, explaining the significance and importance of Galileo's new knowledge.

[C2]   Galileo's telescope – Part 2

> (Because of this) Galileo could know ... some things about the Moon well, he could know some
>
>   things about the "planets" well. At the same time he could know some things about the Sun well.
>
> Because of this he could know well that it was like Copernicus said:
>
>   the Sun does not turn around the Earth, the Earth turns around the Sun.
>
> He knew that it was true.

By using expressions like *because of this*, *know*, *know well* and *true*, text [C2] gets by without resorting to untranslatable English words such as *fact*, *evidence* or *proof*.

§3 The lexicon of Minimal English

This section outlines the vocabulary of Minimal English in its extended or augmented form, as we see it at the present time. At about 400, the total number of words is a bit larger than we forecast in our Position Paper of November last year.

3.1 Semantic primes

First things first, as the saying goes, and when it comes to simple cross-translatable words, this means starting with the most basic meanings of all: semantic primes. They are listed in Table 1 below. For people who are seeing this list for the first time, it may be helpful to make a few observations. First, it includes words from all broad "departments" of the lexicon: substantives (noun-like words and pronouns, including indefinites like *someone* and *something*), demonstrative *this* and some other specifiers, some quantifying and descriptive words, words from the areas of time and place, "logical" words like *if*, *can*, *because*, and *maybe*, and a fairly rich collection of verb-like words. The latter includes both experiential/subjective words (*want*, *don't want*, *think*, *know*, *feel*, *see*, *hear*), social (*say*), and objective (*happen*, *do*, move), as well as *live* and *die* and various "stative" verbs: *be (somewhere)* [locational 'be'], *be (someone/something)* [specificational 'be'], and *there is* [existence]. On the other hand, the stock of semantic primes does not include many "concrete" nouns (actually, *body* is the only one) or verbs for physical activities or processes, and there are no words like 'and', 'but' or 'or' either.

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Table 1: Semantic primes (English versions) grouped into 12 categories

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1	I~me, you, someone, something~thing, people, body, kind, part
2	this, the same, other~else
3	one, two, much~many, little~few, some, all
4	good, bad, big, small
5	think, know, want, don't want, feel, see, hear
6	say, words, true
7	do, happen, move
8	be (somewhere), there is, be (someone/something), (be) mine
9	live, die
10	when~time, now, before, after, a long time, a short time, for some time, moment
11	where~place, here, above, below, far, near, side, inside, touch
12	not, maybe, can, because, if, very, more, like

There are 65 semantic primes, but because some of them occur in variant forms (allolexes) or are expressed in English phrasal expressions (such as *a long time* and *don't want*), the total number of words is greater than this. The primes also bring with them various grammatical words (aka function words) associated with their combinatorial properties. For example:

> *in,* e.g. *in this place, in the same place; in one moment*
> *at,* e.g. *at this time, at the same time; at this moment*
> *of,* e.g. *one of these people; one part of this thing; something of one kind*
> *with,* e.g. *do something with someone; live with someone; say something with words*
> *about,* e.g. *know about something; say something about someone*
> *that* (complementiser), e.g. *I didn't know that this can happen*
> to (complementiser), e.g. *I want you to do something*
> *it* (dummy subject), e.g. *it is good if …, it is bad if …*

All these are features of Minimal <u>English</u>, and do not, of course, map one-to-one to the Minimal versions of other languages. In Minimal Finnish only three of the grammatical functions listed above would be marked by separate words. All the others are expressed using case suffixes (Vanhatalo, Tissari, and Idström 2014).

Variant forms (allolexes) of semantic primes and portmanteau expressions are also part of the core vocabulary of Minimal English. Some appear in Table 1, indicated with ~ (e.g. the word *else* is an English variant of *other*). In addition, there are the following:

> *a lot* (a variant of *much~many*)
> *well* (an adverbial variant of *good*)
> *as, such, way* (variants of *like*, or portmanteau of *like* and *this*)
> *during* (variant of 'for …' about time periods)
> *it* for 'this thing'
> *these* (variant of *this*, used with a plural noun)
> *he* and/or *she* for 'this someone'; *they* or *them* for 'these people' or 'these things'
> *both, every* (portmanteau words based on 'all')
> *nothing, no-one, nowhere, anyone, anything, anywhere*
> *sometimes, often, always, never*
> *who, where, when, how, why* (not as questions, but in contexts like *I don't know who,*
>   *where, when,* etc.)

Most of the semantic primes are grammatically quite versatile. *Say* and *do*, for example, can be used in constructions like the following, which, as far as we know, have equivalents in all languages:

say something (good/bad) about something
say something to someone
says some words to someone

do something to something
do something good for someone, do something bad to someone
do some things with some other people

It is not the case, however, that one can freely use a semantic prime in any way that English grammar allows. For example, the semantic prime *do* <u>cannot</u> be grammatically extended with the word *about*, e.g. in a sentence like *I want to do something about it*. This is a perfectly normal way of speaking in full, ordinary English but it does not have equivalents in other languages so it not be used in Minimal English. Two other non-universal constructions that need to be avoided in Minimal English are what grammarians call indirect speech (the "say that ..." construction) and the comparable "think that ..." construction. To ensure good translatability, it is better to use constructions such as the following:

He/she said something like this: " X Y Z"
I think about it like this: " X Y Z"

Learning to use the basic words and grammatical patterns of Minimal English therefore requires a certain amount of time and practice. There is a pressing need for pedagogical materials about Minimal English. [Note 3]

3.2 Adding universal and widespread "semantic molecules" to Minimal English

Despite the expressive power of semantic primes, more words are needed in Minimal English. The question is: How to chose them? Fortunately, NSM research has identified about 70 words whose meanings, though semantically complex, appear to be universal or near-universal. [Note 4] The words listed in Table 2 are termed "semantic molecules" because they play an important role alongside semantic primes, as building blocks in the composition of other, yet more complex concepts.

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[3] Existing resources include the textbook *Semantic Analysis* (Goddard 2011), the list of '150 Canonical Sentences for Identifying Semantic Primes and the Core Lexicogrammar of any Language' and the 'Chart of NSM Semantic Primes' (the list and chart are available at the NSM homepage [short URL: bit.ly/Lz6QbN]). These resources are, however, about NSM rather than Minimal English, and they are designed mainly for linguists and linguistics students.
[4] The term "universal or near-universal", as we use it, amounts to the claim that an identical or nearly identical meaning is found in all or nearly all languages.

Table 2: Universal or near-universal semantic molecules

Body-parts	hands, mouth, eyes, head, ears, nose, face, legs, teeth, fingers, fingernails, breasts, skin, blood tail, wings, fur, feathers
Biosocial	be born children, men, women, mother, father, wife, husband
Physical	a thing long, round, flat, hard, soft, straight, sharp, smooth, heavy, sweet be on something, top, bottom, middle, front, back, around
Environmental	sun, sky, ground, fire, water, day, night , light
Biological	a creature bird, fish, tree grow (in the ground), egg
Everyday activities	eat, drink, sleep, sit, lie
Other actions/activities	hold, make, kill, play, laugh, sing, dance
"Naming"	be called
Manner	quickly, slowly

We would also like to nominate the 100 or so words in Table 3 for inclusion in the Minimal English lexicon. These appear to be semantic molecules that are fairly widespread across the languages of the world, though nowhere near universal. Some of them, certainly, are culture-specific and/or belong to the language of modernity. Nevertheless, because their meanings form part of many other concepts (i.e. because they or their near-equivalents are semantic molecules in many languages), they are "high value" vocabulary items for Minimal English.

Table 3: Semantic molecules found in many languages

Environmental	rain, wind, sea, sand, hot, cold
Biological	dog, cat, horse, sheep, cow, pig, mouse, (camel, buffalo, seal, etc.) seeds, grass
Times	year, day, month, week, clock
Social places	house, building, room school, hospital, church, bank
Places where people live	the Earth, country, city, village
Professions	doctor, nurse, teacher, soldier
Food and household	sour, salt, sugar, bread, meat, flour, milk, oil, soup wheat, rice, corn, potatoes (yams, cassava, plantain, etc.) table, bed

Materials	paper, iron, metal, glass, leather, wool, china, cloth, thread tobacco, alcohol (kava, etc.)
Transport and technology	car, plane, boat, train, road, wheel wire, engine, machine, electricity, computer
Markings	line, dot
Literacy and media	read, write, book
Abstract categories	number, colour, music
Other	game, ball
Other	money, buy
Other	God

3.4 Other useful words for Minimal English

Some words are not semantic molecules but are nonetheless likely to be extremely useful for talking about things that matter to people all around the world. Provided such words are approximately translatable, and don't smuggle in too much Anglo and/or Euro cultural bias (see next section), we see no harm in including them in Minimal English. A selection is given in Table 4 below. These words vary a lot in relation to how widespread they are in the world's languages. Some of them, like *stars* and *moon*, *east* and *west*, and (perhaps) *breathe* and *dead*, are likely to be very widespread. Many others, like *plastic*, *government*, and *photo*, if they are present in a given language, are likely to be loans or other recently introduced words. The same applies even more forcefully to *science* and *the law.* Nevertheless, a case can be made that these are useful words for Minimal English if it is to be a practical aide to intercultural communication here and now, in the context of Global English.

Table 4: Useful words for Minimal English (not semantic molecules)

Body	brain, heart breathe, hunger/hungry, dead
Environmental	snow, ice, air; river, mountains, desert, island, jungle/forest moon, stars flood, storm, drought, earthquake east, west, north, south
Biological	mosquitoes, flies, snake
Times	hour, second
"Country"	government, capital, border, flag, passport, vote
"Fields"	science, the law, health, education, sport
"Tools"	knife, key, gun, bomb, medicines
"Materials"	gold, rubber, plastic oil, coal, petrol
Technology and transport	pipe, telephone, television, radio, phone bicycle
Literacy and media	photo, newspaper, film

Finally in this section, we would like to say that in general it is not necessarily problematical to introduce into local versions of Minimal English, various locally important words for natural kinds and "concrete" things. For example, in the Pacific it would not necessarily create any problems to add the word 'kava', in the Arctic it would not create problems to add the word 'seal'. It is important, however, to be wary of abstract words. As John Locke (1690) already understood a long time ago, if we "exactly compare different languages, we shall find that though they have words which in translations and dictionaries are supposed to answer one another, yet there is scarce one of ten amongst the names of complex ideas that stands for the same precise idea, which the word does that in dictionaries it is rendered by". And particularly so in the case of "abstract and compounded ideas, such as are the greatest part of those which make up moral discourses". In the final section, we expand briefly on this point.

§4 The many "untranslatables" of Global English

It is helpful to think of Global English as carrying two different loads of cultural baggage, embodied in two overlapping sets of "untranslatables" (cf. Cassin 2014). On the one hand, there are key words of Anglo culture, such as *right* and *wrong*, *fairness*, and *evidence*, which lack precise equivalents even in most European languages. On the other hand, there are key words of the larger European culture, present also in English, such as *system*, *structure*, *rational*, *morality*, and *art*.

Both Anglo culture and the broader European culture have stamped their imprint on Global English, and as a result much of Global English is untranslatable into the thought patterns of speakers of most non-western languages.

In previous works, most recently Wierzbicka (2014), whose subtitle is *The hazards of English as a default language*, the focus has been on the Anglo English lexicon. The historical legacy of the Anglo culture is especially important due to the fact that many influential Anglophone writers and thinkers have a huge blindspot when it comes to "plain" Anglo English words such as (to add a few more examples to those mentioned above) *mind, fact, friend, rude*, and *sex* – apparently never suspecting that they are deeply infused with cultural thinking. There are also plenty of more sophisticated English words, such as *violence*, *cooperation*, and *commitment*, which are much more "Anglo"– and much less translatable – than most speakers of English ever suspect.

It also needs to be highlighted, however, that there are shared "Euro" concepts that enter not only into international discourse, in highly problematical ways, but also into habitual ways of thinking. We are thinking of words like *structure*, *function*, *system*, *information*, *economics*, *politics*, and the like. It would be unrealistic to think that all such words can be expunged from Global English, but if Minimal English gains acceptance it can help counteract this broader Eurocentric cultural creep, at the same time as helping to counteract specifically Anglo bias.

§5. Closing remarks

As global discourse is increasingly dominated by English words, this all too often means that it is also being dominated by English-specific or Euro-specific concepts, even though this may go unrecognised when familiar, "near-enough" translation equivalents are available. Minimal English offers a way to get around this problem, in a limited way, and at the same time to contribute to clearer thinking. As well, since Minimal English has its counterparts in Minimal Chinese, Minimal Russian, Minimal Finnish, and so on, expressing oneself in Minimal English facilitates translatability into one's home language, if that is a language other than English. The same thing works the other way around too. Finally we want to stress that Minimal English, in the version we have described in this paper, is not closed or final in any sense. We see the project as open and ongoing.

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