

## GLOBALIZATION AND THE WORLD LANGUAGES

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**Abstract:**

*The process of globalization acquires the greatest importance in today's world. It refers to the increased consciousness of the world as a whole and effects the world languages, which are regarded as an essential medium of developing the ability of communicating across cultures. The spread of the English language facilitates the uniformity of the world, but endangers the existed multilingualism and multiculturalism. The given paper describes the global processes and their palpable impact on the usage, knowledge and preservation of the world languages.*

**Keywords:** *charter, education, globalization, internationalization, language, lingua franca, uniformity.*

“The term “globalization” was first employed in the publication entitled “Towards New Education” in 1952, to denote a holistic view of human experience in education” [Turner B., 2009]. Since its inception, this concept has inspired a lot of competing definitions and interpretations. For example: according to Anthony Giddens, it is “the intensification of worldwide social relations which links distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” [Giddens A., 1990]. Roland Robertson views the global processes as the “accelerated compression of the contemporary world and the consciousness of the world as a singular entity” [Robertson R., 1995]. According to Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton, globalization refers to “those spatio-temporal processes of change which underpin a transformation in the organization of human affairs by linking together and expanding human activities across regions and continents” [Held D., 1999]. However, while the theorists tend to agree on the general parameters of globalization, there are different views about when it actually started. Some scholars situate its origins in the modern era, while others regard it as a phenomenon with a long history. Robertson and Held acknowledge, that globalization is perhaps a pre-modern phenomenon with beginnings in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Thomas L. Friedman divides the history of its development into three main periods: period 1 (1492-1800) – the globalization of countries, period 2 (1800-2000) – the globalization of companies and period 3 (2000-present) – the globalization of individuals. Some other theorists take more here-and-now positions, situating the beginning of the global processes at the time of the first major fuel crisis of 1973, the decline of traditional modes of industrial production and the subsequent move towards a demand-led economy.

During the 70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the industrial society “transformed” into the post-industrial one, the term “globalization” began to be widely used by economists and other social scientists. The process of transformation aimed at the increase of material wealth, goods and services through the international division of labor by the efficiencies catalyzed by the international relations and competitions. The term “globalization” described the process by which regional economics, societies and cultures had become integrated through communication, transportation and trade. It was mostly associated with the term “economic globalization” – “the integration of national economics into the international economy through trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration, the spread of technology and military presence” [Bhagwati J., 2004].

However, besides its economic meaning, the term “globalization” has been discussed in the more popular discourse, where it was equalized with the word “internationalization”, referring to the growing interconnectedness and interdependence of people and institutions of the world. Nowadays, “internationalization” is usually regarded as the less theorized term, while “globalization” has come to denote a social process, which is characterized by the existence of global political, economic, environmental interconnections and flows, that make many of the currently existed boundaries irrelevant. Therefore, it is treated as a rapid mutual penetration and fast intensification of the interdependence of national states in economical, ideological and cultural fields. In the wider sense, “globalization” refers to the transnational circulation of ideas and languages through acculturation. Moreover, researchers always overlook the extraordinary nature of the language as an economic good:

- Firstly, languages help us to develop the ability of communication across cultures.
- Secondly, the knowledge of foreign languages enables us to think globally and to perceive new horizons.

A lot is written about globalization and languages. According to its general definition, “language” is a body of words and the systems of their use common to a people who are of the same community or nation, the same geographical area or the same cultural tradition. Language is usually regarded as a sense substance of the culture, which contributes to its formation through vocabulary, greetings, humor, etc. It serves as an important symbol of group belongings, enabling different groups of people to know what ethnic groups they belong to and what common heritages they share. Without a language people lose their cultural identity.

In the global sense, a language is usually regarded as a very lifeline of globalization: “without languages, there would be no globalization and vice versa, without globalization, there would be no world languages” [language&globalization]. Proficiency in the planet’s “corporate language... will soon define each person’s place on the Earth... and beyond” [The Language Situation in Today’s World]. Nowadays, the corporate or the most spoken second language of the world is English (hence, the world’s most spoken first language is Mandarin, which is followed by Spanish and English). Its status is reinforced by the widespread term “global English”, which indicates to its dominant usage. “English has run rampant across the globe... people want to speak English, because it is the language of advertising, blockbuster movies, and pop music, as well as a vital tool for success” [Tuhus-Dubrow R., 2002. “Except English, no other languages dominate international business, academia, media, the Internet, and international air/sea traffic” [Li S., 2002]. Moreover, persons of different nationalities learn a dominant language for functioning on a global scale. The acquired status of “lingva franca” (the communicative language of the individuals of different nationalities) indicates to the increasing spread of English across Europe and other countries.

- “About 35% of the world’s mail, telexes and cables are in English.
- Approximately 40% of the world’s radio programs are in English.
- English is the dominant language on the Internet” [globalization].
- English becomes the language of science – scientific publications, international conferences, joint academic/research projects, students’/researchers’ mobility or exchange programs, etc.

The spread of the English language has some negative impacts. The increased risk of uniformity endangers the disappearance of some world languages “under the shadow” of the dominant one. The acquisition of “lingva franca” at the expense of regional and local languages (especially in the educational system, media and public life) endangers “smaller” ones. According to the experts’ recent estimations, within a few generations “more than 50 percent of the estimated 7000 languages spoken in

the world today may disappear” [Globalization and Languages: Building on our Rich Heritage]. The regression of linguistic diversity is more vividly seen in South America, North East Asia and Siberia. There are some weakened languages in Europe too. The scholars are concerned with such consequences. The disappearance of some world languages may cause the disappearance of cultures, because the language is a determining factor of the cultural identity of diverse groups and individuals. Through the language the representatives of each nation build, understand and express their emotions, intentions and values, confirm social relationships and transmit cultural expressions and practices.

Besides the facilitated emergence of the risk of uniformity, global processes have a palpable impact on the usage, knowledge and preservation of languages. Their revitalization is fostered by:

- “Connecting institutions around the world that are working with endangered language communities to promote the revitalization, maintenance and perpetuation of their languages;
- Providing access to information and communication resources that can be utilized to assist communities in preservation their linguistic diversity;
- Connecting endangered language communities from various regions of the world so as to raise awareness, increase advocacy efforts and share best practices” [Globalization and Languages: Building on our Rich Heritage].

Moreover, the prevention of the loss of languages is ensured by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML). The Charter is the European treaty, which was adopted in 1992 under the auspices of the Council of Europe to protect and promote historical, regional and minority languages of Europe. The actual Charter was written in the Parliamentary assembly based on the Congress’ Recommendations. It applies to languages traditionally used by the nationals of the State Parties, which significantly differ from the majority or official languages and have a territorial basis (and are therefore, traditionally spoken by populations of regions or areas within the State) or are used by linguistic minorities within the State as a whole.

The Charter sets up the protection system, which is based on a monitoring mechanism, whereby a Committee of independent experts supervises the implementation of the Charter in each State party. Monitoring takes place in three-yearly cycle and involves periodical reports concerning the implementation of the individual Charter undertakings. In performing its functions, the Committee of Experts carries out a fact-finding visit on the spot. The result of this work is the adoption of an evaluation report including a number of observations to the State authorities on how to improve the situation of each language covered.

Besides developing a monitoring system, the Charter has given “language status to some minority languages, which were previously perceived as dialects, such as Kven in Norway, Low German in Germany, Cypriot Maronite Arabic in Cyprus, Limburgish in the Netherlands” [Globalization and Languages]. Therefore, the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity of Europe has been facilitated.

Besides the above mentioned negative influences, the spread of the English language has some positive impacts: the uniformity of the world is facilitated, the borders and boundaries of different countries become irrelevant, as many people as possible are given the opportunity to learn the common language, to understand it and to formulate their own thoughts in it. For the enhancement of more effective multilingualism and multiculturalism, the Council of Europe set up the project “Language learning for European citizenship”, which presents the following principles:

- **“Language learning is for all:** a need and a right of every citizen and not the privilege of any particular intellectual, social or political elite;

- **Language learning is for life:** the primary goal of language learning is the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for communication in real-life situations. It is also for life-long learning as learners avail themselves of opportunities that may present themselves;
- **Language teaching and learning are for the learner** - based on the needs, motivations, characteristics and resources of learners and therefore, characterized by realistic and worthwhile objectives, appropriate materials and methods and suitable forms of assessment” [Sheils J, 1996].

The project “Language learning for European citizenship” consists of the guideline “The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)”, which describes achievements of learners of foreign languages across Europe and, increasingly, in other countries. Developed through the process of a scientific research and a wide consultation, this document provides a practical tool for setting clear standards to be attained at successive stages of learning and for evaluating outcomes in an internationally comparable manner. The Common European Framework of Reference provides a basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications and facilitates a clear definition of teaching objectives and methods and promotes the necessary tools for assessment of proficiency (six “common reference levels” - **A1** Breakthrough or beginner; **A2** Way stage or elementary; **B1** Threshold or intermediate; **B2** Vantage or upper intermediate; **C1** Effective Operational Proficiency or advanced; **C2** Mastery or proficiency – are singled out and revealed). Therefore, the CEFR has become a key reference document and a valuable tool for educational and professional mobility throughout Europe.

### Conclusions

All the above mentioned can be summarized in the following way:

The process of globalization acquires the greatest importance in today’s world. It makes the existed borders and boundaries irrelevant and facilitates cultural, political, economic and environmental interconnections. Contemporary globalization refers to the increased consciousness of the world as a whole and effects the world languages, which are regarded as an essential medium of developing the ability of communicating across cultures.

The impact of globalization on the world languages has positive and negative consequences:

- Firstly, the predominance of English and its status of “lingva franca” endanger multilingualism and multiculturalism. For the protection of “smaller” languages, the Council of Europe adopted “The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages”. Its protection system is based on a monitoring mechanism, which is oriented on the improvement of the situation of the “endangered” languages.
- Secondly, the dominance of the English language facilitates the uniformity of the world. The borders of different countries become irrelevant and the individuals of different nationalities are given an opportunity to communicate, to confirm social relationships and to transmit cultural expressions and practices. Therefore, the world becomes an “inseparable entity”.
- And finally, the adoption of the project “Language learning for European citizenship” has become a key reference document and a valuable tool for educational and professional mobility. Therefore, the standardized system of the assessment of the proficiency in foreign

languages stipulates the recognition of each individual's knowledge in different countries of today's Europe.

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