PARLEZ GLOBLISH: ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

Maria Yvonne BĂNCILĂ
Universitatea Bucureşti

Abstract: *In the globalized context, J.P. Nerriere's recent theory of Globish broaches the issue of the relationship between English as the international language and local languages as carriers of cultural identity, as well as that of language teaching policies.*
Keywords: *globalized context, Globish, international languag, local languages*

Recent years have seen an explosion of works on the topic of globalization. Among the various referents of the globalization rhetoric (economy, information, lifestyles, and so on) one could single out the generalized use of English language, as an epiphenomenon of the process of globalization.

While language is perceived as an identity marker for any nation, English has often been seen as a vehicle for the cultural imperialism accompanying the process of globalization. It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss this point of view; however, this is a good starting point in discussing Jean Paul Nerriere's theory of Globlish, or Globish as it is also called (a term derived from *global* + *English*: the simplified English spoken by non-natives) which argues that, while making possible the indispensable communication required by the globalized context, this type of 'lingua franca' actually allowes national cultural identities to be preserved.

For the years 2005 and early 2006, Nerriere announced the publication of several books aimed at promoting what could be dubbed “English light”, and bearing titles such as : *Don't speak English, parlez Globish* or *Oubliez les methodes de langues, decouvrez le globish*, in France, *Demain, je parle globish* in Quebec, Canada, as well as the same volumes in their Italian, Spanish and even Corean versions. According to Nerriere, the highest interest in Globish was manifested in Italy, Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Corea, and the US. Since the moment of its creation, in April 2004, Nerriere's website (http://www.jpn-globish.com) has been accessed by an average 186 visitors daily, with a record of 4000 on April 25th, 2005 following the simultaneous publishing of articles broaching the subject in *International Herald Tribune*, *La Republica* in Italy, and *La Nacion* in Argentine. *The Times* in London, and the BBC also offered media coverage for the first book (Parlez Globish) in which the concept is produced of a “the communication tool of the future”, “the worldwide dialect of the third millenium”, to quote Nerriere, deemed enough to “reach and enjoy fruitfully the threshold of understanding” (Nerriere 2005).

Nerriere's theory starts from the remark that, especially in business environments, many non-native speakers of English communicate in a highly simplified form of the language, perfectly comprehensible to them if not correct, and emerging solely from practical usage. Communication appears to be, however, less efficient between non-native and native speakers of English, which has led Nerriere to the conclusion “the language non Anglophones spoke together was [...] something in which we were better off than genuine Anglophones” (Nerriere 2005). Globlish would be, then, a tool - admittedly simple, inelegant but almost universal - intended for communication at basic level, whose entire vocabulary (of 1,500 words) amounts to less than one four-hundredth of the words in the OED, enabling anyone to learn it within a

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week. While this rather simplist theory has its supporters as well as adversaries, a few things capture our attention: on the one hand, the great interest it has stirred among people of various nationalities, who have initiated debates on Internet forums and who do not belong to academic or scholarly circles, which is a telling fact; on the other hand, the fact that a discussion on the special status of English as an international language did not originate with Nerriere, but has actually been initiated long before (and in much more rigorous terms). In the present paper I shall set Nerriere's views in relation to other relevant works and I shall mainly refer to Barbara Seidlhofer's 2002 report to the Council of Europe, concerning the concept of International English and related issues, and discussing language education policies. The above-mentioned text was commissioned by the Language Policy Division for the *Conference on Languages, diversity, citizenship: policies for plurilingualism in Europe* (13-15 November 2002). In this work, what the author defines as "English as International Language" - EIL- could be easily replaced by Nerriere's term "Globlish", since the terms seem to be synonimous and they both seem to refer to "International English" as a 'variety' in its own right. The main thrust of Seidlhofer's report is that "EIL needs to be considered for European curricula, as an alternative option to ENL (English as a Native Language) in some contexts and as the default option on others" (Seidlhofer 2002:11); while this proposal still awaits being put into practice, Nerriere has already endeavoured to publish manuals and develop a piece of software ("Glolexis") dedicated to teaching Globlish. On the other hand, it is a relevant fact that Nerriere should link explicitely the issue of Globish to that of the preservation of national cultural identities, which renders his theory relevant for the topic of the present conference, whether we agree with his standpoint or not.

Nerriere's remark on the unique position of English in the world, with non-native speakers outnumbering native ones, as well as his argument that they are able to fashion a particular variety of English (that is, they have the power to adapt and change the language), seems to echo Brumfit's words in *Individual Freedom in Language Teaching: Helping Learners to Develop a Dialect of Their Own*, of which I quote:

"The English language no longer belongs numerically to speakers of English as a mother tongue, or first language. The ownership *(by which I mean the power to adapt and change*) of any language in effect rests with people who use it, however they are, however multilingual they are, however monolingual they are. The major advances in sociolinguistic research over the past half century indicate clearly the extent to which *languages are shaped by their use*. And for English, the current competent users of English number up to seven hundred million, living in every continent... of whom less than half are native speakers. Statistically, *native speakers are in a minority for language use*, and thus in practice for language change, for language maintenance, and for the ideologies and beliefs associated with the language - at least in so far as non-natives use the language for a wide range of public and personal needs." (Brumfit 2001:116, emphasis mine)

Seidlhofer takes up the argument and mentions the estimates for speakers of English in terms of Kahru's 'concentric circles' : the Inner Circle, that of English as first language, e.g. UK, USA - 320-380 million speakers; the Outer Circle, that of English as additional language, e.g. India, Singapore - 150- 300 million; and the Expanding Circle (English as a foreign language) - 100-1000 million. She also adds the words of the German researcher Gnutzmann, with the assertion: "It has been estimated that about 80 per cent of verbal exchanges in which English is used as a second or foreign language do not involve native speakers of English" (Steidlhofer 2002:7), while Nerriere points

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out: “Globiphones are already at least seven times more populous than anglophones.” (Nerriere 2005). Such works suggest that English has already been affected through its function as *the* world language.

Interestingly, the label ‘international language’ first became established not with reference to the dominant languages such as English or French, but “was in use for nearly a century to refer to non-ethnic planned languages like Esperanto” (Phillipson 2001:15), which was seen as threatening no existing language or ethnic group. The shift occured from the notion of a formally constructed, *artificial* language to designate natural ones and especially English in its form of 'International English'. Nerriere himself lacks precision when defining Globlish (a term obviously alluding to the imports of English words or syntactic structures into other languages, which have produced 'varieties' such Japlish, Singlish, Hinglish, Polglish, Spanglish or Franglais, but which simply designates a 'light English'). He inadequately dubbs Globlish 'a dialect', (”Globlish is not quite a language: it is the worldwide dialect of the third millenium, an international uber-slang”, Nerriere 2005) while commentators sometimes call it a 'patois', wrongly from the linguistic dialectology point of view.

According to Ch. Fillmore, an idiolect is defined as the individual way that anyone uses phonological, syntactic/grammatical, lexical/terminological, and semantic forms in their spoken form (and even written form); a patois is a community level variety that represents the variety used by one community versus another. A patois can be easily identified by specific phonetic/ phonological and lexical traits which can be traced on a dialect atlas of a country. A dialect is a group of patois (usually within a given region) which have several sets of similar phonetic/phonological and lexical traits, while a language represents a group of linguistically defined dialects. The group called "language" distinguishes itself from other group "languages" which themselves also contain subset dialects and patois. Fillmore goes on tho remark that in the case of Globlish, the term “dialect” employed by Nerriere is used to mean something different from both its linguistic definition, and also from the negative connotation (that of substandard form of language) it generally has in non-linguistic circles. (Fillmore, C, http://linguist.org/issues/8/8-49.html)

More accurately (but also quite vaguely), Nerriere seems to recitfy his error by re-defining Globlish as “a tool” , a means to the end of making communication possible for the millions of people in the globalized world. What he suggests is the definition of Globlish as a simplified (or controlled) language, in which nothing is invented as in the case or artificial ones but the lexical terminology is standardized so that there is one term per concept, with a focus on terseness and reduction of items to master, and where and grammatical patterns are also standardized. Globlish is therefore “a controlled (simplified) form of language which uses a restricted vocabulary set intended to have the highest communicative impact in international communication contexts.” (http://linguist.org/issues/8/8-49.html) Its objective would be, then, that of eliminating any redundancy and enhancing communicative effectiveness.

Steidhofer, on the other hand, mentions that the phrase 'English as International Language', “highlights the international use of English rather than suggesting, wrongly, that there is *one* clearly distinguishable, unitary variety called 'International English'. “ (Steidlhofer 2002:8), and lists the terms/phrases used more or less interchangeably with EIL by authors such as Gnutzmann, Crystal, Mair or Meierkord: English as *lingua franca*, English as global language (the closest to the term Globlish), English as world language, English as a medium of intercultural communication, or World English as introduced by Brutt-Griffler in 2002. Brutt-Griffler's perspective reminds in many ways

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of Nerriere's, when she identifies four central features of the development of global language, which Steidlhofer further elaborates on: “a) econocultural functions of the language (World English is a product of the development of a world market and global developments in the fields of science, technology, culture and the media); b) the transcendence of the role of an elite *lingua franca* (world English is learned by people at various levels of society, not just by a socio-economic elite); c) the stabilization of bilingualism through the coexistence of world language with other languages in bilingual/multilingual contexts (i.e., World English tends to establish itself alongside local languages rather than replacing them, and so contributes to multilingualism rather than jeopardize it); d) Language change via the processes of world language convergence and world language divergence (i.e., world English spreads due to the fact that many people learn it rather than by speakers of English migrating to other areas; thus two processes happen concurrently: new varieties are created and unity in the world language is maintained.” (Steidlhofer 2002:9)

Insofar as the role of EIL users is acknowledged as contributing to the linguistic development and to the shaping of language, as well as agents in its spread, this perspective is close to Nerriere's theory of Globlish. Equally remarkable is the assertion that World English does not represent a threat to local languages. As far as Nerriere's theory of Globlish is concerned, he markets it in his own, half-serious half-jocular style, by capitalizing on people's sense of cultural identity, and on their fear that English language would 'conquer' other languages, if not French itself then other languages “of lesser coverage” as he puts it. I quote as relevant a fragment of Nerriere's interview given to a Croatian cultural magazine:

“If I said: “I know the way to make French the privileged worldwide communication vehicle today, again”, everybody, especially in France, would say ”great, please tell us, at long last we will win over our leading contender, English”; I would then say ”it is easy, cut the French vocabulary down to 1.500 words, be happy with a just understandable accent, do not expect to discuss metaphysics, use simple sentences, and an elementary, although correct, grammar”. Then everybody would yell “he wants to murder our language! This is unacceptable.” The same people should accept that, when I recommend to do that to the leading contender, English, I am not helping it. As a consequence, I am helping the rescue of French, of Croatian, of all the languages that are threatened by English today, but will not be endangered at all by Globlish. You understand why it is your best interest to support Globish, if you like your culture and its language. It will limit the influence of the English language dramatically” (Nerriere 2005: 2),

Nerriere says, while admitting however that the spread ogf Globlish can do nothing against the invasion of Anglosaxon and American culture, through the mass media.

If Brutt-Griffler has different grounds and arguments than Nerriere to assert that World English does not jeopardize local languages, their conclusions do not differ essentially. Juliane House, professor of applied linguistics at Hamburg University, Germany, also notes her own opinion that the spread of English can actually enhance the preservation of local dialects: "Paradox as this may seem, the very spread of English can motivate speakers of other languages to insist on their own local language for identification, for binding them emotionally to their own cultural and historical tradition. There is no need to set up an old-fashioned dichotomy between local languages and English as the 'hegemonic aggressor': there is a place for both, because they fulfill different functions. To deny this is to uphold outdated concepts of

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monolingual societies and individuals." (http://www.globalenvision.org) Steidlhofer, in her turn, comments on the statements offered as starting points during the conference "Languages, Diversity, Citizenship: Policies for Plurilingualism in Europe", organized by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, November 2002). Concerning the statement that "if democratic citizenship in Europe is to be internationally based, it is crucial to ensure diversification in language teaching so that citizens in Europe can interact in their own languages, rather than through English as a *lingua franca*," a statement whose underlying assumption is that "citizens' own languages are seen to be competing with English as *lingua franca*", she asks the question "Why *rather than* through English as a lingua franca - why not both? [...] If the position of English, on a global scale, is recognized for what it predominantly is, namely EIL, it follows that EIL is likely to establish itself alongside local languages rather than replace them, and to be shaped by all its users. [...] Sociolinguistic research indicates that if - and this is a vital condition - English is appropriated by its users in such a way as to serve its unique function as EIL, it does not constitute a threat to other languages but, precisely because of its delimited role and distinct status, leaves other languages intact. Properly conceptualized as EIL, 'English' can be positioned, quite literally, *hors concours*." (Steidlhofer 2005:11).

The above quoted opinions of various authors signal a general concern about the relationship between language and identity in today's world, and moreover they indicate an answer to this question, which also pertains to the topic of the present conference.
Globlish is currently being taught in France, with a set of courses run by the company Westmill, the two books *Parlez globish* and *Decouvrez le globish*, and Glolexis, a piece of software developed by the French company "Diagonal", helping learners to write in Globlish. Thus it is trying to provide an answer to an empirical question, earlier formulated by Steidlhofer with regard to EIL: what does EIL actually look like and sound like? Seidlhofer's analysis, dating 2002 , posited the need of finding proactive ways of enabling learners to benefit from the function of EIL, by including EIL in European curricula. From the functional point of view, she remarked, the status of English in the world is generally acknowledged and curricula generally mention both the utilitarian motivation for learning English (its importance for international businesses) and the idealistic motivation (the fact it affords for furthering cross-cultural communication and mutual understanding). However, considering EIL conceptually, linguistically and pedagogically, she deplored the fact that EIL is practically non-existent in language teaching curricula and materials - that is, in the way the subject 'English' is "conceptualized, linguistically described and pedagogically prescribed, [...] the focus has remained on 'cumulative' proficiency (becoming better at speaking and writing as native speakers do) and on the goal of successful communication with native speakers, approximating native-like command of the language." (Steidlhofer 2002:12) Curricula and textbooks still take their norms from 'real English', that is the English used by native speakers in their speech communities in, for instance, UK or the US. The nativeness criterion is, also, maintained in conceptual considerations since the notion of a language is automatically tied up with its native speakers. Seidlhofer concluded in 2002 that "this shows how deeply ingrained the notion of nativeness is in any considerations of language theorising, description and teaching, and hence how urgent, and how difficult, it is to shed the conceptual straightjacket of English as a native language when tackling the task of working out appropriate frameworks for EIL." (Steidlhofer 2002:14) Nerriere, then, seems to have undertaken the task of passing from the teaching of 'real English' to that of 'realistic English', as Steidlhofer put it in the

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title of her work, and of contributing to opening up conceptual space for EIL (or Globlish). The desirability of considering English as a realistic learning goal, however, was mentioned in various publications as early as the early1980s, with "exhortations to rethink the teaching of English which [...] have not had any significant impact on mainstream curriculum planning over the last two decades" (Steidlhofer 2002:21).

Nerriere's work may seem simplistic in comparison with Steidlhofer's endeavour to describe the features of EIL, through the compliation of a corpus (VOICE: the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English) "dedicated to capturing the use of English as an international language from a wide variety of first language backgrounds whose primary and secondary education and socialization did not take place in English, and a good range of settings and domains. [...] The size aimed for at the first stage is approximately half a million words" . (Seidlhofer 2002:18) The interest from the pedagogy point of view would be that of establishing which features tend to be crucial for international intelligibility. Though much less systematically constituted, Nerriere's corpus of 1.500 words is based on a quite similar approach. Both concentrate on spoken English, since variation from standard norms becomes most apparent in speakers' interaction, while in written language use there is more reliance on established norms (which does not mean, however, that questions cannot arise regarding these norms).
Oxford University Press supports the VOICE project at Vienna University, and has declared: "When sufficient corpus evidence is available to show that a particular usage is widely used and understood by competent non-native speakers from a variety of language backgrounds, we would wish to refer to this development in our major English Teaching dictionaries, such as the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary." (Steidlhofer 2002:21)

Mention should be made of the fact that such approaches do not suggest abolishing teaching English in school curricula, but rather a shift, only when appropriate, from ENL - as a carrier of cultural values - to EIL (as an alternative option in some cases, or as the default option in others, such as teaching adult learners). They advocate for what has been called "language awareness", achieving communication strategies and abilities, and orienting English towards a cross-cultural role. According to Widdowson, "what can be done is to provide a basis which students can learn from, fine-tuning subsequently to any native or non-native varieties and registers that are relevant for their individual requirements." (Cf. Widdowson, *Defining Issues in English Language Teaching*, quoted by Steidlhofer 2002:23)

A fact welcomed by some and deplored by others, the goal of achieving native-like command of English, although not abandoned, is now challenged. As the debate goes on, English will continue to grow and change with the same force that has always driven the evolution of language: the natural desire to exchange goods and ideas.

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