ENGLISH - A GLOBAL LANGUAGE IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: The term "global English" comes from David Graddol's (2006) report on the situation of English at a global level, and David Crystal's famous book "English as a Global Language" (2003). A global language represents a linguistic system which functions at the global level as a tool used in communication among people from different nations, languages, or cultures. English is the language of science, technology, academia, youth culture, mass media, and business, to name a few of the most common fields. A global language may thus be an element of a global culture, but it will not lead to a global culture.

Keywords: global language, communication, culture, linguistic globalization, education

English becomes global

English represents the first language for many countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zeeland and some Caribbean nations.

The Britain's colonial expansion set up the pre-conditions for the global use of English, spreading the language to settlements around the world. The English language has grown up in contact with many others, making it a mix language which can rapidly develop to meet new cultural and communicative skills. (Graddol, 1997: 6)

Communities of English speakers were established around the world and, along with them, patterns of trade and communication. In the same time US became the most powerful of the industrialized countries due to its own natural and human resources. Today US represent the world's third most populous country with around 260 million inhabitants and this explains the great number of native English speakers, only Chinese having more first- language users. After the World War II the American Influence was extended around the entire globe.

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According to Crystal (1997: 8), 85% of international organizations use English as one of their working language, 49% use French and only 10% use Arabic, Spanish or German. Besides this reason of English spreading, more other major international domains use this language: scientific publication, international banking, economic affairs and trade, advertising, audiovisual and cultural products (movies, TV, music), education, international law, technology transfer, internet communication.

It is well known that English is a *language of borrowings*: 80% of its vocabulary is foreign-born from different sources: Celtic, Germanic, and Romance. This explains the fact that English has common words in almost all European languages. As a Germanic language in the same category as German, Dutch, Flemish, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian, English shares with these languages similar grammatical structures and words. But in the lexical point of view, more than half of its vocabulary is derived from Latin, so English also shares a great number of words with the other Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese). Besides these features, the English vocabulary contains borrowing from many other languages.

English is not only a *cosmopolitan language* but it is also very rich because, according to the Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language, the language of Shakespeare contains approximately 2,700 words. Comparing the figures which show that the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists about 500,000 words, German claims about 185,000, and French only 100,000, we can state that English is the richest language.

Another favourable aspect for the spreading of English can be its inflectional simplicity. For example, the inflections in the noun have been reduced to *–s* ending as a sign of the plural form and the *'s* for the possessive case. The elaborate Germanic inflexion of the adjective has been removed except for the simple indication of the comparative and the superlative degrees. The verb has also suffered important changes: the elimination of all personal terminations, the abandonment of singular and plural distinction and the gradual loss of subjunctive mood. In other words the grammar of English is a simple one and the same thing can be said about its phonology.

The simple grammar of English represents a very important argument for the spreading of English:

In its easiness of grammatical construction, in its paucity of inflexion, in its almost total disregard of the distinctions excepting those of nature, in the simplicity and

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The American linguist Braj Kachru speaks about *adaptability*, another quality of the English language, which he names "propensity for acquiring new identities". Alan Maley calls this characteristic "chameleon" quality of English, "changing its colour to fit the background, wherever it has settled" (Bolton & Crystal, 1990: 331).

Starting from 1920 English was labelled as *world English* or *international English*, but since the mid 1900s, it was known as *global English*. These labels – *world, international, global* – almost synonymous show that this language was and still continues to be very important. Al-Dabbagh compares the importance of English today with that of Latin in old times: "English has become the Latin of the contemporary world" (2005: 3). The latest denomination of English – *global* – can be traced from the fact that it is spoken on all five continents, so on the entire globe, being the official language for 52 nations.

The increasing importance of English made that the age at which children start learning English has been lowering across the world. English has been introduced as a foreign language in primary school or even in pre-school. This very recent trend has as the intention to create a bilingual population. English learners are getting younger. Across the world, from Chile to Mongolia, from China to Portugal, English is being introduced in primary schools, with greater compulsion, and at steadily lowering ages. A global survey of English for young learners, undertaken by the British Council in 1999, showed that the majority of countries in which English was taught in primary schools had introduced the innovation in the 1990s.

One of the reasons of teaching languages to young children is the idea that they find it easier to learn languages than older students. Practically speaking, young learners face obstacles that older learners do not. They are still developing physically and intellectually; their emotional needs may be higher; they are less able to take responsibility for their own learning. One of the practical reasons for introducing English to younger learners is to ensure that they have longer in their school careers to master the language; another is because the timetables in secondary schools now have too many competing demands. EYL also provides a foundation for a transition to CLIL or even to English-medium in secondary school. (Gaddol, 2006:201).

The linguistic globalization

As being proven, English is undoubtedly, on the top of the hierarchy, being used all over the world in all the forms – written, spoken, formal, informal – and in the specialized types – economic, legal, journalistic, and technical. It has become above all

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the *lingua franca* and continues to secure this dominant position by a self-consolidation process.It has turned into the common language of communication in business, politics, administration, and science, in the academic field being in the same time the dominant language of the global publicity and popular culture.

The increasing globalization of English is due to its leading role in many fields such as: communication, social and cultural relations and international business. The term "globalization" has an anglo-saxon origin and it has as a synonym the French word "mondialisation". Nowadays "globalization" is used by all written and oral means of communication.

In the cultural field we meet the *linguistic globalization*. This phenomenon consists in the utilisation of a common language at a global level and, at the national language level, it is reflected in the usage of abbreviations and the abusive borrowings from the common language. The collocation "linguistic globalization" refers to the latest transformations of the national languages.The four spatial-temporal dimensions of the globalization: extension, intension, velocity and impact (Held, Mc Grew, Goldblatt, Perranton 2004:40) represent as many criteria as in the linguistic field; in the point of the usage of the English language, these criteria are accomplished.

In linguistics, the idea of globalization has appeared as a direct consequence of the economic situation, so it reflects a particular aspect of the relation between the society dynamics and the communication needs. The concept of linguistic globalization must be understood as a deliberate acceptance of a common/unique means of communication in the international economic relations. Only one of four people who speak English is a native speaker. In many cases there is a "connecting language" between two persons who have neither the same native language, nor a common national culture, and they choose English as a foreign language to communicate each other.

English is also named *lingua franca,* which means it is the common language for communication. EFL represents a more complex phenomenon where the English language is an international language or a world language. Even if it is valued by some people or rejected by others, nobody can negate the fact that English is a global language of communication (lingua franca). In most cases English speakers are not natives and they consider English being a foreign language and the many studies of the ELF interactions show that the ELF speakers have different pronunciations of words but there are no problems in the meaning of the context.

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The main language of the computers is English, representing the written language of Windows and the Internet procedures. As a consequence of the information development technology, we are also witnesses of an avalanche of technical and scientific terms used in many languages in the English form: *computer, management, marketing, manager, businessman, barter, broker, damping, dealer, know-how, trend, etc.* – used today without translating them. This invasion of English and American terms is known as "vocabulary globalization".

The spread of English can be viewed both in a positive or negative perception. The positive point of view concerns the necessity of a common code in the worldwide communication, becoming a vital requirement. It is also true that a language spoken by a small group of people can lose its communicative importance and implicitly disappear. But not only the language whose progress governs the worldwide communication represents a threat for the less spread languages, the mass education and the television also representing the homogenous forces whose effects are considered more powerful to the differential forces. (Béra, Lamy 2008: 131)

From the negative point of view, the linguistic globalization is understood as a threat for the national trait. Elena Cobianu considers that globalization "get difficulty to progress" due to the national languages, cultural values and different religions. (Cobianu 2008:17)

Cultural and intercultural issues

First we should define what is *culture*? Freire (1970) has defined it as a human creation and other modern sociologists considered culture as the human part of the environment (Wang, Brislin, Wang, Williams & Chao, 2000). In other words, culture comprises the non-biological aspects of life: values, norms, ways of behaving. So culture gathers the ways people interact, behave and communicate with one another. Culture is something that is learned from parents, school and media. Singer (1998) defined culture as " a pattern of learned, group-related perceptions – including both verbal and nonverbal language, attitudes, values, belief systems, disbelief systems and behaviours that is accepted and expected by an identity group". (Singer,1998; 5)

Cultural globalization refers to the process of spreading of values, ideas and cultural expressions. In the era of the Internet and fast communication people can interact easier. Multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism can be regarded as manifestations of

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cultural globalization. Communities are less protected than ever in history because even those who cannot travel today they are able to meet virtually other cultures and people from other parts of the world. People change their perception and lifestyle being influenced by global cultural and consumption trends. Is it good or bad?

In our opinion there are both advantages and disadvantages of the cultural globalization. First of all, people all over the world can easier access to new cultural products such as art, entertainment, education if they speak and understand English. In the same time they have the possibility to communicate and defend their values and ideas globally. But we can speak also about disadvantages such as the danger of cultural homogenization, westernalization and cultural colonialism because small cultures may lose their district features.

In response to the spread of English and increased multilingualism arising from immigration, many countries have introduced language laws in the last decade. In some, the use of languages other than the national language is banned in public spaces such as advertising. One of the first such legal provisions was the 1994 "Toubon law" in France, but the idea has been copied in many countries since. Such attempts to govern language use are often dismissed as futile by linguists, who are well aware of the difficulty of controlling fashions in speech and know from research that language switching among bilinguals is a natural process.

It is especially difficult for native speakers of English to understand the impulse to maintain the "purity" of a language by regulation. English is one of the most hybrid and rapidly changing languages in the world, but that has been no obstacle to its acquiring prestige and power. Not only do languages survive extensive borrowing, but this process often proves a vital mechanism of innovation and creativity: Shakespeare added much to English by borrowing words from Latin, Greek and French. Another reason for the failure of many native English speakers to understand the role of state regulation is that it has never been the Anglo-Saxon way of doing things. English has never had a state-controlled regulatory authority for the language, equivalent, for example, to the Académie française in France.

The need to protect national languages is, for most western Europeans, a recent phenomenon – especially the need to ensure that English does not unnecessarily take over too many domains. Public communication, pedagogic and formal genres and new modes of communication facilitated by technology, may be key domains to defend.

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English is not enough

One of the themes of this paper is that as global English makes the transition from 'foreign language' to basic skill needed in intercultural communication, it seems to generate an even greater need for other languages.

English has provided a significant competitive advantage to its speakers over the last few decades. But countries, such as India, which have capitalised on their English language skills, are already discovering that they need more languages.

Immigrants to English-speaking countries may need to learn the language of their host society, but increasingly, that may be insufficient. Since they tend to live and work alongside other ethnic communities, they may find they have to learn other languages as well.

Ioana, a young Romanian employee at Accenture in London, complained to me, in an informal conversation that she didn't speak anymore a foreign language and that she needed to learn French or Spanish in the future.

The slogan 'English is not enough' applies as strongly to native speakers of English as for those who speak it as a second language. We are now nearing the end of the period where native speakers can think that they are privileged because they know the global lingua franca. About 1 in 10 children in the UK already speak a language other than English at home. Too often this is seen as an educational and social problem rather than a cultural and economic resource.

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