# LINGUSTIC GLOBALIZATION OR A TRANSIENT LINGUSTIC TREND?

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***Abstract**: The paper aims to discuss the phenomenon of linguistic globalization seen from different perspectives, and given such divergent opinions, to attempt to reach a conclusion. To such purposes, we will present the opinions of both linguists and media personnel with respect to globalization, and will eventually try to see if it is indeed a transient linguistic trend or not.*

***Keywords***: *Globalization, linguistics, trend, English, lingua franca*

## 1. Globalization – attempts to understand the concept

*Globalization* is synonymous with uniformity, standardization and nevertheless homogeneity. The English language has earned some characteristics due to which one can correctly use the phrase "linguistic globalization by means of English". Some of the already well-known features of English are the following:

- It has become dominant all over the world
- It facilitates communication and interaction in any field of activity, helps people and peoples interrelate
- For it to become "the language of globalization", it should also be open to loanwords and loan-translations, which is true since it has acquired and adopted words from other languages it came in contact with.

*Globalization* is a characteristic of our century. It is a necessary phenomenon which facilitates interaction and interdependence. People have become more "globally oriented" and that is mainly due to English and the internet. It seems that everything bears at present the characteristics of *globalization* (e.g. "global era[1]", "global tourist[2]").

*Globalization* is a concept that is differently explained since it is differently understood by people. Therefore, there have been many attempts to define the concept, which has rather become a phenomenon that is not independent of our lives, but one which directly affects and influences them.

*Globalization* makes reference to more than one thing or field and that is why it was classified as complex and multi-faceted. It is a favorite word, sometimes overused, since it is easier to use a

[1] See Pop (2001: 851).

[2] It is a coined phrase given the concept of "tourist culture" that spreads by means of English. It is the language one can use in any destination on the planet and be (easily) understood.



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single term and refer to a multitude of things (Green 2011: 2). **Globalization** is "the process of international integration arising from the interchange of world views, products, ideas and other aspects of culture" (Al-Rodhan, R.F.Nayef, Gérard Stoudmann 2006, Albrow, Martin, Elizabeth King[3]). The latter definition is more intricate and seems to be the synthesis of more works put together, but which appears rather as an unclear reference to integration, adaptation and uniformity at the international level.

The term *globalization* is derived from the verb *to globalize*, "which refers to the emergence of an international network of economic systems" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*[4]). It appears to have initially occurred in the 1930s.

Another dictionary presents the concept in a similar manner, only the dates are a bit different. It is a noun, appeared in 1961, from the verb *globalize*, "which is attested at least from 1953 in various senses; the main modern one, with reference to global economic systems, emerged 1959[5]".

## 2. Linguistic globalization and different perceptions of English

Media and all the other means of communication have proven themselves useful in the process of globalization[6]. Internet, at present the favorite means of communication worldwide, goes beyond any barrier or border, since it may break any limit. Internet and computers are meant to be easily understood and operated by everyone.

As it has already been said, English has also proven very useful in facilitating communication and the spread and interchange of ideas and knowledge. The more information one gets, the more he craves for. The more people one gets to know, the more he wants to be or behave like them. Therefore, we consider it right to state that verbal communication led to globalization and unification in almost all the fields.

*Globalization* is a multi-faceted concept. It may refer to economy, politics, language and many other such domains. *Linguistic globalization* somehow refers to a language being widely used worldwide, which classifies it as global, with the purpose of being learnt, used and understood by everyone.

English has been naturally selected to be used as a unifying language, meant to help people and peoples interrelate and interconnect. Despite the limitation of his discourse to Europe, Görlach (2007: 3) admits that English has had a massive impact on most languages it came in contact with.

Obviously, such ideas have led to controversies, since not everyone agrees with the status that English has acquired – "the language of globalization", "a global language" (Crystal 2003),

[3] *Apud* www.wikipedia.org.

[4] *Ibidem*.

[5] See http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/globalization.

[6] See also Crystal (2001) in his book *Language and the Internet*, where he argues in favor of the internet whom he perceives as rather beneficial and to whom he attributes linguistic characteristics.



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"world English[7]" (Crystal 2004), a "lingua franca" (San Vicente 2002: 19), an easily recognizable language at the international level, the "chief international language" of the future (Crystal 2004).

Of course this rise of English as a global language has also had bad and unwanted effects upon our knowledge in terms of learning or using other foreign languages. Even the most important people in the world choose to express themselves in English and convey their messages in this language for fear they might be misunderstood or misinterpreted if they behave differently. Such examples are presidents and ministers of different countries, or even the Pope himself etc.

Largely said, there are two divergent opinions: on the one hand, there is the hope that English will indeed be able to help people relate to one another (position occupied in the past by Latin and French) and, on the other hand, there is the hope that this is only a transient period, and similarly to Latin, English will cease to have such a role and position. The latter opinion is rather weakened by the fact that English will not perish as Latin did. On the contrary, it seems to gain more and more authority.

English has not always been the language of commerce and trading (*lingua commerciale*, Gannuscio 2009: 152), a "simple language" that everyone attempts and somehow succeeds in learning. Nowadays it enjoys the status that French used to have in the past and also Latin even before French. The acquired status is also due to the growing power and development of the US in the previous century. Similarly to French, English has had monopoly on the culture, commerce, politics and, above all, the media. The latter has played a crucial role in granting English the status of a "global language". Even though at first English was taught and learnt out of necessity, at present it is widely taught and learnt for other reasons, such as prestige, simplicity of expression, commodity of the users (who sometimes prefer to use the original English words instead of attempting to find a substitute), modernity and so on.

*Linguistic globalization* was much easily and shortly explained as Englishization, which points out to the status of English as "the language of globalization".

Despite admitting that one should know how to speak foreign languages, Romano (2010: 29) does not recognize English as a complete authority, but rather converges towards the idea that it was an idiom imposed by the system (given the fact that all research is done in English, it is the language of two countries etc.) and not the choice of mankind.

On the other hand, others (Johnson 2009: 131, for example) display their admiration for English in articles entitled "The Rise of English …" which give us the impression of a titan rising above all the other insignificant idioms, spread all over the world, spoken by everyone, a triumphant language all in all (*The Economistapud* Johnson 2009: 131).

From the article of Helmi (2011) it is very clear that the power exercised by a state upon the rest of the world determines the spread of the language spoken in that specific country (those specific countries, in this case, "The British Empire" and "The American superpower"). It is the case of the US which has risen in many fields such as economy, politics, culture, religion, and,

[7] It has acquired such a status despite the poor predictions on the matter dating from the 1960s or 1970s (see Crystal 2004 for the same purpose).



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nevertheless linguistics, whose immediate consequence is the rise of the English language and its spread worldwide. Crystal (2003: 120) also argues in favor of English having gained the status it nowadays possesses since it was there at the right place at the right time.

It has been noticed that using English words or expressing your thoughts and ideas in English has a different impact and are easier to follow than using any other language. There used to be a saying very popular in the media "publish in English or perish in French" which better emphasizes those said above. The saying is taken from an article entitled "The triumph of English. A World Empire by other means" which appeared in *The Economist* (2001). The same idea of "English" as a threat, as an "intruding[8]" language is recurrent in all the purist works, which consider English as a real threat to the values of one nation (cultural, ideological and, last but not least, linguistic). Others share the same idea, i.e. linguistic globalization leads to the loss of human languages.

Other linguists use striking combinations of words, medical and linguistic concepts in the same context with reference to this phenomenon, calling it "benign globalization[9]". Still, the tone is rather optimistic, since the problem has not yet metastasized.

We can only anticipate what is likely to happen in the future, although when it comes to the future we can only predict and assume what is going to happen. Therefore, we consider it very unlikely for any other state to gain (political and military) supremacy over the US or the UK. This is a game played in other fields and, once won in those fields (military, diplomatic, political, technological and economic), it affects all the others, linguistics included.

## 3. Conclusion

To conclude with, we think that English will not only continue to have monopoly over the parts of the world already monopolized, but it will continue to rise in the remaining part of the world, thus becoming familiar to everyone worldwide. The same idea is shared by Görlach (2007: 12) and expressed in the *Introduction* to his volume *English in Europe*, in a subchapter entitled "The future of Anglicisms". However, it is not synonymous with forbidding the mother tongue in the country of origin, as it may lead to controversies or, even worse, to rebellion. People might start to think and perceive things differently than they should; they might summarize everything to conquerer and conquered[10], and this is not the purpose of either globalization or English.

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[8] See also Kristiansen, Kristiansen, Sandøy (2010: 2).

[9] See Fishman, Joshua A. (2001), article entitled "The new linguistic order" in *Digithum* 3/ 2011, http://www.uoc.edu/humfil/articles/eng/fishman/fishman.html (accessed 3.05.2015).

[10] See among others, a special report by Malone Elizabeth entitled "Endangered Languages" published in "National Science Foundation" (https://www.nsf.gov/news/special_reports/linguistics/endangered.jsp, accessed 3.05.2015).



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