

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract:

This paper intends to present two concepts: the study of a foreign language and the globalization and the relation between them. In today’s society, experts are often saying that people should learn a foreign language in order to cope with an interconnected world. Learning a language means the acquisition of new language skills and a detailed understanding of the world. Language is an important part of culture and as a person learns a foreign language his cultural horizon expands. Language is a major branch of globalization and in close connection with aspects such as the new demographic and social changes generated by the present waves of migrants, the changes in economy, the much debated political decisions taken recently by the European states and generated by same migrants. “Globalization demands more foreign languages, not less. In addition to providing you with knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary in the workplace, the study of languages, literatures, and cultures, like the study of history, philosophy, or mathematics, helps you develop the analytic skills needed to be an effective participant in local and national discussions. Studying languages in the context of history, politics, and popular culture can help you follow international events with insight, opening up perspectives to make you an informed and responsible citizen of your country and of the world. Knowing another language enriches your personal life, expands the range of professional opportunities open to you, and increases your power to act as a citizen of the world.”

Key words: foreign language, globalization, culture.

1. Introduction

1.1. What is globalization?

“The term “globalization” has acquired considerable emotive force. Some view it as a process that is beneficial—a key to future world economic development—and also inevitable and irreversible. Others regard it with hostility, even fear, believing that it increases inequality within and between nations, threatens employment and living standards and thwarts social progress. Globalization offers extensive opportunities for truly worldwide development but it is not progressing evenly. Some countries are becoming integrated into the global economy more quickly than others are. Countries that have been able to integrate are seeing faster growth and reduced poverty. The term sometimes also refers to the movement of people (labor) and knowledge (technology) across international borders. At its most basic, there is nothing mysterious about globalization. The term has come into common usage since the 1980s, reflecting technological advances that have made it easier and quicker to complete international transactions—both trade

and financial flows. It refers to an extension beyond national borders of the same market forces that have operated for centuries at all levels of human economic activity—village markets, urban industries, or financial centers.”

The process of globalization, although intensely debated today, is a very old one. We are used to discuss globalization in modern terms and from our modern problems perspective. However this process must be analyzed from a historical point of view. If we study different historical sources we will observe that this process began on the African continent. Our distant ancestor left it and spread all over the world. And if we mentioned this subject we must also mention that migration is not a modern notion but it has also historical roots.

Although back then the physical and the human made barriers were not as visible as today, the first migrants were the ones that broke them. As time passed and the societies appeared and developed so did the process of globalization facilitated by the exchange of goods, ideas, the development of new technologies and the exchange between cultures.

But, as any other new process, the process of globalization had its advantages and disadvantages. It might be born with the best intentions and for the peoples’ benefit and welfare but, in time, its other face appeared. We, the modern society, were delighted when the physical borders disappeared and new opportunities appeared. But there are more and more voices that emphasize the negative aspects of globalization like: the spread of fast-foods, the rise and fast development of capitalism, the mercantilism and the corruption that affected organizations that until then were considered untouchable.

As mentioned above the main intend of the process of globalization was the free flow of ideas, technologies and culture. And this process could not be made without a common language that facilitate this exchange.

1.2 The study of a single, common foreign language.

In our modern and continuous changing world, many countries, give up to their borders and to their individual language in favor of a single, common one, due to a continuous flow of persons and technologies. Today we can no longer talk about the individualism and nationalism of a country and learn several foreign languages. If we study the top of the languages spoken on our planet, we observe a significant narrowing of their number.

This globalization is reflected not only in language but also in the structure of our society. For example:

The economic field

From the economic field, the business area is the one where these changes can be seen more clearly. It is clear that businesses have always been competitive one not only al local level but also at a global scale. The persons who activate in this field are dealing every day with a culturally diverse environment so they must have good communicative skills. There are several branches of economy where speaking one or several foreign languages is mandatory: **the service industries** (hotel, tourism, food); **the entertainment industries** (films, radio, and sound production); **multinational companies** with overseas accounts; and other areas such as **medicine, law, business, journalism**, etc.

The security field

The series of misfortunate events that shaped our modern society starting with September 11, the bomb attacks from France etc. have highlighted the need of a language connection. Until recently different governments of the world considered the technical means a main and reliable source of national security. However, the events, above mentioned, changed their data and now, people with a good level of foreign language are used for gathering information. The experts in national security understood that, although the technical means are almost infallible, the expertise in foreign language is a crucial step in the understanding of another country's language and thus coordinating different intelligence operations.

Cultural understanding

A more obvious reason to study a foreign language is the power that language has to mediate understanding between people of different cultural backgrounds. Another reason for studying a foreign language is the opportunity to become more open and willing to learn and appreciate other cultures. And, the only path to do that is learning a common language.

Diversity

It is a clear fact for everybody that a future job will combine many cultures and languages and the boards of different companies will have to deal with it. We can see in different European countries and even in America that the work force is already a combination of nationalities such as Chinese, Indians, Asians, Spanish etc. All these different nationalities are well integrated in their adoptive countries and their language is a combination between their native language and the one of the adoptive country.

Enhanced career opportunities

In a world without borders, physical or of language, workers will be called upon to cooperate with colleagues in other countries, crossing time zones, languages, and cultures.

2. English vs. other languages

The relation between language and society is an old and closely connected one. The modernization of societies also implied changes at the language level. The more complex the societies became so did languages. Let us take the case of Latin. It is a known fact that in the 17th century, the upper classes in central Europe used it to demonstrate its status.

The 19th century, instead brought a change and German replaced Latin in peoples' preferences mainly due to the fact that it was a language spoken by the Habsburg monarchs who reigned over almost entire Europe. The balance of power again shifted and a hundred years later, the dominant language in Europe was Russian. After Russian, French became the favorite language especially used in diplomacy, upper classes and external relations. Today English is the dominant language used in fields such as education, business, economy, law, medicine, external relations etc. Much of the English language success was ensured by globalization more exactly by the disappearance of physical borders. It must also be said that English is spoken not only in the European Union but also on the American and Asian continents.

Today we can say without hesitation that if you travel all over the globe with business or on holiday you will be understood by everybody if you speak English. So English has become a single, common foreign language.

However, there is **an important question** that must be asked: **what will happen to the other main languages?**

If we study the map of the world we will see that some countries still preserve their own language. In fact we can build a top of the languages most studied across the globe. As mentioned above English is on the first place. Russian occupies a second place due to its spread in the Baltic countries. The next place is occupied by German spoken in central Europe and even preferred during the communist era when it was taught at least as widely as English. Unfortunately, the German language had a rough start because after the war nobody wanted to learn it or the German culture due to the negative influence of Hitler. French occupies the fourth place. Its cultural diplomacy renown all over the world and although it is a known fact the French is the language of diplomacy and official acts it never gained English popularity. In fact, our country is among the few ones that still appreciate and study it. It is also true, that an important part of the English attraction is due to the foreign investors. Many European companies consider English as their common, working language.

Although English is used as a common language in all European institutions, the EU recognizes the official languages of all member states and translates all main public documents into all those languages. However, civil servants and committees within the EU's institutions use three main working languages: English, French and German.

Conclusions

No matter how often the preferences in languages change, English will always be a dominant, common, global language. Its success is due to several factors: **Internet** – all the sites and the information are in English; **Education** – many students, children or adults still consider English as “cool” especially because all the programs that appear on TV, music and films, are in this language. There is another reason for which English is appreciated: children and adults are learning it faster if they watch and listen television programs and radio.

French is still on trend being preferred by the older generations who studied it in school and by the new ones who study it as the second language. It preserved its status as of a beautiful and elegant language still being the mark of diplomacy and high class.

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