
USE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT: INTERCULTURAL IMPLICATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS TRENDS

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Summary: *Significance of the English language use in the globalized economy has been indisputable. Reforms of educational systems have been tailored to accommodate the role of the English language in today's globalized context. While many scholars are propagating dissemination of this idea ranging from innovating language teaching methodologies to unique business strategies, still many are pointing to problems related to cultural and socio-political issues. A dichotomy between the single language use for international communication and local languages throughout the world brings up a major intercultural issue. Solutions to this issue represent a complex and difficult task requiring organized efforts both at national and global levels.*

Key words: *global communications, Lingua Franca, teaching methodology, multilingual and multicultural, international communication standards*

JEL Classification: *A10*

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to review the benefits of the English language use in the modern globalized context and alerts to potential problems and conflicts accompanied by a single language use in global communications. This article presents a number of issues and potential problems related to the use of English as the main language in the globalized context, presented by numerous scholars and authors. Some authors have argued that the use of a single language in international communications should not

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pose a problem in social and political contexts, however clear solutions are yet to be defined.

ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA

English is often defined as the Lingua Franca of today; it is a common denominator language used by international businesses and organizations in multi-linguistic environments. It is used by many organizations with an international orientation as the official language of communications.

Recognition of English as the Lingua Franca has a long history and tradition. The original “Lingua Franca” was mostly based on Italian while it subsequently acquired linguistic features of Spanish, French, Greek and Arabic, and was used as early as the 12th century in the Mediterranean region. The original purpose of this language was to facilitate communication among traders of different linguistic backgrounds. Although this paper does not discuss the historical process of the English language evolution into a prominent vehicle of global communications, it does recognize its undeniable status as the world’s Lingua Franca as the result of globalization. The Lingua Franca definition has obviously emerged and evolved into a distinct concept relevant to current trends. Geopolitical or other factors that contributed to this prominent role are not here considered, either.

There is a tendency even among non native speakers of English to use the English language terminology in the non English speaking environments in order to communicate profession related ideas – and this was precisely the function of the original Lingua Franca of the Mediterranean region.

Barbara Seidlhofer, Angelika Breiteneder and Marie-Luise Pitzl (2010) provide an original view of the English language use as Lingua Franca in Europe. Namely they, propose a single linguistic concept of English as a Lingua Franca (EFL) without a distinction between English as the mother language and English as the second language. They conducted empirical research of the English language use, and reached the conclusion that all speakers of English use certain intrinsic language features for communication purposes.

Although it has been asserted that geopolitical, social and cultural factors contributed to the rise of English as the universal Lingua Franca, we should also consider the structure of the English language itself. It is a well known fact

that a large percentage of English vocabulary derives from Latin and Classical Greek to some extent, specifically relating to scientific and technical terminology. Needless to say, a large number of scientific terms are intelligible among the native speakers of modern Romance languages. English has also extensively borrowed from non-Indo-European language families including semitic. We should also take into account the fact that as English further evolves and spreads as the major language used in global communications, it is likely to further borrow vocabulary from other language families.

ENGLISH AS A REQUIREMENT FOR GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS

In current times international business activities requiring specialized technical, scientific, medical or legal terminology can not be effectively conducted without the superior command of English. Advanced linguistic skills represent a prerequisite in the complex industry specific environment. Contemporary business environments consisting of diverse professional and skill backgrounds require general communication jargon, which cannot be accomplished without the strong language skills and the ability to efficiently communicate with different professional groups.

Efficient communication is directly relevant to productivity of businesses and organizations. Communications competence of individual employees fosters the information sharing, which in turn synchronizes activities and increases the productivity of the group as a whole. Needless to mention the requirement for superior communications competence in multinational and international organizations refers to the English language.

The omnipresence of English is apparent on the internet, in the media, social and organizational networks at the global level. It has played an essential role in the IT research and development, as well as the design of hardware and software programs. Evolvement of advanced technologies and globalization of the IT market further spreads the use of English and contributes to its status as a commodity.

Availability of the language – translation software have not diminished the need for the English language use. Moreover, professional translation services are not in most instances sufficiently adequate to replace direct communications in conducting important business negotiations and activities.

Academic institutions and universities throughout the English and non English speaking world encourage the English language acquisition through the English as a Second Language Departments and Institutes. Moreover, contribution of academics to scientific and technical journals, periodicals and other means of academic publications cannot be imagined without the higher level of the language skills.

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE STATUS

Aside from being attributed the major role in efficient communications globally, it is often feared to be a vehicle of imperialism, ambitions of higher professionalism and linguistic superiority thus having adverse effects on cultural and linguistic integrity of peoples and nations all over the world. As shown bellow, a number of authors express an ambivalent stance regarding the English language status, while they also call reforms and new methodologies in teaching English.

English Language – Education and Society

English is highly relevant in the social and political context. Robert Yagelsky (2010) asserts that English has a crucial role in the constantly evolving and complex technological world at the start of the new millenium. He does, however, point to popular terms at the present time, such as: “agency, cultural critique, and hegemony”.

While Yagelsky (2010) addresses the issues of the English role in the US including education policy makers, these views nevertheless are very relevant to its role in the global market place. Structures of the class rooms, curricula and school programs have remained by and large unchanged, contrasting with very rapid cultural, social and technological changes.

Jay David Bolter (1991) points to a beginning of a new teaching era equating new technologies with literacy. These advanced technologies should be incorporated into the English teaching curriculum, and the ever changing technological context should even become the focus of the emerging curricula reforms. English teachers should have an ambitious vision to incorporate advanced technological changes, where English becomes directly relevant to the newly evolved society. According to Joel Spring (2008), English representing the language of commerce has a prominent role in contributing to uniformity of national curricula at the global level.

Advanced technologies have triggered a new era of “informationalism” directly affecting communications at the global level. There is no doubt that, globalization will have distinct consequences for the English language teaching. According to Mark Warschauer (2000), the current curricula based on syntactic and functional elements of the language, and tasks that have been traditionally presented relatively narrowly will become increasingly ineffective. Both students and teachers will have to become adept at communication skills imposed by the new informational and technological requirements. As he asserts, advanced information technologies will have a strong impact on the concept of literacy, requiring online research and communication, expertise in authoring and analysis of hypermedia as critical skills for the students of English. Furthermore acquisition of English by non-native speakers requires new definition of the traditional concepts, such as language, culture and communication. Non-native speakers will have to give priority to the use of English in international communications and cooperation. Their language skills will have to be sufficiently advanced to address very complex concepts. By the same token, they will have to master superior presentation skills to well informed advanced audiences and acquire the ability to adapt to the newly developed environment.

Francois Victor Tochon (2009) insists that educational institutions should give priority to language education as one of the strategic goals including the timely language acquisition and advantages of bilingualism within the globalized context. At the same time he points to the problems of integrating international language policies with recognition of other languages and cultures.

Educational systems should account for integrating English with institutions both at the global and national levels. The relevance of English teaching should be periodically examined to conform to the newly evolved conditions of the modern world including the new technologies and all other aspects of the globalized economy.

English and Intercultural Communications

Priscila S. Rogers (1998) claims that successful business communications are founded on effective cross cultural communications and intercultural negotiations, which in turn are either directly or indirectly conditioned by language learning, linguistic analysis and discourse pattern.

English is the language of trade and commerce. It is the primary language for research publications (U.K. Ahmad 1997). Everyone acknowledges that English should have a priority as an international business language.

Rogers (1998) points to a general consensus on the “English divide”. “Multilingual reality” is present in business transactions in most parts of the non-English speaking countries, where business communication depends on crucial terms such as “multilingualism, English as a Second Language (ESL) and Business English (BE)”. As Rogers (1998) asserts, “The English divide” could also include the resentment feeling of non-native speakers who feel compelled to learn English for business purposes at the expense of their own mother language.

Different attitudes to the use of English as a universal business and marketing language stem from cultural diversity. Other authors, like Nigel Holden (1998) point to “cultural myopia and intellectual self-deception” of the English-speaking scholars who tend to be proponents of the mono-lingual research and communication. He argues that problems in translation of the marketing terminology of the Eastern European countries and Japan, for example, are due to distinct cultural perception of terms and concepts.

Future evolvement of globally significant fields, such as economy and marketing along with translation terminology will be significantly affected by the multicultural views within future global environment.

An H. Kuppens (2010) provides evidence that mere usage of English is an advertising technique on its own. Extensive research on the use of English in advertising relates to specific marketing strategies and cultural connotation that it carries. Robert B. Kaplan (1993) claims that English exercises a powerful hegemony within the international register of science and technology and other major transnational domains.

It has also been observed that the globalization process has posed challenges in intercultural communication in business negotiation and exchanges. Different cultural backgrounds contribute to distinct norms and expectation inherent to the intercultural communication process which can create potential problems and misunderstandings.

The opponents of the globalization trend argue for distinct educational practices in order to preserve unique cultural and linguistic identities. It is understand-

able that languages and cultures at national levels need to be preserved, while the challenging task of balancing the need to maintain unique cultural and linguistic traits and integration with the major global trends, remains.

Multicultural backgrounds imply diverse workforce which requires effective communications for the overall business success. The current global trend is to maintain and improve communications by coordinating distinct professional skills and talents within the team. The rise in international and multinational companies brings up the issue of diverse employee base which consist of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, cultural heritage and races. Diverse backgrounds may contribute to increased talent and creative potential thus producing the economic benefits aside from representing a social issue.

Juliane House (2001) claims that speakers of other languages are emotionally bound to their cultural heritage and tend to insist on their native languages as a means of identification with their own tradition. As she argues, this paradox perpetuates a traditional dichotomy between English as the “hegemony” and national languages on the other hand. Furthermore, House (2003) makes a distinction between the “language used for communication” and the “language used for identification”, arguing the major role of English in global communications poses no threat to multilingualism.

Realization that English as the major language in global communications has a distinct function and does not necessarily degrade cultural and linguistic diversity. Objectively speaking, it simply fulfils its role of facilitating communications in international markets and processes. Rather than being observed as an instrument of divisions, English could serve as a powerful source of bringing distinct cultural and linguistic communities closer together. It simply signals that a commencement of a new world order is well under way.

Priscilla (1998) points to a need for creating an integrated community of the educators pointing to the analogy of ABC as an organization consisting of international members who remain autonomous while working on mutual understanding, cooperation, in order to foster business communication, research and teaching. House (2003) also argues for “international degree programs” with English as the language of instruction. We may conclude that the establishment of common standards for global knowledge dissemination is necessary.

CONCLUSION

Distinct national and cultural agendas, as well as perspectives on communications requirements, should be reduced to a limited set of global standards, which are indispensable in the current globalized milieu and ever changing context of advanced technologies. Establishment of international institutions and organized efforts with the aim to promote and foster the English language use globally, while striving to maintain cultural and linguistic diversity of nations throughout the world is a desideratum. Needless to say, it requires a carefully balancing act to maintain the major linguistic means of global communications without compromising cultural and linguistic interests worldwide.

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UPOTREBA ENGLESKOG JEZIKA U GLOBALNOM KONTEKSTU: INTERKULTURALNE IMPLIKACIJE I GLOBALNI TRENDVI

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Rezime: *Značaj engleskog jezika u globalnoj ekonomiji je neospornu. Reforme obrazovnih sistema treba da se prilagode značajnoj ulozi engleskog jezika u današnjem globalnom kontekstu. Dok mnogi naučnici podržavaju diseminaciju ove ideje ukazujući na uvođenje novih metodologija učenja jezika kao i jedinstvenih poslovnih strategija, mnogi i dalje ukazuju na probleme koji se odnose na kulturalna i društveno-politička pitanja. Dibotomija koja postoji između upotrebe jezika za međunarodnu komunikaciju i lokalnih jezika širom sveta dovodi do osetljivih interkulturalnih pitanja. Rešenje ovih problema predstavlja kompleksan i težak zadatak koji zahteva organizovane napore na nacionalnim i globalnim nivoima.*

Ključne reči: *globalna komunikacija, Lingva Franca, metodologija predavanja, visejezički i multikulturalni, međunarodni standardi komunikacija.*

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