

Globalization and Biculturalism in Language

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This paper discusses how globalization has produced drastic changes in our society in terms of social, cultural values, political rather than purely economic and ethical. It is clear that economics rides on the back of globalization (Maley 2005). Tourism, air travel, multi-national cooperation, organized crimes including drugs and money laundering. All of these contribute, to and draw their sustenance from consumerism, mediated and fostered by globalization. As such, the writer wonders whether globalization facilitates the introduction of new aspects of socio-educational cultures of developed countries to our national culture. Holliday, for example, points out that the introduction of these values to foreign culture can lead to "tissue rejection"(Hoyle, cited in Holliday 1994:134). Nevertheless we cannot reject these values as such unless they contradict our convictions. Therefore, we shall explore what globalization has produced in our society with regard to culture and biculturalism and language. When language crosses its national borders, it carries with it its culture, which will result in biculturalism in language – the state of a foreign culture existing side by side with the native culture. There are two aspects of biculturalism: the positive and negative sides, which will be discussed below.

1.0 Introduction

If we trace the history of the term globalization, we will find that it was hardly used just a decade ago. Wright (1999) writes that the world is changing drastically. Government-imposed barriers and structural impediments, which segmented domestic markets are falling rapidly, while technological advances in production, transportation, and telecommunication – especially in the internet allow even the smallest firms to have an access to customers, suppliers and collaborators around the world. This is the origin of globalization as a movement in trade and marketing, which crosses national boundaries. However, language globalization began much earlier. Its origin could be traced to the beginning of the Renaissance period. In fact languages have been crossing official barriers for a long time; and these barriers were not imposed to stop languages moving from country to country, that is, governments have no control over the spread of foreign languages. It is worth noting that language 'infiltration' across national boundaries has increased a great deal since the 20th century. The flow has been prompted by (a) the two world wars, (b) education, (c) telecommunication revolution and (d) globalization.

This paper is in seven parts, an introduction and six parts. Part 2 discusses factors promoting globalization in language; part 3 explores the impact of globalization on language and culture. Part 4 is devoted to biculturalism and language globalization; part 5 deals with positive biculturalism and negative biculturalism. Part 6 treats the topic of back to one language, and part 7 concludes the paper.

2.0 Language globalization

The main factors which have helped the English language to achieve a global status are: (a) the two world wars, (b) the socio-economic, political, technological and military importance of the people(s) who speak English, (c) education and (d) improved means of communication. A brief account of these factors follows:

(a) The two World Wars

From the earliest times up to the nineteenth century the main reason for imposing the language of a conqueror on the conquered was colonization. History abounds with such examples; the Germanic languages in England in the old English period; the French language in North Africa and the English language in India and a number of African countries in modern times.

In the twentieth century the two world wars pulled down many national borders and helped the English language to cross them. The language of the two great victorious powers, the USA and Britain, became the world language, a status which the English language has continued to enjoy.

(b) Socio-economic, political technological and military factor

The global status of a language is enforced by a strong economic, technological, military and political position of the people(s) speaking that language. It is a fact that a language is strong as long as the people who speak it are strong. A language declines and dies if the speaking community declines and dies. Thus economic, technological and political globalization is bound to encourage language globalization because language is a vital part of any type of globalization.

(c) Education

One important way of promoting the globalization of a language is through education – the policy of teaching a foreign language is a policy of globalization. It promotes the pulling down of linguistic barriers and encourages languages to travel freely across national frontiers. English at present enjoys a position second to none in the educational systems of many countries, including the Arab World.

(d) Improved means of communication

Radio broadcasting, satellite channels and the internet hardly recognize any borders. Very few countries prohibiting these means of communication which are freely used by

all the countries of the world. English, of course, looms large in these means of communication.

One vital aspect of these means of communication is translation. The process of transferring texts from one language into another inevitably involves transferring the culture of the source language. During the various periods of history, translation has been the main factor in the emergence and revival of cultures and civilizations..

If globalization in trade involves seven great power (G7) or even G8) globalization in language is probably confined to one language – English, helped by the factors mentioned above. Moreover, with the English language comes of course English culture or we should say cultures, which is the topic of the next part.

3. Impact of globalization on language and culture

The language "English" has gone a complete change from a language (which is largely process-oriented) to an item of economic value, that is a product. There are constant advertisements in the press, and government ministers and agencies like the British Council, to English as a valuable 'product'. Moreover, there are now global structure marketing examinations, language schools and universities, and publishing in support of the English language industry. Academics and academicians provide justifications for the maintenance of English as a globally-marketable commodity (Graddol 1998, Jenkins 2003, McKay 2002).

The shift of English to a product involves competitive pressures related to marketing in a global environment. The Anglo-American cultures compete strongly in the market for English. This results in the increased pressure on everyone involved to deliver the product faster, more efficiently and more cost effectively. Teachers, among others, are 'managed', assessed and evaluated as never before. One result is that considerable time is spent on documentation and evaluation, at the expense of time available for preparation, teaching and student care: just one of the little ironies which an over commitment to efficiency brings in its wake. Tenner (1996) claims this is but one of the 'revenge effects' which is built in to innovation.

As English has become a global language and the communicative vehicle for Consumerism. As such, not only does it pose a moral dilemma for teachers, but also a problem on the issues of correctness, appropriateness, acceptability etc and thus undermines the teachers' authority. On the other hand, teaching English is still very traditional in terms of the media it deploys. Despite rapid advances in multi-media and computer-based materials, the English teaching business still relies most heavily on books. This implies that books are of great economic value to Anglo-American countries. All too often, technology is seen as a magical solution to the problem of learning, which leads to a misapplication of technology. The wrong question is asked. Rather than asking 'Here's a lovely new piece of technology. What can we use it for?' A better question would be 'Here is an educational need: how could we use technology to fulfil it?' (Kramsch 1997). We should know that the nucleus of learning is the learner, and that

learning is an internal process which is largely unobservable, and only partially manipulable.

As shown above the factors that have helped the English language to attain this privileged position are well known; there is no need to discuss them here; they are political, economic, geographical, scientific, technological and linguistic, among others. The important thing here is that English has found speakers, many or few in every country in the world. One of the results of a dominant world language crossing the national boundary of less advanced countries is what we call biculturalism: emergence of a state in the host country, where two cultures compete, the native culture and the foreign culture. Backed by a global language, a strong economy, a powerful political system and a military might, the foreign culture is nearly always destined to have the upper hand. The native culture's only support is the patriotic feeling of its people –a poor support at the best of times.

Let us look back at history. If we are to believe the myth of Babel, languages started with one language. The earliest human community spoke one language. Is this kind of globalization? The one language split into various languages because of a discord. Thus different human languages are associated with a state of discord among human beings. Is humanity's hope of a peaceful life linked with the act of going back to the earlier state of one language? Perhaps. We will call this hopeful state positive biculturalism, to be distinguished from negative biculturalism, which will be discussed in due course.

4. Biculturalism and Language Globalization

It is a well-known fact that language forms an integral part of culture, and the two cannot be separated. Thus when a language crosses the national boundary into another country, it carries with it certain aspects of the culture to which it belongs. With the passing of time the foreign culture grows gradually side by side with the native culture. This is what we call biculturalism – two cultures existing together in one nation, one native and the other foreign. Competition usually results in a conquering and a conquered culture. The other process, that of complementation is, the writer believes, a healthy one.

This state of biculturalism may be noticed to a varying degree in a number of Arab countries, where Arab culture exists side by side with a Western culture brought into the country mainly by the English language, but also to a less extent by the French language. What are the manifestations of this process which the writer has termed biculturalism. Two of the main aspects of biculturalism are coped with here, one in spoken language and the other in written language. The most important realization of linguistic biculturalism in speech is in code switching. A mild type of this phenomenon may be noticed in the two Arabic speaking persons engaged in a conversation, provided the participants belong to the educated strata of the society (educated may be defined in the present context as university education or middle or upper middle class). Code switching is not a rare phenomenon among certain classes of the society: it is quite common..

We are constantly reminded that English has spread into all corners of the globe geographically, and into most of the functional areas of language use. It has become the most widely used language for international business, science, technology, tourism, aviation, diplomacy, publication, the Internet, etc. In short, English has become the communicative vehicle for Consumerism. The effect of global English on other cultures and languages has been widely documented and reviewed (Philipson 1992, Pennycook 1994, Canagarajah 1999).

There are other, perhaps less obvious, problems for the teacher of English. As English becomes more international, it becomes less 'English' (Maley 2005). English no longer belongs to the English-speaking peoples when it is spoken as a second or other language by a majority of people in the world

5. Positive Biculturalism and Negative Biculturalism

Biculturalism has a positive side and a negative one. On the positive side, one can claim that nothing is more damaging to a culture than the state of isolation. If all foreign influences are banned in an attempt to keep the native culture 'pure', then this isolation will stifle the native culture and contribute to its decline and deterioration. For, to modify slightly Donne's famous words, no nation or culture is an island entire of itself, every culture is part of other cultures, and every nation is part of humanity. Nothing is more harmful to promoting understanding among nations than the isolation of language and culture. In ancient times the Arabs used to say: Learn the language of your enemy. We may say now: Learn the language and culture of other nations. Such a phenomenon may result in less resistance to understand perhaps assimilate the Western culture. This leads to a more exposure to English which may facilitate its learning/acquisition.

A foreign culture definitely enriches our culture and broadens our minds. New ideas, beliefs, patterns of behaviour may prove to languages and cultures is the road to understand and eventually to teach. Languages and cultures borrow from one another and lend to one another, and this is how they live and grow. History tells us that in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, indeed in all periods, there was an active interaction between the Arabic language and culture and the languages and cultures of other nations including Greek, Persian, Syriac and Indian. The great danger to any language and culture is to be enclosed between four walls. We cannot afford to follow Polonius's advice to his son in Hamlet: 'Neither a borrower no a lender be'. The least that can be said about this advice – and it has often been said – is that it is a recipe for egoism. The basic principle of life is 'Give and take'.

The other side of biculturalism – the negative side-is more obvious. This is the reason why it is more often emphasized. Opposition to a foreign culture (and language, sometimes) boils down to the fact that a foreign culture may swallow up the native

culture, or at least corrupt it. This argument is also used against a foreign language. Since language and culture are an integral part of an individual's identity, this is a serious threat. These fears are greater when the foreign language and culture enjoy a global status. Biculturalism, in this case, may develop into a situation where the foreign culture becomes dominant and the native culture subordinate. This state may soon grow into a superior culture and an inferior culture, and the individual - or even the whole society - a mere imitator of the imported superior culture. Often such fears spring from a potential rather than a real state of affairs. However, there is no denial that such potentiality does exist. The way to avoid this danger is not to isolate one's culture and to reject into anything foreign related to culture or language. What, then, is the other alternative?

The way to avoid the negative aspect of biculturalism, as we see it, is to strike a balance between the native culture and the foreign culture, to choose what is good in both cultures, not to imitate and adopt the good with the bad. Moreover, the role of an appropriate education comes, which helps the citizen to make the right choice. If school and university education is unable to train the individual to make the right choice these institutions will have failed in achieving their objectives. For the individual to make the right choice, there must be a choice; a ban on foreign elements may be the easiest way but it is certainly not the right way to be followed since it deprives a person of his/her right to choose.

6.0 Back to One Language

Babel is a watershed in the history of humanity. Before the fall of the Babylon Tower, peoples spoke one language and, as a result, they achieved a great degree of understanding. Since many discords spring from linguistic misunderstanding, it is assumed that these monolingual societies lived in a greater state of harmony than what is observed now. The authors of **The Meaning of Meaning** published in 1923 believed that quarrels among human societies basically sprang from erroneous idea that objects had constant meanings. Ogden and Richards wrote their book in the hope that they would disprove this notion of constant meaning and hence remove the cause of discords and quarrels. They must have been disappointed when in less than two decades after the publication of their book a second global war broke out. We now know that there are other causes for quarrels and wars including economic ones, but it cannot be denied that language plays an essential role in bringing people together. The harmonizing role of language becomes greater with the advancement of humanity to a status whereby grabbing each other's property is no longer acceptable, and material greediness comes under human control.

In this case what hope is there for language harmony – and culture harmony among nations except for humanity to go back to a state similar not identical, to that before Babel? Human beings must speak one language and live in a harmonious culture if they want to survive. This is not a Utopian ideal which requires renouncing national languages. National languages will be kept as they are but they will be enforced by a solid foundation of a unified language. There is nothing unusual about this unity of language lying beneath, or beyond, national languages. It is an old idea which inspired

the work of Port Royal Linguists of the seventeenth century and still inspires the supporters of universal language.

Our prime efforts should aim at promoting the global basis of human understanding by means of encouraging similarities in human cultures and languages. In education, in work of translation, and in other linguistic and cultural activities our objective should be the broad view of the unity of language and culture – a unity which goes beyond national languages and cultures.

7.0 Conclusion

Globalization in language predates that in trade and commerce: languages have been crossing political borders for a long time. In the present age the English language enjoys a global state second to none. Language globalization brings with it culture globalization, resulting in biculturalism in language – the state of a foreign culture living side by side with the native culture. There are two aspects of biculturalism: the positive side and the negative one. On the positive side, the foreign culture and language can enrich the native culture and language, and help to promote understanding among the peoples of the world. On the negative side, biculturalism may develop into a superior culture and an inferior culture, usually represented by the native culture.

This is a very natural form of negativism due to globalization. The negative option is to retreat into some form of extreme behaviour in response to the frustration provoked by impotence. Unhappily, the spread of religious fundamentalism (both in the USA and elsewhere) is one form of this. The globalization of terrorism is another.

The best way to avoid negativism in biculturalism is not by adopting a policy of isolation and protection of the native culture, but by training the citizen to make the right choice when he/she adopts aspects of the foreign culture.

There is a belief that beyond national languages and cultures, there exists a universal state representing a universal language and culture. It is this pre-Babel basis of harmony that should be encouraged by means of an efficient interactive process of borrowing and lending among the various languages and cultures of the world. After all, similarities between men are greater than differences. Language globalization should therefore be exploited to promote these similarities as a basis to promoting understanding among the peoples of the world. We can join others who share our concerns, taking strength from solidarity. This is one area in which the Internet can have a positive effect by facilitating contact with associations and organizations seeking to combat the negative effects of many phenomena mentioned earlier in this paper.

If we are teachers, we have enormous power for positively influencing our students. Students do not only learn the subject matter we teach them: they learn their teachers. It is the values and attitudes they learn from us that they will carry away with them into their future lives.

To close, let me cite Edward Said from the new preface to 'Orientalism' (Said 2003).

'We still have at our disposal the rational interpretative skills that are the legacy of humanist education. Rather than the manufactured clash of civilizations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other and live together, but for that kind of wider perception, we need time and a patient and skeptical inquiry, supported by faith in communities of interpretation, that are difficult to sustain in a world demanding instant action and reaction.'

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