

Globalization and English Teaching in Jordan

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Abstract

This study discusses globalization and its effect on both education and culture. English as a global language is discussed and how attitudes of people in Jordan have changed according to this fact. Many people in Jordan are keen on learning and even using English in different aspects of life. The positive and negative sides of globalization are elevated and the importance of not letting the negative effect of globalization erase our identity was a point that this study raised. The study concludes by emphasizing the role of teachers in enlightening their students and making them aware of how to proceed into their future as envoys of their own culture to the rest of the world.

Key words: globalization, education, culture, English teaching

1. Introduction

Globalization is widely used nowadays in different aspects of life. It is a term that we have been hearing quite frequently, which consequently leads one to wonder whether it is a new concept that have concurred in our lives recently or it has roots in the history of humanity. Exploring the meaning of globalization, and taking into consideration globalization as a *phenomenon* and the *term* Globalization, might lead to some answers.

We can start by stating that it is a misleading concept in the sense that some literature refers to globalization as it has been happening for 500years. Rather what is new is that we are entering an 'age of transition'. The modern world system is in structural crisis and has entered into a period of chaotic behavior which will cause a complete division and a transition to a new structure whose nature is as yet undetermined and, in principle, impossible to predetermine, but one that is open to human intervention and creativity.

In other literature, Globalization is a historical process that began with the first movement of people out of Africa into other parts of the world. Traveling short, then longer distances, migrants, merchants, and others have always taken their ideas, customs, and products into new lands. Others suggest that the *phenomenon* of globalization began in a primitive form when humans first settled into different areas of the world; however, it has shown a rather steady and rapid progress in recent times and has become an international dynamic which, due to technological advancements, has increased in speed and scale, so that countries in all five continents have been affected and engaged or it is a historical legacy and is lasting as old as history. It is a continuous phenomenon with different titles; like globalization, westernization, internationalism, and Americanization.

Another path would consider globalization as a recently introduced concept that has only come up in the last twenty years of the twentieth century or even less. If we trace the history of the *term* globalization, we will find that it was hardly used just three decades ago. A radical change in the world is taking place quickly. Government-imposed barriers 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.

Despite the positive impact of globalisation in making the world a smaller place and in speeding up the flow of information, the present process of globalisation is nothing but a tool for the more powerful states in the world to exert their domination in the areas of knowledge production and the economy, and therefore, of development. Progress in the means of producing knowledge and information at the international level has turned this service into a private commodity, subject to new laws governing the protection of intellectual property. The world's most powerful states ensured that the laws protecting intellectual property contain clauses and conditions granting them what amounts to a monopoly over knowledge production. Globalization is a complex phenomenon from the economic, political and cultural point of view.

Globalization shows, on the one hand locality, on the other hand globality. It also presents uniformity and multiplicity. It affects national and local practices but at the same time these national and local practices affect global processes. Globalization means global, transnational interactions of people, shared cultures, information and technology, education, economy and value systems beyond the cultural divide of West and East.

2. Globalization and Education

Globalization, in the context of education, can be defined as the integration of information, ideas and knowledge. The term Globalization was primarily associated with economics. However, its usage is now common in the field of education, (De Wit, 2002). Globalization brings the cultures of different countries together. The phenomenon that is globalization has brought new dimensions to this world, and people are mingling with each other like never before. The social, economic, and political changes that globalization has brought have been accompanied by some challenges. Education is generally seen as a formal process of instruction, based on a theory of teaching, to impart formal knowledge. However, the process of learning can occur, with or without formal institutional education. Knowledge accumulation and the accumulation of skills will occur increasingly outside the traditional institutions of formal education.

When it comes to education, the effect of globalization can be felt in terms of languages and technology; it is currently considered that globalization has made English the common medium of communication in most countries, (De Wit, 2002). According to Zughoul (2003) the English language has become entrenched in the Arab world, especially after the Second Gulf War 2003. People can only contribute and benefit from globalization if they are endowed with knowledge, skills and with the capabilities and rights needed to pursue their basic livelihoods. They need employment and incomes, and a healthy environment. These are the essential conditions which empower them to participate fully as citizens in their local, national and global communities. These goals, can only be reached if national governments allocate adequate resources to education, basic infrastructure and the environment, and create the institutional framework which ensures broad access and opportunity. Globalization is a complex phenomenon that has had far-reaching effects. Not surprisingly, therefore, the term “globalization” has acquired many emotive connotations. At one extreme, globalization is seen as an irresistible and benign force for delivering economic prosperity to people throughout the world. At the other, it is blamed as a source of all contemporary ills.

To different scholars, the definition of globalization may be different. For some it may refer to the transfer, adaptation, and development of values, knowledge, technology, and behavioral norms across countries and societies in different parts of the world. The typical phenomena and characteristics associated with globalization include growth of global networking (e.g. internet, worldwide e-communication, and transportation), global transfer and interflow in technological, economic, social, political, cultural, and learning areas, international alliances and competitions, international collaboration and exchange, global village, multi-cultural integration, and use of international standards and benchmarks. Globalization is described as the increasing interdependence of the world’s inhabitants, on an economic, technological, cultural, as well as political level. It is seen as a general tendency towards the liberalization of economic trade, a wider circulation of capital, goods and products, and a quasi-abolition of national borders. The speed of communication and the relatively low cost of processing information have caused distances to be eliminated. The categories of time and space have been completely overturned. Models of consumption, values, and standardized cultural products thus tend to make behaviors and attitudes more similar and wipe out differences across the globe.

3. Globalization and Culture

It is possible that focusing instruction on a national language could result in attrition of a student’s native language or the local language, as well as in the devaluing or abandonment of local cultural practices and ideals (Abdel-Jawad, 2006; Allen, Crago & Pesco, 2006; Priven, 2008; Rong, 2007). Academic achievement among minority language speakers may also suffer as students struggle to learn the languages taught in their schools. Monolingual, majority language education may also alienate students from the educational system, or create a sense of disconnectedness from the students’ own cultures. Although it is possible that students instructed in the lingua franca or another majority language may meet with increased international education and employment opportunities later in life, is it acceptable to risk the loss of local languages and cultures to achieve global economic viability? While some research shows that exposure to a non-native language such as English in school supports increased meta-linguistic awareness of one’s mother tongue, other research indicates that the sole use of a majority or national language in the educational environment may lead to a decline in the students’ fluency with their native language, (Abd-el-Jawad, 2006; Allen, Crago & Pesco, 2006; Priven, 2008) or potentially to a reduced level of educational attainment among minority language speakers (Rong, 2007; Trudell, 2007).

Providing children with an education that includes a language, such as English, that will help them be competitive in a global market should probably not come at the expense of the language of the student’s family and local culture. If multilingualism and multiculturalism are to truly be valued in a society, then, to begin with,

its institution of education must reflect this value. These constructs should be embraced, and instructional practices should also meet the needs of those students who are learning more than one language.

Whether that learning takes place formally or informally, the education process will be advanced, not hindered. One might suggest that, in a perfect world, all men would speak a common language so that they could communicate ideas freely. They would carry common ideals, values, goals, aspirations and ethics. Such a world would be ... colorless. It is the very fact that we have diversity that gives this world color and spice. Given the realities of globalization, the current worldwide trend toward increased interaction between citizens of all nations and ethnicities, the economic success of the individual and the community is inextricably tied up with our ability to relate to one another. Comprehension of the —other is dependent upon cultural understanding, since culture cannot be divorced from language. Thus, linguistic competency beyond that of our own mother tongue builds connections across cultural divisions.

On the other hand, globalization, when taken to extremes, threatens the diversity of human culture. While the development of a global culture, can aid in breaking down old stereotypes and bring about a greater awareness of the interdependence of all the world's inhabitants, we must be careful to avoid the hubris of a totalitarian mindset. No single society has ever developed a perfect way of life that can be universally exported, a system that can function flawlessly in every context. Civilizations across the world have been evolving for thousands of years, accumulating knowledge that is passed on to each successive generation. Rather than extinguish these multiple and various perspectives on human existence, we must work to preserve and utilize them to enhance and enlighten our path towards increased world-wide cooperation. A global culture, representing a global worldview and expressed through a global language, must, therefore, defend its own origins in all the neglected corners of the world.

As globalization continues, as we move toward a global culture, it is vital that we remain aware of this issue. Increased economic cooperation and co-dependence can help to bring peace to the world, but it must not be allowed to do so at the expense of freedom and the expression of the individual through his or her native language and culture. The lessons that each human group has learned can enrich the communal knowledge of all humanity. To learn about other cultures we must learn other languages, but we also must remember our own and be willing to defend those in danger of being lost. We must take control of this process, using our increased awareness of other foreign cultures to come to a better understanding of them and show them the respect they deserve. Globalization, unchecked, can crush diversity. Handled wisely, it can make the world a far better, far more peaceful, and still very interesting place.

4. English as a Global Language

Globalization has made English the common medium of communication in most countries. As history taught us at the end of colonialism and the arrival of our post-modern course, we have already seen the end of linguistic imperialism symbolizing American English and British English. We now see a variety of *Englishes* in today's world. It can be said that we have entered the age of *Englishes* within the framework of English as an international language and global/world language. English is currently considered as an International Language that belongs to no single culture, but rather provides the basis for promoting cross-cultural understanding in an increasingly global village (McKay, 2001). The very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it (Widdowson, 1994). 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.

Also, as McKay (2001) notes, learners of an international language do not need to internalize the cultural norms of native speakers of that language as the ownership of an international language becomes denationalized. The notion that an international lingua franca is necessary to allow worldwide communication has emerged in correspondence with the ongoing process of globalization. Although the spread of the English language is often portrayed as an inevitable consequence of global forces, it can also be conceived as a subtle and insidious form of western imperialism.

The proliferation of English Language Teaching (ELT) programs can be viewed as an instrumental part of this. The inequality produced from the global spread of English, through the threat it poses to local languages and cultures, raises questions about the common representation of ELT programs as universally beneficial. Merely focusing on the function of language as a means of generating mutual intelligibility trivializes its importance in individual identity and group culture. The structure of a language is of a direct influence, through speakers understand and organize the social and natural world around them. In opposition to this, sociolinguists have tended to view language as a reflection of the social structure. Similarly, the structural functionalists approach to

language identifies its functional role in the maintenance of social structure (Williams, 1992). All of these positions, however, point to the integral role of language in the formation of personal and distinctive cultural meanings and identity. Language can thus be seen as a repository of a unique world view, so that the disappearance of a particular language will have major social consequences. Language also cannot be removed from its economic and political context (Williams, 1992). According to Antonio Gramsci, a leading Italian Marxist, language is a field of force where different ideologies, interests and styles can compete. Likewise, the post-structuralist position moves beyond the conception of language as merely a functional linguistic system, pointing to the existence of 'discourses', the articulations of ideology and power relations in language. The promotion of and resistance to the global spread of English, therefore, cannot be separated from broader economic, social and political contexts (Williams, 1992).

5. English in Jordan

The teaching of English in Jordan dates back to the establishment of the Kingdom of Jordan. The English language instructional field has seen various educational reform initiatives which intended to create a change and improvement in teacher's teaching of English. Various changes have taken place in English language instruction in Jordan and elsewhere in the world represented locally, for example, by various initiatives to develop the educational process. Teacher education is at the centre of this development movement. These might have left together with other factors demands for effective English language instruction and the need to revise teacher preparation to provide effective teacher education. The EFL instructional theatre of Jordan has witnessed an increasing demand for effective English language teaching. State-wide the pressure on English language teachers escalates due to demands for quality English language learning as the country enters in economic and political environment that call for rigorous EFL instruction.

The spread of English in recent times is often discussed against the backdrop of globalization. Globalization is seen as a driving force to strengthen the position of English as a global language, and English is seen as a mediation tool for globalization. The unprecedented spread of English as "the" lingua franca of our globalized era has placed new and pressing linguistic demands on educational systems of non-English speaking countries like that of Jordan.

Communicating in English often tops the list of skills with which students need to be equipped in order to be able to compete not only at regional and global levels, but also locally, considering the ongoing liberalization of the economy and the growing presence of international and transnational organizations in Jordan in recent years. Just like any other language, however, English is not value-free. It has been hypothesized that English could hegemonically pose a threat to local languages and cultures. The global dominance of English in many fields is hegemonic as it has created divides between those who speak it and those who do not.

On the other hand, other narratives of English have portrayed it as a tool for promoting international understanding and the global common good (Crystal, 1994). English use in Jordan has historically been limited to EFL domains such as tourism, commerce, diplomacy, and other international business functions. However, as English is evolving into a world language, its status in the Expanding Circle, including Jordan, has been getting stronger with time. In Jordan, two varieties of Arabic language are used rather than different languages. These are Classical Arabic and Jordanian Arabic. Beyond this diglossia of Classical and Jordanian Arabic, English plays a dual role in Jordan. On the one hand it is the principle foreign language of the general population as well as, it is the first and only mandatory foreign language taught in schools, with obligatory English language instruction starting in first grade and private kindergartens. Hotel workers, shopkeepers, and street salespeople use English to communicate with foreign visitors and residents, especially in major cities and tourist destinations (Schaub, 2000; Stevens, 1994). Beyond that, English starts to serve as a second language of additional communication for a large group of Jordanian's elite. The majority of private schools are considered English language schools, which means that English language instruction begins in kindergarten and that English is a medium of instruction of other specified subjects (i.e., mathematics and science). The Ministry of Education has started to teach English from the first grade within the public school system.

The elite usually continue their post-secondary education in English, studying either abroad or in faculties such as, Medicine, dentistry, engineering, the natural sciences, and computer sciences in the Jordanian universities, all use English as a main medium of instruction, and other disciplines, such as commerce and law, have special English-medium sections which are considered more prestigious and difficult to enter. Graduates from these universities and programs often enter careers in which English continues to be used as a daily medium of communication, such as international business or computer science. Professionals in other elite fields, such as medicine, continue to use English as an additional language through frequent contact with foreigners and through professional activities. Conferences of doctors, dentists, and nurses in Jordan are conducted in English,

even without foreigners present, and professional publications of these groups are published in English.

6. Conclusion

Globalization in language exceeds trade and commerce: languages have been crossing political borders for a long time. In the present age the English language enjoys a distinctive global state. Language globalization brings with it culture globalization, where a foreign culture lives side by side with the native culture. There are two aspects of this situation, the positive side and the negative one. On the positive side, the foreign culture and language can augment the native culture and language, and help to promote understanding among the peoples of the world. On the negative side, it may develop into a superior culture and an inferior culture, usually represented by the native culture. The best way to avoid negativism is not by adopting a policy of isolation and protection of the native culture, but by training people to make the right choice when they adopt aspects of the foreign culture.

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.

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, Edward Said in the preface to 'Orientalism' (2003) states:

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 (p.p. xxii).

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