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***Globalization:  
an opportunity or an abstacle to communication ?***

### **Preliminaries**

We live in an era when the dimension of communication, especially in what concerns its importance, has reached levels that, only a few decades ago, belonged, in the happiest case, to the realm of imagination. The development of electronic communication technologies has determined new levels of interaction and cohesion between people everywhere and, subsequently, has led to a “dissolution” of the traditional geographical borders. People from the remotest parts of the world, individuals who know nothing about each other, have nowadays a chance – which many generations did not even dream of – (and the tremendous evolution will definitely not stop here!); the freedom to communicate with each other, without any spatial or temporal limits. The extension of communication networks at a global level has given the concept of communication entirely new dimensions and connotations. But all these “facilities” represent only a link in a chain that will tightly bind all humankind, they are “facilities” that require a tribute, a price to be paid: this is generically called *globalization*.

A largely discussed and disputed phenomenon that combines supporters and critics, the globalization presupposes essential transformations at the most important levels of human life. But these transformations that are thoroughly discussed (when the terms are placed in the equation of globalization) may only materialize with the help of the *fundamental* link for our very ontological becoming, that is, *communication*. It is enough to remember that communication lies at the basis of any form of human interaction (as the Palo Alto School teaches us) in order to understand that the fundamental constitutive elements for the global human society – politics, economics, technology, and especially culture – are inconceivable without communication.

We must not ignore or minimize the role of communication, although – unfortunately – in the frame of globalization, communication is often treated and seen as “a problem among

others”, when, in fact, *it* should be given central attention. Therefore, this article aims precisely to stress the irreplaceable functions of the process of communication in general, and of the achievement of globalization, in particular.

### **The Dimensions of Globalization: general descriptive context**

A phenomenon of major complexity due to its multiple implications at all the levels of human life, globalization generates continuously interest and a preoccupation from specialists from various fields. We may accept it or fight it, understand it more or less, we may be more or less aware of it, but globalization will occur anyway, as all evidence points out; definitely, the good thing about it is that it will not take place over night, and therefore we will have the time to *try* to understand it, to grasp its signification as much as possible.

The phenomenon of globalization appeared 35-40 years ago in human civilization, and was especially evident in the field of economic life, first and foremost through an extension of commerce at the world level. The progress towards globalization determined a reconfiguration of the world economic map, the creation of multiple scientific, technological and communication networks that connect the research centers to the important business environments worldwide. Enhanced by the theories of the free exchange and supported by the development of the new information technologies, the economic, political, scientific and cultural links at the world level have therefore created the necessary conditions for opening the national borders. Globalization is considered to be a process triggered by the development of capitalism, a process developed especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, seen as a possible alternative to the destruction or re-dimensioning of the old international economic organizations.

In social sciences, the term globalization refers to “the process that increases the interdependence and communication between the peoples in the world, up to the creation of a *global society*. Such interdependence has been created in different fields, so that we can talk of a plurality of processes of globalization (political, technological, economical, cultural etc.). The process of globalization can be therefore studied and understood as a process of global communication that presupposes an extension of all the communication systems and especially of the possibilities offered by

communication using media, as well as multiple directions of communication.” (Marco Drago, Andrea Boroli, 2004, p.397) In short, globalization refers to diffusing a system of tendencies, concepts, processes of circulation of the material goods and of the financial resources, also involving the consequences that inevitably derive from the general context of the phenomenon under discussion; we can even speak of mutations in the political life, and of essential economic changes.

### **Pros and cons to Globalization**

As Arnett states, “from certain points of view, globalization has been in place for centuries: cultures have long influenced one another through wars, migrations, and jobs. From other points of view, it is just beginning.” (J. Arnett, 2002, p.801)

In the descriptive frame of globalization, we are convinced that the forces of globalization come to configure a new world order. The supporters of the theories of this phenomenon actually refer to the formation of a *unique*, global society, of a world system that requires an increase in the collective conscience of human society, resulting in a *redefinition* and a reconfiguration of the ethnical, national, and cultural identities.

The supporters of globalization argue that it represents the logic and natural culmination of democratic capitalism, and that the main attributes of such a world would be welfare and friendship. The world would be much more homogenous, and the existence of a single culture would unite all mankind in a universal community; it would be a world without the burden of ethnical conflicts and of economic, political and social differences, a world freed of social convulsions. In short, we are promised a world of facilities of all types, something that reminds us of the older “promised land” ... with plenty milk and honey. This would be, in very general terms, of course, “the words” of those who wish to inspire optimism and trust in the global future.

On the other hand, there are those who seriously fight the profound transformations of humankind, who consider them as thoroughly destructive for the very human essence.

As a process that contributes to the extension of social change to the level of the entire world, globalization triggers the evolution of two parallel plans: on the one hand we can notice an “unhindered”

persistence of internationalization, and on the other a tendency to return to one's own norms and values. No doubt that such an evolution is likely to create for all of us who witness this era (irrespective of which opinion we favor) conflicting emotions.

Concepts, theses, fundamental ideas belonging to the Enlightenment and to modernity, all fade in the blinding light of globalization, and this fact necessarily determines a reconsideration and a rethinking of the theories related to politics, economy, culture, to which we had got used. Some concepts such as "the territorial state", "the raise of the life standards based on technical progress", "the determinism imposed by local communities and cultures" lose their traditional echo and make room for different concepts, such as "multi-national and cross-national corporations", "the development of global communication networks," etc.

Obviously, the effects of globalization act subtly and on the long term; in what concerns the phenomenon of globalization, there are numerous factors that determine fear, uncertainty, confusion, conflicting emotions within and between individuals, etc. As our intention is not to penetrate the many details that provide various "shades" to this phenomenon, we wish to stop, in what follows, at the fundamental problem of the present article: the process of *communication* that stands at the basis of any form of *human interaction*. It follows that when we speak of globalization, first of all (be it the sphere of politics, economics, society and culture) we must consider communication, upon which, in a strict dependency, are built all the other elements that contribute to defining globalization.

### **Globalization from the point of view of communication**

As an essential component of our identity as human beings, communication represents the link of every culture, allowing the participation of the citizens to social life, and favoring social cohesion. Communication is the most direct expression of the transmission of the cultural heritage of a nation; without a cultural heritage, that nation lacks identity, and practically it does not exist. Many people invoke, besides other effects of globalization, the loss of the national identity: the requirement to remain connected to a system, knowing that a disconnection would mean self-destruction, is a truth with terrible echoes for many inhabitants of this planet. Undoubtedly, globalization will determine a new linguistic context.

If we think only of the impressive number of languages spoken around the world, that is, 6,000, it is enough for this globalization, including from a linguistic perspective, to worry us. There may raise questions such as: “What will happen in all this linguistic mixture that we will have to accept?” “What type of structural morphological, syntactic stylistic structures will have to characterize the languages of all the peoples in order to meet the requirements of such a change?” “How will all these materialize in the context of communication *per se*?” “Will the existence of a *lingua franca* solve the barriers that might appear in the complex process imposed by the globalization of all the spheres of human life?” Certainly, the questions, presuppositions, opinions, worries and uncertainties tend to plus infinite... Without trying to offer an exhaustive approach to the problems determined by the phenomenon of linguistic globalization and by the manner in which they are projected at the communicational level (which would actually be impossible first of all for the lack of space in this type of paper), we will try, in what follows, to define a possible frame referring to the manner in which the language and communication interfere with the dimensions of globalization, with an accent on the economic context.

As we have already mentioned in this paper, it seems that the inherent character of globalization is more and more acknowledged by the citizens of this planet, and this fact should direct us towards searching for and finding the best methods to assimilate it. And if such methods do not materialize (in other words, if the discussed phenomenon is not completed), the better it will be, as we will have won the experience of practicing ways to solve complex problems.

From the many languages that have acquired the status of international languages, English clearly detaches itself from the point of view of the extent of its usage. The reasons why this happened are numerous and well based, even if they may be difficult to accept by the nations who notice that the importance of their languages diminishes because of the English competition. Whether *this* language deserves or not the status of globalization language, whether English “has the right” or not to have a central position among all the other international languages, that this fact bothers more or less other nations, these are all present realities that remain to be discussed.

Obviously, the tremendous development, in the United States, of top fields for an appropriate economic evolution, such as computer science, finance, and banking, represent a substantial basis for the reasons that have contributed to the spread of English worldwide. Therefore, the countries that wish to have access to the American scientific discoveries have been forced to adopt the interlocutor's language for the good development of the negotiation processes. This statement can be supported with the example of two countries: Israel, which understood that only by learning the language of the business partner can we attain true financial prosperity, therefore accepting English without reserves. Another unconditioned acceptance of English is the case of Japan which, wishing to reconstruct its economy after the end of the war, adopted the language of the former "enemy" as the language of communication in the technical and economical field. We must admit that, both in the case of Israel and in that of Japan, reluctance to this acceptance would have significantly delayed the rhythm of economic progress. Therefore, economical interests have managed to overwhelm linguistic and cultural national pride in these two countries chosen as examples. Certainly, specific *conjectural* factors may determine things to occur in a similar way in the case of the other dimensions that work towards supporting globalization (politics, society, culture).

It is known that many countries whose languages have won, in time, the status of universal languages feel nowadays threatened by the *lingua franca* position that English tends to hold. For instance, French acutely feels this victim position and actively fights it. Statements such as "English is, inevitably, the future of Europe" (J.Naisbitt, 1991, p.119), or: "the idea that tends to be imposed is that English is not only an international language, but a universal language, a sort of natural language. The delirium has gone too far" (cf.: *L'anglais...*); or: "Unfortunately, French will never be on the same position as English again. Why? Because French is a language of the *past*. Reality is the strongest proof! And, attention, this does not refer to the values of the two languages. It is merely a problem of actuality" (cf.: *Europe...*); in the same spirit, the French people probably remember the words of the great general De Gaulle: *Europe, which will use American English to communicate, will be, sooner or later, Americanized, losing its identity etc.*, may determine protests and manifestations. These are even more rightful, from the

point of view of the ones affected, as the official documents of the international organisms mention the equal character of the work languages adopted by them: for instance, the constitutive Treaty of the European Union stipulates that *all* the languages of the member states are declared official and, at the European level, there is a *principle of equality of the official and work languages*, a principle that has been re-approved a few years ago by the European Parliament; the United Nations Organization has *five* official languages, and UNESCO, where the English supremacy to other languages is obvious, has *eight* work languages (cf.:<http://ro.altermedia>).

Considering all these realities, there should be, first of all, a unanimous unconditioned acceptance, irrespective of national pride, of the existence of a *natural language* as a unique method of communication, an idea that is actually in accordance with the idea of globalization. This context implies overcoming this view that sends to the meaning of the phrase *linguistic supremacy*. Although it is not easy to achieve, the effort of accepting the inevitable may spare the nations, especially the French, of the more or less realistically negative effects of the phenomenon referred to here. Definitely, such recognition hurts national prides, damages cultural ambitions, causes disorientation and imbalance in all the components of society; unfortunately, the conclusion we have reached is that fighting it increases the impossibility to change anything once the “dice” have been cast. Apparently, there is a destiny that mankind *must* follow irreversibly, irrespective of the consequences, because IT HAS BEEEN DECIDED!

Some invoke terms such as *anglicizing*, *Anglo sphere*, some talk seriously of the “marginalization” of certain languages, of a “violation” of the vocabulary of a certain country through the unsought invasion of English words, laws are adopted to stop the extension of the usage of English words and phrases (two examples in this sense are France and Romania, with the Pruteanu law; none of these laws has proven – fortunately or not(?) – the expected efficiency). But the essence of the problem is not the English language (which, we must admit: has one of the most beautiful sonorities!), nor the fact that it is fashionable (as French has been for decades); moreover, the phenomenon of the enrichment of the lexical heritage benefits any language. Actually, the “threatening” wave represents the intrusion of American and McDonald’s-specific

elements, translatable through globalization. In this context, “the bad luck” of English is that it has been adopted by the country that started globalization in the first place, which determined: rejection, denial, blaming *all* that is connected to the beautiful English language. Or, maybe dissociation between what super-invasion of the American products means at all levels and anywhere in the world, and the linguistic aspect in itself, included in the upper-level phenomenon, could be appropriate. From this perspective, the penetration flow of the English words into the various languages should be understood as the result of the natural evolution of a language.

Another important aspect is that, through theory, linguistic globalization can be connected with the concept of *bilingualism*, but not in its collective sense, but at an individual level. The idea is that the vocabulary necessary in the relationships pertaining to the economic sphere as a whole (partnerships, economic exchanges etc.) must include only the English language knowledge specific to *those* relationships alone, with the purpose of creating an optimal communication and nothing more. Therefore, even in the context of globalization, the linguistic component should not be regarded as a threat to the integrity and unity of the language of a certain country.

## **Conclusions**

What will globalization “look” like, *if* it is ever completed, how and how much it will affect us concretely, and other questions, suppositions, statements etc. are placed outside the virtual sphere; still, something remains absolutely certain about the phenomenon of globalization, that is, the fact that it cannot leave us indifferent, not preoccupied, ignorant, carefree. Yes, we care, and not just anyhow, but truly: globalization makes us responsible! With all its characteristic features, globalization stresses the dimensions, the importance, and the accelerated and interdependent character of the problems that the international community faces. The awareness of the irreversible character of the process generates aspects that each inhabitant of this planet has to solve.

At the linguistic level, globalization should be regarded as an effect of economic globalization, a phenomenon which, at the level of verbal exchanges, has favored the appearance of a new situation of

communication, characterized by the existence of a unique language, necessary for the efficient development of economic relationships. A chance event or not, the selection of *American English* as an exclusive means of communication in economic relationships is a reality that, from a *strictly* linguistic point of view, is meaningless. It acquires a meaning only if it is associated with the other transformations that globalization implies, if they are significant.

### Notes

1. General co-coordinators: Marco Drago, Andrea Boroli, (2004, p.397), *Enciclopedie de Filosofie și științe umane*, translated by Luminița Cosma et al., All Educational Publishing House, Bucharest, p.397;
2. Arnett, J. (oct.2002, p.801). The Psychology of Globalization. *American Psychologist* Vol.57, no10.: <http://imagesrvr.epnet.com/embimages/pdh2/amp/amp5710774.pdf>;
3. Naisbitt John, Aburdene Patricia (1991, p.119). *Megatrends 2000*. – London: Pan Books.
4. <http://globalizarea.com>;
5. *L'anglais: une langue internationale, universelle ou naturelle?*:
6. <http://www.accentgrave.org/article>;
7. *Europa nu are nevoie de o limbă unică* // <http://www.franta-romania.com/node/87>.
8. [http://ro.altermedia.info/eutopia/o-noua-limba-pentru-europa\\_2712.html](http://ro.altermedia.info/eutopia/o-noua-limba-pentru-europa_2712.html);
9. <http://ro.altermedia>.