

“Are Ethnic or Minority Languages a Collateral Damage of Globalization?”

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ABSTRACT

In order to trail trends, the language policies often become an issue of economic rights and integration tool that welcomes globalization in order to prevent stereotypes and negative traits in communities. What seems to be forgotten in this context is that languages are not only diversity tools that promote social and economical stability or integration but are also the main carrier of cultural heritage and identity. In this strive for integration, multiculturalism and globalization the collateral damage are the ethnic or the minority languages. They seem to not fit in this aggressive economic race and are lacking vitality and policy mechanisms to survive. The Endangered Language Alliance (ELA), an independent non-profit organization based in New York City and the only organization in the world focused on the immense linguistic diversity of urban areas states as many as 800 languages are highly endangered in urban areas. These languages are whitewashed by not being a factor in the economic impels and as a result they first lose their importance and attractiveness and unfortunately later-on they lose their chance for revitalization. European language policies need to provide more solidarity toward minority or ethnic languages in urban Europe in order to create basic survival conditions. This paper aims to explore possibilities to promote multilingualism and multiculturalism with prudence by making sure that ethnic or minority languages do not loose they role or value and not be considered a collateral damage of the globalization.

Keywords: *Endangered languages, language policy, globalization, urban usage of languages.*

INTRODUCTION

It is widely known today that linguistics itself has become an industry. This is particularly factual with English language. In 2014 only from student spending and tuition, accommodation and other living expenses the ELT sector, the British government has collected an estimate sum of US \$ 3.48 billion. In a study named “Supporting the British economy through teaching English as Foreign language” a team Capital Economics for UK has reported that the sector supports approximately 26.650 jobs throughout England only and it results to a net tax return of US \$281 million to government coffers. It is stated in the study that this industry earns more than Coca Cola or Vodafone Company and is competing to some extent to the industry of BP (British Petroleum) in regard to its 18.000 UK employees.

While certain languages retain great expansion, many other languages are dying. This could not be considered a conscious and purposeful neo-colonialism of English language since the expansion is not managed by any government nor kingdom, but in the name of integrated

market-economy it has clearly opened common ground for expansion through the process of globalization, market economy, education, Hollywood, internet and lately through the social media.

While there is some good news for one language, the story is negative for other smaller languages. A number of studies have confirmed that “small” languages are dying rapidly around the globe. In a study conveyed by the British Anthropologist Dr. Mark Turin (2012), the chair of the “First Nations and Endangered Languages Program” states that:

Some sobering statistics will help to contextualize the urgency of the task: the Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger released by UNESCO in early 2009 claims that more than 2,400 of the over 6,500 languages spoken around the globe today are in danger of disappearing. The UNESCO consulting team ranked these vanishing voices on a sliding scale from vulnerable to extinct (Moseley, 2012): noting that many such speech forms will cease to be used as communicative

“Are Ethnic or Minority Languages a Collateral Damage of Globalization?”

vernaculars by the next generation of speakers, and that many of these languages are entirely oral (or signed) and have no established written form, so are at risk of disappearing without trace.

These figures are alarming. In order to understand the full scale of the problem we need to understand the challenges this languages go through, and how is this process affecting other aspects of linguistics. Why do languages die? First and foremost known factor in this process is the loss of native speakers. Language can have very pragmatic syntax and a great quantity of practical lexical items but when there are no native speakers to nourish it and develop it, its existence is threatened. Language survives when there is cultural transmission and when this transmission ends, the language ends as well. Following are the two most well known scenarios for language death:

- Cataclysmic or population attrition
- When speakers are absorbed by another culture and a different language.

In the first scenario, all speakers die, so there is no transmission to younger children. These cataclysmic cases have occurred in different historical period in which a large scale of population is hit by a disease or natural disaster like earthquakes, hurricanes, volcanoes or floods of cataclysmic proportions and the cultural transmission ends since there are no children to learn it nor transmit it. We briefly described the cases of the second scenario in which a language and a culture are absorbed by another neighboring or ruling or colonial languages and culture. In these cases one language loses its importance since its social need decreases and this small languages have more of a sentimental value than an economical, development or survival role. In that context there are language deaths which are *sudden* in which most or all speakers die or are killed such as the Tasmanian languages. Also there is a *radical* language death in which users of that language are threatened or under a serious political repression that sometimes it is genocide as well. There is also a *gradual* language death in which a language considered as not dominant is assimilated in a setting that its existence is threatened by a dominant language or culture. There is also a bottom-to-top context in which the language (such as Latin) endures only in liturgical tradition.

It is regrettable that this process is often irreversible and revitalizing the

endangered languages is a difficult process. Turin (2012) states that... *according to conservative estimates, 97% of the world's people speak 4% of the world's languages. Conversely, 96% of the world's languages are spoken by 3% of the world's people. Over 1,500 languages—one quarter of the total number of living speech forms—have fewer than 1,000 speakers...we now know that at least 50% of the world's languages are losing speakers, some of them at a dramatic rate... Up to 90% of the world's speech forms may be replaced by dominant regional, national or international languages by 2100...* These discouraging figures are a result of the change in demography, economical development and globalization itself. We can't blame only the dominant culture which in this case is English, in reality, language death is not only result of globalization but also colonization such as Spanish or Portuguese.

IS THERE A NEGATIVE INTENTION IN THE PROCESS?

Although in some literature circles the dominant languages are also considered the predator language, which in itself associates the image of the animal domination over a more sensitive and weaker species, according to Turin (2012). A well-intentioned and important national education program in one of the world's major languages, such as Mandarin Chinese or French, may have the unintended side effect of undermining local traditions and weakening regional languages. Example can be found easily in the majority of Eastern European countries in which Anglicism's can be evident in articles published in local languages. A considerable number of studies have been conveyed since the 1980 from Albanian linguists in regard to the impact of that English language has in local languages. The inclusion of Anglicism's in local languages would be considered as one of the first stages in which languages start feeling endangered or its structure in syntax can experience changes. Among those studies we can highlight Mehmeti's (1982) analyses on the morphological and semantic adaptation of Anglicism in Albanian language, but also Nuhiu's (1982) Phonological analyses of the English Element in the Albanian language. This process is not a characteristic of “small” languages, and by small refer to a small scale of

“Are Ethnic or Minority Languages a Collateral Damage of Globalization?”

native speakers, but it is evident also in “large” languages such as German which together with English belong to the West Germanic branch in the Indo-European Language family. Pfitzner (1978) was among the researchers that analyzed the Anglicism’s in the German language. In a recent study conveyed in Albanian by PATA – Kapo (2014) regarding the impact that foreign languages have on Albanian languages after the all of communism in 1990, and particularly English language it is stated that factors are not always linguistic but can be external as well but also.

Clearly there is not “predator vs. victim” relationship in the process but the languages interact and the only constant in languages seems to be the need to develop, interact and change, but hopefully not disappear. Another factor is the economic and demographic capacity of one culture or language to absorb another language or culture.

WHOSE DUTY IS TO DOCUMENT AND REVITALIZE ENDANGERED LANGUAGES?

Regarding the responsibilities for transmitting and developing languages, it is logical that the native speakers of a particular language have the sole responsibility to cultivate the language in a long-lasting process. A natural dilemma arises if the language users are not aware of the language assimilation and/or do not have the institutional capacities to deal with the process. In these groups we would include languages that have been isolated for a certain period, or their language is a minority language in the society and has never had an official status in a country in order for the educational or other heritage institutions within a particular country to deal with the language challenges and phenomena. Does this become the responsibility of the linguists in the region? Can an outsider preserve another language? From today’s practice, it has been proven that linguists who are not native speaker of the target endanger can document, analyze it and at least document it via recording and data collections. There are number of projects that are active.

There are a number of institutions in the country who deal directly with the endangered language issues, such the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in England, also the National Science Foundation in the United States. Similar initiatives are also active in mainland Europe such as the Max Planck Institute in the Netherlands. Some of these initiatives have regional endangered languages projects, but

there are also few who are using the latest technological tools such as the ELCat project supported by Google. According to the project managers, this is a catalogue of Endangered Languages which also serves as a venue for sharing information and resources on the world’s endangered languages and the knowledge contained in them and through a process of continuous quantitative measurements the vitality of the language is compared across a variety of context around the globe. According to the Endangered language Catalogues(ELCat2015) there are 180 countries in which languages are threatened to vanish in areas such as Africa, Australia, Caucasus, East Asia, Europe, Central America and the Caribbean, Near East Asia, North America, Pacific, South America and South and Southeast Asia and language preservation is essential to the heritage recovery of the globe

There is another category of the mode the languages are endangered e.g. Irish also known as Irish Gaelic or Ersel, which lose their language capabilities not only from the colonial context but also from being geographically closer to the English language which is constantly expanding in the society and it also has the role of serving as the language-for-integration. A similar context is introduced in few Balkan countries, among them is also Macedonia. A pilot project from the OSCE for the sake of integration proposed introduction of Macedonian language to Albanian first grade students who besides their native language already study English language, and in the 5th grade also a second foreign language which is often French. These types of proposals promote the idea of integration which is very often similar also the focus multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue, but create a ground for domination or even predator language setting.

HOW DOES THIS REFLECT IN THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT?

If Education is an ongoing and a reform-oriented process it must also consider identity and traditional values of the minority languages in the curriculum design process. Influenced from the social and economical settings, few languages are more vibrant than other and can adjust easier to the new development regarding their speech for, syntax and pragmatic aspects. As a result there must be a way to formally and institutionally protect more sensitive languages. The rule of the jungle in which the predators dominate and weaker species hide and become

“Are Ethnic or Minority Languages a Collateral Damage of Globalization?”

invisible might not be appropriate since if the language is invisible, does not develop through exchange, exposure and literary production, there is a greater chance that this languages might be endangered or even extinct.

DO FEWER LANGUAGES MEAN MORE VALUES FOR THE NEW OR DOMINANT LANGUAGES?

If there is a dilemma as such the answer is: No! Language presence is not a pie. In a “pie scenario” majority gets more, but in the language heritage reality, less languages means less values in the linguistics horizon but also less values to the world in general. Besides used for communicational purposes, languages also transmit cultural values, oral literature such as epic poems, folk tales, traditional maxims, myths and spells. This transmission which goes further to songs, musical genres and recitation cannot be transmitted in two the new languages but will most certainly loose large portion of its assets. These speech forms according to Turin(2012) encode oral traditions...and when elders die and livelihoods are disrupted, it is such creative expressions that become threatened.

WHERE IS THE IDEA OF INTEGRATION IN THIS PICTURE?

If the price for integration would mean losing all these values for the sake of economical and social cohesion, it is certain that the price we are paying as humanity is pretty high. In these settings we promote the idea of many languages for the sake of integration but consciously or unconsciously we create a setting for local non dominant languages to be the collateral damage. A scholar or curriculum designer should not create “important” and “not very important” categories when design a language program since integration aims for community to participate in and *equity pedagogy* concept and not just touch the surface through aligning one language on top of another, less important one. This does not mean we should not study foreign languages, but be aware that local and minority languages are not becoming a collateral damage of the process.

CONCLUSION

In this ever-changing world there will always be tendencies of one culture dominate the other, and more and more languages will be endangered. It becomes the duty of the linguistic community to find modes to preserve these

languages, just as it is the duty to of environmentalist to protect endangered species. It is a characteristic of the human nature to adjust and adapt with the new settings in order to survive or integrate but leaving behind a native language would also threaten the speech code of oral tradition that is created through centuries. It becomes our duty as linguists to raise awareness on the issue. What seems to be forgotten in this context is that languages are not only diversity tools that promote social and economical stability or integration but are also the main carrier of cultural heritage and identity. In this strive for integration, multiculturalism and globalization the collateral damage are the ethnic or the minority languages. They seem to not fit in this aggressive economic race and are lacking vitality and policy mechanisms to survive. These languages do not find setting that is user-friendly, and sometimes are whitewashed by not being a factor in the economic impels and as a result they first lose their importance and attractiveness and unfortunately later-on they lose their chance for revitalization. European language policies need to provide more solidarity toward minority or ethnic languages in urban Europe in order to create basic survival conditions.

There are a several global organizations that promote these projects in global level but it requires a larger effort from the linguistic professionals in Europe to pursue language documentation, revitalization in the communities in which there are endangered languages. Some of these languages are not endangered in their native countries but also according to Endangered Language Alliance (ELA), in New York City an immense linguistic diversity in quantity as high as 800 languages are threatened in urban areas as a result of globalization and migration. According to the Endangered language Catalogues (ELCat2015) there are 180 countries in which languages are threatened to extinct.

A higher awareness for the endangered languages becomes a duty of the intellectual of the 21st century since the value transmitted through language is much more extensive than the written and recorded materials. The Latin saying “Accensa domo proximi, tua quoque periclitatur” or in English “When the house of your neighbor is in flames, your own one is in danger” refers to the reality we are facing today as a result of Globalization. We ought to protect the language identity of endangered languages since this might risk even larger language

“Are Ethnic or Minority Languages a Collateral Damage of Globalization?”

communities and great cultural and historic heritage would be considered in risk.

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