

**THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND GLOBALISATION**

Magda PAŠALIĆ

magda@efst.hr

Sanja MARINOV

smarinov@efst.hr

Economic faculty University of Split

---

**Summary:** *Dominance of one language as a prime means of communication worldwide and too frequent usage of its words loan in many official languages has been causing disputes among linguists and mother tongue experts especially in European countries. The process of globalisation through which one language has evolved into a global or world language has lasted for decades.*

*In the paper the authors have tried to state their opinion regarding the topic of English as a lingua franca and its acquired label of being a language killer. The authors will also provide the comment on the influence of English on Croatian. English has been a widely taught and learnt foreign language in Croatia for decades. It is being taught in kindergartens, primary, secondary schools, in a large number of private schools for foreign languages and at faculties. Globalisation in the economic domain enabled many foreign companies the expansion of their business in Croatia. All of these companies require from their employees a good command of English. A fair knowledge of English has become a prerequisite for a professional and social promotion in Croatia.*

*The fact that English has become a global language is not the only effect of globalisation when the language issue is analysed. Globalisation has fostered the promotion of some regional or minority languages in Europe as well as the promotion of some official languages in European countries. Therefore, it seems that there are not enough arguments to support the fear of English as a language killer or as a global threat.*

**Key words:** *Croatian, English, global language, globalisation, language killer*

---

## 1. Introduction

Dominance of one language as a prime means of communication world-wide and too frequent usage of its words loan in many official languages has been causing disputes among linguists and mother tongue experts especially in European countries. The process of globalisation through which one language has evolved into a global or world language has lasted for decades. Globalisation includes interdependence and interconnectedness of the large number of countries in economic, cultural, scientific, linguistic and many other domains.

It is very easy to answer the question which language has the status of the only global language nowadays. It is not easy to answer the question to what extent the influence on other language or languages is allowed, i.e. can we set the percentage of the loan words, syntactic and morphological features of the global language that may be used in any other and become a part of its standard form without considerable influence in terms that it represents a threat to its existence.

The answer to the first question is English. It implies a series of other questions e.g. why has English become the global language, how did that happened or do we really need to fear that in five or six hundred years English will be the only language used in the world? Furthermore, do we need to stop the influence of English on our native language or reduce it and how do we make it possible?

The final answer to the second question has not been given yet. A view from a different angle and yet another perspective on that issue is given in this paper.

Evidently, languages change. Languages change by the influence of people who speak them. They change under the influence of every contemporary achievement in all human activities as well.

English being the global language does not represent a threat to the existence of other languages. It is an advantage to have a language which will provide a successful means of communication for teenagers, students, teachers, actors, artists, physicists and many others. The global language, supported by the Internet, does serve as a means which will help in establishing a better intercultural communication.

However, this does not mean that English is better than any other language that exists in the world. The role the English language has at the moment makes it "superior" to other languages. As a language it must not be considered superior.

This paper gives an overview on these issues relying on recent papers written on the topic of globalisation and languages, some of them referring to the situation in Croatia and the authors' own perception of the matter.

## **2. What is globalisation?**

Globalisation is a process which has started developing after the Second World War when the countries with the most powerful economies deregulated and liberalised their trade and financial markets. This has meant a creation of a large economic network, i.e. a deeper economic integration around the world. Economic interdependency has led gradually to the homogenisation of the cultural systems throughout the world.

The opening of national frontiers in order to achieve free movement of goods, capital, labour and information has caused a shift of all human activities to a global level. This process has accelerated by the immense progress in technology. It is clear that globalisation processes nowadays influence not only economic relations worldwide but cultural, scientific and social ones as well.

If a country's art, music, science, technology, trade and lifestyle are being globalised, then language cannot be left out. Globalisation has encouraged the use of a world or global language as a means of communication by millions which adds another interesting aspect to that phenomenon.

## **3. English as a global language**

Globalisation has undoubtedly made one language to be used worldwide. Among all languages that are spoken in the world, English is the only one that can bear the status of the world or global language. English has expanded over decades and it is currently one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. It is spoken by more than four hundred million native speakers and by the same number of those who speak it as a second language (Wickramasinghe, <http://www.dailynews.lk/2004/02/16/fea04.html>, 2004).

These figures only partly prove the fact that English has rightly become the lingua franca in the world and not any other language such as German, French or Italian. However, the figures alone do not present a strong argument in this context, because we cannot answer why for instance Spanish, Russian or Chinese have not gained the status of the global languages since they are also spoken by millions of people.

There are at least two reasons for this. Firstly, there was the vast expansion of the British colonial power in the 16th century which enabled Britain to continue playing an important role in the economic and political spheres in the world until present times. Secondly, in the 20th century the United States became the world's leading economic power which made even a greater impact on the spread of the English language.

The dominance of the United States in the fields of science, technology, mass media, electronic communication, publishing, music, economy and many others has made English the main means of communication to numerous people involved in further development of these fields. However, not only the experts in a particular field use English in order to exchange their knowledges, experiences and the latest results in the field, but also everyone who uses outputs of any of these fields.

The language of the Internet, which represents one of the most widely used means of transmitting data and knowledges and of establishing intercultural communication, is English. The role that the Internet plays, particularly among younger generations, made many people use the English language every day. English has become a part of their everyday life and professional communication.

English dominates all of the EU institutions. Here we encounter another proof which argues in favour of labeling English the global language. English is the official language of the European Central Bank although its headquarters are in Frankfurt in Germany and despite the fact that none of the predominantly English-speaking countries is actually a member of the European Monetary Union.

According to Kelly (2003) English has lately become a commodity as well. Those who are able to speak it use that language "as an elevated socio-economic currency on the international market and in international diplomacy, while local languages are pressured to be kept within the home or within communities" (Kelly, [www.globalenvision.org/library/8/655](http://www.globalenvision.org/library/8/655)).

To some English represents a threat to native, regional and minority languages. English-speaking countries have been accused many times for their attempts to keep their dominating role in world affairs through their cultural and linguistic imperialism. Nevertheless, the fact remains that it was the globalisation, including its two main features of interdependence and interconnectedness, that generated the need for the usage of one global language (Gomez, 1999).

It is obvious that the spread of English on the global level cannot be stopped easily. Accordingly, its dominant role in the world's activities and spheres can hardly be played by another language at least for the time being. This, however, does not mean that English is better than any other language spoken in the world and it must not be considered to be superior.

#### **4. Does English threaten the existence of other languages?**

By some English has been considered a "language killer". The reason for this can be sought in the past. As it has already been mentioned, Britain was once a powerful colonial empire. It was a dominant country whose language was intro-

duced into a colonial community. This community was inhabited by indigenous population who regarded English as more important and more prestigious language than their own because it enabled them an easier access to the imperialist authorities. For those who were able to speak it fluently, English provided a better life. Hence, the indigenous population turned bilingual at first and after a while they used their language in fewer and fewer occasions. In the end they would stop using their language and would completely shift to English. This phenomenon is called linguistic obsolescence (Eckert et al. according to McMahon, 1994).

On the other hand, the influence of English on many native languages during the last few decades was significant. Globalisation brought about the spread of English worldwide which made a large number of languages affected by it through the use of numerous anglicisms.

If the influence that English has made on languages in Europe is observed, it does not surprise that some think that languages in Europe are threatened by the ever greater influence of English. Many words borrowed from English have been integrated in either major i.e. most widely spoken languages or minor i.e. less spoken European languages. Most of the loan words are scientific and technological terms. There is also a wide range of colloquial loan words which are mostly used by young people as well as abundant loan words used in advertising industry and journalism. The colloquial loan words are often used in the spoken language of young people and usually indicate a particular lifestyle or are considered fashionable.

In his text entitled Languages and Globalisation Rainer Ganahl (1998) provides an example of the English influence on German. His four-year-old niece who lives in the German speaking Austrian Alps finds things cool or heavy, says thanks and feels sorry. These are the words that can be heard in conversations of young people in many European countries and Croatia is not an exception.

Simon Rüschkamp ([http://www.tln.schulnetz.org/ge/globala/sprache\\_e.htm](http://www.tln.schulnetz.org/ge/globala/sprache_e.htm)) gives us another example of English dominance in German by stating that German companies, even those that do not conduct business internationally, do not use slogans in German but in English since it is the language of trade and advertising.

Furthermore, in restaurants the German term Selbstbedienung is rarely used, instead the English term self-service is used. Telecommunication companies for instance use the term city call more often than Stadtgespräch or Ortgespräch.

It does seem that contemporary Anglo-Saxon culture, science and technology have made much larger impact on European countries than the English language itself. According to Matasović (Đukić, 2005) English has gained today's status primarily due to external reasons such as political, economic and scientific.

Naturally, as language is connected to all spheres of a society, the impact of English on other languages, through the changes and innovations that influenced other fields, has been unavoidable.

On one hand, the problem with a frequent use of numerous English words in other languages is that either most of these languages do not provide an equivalent or the equivalent comes too late or it is inadequate, which means that people cannot accept the native language term and continue using the English term.

On the other hand, English terms have become quite deep-rooted and sometimes adapted to the receiving language that even when the equivalent exists people do not use it. What actually happens is that a receiving European languages borrow English words, adapt them and consequently they become an integral part of its vocabulary (Filipović, 1996). There are numerous examples for this phenomenon even in Croatian. Why does someone use the verbs *implementirati* or *targetirati* instead of using *primjenjivati* or *ciljati*? Apart from the above stated reason, another might be the fact that this way people express their belonging to a certain social class or a group of professionals. It does not seem, however, that such linguistic cases will threaten the existence of Croatian.

France is a country which makes more efforts to fight against the dominance of English than any other country in Europe. In order to reduce the influence of English in French they even take legal measures. The law which is enforced in state publications, language regulations and against civil servants since 1994 forbids the usage of 3,500 English terms. They include terms such as *marketing*, *airbag* and *software* and the usage of French terms *mercantique*, *sac gonflable* and *logiciels* is required (Viereck, 1996).

All of the above stated examples and arguments show that English has made a significant impact on many languages of Europe. However, this does not mean that some people's fear of English as a language killer is justified. There are no convincing arguments that English will replace any native language, at least not in European countries. It cannot be expected that any country will stop using its native language in schools, literature, national television, daily press, radio and start using English instead. The question of a country's language is a question of its national and cultural identity. Every country in Europe seems to have a self-confident connection to its language and culture and it will not allow British and American linguistic and cultural imperialism.

## **5. Croatian language and globalisation**

The fact that English has made a considerable impact on Croatian has been mentioned in the previous chapter. The examples stated above represent only a small amount of anglicisms in Croatian. Škara (2005) noticed that "... phenomenon of the transfer of Anglo-American culture is notable in Croatia,

and it profoundly influences Croatian society. (...) Croatian speakers easily adopt whatever comes from the West, without any selective approach.”

Words and expressions such as cool, whatever, sorry, anyway, by the way have become a part of young people’s jargon in Croatia as in many other countries in Europe.

English has been widely taught and learnt foreign language in Croatia for decades. It is being taught in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, in a large number of private schools for foreign languages and at faculties.

Globalisation in the economic domain has enabled many foreign companies expand their business in Croatia. All of these companies require from their employees a good command of English. Even Austrian and German companies introduce English as the corporate language.

A fair knowledge of English has become a prerequisite for a professional and social promotion in Croatia. This has unjustly led to a fewer usage of such languages as German, Italian, French, Spanish and therefore they are taught and learnt less in Croatian schools. This may be considered as one of the negative effects of globalisation in Croatia which appeared as a consequence of the dominance of English in all European countries.

There are language and mother tongue experts that strongly oppose the frequent usage of anglicisms in Croatian. They seem to be slightly “English-phobic”. If a seventeen-year-old finds something cool, it does not need to be considered a part of the American and British conspiracy. Nevertheless, it is a fact that the number of anglicisms in Croatian should be reduced because there are appropriate Croatian terms for certain anglicisms. However, forcing people to use a Croatian term which does not provide a suitable equivalent for an English term is not a solution.

The problem Croatia faces is the lack of successful communication between the government and institutions which take care of the standard Croatian. The government has to consult these institutions prior to making decisions regarding the Croatian language. It particularly refers to the harmonisation and standardisation of scientific and technical terms. Furthermore, standard Croatian has to be taught and used on all levels of education. It has to be used in public and professional communication as well (Kovačec, 2004).

Another problem is that Croatian language has become a victim of politics and ideology. Language must not be a question of politics. It is a question of national and cultural identity. If political and ideological attitudes are set aside in discussions on the threatening influence of English on Croatian, the fear of English as a language killer would be find unjustified.

## 6. Conclusion

In terms of languages, globalisation is frequently associated with the growing influence of English language worldwide. It is evident that the expansion of English cannot be stopped easily. It is used as a means of communication in all fields of human activities. For a large majority of population in European countries English is a leading foreign language. English is the language of science and technology, commerce and banking, aviation and shipping industry, and of mass entertainment.

Nevertheless, the fact that English has become a global language is not the only effect of globalisation when the language issue is analysed. Globalisation has fostered the promotion of some regional or minority languages in Europe as well as the promotion of some official languages in European countries. Activities undertaken to support and promote these languages have, to a certain extent, turned into the resistance to the dominance of English. France certainly represents the most radical example of such resistance. Both France and Germany invest heavily in support and promotion of their languages and cultures abroad. It is proved by the increase in activities undertaken by the Alliance Francaise and Goethe Institutes worldwide.

The EU has been protecting the language rights of its citizens who speak any of the forty recognised minority languages for years. It has started with the establishment of the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages in 1984.

Therefore, there are not enough arguments to support the fear of English as a language killer or as a global threat. English as a global language has a stronger political and economic background than linguistic. It seems too radical to claim that English will cause death of other languages, particularly in Europe where multilingualism has become one of the essential pillars of European national states.

## References:

1. Đukić, Goranka (2005): Mali jezici žrtve lingvističke globalizacije. *Vjesnik*, May 15/16
2. Eckert Tanja, Johann Andrea, Känzig Anna, Küng Melanie, Müller Bianca, Schwald Cornelia, Walder Laura: Is English a 'Killer Language'? The Globalisation of a Code, <[http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:rA-PIIdN6mmwJ:www.ehistling.meotod.de/data/papers/group\\_g\\_pub.pdf+globalisation+of+a+code+Eckert&hl=hr](http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:rA-PIIdN6mmwJ:www.ehistling.meotod.de/data/papers/group_g_pub.pdf+globalisation+of+a+code+Eckert&hl=hr)> (May 1, 2005)
3. Filipovic, Rudolf (1996): *English as a word donor to other languages of Europe*, in: R. Hartmann (ed.), *The English language in Europe*, Europa, Oxford

4. Ganahl, Rainer: Languages and Globalisation, 1998, <<http://www.ganahl.info/languageandglobalisation.html>> (May 1, 2005)
5. Gomez, Xavier Anthony: Globalisation and the English language, <[http://www.wfsf.org/pub/publications/Bacolod\\_99/Gomez.pdf](http://www.wfsf.org/pub/publications/Bacolod_99/Gomez.pdf)> (May 2, 2005)
6. Kelly, Terri: From Lingua Franca to Global English, <<http://www.globalenvision.org/library/8/655>> (May 2, 2005)
7. Kovačec, August: Izazovi globalizacije i hrvatski jezični standard, *Jezik*, 2004, Vol. 51
8. Rüschkamp, Simon: Globalisation of language, < [http://www.tln.schulnetz.org/ge/globa/sprache\\_e.htm](http://www.tln.schulnetz.org/ge/globa/sprache_e.htm)> (May 2, 2005)
9. Skara Danica (2005): Rethinking Globalisation/Americanisation: Self-identity or Modernity, in: S. Ureland (ed.), Integration of European Language Research, *Studies in Eurolinguistics*, Vol. 2
10. Viereck, Wolfgang (1996): English in Europe: its nativisation and use as a lingua franca, with special reference to German-speaking countries, in: R. Hartmann (ed.), *The English language in Europe, Europa, Oxford, Vol. 2, No. 3*
11. Wickramasinghe Wimal: Is English a killer language?, <<http://www.dailynews.lk/2004/02/16/fea04.html>> (May 1, 2005)

UDK: 811.111(100)

Pregledni članak

Primljeno: 15. 09. 2008.

Prihvaćeno: 25. 11. 2008.

## ENGLISKI JEZIK I GLOBALIZACIJA

M. PAŠALIĆ,  
S. MARINOV, Split

Šk. vjesn. 57 (2008.), 3-4

---

**Sažetak:** *Uzrok mnogih rasprava među lingvistima i stručnjacima za materinje jezike, osobito u Europi, bio je prevelik utjecaj jednog jezika kao glavnog sredstva komuniciranja diljem svijeta kao i prečesto korištenje posuđenica iz tog jezika. Autori ovog rada će dati i svoj doprinos ovim raspravama s osvrtom na utjecaj koji engleski ima i na hrvatski jezik.*

*U Hrvatskoj se engleski već desetljećima podučava u vrtićima, školama, privatnim školama za strane jezike i na visokim učilištima. U području gospodarstva, globalizacija je dovela do toga da su mnoge inozemne tvrtke proširile svoje poslovanje i na Hrvatsku. To je dovelo do toga da je engleski danas u Hrvatskoj jedan od važnijih preduvjeta profesionalnog i društvenog uspjeha.*

*Činjenica da je engleski postao globalni jezik ili lingua franca nije jedini učinak globalizacije. Globalizacija je potpomogla promoviranje mnogih regionalnih i manjinskih jezika u Europi, ali isto tako i nekih službenih europskih jezika. Čini se da nema dovoljno argumenata koji bi opravdali strah od engleskog kao jezika ubojice drugih jezika ili kao globalne prijetnje.*

**Ključne riječi:** *engleski jezik, globalizacija, globalni jezik, hrvatski jezik, jezik ubojica*

---