
SOCIOCULTURAL ISSUES OF THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, globalization has become one of the most influential forces shaping international communication, economic development, education, and cultural exchange. As a result, English has established itself as the dominant global lingua franca, facilitating interaction among people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Today, it serves as the primary language of international business, science, technology, diplomacy, higher education, and digital communication, making it an essential tool for global connectivity.

However, the worldwide spread of English has generated not only significant opportunities but also a number of sociocultural challenges. While the globalization of English promotes intercultural communication and access to knowledge, it also raises concerns about linguistic diversity, cultural identity, language inequality, and the preservation of minority languages. The increasing influence of English may contribute to the dominance of Anglophone cultural values, leading to cultural homogenization and the gradual marginalization of local languages and traditions. At the same time, English has evolved into a global language that is increasingly adapted to local contexts, giving rise to numerous regional varieties and new forms of intercultural communication.

These developments have attracted considerable attention from linguists, sociologists, educators, and policymakers, who seek to understand the complex relationship between language and globalization. The spread of English is no longer viewed solely as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a sociocultural process that reflects broader issues of power, identity, and cultural interaction¹.

The purpose of this article is to examine the major sociocultural issues associated with the globalization of the English language. Particular attention

¹ MacArthur, T. World English and world Englishes: trends, tensions, varieties and standards. *Language Teaching*. 2001. Vol. 34, p. 1–20.

is paid to the impact of English on cultural identity, multilingualism, linguistic diversity, and intercultural communication, as well as to the opportunities and challenges arising from its role as the world's leading international language.

1. English language and English culture

The formation of an anthropocentric paradigm in modern humanities has led to a shift in linguistic research towards the study of human beings and their place in culture². The issue of interaction between language and culture has become a subject of interest in such fields as cultural linguistics, ethnolinguistics, and linguoculturology. The relationship between language and culture is also examined from the perspectives of psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and such interdisciplinary fields as ethnopsycholinguistics and linguosociopsychology. Furthermore, it is explored in studies of the linguistic worldview, the correlation between language and national self-awareness, the investigation of linguistic personality, concepts and conceptual spheres, intercultural communication, and other related areas³.

In twenty-first-century linguistics, the approach that views language as the cultural code of a nation, rather than merely as a tool of cognition and communication, continues to be actively developed. The close interrelationship between language and culture is reflected in the term *linguaculture*, which embodies the idea that one of the fundamental functions of language is to serve as a means of creating, developing, preserving, and transmitting culture. The origin of the term *linguaculture* is associated with the works of American linguistic anthropologists Paul Friedrich (*linguaculture*, 1986) and Michael Agar (*linguaculture*, 1994), who modified the spelling of the term borrowed from P. Friedrich⁴.

The emergence of the term *linguaculture*, one of whose definitions is “the universe of vocabulary, grammatical semantics, and verbal culture”, was driven by the need to introduce a concept that could replace such expressions as “language and culture”, “language in culture”, “culture in language”, and other terms that had been used for decades in attempts to describe the interrelationship between language and culture⁵.

² Мішеніна Т. М. Зміст культурологічного складника у фаховій підготовці майбутніх учителів філологічних спеціальностей. Педагогіка вищої та середньої школи : зб. наук. праць / голов. ред. З. П. Бакум. Кривий Ріг, 2014. Вип. 41. С. 238–245.

³ Романовська Ю. Соціокультурний та лінгвокультурологічний аспекти як важливі компоненти змісту навчання іноземних мов. Освіта і управління. 2010. № 1. С. 63–71.

⁴ Agar, M. *Language Shock: Understanding the Culture of Conversation*. New York: William Morrow, 1994. 284 p.

⁵ Attinasi, J. & Friedrich, P. *Dialogic Breakthrough: Catalysis and Synthesis in Life-Changing Dialogue. The dialogic emergence of culture*. By Dennis Tedlock, Bruce Manheim. University of Illinois Press, 1995. P. 33–53.

The concept of linguaculture effectively embodies the idea that “language influences culture and reflects it in the same way that culture influences and reflects what exists within language”⁶. It is extremely difficult, if possible at all, to understand a country’s culture without first understanding its language; likewise, it is impossible to comprehend a language outside its cultural context⁷. Acquiring only conversational skills and developing so-called “functional competence” (functional awareness) without achieving cultural competence (cultural awareness) is insufficient⁸. As noted by researchers, “those who achieve only limited functional competence are destined to occupy only low-paid positions... while those who attain cultural competence will have power and occupy leadership positions”⁹.

The importance of understanding the culture of the country whose language is being studied is also demonstrated by the use of the terms biculturalism and multiculturalism alongside the well-established concepts of bilingualism and multilingualism¹⁰.

In the process of learning most foreign languages, the question of which variety of the language and which country’s culture should be studied does not usually arise. Even languages that have official or national status in several countries around the world generally maintain a close connection with their countries of origin, whose cultures are typically studied first. The situation with English, however, is somewhat different. The problem of determining which cultures should be considered English-speaking and which variety of English should be regarded as standard has emerged as a result of the rapid global spread of the English language.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, learning English generally meant studying the so-called “Queen’s English” (or “King’s English”), which was also referred to as “good English” or “proper English.” In the 1930s, this answer was still considered acceptable in Great Britain, whereas in the United States it had already begun to raise doubts. Immediately after the Second World War, the only acceptable answer to the question of the standard variety of English was: both the British Standard English (BrSE) and American Standard English (AmSE) varieties.

⁶ Fantini, A.F. Introduction – language, culture and world view: exploring the nexus. 2005. Vol. 19 (2), p. 143–153.

⁷ Ferraro, G., Trevathan, W. and Levy, J. *Anthropology: An Applied Perspective*. Minneapolis: West Publishing, 1994.

⁸ Padilla, A.M., Perez W. Acculturation, social identity, and social cognition: a new perspective. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*. 2003. Vol. 25(1), p. 35–55.

⁹ Parker, D. The Global Banyan Tree: English, Culture and Western Modernity. *Research in Foreign Language & Literature*. 2005. Vol. 5 (1), p. 1–16.

¹⁰ Fry, R. Perspective shifts and a theoretical model relating to kaigaishijo and kikokushijo, or third culture kids in a Japanese context. *Journal of Research in International Education*. 2017. Vol. 6 (2), p. 131–150.

A new perspective on this issue emerged during the last decade of the twentieth century, when it became evident that, alongside the two “traditional” standards of English, numerous other varieties existed – both in Great Britain, the United States, and other parts of the world – as components of World English. It also became clear that, in addition to British and American Standard English, other standard varieties had developed, including Australian Standard English (AusSE), Canadian Standard English (CanSE), and Philippine Standard English (PhilSE), representing the broader concept of World Englishes.

During the same period, the term Global English began to be widely used. It was coined by analogy with expressions such as global village, global markets, and global warming, reflecting the growing popularity of the words global, globalize, and globalization and the processes associated with them¹¹.

For several decades, discussions on the classification of varieties of English have widely employed the tripartite model, according to which regions of the world are distinguished where English functions as a native language (English as a Native Language – ENL), a second language (English as a Second Language – ESL), or a foreign language (English as a Foreign Language – EFL). Although it is relatively easy to estimate the number of countries in which English has the status of an official or national language of communication – according to David Crystal, slightly more than 60 countries – it is almost impossible to determine the total number of English speakers worldwide.

David Crystal provides the following estimates: English is a native language for approximately 320–380 million people worldwide, a second language for 150–300 million people, and a foreign language for 100 thousand to 1 million people. According to these figures, the total number of English speakers in the world ranges from 570 thousand to 681 million people¹². Another researcher, David Graddol, suggests a different estimate: approximately 375 million people speak English as a native language, 375 million as a second language, and 375 million as a foreign language, resulting in a total of 1.5 billion English speakers worldwide¹³.

Attitudes toward the dominant position of English in the world are far from unanimous, as demonstrated, in particular, by the metaphors used to describe its global role. Some of these metaphors emphasize the imperial expansion of English (the world language, the language on which the sun never sets, a universal language), while others express hostility and distrust toward it

¹¹ Wierzbicka, A. *English: Meaning and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. 352 p.

¹² Crystal, D. *English as a global language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 232 p.

¹³ Graddol, D. *The Future of English? A guide to forecasting the popularity of the English language in the 21st century*. London: The British Council, 1997. 67 p.

(a Trojan horse, the other tongue, step-daughter) or provide a radical negative evaluation of English (the most racist of all human languages)¹⁴.

The growing criticism of Global English is associated with the publication in the 1990s of two influential works on language policy: Robert Phillipson's *Linguistic Imperialism* and Alastair Pennycook's *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*. These studies established an important theoretical foundation for the development of critical discourse on World English¹⁵.

Critical attitudes, although directed primarily at the American variety of English, can still be found in Great Britain. As recently as 1995, in a speech at the British Council, Prince Charles stated that the American variety of English was "very corrupting" and claimed that only the British variety was "the proper one." He also emphasized that "all possible measures should be taken to ensure the preservation of the status of English as the language of international communication in the next century", undoubtedly referring primarily to the British variety of English.

Although the majority of linguists agree that English is likely to maintain its dominant position in the future, the views of scholars who predict other possible scenarios should not be overlooked. David Graddol, while acknowledging the tendency toward the global expansion of English, argues that this situation may change rapidly and unexpectedly as a result of even minor shifts in the course of world history. Other researchers¹⁶ suggest that while English is spreading globally, it is facing competition from other languages within English-speaking countries. For example, in the United States, English is considered to be "threatened" by Spanish, the number of its speakers continuing to grow steadily.

American linguist Braj Kachru¹⁷ proposed a model of the global spread of English based on three concentric circles. According to his theory, the "Inner Circle" of Englishes includes the so-called "older Englishes": British, American, Irish, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand varieties of English. The "Outer Circle" comprises Indian, Singaporean, Nigerian, Malaysian, Philippine, and other varieties of English that function as second languages in multilingual states. The third category, which Braj Kachru called the "Expanding Circle," includes countries such as China, Egypt, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Korea, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, and Russia, where English is primarily used as a foreign language.

¹⁴ Kachru, Braj B. *English as an Asian language*. *Links & Letters*. 2008. V. 5, p. 89–108.

¹⁵ Bolton K. *World Englishes*. *The Handbook of Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. P. 369–396.

¹⁶ Wallraff, B. *What global language?* *The Atlantic Monthly*. 2003. Vol. 286 (5), p. 52–66.

¹⁷ Kachru, B. *The alchemy of English: The spread, functions, and models of non-native Englishes*. Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1990. 200 p.

However, nowadays it is important to clarify that not all residents of a particular country are necessarily speakers of English as a native, second, or foreign language. Due to the instability and constant transformation of the modern world, driven by various sociocultural factors – including the development of global print and sound media, the growing number of Internet users, large-scale migration, numerous business trips, increasing international travel, and the expansion of tourism, especially air travel – linguistic realities have become increasingly complex. These processes have resulted in situations where, within a single country, English may function as a native language for one part of the population, a second language for another, and a foreign language for others. Examples of such countries include Great Britain, the United States, Canada, and Singapore.

2. Why is English considered the language of international communication?

Despite the large number of English speakers worldwide, it is generally believed that the number of speakers, although important, is not the decisive factor determining whether a language acquires the status of a language of international communication. According to David Crystal, much more important than the number of speakers is who those speakers are. As an example, he refers to Latin, which became an international language due to the power of the Roman Empire rather than the number of Romans, which was considerably smaller than the population of the countries conquered by Rome. Even after the decline of the Roman Empire's military power, Latin remained the international language of education for another millennium, owing to another form of power – the ecclesiastical authority of Roman Catholicism. This example demonstrates the close relationship between the global dominance of a language and the economic, technological, and cultural power of the country with which it is associated.

As it has become evident, English has become a world language in both senses of the term: as a language of international communication and as a global language. It functions internationally as a means of expressing literary and other forms of cultural life, particularly in the countries that were formerly part of the British Empire. On a global scale, English is not only a tool of globalization but also actively contributes to the formation of a new technological and information age. Therefore, those who use English possess considerable power¹⁸.

¹⁸ Halliday, M.A.K. *Written language, Standard Language, Global Language. The Handbook of World Englishes*. Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p. 349–365.

For several decades, English has dominated the prestigious fields of science and technology. As early as the 1980s, applied linguists obtained data indicating that more than half of the millions of academic publications produced annually were written in English, and many scientific journals around the world had shifted from their native languages to English. In some disciplines, English has become a universal language of communication. For example, English has become a *de facto* working language for 98% of German physicists, as well as for 83% of chemists, 81% of biologists, and 81% of psychologists.

The enhancement of the prestige of English worldwide and the promotion of the English language and culture are actively supported by the governments of English-speaking countries, which establish special organizations aimed at facilitating the spread of English and introducing people in other countries to the history and culture of English-speaking nations.

Due to its high global prestige, English is often regarded as a kind of standard against which other languages are compared. This idea was aptly expressed by Richard Francis, Director General of the British Council, who described English as “a currency against which all other languages are measured, the gold standard of international communication”¹⁹.

English is also considered one of the most significant “commodities” exported by Great Britain: “Britain’s real black gold is not North Sea oil, but the English language... It is difficult to determine with certainty what constitutes a national resource. The importance of people using the language of your culture in the post-industrial age is immeasurable”.

In answering the question of why people decide to learn a particular language, the renowned linguist Michael Halliday argues that this need is determined by the so-called “functional complementarity,” which refers to the ability of a language to enable individuals to do something new – something they want to do and would be unable to do, or unable to do effectively, without knowledge of that language.

It is precisely due to its great potential for “functional complementarity” that English has developed from a standard language into a national language and, eventually, into a language of international communication. According to M. Halliday, a standard variety of a language is a variety that has spread beyond its original region and has become national, being used by speakers of other dialects who nevertheless retain certain regional forms of expression. When the area of use of a language variety extends worldwide, the language becomes global, and the standard variety begins to function in new registers – new domains of use – revealing and expanding its meaning potential.

¹⁹ Francis, R. 1992 and All that: The currency of English. British council pamphlet. London: British council, 2011.

As Michael Halliday points out, English, along with several other languages of the modern era, has expanded from a local sphere of use to national and international domains, undergoing significant changes along the way. However, these are not the same types of changes that usually occur in the development of a language. Linguistic changes also take place when a language assumes new cultural, economic, and political functions. An important stage in the history of a language is the moment when it ceases to exist solely as a spoken language and becomes a written one, followed by the stage when it acquires the status of a standard language within a particular state. From this sociohistorical perspective, English is currently acquiring a new identity as a global language of late capitalist society. Some consequences of this process are already evident, but much more time will be needed before the long-term effects of globalization on language can be fully understood.

Although all researchers agree that English functions as a language of international communication, not all of them support the use of the term *lingua franca* in relation to English. The reason is that defining English as a *lingua franca* (ELF – English as a *Lingua Franca*) implies “interaction in English between representatives of two or more linguacultures, for none of whom English is a native language”²⁰. Therefore, in cases of communication between native English speakers and non-native speakers, the term “English as an International Language” (EIL) should be used instead.

There is no single universally accepted interpretation of the term World Englishes, which is sometimes used as an “umbrella label” to refer to a wide range of different approaches to describing and analyzing the various varieties of English that exist around the world. In its second, narrower sense, the term World English refers to new varieties of English (new Englishes) that have developed in the Caribbean, West Africa, and some East African countries, such as Nigeria and Kenya, as well as Asian varieties of English (Asian Englishes), including Hong Kong English, Indian English, Malaysian English, Singaporean English, and Philippine English.

Some scholars use the term World English in the singular, alongside the terms Global English and International English, whereas others prefer to use these terms in the plural form. In recent years, a large number of new terms have emerged to describe different varieties of English, including English as an international (auxiliary) language, Global English(es), International English(es), localized varieties of English, new varieties of English, non-native varieties of English, second-language varieties of English, World English(es), and New

²⁰ Jenkins, J. Current perspectives on teaching World Englishes and English as a *Lingua Franca*. *TESOL Quarterly*. 2006. Vol. 40 (1), p. 157–181.

Englishes. These terms are used alongside the more traditional concepts of ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language).

According to M. Halliday, in the field of information technology, the varieties of English belonging to the “Inner Circle” continue to dominate. Although they experience pressure from other varieties of English, they are not significantly affected by it, possibly because this pressure lacks a consistent structure or clear direction. If African or Asian varieties of English were not merely means of expressing regional cultures but also contributed to the creation of a culture that is already global in nature, speakers of these varieties would be able not only to use meanings created by others but also to become creators of meanings themselves, thereby contributing to the development of Global English.

M. Halliday emphasizes that meanings do not change through deliberate decisions or commands but through interaction occurring within the semiotic contexts of everyday life – contexts that have already become global, even though the people involved in them represent only a small proportion of the world’s population. Those who seek to resist what they consider to be the harmful influence of English could achieve much more if they focused on transforming the English language itself, changing its meanings and meaning potential, in the way that speakers of the “Outer Circle” have already begun to do.

The increasing number of contacts between individuals and entire cultures in the era of globalization has led to the search for a single global standard variety of English, referred to as World Standard (Spoken) English (W(S)SE) or as World English (WE), World Standard English (WSE), International English (IE), and International Standard English (ISE). This concept represents a hypothetical, monolithic form of English, although David Crystal suggests that, at present, the function of a global standard variety of English is successfully performed by the American variety of English.

The issue of an international language standard remains relevant, as learners of English are concerned about whether they will be understood in other countries and whether they themselves will be able to understand other speakers of English. It has been suggested that there already exist at least printed standard varieties of English based on American and British English, which interact so successfully that they may be considered not two separate standards but rather a single dual standard.

The English used in global English-language print and electronic media represents a kind of print standard, which most closely corresponds to the concept of a language standard compared with any other spoken or written form. The spoken variety of English that most closely approaches a standard form can currently be heard at international airports and in the register used by international aircraft crews when communicating with passengers.

The spread of English in the world is accompanied by two opposing trends – on the one hand, there is acculturation and “nativization” of English, as a result of which it has a noticeable influence on the languages and literatures of other countries, which is called the “anglicization” of other languages and literatures. On the other hand, English as a language of international communication begins to lose cultural and ideological associations with English-speaking countries²¹. The fact that English no longer belongs exclusively to the English-speaking countries of the “inner circle” is eloquently demonstrated by the title of Bray Kachru’s article “English as an Asian Language”, in which the author argues that Asian English “forms its own world from a linguistic, cultural, international and political point of view.

In her book “English: Meaning and Culture”, Anna Wierzbicka expresses surprise at the lack of research on the relationship between English and English-speaking cultures:

“Considering the growing role of English in the world, it is not surprising that a large number of scientific and pedagogical publications appear every year, which examine various aspects of the English language. But, despite this, all this literature has one notable flaw: while many books are published whose authors link the Japanese language with Japanese culture or the Chinese language with Chinese culture, there is almost no contemporary literature that studies the connection between the English language and Anglo culture”.

The clear position that Anna Wierzbicka takes in her book is that “... despite the existence of many varieties of English in the world (all of which deserve recognition, high appreciation and study), there is also an “Anglo” English, an “inner circle” English that includes “the traditional main English-speaking cultures: Great Britain, Ireland, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand”, and that this “Anglo” English cannot be considered a cultural taboo race”.

English speakers belonging to the “outer circle” also claim the right to speak English, considering it as their own, as well as the language of Great Britain or the USA. Bry Kachru notes the multiculturalism and pluralism of the English language, which touches on the most vital aspects of the life of Asian countries – their cultures, languages, models of interaction, discourse, economy and even politics. But, above all, English plays a major role in transforming the identity of both the inhabitants of Asian countries themselves and their societies, and also affects the identity of their languages. According to B. Kachru, in addition to the already mentioned “anglicization” of Asian languages and cultures, there

²¹ Flaitz, J. French attitudes towards the ideology of English as international language. *World Englishes*. 2003. Vol. 12 (2), p. 179 – 191.

is a “South Asianization” of the English language itself, which, together with “Africanization”, is a manifestation of its acculturation in other countries. Kachru believes that the English language used in South Asian countries is also closely related to the culture of these countries. In particular, in the Philippines, Singapore and India, English has every right to be considered part of the “local cultural heritage”, since English has been used in various parts of Asia for almost 200 years, almost as long as in the USA, Australia and New Zealand.

CONCLUSIONS

Today, there is no single universally recognized standard variant of the English language. In many cases, the functions of the world standard are performed by the American and (to a lesser extent) British variants of the English language. The written form of the variant of the English language that most closely corresponds to the ideas about the language standard is considered to be the language of the world's print and electronic media, the English language used in international airports, and the register used by aircraft crew members to communicate with passengers.

Despite the significant spread of English in the world, its close connection remains primarily with “Anglo culture”, which includes the “basic” English-speaking linguocultures: the United States of America, Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The inhabitants of other countries in which English is used as a second language, and which belong to the “outer circle” of English-speaking countries can also be considered speakers of English-speaking linguoculture.

Areas of further research may include: studying the connection between the English language and English-speaking linguistic cultures, identifying common and distinctive features in English-speaking linguistic cultures, and comparing English-speaking linguistic cultures belonging to the “inner” and “outer” circles of English language distribution.

SUMMARY

The article examines the complex sociocultural dimensions of the globalization of the English language and its role as the dominant international lingua franca in the twenty-first century. The author analysis the transformation of English from a standard national language into a global phenomenon, giving rise to numerous regional varieties and the concept of World Englishes. The paper concludes that currently, there is no single universally recognized standard variant of English; its global functions are mostly performed by the American and, to a lesser extent, British varieties. The written standard is primarily represented by global print and electronic media, while the spoken

standard is closest to the register used at international airports and in aviation communication. Despite its extensive worldwide spread, English maintains its deepest connection with the "Anglo culture" of the Inner Circle countries (the USA, Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand). Concurrently, speakers in Outer Circle countries (such as India, Singapore, and the Philippines) actively adapt the language, making it part of their local cultural heritage. Finally, the author outlines prospective areas for further research, including the comparative analysis of English-speaking linguacultures across both the inner and outer circles of language distribution.

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