

IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

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Abstract

Scholars have written extensively on the processes and effects of globalization, documenting its many dimensions including economic, political, ecological, cultural, and ideological. That said, there is little found in the published literature on the relationships and interactions between globalization processes and language. This paper will provide new insights into the roles that languages play in today's globalizing world.

In the public mind, there are two predominate scenarios about the roles and outcomes of languages in the globalizing world, and the English language is implicated in each one. In the first, English is spreading everywhere and causing the extinction of the world's languages (e.g., Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, Phillipson 1992). In to this scenario, English has been characterized as a weed, a *Tyrannosaurus rex*, the 'killer language' in a language-eat-language world driving the planet to the brink of unprecedented and dangerous uniformity and conformativity.

The alternative scenario claims that, as the global auxiliary language, English is creating a common standard for communication that will promote greater understanding and transparency among peoples in the realms of trade, international relations, and cultural exchange (e.g., Walker 2009). In this case, English has been characterized as a unifying *lingua franca*, the antidote to the curse of Babel, and a benign facilitator integrating the world diverse cultures within the proverbial Global Village. These parallel but opposing scenarios, the one dystopic, the other utopic, are naïve. The reality is far more complex and far more interesting.

This paper provides a critique of these prevailing scenarios and proposes both a more nuanced perspective on the effects of globalization processes on languages and the roles that languages have to play in the globalizing world. For example, both scenarios assume that languages are definable objects, that languages are discrete and bounded within a horizontal space, that languages are mono-functional, and that there is only room for one language at a time in any given space. However, recent sociolinguistic approaches to languages and communication show otherwise. Drawing on fresh perspectives presented in the research literature (e.g., Blommaert 2010, Jacquemet 2005), this paper will show how globalization processes have not only extended the existing communicative potentials of language, but also how they have created novel interactive niches for the emergence of new styles, genres, and discourses.

Keywords: globalization, language shift, English, sociolinguistics, lingua franca.