

Globalisation and Minority Languages: A Critical Analysis of the Impact of Globalisation on Minority Languages

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Abstract: This essay critically examines the multifaceted impact of globalisation on minority languages. It begins by defining globalisation and minority languages, then delves into the various ways in which globalisation influences minority languages, including language shift and endangerment, language maintenance and revitalization, and language rights. Through an analysis of case studies and existing literature, the essay explores how globalisation can both accelerate language endangerment by promoting dominant languages like English while also providing avenues for language revitalization through advancements in mass media and high technologies. Additionally, it discusses the role of globalisation in promoting awareness and advocacy for minority language rights, while also acknowledging the potential threats posed to these rights by the homogenising effects of global culture. Ultimately, the essay highlights the complex interplay between globalisation and minority languages, emphasising the need for context-specific approaches to address the challenges and opportunities presented by linguistic diversity in the globalised world.

Keywords: Globalisation, Minority Languages, Language Shift, Language Endangerment, Language Maintenance, Language Revitalization, Language Rights

1. Introduction

This essay will critically examine the impact of globalisation on minority languages. I will briefly discuss the concepts of globalisation and minority languages, and subsequently examine the impact of globalisation on minority languages in terms of language shift and endangerment, language maintenance and revitalization, and language rights.

2. Globalisation and Minority Languages

Globalisation is the process through which individuals, organisations, regions, and countries worldwide become highly interconnected and interdependent [1]. Globalisation encompasses the integration and interconnection of economies, politics, cultures, ideologies, technologies and languages across diverse regions and countries [2]. Due to globalisation, an interconnected global network of trade, transportation and interaction has been established, leading to a reduction in the limitations imposed by geography on social and cultural arrangements [3]. Globalisation is a multifaceted phenomenon that exerts profound influences on individuals, institutions, regions and countries in various aspects, including the economy [4], technologies [5], and politics [6]. The impact of globalisation can also be studied from a linguistic perspective, particularly in the case of minority languages.

Minority languages are the languages spoken by non-dominant groups in a society who seek to preserve and protect their cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic heritages, which differ significantly from those of the dominant majority [7]. Minority languages, no matter how many people speak them, often play a marginal or inconsequential function in the public domains of society [8]. In other words, though a language is spoken by a considerable number of people in a particular society, it can still be considered a minority language if it is not widely used in official government communications, media, education and business [8]. For example, in Chuxiong City, Yunnan Province, China, the total population is 2,655,301, with the Yi ethnic group comprising 29.6% of the population [9]. The Yi ethnic group has its own language, known as the Yi language. Despite the fact that there are a

significant number of Yi language speakers in the area, the Yi language is still considered a minority language due to its limited functional role in the public domain [10].

The relationship between globalisation and minority languages has been studied in different countries and regions, such as Chile [11], France [12] and India [8]. Based on related studies [13][14], the influences of globalisation on minority languages are multifaceted and complex. These impacts can be considered from the following perspectives: language shift and endangerment [15], language maintenance and revitalization [13], and language rights [16].

3. The Shift and Endangerment of Minority Languages

Globalisation is often linked to the shift and endangerment of minority languages. Language shift occurs when one indigenous minority language is gradually replaced by a more dominant language within speech communities [17]. The process of language shift can be subtle, and by the time it is recognised, it may be too late to reclaim the minority language [18]. If the minority language is expected to disappear in the present century, it is considered endangered [19], with a continuous decline in the number of speakers, young learners and domains of use [18]. When an endangered language is no longer spoken, it is considered lost or extinct [20]. There are approximately 8,324 languages spoken, signed, or documented worldwide [21], and nearly half are considered endangered [22].

The lingua francas of globalisation, such as English, French and Spanish, have been associated with the shift and endangerment of minority languages [14][23]. To facilitate cross-border trade, interactions and information flow within globalisation, a strong desire to use common languages emerged [12]. In terms of English, British colonisation led to the establishment of English as an official language in many parts of the world, while the global economic and cultural influence of the United States further reinforced the position of English as a dominant global language [24]. Additionally, the popularity of English in media, science, technology and business has also contributed to its status as a lingua franca of globalisation [24]. With the enhancement of globalisation, English is globally recognised and highly associated with power, prestige, status and functionality [25]. In some non-English-speaking developing countries and regions, especially those with active participation in international forums, business and trade, local individuals, institutions and governments may attach great importance to English, believing that it can maximise their socio-economic and political returns [26]. On the contrary, indigenous minority languages may be associated with restricted use in a few domains, and deemed irrelevant in meeting the socio-economic and political demands of daily life [27]. Consequently, language policy makers may prioritise the use of English in various aspects of social life through laws and regulations, such as education, politics and the economy [26]. Meanwhile, individuals may strive to improve their English proficiency and use English in their daily work and family lives [26]. Due to the ongoing expansion and promotion of English, indigenous minority languages in these countries and regions may not be favoured or used by their speakers, and may become relegated to the background, further marginalised and endangered [28].

For example, in Nigeria, a former British colony, English is the official language with hegemonic status, which has relegated the local minority languages to subsidiary status, such as Igbo, Edo and Igala [15]. Many of the local people may hold negative attitudes towards these indigenous minority languages with limited socio-economic and political benefits [29]. On the contrary, English has a reliable, well-established codified form with considerable national and international usage [29]. Indigenous people may deem that English can offer them access to economic benefits, political power, high technologies and global communication [29]. In practise, English is used in a large proportion of social conversations or interactions in Nigeria, either formal or informal, such as in business, the market, education and churches [30]. Even in some families, parents and caretakers do not allow their children to use their local minority languages, making it difficult to maintain and transmit related minority cultural traditions and values to future generations [31]. As a result, the survival of indigenous minority languages in Nigeria is undermined, and over 36 Nigerian languages are on the verge of extinction [30].

However, these lingua francas of globalisation can also slow down or even reverse the shift and endangerment of minority languages to some extent [32]. These lingua francas can help minority language communities connect with the world, access global trade and develop their economies [32]. In this process, these communities can learn how to maintain and revitalise their minority languages from other minority communities with successful experiences, leading to a potential reversal of the

shift and endangerment of their minority languages [32]. Due to the word limit in this essay, other aspects of globalisation which are associated with the shift and endangerment of minority languages will not be examined, such as economy and politics [33].

4. The Maintenance and Revitalization of Minority Languages

Globalisation can contribute to the maintenance and revitalization of minority languages. Language maintenance refers to the process by which the use of a minority language is preserved and sustained [17]. Language revitalization extends beyond language maintenance and aims to reverse language shift, reclaim and reconstruct endangered minority languages, as well as bring them to life [17]. Thanks to globalisation, a shrinkage and compression of space and time have been made possible, which has facilitated the cross-border exchanges and diffusion of technologies and information flow between countries and regions [17]. Against this background, advancements in mass media and high technologies, such as television, the internet and social media, are accessible on a global scale, which have brought new opportunities for minority language maintenance and revitalization efforts [34].

In terms of television, for example, Catalan, as the official language in Catalonia in northeastern Spain, used to be an endangered minority language during Franco's dictatorship from 1939 to 1975 [13]. During this period, the Spanish government managed to suppress regional languages to promote Spanish [13]. Catalan, along with other regional languages, was intensely persecuted and discriminated against, and was not allowed to be used in social life [13]. As a result, it became an endangered language with a severe decline in the number of its users [13]. The use of Catalan resumed after the death of Franco and the subsequent democratisation of Spain [13]. To revitalise Catalan, the regional government established a television channel, TV3, which broadcasts exclusively in Catalan and has fostered a sense of community [13]. By adhering to a consistent form of Catalan in its programming, TV3 has helped to establish a unified and recognised form of Catalan that is widely understood and accepted in the community [35]. The channel contributed to the standardisation and normalisation of Catalan, thus bolstering the community's linguistic competence [35]. Additionally, the channel has provided a platform for Catalans to produce their own cultural products, such as films, music and TV series [35]. Exposure to these cultural products can encourage the use and appreciation of the Catalan language among Catalans themselves [35]. Therefore, TV3 has played a significant role in revitalising and maintaining Catalan.

Furthermore, the internet and social media have provided a platform for minority language users to actively produce their own media content, rather than being solely consumers of content in the majority language [36]. This development has positively influenced the preservation and revitalization of these minority languages [36]. For instance, Catalan speakers with access to the internet and social media can produce, store and disseminate information about Catalan and their own culture [36]. Online resources have made it possible for people interested in Catalan and its culture, both within and outside the Catalan community, to access information and learn about the language, thus promoting the education and dissemination of Catalan [36]. In addition, social media provides a virtual space for Catalan speakers to connect with each other, which can strengthen their interactions and help to create a sense of community [36]. By encouraging the use of Catalan in their interactions, Catalan speakers can practise and reinforce their language skills, thus contributing to the maintenance of Catalan [36]. Hence, the internet and social media have facilitated the maintenance and revitalization of the Catalan language.

The effects of globalisation, particularly advancements in mass media and high technologies, have had a positive impact on the maintenance and revitalization of minority languages. However, these advancements can also jeopardise the maintenance and revitalization of minority languages. They may increase the exposure of minority language speakers to popular dominant languages and cultures [35]. This exposure may lead younger generations of minority language speakers to develop a preference for using dominant languages, thus potentially undermining efforts to maintain and revitalise minority languages [35]. Due to the essay's word limit, I will not explore the relationship between language maintenance and revitalization and other aspects of globalisation, such as tourism [37] and education [38].

5. Minority Language Rights

One of the consequences of globalisation has been an increase in the recognition and advocacy of

minority language rights. In terms of minority language rights, members of minority language communities enjoy a series of linguistic rights which should be protected and preserved, including but not limited to the liberty to use their minority languages without facing discrimination, access to education and government services in their minority languages, as well as assistance in language revitalization and maintenance [39].

Globalisation promotes minority language rights from various perspectives. In the age of globalisation, people are exposed to various cultures and languages through travel and communication [40]. They learn about the world through multiple forms of cultural and linguistic expression, such as foreign films, music and literature [40]. Throughout this process, people become more aware of the existence of cultural and linguistic diversity than ever before, leading to an increased appreciation of diverse cultures and languages [2]. Consequently, this heightened awareness and appreciation contribute to increased public awareness and support for minority language rights [2]. Moreover, communication and information flow within globalisation have been facilitated by the rapidly developing internet and social media [36]. Minority language communities can showcase their languages and cultures to the world, enabling them to gain more visibility than before [36]. Meanwhile, they can connect with other minority communities all over the world, share their experiences about the maintenance and revitalization of minority languages and build their social networks [36]. The social networks have strengthened and developed alliances between minority language communities, and raised awareness of minority language rights on a global scale [36]. Last but not least, one of the outcomes of globalisation is the flow of people across borders. Immigrants move from one country or region to another in search of better opportunities for work, education, or living in a better environment. When immigrants settle in a new country or region, they often retain their mother tongue, which may diversify the linguistic landscape of the destination, contribute to the building of new linguistic communities and increase the demand for services provided in various languages [41]. All of these may contribute to the recognition of these minority language rights in the destination, leading to changes in language policy to guarantee these rights [42]. Therefore, globalisation has helped enhance the recognition and protection of minority language rights on a global scale.

However, globalisation can also suppress minority language rights. The lingua francas of globalisation, global technologies and mass media, as well as cross-border communication and commerce may together accelerate the homogenization of economy, culture and social standardisation on a global scale [43]. This process may reinforce the dominance of dominant languages and cultures, and lead to the marginalisation of minority languages and the suppression or ignorance of their language rights [43].

6. Conclusion

This essay has examined the complex and multifaceted impacts of globalisation on minority languages. Globalisation can lead to language shift and endangerment among minority languages, while also potentially slowing down these processes. Additionally, it can both aid and hinder efforts to preserve and revitalise minority languages. Furthermore, it can simultaneously promote and suppress the rights of minority languages. However, it should be stressed that these influences may not be universal, and their degree can vary depending on the specific context and time period, which requires further analysis to better understand these dynamics.

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