

The Interplay of Language, Culture, and Globalisation in Shaping Communication and Education

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Abstract: Studying language through the lens of social sciences is crucial for understanding its role in both connecting and dividing individuals, depending on their linguistic proficiency and the social context in which the language is used. In contemporary society, communication is predominantly intercultural, emphasizing the necessity for effective interaction with members of other cultures. This study examines Croatian university professors' views on globalization, the integration of intercultural competence in language education, student interest in learning languages, and the role of language and communication subjects in the educational system and society. The findings underline the importance of fostering intercultural competence and highlight the positive self-assessment of teacher engagement in these areas.

Keywords: Education, Globalization, Intercultural Competence, Language, Sociology

Introduction. Language is foundational to human socialization, and its acquisition and use are essential to societal progress. Sapir (1921) argues that language is a uniquely human, non-instinctive means of conveying thoughts, emotions, and desires through symbols that are intentionally created. As a tool for articulated speech, language differentiates humans from animals, whose communication remains limited to emotional expressions (Ilić, 1980). Unlike animal communication, language evolves, serving as a primary medium for transmitting culture, values, norms, and identities (Gvozdanovic, 2010). Moreover, language is shaped by society, making it a dynamic entity rather than a fixed system with a singular history or uniform set of properties (Kordic, 2010, p. 52). Changes in language can either constrain or enhance its ability to convey cultural content, thoughts, and emotions (Jezic, 2014, p. 31). A contemporary area of debate concerns the effects of globalization, particularly the dominance of English as a global lingua franca, which influences many other languages it encounters.

While language is one of the most significant social phenomena, it has rarely been systematically examined within sociology. Classical sociologists have intermittently acknowledged its relevance in their work. Marx viewed language as an expression of practical consciousness, Durkheim argued that language could be used to classify social facts, and Bourdieu explored how linguistic variations delineate social group identities, shaped by distinctive habitus (Heritage, 2006, p. 322). Sociological studies have also examined how conversations—whether through joking, apologizing, or threatening—construct social reality (Bakker, 2007, pp. 2534–2535).

Language is reshaping the modern world, nations, and human lives, facilitated by communication at local, national, regional, and supranational levels (Sun, 2013, p. 35). English has emerged as a global language, dominant in business and online communication. Globalization, a concept that permeates political, economic, technological, and scientific discourse, has made the world increasingly homogeneous through cross-cultural contact and the flow of people, information, and goods, aided by

technological advancements (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 2006, p. 167). This phenomenon raises critical questions about how language changes—such as the global spread of English and the growing influence of Anglicisms—impact language education. Globalization's effects on language teaching reflect broader social shifts and prepare individuals for living in an interconnected world. This study investigates how Croatian language and communication professors perceive globalization, intercultural competence in language education, student interest in learning languages, and the role of language and communication subjects in modern education.

The European Union emphasizes the importance of communication in both native and foreign languages as key competences for lifelong learning, alongside mathematical, scientific, technological, and digital skills (Popovic, 2017, p. 74). Successful language education thus requires fostering intercultural competence, where language learning integrates cultural understanding. Intercultural communication, increasingly common within societies due to immigration and social changes, requires cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components, including cultural knowledge, curiosity, motivation, and problem-solving skills (Dragas, 2013, p. 19). Bhushan (2011) suggests that language teaching must connect language knowledge with the social contexts in which it is spoken, emphasizing the role of social sciences in improving the quality of language education. Globalization, while enhancing global interconnectedness, is a complex and locally contextualized process that necessitates adaptive teaching methods to effectively integrate language education with its socio-cultural context (Block, 2004, p. 756; Milardovic, 2004, p. 155).

This research explores how language and communication teachers in Croatia assess the role of language in fostering intercultural openness, their engagement in promoting intercultural competence, student interest in languages, and the position of language studies in the Croatian educational system. English has become a dominant force in Croatia, with widespread use from preschool education to lifelong learning and significant influence in business and media. Despite concerns about the influence of English on Croatian, this study aligns with perspectives that dismiss the notion of a threatened Croatian language, emphasizing that language preservation is key to cultural identity and social cohesion (Bozanic, 2014; Hersak, 2001, p. 191).

Methodology and Sample. This research used a survey method, distributed in early 2017, employing a closed-question questionnaire to assess how globalization influences the teaching of language and communication subjects in Croatia. The study focused on professors teaching in departments responsible for training future primary and secondary educators in the social sciences and humanities. The sample consisted of 47 respondents, a typical number for online surveys. While the initial goal was to survey 120 teachers, the smaller sample still provided valuable insights. Research questions were framed to evaluate the broader implications of globalization on language teaching, and results from the pilot phase suggest a need for further research with a larger and more specific sample.

The sample was diverse, comprising mainly female respondents, reflecting trends in the feminization of higher education, particularly in the social and human sciences (Women and Men in Croatia, 2017). Most participants were middle-aged, and the majority taught at the University of Zadar, with a range of language expertise, primarily Croatian, English, and German. These characteristics suggest a heterogeneous sample that enhances the robustness of the findings.

Results indicated that most respondents felt competent in discussing globalization, though the broad scope of globalization made some uncertain in their assessments. The majority acknowledged the importance of fostering intercultural competence through language teaching, reflecting a positive self-assessment of their teaching engagement. However, concerns about students' diminishing interest in language and cultural depth were also noted, suggesting a potential gap in students' commitment to language learning.

Results and Discussion. It is intricately tied to culture and human behavior, with societal norms and behaviors becoming embedded in both culture and language (Brooks, 1986). A person's perception of the world is shaped by the linguistic differences they encounter. Hantrais (1989) suggests that culture is a set of beliefs and practices that govern society, with language serving as the primary medium for expressing these cultural elements. Therefore, individuals articulate their perspectives through the lens of their culture, which is deeply intertwined with the language they use. According to some researches, most respondents feel equipped to discuss globalization and the role of intercultural competence in language teaching. However, some participants are unable to fully assess their competence, possibly due to the complex and multifaceted nature of globalization. On the other hand, there can be concerns regarding students' perceived lack of deeper engagement with language and culture, which may reflect a broader societal trend of linguistic superficiality. This trend could indicate a diminished capacity to understand cultural diversity, potentially limiting global communication and social relationships. Emmitt and Pollock (1997) further contend that even individuals from similar cultural backgrounds may have differing, as the language they speak influences their perception of reality.

Conclusion.

The findings from this pilot study largely support the initial hypotheses, with most respondents expressing confidence in their ability to discuss globalization and intercultural competence. While some respondents struggled to assess this, the overall trend suggests a strong commitment among teachers to promoting these competencies. However, concerns regarding students' interest in language learning and cultural depth warrant further exploration. The results emphasize the importance of fostering a deeper understanding of language and culture to ensure effective communication in a globalized world. Future studies should focus on a larger sample and more specific student populations to provide clearer insights into these issues.

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