

## Conference Paper

# Language Aspect in Education As an Aspect of Intercultural Rivalry

**Nikolay V. Litvak**

Doctor of Science (Sociology), Professor at MGIMO University under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Moscow, Russia

**Abstract**

This article considers how the modern phenomena of multilingualism, multiculturalism and media diversity are different from those of previous periods. With the promotion of multiculturalism as a constructive interaction of cultures, the “clash of civilizations” is also actively discussed as is the fact that, despite the expansion of compulsory multilingualism in education, the dominance of only one language is consistently growing, including officially multilingual Europe. In this regard, it is important to consider such sociocultural processes against wider sociopolitical, cultural and philosophical contexts. The mobility of modern people and their communication with each other is much greater than before, but the language barrier is overcome not so much by their multilingualism or a new *lingua franca* (English), but by the creation of tourist and business infrastructures, whose employees learn several foreign languages, and only in a small necessary amount. In addition, a small number of professional translators are used when and where a highly qualified translation with a very precise semantic understanding is required. In the future this role might well belong to translation machines. With these realities, as well as with some of the rights of the child, the obligatory study of two or more languages, in most cases the English, provides a stark contrast. The main justification for such a policy is that it supposedly increases the chances of employment. Yet this is an ideological construct, the implementation of which is consuming an ever-increasing proportion of budgetary funds and personal time of students and teachers.

**Keywords:** education, bilingualism, multilingualism, values, intercultural communication, intercultural rivalry

Corresponding Author:

Nikolay V. Litvak  
jourfr@mail.ru

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## 1. Introduction

Multilingualism and multiculturalism are widespread today, and with the increasing mobility of citizens and their use of electronic media, the carriers of different languages and cultures interact much more intensively than before. This intercultural communication takes place with different consequences, and in this connection the search for a policy that would promote a constructive interaction of cultures, and not a “clash of civilizations”, continues. Based on the opinion that conflicts occur because of the ignorance of other cultures, which, in turn, is due to the lack of knowledge of the

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respective languages, the concept of multilingual education was formulated as a tool to facilitate intercultural communication.

By now, a large amount of research has been done on the subject of learning foreign languages and education in foreign languages, as well as intercultural communication. According to the research that showed positive results of bilingualism and multilingualism, the programs of compulsory study of two foreign languages were introduced, particularly in European schools. At the same time, experts advocate the continuation of research, as a rule, adhering to the position that positive results of such education are achieved only in specific conditions: sufficient attention to children, appropriate qualifications of teachers and a balanced learning process.

In this regard, the article examines the study of foreign languages not per se, but in a wider sociopolitical, cultural and philosophical context. Also, an interdisciplinary analysis of documents and research data of the European Union and France on multilingualism and educational issues focused on the problem of values and intercultural communication was carried out.

## 2. Psychological Aspects of Multilingualism

First of all, it should be noted that among researchers the discussion about the positive effect of bilingualism and, moreover, multilingualism continues. Along with the enthusiastic comments on the positive impact on cognitive abilities in youth and mental health in old age, there are also negative data about difficulties, both in learning and in adult life, right down to provoking mental retardation in certain conditions, due to the mental overstrain of children (leaving behind the studies of the first half of the last century that described the opinion prevailed among psychologists, speech therapists and teachers about the exceptional harm even bilingualism could cause).

Therefore, the problem of creating conditions for only positive results arises. It turns out that this requires constant and professional attention to the child, his traits and the course of development, i.e. to the point his individual education. Also, for example, L. Richardelli revealed that in order to prevent cognitive impairment (!) and gain cognitive advantages, it is necessary that children reach a certain high level (thresholds according to J. Cummins) of bilingualism, being equally good at both languages [1]. E. Bialistok, one of the experts and the supporter of multilingualism, when pointing to the advantages including the retardation of cognitive aging, at the same time notes that there are many open-ended questions. In our opinion, she also makes the main conclusion, notably that when bilingualism additionally stimulates the brain, it "acts the same way as formal

education and other things that contribute to the cognitive reserve and protect cognitive abilities”, and that “many people become multilinguals because they are more talented, more educated or motivated to learn many languages” [2]. So, different languages in the practical life of every person embrace not only dialects and literary language, but also a whole group of special, professional, thematic “languages” containing the system of abstract concepts of different complexity. A thorough study of the relevant areas, such as production, culture (art) and science, even in their native language is useful for cognitive development.

### 3. Multilingualism in Europe

Multilingualism exists in most countries of the world for historical reasons - as a result of the military-political formation of the modern nation-states, which, as a rule, included defeated nations and ethnic groups who spoke another language, as well as a permanent migration process. In different countries there are different approaches and policies regarding multilingualism, which can be reduced to two main ones: language assimilation of minorities and the coexistence of languages. In the first case, under the influence of the overall democratization process of the second half of the twentieth century, in the USA since the seventies and in Europe since the nineties the growing waves of mass migration gave a powerful impetus to the development of bilingual education. The purpose of such education in elementary schools is to prepare immigrant children to further study in one language - the language of the host country. In the second case, as a rule, we are talking about the official, but local use of one or more other languages, like, for example, in India, Switzerland, Canada and Belgium. In some countries there emerged a new phenomenon – a compulsory for all citizens learning of two state languages at schools, for example, Hebrew and Arabic in Israel or Arabic and Berber in Morocco.

The third policy has become a novelty – the purposeful development of multilingualism in European countries participating in the integration project of the European Union. This policy develops both inward, establishing the compulsory study of one and then two foreign languages from the smallest possible age (elementary school and even kindergarten), and in breadth, moving from studying an increasing number of foreign languages to developing non-language teaching in foreign languages.

The political basis of this policy, as well as the entire EU, is striving for security: Europe, which nations have long and terribly fought against each other, in an effort to stop this self-destruction finally launched a project of political unification, not a military one. Due

to the political nature of this decision adopted by various sovereign political forces, their diversity is formally protected as the basis and guarantee of the sovereignty. Hence, the key principle of the EU is “unity in diversity”, which is practically expressed in the creation of supranational structures and the expansion of local self-government of the “Europe of Regions”, thus trying to remove the most conflicting element of numerous sovereignties. Therefore, 24 official languages have been established in the European Union today and more than 60 languages have the status of regional and minority languages, and their speakers have the right to use them in education and self-government (in the countries which signed and ratified the 1992 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages). The need for universal compulsory study of at least two languages other than the national one was declared (2002).

The rationale for such a policy is largely declarative. For example, the 2007 European Commission report stated that “citizens who speak more languages can reap the full benefits of free movement in the European Union and can integrate more easily in another country for study or work” [3]. Another European Commission document (2008) stated that multilingualism is “an asset for Europe”, and that “The harmonious co-existence of many languages in Europe is a powerful symbol of the European Union’s aspiration to be united in diversity, one of the cornerstones of the European project. Languages define personal identities... can serve as a bridge to other people and open access to other countries and cultures, promoting mutual understanding. A successful multilingualism policy can strengthen life chances of citizens: it may increase their employability, facilitate access to services and rights and contribute to solidarity through enhanced intercultural dialogue and social cohesion. Approached in this spirit, linguistic diversity can become a precious asset, increasingly so in today’s globalised world’ [4].

The outcomes of the twenty-year implementation of such a policy are yet ambiguous. Indicative, in particular, is the example of France, a country with a large population, a developed culture and a system of its reproduction based on a thorough study of the French language, literature and philosophy. According to a recent study provided by the National Council for School System Evaluation (Cnesco), 39% of primary school students have difficulty in understanding spoken English. The amount of such students finishing the secondary school (3rd grade in France) is 43%. Even worse is the ability to speak: 75% cannot speak proper English in general, 73% lack Spanish language skills and 63% cannot speak German. Therefore, France is at the bottom of the European list on this indicator (the best are school students in Sweden, where the study of foreign languages, that is, English, in an elementary school was introduced in the 1960s) [5]. Recommendations to improve the situation include the study of foreign languages

from kindergarten, the increase in foreign internships for children, the strengthening of training for foreign language teachers, and the involvement of parents in the process [6, 7]. At the same time, on the one hand, the problem of “brain drain”, mainly to the US, is being discussed in France [8–10], as according to statistics from the scientific social network LinkedIn, France takes the second place in the world after India on the indicator of academics leaving the country [11]. On the other hand, a decline in the general level of education and in the students outcomes in mathematics, French language and philosophy chronologically correlated with the introduction of compulsory study of two foreign languages.

Besides, at the same time video games were actively developed, and then – computer games, mobile communications and the Internet, which turned out to be real “time devourers” and made their “contribution” to the decline in the general level of education. However, these facts exist and need further study.

There is understanding of the problem in Europe as a whole. In the aforementioned documents of the European Commission, multilingualism is characterized not only as an “asset”, but at the same time as a “challenge” for Europe. Therefore, the management of linguistic diversity as a form of public and state policy is being studied in the framework of the interdisciplinary research project “Mobility and inclusion in multilingual Europe” (MIME), which reports, in particular, that “Linguistic diversity is neither good nor bad in itself. It is a reality that carries advantages and drawbacks.... The policy problem, then, is to manage linguistic diversity in order to maximize its ... advantages while minimizing its ... drawbacks”; “Multilingualism, then, is a challenge precisely because it points towards two main goals that are not easily reconciled: mobility..., (and) inclusion...” [12]. However, the advantage of mobility, at which, inter alia, studying foreign languages is aimed, looks strange in the conditions of active propaganda of the information society, knowledge society, etc., the modern versions of which are based on the electronic media and communication, which just “destroy” the space, allow people both to work and constantly communicate with any person or organization, regardless of their locations on the planet.

In terms of the possibility of any EU citizen to apply to the European institutions in any of the 24 official languages, English, German and French in fact are most often used as working languages (English – in more than 80% of cases).

Although “only” in half of the European countries English is compulsory for studying in schools, and in the rest (including France) – by choice, the majority chooses English. MIME studies show that “Many Europeans have doubts about the uncontrollable, seemingly uncontrollable growth in the use of English. Even if they see the usefulness of

having (such) means (English or others) for broad communication and welcome the opportunity to master them, this does not mean that other (languages) are not important, and, of course, does not mean approval of marginalization or replacement of the national languages by English, for example, in higher education in some member states ” [13].

Finally, in the context of the repeated mantra of intercultural communication, the European declarations on multilingualism clearly express the main goals which are not cultural at all, but economic: increasing the opportunities of the European business in foreign trade using several (not all) common European languages and some others (English, Chinese and Russian), and the export of labor from Europe.

#### 4. Language Situation and the USA

But the ubiquitous study of English is only one “pole” that defines this “power line” of modern education. And what is the situation at the second “pole”, in the USA, where aspirants both learn English and impose its study on the children all over the world? There also exists linguistic diversity, but the policy regarding it is different, which is a consequence of the general modern American policy of the most modern, present, real capitalism. Through this quality of capitalism, the United States also owes its scientific, technological, economic and military leadership. However, the effect of this factor on the distribution of English is not so obvious. The prevailing viewpoint is that Americans impose its study on other countries, financing the network of language courses, organizing television and radio broadcasting, and so on.

However, attempts of other countries to follow the same path, in particular, France with its largest network of cultural centers around the world and international TV channels, as well as Germany, Great Britain, and China have so far been unsuccessful. Indeed, the problem is already being understood and transformed into a question: why do institutions of similar form fail to produce the same results? Why does the relatively “primitive” American culture, as well as the USA as a whole, manage to dominate in the modern world? Trying to answer, the French sociologist F. Martel showed the creation of cultural industries in the USA, i.e. production of a cultural product like any other in a commercial enterprise, but also having philosophical, civilizational, value aspects and objectives [14].

While in Europe they continued (and continue) to consider only elitist culture (high culture) as real culture, in the USA within the framework of competition for the consumer, which is natural for real capitalism, culture was socially overvalued. The criteria for what is “art” and even “common culture” were changed and weakened: according

to Martel, the Americans not only included in the culture, but equalized any cultures (non-professional cultures, subcultures) with “high culture”, which products are mass produced and distributed as accessible to wide, non-elite segments of society, not requiring a high level of education for consumption. Therefore, American cultural products – music, cinema, cartoons, technology, lifestyle, etc. – having won the real competition at home, are winning all over the world, no matter how much someone discusses their “primitivism” and other “flaws”. The same applies to the language – under capitalism one can study all sorts of languages and generally anything, but one can survive only by selling his labor in the market dominated by the strongest economic actors.

And today these actors are American and use English. And, above all, the same applies to the United States itself, where there is no compulsory foreign language study in schools, but English itself is not a federal official language and is introduced as such in only 31 states. Undoubtedly, the teaching of foreign languages in elite schools is widespread. However, it is precisely there that the principles of high qualification of teachers and professional pedagogical support for children are implemented, which makes good results. The priority is not given to languages as such, but specifically to cognitive development and abstract thinking, and therefore the study of “dead” (Latin, ancient Greek) languages which have nothing to do with obtaining good work is popular”.

The high level of electronic media and communication allows Americans to exercise their large-scale and widespread informational and cultural influence. In addition, in modern conditions of strategic military parity, the main type of wars, which complete the periods of liberal, market development of capitalism, are information wars. In their turn, besides tactical operations (for example, creating and spreading false news and facts), the main ones are strategic operations in education, science and culture in general. The winner gets at his disposal other human resources earlier belonging to the countries that suffered a defeat in this war of countries. These human resources are taken without capturing their territories, but the winner also forms the necessary personnel in the territories, capable of working with the necessary language [15].

In fact, for a hundred years the United States has been the largest importer of the best scientists and qualified personnel (up to half of its needs), although its schoolchildren and students study English, which does not in itself make education the best.

And the import of personnel is much more effective than their training – a good education system is expensive to maintain, and even more expensive is to train scientists (the academic preparation takes at least 20 years: school – university – graduate school).

## 5. Conclusion

Today, people travel much more than before, but the language barrier can be overcome, first of all, by the creation of tourism and business infrastructures, which employees learn foreign languages, and economically – only to the necessary extent. The fact is that any language itself is only a means of communication. Its use and quality of translation is critically dependent on the language level. Therefore, the study of any language, starting with the native, allowing free understanding and communication across a wide range of areas of culture and science, requires a huge amount of time – the main and irreplaceable resource of each person and humanity as a whole. And if many experts achieve this for their very limited professional niches, then just few have good English-speaking skills and can discuss other issues (both for linguistic and general cultural reasons, with the exception of those whose personal hobby is learning a foreign language, literature, etc.). It is significant that science fiction writers and futurists have long been modelling the future with automatic machine translation as means of communication, and not with a “new” person who speaks all 7 thousand languages still existing on the planet.

Natural for the business effectiveness contrasts sharply with the ever-increasing amount of public and state resources directed towards the compulsory study of several foreign languages (in fact, for the last twenty years or so, the whole world, with the exception of the USA, has been developing, albeit with different intensity, the transition to bilingual education: the state language of each country and English).

This is a consequence of an ideological attitude based on a false or insufficient understanding of reality, which is this: the overall leadership of the United States is not due to the fact that their citizens mostly speak English, but to the quality of capitalism superior to other competing states. Therefore, the United States continues to generate the largest cash flows, create better economic conditions and attract capital, technology, and the people who have to learn English. But with very insufficient argumentation, citizens, especially learners of other countries, have no choice. Moreover, the discussion about the rights of the child, about his right to choose a life path, including the “educational trajectory”, and the attitude to foreign languages, first of all, to English, steadily avoids this tendency and essentially opposes it. Thus, with all democratic, as well as patriotic sociocultural declarations, a policy is pursued that objectively focuses on the export of talents to the United States.

The study of any foreign language complements the process of personality formation by other, foreign cultural realities, values, stereotypes, etc., necessarily taking the appropriate place of the national ethnocultural and ethno-linguistic content.

When this foreign language is the only one, then instead of multicultural enrichment the reverse process takes place, namely the replacement of all cultures by one single expressed in that same language. Moreover, children living in different countries and cultures have no all-encompassing contact with the reality which language and culture they learn. On the other hand, they all have an aim appropriate for this culture – in this case, to achieve the “American dream” to earn as much as possible, to get financial and material returns from education (and not “the desire to learn other cultures”).

In general, this is characteristic of all capitalist countries, but for the above reasons, today only the United States benefits from it, selecting the best employees. The vast majority of citizens of other countries do not require English for future life and spending huge state and personal resources to study it is irreplaceable, weakens other national economies, and in cases of poor-quality teaching also hampers the development of non-American schoolchildren in general. Thus, the linguistic aspect in education is an aspect of intercultural and interstate competition.

Under no circumstances can the problem of European intercultural communication be solved by the compulsory study of even two foreign languages, especially with its current formulation as support for as many national cultures and their languages as possible. This problem can be solved by an ever-improving machine [13, 16] and professional translation and a real, independent choice to study a particular foreign language or not to study any, focusing on something else (which is implemented in the USA). The quantitative aspect is also important: according to statistics, up to two thirds and even more citizens of the large developed countries, including the United States, never leave the borders of their countries and most of them do not need foreign languages for their professional and cultural life.

It is significant that, like France, the same economically and culturally developed countries, like Italy and Japan, are also at the end of the rankings in terms of knowledge of English. Thus, the citizens of the countries with a developed culture and science that exist and are reproducible in national languages are much more difficult to Anglicization, if at all, as compared to the less developed countries with mainly local culture and, especially, a small population. Obviously, culture and science are not directly dependent on the size of the population; a larger population is a favorable, if not necessary, factor, but not sufficient.

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