'Globalization need not sound the death knell for minor local languages, whether Catalan, Welsh, Ukrainian or Frisian.' Discuss.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary\(^1\) Globalization is 'The process by which businesses or other organisations develop international influence or start operating on an international scale' and this globalization in our modern world has directly led to a linguistic globalization\(^2\) in which English has become a tool for global communication. Although globalization has been positive for the growth of the world economy and international relations, it has had a negative impact on many worldwide minor languages. According to UNESCO\(^3\) a language disappears every two weeks. If a language does become extinct, the associated culture is lost with it. However, in a globalised world, English is predominantly the language of the global financial and business sector rather than everyday life, and consequently this globalization 'need not sound the death knell for minor local languages'. There are countless examples which undermine the idea of globalization being the disease to our linguistically vibrant world and support the prominent return of minor languages.

It is impossible, when addressing the topic of globalization, to ignore the significance of the English language across the world. English has become the lingua franca\(^2\) of the world, arguably after the Treaty of Versailles was written in English in 1919 but more likely due to England simply being a huge global power both economically and imperially across the centuries. In more recent times the dominance of the United States of America as a global power has further driven the pre-eminence of the English language. English is now the global language of the international workplace, dominating the financial and business sectors. In some places English has even invaded the native workplace, for example, in Sweden\(^4\) English is spoken in the workplace rather than the native language due to the internationality of their enterprise. The English language also dominates the internet, (around 80% of the world’s electronically stored information is in English\(^5\) and the worldwide education system. UNESCO has contributed to the rise of English in education through its Millennium Development Goals\(^6\), in which the 2\(^{nd}\) goal promotes the right to multilingualism in education through the inclusion of global languages in the curriculum. Although this goal endorses multilingualism, it has arguably caused minor local languages to be pushed to one side, especially in the African continent.

In the modern world, money is the requisite to success\(^6\) and the gateway to this financial prosperity is seen to be through the English language. Therefore, throughout Africa English is taught from an early age to decrease inequality and provide people from all background and countries an equal chance to be involved in global affairs. In Namibia, since the Namibian Constitution\(^7\) was published in 1990 after their independence from apartheid South Africa, students have been given the right to be taught in their local home language or English. Although only 2% of teachers in 2012 were sufficiently fluent\(^8\) in English and a small minority of the general population spoke it, English was adopted as the educational language throughout the country. Present day Namibians feel obliged to study English because of its function in

\(^{1}\) (Oxford Dictionaries | English, 2018)
\(^{2}\) (Smokotin, Alekseyenko and Petrova, 2014)
\(^{3}\) (Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue, 2009)
\(^{4}\) (Mydans, 2018)
\(^{5}\) (Unesco.org, 2018)
\(^{6}\) (Chavez, 2016)
\(^{7}\) (Namibweb.com, 2018)
\(^{8}\) (Kisting, 2018)
their society; if they want to enter a scientific field, work for the government, or have any prestigious position, it is necessary they become fluent in English. A comparable situation also lies in South Africa, where students prefer their language of education to be English rather than the native minor language of Xhosa due to its limited applicability in a new globalised world. This dominance of English has caused the decline in many of Africa’s native languages, with a potential loss of cultural identity by disregarding the importance of a person’s own native tongue.

Herbert Schiller proposed an idea of cultural imperialism, in which powerful nations hold immense cultural dominance over the weaker countries they permeate. This problem of globalization and cultural imperialism thrives in the Latin American world. In the Spanish speaking country of Ecuador lies a cultural hierarchy in which, ‘Elite Bilinguals’ or ‘Mestizos’ speak English, German and Spanish and consequently partake in global professions, whilst ‘Minoritized bilinguals’, who speak Spanish and an indigenous language, form the lower classes of society. This cultural hierarchy has caused the indigenous speaking people to see the inferiority of their language as part of their identity, and believe that they must instead speak English rather than their native tongue to compete within the workplace, education and economy. However, the Mestizo population are highly against this, arguing that it would result in a loss of indigenous identity and culture. These attitudes demonstrate the globalised hierarchy in Ecuador and places the native tongue of Quichua at the bottom of the social pyramid. The stigma attached to Quichua by Mestizos encourages individuals to shy away from their indigenous language favouring global languages due to the economic prosperity they can bring, which results in a disastrous loss of cultural identity. A similar cultural imperialism lies closer to home. Within France the minor regional languages are not recognised as official national languages to protect the dominance of the French language. Consequently, minor languages like Occitan could be lost forever, along with the associated cultural and ecological diversity.

However, despite these challenging issues, it is extremely evident that ‘globalization need not sound the death knell for minor local languages’. The importance of individual languages is recognised worldwide, as indigenous languages are vital for social and economic justice, ecological diversity and cultural expression. The possibility of language extinction strengthens peoples resolve to hold onto them, as speakers begin to treat their mother tongue as a heritage language and reinstate it into their community as part of their identity. The region of Catalonia is a good example of this. Under Franco’s dictatorship, Spanish was declared the only official language of Spain and minor languages like Catalan were suppressed. This led to the Catalans becoming highly partisan and protective of their region and minor language, which can be seen through their recent urge for independence, and their language continues to thrive with 11.5 million speakers. Norway is another example of partisanship maintaining a minor language. Immigrants in the country must learn Norwegian and the minor languages in the region in which the live, for example Sami. This highlights that minor languages can be protected from the impact of globalization.

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9 (Barkhuizen, 2018)
10 (En.wikipedia.org, 2018)
11 (Lr.library.louisville.edu, 2018)
12 (En.wikipedia.org, 2018)
13 (Dorren, 2015)
14 (Banda, Mostert and Wikan, 2012)
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UNESCO\(^5\) is vital for the current promotion and continuation of minor languages, promoting languages as a central pillar for social integration, cultural identity, diversity, education and heritage. UNESCO promotes global diversity as a prerequisite for cultural diversity and a policy of multilingualism, encouraging the maintenance of cultural diversity while preparing students for a global future. To promote the cause of multilingualism UNESCO created an International Mother Language Day\(^5\) in 1999, celebrated globally on 21\(^{st}\) February each year. The Language in Education\(^{16}\) policy also demands that every child has the right to multilingualism, with a minor local language alongside a global language, allowing globalisation of languages to move hand in hand with native tongues rather than against them. This multilingual teaching can be seen in the municipality of Samedan in Switzerland\(^7\), where Romansh was spoken by around 60,000 people. After usage fell sharply due to the immigration of Swiss German speakers, who lobbied for the schools to provide teaching in the majority language, the area began multilingual teaching to protect the declining minor Romansh language and its cultural value. This has been highly successful, increasing the number of Romansh speakers. The Basque region in Spain takes a similar approach, with Basque and Spanish being on an equal level in the education system meaning lessons are taught in both languages. These steps have revitalised the Basque language, and increased it by 185,000 speakers in the past 20 years\(^8\). A similar idea of multilingualism exists in Wales. The Welsh Language Act\(^9\) ensures Welsh has equal importance alongside English. There has also been an increased availability in minor language university courses, for example Catalan at the University of Oxford and Ukrainian at UCL, which helps to keep minor languages alive.

Although in the late 20\(^{th}\) Century many African countries adopted English as their official language, their native tongues still thrive today. In Namibia, English failed to take over in education as the public struggled with the language and many teachers were not sufficiently educated in it to teach it successfully. Despite English being the official language, only 8% of present day Namibians\(^9\) are English speakers and less than 1% of them speak English as their native language, unlike the minor native language dialects of Oshiwambo which are spoken by 48% of the population. This clearly shows that the country still thrives on the local native tongue. Similarly, in Senegal\(^7\), the native language of Wolof is spoken by 80% of the population compared to the country’s official language of French which is spoken by only 15% of the population. Therefore, the common place view of Senegal being a French speaking country is not entirely true. In many cases, the idea of globalisation being the cause of death of thousands of languages is simply a western idea, rooted in the western concept of their superiority over the rest of the world. But when faced with the facts, in many cases this “death” of local languages due to globalization, is simply superficial and when one looks deeper into the statistics, minor local languages have been predominantly resistant to this plague of globalization.

To revitalise minor local languages, it is vital to change the community’s attitude towards their language. In recent years technology has been vital in supporting a cultural identity and through this protect the native tongue. Technological networks, for example mobile phones and the internet, have allowed minor local languages to thrive, enabling their speakers to connect worldwide, breaking down former social, cultural and geographical boundaries. Not every minor language has a presence on the internet,

\(^{15}\) (UNESCO, 2018)  
\(^{16}\) (Languageeducationpolicy.org, 2018)  
\(^{17}\) (teaching and learning to read in a multilingual context, 2017)  
\(^{18}\) (Anon, 2018)  
\(^{19}\) (En.wikipedia.org, 2018)
with only 60 well represented languages online\(^\text{20}\) and some of the most spoken languages virtually absent including Swahili with over 30 million speakers worldwide. Therefore, UNESCO encourages countries to create resources for the promotion of the use of linguistic diversity on the internet, to save minor languages from extinction. For example, in 2015 in San José, Costa Rica, UNESCO\(^\text{21}\) held the “Multilingualism in Cyberspace: Indigenous Languages for Empowerment” conference, highlighting the need for multilingualism in cyberspace and the Human Right of access to indigenous languages online. Furthermore, in 2016 UNESCO announced the production of “World Atlas of Languages”\(^\text{22}\) with Talkmate, which will include an online interactive interface allowing users to contribute comments, converse with people across the world in their indigenous language and have a space for traditions and cultural practices to survive on mobile communities. YouTube and Skype provide similar platforms. In addition to this, the rise in translations of novels is also helping endangered languages to thrive for example JK Rowling’s Harry Potter was translated\(^\text{3}\) into many minor languages including Catalan.

In recent years there has also been a rise in the archiving of minor local languages, allowing minor languages to be saved for future generations. National Geographic\(^\text{20}\) has created the Enduring Voices project, taking technology recording equipment including cameras and voice recorders to record dying languages so that they will never be lost. A similar project\(^\text{23}\) has taken place in the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal. In January 2010 Boa Sr, the last fluent speaker of the Bo language, died causing the Bo language to become officially extinct however before her death, Anvita Abbi, Professor of Linguistics at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, had worked with Boa to document not only her language but also the historical, cultural and ecological knowledge that it conveyed. Therefore, although Boa’s death marked the loss of another speech form of Bo, a comprehensive archive of cultural and linguistic patrimony including digitalised audio, visual and textual documents is now available for future generations and so the language lives on.

Globalization could even be the catalyst of new native tongues as linguistic diversity reflects the creative adaptation of humans to their developing social and physical environments. Although languages such as Latin and Ancient Greek are usually associated with the phrase ‘dead language’\(^\text{23}\) they have simply undergone ‘the normal processes of linguistic change’\(^\text{24}\). Ancient Greek developed into modern day Greek, and Latin split into a wide range of modern roman languages such as Italian, Spanish or French. ‘What happened... is not death, but metamorphosis’\(^\text{23}\) and since their modern forms are used today, these languages are very much alive. A similar development is now taking place with other languages such as English across the world, as they are adapted by the global communities they are being spoken in. Many believe that English will fragment\(^\text{25}\) and form new languages know as Engishes, some of which have already appeared today in places such as Singapore with Singlish and the Philippines with Taglish. There has also been a rise in the new modern-day Spanglish spoken along the border between Mexico and USA. With this prospect of the creation of new minor languages, native speakers may have to become bilingual in their own language to converse with global speakers of their language.

\(^{20}\) (YouTube, 2018)
\(^{21}\) (Unesco.org, 2018)
\(^{22}\) (Yaleglobal.yale.edu, 2018)
\(^{23}\) (Eckert et al., 2018)
\(^{24}\) (McMahon 1994:285)
\(^{25}\) (Mydans, 2018)
In a modern globalised world, languages will evolve. At first thought it may seem that this globalization could be the ‘death knell for minor local languages’, however in many cases globalization has instead had the opposite effect and caused a new patrimony towards native tongues. It is indisputable that some native languages will naturally die out over coming years, but it would be wrong to argue that globalization will be the only cause of this. It is undeniable that globalization has led to the expansion of worldwide speakers of dominant languages like English, however it is also undeniable that this has in turn encouraged minor local languages to thrive once again. Speakers have become more devout to and protective of their native tongues and international bodies have followed suit. UNESCO and other organisations have established countless projects which protect and raise awareness of minor local languages, supported by modern technology. However, the most influential factor of recent language safety has been native speaker’s dedication to their local tongues. They have preserved their languages despite both economic and political hardships, and this is the key to language survival. Despite the prevalence of global languages such as English and French, native indigenous speakers do not allow this to take over their language, and instead hold onto their culture and native tongues with an unstoppable fervour.

Bibliography


