Latinity: a paradigm shift from global language to enabler of globalization

Eva-Nicoleta BURDUȘEL

Universitatea „Lucian Blaga" din Sibiu, Facultatea de Litere și Arte
"Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, Faculty of Letters and Arts
Personal e-mail: eva.burdusel@ulbsibiu.ro

Latinity: a paradigm shift from global language to enabler of globalization

Communication represents one of the key competencies in a knowledge-based society enabling both empowerment and employment; it is also an effective vehicle for connectivity, cultural innovation and bridging polarities. The triad communication – culture – language should be considered as an essential instrument for overcoming any "cultural shock" in today`s multipolar world. Since communication and human interaction are heavily mediated by culture and facilitated by language, hence an unbiased, complex understanding and awareness of other "cultural grids" is a prerequisite for effective interaction and cooperation. Communication does not equal presuming, rather it requires thorough knowledge of language, intellectual empathy and a comprehensive understanding of culture and its main aim is to connect: individuals, communities, geographical or cultural regions of the world. The effectiveness of intercultural communication relies on the power and impact of discourse as well as the ability to empathize with the others. The main goal of the present study is to provide a definition and reassessment of the concept of "international language" mainly grounded on economic and cultural pillars, revolving around the notion of power. The novelty and originality of the present study reside in highlighting the connection between tradition and modernity, between East and West. Chinese language has the potential of becoming international also due to the Romanization of Chinese characters, by means of a worldwide accepted system - Hanyu Pinyin.

Keywords: communication, culture, language, globalization

Communication is one of the key competencies of the current knowledge-based, multicultural and multipolar society; and it proves to be an effective vehicle for individual and institutional connectivity, cultural innovation or bridging polarities. The process of communication has always been defined and imbued with three fundamental dimensions: *socio-political* factors of a given anthropo-geographic area – thus inherently combining human and physical geography; *cultural* context emerging from millennial tradition, collective identity and enabling a nation`s sustainability, and the degree of *economic* development promoting it worldwide. Peter Trudgill acknowledges that "language is a social and cultural phenomenon" conveying information about the speaker and establishing social relationships. [1]

Edward Sapir advocated in his study on *Culture, Language and Personality* the idea that "language is a guide to social reality" and "no two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached." [2] Renown expert Susan Bassnett sums up in her canonical book on *Translation Studies*, that language is "the heart within the body of culture, and that it is the interaction between the two that results in the continuation of life-energy" [3] Her argument, unhesitatingly endorsing the inherent connection between the translation process and its cultural context, relies on the related scholarly

comments of Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf and Juri Lotman according to which "no language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structure of natural language." [4]. This theory is strengthened by Umberto Eco, in his landmark study *Experiences in Translation,* who considers translation as a "shift, not only between two languages, but between two cultures – or two encyclopedias." [5] The tight connection between language and culture is thus highlighted by the translation process which is "not only connected with linguistic competence, but with intertextual, psychological and narrative competence. Similarity in meaning can only be established by interpretation, and translation is a special case of interpretation, in Pierce`s sense." [6] In the 1990s, travel writer Bill Bryson concluded that "all languages have the same purpose – to communicate thoughts – and yet they achieve this single aim in a multiplicity of ways." [7] The statement reinforces the power of tradition, heritage, identity, culture in addition to individual and community-awareness – and other extra-linguistic factors – in the expression of encoding of meaning as well as the reception and decoding of meaning. Nicholas Ostler pertinently articulated this idea in *A Language History of the World:* "the language that a group shares is precisely the medium in which memories of their joint history can be shared. Languages make possible the living of a common history and the telling of it … Every language is learnt by the young from the old, so that every living language is the embodiment of a tradition." [8] Additionally, languages may interact however not always be subject to influence which may be the result of dominance. In this respect, Chinese language serves as an example of strength and resilience in continuity: "the traditions are kept in the language. Language was an obstacle to us going out, but it also prevented other getting inside. Language was our Great Wall." [9]

Therefore, the aforementioned term connectivity has a twofold significance: cultural – as mutual awareness and understanding, in view of creating and disseminating value – and economic – in order to facilitate the creation of a global interactive network. Effective communication connects and relies heavily on the ability to build bridges among human communities and inhabited areas instead of emphasizing or deepening the divide.

People are connected like never before. New opportunities are opening across the globe for exchange and cooperation. But these are also turbulent times – times of uncertainty and economic crisis, when societies are ever more diverse and vulnerable. This is why dialogue and mutual understanding are so essential. We need new forms of exchange between cultures, between societies and within them, on the basis of respect and equal dignity. Dialogue is the best way to strengthen the solidarity of humanity against the pressures of fragmentation. [10]

Communication competence enables an individual or a group of people to provide, maintain and ensure smooth and successful interaction, both in intra- and inter-cultural contexts.The triad communication – culture – language proves to be a prerequisite for alleviating any "cultural shock" in today`s multipolar world - "a society`s language is an aspect of its culture … The relation of language to culture is that of part to whole." [11]

Since communication and human interaction are heavily mediated by culture and facilitated by language, hence an unbiased, complex understanding and awareness of other cultural grids patterns is a prerequisite for effective interaction and cooperation. Mention should also be made here of Edward Hall`s distinction between *high-context* and *low-context* culture, expounded in his seminal book, "Beyond Culture" [12] and highlighting major differences between East and West, in addition to the theory set forth by Harold Innis concerning *space-biased* and *time-biased* societies and civilizations [13].

Communication does not equal presuming, rather it requires thorough knowledge of language, intellectual empathy and a comprehensive understanding of culture and its main aim is to connect: individuals, communities, geographical or cultural regions of the world. The effectiveness of intercultural communication relies on the power and impact of discourse as well as the ability to empathize with the others. In this context, let us mention Martha Nussbaum`s definition of the concept 'narrative imagination' which recalls the ability to empathize fairly closely.

Citizens cannot relate well to the complex word around them by factual knowledge and logic alone. The third ability of the citizen, closely related to those two, is what we can call the narrative imagination. This means the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person`s story, to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have. The cultivation of sympathy has been a key part of the best modern ideas of democratic education, in both Western and non-Western nations. [14]

This statement raises our profound awareness that we need to overcome the fallacy underlying the assumption that "I am right you are wrong" and replace the obsolete view of "either/or" perspective of any debate, according to Edward de Bono [15].

Apart from the socio-cultural factors, the *economic growth* of a nation and its ascending status contribute

significantly to the worldwide promotion and appeal of a language and its subsequent potential of becoming a second-language acquisition. Specific reference should be made here to the current rise of China, an economic growth that has often been labeled 'miraculous' with manifold consequences in terms of its relation with the world. Martin Jacques, author of *When China Rules the World,* highlights China`s interaction with the world and their reciprocal influences, as "the bearer and driver of the new world", "… as countries grow more prosperous they become increasingly self-confident about their own culture and history, and thereby less inclined to ape the West." [16]

Based on the aforementioned considerations, let us recall the opinions set forth by the reputed linguist David Crystal who conceptualized the phrase "global language" whose overriding criterion is power: "Why a language becomes a global language has little to do with the number of people who speak it. Without a strong power-base, of whatever kind, no language can make progress as an international medium of communication … A language has traditionally become an international language for one chief reason: the power of its people." [17]

Hence, the potential of any language for achieving international or global status, particularly in the contemporary context, is heavily determined by: economic development and competitiveness on a global market; investment in education and research with outstanding outcome, as well as an effective promotion of cultural values, illustrated by awards with global echoes, i.e. Nobel Prize for Literature, or setting up cultural institutes worldwide. China has successfully and uniquely managed to connect the cultural patterns of an immense territory and ultimately create unity in diversity. [18] As Martin Jacques wisley noted „when the Roman Empire was in the process of fragmenting into many smaller states, China was moving in the opposite direction, acquiring a unity which has ... lasted until the present." [19] „Despite everything, the Chinese never lost their inner sense of self-confidence – or feeling of superiority – about their own history and civilization." [20] Chinese as a foreign language currently enjoys an unprecedented popularity worldwide and it is still in great demand testified by the number of people who have undertaken the endeavour of studying Chinese in view of educational progress, professional advancement, or to facilitate cultural exchanges and business cooperation. Direct or mediated interaction with one of the fastest-growing economies in the world – "the Chinese miracle" whose economic prestige commands attention – is a sine-qua-non component of a global awareness and substantiated understanding of Chinese tradition and modernity – mediated by an effective intercultural communication.

Let us conclude our study by reinforcing the role of Latinity: a paradigm shift over centuries from Latin as a lingua franca at the time of the Roman empire and governance to the more recent process of Romanization of Chinese characters enabling and facilitating its worldwide appeal with astonishing rapidity and contributing to strengthening its soft power a concept defined by Joseph Nye as "the attractiveness of a country`s culture, political ideals and policies." [21]

Notes:

1. Peter Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society,* Penguin Books: 1983, pp. 14, 32
2. Edward Sapir, *Culture, Language and Personality* qtd in Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies,* London: Routledge: 1998, p. 21
3. Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies,* London: Routledge: 1998, p. 22
4. Ibidem
5. Umberto Eco, *Experiences in Translation,* translated by Alastair McEwen, University of Toronto, Toronto, Buffalo, London: 2001, p.17
6. Idem, p. 13
7. Bill Bryson, *Mother Tongue: The English Language,* Penguin Books: 1990, p.26
8. Nicholas Ostler, *Empires of the Word: A Language History of the World* qtd in Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World,* The Penguin Press, New York: 2009, p. 114
9. interview with Hung Tze Jan, Taipei, March 1999, qtd in Martin Jacques, op.cit, p. 114
10. Irina Bokova, Director-General UNESCO, address on the occasion of the event "Dialogue of Cultures" 13 April 2013
11. Gooodenough, "Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics", qtd in R.A. Hudson, *Sociolinguistics,* Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.79
12. Hall, Edward T., *Beyond Culture,* Anchor Books, 1976
Innis, Harold A., *The Bias of Communication,* University of Toronto Press, 2008
13. Martha Nussbaum, (2010), „Skills for Life", TLS, April 30, p. 15
14. Edward de Bono, *New Thinking for the New Millennium* and *I Am Right, You Are Wrong*
15. Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World,* p. 9, 11
16. David Crystal, *English as a Global Language*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.7
17. Eva-Nicoleta Burdusel in „Intercultural Communication – Vector of Reconciling Differences. Case Study: Confucius Institute – Best Practice in Understanding Cultural Diversity" in *Acta Universitatis Lucian Blaga seria Jurisprudentia*, ISSN 1582-4608, nr. 1/2014, pp. 247-254
18. Martin Jacques, op.cit, p.15
19. idem, p. 93
20. Joseph S. Nye jr., *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics,* Public Affairs, New York: 2004