

# THE LOCALIZATION OF THE GLOBAL LANGUAGE: THE EMERGENCE OF ALGERIAN ENGLISH IN THE ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

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## Abstract

This paper sheds light on the sociolinguistic consequences of globalisation. The emergence of English as a global language has attracted hot debates. In fact, English is no longer the property of its native speakers as it is adapted to meet the local communicative needs of its users worldwide i.e. English has been localised after being globalised. This became clear after the emergence of 'world Englishes' that are neither purely global nor purely local varieties – the term 'glocal' is used to refer to such a situation.

The present work is an investigation that aims at exploring the properties of one of the world Englishes that has been adapted to suit the Algerian local culture and that has spread because of the Internet mainly via the Online Social Networking Sites. The challenge highlighted in this paper is not how Arabic is affected by English, but rather the impact of Arabic on the English language online which might lead to the emergence of *Algerian English*.

The frequent contact between the two languages that represent different cultures may lead to the emergence of a new variety of English that suits the Algerian local culture. In other words, the nature of the relationship between Arabic and English can be viewed from a positive perspective not as being based on threatening one another because English in its turn is changing and is influenced by the various social phenomena. Though it is spreading worldwide, it is not preserving its original standard form but rather, it is acquiring new features wherever it goes.

**Keywords:** Globalisation, Global English, World Englishes, Algerian English, Online Social Networking Sites.



## 1- Introduction

Fear, confusion, enthusiasm, longing for transnational knowledge and relations, and wondering about the future of humanity are feelings that characterise a person in the twenty-first century as the 'traditional' geographical, cultural, and linguistic borders do no longer hinder contact between peoples. This paper deals with the sociolinguistic consequences of globalisation. Endangered and minor languages are said to be threatened and even the position of world languages, such as French and Arabic, is declining at the international level leaving the ground for the emergent *Global Language*. The *virtual world* is further complicating the struggle between languages and cultures as it brings together peoples from different parts of the world despite of the geographical and time limits. The main question to be addressed here is: what is the nature of the relationship between Arabic and English in the Algerian context online? Before approaching the answer, other steps are required in order to introduce and pave the ground for what is aimed behind this investigation. It deals first with an attempt to explain the concept of globalisation; it tackles, then, its major sociolinguistic consequences, mainly global English and *world Englishes*; later on, the scope of the study will be limited to the Algerian sociolinguistic profile online.

## 2- Towards an Understanding of Globalisation

Globalisation, in fact, is open to various interpretations as it is associated with multiple domains and disciplines. It is often viewed as being vague, elusive, and difficult to define. Understandings of the concept can be arranged under three schools of thought: the *Hyperglobalisers*, the *Skeptics*, and the *Transformationalists* (Garrett, 2010) who view globalisation from different perspectives and differ in their arguments for and against the various forms of the phenomenon.

Globalisation involves processes that transcend national boundaries, nations that are becoming more and more interconnected in all domains: economic, political, social, and cultural. The term *global* need not to be confused with the term *world-wide* because



there can be global interconnectedness among economic structures or organisations at the local level (Mufwene, 2010). Yet, the concept of globalisation is often referred to as transnational relations that extend across geographical borders. Viewing the phenomenon from this perspective, one may think of other forms of globalisation that can be traced back to the beginning of agriculture when interdependences between people were not limited by small boundaries. Moreover, long-distance trading practices that characterised famous civilisations long in the past like the Babilonians, the Egyptians, the Phonecians, the Chinese, the Arabs, the Greeks, and the Romans, in addition to colonisations carried out by the great European powers during the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries also can be considered as forms of globalisation (Ibid).

Hence, whatever globalisation is, it is not new because international relations have a long history stretching back to early periods in the history of mankind. This led to the spread of powers and cultures of nations at the expense of others (Coupland, 2010 and Mufwene, 2010). Indeed, the economic exchange between nations is not necessarily symmetrical; i.e., the partners involved don't hold equal powers and of course the powerful part will dominate and control the process (Mufwene, 2010). For that reason, globalisation attracted controversial attitudes especially that to the eyes of many, it is nothing but a new form of imperialism and it is facilitating the spread of the western power and culture, an attempt to *Americanize* everything. That is why feeling of anti-globalisation arose, especially amongst Third World countries (Mooney& Evans, 2007).

Thus, despite of the fact that literature on globalisation has been boomed only by the 1990s, its roots date back to the beginning of the history of humanity. For instance, the spread of the American culture and language is said to be similar to Latin when the Roman Empire was at its peak (Coupland, 2010 and Mufwene, 2010). Yet, what is special and striking about the spread of interconnectedness between nations nowadays is the rapid evolution of these processes. Human exchange of goods and information has been accelerated and



facilitated in an unprecedented way due to developed means of transportation and communication.

The increased fusion between presence-absence and local-global is the main defining feature of the phenomenon. Giddens (1990: 64 quoted in Kiely&Marfleet, 1998:02) believes that globalisation « *is best understood as expressing fundamental aspects of time-space distanciation. Globalisation concerns the intersection of presence and absence, the interlacing of social relations 'at a distance' with local contextualities* ». Besides that, the concept is also characterised by the economic, political, and social relations that link between distant localities in such a way that what happens in an area is shaped and shapes, in turn, what is happening elsewhere in the globe (Ibid) and what is more striking is the rapid spread of information worldwide, thanks to the development of the new information and communications technologies.

On the other hand, others believe that globalisation is experienced differently in different parts of the world and that time, space, and culture cannot be absolutely transcended but rather « *globalisation is, in fact, also associated with new dynamics of re-localisation* » (Morley & Robins, 1995 : 116 quoted in Kiely&Marfleet, 1998 : 04).

Despite of all the controversies and debates about the meaning and the beginning of globalisation, it can be understood as the transnational social, economic, political, and cultural relations that are leading the world towards a *global village*, which is neither completely hybridising its different features nor is it homogenised at the expense of cultural diversity. A village that is determined to be interconnected by various bonds fostered, especially, by the new means of communication. Of course, a nation cannot stay in a shell isolated from what is going on in the world. It is required, however, to cope with the global movement and maintain, at the same time, its local cultural identity which is also subject to change because change is natural and nothing can remain static forever especially if it has to do with humans.



### 3- Global English or World Englishes?

English is the pre-eminent world language. It is the language of globalisation and westernisation. It is no longer the property of its native speakers since the speakers of English as a second or a foreign language outnumbered its native users (Crystal, 1997). It is used, increasingly, in international settings; in international business and commerce, international relations and politics. Interestingly enough, technology reinforces the global status of the language since the spread of the former means necessarily the worldwide diffusion of the latter. English, nowadays, is correlated with power, advanced education, urbanity, scientific development and research, new literature, entertainment genres, travel, tourism, and media. In addition, it is also identified as a linguistic gateway to economic prosperity; it is, in this sense, an access to attractive jobs and business opportunities. In other words, it has spread widely beyond its 'traditional' boundaries; it is used in a host of various countries, contexts, and in a range of different forms, functions, discourses, and media – spoken or written.

One might wonder about what explains the global spread of English instead of another world language such as Spanish, French, Chinese, or Arabic. One of the reasons lies in the legacy of history; due to Britain's colonial expansion, English has been taken from its birthplace to many countries around the world (Graddol, 1997). After independence, Britain left these countries but her language remained, as a language of cultural heritage. Because of English links between all her former colonies, it is often used as a lingua franca in these areas. This has been referred to, by Crystal (1998), as the World Spoken Standard English (WSSE), a standard form of English that is used in international settings.

Besides that, the rise of the US as a leading power in the twentieth century went hand in hand with the spread of the language to different economic, technological, and cultural domains (ibid). Hence, the



global expansion of English is not described only by the geographical borders but it has been diffused to new settings and contexts. Consequently, it has been adapted to meet new cultural and communication needs (Graddol, 1997 and Crystal, 2010). These gave rise to new vocabularies, new ways of speaking and writing, and, obviously, new grammatical forms; as a result of contact with different languages, the linguistic habits and practices of its new speakers, in addition to the local culture. Thus, English is being localised and it is losing its standard properties i.e. the emergence of new varieties of English, which are mutually unintelligible. This is what has been referred to as World Englishes. In so far as the concept global English is understood, it seems to be leading to contradictory directions.

**“On the one hand, the use of English as a global lingua franca requires intelligibility and the setting and maintenance of standards. On the other hand, the increasing adoption of English as a second language, where it takes on local forms, is leading to fragmentation and diversity” (Graddol, 1997: 03)**

So, does the global language mean that there is a standard form of English worldwide? Alternatively, does the concept, in fact, refer to the different emergent varieties of English around the world?

Before trying to answer this question, reviewing relevant literature that classifies the spread of the English language worldwide is necessary for a better understanding of both concepts: English as a ‘global’ and as a ‘localised’ language. Several models classifying the range of world Englishes have been proposed. The most conventional is Kachru’s *Three Circles* model that distinguishes between: first, countries where English is spoken as the mother tongue like in US, UK, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia; Second, the former colonies of Britain where the language is installed as an official language i.e. it is considered as the second language such as in India, Ghana, Cameroun, Singapore, and so on; Finally, countries where



English expands to be given the priority for foreign language education, though it has no official status like in China, Japan, Egypt, and Algeria. These three categories are labelled the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle respectively (Kachru, 1985 in Schneider, 2011).

This tripartite division, however, has been criticised because of its superficial classification (Schneider, 2011). South Africa, for instance, belongs in fact to both the Inner and the Outer Circles; yet, the division between the circles in the model is not a clear cut. In addition, minorities like the Maoris in New Zealand, which belongs to the Inner Circle, is disregarded and does not figure in the classification. This categorisation also does not account for internal variability of English in different countries due to its adaption to suit different contexts and cultural needs. Besides, the ongoing changes are not reflected in the model because countries like Singapore, for example, are acquiring native speakers of English; moving, thus, towards the Inner Circle and leaving out the Outer Circle. Because of the various shortcomings of this categorisation, the *Dynamic* model that accounts for the evolution of World Englishes alongside the changes that happen within the different contact situations has been proposed (Ibid).

Accordingly, a global language does not mean that everyone in the world should muster it or that it is the official language in every country, nor does it refer to a uniform/standard global variety that is intelligible to its speakers worldwide. A global language viewed from this perspective is an utopia, since English is diverging wherever it goes and it is being nativised and taking over the characteristics of its local new speakers. English has been evolving since ancient times in its own history thanks to contact with other languages and cultures. It was so flexible to adapt to new situations. This, in fact, explains the amount of loan words in the English language. Consequently, the hybrid and the permeable nature of the language allowed it to be used for new domains and settings and for more purposes than ever before. It is, hence, no longer used exclusively in its standard version but it is



being vernacularized. In defining this sociolinguistic issue. Crystal (1998:17) believes:

**“When people talk about ‘global English’, they are usually referring to the common features which identify the variety we call Standard English. Increasingly, however, attention has been drawn to the regional features which differentiate one part of the English-speaking world from another (...) studies are accumulating of the way these varieties make distinctive use of pronunciation, orthography, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse”**

In addition to that, one of the defining features of the global language is not the number of its speakers across geographical borders but because it serves as the world’s international lingua franca (Mufwene, 2010). This question of the global spread of the English language has been over complicated after the advent of the Internet, since English is overwhelmingly the main language of the technology.

#### **4- World Englishes in the Virtual World**

Internet is embedded in human’s everyday social practices as it is used for interpersonal interactive purposes alongside the professional ones. This has provided a wide range of new linguistic activities and forms in an unprecedented way. One of the major issues discussed, due to the linguistic outcomes of the Internet, is the extent to which English is prevalent online and what effects this might have on languages other than English worldwide. Internet, in fact, is often accused of being an arena that fosters the global spread of English at the expense of minor and endangered languages because the technology is still in the hands of its inventors and serves their interests. This intensifies the digital divide that separates between the powerful nations, the owners of technology on the one hand, and the developing countries on the other. By the 1990s, English was the dominant language of the Net (Crystal, 2006), it was the language of almost all Internet websites; 80-85% of the websites were in English



in 1997 (Amant, 2007). In addition, it was used as a lingua franca of online international and professional communication (Androutsopoulos, 2006). So, in order to cope with the new technological development, people hurried to acquire its language.

Since then, however, non-English-speaking population increased in number to be 69.4% while English speaking Internet users have dropped to 30.6% in 2005 (Amant, 2007). Researchers argue that endangered languages are no longer threatened by the previously English-dominated Internet but rather, it gives them an opportunity to be revitalised and preserved i.e. it provides '*home*' to all languages (Crystal, 2006). Before the coming of the Internet, it was really difficult to find public examples of unedited regional or dialect writing. Writings of many social minorities were found only inside that community and they seldom achieve an outside audience (Ibid). So, Internet is an occasion for these regional writings to be public throughout the globe. Moreover, Internet became an opportunity for the formerly spoken-only varieties to be publicly written, such as Colloquial Arabic, vernacular Singapore English, and the Swiss-German dialects (Androutsopoulos, 2006).

In addition to Global English and endangered languages, the linguistic properties that English has acquired because of the new interaction media have also led to controversial attitudes. Internet has created new communication environments where linguistic forms have been turned upside down and where the break with the rules became the norm. Due to the constraining futures of Internet communication, depending only on the limited set of characters available on the keyboard and a screen, people use creative strategies online. The most common emergent linguistic properties online are, for instance, the use of abbreviation and acronyms, exaggerated spelling, repeated punctuation marks and letters, stylistic use of capitals, spacing, images, emoticons, typographic symbols, letter/number homophones, letters' deletion, non-conventional spelling, and so on (Crystal, 2006 and Farina & Lyddy, 2011). Besides that, these media of communication, especially the synchronous,



blurred boundaries between writing and speech because many writing conventions are sacrificed for the sake of synchronicity; to be as rapid as speech in typing the message. Consequently, to the eyes of many, language use online is a linguistic 'ruin' and a 'deviation' from 'proper' forms of language.

Crystal (2006) believes, however, that the way language is used online is a linguistic revolution which led to the emergence of a new variety, he calls Netspeak. According to him, Netspeak is neither speech nor writing, not even a blending between the two but it is a distinct variety of language created to cope with the new medium of communication and it is complete with its lexicon, graphology, and grammar. Accordingly, the spread of the global language to the different media of communication leads to further divergence of the language online i.e. English is gaining more varieties in addition to the ones it already acquired offline.

One of these abovementioned varieties might be used by the Algerians in their online interaction since English is seeping gradually to the Algerian sociolinguistic profile. The questions to be addressed in such a context is what would result from online contact between Arabic and English in Algeria? In other words, will English affect negatively the Arabic language? especially that the former is always believed to be a '*killer language*'.! Or it might be the opposite. What is the impact of the Arabic language on English in the Algerian context? Is the increasing use of English by the Algerians will lead to the emergence of *Algerian English* that can be loaded with local cultural and linguistic properties?

##### **5- The Importance of English in the Algerian Sociolinguistic Profile**

Algeria is characterised by a complex sociolinguistic situation due to her geographical location and eventful history (Taleb Ibrahim, 1997; 2007). This complexity is salient in the existence of different languages, or rather linguistic varieties, which are in frequent contact. Contact between these varieties has resulted in phenomena like code-



mixing, code-switching, and linguistic borrowing. Features like cohabitation, conflicts, and competition characterise the contact between these linguistic varieties; Standard Arabic, Algerian Arabic with its various regional dialects, Tamazight that contains in turn different dialects, French, and English. *“The Algerian educational system is involved in a ‘war of languages’ between French, Arabic, Berber and English to some extent”* (Bedjaoui, 2009: 02).

The importance of the English language within the linguistic profile of the country is growing steadily because the Algerians are aware of its global reach. Algeria belongs to the expanding circle of English since it is given the priority for foreign language in education. It is taught from first year middle school in state schools and taught also in private primary schools. English is seeping to the Algerian sociolinguistic landscape also because of the widespread of ‘*Pop culture*’ via its different genres such as music, movies and TV broadcast especially Hollywood movies which became so popular; in addition to sports, news, politics, fashion, and technology. This situation has been further complicated after the diffusion of the Internet in the country because English is its lingua franca and perceived as an openness to the outside world, and an access to the western culture and civilisation. Moreover, social networking sites are vehicles of the western culture as the Algerians use these sites not only because they are considered as sources of entertainment, but also because they are facilitating cross-cultural communication in an unprecedented way. All these factors foster the spread of English to the Algerian linguistic usages; the increasing number of English language learners in Algeria is the best evidence for this claim.

Thus, and due to its growing importance in the country, English has entered in a kind of rivalry with French since it is capturing the attention of most of the Algerians, especially young people who are interested to learn English more than French. This generation is replacing the old one which was only exposed to French; the language of cultural heritage – inherited from the French colonisation. That is, English is replacing French in Algeria (Crystal, 1997). Therefore,



French seems to be dying out gradually from the Algerian linguistic profile. Yet, it is, of course, not easy that a language which is deeply rooted in the Algerian linguistic manifestation can be removed overnight because the use of French words and expressions mixed with Arabic is among the defining features of the majority of the regional varieties of Algerian Arabic. French has been '*nativised*' or '*vernacularized*' to suit the Algerian cultural and communicative needs. In addition to that, the Algerians are said to be the best speakers of standard French after its native speakers among all the francophone people. It seems, however, that these facts about the importance of French in Algeria have been challenged by the spread of the global language to the country. In other words, the position of French, which has installed itself a long time ago in Algeria is being threatened by English. So, what will happen to English in Algeria? Is it going to be nativised and vernacularized, one day, like French?

#### **6- Arabic Use Online and its Relationship with the English Language**

Arabic speakers are always worried about the negative impact of English on the Arabic language. This fear has been intensified after the public use of the Internet, mainly for interpersonal interaction, which is thought to foster the spread of its language at the expense of others. One of the outcomes of the Internet on the Arabic language is the widespread use of a new orthography to represent the language in addition, or sometimes instead of, the Arabic script. The Arabic language was not represented in the technology because the latter was based on the Latin character set; it was only until 2005 that the Arabic script was integrated, in addition to other languages with non-Roman scripts. In order to adapt to the constraining nature of the Internet, Arabic users created new ways of self-expression – which are given various labels such as Arabish, the hybrid language, and Latinised Arabic (Palfreyman& Al-Khalil, 2003; Allmann, 2009 and Foraghly, 2010). People believe that the new form is not only making the end of conventional linguistic features of Arabic but it also causes the death of literary style and content as well (Mostari, 2009 quoted in Gordon, 2011). In addition to that, Standard Arabic is also thought to be replaced by English and other languages with wider communication online. Moreover, the Internet is considered to be an



arena that promotes the use of colloquial Arabic at the expense of the Standard form.

Hence, as far as the relation between Arabic and English online is concerned, the former is often thought to be threatened by the latter and this is enhanced, especially, in the new interaction environments. Yet, the relation between them can be viewed from the other perspective i.e. what is the effect of the Arabic language on English online? In fact, the relation between languages in contact situations is not necessarily built upon threatening one another. English also seems to be adapted to meet the communication and cultural needs of the Algerians online and is shaped by the virtual world as well. Sociolinguistic forms like code-mixing, code switching, and linguistic borrowing are neither threats nor deviations from the standard forms; they are, indeed, natural results of language contact. Bilingualism, obviously, will lead to the alternative use of the languages concerned and, thus, to linguistic interference between them at all levels, grammatical forms, pronunciation, vocabulary, and orthography.

This is the same concern as regards the question of what is happening to English worldwide. It is acquiring new features across different regions and social contexts leaving out its 'traditional' 'conventional' standards. Yet, the language is not dying but it is evolving and changing; this is quite natural, simply because a language that does not change dies. Instead of being afraid to see a language changing, we should rather be anxious if it were static because this would be abnormal. Language is purely human and it is, accordingly, flexible and adapts to new domains, uses, and functions; this is especially in this century since globalisation is the standard. The Internet is fostering globalisation because it is bridging the gap between the different regions, cultures, religions, and languages as well. That is, contact between peoples of different cultural backgrounds is becoming frequent more than ever before; so, how can a person expect that languages would not be affected and remain static? Of course, no two persons disagree on the fact that a language is the representative of people's identities, cultural belonging, and socio-economic status. Thus, a language, being a 'hybrid' or 'pure' represents and mirrors its speakers. How can a language used a century ago remains the same or represents a person of today? This is not obvious, this might be true if the person and his language were frozen during this century.!



## 7- Linguistic Interference Online and the Emergence of Algerian English

In bilingual situations, interference between the mother tongue and the foreign language is unavoidable, especially if it is subordinate bilingualism where the individual does not have a good mastery of the second language to the degree of the first one. Linguistic interference is often considered as a shortcoming in the process of second language acquisition. *“From the point of view of psycholinguistics, it [interference] is a negative transfer of language habits and skills from the mother tongue or from a foreign language to another foreign language”* (Lekova, 2009: 320).

Interference between languages in contact situations occurs at all language levels; phonetic, morpho-syntax, and lexical-semantic (ibid). It is, in fact, not necessarily, an indication of linguistic incompetency in the second language but it might have strong ties with the local culture of the speaker. English, for instance, develops independently in different countries where it is installed as an official language or where it is taught as a foreign language. In each of these countries, it is acquiring new features that are specific to this area and best represents its culture. This has resulted in the emergence of the English varieties which are most of the time mutually unintelligible like Singaporean English, often referred to as Singlish, Indian English, Egyptian English and so on. That is, linguistic interference can be viewed from a sociolinguistic point of view as a change in linguistic structures that leads gradually to language change or to the emergence of a new variety that incorporates features from both languages and more importantly that best represents the local culture of its users and meets their communication needs.

Accordingly, the growing importance of the English language in Algeria and the frequent contact between English and Arabic may lead to a change in the sociolinguistic profile of the country, especially that English is replacing French because the youngsters are interested in acquiring it more than French, unlike the old generations which were exposed only to French. Yet, English is still used by the young Algerians online more than in their offline discussions i.e. the virtual world is witnessing the emergence of Algerian English. Henceforth, Algerian English is a variety of English that is the outcome of contact between English and the Arabic language and culture in Algeria. It has been fostered mainly by the growing importance of the global



language in the country especially through the social media of communication, TV channels broadcasted in English, songs, and movies, in addition to education. This emergent variety is based on the interference of linguistic features from both languages, acquiring, thus, new vocabularies, pronunciation, and new grammatical forms. In other words, English is being adapted to meet the local cultural and communication needs of the Algerians.

### **Conclusion**

This paper is an attempt to approach the meaning of globalisation and its sociolinguistic consequences, namely global English, world Englishes, and the clash of languages within the Algerian context as a result of contact between different linguistic variations; that is fuelled mainly after the diffusion of the Internet in the country for interpersonal and cross-cultural communication. The challenge in the paper lies in reversing the way the relation between English and Arabic is perceived. Arabic is always thought to be threatened by the global language especially within the electronic media of communication. Yet, English is also being affected by Arabic; at the level of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and orthography because it is being adapted to meet the Algerian communicative and cultural needs. In other words, contact between the above mentioned languages in the digital environments of communication is not built upon threatening one another because sociolinguistic phenomena such as linguistic interference, linguistic borrowing, code-mixing, and code-switching are natural results of bilingualism and they are characterising both languages not only Arabic. Here, gates are to be opened for further research; a micro-sociolinguistic research dealing with the English language in the Algerian context is required to investigate the linguistic interference between Arabic and English. Another macro-sociolinguistic approach is also important, taking into consideration the Algerian cultural impact on English to foresee whether or not we are at the brink of the emergence of *Algerian English* online.



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