

Contemporary diversity issues in communication

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



If there is one particularly adverse effect of globalization, that is the homogenization of culture and the subservience of minority or ethnic cultures and languages under the dominant one. It is a phenomenon that if allowed to continue unabated can lead to the extinction of minority languages and culture, which in effect can lead to the loss of the uniqueness that renders individuals with their own creative individuality. In a world that purports to celebrate diversity, it is ironic that communication seems to be leaning towards homogenization or standardization of forms.

Globalization necessitates the need for the homogenization of communication because in an age of international businesses, language diversity can hinder trade relations and transactions. Using one form of communication facilitates interaction and leaves very little room for misinterpretation. Languages develop out of the user's need to express themselves. As such, it is fair to say that all languages are equal.

This equality means that all languages, regardless of their characteristics and linguistic qualities, all meet the social and psychological needs of the users.

(Crystal, 1987, p. 6)

They are tailor made to the unique circumstances of the people and culture that created them. In the face of unrelenting globalization, these unique languages and cultures are giving way to a standard form. The standard form imposes itself upon other languages in the form of linguistic prescription or prescriptive norms in culture, defining a standard form or ways of doing for a specific purpose or activity. Prescriptive norms serve as a controlling force that is exerted by the community over its members (Punder

2000, p. 141), and globalization imposes the homogenization of language and culture to facilitate communication and relations.

While the usefulness and convenience of having a standard language or culture, particularly in a business environment, cannot be dismissed, this way of thinking brings to the table a lot of complications; not the least of which is stereotyping and its resultant complications like cultural and political discrimination. As John Fought (2007) once said, " Language has always helped to signify who we are in society, sometimes serving as a basis for exclusion. " The determination of the use of a standard language is largely a function of political and economic power, in an act of acknowledgment of a certain culture's dominance over the rest.

A standard form of language and culture will be of no use when there is no variation in the first place. There is a need to standardize because the diversity in our languages requires us to lessen the confusion and make for efficient transaction of our ordinary activities and important businesses. Because language is a fundamental aspect of culture, it is therefore only natural that we become defined or identified by our native language. Difficulties can arise if we are not fluent in the standard language being used in a particular place.

In such cases, when we do not know the standard form of communication, we are immediately labeled as " foreigners", or not born native to the place, a label that carries with it an entirely new set of biases and stereotypes that limits the opportunities that would have otherwise been available to the individual. The need to conform is related to the prestige that is associated with being able to act and communicate according to the dominant language

or culture. (Abrams et al 2005, p. 120) Related to the issue of race is the issue of social class.

There are some people who have more linguistic powers at their disposal and are able to use this fluency to their advantage. (Bonfiglio, 2002, p. 12) Fluency in language often connotes good breeding and education. Conversely, if you have difficulties in the standard language, other people will consider it as a statement of weakness or lack of social status. Of course it should also be said that the bias also goes the other way. In most third-world countries, those who speak a foreign language or have foreign accents are considered first class citizens and are given preferential treatment in all aspects of their functional activities.

What we speak and how we speak, reflects our history as an individual. How we speak makes a statement about who we are as a person and a measure of who we could be. Either way, these stereotyping based on one's communication style is very counter-productive and corrosive to the individual. Aside from discrimination and stereotyping, homogenization of communication is also adversely affecting the rich diversity of our world's languages, particularly on dialects.

As prescriptive norms of standardized communication forms threaten the extinction of minority languages and dialects, it also slows language change. Language change is a natural process in the evolution of our languages. Language is constantly in flux, ever adapting to the needs and realities of the times. It ever-changing and shifting its form, evolving in a process that is very much akin to natural selection. Language change is not so much a preference over one language variant, but the removal of a language that is

socially inappropriate or no longer useful, for some reason or another. (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 173)

With the presence of a homogenized form of communication and culture, the normal evolution that should have taken place to strengthen local languages and make them constantly relevant has been forcefully suppressed by the imposition of a uniform language or code that is universal to all situations. In light of this, language change becomes almost unnecessary because the homogenized form of communication has removed the necessity for the local language to adapt because the change has been imposed artificially by the dominant culture.

Globalization presupposes the interaction of various cultures. Over man's collective history, culture exchange has resulted in the constant evolution of cultures as it gets constantly exposed to another culture. This is a two-way process that enriches the culture of all those involved. In a process called acculturation, a certain group of people imbibe new ways of doing without necessarily changing their distinct identity. Acculturation represents the adaptation of a certain culture to change but keeping their culture uniquely their own.

However, in this age of homogenization, acculturation has come to mean the slow erosion and subservience of the ethnic culture under the dominant one. (Castro 2003, p. 19) Thus, acculturation can be considered as a process of culture change where the foreigners or minorities must adapt in order to survive. In other words, this refers to the homogenization of communication and culture in order to flourish in a global community. This discourse does not mean to present language and cultural homogenization in a bad light.

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In some cases, such homogenization is truly necessary to facilitate communication and exchange similar to what a standard currency will do. What is important to remember is that a standard form of communication can be learned without having to sacrifice our own native languages and culture. Our ability to learn a language is elastic, and we can speak as many variations without necessarily affecting the other. To learn one form of language does not necessarily mean that we have to supplant the old one..

In an era of globalization where the language of trade becomes the dominant form, the ability to communicate in the standard language is a definite advantage. However with that being said, the value of the mother tongue should never be forgotten. The respect that we have for our own cultural heritage renders us with our own unique identities. And in an era of globalization, where everything is being homogenized we need to hang on to that identity or stand to lose everything about ourselves that makes us special, and thus indispensable to our community.