

The Status of Indigenous Languages under Globalization

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Abstract. This paper examines the impact of dominant languages on indigenous languages in a globalized context, emphasizing the influence of dominant languages on local systems through Appadurai's theory. Analysis of indigenous language documentation in the Philippines, Heilongjiang Province in China, and Morocco demonstrates how the migration of foreign ethnic groups and the influx of ideologies alter local language systems. Language assimilation policies employed by dominant cultures in various regions also yield varied effects. The Philippines shows dominant languages erasing indigenous ones, while in Morocco, religion and dominant languages alter cultural identities. The status of indigenous languages also encompasses issues such as speakers' loyalty to their mother tongues, with some communities fiercely defending their rights when powerful languages threaten their mother tongues, as seen with the Berber people in Morocco, while others voluntarily relinquish passing on their mother tongues to subsequent generations, as observed with the *Hezhen* in Heilongjiang. Investigating the influence of dominant languages on indigenous languages helps recognize the link between language and cultural preservation, illustrating how the decline of indigenous languages can lead to the loss of cultural practices, traditions, and knowledge systems associated with those languages.

Keywords: Indigenous Languages, Globalization, Global Culture Flow.

1. Introduction

Globalization is widely recognized for its ability to facilitate the exchange of ideas, cultures, and goods. It improves communication and access to information through technological advancements. Furthermore, globalization plays a crucial role in fostering understanding among individuals from different backgrounds, enabling them to connect and learn from one another. However, globalization also leads to the dominance of major world languages and can contribute to cultural assimilation and homogenization, where local cultural practices, beliefs, and traditions are replaced by globalized cultural norms. Six official languages of the United Nations are known as "universal languages," namely Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. More boldly, as David Crystal (2003) states, "English is the global language." Learning "global languages" seems essential for individuals worldwide to access global information. In a globalized environment, many indigenous languages and dialects are disappearing due to the use of the global language system. The linguistic unification trend seems to destroy cultural and linguistic diversity, and the concern leads to the research question: How does the dominant language impact the status of indigenous languages?

1.1. Theoretical Elements

Arjun Appadurai (1996) provides "five dimensions of global cultural flow, including *ethnoscapes*, *mediascapes*, *technoscapes*, *financescapes*, and *ideoscapes*," which represents the flow of people migration, the flow of cultural industry, the flow of technology, the flow of capitals and finance, and the flow of ideology. Together, these five dimensions help to build a comprehensive understanding of the complex and interconnected nature of global cultural flows. They illustrate how globalization impacts various aspects of society and regions.

Also, Phillipson (1992) proposes a theoretical framework of "Linguistic Imperialism" to reveal the essence of the globalization of the English language to analyze the relationship between the dominant and the non-dominant cultures reflected in the process of popularizing the English language.



Summarizing Galtung's (1980) theory of cultural imperialism, Phillipson (1992) argues that linguistic imperialism is closely connected to imperialist efforts across various domains such as education, culture, and military. "Linguistic Imperialism" is developed by establishing colonial languages, cultivating proficient local elites and privileged classes acting as colonial language agents, and ideological penetration and assimilation through media and technology (Lai, 2019).

1.2. Methodology

This paper aims to identify the impact of the dominant language caused by globalization on indigenous languages, and qualitative document analysis of indigenous languages, including the Filipino languages in the Philippines, the *Hezhen* Language in China, and the Berber language in Morocco will be utilized. The status of language is measured by factors UNESCO provides, such as "intergenerational language transmission, absolute numbers of speakers, and proportion of speakers within the total population." This article takes the Filipino, *Hezhen*, and Berber languages as an example to analyze the dominant language influence on local language systems.

In the research question, "indigenous languages" refers to languages native to a particular region and spoken by its indigenous peoples, regardless of whether they are set as national languages. The "status of language" is a phenomenon that indicates people's attitudes toward their mother tongue, their attitudes toward speakers of that language, and the institutional and national perspectives on the language. "The dominant language" is the language that is primarily used for communication and relied upon the most in a region.

1.3. Expected Findings

The finding could be that the indigenous language is influenced by population movement, urbanization, and market-driven consumerism due to globalization and may reveal language loss and how dominant languages exert control over marginalized or minority languages. The research may highlight the role of globalization in some powers promoting the dominant languages and cultural expressions, potentially leading to language endangerment, while other powers recognize the minority and lead the language vitalization.

2. Literature Review

2.1. "English" Represents "International"

With the influence of global power dynamics and the history of colonization, English-speaking countries control the world's valuable technology and commodities, which construct a global environment predominantly influenced by the English language. (Fishman, Conrad, and Rubal-Lopez, 1996) According to Bolton's (2008) estimates, the population of English speakers in Asia exceeds 800 million. Furthermore, approximately 80% of English conversations occur between individuals who are proficient in multiple languages. (Graddol, 2006). For example, according to the study by Li Pan and David Block in China, both teachers and students "recognize the status of English as a global language." (2011) The research participants acknowledge the communicative benefits associated with English, implying that they consider English to hold a higher position in the hierarchical structure of languages. Students want to learn English because it is often referred to as a "capital," a "window," and a means to connect with the world. Also, English is considered valuable for China's internationalization and globalization. English is seen as a practical asset and a linguistic capital that can enhance individuals' employment prospects and career growth. (Pan and Block, 2011)

2.2. Changes in Indigenous Perception under *Ethnoscapes* and *Ideoscapes*

The movement of people across the globe has led to the emergence of multilingual countries or countries with cultural bias, resulting in alterations to the indigenous language system. Nepal, a multilingual nation with 131 spoken languages, has citizens who are proficient in multiple languages.

Binod Dhimi (2023) states in his findings that the participants clearly expressed their belief that the English variety spoken in Nepal reflects the cultural identity prevalent in their communities, despite Nepali remaining the primary language they use. English in Nepal has changed over time, and it is the localization of English in Nepal wherein it has adapted to the local context and culture. Another similar situation illustrates the change in local citizens' perceptions. Yoko Kobayashi (2021), who did a document analysis on “the blogs of Japanese college students studying abroad in France,” illustrates that the global dominance of English as the world's primary language has negative consequences on the learning of other languages, specifically impacting students' motivation to pursue long-term language learning. The extensive use of English in Europe is a significant factor that discourages students from continuing their studies in French. The former prestige of European languages like French, which were once highly regarded in Japan, has been diminished due to the dominance of English and the emergence of non-European languages.

Since most previous studies focused on regional language analysis, this paper mainly studies the influence of the dominant language on local languages in the global environment, from historical imperialism, population movement, and ideological change, to study the status of indigenous languages.

3. Analytical Part

3.1. “Linguistic Imperialism” Effect on Colonies

Britain implemented colonial language policies across different regions during the 19th century. Consequently, English has emerged as the official or widely spoken language in the colonized nations or areas. After the Second World War, the United States assumed the position of the world's leading power. The United States made efforts to elevate the status of the English language and utilize it for cultural dissemination to countries, thereby influencing their language policies and sociolinguistic environment.

3.1.1. US Policies and Language in the Philippines

The indigenous language system of the Philippines is one of the consequences of “Linguistic Imperialism.” The Philippines is ethnically diverse and linguistically complex, with more than 170 languages of communication (Zhou et al., 2015), of which Filipino and English are both official languages. From 1898 to 1946, the history of the Philippines is known as the American colonial period after being a colony of Spain for over 300 years. In 1901, English was introduced into the Philippines public school system as the only language of instruction by the Philippine Commission and legislated by Act No.74. Unlike the language differentiation policy of the Spanish colonial authorities, the American colonists tended to adopt a language assimilation policy (Chen Bing, 2011), focusing on the establishment of an American-style education system in the colonies. Between 1901 and 1902, the Philippine Commission authorized the Secretary of Public Instruction to bring a group of 600 teachers from the United States, known as the *Thomasites*, to the Philippines. (Zimmerman, 2006) Later, after Filipinos fought for independence and political instability, the 1987 Constitution under President Corazon Aquino declared Filipino to be the country's national language in Section 7 of ARTICLE XIV. Filipino, which developed from *Tagalog* as the main language, is spoken by 24.44% of the Philippine population, mainly in Manila and neighboring areas. (Zeng and Yang, 2022)

3.1.2. Influence of English on the Philippines

English as the dominant language has brought about both positive and negative effects on the Philippines. English educational policies led to the colonized people's use of a single language, which objectively improved the efficiency of communication. The imposition of English ended the lack of a national language in the Philippines and facilitated communication among the various ethnic groups of the Philippine islands, thus contributing significantly to socio-economic development. Phillipson (1992) argues that the impact of the English language was mainly negative and that proficiency in the dominant colonial language was achieved at the expense of other local languages. The English-only

assimilationist language policy of the American colonial administration objectively hindered the survival and development of the native languages of the Philippines.

3.1.3. Status of Filipino Language in the Philippines

In 2013, three Filipino students were forced to transfer to another school after violating school rules by using their mother tongue during a break between classes. (Tupas, 2015) This incident is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of language education in schools, but it reflects the stratified language environment in the Philippines, where English is valued, and the mother tongue is devalued. English remains the main medium of instruction, and the dialects of the islands, except for Manila and Luzon, are almost marginalized. (Zeng and Yang, 2022) According to UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, "the indigenous languages of the Philippines are Austronesian," including at least thirteen languages with five hundred or fewer speakers among the many Austronesian languages. (Wurm, 2007) As per the UNESCO World Atlas of Language database on December 16, 2023, while *Tagalog*, a major language, is not at risk, several Austronesian languages face endangerment; the population of indigenous speakers remains only one speaking *Isarog Agta*, eleven speaking *Arta* and twenty-nine speaking *Ati* while more than 14 million Filipinos speak English as an official language. The status of the Philippines' indigenous language is of concern. As the first official language, Filipino is less influential domestically and internationally than English, the second official language. English is widely used in the daily lives of Filipinos in official documents, newspapers, magazines, textbooks, the internet, and television programs. (Zeng and Yang, 2022) Even though English filled the vacancy of a national language for communication in the early stage, it also vanished the privilege of the mother tongue, leading to increasingly severe consequences over time.

3.2. Indigenous Languages under *Ethnoscapes*

The term *Ethnoscape* refers to the dynamic population that shapes the shifting world. This includes tourists, immigrants, refugees, guest workers, and other mobile individuals. These diverse populations play a crucial role in global politics, exerting an influence between nations that has reached an unprecedented level. (Appadurai, 1996) With people's migration, the language system of a region would be changed and influenced by eternal language and culture.

3.2.1. The *Han* Immigration to Manchuria

Before the ethnic group name *Manchu* was created by Hong Taiji in 1634, the majority ethnic group in the area was called *Nuzhen* in Chinese, referring to Jurchen people. According to The State Council of the People's Republic of China (PRC), *Donghu*, *Sushan*, *Yilou*, *Fuyu*, *Wuhuan*, *Hezhe* (*Nanai*), and more ethnic minorities are in the areas of the three northeastern provinces. In UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, the number of Chinese *Han* immigrants in Manchuria has surpassed 100 million in recent years, whereas the indigenous populations make up only about 10 million. Initially, the *Nanai* people resided in the northeastern provinces of China (Manchuria), engaging primarily in fishing and hunting activities. According to the Seventh National Census of China in 2021, there are 5,354 *Nainai* people in the country, including 3,613 in Heilongjiang province, accounting for 67 percent of the total population. The *Nanai* people in China (*Hezhen*) are one of the least populated of China's fifty-five ethnic minorities. At the beginning of the PRC, the population of *Hezhen* was only about 300 people, almost on the verge of extinction. The population in 2021 is almost eighteen times more than that of 1949, but it is still the fourth lowest-populated ethnic minority in China. Even with the increasing population, the language of *Hezhe* is still in danger due to the cultural assimilation of *Han* and the language impact of Mandarin as the official language.

3.2.2. Underestimated Mother Tongue by *Hezen* People

Hezhen have their own language, but there is no written record of their language. In the early 1930s, Ling Chunsheng, an ethnographer at the Academia Sinica, did field work near the Songhua River to investigate and record the production and life of the *Hezhen*. In his book *The Hezhen People on the Lower Songhua River*, he collected vocabulary and organized verbal records and grammatical

structure of the *Hezhen* language. The *Hezhen*, because they have been living intermingled with the *Han* (Chinese) for a long time, have used the Chinese language as a means of verbal and written communication, and, except for special circumstances, they have seldom used their native language. Ling (1934) presents in his book that the *Hezhen* people under the age of 30 know little or nothing about their own language; those between 40 and 55 can only understand or speak some simple words, and those over 55 can still communicate in their own language. Jin Lina (2016) conducted a survey in the *Hezhen* inhabited area. She illustrates that compared with ten years ago, the number of speakers of the *Hezhen* has further decreased, and the indigenous language use has also reduced to very few occasions and remains fragmented in the *Urigong* Conference and artistic performances. *Hezhen* has completely withdrawn from the home language environment in other communication scenarios.

3.2.3. Lack of Linguistic Environment for *Hezhe* Group

Urbanization and the popularization of Mandarin in China have changed the language environment of the *Hezhen*, which has also affected the *Hezhen* students. On February 6, 1956, the State Council issued “The Instruction on the Promotion of *Putonghua* (Mandarin)” to promote Mandarin nationwide. The Instruction formally established that *Putonghua* is to be “based on the Beijing dialect as the standard pronunciation, the northern dialect as the basic dialect, and the modern vernacular writings as the grammatical norms.” Even though article one of the Instruction explains: “except for ethnic minority areas, the teaching of *Putonghua* is introduced in all language classes in schools nationwide.” However, most of the language environments have been replaced by *Putonghua*, according to article twelve of the Instruction: “In all ethnic minority areas, *Putonghua* should be vigorously promoted among the *Han* Chinese people in each area. Radio stations in minority areas should endeavor to use *Putonghua* in their Chinese-language broadcasts.” More than half of the interviewees in Si Guoqing’s study (2020) said there is a lack of linguistic environment for learning the *Hezhen* language. Three ethnic town schools have been offering *Hezhen* language classes for more than ten years, but with urbanization and the popularity of Mandarin, the schools lost a lot of students; many students transferred to the bigger town schools with *Han* culture, and there are fewer and fewer students who can know and learn *Hezhen*. The remaining linguistic heritage is the *Imakan* of the *Hezen* people, preserved by China’s cultural protection policies. This oral literary work of the *Hezhen* is mainly narrated in Chinese, while the singing parts are mostly in the ethnic language of *Hezhen*. They sing for the main part along with the supporting speaking part, which has a distinctive regional style. (Si, 2023) However, *Hezhen* words are harder to find nowadays compared to its cultural activities such as dance.

3.3. Indigenous Language under *Ideoscapes*

Appadurai (1996) states that *Ideoscapes* can be seen as collections of images, yet they primarily hold political significance and are often linked to the ideologies of states and the opposing ideologies of movements that aim to gain control over or influence state power. Ideology can be spread through cultural assimilation, and religion is one of the best ways to spread ideas and culture. During the imperialist period of the 19th century, when foreign cultures entered the local area, theology was always the first to appear in the public eye.

3.3.1. Berber Languages as the Official Language in Morocco

Morocco is northwest of the African continent, at the junction of the African and European continents and the Atlantic and Mediterranean waters. Due to the special natural and geographical conditions, Morocco has been an important area for human migration and settlement in history. The Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs, French, and Spanish came to this land, and this is the root of the multilingual phenomenon in Morocco. However, The Berbers are the indigenous people of Morocco, and their national language is Berber or *Amazigh*. The word “Berbers” comes from the Latin *Barbarus*. The Greeks first used it to refer to people who did not speak their language. After the Arabs conquered the Maghreb region, the word became a term for people living in the Maghreb. In 2011, Morocco’s constitutional referendum promulgated a new constitution, finally confirming Berber (Standard

Moroccan Amazigh) as the official language alongside Arabic. (Spolsky, 2018) Although Berber is the common language of the Berbers people, the Berber languages are not the same in different tribes, and this divergence still exists today. The general name for the Berber-speaking ethnic groups in this area includes the *Tamazighets*, *Rivs*, *Schluhs*, *Kabyles*, and other ethnic groups. Rabia Redouane (2016) analyzes the current language status of Arabic, Berber, and French in Morocco and the conflicts between the languages. Redouane's article points out that although Morocco has carried out a series of language policy reforms in the past decade that are inclusive of linguistic diversity and oriented to modernization and globalization, the language situation in Morocco is still complex situation.

3.3.2. The Ideoscapes to Morocco from Arab

“When a language is associated with a religion, it gains the impetus to be maintained and spread.” (Zhu, 1996) After the Arabs moved into Morocco, they spread Islam in the area, and Arabic began to become the circulating language in Morocco. Religious assimilation policies were adopted towards non-Muslims. Because of the preferential treatment for believing in Islam, the Berbers joined Islam in droves. The Arabic language took root under the Arab regime and the cultivation of the Islamic faith. Although the centralized Arab rule over Morocco ended in failure, Islam triumphed in the region. (Hong, 2020) The 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Morocco by the US Department of State illustrates that “according to the constitution, the country is a ‘sovereign Muslim state’.” However, with the new wave of ideology spreading globally, Morocco people contact more different ideas from global communication. According to the 2019 Morocco Country Report, “support for political Islam is in decline in Morocco.” In 2006, a majority of approximately 58 percent of Moroccan citizens expressed the belief that religious leaders should possess influence in governmental decision-making. However, this percentage has steadily decreased, reaching 21 percent by 2018.

3.3.3. The Status of the Berber Language in Morocco

The 2011 constitution states that according to official statistics, 40 percent of the Moroccan population is Berber. Even though the UNESCO World Atlas of Language in 2023, “with the most common estimates of current speakers of *Tamazight* is about 40 percent of the total population in Morocco,” indicates that the population of Standard Moroccan Tamazight speakers took the majority rather than Arabic. The actual number of Berber speakers is not as high as the proportion of this ethnic group in the Moroccan population. According to the 2014 Morocco census, the proportion of residents who speak Berber is 27 percent. Although the constitution gives the Berber language the status of an official language and enhances the language rights of the Berber people, the actual use of the Berber language is still not optimistic, and the main Berber-speaking community is still in rural areas. (Hong, 2020)

4. Discussion of the Findings

This paper demonstrates the impact of dominant languages on indigenous languages in the context of globalization. By analyzing the documentation of indigenous languages in the Philippines, Heilongjiang Province of Northeast China, and Morocco, it becomes evident that while the language assimilation policy is a prevalent approach employed by the dominant culture in various regions, its effects vary significantly. Using Appadurai's global cultural flow theory to study the impact of dominant languages, we can find that the migration of foreign ethnic groups and the inflow of ideology have greatly affected the local language system. In the case of the Philippines, due to the diverse cultural background and the lack of official languages, the dominant foreign language has filled the gaps in the official language, making it more influential and obliterating many indigenous Filipino languages. In the case of Morocco, the dominant language increases its influence through the spread of religion and affects indigenous languages by changing the beliefs and cultural identity of the people. Furthermore, the immigration of *Han* Chinese led to the lack of Hezhen language environment for indigenous people. The status of indigenous language also involves issues such as

the loyalty of speakers to their mother tongues, with some communities fighting back strongly for their rights when powerful languages threaten their mother tongues, such as Berber people in Morocco, while others voluntarily give up passing on their mother tongues to the next generation such as *Hezhen*.

Understanding the impact of dominant languages on indigenous languages can shed light on the challenges faced by indigenous communities in preserving their linguistic heritage. Language serves as a fundamental component of a community's cultural identity. Investigating the influence of dominant languages on indigenous languages helps recognize the connection between language and cultural preservation. It highlights how the decline of indigenous languages can lead to the loss of cultural practices, traditions, and knowledge systems associated with those languages. It can uncover how the marginalization of indigenous languages affects access to education and employment opportunities for indigenous communities.

5. Prescription

Based on the above issues and combined with reality, the following solution is proposed to strengthen indigenous language protection and secure ethnic group cultural identity preservation. In similar cases of *Hezhen* in the Northeast province of China and the Berber people in Morocco, in the face of their existing problems, utilizing digital resources and technology can facilitate language preservation. Developing language learning apps and interactive platforms can make language learning more accessible and engaging because communities are mostly located in rural areas while individuals strive for improved living conditions in urban settings. Digital Learning can be a better way to spread and pass on the language without hindering their personal development.

6. Conclusion

The dominance of some languages will certainly lead to the disappearance of indigenous languages. Although globalization has brought convenience, inappropriate cultural and educational policies have also made the dominant languages thrive while the indigenous languages decline, resulting in the unification of languages and writing systems around the world and the destruction of linguistic diversity. A heterogeneous population of dominant language speakers, the polarization of ethnic groups, the fusion of nationalities, and the lack of language environment can contribute to the change of indigenous language. Despite the government's cultural support policies, indigenous languages may be voluntarily abandoned by local people due to inconvenience and unused characteristics. By obtaining more international information, indigenous people can also be suspicious about the dominant cultural and language environment and show resistance fighting for their cultural preservation, such as the Berber in Morocco. However, in more cases, the dominant language is a more convenient and powerful communication tool for indigenous people, and the mother tongue is devalued. The inflow of ideology affects the indigenous language system, while indigenous people embrace more dominant ideas rather than traditional ones, causing the younger generation to deny learning indigenous languages.

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