Migration, Language, and Language Personality in the Global Context

Linna Liberchuk
The Institute of World Politics, Washington, DC, United States

This article explores key aspects of migration, modern views on language, and language personality and their interrelations that affect socio-economic, cultural, educational, and security segments of a global labor market. Migration and linguistic dimensions include sociolinguistic issues as well as technological, economic, socio-cultural, and language transformations of the 21st century, which determine policies toward national and foreign languages and globalization of modern education. Our research efforts aim to identify migration-language-personality characteristics relevant for current economic development of the global workforce. Interrelated social-linguistic activities and multinational and multicultural interactions, grounded on digital business and electronic communication and provided by the international workforce, serve for the global businesses and for the national interests as well. In this article, we examine the following considerations: (1) migration issues and factors that determine linguistic implications of migration in the global labor market; (2) language and alternative modern visions on language and its functions; (3) language personality theory and its various interpretations related to social settings in the global context; and (4) challenges for a global workforce/migrants associated with language issues.

Keywords: migration, global labor market, linguistics, language, personality

Introduction

Global Workforce

The major changes of the 21st century rooted in globalization that establishes economic market advantages and real power for the global labor pool and those who engage in global developments of economic, technological, and educational innovations. The global workforce is the international labor pool associated with diverse companies, organizations, and multinational corporations and could connect through a global system of networking and production, those who are immigrant workers, transient migrant workers, and telecommuting workers and those in export-oriented employment. The global workforce establishes the relationship of communication between suppliers and demanders to do business together in the global market, to learn and to use ideas and customs from the other countries, and to work for the good of a whole world. The global labor market is often functioning without physical location: Buyers and sellers arrange exchanges via email, telephone, and fax machine by doing business at a long distance in a global virtual market. Many international organizations, such as (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) BRICS, Eurasian Economic Union, WTO, the World Economic Forum, European Union, and others represent the global market that requires to

Linna Liberchuk, PhD, The Institute of World Politics, Washington, DC, United States.
MIGRATION, LANGUAGE, AND LANGUAGE PERSONALITY

manage the global workforce and to develop relevant professional skills for the needs of a particular industry (e.g., cybersecurity) or the sector (e.g., pharmaceutical products). Technological, economic, and socio-cultural transformations are changing global visions of organizational culture: today, an organization’s success depends on effective communication, language skills, and speech strategies of the individuals. Economic models of the 21st century, based on the global collaboration, determine how language uses and serves the different needs of the individuals in the civilized world.

Migration Parameters and Their Linguistic Implications

Social and migration studies, focused on global evolutionary processes, recognize various ways, in which current globalizing migration has intertwined with a number of language themes. Paul Kerswill (2006) considered how the linguistic consequences of internal and external migration—a dynamic process of human affairs in a modern world—reflect in the dimensions, such as “the society of origin, the society of destination, and the migrants themselves” (p. 1). These three areas of migration-language issues are grounded on the following concepts: (1) migration is an extra-linguistic factor that influences language contacts of migrants and linguistic changes in the “host” speech society and national languages of migrants determining multilingualism, borrowing, and second language acquisition; (2) language contacts occur when speakers of different languages and dialects must communicate with each other on a new linguistically territory. The nature of contacts might lead to accommodation, mixing, and simplification of language units at various levels. For example, in the UK, new patterns of “standard-and-regional” pronunciation have been discovered in the English speech of “in-migrants” from Scotland; (3) migration boundaries, distance, and direction affect regional dialects. Thus, in the UK, a local accent of people from Yorkshire who moved from this area to London marks language interaction and depicts their regional identities; (4) migration time determines daily, periodic, seasonal, and long-term migratory categories. Researchers noted a loss of dialects or formation of the so-called koinéised new dialects of migrants’ speech. Among other things, German speakers-re-settlers from eastern parts of the country after WWII transformed their “old” dialect into a new dialect. It was also revealed that the long-term migrants (e.g., businessmen working abroad and students studying far away from homeland) might provide and enhance language contacts as “language missionaries” (Kerswill, 2006, p. 6); and (5) motivation and social-cultural factors generate personal linguistic preferences in language learning: In African countries, located at the boundaries of French-speaking or English-speaking metropolitans, the internal migrants can choose the language (French or English) for their further education and communication. According to the author, the concepts described above might be useful in analyses of: (a) assessment of sociolinguistic tendencies in migration groups; (b) considerations and projections of migration flow, types of language-cultural contacts between migrants and “host” communities, and language planning approaches; and (c) preservation of lingua franca and national languages. It should be added that in recent years growing xenophobic nationalism and hostility in many countries (e.g., Ukraine) indicate a complicated communication breakdown in education and language use for various migrants’ settings. The negative attitude towards the others is forming another important factor of migration policy nowadays.

Language, Its Functions, and Their Implications for the Society

The research literature on language associated with various social dimensions and events is extensive. Our consideration of understanding language and its functions are based on linguistic interpretations that can be
found in recently published books of prominent British, American, and Russian scholars (Katzner, 1995; Crystal, 1997; Kolesov, 1994; MacNeil & Cran, 2005; McWhorter, 2001). The world’s authorities on linguistics represent various views on language, propose different definitions of language, argue about fundamental functions of language, and describe major current language trends in their books. Although scholars present British, American, and Russian linguistic schools, they examine the basic concepts related to language in the following similar ways. Firstly, the authors differentiate the public’s and linguists’ views on languages. The general public takes language for granted. The linguists, presenting two camps—conservatives and liberals—identify language whether as a system of strict rules/standards established by an elitist group [the educated upper middle class in the UK and US, and the intelligentsia in the RF—abbreviated from the Russian Federation] or as a dynamic system of living language (e.g., Amglish) that includes a variety of formal, informal (e.g., fastforwarding, preapproved, what is your mix?), and colloquial expressions. Language teachers and educators, who are involved in teaching and language planning, might be associated with a public social “layer” that particularly concerns of how best to teach languages and about directives on language policies. The non-native speakers, foreign-born temporary or permanent residents in the “host” countries, migrants, and global workers present a special group of those who have to learn hard both a particular language by levels and speech skills at the same time. Despite the lexical contribution of different languages to English (e.g., boss, waffle, kaput, glitch, pizza, ranch, and corral), non-native speakers might originate a language self-identification (e.g., a mixed bag: Amglish, Spanglish, Italish, or Newspeak) that irritates English speakers (Rowse, 2011; Timofeeva, 1995). The conservative English-speakers often blame liberal American-speaking fellows for degradation of English. At the same time, most of liberals and conservatives agree that the media (talk show style), incompetent English teachers, and society itself cause battles over the state of the language. They can say, “I think a society in which the uneducated lead the educated by the nose is not a good society” (MacNeil & Cran, 2005, p. 18).

Secondly, the authors of different nationalities agree that language is a fascinating dimension because of its unique role in capturing human intellectual activities—thoughts. Therefore, considering ways of human interaction and linguistic needs to serve for it, scholars put forward the most important language functions, such as to communicate human ideas (e.g., facts, concepts, opinions), to perform mental activities (e.g., language vs. thoughts, “an inner speech”, the need to speak thoughts aloud, to perform calculations in mind), and to control reality (e.g., rituals in church events, performance of social roles—judges or doctors). The second group combines the functions that are linked to actions, such as to express emotional states (e.g., verbal reactions to beauty, arts or frustration (wow, Lord), to explore how the sounds affect speakers and listeners (e.g., oral poetry, a typical ball-bouncing phonetic game—I like coffee, I like tea, I like radio, and TV) (Crystal, 1997), and to maintain social interaction (e.g., Happy Monday! Lovely day! Glad to meet you!). The language function directed to record the facts (e.g., historical records, surveys, accounts, legal acts, and databases) is identifying with a systematic organization of human knowledge in various classifications and databases. In connection with classifications of information in our digital age, language performs a newly formed function aimed to store and

1 Additionally, we can compare different approaches reflecting in definitions for a word “language” provided by recently published explanatory English and Russian dictionaries: (1) Russian: “Language is a system of verbal expression of thoughts possessing particular sound and grammar structure and serving as a means of communication” (Russian Explanatory Dictionary, 1999, Saint-Petersburg). (2) English: “Language is the speech of a country, region, or group of people including its diction, syntax, and grammar” (Encarta, 1999, St. Martin’s Press).
transmit electronic/digitalized data in a virtual reality. The systematic investigation of language functions provides valuable knowledge about particular social situations, in which communicative characteristics of different languages affect the speakers’ behavior. This aspect of sociolinguistics also plays a crucial role in determination of language policies in modern multilingual communities.

Finally, a powerful function of a human language to express personal identity marking linguistically national/regional origin, social background, level of education, occupation, age, sex, personality, and “who we are and where we belong” must be underlined. The social and functional characteristics of language related to social categories of speakers were recently described by the Moscow sociolinguist L. Krysin. The concepts of language identity, personal linguistic identity, and language personality have been considered from different perspectives in sociolinguistics. These identities might coordinate with characteristics and functions that manifest linguistic and social behavior in particular communicative situations. However, we consider that a concept of language identity is grounded on the following elements: (a) identification of speakers with a particular national language (e.g., Russian or American English); (b) identification of distinctive features in a linguistic portrait of an individual (e.g., sounds and intonation can indicate a particular language); (c) reflection of cultural characteristics in a speaker’s perception/production of formal/informal speech (e.g., forms of greetings); (d) attitudes towards local dialects (e.g., accents in modern American speech are common, but accents in Russian cause jokes and negative reactions); and (e) the use of language to mark an age or an occupation of speakers (e.g., “codes” in various forms of electronic interaction). These considerations have been used as a foundation of a concept of language personality that is describing below.

**Language Personality Theory and Its Implications for Language Education**

The Western linguists believe that in the mid-1930s, a Russian scholar-psychologist L. Vygotsky initiated first efforts in the development of language personality theory. Later, in the 20th century and in the beginning of the new millennium, many sociologists, linguists, psychologists, and philosophers from different countries contributed to this theory: Their names can be founded in bibliographical sections of this article. In our view, language personality is a unique individual manner of performing language operations that provide four major functions of human communication—listening, speaking, writing, and reading. That manner involves a personal linguistic portrait (unique phonetic, lexical, and stylistic features, qualities of voice, and speech strategies). The following concepts supporting the theory were introduced: (1) Language personality is connected with considerations of an individual’s speech production behavior in a variety of contexts, for example, language behavior of a speaker in a family and a work place or individual characteristics interrelated with values of a speaker (e.g., a language portrait of a modern business woman in the UK, US, and Russia or a diplomat or an exchange student); (2) language personality is analyzing in a context of computer-mediated communication and language learning based on technology in modern British and American sociolinguistics and educational technology (Baron, 2000); (3) language personality plays a significant role in learning foreign languages. In Russian school of thoughts, linguists and psycholinguists developed the criteria to evaluate

---

2 Dr. L. P. Krysin is a representative of the Moscow linguistic school that in the mid-1980s developed methodology of sociolinguistic research as an innovative approach to our understanding of issues of language and society.

3 Lev Vygotsky, a prominent scholar, who originated perspective ideas, adopted across the globe since the 1960s in pedagogy, linguistics, and psychology, was murdered in 1934 during political repressions.

4 In connection with this new aspect of the issue, we might refer readers to following works: Baron, Naomi (2000) and the publication by Professor Frank Borchardt (Duke University) in the above list of references.
features of language personality in language learning settings. The following components were taken into account: language ability (understanding of various combinations of signs, forms, and meanings), language mechanism (to distinguish phonemes of different languages), and language activities (to continue a speech act, handling it linguistically).

**Characteristics of Language Personality in Learning Foreign Languages Environment**

In 1995, the Department of Psycholinguistics at Moscow State Linguistic University conducted research on foreign language acquisition by gathering the data from 50 teachers of foreign languages. The key point was to determine the nature of abilities for better studying foreign languages. The set of characteristics were established and classified according to their degree of frequency in answers of the respondents. The results of surveys are presented below:

Characteristics/Intellectual qualities: (1) Memory—80%; (2) general erudition—70%; (3) logical thinking—65%; (4) abstract thinking—45%; (5) humanitarian mind—55%; (6) sense of language—40%; (7) imitation—32%; (8) good ear for music—20%; (9) motivation—15%; (10) interest—15%; (11) sociability—12.5%; (12) diligence—7.5%; and (13) flexibility—6%.

Russian researchers considered that the most important components for learning foreign languages are memory, general erudition, logical and abstract thinking, humanitarian type of mind, and a sense of language (“the feeling of the language”). “The feeling of the language” can be considered as a special intellectual feature, a means of cognition, and the important characteristic of a language personality. Moreover, “the feeling of the language” is an ability of an individual to develop knowledge about language and mental capacity to generalize linguistic information. To determine “the feeling of language” is a first condition in the selection of students for studying foreign languages in the philological classes Russian universities. Also, modern linguistics-researchers consider that today there are many innovative methods to develop language personality. For instance, a feeling of language can be developed in the technology-based course of practicing skills in a target language. At the same time, linguistic myths, social and educational policies on learning languages, and personal language tastes towards foreign languages (e.g., private priorities, sometimes business demands, are always remaining in choosing language to study) might influence the development of a sense of language. Indeed, for many students, the linguistic nature of Arabic or Russian or Italian might dictate the choice. Additionally, the national character and the open-minded communication (e.g., the Russians are more introversive than the Americans, but more extroversive than the Chinese) affects teaching/learning foreign languages. Thus, Americans are more “problem-solving oriented” students then Russians and Chinese. However, Russians are more flexible in terms of logical and abstract thinking, and Chinese are more comfortable with “semiotic” abilities. Discussing various techniques in language personality development, we might speak about a cultural-mental-language complex: for example, for representatives of Scandinavian countries learning activities based on games (role-plays, singing, and verbal performances in brainstorming or arguing) are not productive in a foreign language class. Finally, experts on language instruction mentioned that the ability for a foreign language is not a homogeneous formation: It is a complex of psychological, cognitive, and language traits connected with intellectual creative thinking capabilities of a learner. As a whole, the Moscow experiment showed that 85% of students are capable to study foreign languages, although “inborn” abilities for foreign languages have only 70% of students

---

5 Professor Belyanin shared the information in the paper presented at a meeting of the International Association of Applied Psycholinguistics in 1995.
involved in language studies. The results of the survey can be used in the development of innovative methodology and approaches for learning languages, presentation of language knowledge and skills in intercultural communication in international business establishments, further research on cognition, linguistics, and cultural diversity influence new models of relationships between an individual and a modern multilingual society.

Conclusion

Challenges for a Global Workforce and Migrants Associated With Language Issues

Language status (how cool is your language?) remains a persistent problem in the society. This “web-question” reflects the attitude towards language in bilingual communities and the desire of people to know a particular language: e.g., studies identify the following socioeconomic rates—English is # 3, Russian is # 8, German is # 13, Italian is # 21 (Liberchuk, 2016). Language can be considered from: (a) a state of its important functions; (b) a state of relations with social groups; (c) a state of educational policies and modeling promising strategies in teaching/learning foreign languages; (d) a state of consideration of language personality; and (e) perspectives of globalization and movement people around the world. The language world is changing. This process has a number of links to new images of the world, new ways of social organization of national and international communities, new representations of human cultures, categories of knowledge, and communicative behavior in a native or foreign language environment. The fundamental challenges for those who represent global labor and migrant groups are language policy regarding promoting knowledge of foreign languages as a commodity and measurement of language proficiency skills. Traditional interpretations of tests (e.g., content of language tests, standards/norms in speaking) are becoming a debatable topic for educators, language experts, and the general public as well. Innovative technologies applicable for writing speeches or analytical reports and summaries available for official, business, or teacher-student interactions (and translation) play a critical role in contemporary reality. The electronic resources might serve as grounds for various modifications of curriculum, implementation of language pedagogical programs, and business “without borders” companies. Finally, the increasing demands in services provided in foreign languages marked by global internationalization of the Internet in English: A few linguists are asking a rhetoric question, “Will the Internet always speak English?” In this connection, David Crystal (2004) noted,

Global English has given extra purpose to a variety of Standard English in the way it guarantees a medium of international intelligibility; but it has also fostered the growth of local varieties as a means of expressing regional identity, and some of these new varieties will, in due course, evolve into new languages. (p. 92)

New language situations will foster rethinking of linguistic identities of non-English speakers (Timofeeva, 2003) and provide a plenty of opportunities to discover new distinctive features in relations between language, language identity, language personality, and bilingual communities. The Internet, electronic gadgets, social media, and the global labor market force many unimaginable areas of communicative behavior (e.g., customer service in the global market) and intellectual activities that are changing the standards of traditional interactions and create a new area for sociolinguistic interpretations of units of language systems and differences in perception of natural human speech.

References

