



## Between Global Reach and Cultural Erasure: English Hegemony, Linguistic Diversity, and the Politics of Language Survival in the Age of Globalization

<sup>1</sup> Ilaha Ashrafova, <sup>2</sup> Zeynab Safarova  
<https://doi.org/10.69760/egille.2602033>

**Abstract.** *The unprecedented global ascendancy of English as the dominant medium of international communication, scientific discourse, and digital exchange has generated a debate of profound theoretical and sociolinguistic consequence: does the structural dominance of a single global language constitute an existential threat to the world's extraordinary reservoir of linguistic diversity? This article systematically investigates the relationship between English global hegemony and minority language decline, examining the sociolinguistic, socioeconomic, educational, and ideological mechanisms through which language shift occurs in multilingual communities. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of linguistic imperialism, language ecology, and reversing language shift, the study analyzes the multifactorial nature of language endangerment, demonstrating that the decline of minority languages is not reducible to English dominance alone but results from the convergent operation of globalization, urbanization, migration, educational policy, technological mediation, and the symbolic economies of prestige that determine which languages are perceived as valuable. The analysis identifies the conditions under which English and minority languages can genuinely coexist within sustainable multilingual ecosystems, and proposes the principles of an ecologically balanced language policy framework that supports linguistic diversity as a form of intangible cultural heritage while enabling communities to access the communicative and economic resources that global English provides. The article argues that the central challenge is not the fact of English's global reach but the ideological conditions under which it operates — conditions that can be contested, reformed, and redirected through principled multilingual education, community-based language revitalization, and institutional recognition of linguistic rights.*

**Keywords:** *English as a global language, language extinction, linguistic diversity, globalization, linguistic imperialism, language ecology, language preservation, multilingualism*

<sup>1</sup> Ashrafova, I. Nakhchivan State University, Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan. Email: [ilahaashrafova@ndu.edu.az](mailto:ilahaashrafova@ndu.edu.az). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2127-3487>

<sup>2</sup> Safarova, Z. Nakhchivan State University, Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan. Email: [zeynepseferova008@gmail.com](mailto:zeynepseferova008@gmail.com). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0213-258X>



## 1. Introduction

Language has always been one of the most fundamental elements of human identity, culture, and collective memory. Every language constitutes an irreplaceable system for encoding a community's history, cosmology, ecological knowledge, aesthetic sensibility, and social relations — what Maffi (2005) terms biocultural diversity, the inseparable interdependence of biological, cultural, and linguistic diversity that constitutes the adaptive heritage of humanity. Today, more than 7,000 languages are spoken around the world, yet the majority of them are endangered and at accelerating risk of disappearance (Crystal, 2003). UNESCO estimates that approximately half of the world's languages may be lost by the end of the twenty-first century if current trajectories are not reversed, representing an irreversible diminution of human cognitive and cultural diversity comparable in magnitude to the loss of species in biological ecosystems.

At the same time, English has become the dominant global language of education, science, technology, business, tourism, and international communication. Due to globalization and technological development, the influence of English continues to expand rapidly across different societies and cultures (Phillipson, 2009). The ascendancy of English is not merely a demographic or functional phenomenon — it is an ideological one. English has been constituted as the language of modernity, rationality, and economic opportunity in ways that systematically devalue other languages and the communities that speak them, creating what Bourdieu (1991) terms a symbolic economy in which linguistic capital is unequally distributed and in which speaking the dominant language is structurally rewarded while speaking minority or subordinate languages may carry social stigma.

Millions of students learn English as a foreign language because it provides access to better educational opportunities, international careers, and global communication networks (Elisoy, 2024). English is also the primary language of the internet, social media platforms, scientific publications, and multinational companies. As a result, individuals with English proficiency often have greater access to information and economic opportunities than those without it (Ashrafova, 2025). However, this functional value of English comes at a cost when it is pursued at the expense of linguistic and cultural diversity — when communities abandon their languages not from a free choice but under structural compulsion created by the unequal distribution of social and economic rewards.

This article investigates the complex and theoretically contested question of whether English is "killing" other languages, examining the sociolinguistic mechanisms of language shift and language endangerment, the role of ideological and structural factors beyond English itself, the theoretical debate between linguistic imperialism and its critics, and the conditions under which sustainable multilingualism can be achieved. The analysis draws on the theoretical frameworks of Phillipson (2009), Fishman (1991), Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), Crystal (2003), and Haugen's



language ecology paradigm, supplemented by research on the Azerbaijani and Central Asian contexts (Ibrahim Zakir oğlu, 2022; Ismayilova, 2023; Naghiyeva, 2024).

## 2. Methodology

This study employed a systematic descriptive and analytical research methodology to examine the influence of English on other languages and its role in global language shift. The research drew on an extensive review of sociolinguistic, policy, and educational literature, encompassing peer-reviewed journal articles, academic monographs, and institutional reports from UNESCO, the Endangered Languages Project, and national linguistic policy bodies. Primary theoretical frameworks were drawn from Phillipson's (2009) linguistic imperialism theory, Fishman's (1991) reversing language shift model, Skutnabb-Kangas's (2000) linguistic genocide framework, Crystal's (2003) descriptive account of English as a global language, and Haugen's language ecology paradigm.

The analytical dimension of the research applied critical discourse analysis to evaluate the ideological dimensions of English dominance, examining how language is positioned within educational policy, media discourse, and economic institutions. Local and regional research — including studies on globalization and linguistic identity in Azerbaijani contexts (Ibrahim Zakir oğlu, 2022; Ismayilova, 2023; Naghiyeva, 2024; Zeynalova, 2022) — was integrated alongside international scholarship to ensure the analysis is responsive to the specific sociolinguistic contexts that are most directly relevant to the journal's readership. The study adopted a theoretically pluralistic approach, presenting multiple scholarly perspectives on the contested question of whether English causes language loss, rather than advancing a single determinist account.

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1 English as a Global Language: Origins and Mechanisms

Crystal's (2003) authoritative account identifies the global spread of English as the product of three successive historical phases: the colonial expansion of British political and economic power from the sixteenth century onward, which implanted English across North America, Australasia, Southern Africa, South Asia, and the Pacific; the emergence of the United States as the dominant military, economic, and cultural power of the twentieth century, which consolidated English as the language of science, commerce, and popular culture globally; and the digital revolution, which established English as the default language of the internet, computing, and global information networks. These three historical forces are distinct in their mechanisms but converging in their effects: they have created a situation in which English occupies a structurally dominant position relative to all other languages across the domains of greatest social and economic value.

Phillipson (2009) offers a more critical account of this ascendancy through his concept of linguistic imperialism — the proposition that the global dominance of English reflects and perpetuates structural relations of power between anglophone core nations and multilingual periphery nations,



and that this dominance is actively maintained through institutional mechanisms including educational policy, language testing regimes, publishing practices, and development aid conditionalities. Phillipson's framework positions English not merely as a language that happens to be widely spoken but as a site of ideological contestation in which the interests of anglophone-dominant institutions systematically override the language rights and cultural interests of non-anglophone communities.

Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) extends this analysis to its most radical formulation, arguing that the structural conditions under which minority languages are suppressed in formal education — a process she terms "linguistic genocide" — constitute a violation of internationally recognized cultural and linguistic rights. Her framework identifies educational language policy as the primary mechanism through which minority languages are devalued and displaced: when children are educated exclusively in a dominant language at the expense of their first language, the intergenerational transmission of minority languages is interrupted with consequences that are frequently irreversible.

### *3.2 Language Ecology and the Multifactorial Nature of Language Loss*

Fishman's (1991) framework for reversing language shift provides a more nuanced account of the mechanisms of language loss that situates English dominance within a broader ecology of factors. For Fishman, the critical variable in language maintenance or loss is not simply the presence of a dominant language but the degree to which minority language communities maintain intergenerational transmission — the passing of the language from parents to children within the family and community domain. His Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) identifies the conditions of language shift from minimal erosion to near-total language death, providing a diagnostic tool for evaluating where specific languages sit on the continuum and what interventions are most urgently needed. Fishman's analysis demonstrates that language shift is driven primarily by social, economic, and educational pressures that lead communities to value the dominant language more highly than their own — pressures in which English is one factor among many, alongside urbanization, migration, employment structures, and the prestige economy of education.

Local researchers have examined how these global dynamics manifest in specific regional contexts. Ibrahim Zakir oğlu (2022) analyzes how globalization affects linguistic identity and cultural transmission in Azerbaijani society, arguing that while English provides communicative advantages, societies must develop institutional mechanisms for protecting their linguistic heritage alongside global language competence. Ismayilova (2023) examines the role of English in intercultural communication and foreign language education, noting that excessive prioritization of English in academic and social environments may inadvertently diminish the perceived value of native language use among younger generations. Naghiyeva (2024) documents the specific role of digital communication platforms and social media in spreading English vocabulary and



discourse patterns among young speakers, a process that may influence native language use through mechanisms of lexical borrowing, code-switching, and the gradual displacement of native language registers in online communication.

### ***3.3 The Case Against Linguistic Determinism***

The linguistic imperialism framework has also attracted significant theoretical critique. Canagarajah (1999) argues that the model underestimates the agency of non-anglophone communities in appropriating, adapting, and resisting English for their own purposes, and that it reproduces a binary of dominant and subordinate languages that obscures the complex negotiations of identity and power that characterize multilingual communities. Crystal (2003) himself cautions against the assumption that English is inherently destructive of linguistic diversity, pointing to historical and contemporary examples of communities that have maintained vibrant minority languages alongside high levels of English proficiency — Welsh in Britain, Catalan in Spain, and various indigenous languages in New Zealand and Canada — as evidence that language shift is a choice modulated by institutional support and community will rather than an inevitable consequence of English exposure. Elisoy (2024) similarly argues that within educational systems that are thoughtfully designed, English learning and native language maintenance are not competitors but complementary goals whose simultaneous pursuit is both practically achievable and pedagogically valuable.

## **4. Discussion**

### ***4.1 The Mechanisms of Language Shift***

The evidence reviewed in this study confirms that the decline of minority languages in contexts of English dominance is not a simple matter of one language displacing another but a complex sociolinguistic process mediated by multiple intersecting mechanisms. The most powerful of these mechanisms is the symbolic economy of language prestige, in which English is positioned — through educational policy, media representation, employment markets, and social norms — as the language of modernity, opportunity, and intelligence, while minority languages are implicitly or explicitly devalued as backward, parochial, or economically irrelevant. When younger generations internalize this symbolic hierarchy, the consequence is not merely a preference for English in certain domains but a fundamental disruption of intergenerational language transmission: children who grow up associating their parents' language with limited opportunity may choose not to transmit it to their own children, initiating the process of language death that Fishman (1991) identifies as the most lethal threat to minority language survival.

Globalization and digital communication significantly amplify these mechanisms. International movies, music, online platforms, and social media expose people to English on a daily basis and create powerful associations between English and desirable cultural identities (Naghiyeva, 2024). Constant interaction with English-language content encourages individuals, especially young



people, to adopt English vocabulary and expressions in everyday communication, a process of lexical infiltration that can gradually transform native language registers into hybrid varieties and eventually displace those registers altogether in domains where English has established structural dominance. In some communities, parents choose to communicate with their children in English in order to maximize their educational and professional opportunities, interrupting the most fundamental mechanism of language transmission at its source.

However, the research also confirms that English alone is not responsible for language disappearance. Social, political, and economic factors — migration, urbanization, educational policies, and economic pressures — often exert more direct and immediate influence on language use than English exposure per se (Fishman, 1991; Ibrahim Zakir oğlu, 2022). Communities that maintain strong institutional support for their minority languages — through bilingual education, official recognition, media presence, and cultural programming — can sustain intergenerational transmission even in contexts of high English exposure. The Azerbaijani context illustrates this dual dynamic: while English proficiency is increasingly valued in educational and professional contexts (Ashrafova, 2025), the Azerbaijani language retains strong institutional support through state language policy and educational systems, demonstrating that the relationship between global language exposure and minority language maintenance is mediated by institutional and political choices rather than determined by linguistic competition alone.

#### ***4.2 Coexistence, Ecology, and the Politics of Multilingualism***

The most theoretically productive framework for addressing the question of English and linguistic diversity is not the competitive metaphor of language killing but the ecological metaphor of language diversity — the idea that linguistic diversity, like biological diversity, is a form of collective inheritance whose value exceeds the sum of its individual components and whose loss constitutes an irreversible impoverishment of human cognitive and cultural resources (Maffi, 2005). Within this framework, the question is not whether English can be stopped — it cannot, and the attempt to do so would impose its own costs on communities that need access to the communicative resources English provides — but whether the structural conditions in which English operates can be reformed to permit genuine multilingual coexistence rather than a de facto hierarchy in which English dominates and minority languages survive only at the margins.

Educational institutions, governments, and cultural organizations play an indispensable role in creating these conditions of genuine multilingualism (Ibrahim Zakir oğlu, 2022; Zeynalova, 2022). Bilingual education programs that develop competence in both the national language and English, curriculum policies that treat minority language literacy as a core educational goal rather than a supplementary extra, media and cultural policies that ensure minority languages have a visible and prestigious presence in public life, and language revitalization programs that engage communities in the active reclamation of endangered languages — these are the institutional mechanisms through which linguistic diversity can be actively maintained rather than passively mourned



(Babayev, 2023). The research of Orucova (2023) further highlights the importance of educational environments that cultivate positive language attitudes, enabling students to develop pride in their linguistic identities alongside competence in global communication languages.

## 5. Conclusion

The global spread of English represents one of the most consequential sociolinguistic developments in human history — a development that has simultaneously expanded the communicative possibilities of billions of people and created structural conditions in which the world's extraordinary linguistic diversity is under sustained and accelerating threat. This article has argued that the question of whether English is "killing" other languages cannot be answered with a simple yes or no, because the causal relationship between English dominance and minority language decline is mediated by a complex ecology of social, economic, political, and ideological factors that cannot be reduced to the mere presence of English as a widely spoken language.

English is not killing languages directly. It is creating — through its structural positioning in educational, economic, and media systems — the conditions in which communities make rational choices to abandon their languages in pursuit of opportunities that are artificially restricted to English speakers. The remedy is not to restrict English but to dismantle the structural inequalities that make it rational to abandon one's language, by creating educational, economic, and social conditions in which multilingualism is genuinely valued and institutionally supported. The key insight of Fishman's (1991) reversing language shift model — that language maintenance requires not merely the preservation of linguistic forms but the active maintenance of the social contexts in which those forms are transmitted and valued — remains as theoretically indispensable and practically urgent as when it was first formulated.

Ultimately, language is not only a communication tool but a fundamental component of culture, identity, and collective memory. The world's linguistic diversity is an irreplaceable resource — a repository of alternative ways of perceiving, categorizing, and engaging with reality that cannot be recovered once lost. Protecting this diversity alongside enabling access to the opportunities that English provides requires not the suppression of English but the construction of genuinely multilingual societies, educational systems, and symbolic economies in which all languages are recognized as valuable and all communities are empowered to transmit their linguistic heritage to future generations. This is the central challenge for language policy in the age of globalization — and meeting it requires not resignation but principled, informed, and sustained commitment.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization: I.A.; Methodology: I.A.; Investigation: I.A.; Writing – original draft: I.A.; Writing – review & editing: I.A.



This is an open access article published under the  
Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Euro-Global Journal of Linguistics and Language  
Education  
Vilnius, Lithuania

## References

- Ashrafova, I. A. (2025). Language and cultural identity in the age of globalization. *Philology and Translation Studies*, 3(2), 18–25.
- Babayev, C. S. (2023). The role of English language teaching in modern education. *Nakhchivan State University Scientific Works*, 2, 52–59.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power* (G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.). Polity Press.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (1999). *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Elisoy, H. (2024). Modern approaches in English language teaching and communication. *Foreign Language Teaching Journal*, 4(1), 33–41.
- Fishman, J. A. (1991). Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages. *Multilingual Matters*.
- Ibrahim Zakir oğlu, Ü. (2022). *Globalization and linguistic influence in modern societies*. ADU Publishing.
- Ibrahimli, N. Q. (2023). Communication skills in foreign language learning. *Modern Philological Studies*, 5(2), 40–46.
- Ismayilova, T. M. (2023). Language diversity and intercultural communication in education. *Pedagogical Research Journal*, 5(2), 44–50.
- Maffi, L. (2005). Linguistic, cultural, and biological diversity. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 34(1), 599–617. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.34.081804.120437>
- Mehdi, S. H. (2024). The influence of globalization on language and culture. *Academic Research Journal*, 3(1), 27–34.
- Naghiyeva, G. Y. (2024). Communicative competence in foreign language learning. *Modern Education Review*, 6(1), 61–67.
- Orucova, D. I. (2023). Language and identity in modern educational environments. *Language and Society*, 4(2), 55–62.
- Phillipson, R. (2009). *Linguistic imperialism continued*. Routledge.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2000). *Linguistic genocide in education — or worldwide diversity and human rights?* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.



Zeynalova, L. K. (2022). The role of multilingualism in global communication. *Scientific Bulletin of Education*, 7(1), 39–45.

Received: 15 April 2026

Accepted: 17 May 2026

Published: 19 May 2026



This is an open access article published under the  
Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

**Euro-Global Journal of Linguistics and Language  
Education**  
Vilnius, Lithuania