

Departments of English at Arab Universities and the Challenge of Globalization

Majid Al-Quran
Hashemite University

1. Introduction

Realizing that the world has shrunk and that a global perspective is deemed vital for one's citizenry to obtain, it is time as we are stepping in the third millenium to reconsider how the humanities, including languages, can contribute to this new and enlarged view of the world. Language is one of the major disciplines of humanities, which are concerned with human self-expression. It is in their languages that the people of this universe preserve for subsequent generations the tradition of their thought and wisdom, both secular and religious. Writers and poets record the wide range of human experiences, which serve as the basis for the common bond for all mankind. This includes love and passion, selflessness and egotism, loyalty and betrayal, the joy of living, the agonies of aging, the existential fear of dying, the humility of man, fear and courage, and the ultimate greatness of man. It is doubtless that the sum of all thinking, of chronicles and feelings is carried by language and thus, the humanities are all said to be language centered.

The present paper is an attempt to shed light on the new demands that the departments of English at Arab universities should meet in the light of the worldwide move towards globalization. This eventually entails including and investing elements of global education as a means to further English

language learning. More awareness of the global culture is needed and has to be carefully reflected in syllabus design and study plans in terms of scope and sequence and selection of teaching materials. This could be actualized through the inclusion of culture studies from other parts of the globe so as to keep up with the ever-increasing cosmic changes. Moreover, it is a major task of the departments of English to demonstrate in their study plans how to raise awareness in their students that judgments on the relative superiority of some cultures are at best dubious.

The global perspective, which has to be adopted by all humanities including languages and literature, attempts to transcend the national boundaries and even the larger realm of the cultural sphere. This new outlook has to open the broad panorama of contemporary events all over the world. Besides, serious consideration is to be given to the future and cultural politics of English as an international language in the age of globalization, in addition to the new role and input that literature can have in the light of the paradox of a fragmented global village.

Moreover, civic issues, values and virtues and the cause of citizenship are now of global interest and thus have to be addressed within the global perspective by all educational institutions. It seems quite obvious that the fact that promoting good citizenship as one of the most commonly stated values in the mission statements of our colleges and universities is overlooked.

2. A Global Perspective

A social scientist in a university department of interdisciplinary studies, Ghulam Haniff (1981) has the following to say concerning a global perspective:

It is no longer fruitful to view the planet earth as an infinite land mass inhabited by culturally diverse groups of people living in relative isolation from each other and comprising autonomous communities capable of a variety of activities carried on autonomously. While it is true that members of the human species continue to occupy spatially distinct pieces of real estate and to live in a state of social fragmentation, it is also true that the events of the

contemporary world have made them all citizens of a global village- a village in which the sharing of resources and community life has become a social imperative (in Muessig and Gillian, 1981:5).

William Wordsworth, cited by R. Muessig & M. Gilliom (1981), projected the poet's perspective of globalization and thus says in this respect:

In spite of differences of soil and climate, of language and manners, of law and customs – in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed, the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time. (ibid:4).

The global perspective is deemed vital in the light of the increasingly interdependent human relationships on earth. This interdependence yields common grievances and brings about shared interests, needs and opportunities. People can now talk to the ends of the earth as easily as villagers once conversed with each other. Educational institutions have to address this demand of interdependence among the peoples of the globe in addition to the growing recognition of the complexity of the relationships and the processes involved in them. Therefore, how can this new demand of interdependence among the people of this global village be equally handled by the departments of English at Arab universities?

One outstanding manifestation of the complexity of relationships in modern times is that every individual is becoming a member of many different groups, each claiming his/her loyalty. However, in spite of the fact that we are living in a small world where multiple loyalties are emerging, conformity to one's group seems to conflict with the interests of other groups. Given this multiplicity of loyalties and new forms of belonging due to interdependence, successful adoption of the global perspective approach is expected to help individuals mediate some such conflicts and find a reconciling way out of this dilemma.

3. Global Education

Some of the pioneers in this movement define global education as education for responsible citizen involvement and effective participation in global society. Others look at it as an effort to create educational systems in which children, youth as well as adults are expected to perform two main things. Firstly, students learn to perceive world as a single and complete global system. Secondly, they are hoped to learn to see themselves as participants in the world system and to understand the advantages and costs, the rights and the responsibilities inherent in this participation.

Furthermore, global education is meant to help citizens develop the problem-solving potentials especially those addressing thoughtful decisions. It further seeks to assist people in developing the skill to make sound and reasoned judgements about their own international behavior and the decisions and actions of others; it further involves helping them develop the capacity to exert some influence over international social and economic processes in which they are inevitably involved in daily life.

4. The Call for Globalization:

Several scientists in the field voiced the need for a profound reshaping of education if mankind is to survive in the sort of world that is fast evolving. The pressing need stems from the many grave difficulties that the humanity will face which can only be solved on a global scale. This new situation entails a higher degree of understanding and a greater capacity of cooperation between nations. Complaint is also voiced that the present systems of education, as they currently operate in different parts of the world, are not moving rapidly enough in the right direction in terms of producing the right knowledge about the outside world and the attitudes toward other peoples that may be vital for human survival within a generation or two.

The present systems are viewed not to adequately address matters as unity and diversity of mankind, the interdependence of nations and peoples, and the need for international cooperation in shaping an acceptable future. Thus, the study of world society needs to be built into educational

systems, just as in mathematics, language, health and other disciplines of knowledge.

One of the challenges that globalization poses at all life levels is that of abundant information. Information dissemination through mass media plays a significant role in the process of globalizing culture. The spread of knowledge is supposed to foster a better understanding of facets and complexities, to reduce deep rooted pre-conceptions that imprison minds and segregate interactions and to bring to the surface public moral transparency. Due to advancements in communication technologies, most world communities and environments have become open and thus, information flows are now integral components in the life of people and institutions. In the light of these new demands, the departments of English at Arab universities should explicitly incorporate into their stated goals that sharing abundant information is a new community experience that requires adequate handling in terms of classroom practices. Critical thinking and analytical skills could be developed in students while reacting to the contents and the surrounding circumstances as reflected in this abundance of information. By exposure to texts that address these issues, English majors can be trained to achieve objectivity and have access to information transparency in the new open world of today. During the last three decades, information has been growing faster than the individual and institutional capacities required to make sense of the new diversity of signal and messages. If we are to achieve quality education, we have to maximize our institutional and, consequently the individual capacities to absorb information saturation and its various consequences such as those of confusion and randomness. By doing so, the departments of English can have a very significant input into the aspired-to, long term educational outcomes of achieving order and security. When trained in the skill of “creaming” the information, students are expected to re-establish the equilibrium between oneself and the unstructured random bulk of messages. Since the content of education is inevitably affected by this massive flow of information, success in the quality of education will go incomplete unless students are skillfully trained to bring about this state of equilibrium, which in its turn feeds the overall educational security.

5. The Multidisciplinary Mode of Handling Globalization

Globalization at the educational level must have specific properties. There are some overlapping components of globalization to be appropriately approached at the educational level. First, elements of global education should be available to all students, children as well as adults, as continuously as possible if genuine worldmindedness is to be developed. English majors at universities, over all years of study, have to be provided with the opportunities of investigating broader frameworks of globalization and marginalization with the purpose of training them on investigating how processes of domination and resistance are negotiated either on a local or international level since quite many issues in this field are subject to controversy. Second, the subject matter and topics of global education are most often handled in a multidisciplinary mode. This of course entails that topics are shared by the different disciplines of study since the body of knowledge involved in global education is a hybrid one and no specific institution or department at the higher education level is only shouldered the responsibility for this task. So, all departments including those of English language and literature are expected to have a very significant contribution to the input and the outcomes of global education. It cannot be done by the social studies field alone; it must be done by work in all fields. It is true that social studies educators may have been among the first to see opportunities to nourish worldmindedness through history and the social sciences, but others must join them in numerous disciplines. The third ingredient is instructional media. Since learners have heterogeneous needs, interests, abilities, talents, problems and aspirations, innumerable methods and materials are to be tailored to cater for these individual differences. Syllabi of English language and literature should introduce students to concepts of self-directed learning and equip them with the skills they need to develop further if they are to engage in self-directed learning.

6. The Input of Literature in Globalization

How can the teaching of literature as a basic component of the humanistic education move the student towards a global perspective in his/her general outlook on the world? It has been mentioned earlier that some of the imperatives of involvement in a global culture include skills of self-directed learning, critical thinking, analysis, sifting information and problem solving. Such skills could be enhanced through exposition to

comparative literary perspectives on globalization. Courses offered by the departments of English through successful implementation can provide training opportunities of studying selected literary texts from a range of periods and cultures. This will lead to critical and creative discussion of key issues of globalization. A study like this in comparative literature will provide opportunities to read in English translation works from diverse linguistic and national traditions. At the same time, questions of language, translation and canonicity in world literature can be considered. More precisely, students can see how globalization affects literary production, distribution and reception.

Of course, a variety of goals are pursued in the teaching of literature. Predominant among them, are two. First, the esthetic properties of style, metaphor, imagery and the structural elements are assessed in addition to considering the message or the idea expressed when looking at a play, novel or poem. Second, we look at how people in these different works of literature live; how they relate to one another; what character traits, events, or social conventions direct and influence their lives; what their general socioeconomistatus is; how they interact and cope with their environment, whether physical or historical. It is on this second level of observation that literature plays the role of the carrier of information and messages from different times, from other parts of the world, from unknown strata of our own as well as foreign social structures, and from value systems that may be very familiar or even frighteningly alien to us. The global perspective approach can be highly rewarding and informative to compare structural elements of different pieces of literary art in various civilizations and to gain insight into the cultural esthetics as manifested in literary works.

Through courses like world literature, teaching could be geared towards highlighting the sameness among all human beings and all human societal or political organizations. It could also be directed to show students that differences among societies are often only different outward manifestations. This can be achieved by selecting a series of works with a similar theme from different times and cultural spheres. Love, for example as a universal theme could be handled in a number of novels that deal with it in the local community, or a closely related one and in three other cultures with different social rituals, conventions and taboos. These

contrasting examples would demonstrate to students stunning differences that exist among their culture and others on many levels of social interaction. Other themes may include choice of marriage partners, woman-man relationships, various forms of family structure and how persons of old age are treated differently across cultures. The greatly contrasting sexual mores of other cultures can be examined, or the value system that each culture has built based on its conventions, its societal needs, and its religious beliefs.

Other literary genres are to be used such as plays that show thematically the issue of human conflict between loyalty to oneself and to one's own moral beliefs as a major theme in the literatures of all peoples. Poems that show the sufferings of human beings in periods of great fear and distress can also be utilized. Autobiographies of important contemporary figures from other countries can show how societies are looked at by others. Regardless of the literary genre, the ultimate purpose is to make students aware of the differences and the sameness that can be found among different cultures. More specifically, students can be made aware of the fact that human beings, no matter what their social mores and conventions may be, strive for the same basic happiness and human fulfillment, for love, respect, security and dignity in their human existence. If the aimed goal is realized, students will possess the increased appreciation for cultural value systems other than their own and, having sensed the sameness of human desires and intentions, they will also enjoy a heightened understanding and an informed respect for the otherness of the foreign.

Moreover, as far as the policy of course design and selection is concerned, it has been stated earlier that comparative literary perspectives on globalization can be of much help in this respect. This brings to mind the consideration of the "English" literature of globalization or the globalization of "English" literature. In a course handling this issue, focus can be on literary responses to globalization through an exploration of contemporary works of fiction in English. In postgraduate programs, for example, students can be directed towards investigating literary texts which represent changing notions of global relationships, while also considering some of the ways in which those changing global relationships have functioned economically and discursively to shape the literary field. In

particular, they can consider the process by which individual texts become incorporated in popular and academic discourse into a category of world literature – a category whose nominal globalism masks myriad exclusions on the basis of language, culture and geography. In their approach to the literature, students can be stimulated to utilize the tools of literary theory, particularly postcolonial theory to critically analyze the multinational move for emphasizing hybridity, heterogeneity, and border-crossing.

Furthermore, globalization can be further dealt with in the literatures of immigration and Diaspora. A course of this nature will help students examine contemporary literature written in English by authors who have migrated from ex-colonial countries to metropolitan centers in order to assess the cultural re-fractions and displacements occasioned by globalization. Students can be guided to explore the possibilities of finding adequate ways to organize a study of the prolific and diverse range of literatures about displacement. What kind of human subjects are raised and circulated in these literatures? What specific role does the English language play in yielding globalized consciousness? How is resistance to or subversion of the neo-imperial movements of globalization articulated in these texts? Students can consider this in relation to contemporary debates in cultural studies about the terms “migration” and “diaspora” as well as in relation to the critical methods that have emerged from postcolonial theory and minority studies.

7. The Future of English in the Age of Globalization

It has been voiced by some linguists such as Phillipson (1988) that the “professional training of ELT people concentrates on linguistics, psychology and education in a restricted sense. It pays little attention to international relations, development studies, theories of culture or international contact, or the politics or sociology of language or education.” A number of writers have pointed to the broad range of cultural and political effects of the spread of English. This widespread is believed to not only threaten other cultures but also their related cultures. Quite many believe that the new position of English in the world gives it the role of an international gatekeeper and thus is bound up with aspects of global relations such as the spread of capitalism, development aid and the “dominance particularly of North America,” Pennycook (1996:13).

Reference to the relevance of world literature and comparative literary perspectives has been made in handling the issue of globalization. It is about time that the departments of English at Arab universities consider the question of what English and English literature will be like in the 21st-century and how it will be studied. This serious reconsideration has to be carried out in the light of globalization and the simultaneous move toward the preservation of cultural distinction or in the light of the paradox of a fragmented global village.

Foreign language learning is an area of humanistic study, which is viewed to bring about broadened perspectives in the minds of young people almost more than all other areas. The fact that the use of English as a major international language of business, diplomacy and science should be fully invested as a tool for understanding across national boundaries. This advantage that English has can and should be taken into consideration while tailoring the courses, especially at freshman and sophomore levels whereby extensive cross-cultural readings are proposed and offered. This would provide a reasonable penetration of other cultures in addition to preparing in students splendidly an open attitude towards and an appreciation for the broader vistas that a global education attempts.

As mentioned earlier, the topics and issues of global education are not the responsibility of just the departments of social studies. These could and should be disseminated in the courses offered by other departments. For example, topics that are of truly global concern and which should be dealt with by a worldwide effort could be presented through reading/listening texts or texts handled in an oral skills course. Such subjects might be nuclear war, providing food for the world, control of population growth, industrial pollution, energy problems, etc. Of course the including languages do not directly relate to solutions of these problems. However, people throughout the world who wish to address these questions must first learn how to understand each other's histories and traditions, the different value systems and societal structures, the contrasting modes of thinking and of approaching problems. Thus, through the teaching of these subjects using English as a medium of instruction, the whole learning process becomes a multipurpose one. Learning the target language is furthered and the issues of global education and the targeted values can be acquired and enhanced. In this way, that is, in language

courses misunderstandings, mistrust and preconceived notions can be eliminated, respect and understanding for other peoples of the world might be built, and the sameness of humankind can be highlighted and taught. So, it is in these areas that the humanities including language, which is a human phenomenon, can make a contribution if they shift their approach to a more global perspective.

However, in postgraduate programs, the future of English in the age of globalization should be given priority. The relevance of this question, as stated previously, stems from the irony or paradox of the postmodern view of particularity, difference, and cultural relativistic incommensurability called upon by a fragmented global village. Until fairly recently, "English" literature has been thought of primarily as fiction, drama, and poetry written by citizens of Britain and the United States. It was conceived, that is, as a national literature, divided off for purposes of study into British and American literature. Now, however, under the forces of globalization and migration, "English" literature is being written all over the world by authors born in dozens of countries. It is doubtless that we have entered the age of global and multicultural literature. Thus, in this age, English is coming to look more like a language for writing than a national literature. The identities of those who write it have often been formed by a global culture and by the experience of displacement and migration – rather than by rootedness and tradition.

The emergence of a global culture, moreover, facilitated as it is by mass media in general and by forms of electronic communication and publication in particular, threatens the primacy of the book and of written communication. More and more literature in the future, it seems safe to claim, will be written as hypertext. Both these developments will have a profound impact on English in the future. Not only does it seem likely that English will continue to evolve away from narrow national boundaries toward a more global cultural and political context, but the medium of its very transmission has already started to change dramatically. English, the text, authorship and the very act of reading are all undergoing radical changes in a way that suggests a profoundly different academic discipline will come out in the new millenium.

Therefore, the departments of English at Arab universities have got to show awareness of all these developments, which come on the heels of

earlier changes that have already transformed the sense of English and how it ought to be studied not only in universities but also in high schools and colleges. Awareness of the fact that traditional assumptions about texts, authors, reading, and the activity of literary criticism have undergone tremendous changes in the age of theory has also to be reflected. In response, it is time to regularly offer courses that mix canonical and popular forms, utilize electronic texts. More and more, the study of English has to be subsumed by the study of culture. As a result, a question is to be raised as to what all of this bodes for the future of English in the new millenium, especially when combined with the pressures of globalization and hypertextuality. Will global culture turn out to simply be another form of the West's cultural imperialism, or will that truly new hybrid cultural forms emerge out of this trend?

Wardhaugh (1983) believes that "one of the greatest paradoxes of modern times is that while developments in transportation, in the mass media, and in the corporate ways of doing business have turned the world into a 'global village', that village itself has become more and more fragmented as a community. The ethnic consciousness which underlies much nationalism, regionalism and factionalism has never been stronger than it is now in a world of multinationals, global alliances, and satellite telecommunications.... This 'tribalism in modern dress' is very conspicuous feature of contemporary life "(p.153).

Taking into consideration these notions voiced by Wardhaugh, a new demand that has to be handled in postgraduate programs is to expose Arab students to varied texts and cross-cultural types of discourse especially from the postmodern era for purposes of analysis in terms of form and content to examine the size of the input that these types of discourse may or may not have into this claimed paradox of a fragmented global village. For example, students have to be made aware of what can be termed as linguistic violence. In a world full of spots of conflict and strife for freedom, human rights, equity and resolution of all forms of dispute through dialoguing, what Day (1985) termed as "linguistic genocide" is reactivated and thus is acquiring a special echo. This brings to mind whether or not there is a special type of violence characterized as linguistic? What kind of discourse can have this epidemic? Is it the political discourse, for example? Day (1985), in his study of the gradual replacement of Chamorro in Guam and the North Marianas, referred to

linguistic curtailment, genocide, where he pessimistically concludes that “as long as the Marianas remain under the control of the United States, the English language will continue to replace ChamorroThis has been American policy and practice elsewhere.”

Reading Day’s prolonged talk about this phenomenon of linguistic violence and enmity stirs up other questions related to cultural parching, which can be exercised by one language to sustain the dominance of the supernatant culture. What type of texts can use language as an effective weapon to launch this special type of war? How can they perform this function and what are the specific characteristics of this texture? By exposure to different types of texts taken from other related disciplines, students can develop appreciation of how of language can contribute to the claimed worldwide democratic movement. They can also develop the skill of assessing language ability in the light of the universal call for a culture of peace on the one hand or how it can be a real call for being schizophrenic on the other. Quite many talk about the claim of the growth of ‘virtual’ communities and subcultures across national boundaries. This of course, embodies parallel invitations for diminishing opportunities for human dialogue.

Last but not least, this new outlook will hopefully help students in developing valid and reliable set of criteria for establishing sound but relatively objective judgements in text analysis. In addition, it will help enhance skills of interpreting various media messages and images in the light of the pertinence of difference, otherness and identity as interpretive mechanisms of postmodern political, social and economic frustrations if any exist.

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