



**TÜRKİYE CUMHURİYETİ
ADANA ALPARSLAN TÜRKER SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
UNIVERSITY**

**GRADUATE SCHOOL
POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
DEPARTMENT**

**THE INTERSECTION OF GLOBALIZATION AND LINGUISTIC
DIVERSITY: THE TED TRANSLATORS INITIATIVE**

CİHAN EKMEKÇİ

M.A.

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ADANA, 2025

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

THE INTERSECTION OF GLOBALIZATION AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY: THE TED TRANSLATORS INITIATIVE

This **M.A.** thesis, completed under the conditions determined by the relevant regulations, by **Cihan Ekmekçi** with student number 23802201001 in **Adana Alparslan Türkeş Science and Technology University Institute of Graduate School Political Science and Public Administration Department**, has been evaluated by the following academic committee, and approved in accordance with the relevant articles of the "Adana Alparslan Türkeş Science and Technology University Graduate Education Regulations".

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DECLARATION OF CONFORMITY

In this thesis study, which was prepared following the thesis writing rules of Adana Alparslan Türkeş Science and Technology University Institute of Graduate School, I declare that I provide all the information, documents, evaluations and results in accordance with scientific ethics and moral codes without resorting to any means or assistance that would be contrary to scientific ethics and traditions. I also declare that I refer to all of the articles I used in this study with appropriate references and accept all moral and legal consequences if a situation is found contrary to my statement regarding my work.

08/12/2025

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Cihan Ekmekçi

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I am deeply grateful to the TED Translators community, whose passion for linguistic diversity inspired this work. Their participation in the survey strengthened the empirical foundation of this thesis. I also wish to thank the TED Localization team for their time and valuable perspectives for the interview.

ABSTRACT

THE INTERSECTION OF GLOBALIZATION AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY: THE TED TRANSLATORS INITIATIVE

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M.A., Department of Political Science and Public Administration

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This thesis investigates how globalization reshapes linguistic diversity by reinforcing fluid yet persistent hierarchies among languages. Rather than functioning as a neutral process of cultural exchange, globalization, driven by capitalist structures and accelerated by rapid technological expansion, creates conditions in which certain languages gain symbolic and economic capital while others are marginalized. The emergence and reinforcement of global linguistic hierarchies generates specific spaces of inclusion and exclusion.

Within this context, the TED Translators program is used as a case study to analyze the effectiveness of community-driven translation initiatives in representing linguistic diversity, serving as a large-scale example of digitally mediated volunteer localization program. The study explores patterns of language homogenization and linguistic hierarchy, as well as the functionality of translation practices in a globalizing world characterized by stratified and evolving language dynamics.

Keywords: globalization, glocalization, language homogenization, linguistic diversity, linguistic hierarchy.

ÖZET

KÜRESELLEŞME VE DİLSEL ÇEŞİTLİLİĞİN KESİŞİMİ: TED TRANSLATORS GİRİŞİMİ

Cihan EKMEKÇİ

Yüksek Lisans, Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi Anabilim Dalı

Danışman: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Murat Yüksel

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Bu tez, küreselleşmenin diller arasındaki dilsel çeşitliliği, akışkan ancak kalıcı hiyerarşileri pekiştirerek nasıl yeniden şekillendirdiğini incelemektedir. Tarafsız bir kültürel alışveriş süreci olmaktan ziyade, kapitalist yapılardan beslenen ve hızlı teknolojik gelişmelerle ivme kazanan küreselleşme, bazı dillerin sembolik ve ekonomik sermaye kazanırken diğerlerinin marjinalleştiği koşullar yaratmaktadır. Küresel dilsel hiyerarşilerin ortaya çıkışı ve pekişmesi, dâhil edilme ve dışlanma için belirli alanlar üretmektedir.

Bu bağlamda, TED Çevirmenleri programı, dilsel çeşitliliği temsil etmede topluluk temelli çeviri girişimlerinin etkinliğini analiz etmek üzere bir örnek çalışma olarak kullanılmakta ve dijital olarak aracılanmış büyük ölçekli bir gönüllü yerelleştirme örneği sunmaktadır. Çalışma, küreselleşen dünyada tabakalaşmış ve evrilen dil dinamikleriyle nitelenen bir bağlamda, dilsel homojenleşme ve dilsel hiyerarşi örüntülerinin yanı sıra çeviri uygulamalarının işlevselliğini de araştırmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: küreselleşme, glokalleşme, dilsel homojenleşme, dilsel çeşitlilik, dilsel hiyerarşi.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	: Artificial Intelligence
ASCII	: American Standard Code for Information Interchange
CERN	: European Organization for Nuclear Research
EFL	: English as a Foreign Language
ELT	: English Language Teaching
ESL	: English as a Second Language
ICT	: Information and Communication Technology
IELTS	: International English Language Testing System
LLM	: Large Language Model
NATO	: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
TED	: Technology, Entertainment and Design
TESOL	: Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TOEFL	: Test of English as a Foreign Language
U.K.	: United Kingdom
U.S.	: United States
UN	: United Nations
UNICODE	: Universal Character Encoding Standard

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization has emerged as a multi-layered and defining force of the 21st century, reshaping political, economic and cultural landscapes all over the world on a massive scale. Increased mobility, cultural exchange, and technological advancements have reduced distances and intertwined societies across the globe. While globalization has presented remarkable opportunities for exchange and cooperation, it has also intensified inequalities and cultural homogenization, especially in the realm of language.

Among the many layers of globalization, its effect on language dynamics in the contemporary world remains significant. The global information flows, the capital, and cultural products increasingly center on a limited number of dominant languages, mainly English, which marginalize less widely spoken languages and harms linguistic diversity.

This thesis explores the complex interplay between the globalization phenomenon that started in the late 20th century, which has led to language homogenization, and the functionality and effectiveness of the local and national languages. The thesis conducted thorough research into language dynamics in the modern world by exploring how socio-political, economic and cultural influences have contributed to the rise and decline of certain languages, how globalization both affects and is affected by these dynamics, how the digitalization has accelerated these processes, and more importantly, how and to what extent linguistic diversity is represented, and how linguistic hierarchies are shaped in this context.

The research question of this thesis is to assess how effective community-driven language translation practices with advanced digital tools are in representing and promoting linguistic diversity. In this regard, the thesis aims to explore the extent to which the content is translated and distributed across different languages, identifies which languages receive the highest volume of translations, and analyses how these languages differ in terms of functionality and effectiveness in the global discourse. It further explores how translation flows are structured within a hierarchical system and clarifies the role English plays as a pivot language within these flows.

Linguistic diversity has been conceptualized as the range and distribution of the world's languages, shaped by ecological, cultural, and historical processes that govern how languages emerge, evolve and disappear (Nettle, 1999). In Nettle's conceptualization, the diversity not only refers to how many languages exist, but also how they are distributed and how much difference exists between them. It has been further argued that globalization reduces linguistic diversity, as smaller languages lose functionality and prestige to dominant ones, such as English and Mandarin.

Scholars challenge the notion that linguistic diversity is merely a cultural issue, fundamentally associating it with issues such as power, inequality, and social justice. This is because certain languages are given more prestige, which can marginalize speakers of less widely spoken languages. Access to education, employment and even citizenship is regulated through dominant languages; in this context, language functions as a gatekeeper, and it creates certain spaces for inclusion and exclusion. (Piller, 2016).

The use and dominance of certain languages in the contemporary world has been strongly discussed within the concept of symbolic power and linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991); a distinctive approach and a critique to the traditional linguistic theories, according to which languages are not neutral systems but historically, socially and politically constructed mediums of power. Bourdieu argues that there is a certain value and legitimacy attached to certain linguistic forms within a specific social context. Speakers who possess more linguistic capital, i.e. speakers of widely spoken, dominant languages, can convert it to economic and social advantage and prestige; however, speakers of less spoken languages are marginalized with their access to opportunities reduced.

Socio-political influences and the effects of globalization have led to the emergence and persistence of linguistic hierarchies, which make them highly effective within global communication structures. In the proposed model of the Global Language System (de Swaan, 2001), all the languages in the world are categorized into four groups. In the bottom of this hierarchical system, there are peripheral languages that make up about 98% of all the languages, which are mostly used orally and not recognized by law. In the third level above, there are central languages, which usually have nation-wide recognition; they are taught in schools and used in the

public domain. In the second level, there are super-central languages, which are regionally significant as they are spoken across multiple countries, such as French or Russian. At the top, there is only one hyper-central language, English, which serves as lingua franca and used primarily for global communication. Swaan's proposed model makes the role of the English language especially distinctive in the research of the thesis because English becomes the node through which most translation, communication, and information exchange flows, and it functions as a pivot language in translations.

Furthermore, linguistic inequalities and hierarchies emerged in the era of globalization have accelerated in the 1990's with the use of the internet; and such inequalities also apply in the digital spaces (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011). Scholars have questioned the potential of technology in representing linguistic diversity, mainly advanced digital tools and artificial intelligence (AI)-based systems, arguing that these systems tend to reproduce the existing linguistic hierarchies due to the nature of their training data sets (Andersson & Kuteeva, 2024).

These theoretical insights illustrate that globalization shapes language not through linear homogenization but through complex interactions between global forces and local linguistic practices. In order to better understand this complexity, it is necessary to examine frameworks that account for the simultaneous pressures toward uniformity and diversification, most notably the concept of glocalization, which is a portmanteau of the two words "globalization" and "localization." It was coined as a term by sociologist Roland Robertson (1995), according to which tendencies toward homogeneity and standardization occur simultaneously with heterogeneity and diversity. Globalization and diversity have often been used academically as contrasting yet inseparable concepts, symbolically represented by Friedman as the Lexus and the Olive Tree (1999). The Lexus symbolizes modernity and technology whereas the olive tree represents cultural identity.

Even though the concept of glocalization primarily discussed by Robertson (1995) presented an answer to the question of what the relationship between the global and the local is, with a strong stance on the presence and necessity of diversity, hybridity, and the local values for globalization; critiques and limitations to this concept have also emerged with the argument that localized forms

and variations might seem to foster diversity and inclusion but in fact serve the top-down expansion of a standardized culture, called globalization. (Ritzer & Ryan, 2002).

Ritzer and Ryan (2002) argue that localized forms lack distinctive content, and therefore they are easier to adapt to local societies and communities, rather than rich distinctive content that could encounter challenges in the local market. Such empty forms, they refer to as “nothingness,” are also cost-effective and practical to replicate and ensure efficiency. Therefore, globalization is merely an expansion and dissemination of forms without meaningful specificity. Globalization also suggests that commodities and the media are main factors driving social change in the era of globalization, and they hold power over individuals and societies, and these systems shape what people consume, think, and value.

From this perspective, translation and localization practices, although portrayed as mechanisms of diversity, do not challenge cultural or linguistic homogenization, they function as expanding globalized content, not promoting or representing genuine linguistic diversity. In this context, the functionality and effectiveness of translation and localization initiatives and practices remain controversial.

The TED Translators Initiative was used as an example of the proposed thesis to observe trends of language homogenization and the presence of linguistic hierarchies. TED Conferences, LLC, is an American-Canadian non-profit organization that holds several conferences a year in English with significant talks on not only science and technology but also important global matters such as the climate crisis and the ongoing wars, and these videos have significant outreach through its multimedia platforms. TED also promotes inclusivity with its TED Translators initiative, providing subtitles in over 115 languages and artificial intelligence (AI)-powered dubbing in select languages.

The TED Translators is a global network of volunteers who subtitle and recently helped AI-dub the conference talks. There were 53,182 volunteers registered at the time the research was conducted, and there were nearly 250,000 pieces of translated content. The TED Translators initiative has been chosen as a case study for this thesis because of its extensive network of

volunteers and TED's highly effective use of digital media to reach a large global audience. Additionally, the volunteer translators use advanced digital tools and large language models (LLMs) provided by TED to efficiently translate the conference talks, further emphasizing the relevance to this thesis.

The methodology of the study included a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods. In order to provide an in-depth examination of the TED Translators Initiative, a thorough triangulation of analysis of the initiative has been conducted: the actual outcome of the program through content analyses, followed by the motivations and attitudes of the volunteers through a survey, and finally the motivations and strategies of the TED Localization department through a semi-structured interview.

As a secondary data collection method, the 115 languages used by the TED Translators program were ranked according to the number of translations each language has submitted and published. The data, obtained from the official website of TED, was categorized and interpreted according to the socio-political frameworks discussed in the second chapter of the thesis. The content analysis based on the data provided significant findings about contemporary language dynamics, linguistic hierarchies, and the influence of the initiative within this context. Another content analysis was conducted on the 25 most translated TED Talks to identify common or similar themes and assess whether volunteers influence and shape the selection of content being translated, and to what extent such a selection interacts with linguistic hierarchies in the context of globalization.

After the content analyses, an online survey method was employed to collect primary data. The survey was designed to understand the motivations and attitudes to translate for TED and to represent linguistic diversity as a volunteer. The combination of open-ended questions and the Likert-scale items provided both qualitative and quantitative data. 46 volunteers from 28 countries all over the world speaking a total of 38 different languages have participated in the survey. The submissions are coded and then categorized for a thorough thematic analysis. The analysis provided various themes and aspects from the perspective of volunteers about representing linguistic diversity, the effectiveness of the initiative, and the role of technology and AI.

And lastly, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the localization department in charge of the TED Translators program to assess motivations and long-term visions of the program in a technologically and globally transforming world. The thematic content analysis of the interview provided important insight through the lens of the organization.

The last chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the analyses and provides a comprehensive answer to the research question. The roles of languages in the context of globalization, the effectiveness of translation and localization efforts, the rise and fall of certain languages in a stratified system, and the role that the technology and AI play in representing linguistic diversity are discussed. Overall, the research offers an in-depth examination of language dynamics and the linguistic hierarchies formed in the era of globalization, highlighting the roles that languages play in global discourse.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS & LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Defining Globalization and Understanding Glocalization

Globalization is often portrayed as a process that enhances linguistic diversity through interaction and exchange; however, its outcomes often reveal the persistence of structural linguistic inequalities. Within this context, even though language diversity attempts such as localization and translation are commonly presented as inclusion practices and mechanisms of adapting global content into local settings, such processes often operate within the same hierarchies they aim to challenge. Linguistic adaptations in academic, social and digital settings maintain the dominance of the most-spoken languages, especially English. Therefore, the relationship between globalization and language dynamics must be examined critically; and for that reason, the concepts of globalization and glocalization must first be defined and then discussed within the broader context of linguistic diversity.

Globalization was popularized as a term in 1983 (Levitt, 1983) when it was defined as the changing social behaviors and technology that allow companies to sell standardized products all over the world. However, globalization is not a one-dimensional discipline but rather an outcome of an increasingly growing interconnectedness across nations, societies, and institutions.

Scholte (2002) discusses globalization is best defined with his concept of supraterritoriality in which economic, political and social connections are no longer constrained by physical geography: “the spread of transplanetary – and in recent times more particularly supraterritorial – connections between people.” (p.13). Scholte further rejects that globalization must be clearly distinct from internationalization, liberalization, universalization or Westernization as definitions based on these notions would hinder the efforts to understand globalization under the circumstances of the contemporary world.

A relatively comprehensive definition of globalization emphasizes the process of deepening integration and the expanding scale of global flows, including the movement of people, goods,

capital, information, and culture as “a growing magnitude or intensity of global flows such that states and societies become increasingly enmeshed in worldwide systems and networks of interaction” (Held & McGrew, 2000, p.3).

George Ritzer (2010) defined globalization as “a transplanetary process or set of processes involving increasing liquidity and the growing multidirectional flows of people, objects, places and information as well as the structures they encounter and create that are barriers to, or expedite, those flows” (p.2).

Another conceptualization of globalization specifies it as an inevitable and accelerating integration of the most important systems in today’s society on a global scale: “Globalization is the inexorable integration of markets, transportation systems, and communication systems to a degree never witnessed before” (Friedman, 1999, p.21). This definition emphasizes the technological and economic forces that drive the growing interdependence among nations.

A commonly referenced definition is offered by Anthony Giddens (1990), who defines globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (p.64). It is a key definition as it significantly highlights the interaction between the local and global, where one action in one part of the world could impact another.

Friedman’s (1999) example of the Lexus and the Olive Tree also represents the dynamics between globalization and local culture. The Lexus symbolizes modernity, globalization, and the drive for economic development, representing the desire for progress, wealth, and the spread of global markets and technologies. The Olive Tree symbolizes tradition, local identity, and cultural heritage, representing the enduring importance of maintaining cultural roots and values despite the pressures of globalization. Friedman uses this metaphor to illustrate the balancing act between embracing the opportunities of a globalized world (the Lexus) and preserving local traditions and identities (the Olive Tree).

The discussion between the local and global also highlights the concept of glocalization, according to which tendencies toward homogeneity and standardization occur simultaneously with heterogeneity and diversity. It was argued that globalization does not erase the local, but rather interacts with it in complex ways (Robertson, 1992). McDonald's adjusting its menus to local diets around the world is one of many examples of this concept:

The case of McDonald's is instructive: the company has had to adapt its products and marketing to suit local cultures — offering lamb burgers in India, teriyaki burgers in Japan, and wine with meals in France. Thus, the McDonald's phenomenon is not simply the spread of American culture, but an ongoing process of localization within globalization. (Robertson, 1995, p.25-44)

This interplay between global forces and local identities directly mirrors the dynamics of linguistic diversity. As the Lexus pressures societies toward modernity while the Olive Tree anchors them in tradition, dominant global languages exert influence over communication, media, and technology, while local languages strive to maintain relevance and cultural expression. Localization efforts, such as community translation initiatives or adapting digital content to local languages, exemplify a glocal approach: They enable global content to reach wider audiences while embedding local linguistic and cultural nuances.

Robertson's (1992) description of glocalization argues that even the strongest brands cannot continue to sell only by being uniform everywhere, and they must glocalize to resonate with local consumers. Therefore, this is essential to globalization, because it requires particular attention to local distinctions.

However, there have been critiques and strong arguments to the notion of glocalization in the sense that standardization of global forms leads to the loss of local diversity and meaning (Ritzer, 2004). It is also argued that even though these forms are adapted to local contexts through glocalization, they still lack the true value behind the local culture and diversity. The example of McDonald's and its adapted local menus, such as Teriyaki Burgers in Japan, suggests that glocalized forms are commodified and not authentic.

In this regard, Ritzer (2003) is also known to have developed the concept of globalization, another portmanteau coined as a counterpart to glocalization, joining the words growth and globalization. It refers to the expansion of globalized brands, products, and cultural norms in a way that dominates and marginalizes local cultures. According to this concept, what the society witnesses is not true localization, or glocalization, but rather a form of controlled adaptation that serves global expansion. This leads to cultural homogenization, in which seemingly distinct local variations ultimately reproduce standardized global patterns.

The theories centered around the concept of globalization, and glocalization in particular, support the argument that languages adapt to global forces, and glocalization applies linguistically as well (Pennycook, 2007). In this theory, even though the English language spreads globally, it does not spread uniformly; therefore, glocalized English versions emerge.

As the English language was spreading across the globe as *lingua franca*, localized and indigenized versions of the English language, termed as World Englishes, started emerging in response. According to the three-circle framework introduced by Kachru (1985), which explains why these varieties have emerged, countries in the world can be categorized into three circles based on whether English coexists with local and national languages officially and unofficially, and the domains in which it is effectively used. The three circles are the inner circle where English is spoken as native language, thus it is used in all domains of life, such as the United States (U.S.) or the United Kingdom (U.K.); the outer circle where it is spoken as a second language, therefore coexists with English, such as post-colonial countries; and the expanding circle where English is learned as a foreign language for international communication, such as Türkiye and Russia.

The three-circle framework illustrates how English, as the global *lingua franca*, spreads unevenly and interacts differently with local linguistic ecologies. In the inner circle such as the U.K. or the U.S., English dominates all domains, exemplifying the homogenizing pole of globalization, where a single language fully structures communication and carries cultural prestige. In the outer circle, such as India or Nigeria, English functions as an institutional second language, coexisting with indigenous languages. This coexistence shows conditional diversity: local languages remain active, but English maintains higher symbolic and economic capital, sustaining the linguistic

hierarchies. In the expanding circle, such as Türkiye or Russia, English is learned as a foreign language primarily for global exchange (Kachru, 1985).

The emergence of World Englishes is a clear example of glocalization, the simultaneous global spread and local adaptation of a cultural product, and the consequences of it in linguistic terms. Globally, English functions as the lingua franca of international business, technology, and media, driven by globalization. Locally, on the other hand, each region reshapes English to reflect local phonology, grammar, and culturally specific vocabulary. This connection strengthens the argument that globalization does not simply replace local languages with a uniform English. Instead, English arrives with global authority but is localized to fit community needs, producing diversified versions of the English language while leaving the structural hierarchy intact. Furthermore, diversified versions of English are highly stigmatized, creating a push toward a standard English. Thus, World Englishes is a fundamental example of a linguistically glocal pattern: local agency softens global dominance, but the overarching linguistic hierarchy in which English functions as the primary medium for global communication remains unchanged, reinforcing the language homogenization.

Despite this glocal diversification or the example of glocalization, the global spread of English has been observed as a process inseparable from colonial histories and contemporary power relations with the argument that English functions not merely as a neutral medium of international communication but as a carrier of cultural and ideological dominance. Rather than emerging naturally as a global lingua franca, the prominence of English is traced to imperial expansion and the political and economic interests that continue to sustain it. From this perspective, the worldwide teaching and promotion of English reproduce linguistic hierarchies by privileging Western norms and marginalizing local languages and knowledge systems (Pennycook, 2007; Phillipson, 1991).

Based on these critiques, the concept of globalization further explains the dynamics behind the global spread of English, globalization and linguistic diversity. Globalization refers to the expansion of global products and cultural norms in ways that prioritize growth and market dominance, often marginalizing local practices (Ritzer, 2003). Within this framework, English,

and the subsequent presence of dominant languages, can be viewed not only as a lingua franca but also as a commodified product as it is standardized, packaged, and circulated to meet the demands of global communication, education, and commerce (Heller, 2005). The apparent diversity of English and the presence of other dominant languages thus mask an underlying homogenization: translation and localization efforts, while appearing to promote inclusion, primarily function to expand the reach of dominant discourses and sustain the global linguistic hierarchy that privileges English and other dominant languages over other languages.

The critiques of glocalization and the concept of globalization closely relate to the dynamics of linguistic diversity under globalization. Just as global brands adapt superficially to local contexts while maintaining their overarching dominance, global languages, mainly English, shape translation practices and digital communication in ways that privilege dominant norms and hierarchies. In community-driven translation initiatives, even when content is localized into minority or regional languages, the influence of English and globally dominant varieties remains strong and guiding structural choices. In this sense, localization and translation function less as tools for genuine linguistic empowerment and more as mechanisms for spreading the main global discourse under the guise of linguistic diversity, reinforcing hierarchical language structures. This mirrors the process of globalization: Local linguistic forms are modified to fit global expectations, producing a controlled adaptation that may preserve surface-level diversity but ultimately strengthens underlying homogenizing pressures and reproduces linguistic hierarchies.

In this regard, different globalization theories are important to understand linguistic diversity as they provide different approaches for analyzing how global processes interact with languages, which enable scholars to critically examine whether globalization acts as a homogenizing force for languages, a tool for promoting linguistic diversity, or a combination of both. They also help explain why policies, technologies, and international communication strategies may favor dominant languages while simultaneously creating spaces for local linguistic adaptation.

2.2 Globalization Theories

2.2.1 The globalist approach

The globalist approach, also referred to as the optimist view, stresses the positive outcomes of globalization, such as democracy, free trade, and technological access, while acknowledging the significant change and transformation happening all over the globe starting from the late 20th century to the present (Held, et al., 1999)

Globalists argue that the established power of nation-states is decreasing as they become increasingly interdependent and subject to global economic actors. States are considered to be losing control over economic policies and regulations because these are progressively influenced by global market dynamics and supranational institutions. Instead, regions and cities that are globally connected to the world become more important actors. In this view, globalization is deemed as an opportunity for efficiency, innovation and global integration. (Ohmae, 1990).

It has been argued that globalization and liberal democracy are strongly linked to each other; and liberal democracy, spread by globalization, is the final form of an ideal political system on the grounds that only this system has achieved fostering values such as democracy, human rights, and rule of law. His thesis further suggests that this system is compatible with human nature, thus as globalization continues to spread, the liberal democracy norms will also spread, and any resistance encountered will only be temporary. This theory emphasizes the popular globalist notion that globalization is an inevitable force (Fukuyama, 1989).

The globalist view also suggests that globalization fosters cultural diversity and heterogeneity by enabling cultural exchange, economic integration, and the dissemination of technology. As people increasingly encounter different cultures, they feel a stronger urge to retain their local culture; therefore, it leads to hybridization rather than homogenization. As geographical distances become less significant, individuals are freed from barriers to access to information and opportunities that globalization offers, including language barriers (Friedman, 2005). It can be inferred from this argument that globalization is considered to help wider communication and reach through speaking a common language.

From an optimistic standpoint, technology is also recognized as a positive driver for access, inclusion, and integration. Globalization has accelerated the spread of technology and increased the volume of knowledge flows through digital means. Although these flows are concentrated in the developed countries, they create windows of opportunity for wider participation and access. Technology and digital networks can democratize access provided that relevant policies are implemented (Archibugi & Pietrobelli, 2003).

The role of technology in distributing access to information is essential to the globalist view. The acceleration and improvement of technology is so powerful that the information flow is unstoppable even if everyone in the world speaks a different language. The dissemination and adoption of the English language serves as a foundational infrastructure to regulate the transmission of knowledge and ideas (Held, et al., 1999). Moreover, the globalists defend this notion on the premises that electronic media has created a new form of space in which information is detached from physical distances. Before communication technologies, communication was significantly tied to physical places; and access to information was restricted to one's location and the group they belong to. However, the advancement of communication technologies has enabled individuals and societies to access real time information regardless of location, which makes geographical distances less relevant (Meyrowitz, 1985).

The globalist notion cannot be reduced to solely economic, political or technological globalization, nor can it be a westernized expansion; it also has certain implications for the modern social organization as evident in the rise of multi-national corporations, spread of popular culture, and global advocacy for environmental concerns, all of which require shared linguistic resources (Held, et al, 1999).

Linguistically, the globalist notion argues that access to information is democratized through the prevalence and spread of the English language. Crystal (2003) presents a neutral-to-positive approach to language dynamics, acknowledging that the rise of English as a global language in the era of globalization, indeed, provides a common linguistic platform for people all over the world to communicate and access resources. However, he emphasizes that multilingualism is required

and must be preserved; in that regard, the use and teaching of English must be balanced with efforts to promote and preserve linguistic diversity.

Building on this view, localization and translation can be seen as extensions of the globalist notion that globalization and technology simply democratize access to information. Translation, in this framework, symbolizes inclusion because it transforms global content into accessible forms for diverse audiences, and technology eases this process. Therefore, localization and translation hold the promise that globalization does not only connect the world socio-economically, but also linguistically by fostering worldwide communication and integration.

2.2.2 The skeptic approach

Traditionally called the pessimistic theory of globalization, the skeptic view challenges the notion that globalization is a new, all-inclusive and inevitable force that uniformly benefits all societies; on the contrary, this perspective suggests that what is called globalization has already existed for a long time, generates economic inequalities or sustains existing ones; causes exploitation, cultural homogenization and loss of cultural identity.

Leaning toward the left side of the political spectrum, the skeptic view argues that globalization creates structural inequalities and does not benefit all. In this argument, globalization is not a new phenomenon, it is an expansion of the capitalist world-economy in which cheaper labor and resources are exploited to widen borders (Wallerstein, 1974, 2004). It has been argued, through the modern world-systems analysis, that the world is divided into core countries, i.e. wealthy and industrialized countries; semi-periphery countries, i.e., intermediary zones such as developing countries; and periphery countries, exploited regions. Globalization is structured around this core-periphery hierarchy, benefiting the core at the expense of the periphery.

It has also been argued that globalization is not unprecedented, and there was highly intense international trade during the late 19th and 20th centuries as well. The economic activity happens within certain regions of the world, such as North America, Europe and parts of Asia, thus, it is not entirely global but is highly regionalized. Moreover, nation-states remain important actors that

shape the economy, and the notion of a borderless economic integration is a false belief (Hirst & Thompson, 1999).

From a more cultural and ideological perspective, it has also been argued that what is called globalization is, in fact, an expansion of Western (especially American) values and cultures, and this is not a balanced integration (Huntington, 1993). This Westernization and the promoted values are not universal and threaten local identities and values, and this leads to resistance and divisions, especially cultural and religious ones. In this regard, civilizations are key actors of global conflict: “A culturally homogenized world is neither possible nor desirable ... Western belief in the universality of Western culture suffers three problems: it is false; it is immoral; and it is dangerous” (Huntington, 1996, p.310).

Linguistically, it has been argued that the spread of English through globalization is not neutral but is rooted in historical patterns of linguistic dominance. This spread results in the marginalization of local languages, causing a global trend of linguistic homogenization (Phillipson, 1996; Pennycook 2017).

It has been suggested that the notion that English as a global lingua franca is universally beneficial is highly controversial, and it is closely tied to social, economic, and educational opportunities as speakers of dominant languages have easier access to global knowledge, while others encounter structural disadvantages. The marketing of the English language as valuable in globalization creates injustices and hierarchies because it is not equally distributed, thus leading to linguistic exclusion in the form of lack of access to education or employment opportunities due to language barriers (Piller, 2016).

Sociologists and political scientists have offered critical perspectives, arguing that the global spread of languages, particularly English, is driven by capitalist and neoliberal forces and constitutes a form of linguistic domination that threatens the vitality of local languages. It has even been suggested that a new form of imperialism exists in the modern world in the form of the prevalence of the use of English globally (Phillipson, 1996).

It is further argued that the widespread use and adaptation of English is not organic or neutral, and it is affiliated with historical, economic and political power hierarchies. The distinction between English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has blurred, and the two concepts have intertwined. In a country where English is an official language alongside the national language, English is taught as a second language and therefore mandatorily taught in schools; however, this is not required in a country where English is not an official language, and it must be taught solely as a foreign language. However, the Scandinavian countries quickly integrated the English language into their educational systems and in public domains, although English should have been adopted as a foreign language in these countries (Phillipson, 1996).

Globalization has indeed facilitated communication and exchange through a shared linguistic medium; however, it reinforces existing inequalities by privileging those already proficient in it. The assumption that the spread of English democratizes access to information overlooks the structural disparities in education, technology, and economic opportunity that determine who can effectively benefit from such linguistic globalization. Moreover, as English continues to occupy central domains such as science, technology, and higher education, many local and minority languages experience erosion and a decline in their prestige and effectiveness. Thus, rather than promoting true linguistic inclusivity, the global ascendancy of English often reproduces hierarchies that marginalize non-dominant languages and the cultural knowledge embedded within them.

2.2.3 The Transformationalist approach

The transformationalist perspective is the middle-ground approach to globalization, which acknowledges the profound changes that globalization brings to societies, economies, and cultures while also recognizing the significance of individuals, societies and countries to adapt to and shape these transformations.

Transformationalist rejects the argument of the globalist view that nation-states are no longer prominent actors in the contemporary world order; however, it does not accept the skeptic view that nation-states are still as strong as ever. From the perspective of transformationalists, the

emphasis on the nation-state is that the nation-state is undergoing restructuring, as is the case in almost everything else. In parallel with this, the position of the nation-state in the transforming world is closely related to globalization and should be subject to debate. Sociologist Anthony Giddens (2002) provides insight into globalization, which might have laid the grounds for the transformationalist view to emerge:

Are nation-states, and hence national political leaders, still powerful, or are they becoming largely irrelevant to the forces shaping the world? Nation-states are indeed still powerful and political leaders have a large role to play in the world. Yet at the same time the nation-state is being reshaped before our eyes. National economic policy can't be as effective as it once was. More importantly, nations have to rethink their identities now the older forms of geopolitics are becoming obsolete. Although this is a contentious point, I would say that, following the dissolving of the cold war, nations no longer have enemies. Who are the enemies of Britain, or France, or Japan? Nations today face risks and dangers rather than enemies, a massive shift in their very nature. (p.28)

Positioned between the globalist perspective and the skeptic perspective, it has been argued that globalization is neither entirely new nor fully unprecedented, but it is transforming state power, economic activity, and cultural interaction in significant ways. As globalization reshapes authority and democracy, it both presents opportunities and creates inequalities. It is certainly an uneven process; therefore, it is experienced differently in all countries and societies. In this regard, it is important to establish policies and institutions to manage an order that favors all societies equally (Held, et al., 1999).

Scholte (2005) discusses how globalization can foster both cultural homogenization and hybridity. He emphasizes the complexity of globalization and rejects the notion that it is only seen as a force for homogenization, as it is equally a force for diversity. In his theory, globalization can even allow the resurgence of local values as a response. In his argument, the cultural homogenization within the scope of globalization can be overstated. Different dialects of the same language are visible in different regions of the world with a certain degree of variation in vocabulary and understanding, which can be interpreted as local adaptation of societies to globalization, with the further argument that local perceptions to the same global brand would also differ according to different cultural contexts; therefore, global brands need to adjust locally.

From a cultural and linguistic viewpoint, the transformationalist approach seems to align with Robertson's glocalization concept (1992) in which globalization interacts with local cultures, leading to hybridity and the emergence of localized versions of cultural expression. Local cultures are active agents in this process, and the use of language is a significant factor. Globalization offers the opportunity to promote linguistic diversity because languages are more than communication tools in his concept, they are the reflection of identity required for adaptation.

However, the concept of glocalization, has strong counterarguments in which localization attempts are a one-way process where local cultures adjust to fit global formats; and the global always dominates the local (Ritzer, 2003). In this process, termed as grobalization, even when local expressions are maintained, they frequently exist within predefined global structures, reinforcing hierarchies in which dominant languages and cultural norms dictate the terms of participation. As a result, the appearance of diversity can mask underlying homogenization, where local linguistic and cultural practices are subordinated to global priorities, limiting the potential for truly equitable and autonomous local expression. (Ritzer, 2003) In this regard, localization and translation efforts are ineffective and serve only the purpose of spreading dominant discourse; making the language dynamics in the contemporary world align with the skeptic view.

2.3. Linguistic Hierarchies and Language Homogenization

The rise and fall of the world's languages, mainly the global rise of the English language, are closely related to globalization. Globalization has certainly contributed to the spread of widely spoken major languages and caused the decline of less widely spoken languages directly or indirectly. It has been argued that the spread of English is a product and tool of globalization and strongly connected to the cultural politics of globalization (Pennycook, 1994).

This notion also aligns with the concept of linguistic capital and symbolic power, according to which speaking the right language gives access to certain social and economic advantages (Bourdieu, 1991). Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power and linguistic capital is also linked to the cultural homogenization within the scope of globalization and language dynamics. It is the

ability to impose and legitimize certain values and meanings, and beliefs in a way that maintains social structures and hierarchies. It is a type of power functioning as symbols, language and other cultural practices. Those who hold symbolic power can dictate what is valuable or worthy. For example, the English language as a global lingua franca can be seen as a standard or legitimate means of communication because it reflects the political and economic power of countries that primarily speak English. Consequently, it offers more opportunities and social advantages to people who speak it. In this concept, language is seen as a form of social currency as Bourdieu (1991) explains:

One must not forget that the relations of communication par excellence, linguistic exchanges, are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualized. In short, one must move beyond the usual opposition between economism and culturalism, in order to develop an economy of symbolic exchanges. (p.36)

The spread of English has been observed as part of a Cold War diplomatic legacy into globalization, rather than a naturally occurring linguistic phase. It has been suggested that a language does not become a global one because of its structural properties, but rather because of the political and economic influences of its speakers. As Crystal (2003) notes, “A language becomes an international language for one chief reason: the political and military power of its people, especially their economic power” (p. 9).

The United Nations (UN) was formed in 1945 in an attempt to maintain international peace and security and to achieve cooperation among nations on economic, social and humanitarian problems. The UN designated English as one of their official languages. The original charter was enacted in five languages, four of which were the languages of the Allied powers and France, the fifth being Spanish. Arabic was added in 1973.

The formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 is also similar in nature to that of the UN because English, along with French, was designated as one of the official languages of NATO. The original treaty was signed in English (NATO, 1949).

Though the examples of the UN and NATO are prominent, the spread of the English language during the Cold War era is not limited to these two organizations. During the Cold War era, English language education initiatives were a significant tool of cultural influence, primarily used by the United States and the United Kingdom to extend their cultural and ideological influence globally, and to curb the spread of other ideologies. These initiatives aimed to promote Western values, facilitate international diplomacy, and counteract the spread of Soviet communism. The British Council, established in 1934, expanded its activities during the Cold War to promote British culture and the English language (British Council, n.d.).

English language education became a strategic asset for the U.S. and the U.K. during the Cold War era, shaping global perceptions and creating a widespread use of English, which persists as a legacy of Cold War cultural diplomacy into globalization. English teaching has become a prominent form of the economic, technological, and cultural Western expansion, and this only escalated the inequality between English and other languages (Phillipson, 1992). In fact, English teaching practices are a vital part of contemporary globalization processes, which requires significant attention. Phillipson (2009) explains the efforts of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) in the era of globalization:

The significance and role of the English teaching profession in the current intensive phase of globalization is under-explored and emphatically needs closer scrutiny. Exploring it is a tricky and messy business because of the interlocking of language with so many other dimensions, in education, the media, 'aid', and multiple commodification processes. Also underexplored is the relationship between the British and American variants of the profession, and how these relate to the strong traditions of teaching English as a foreign language in western Europe and in former communist states. (p.32)

Language homogenization and its direct effect of the sidelining of other languages have often been discussed within the scope of political and social sciences. The policies established and implemented in the aftermath of World War II were aimed at rapidly increasing the use and effectiveness of the English language. These policies, mainly led by the British Council and the U.S. counterparts, created the concepts of ESL and EFL under the broader term of English Language Teaching (ELT). In the underdeveloped countries, more specifically Africa, English was promoted to be the language of science, technology, and modernity. However, the privileges the

language provides are unequally distributed in these countries. Extensive aid was promised to promote the ELT efforts, but the promise was only partially fulfilled. From that perspective, it only exacerbates inequality. Furthermore, EFL and ESL must be distinct from each other, with different methods of teaching and varying degrees of exposure to the language. ESL is for people who have a mother tongue other than English, but reside in an English-speaking country whereas EFL is for people in non-English speaking countries, but learning English at school for communication with the world. However, the distinction between the two has fluctuated and even become intertwined, as EFL countries such as the Nordic countries, have started prioritizing English-instructed higher education and even made it a condition for academic advancement to speak a certain level of English (Phillipson, 1992).

The prevalence of the English language has affected educational policies and institutions to a large extent. The English-centric educational programs have made it necessary for students to take tests and exams such as Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and Cambridge English to emerge and standardize the assessment of English proficiency globally. Many universities and employers require these certifications, which drives the demand for English education. The adoption of English promoting educational policies, such as English-instructed education and especially the promotion and affiliation of it as more advantageous has caused considerable controversy, but few steps have taken on the national level against it. These policies in education systems promote English at the expense of multilingualism and local languages (Salomone, 2021).

The British Council was the primary organization to operate the ELT/ESL efforts from the U.K. In contrast, there is no single clear institution in the U.S. with a similar responsibility to teach English to the world. This does not mean that the U.S. was less effective; the U.S. did its part through a wide range of organizations in the post-war era, such as the Fulbright awards and the Peace Corps. The humanitarian nature of these organizations and novel foundations had the tendency to serve the interests of the United States, thus favoring the English language (Pennycook, 1991).

Language homogenization is not limited to the English language even though English has a significant role in homogenization due to its role as the global lingua franca. Spanish has often become a topic of discussion within this context. It has been discussed how Spanish has become globalized, not just through historical imperialism, but also through modern cultural flows. There is a push to promote standardized Castilian Spanish (linked to Spain) as the legitimate and prestigious dialect, and that affects other varieties as well as indigenous languages such as Catalan, Basque, and Quechua (Mar-Molinero, 2000).

Several other languages notably contribute to this notion: Mandarin, Spanish, French, Arabic, and Russian. In all these cases, the presence of a dominant language means access to economic and educational resources, making it either difficult or even impossible for less visible, local languages to have the same access. However, English has a special status compared to these five languages, which in fact marginalizes them (de Swaan, 2001).

De Swaan (2001) offered a framework that categorizes languages based on the extent of their influence. In his hierarchical pyramid, there are four levels. The first one is the peripheral languages that make up about 98% of all the world's languages, spoken by less than 10% of the world's population. These languages do not have any official status, and they are mostly oral. The second level includes central languages, which are mostly national languages and have nationwide official status. These languages are taught in schools and have an official status; therefore, they are protected to a certain extent, such as Korean in South Korea or Turkish in Türkiye. On the third level, there are twelve super-central languages that are not only spoken by large populations, but also spoken as a second language in other countries. These languages are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Hindi, Japanese, Malay, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Swahili. At the top of the pyramid, there is only one hyper-central language, which is the primary language of global communication; it connects all the super-central languages. There is only one: English. It is used in international discourse in many fields, from science and technology to academia and global diplomacy.

The hierarchical nature of the global language system not only explains the unique position of the English language because of its effectiveness across the globe, but it also suggests that central and

even super-central languages may not be able to hold their positions unless language preservation efforts and policies are made. Other homogenized languages, too, might lose visibility in the presence of a more dominant and effective language. Japanese, German and Russian started losing significance very rapidly in the era of globalization since their military presence exceeded their national territories; and after having been defeated, they had to retreat back into their homelands. Russian, in particular, has lost significant effectiveness with the fall of the Soviet Empire, and the post-Soviet nation-states recognized their national languages as very different from Russian, as in the case of Ukraine and Belarus. Although Russian continued to coexist in the region, English started replacing the lost visibility (de Swaan, 2001).

In this model, each level is connected to one another. All the languages in the world are actually a network connected to each other as the comparison of a galaxy and constellations. Each level in the pyramid affects its subordinate level. For the utmost communication with the world, one needs to reach the top of the pyramid. The peripheral languages are highly local; they do not have an effect on communication with “the rest of the world.” (de Swaan, 2001). Most people who speak a central language also speak a super central language, such as Ukrainians who speak Russian, or Catalans who speak Spanish. However, people from different regions of the world are not expected to speak a common super central language; for example, a Russian and a Spaniard cannot supposedly communicate through their very effective super central languages, thereby English being the ultimate communicator.

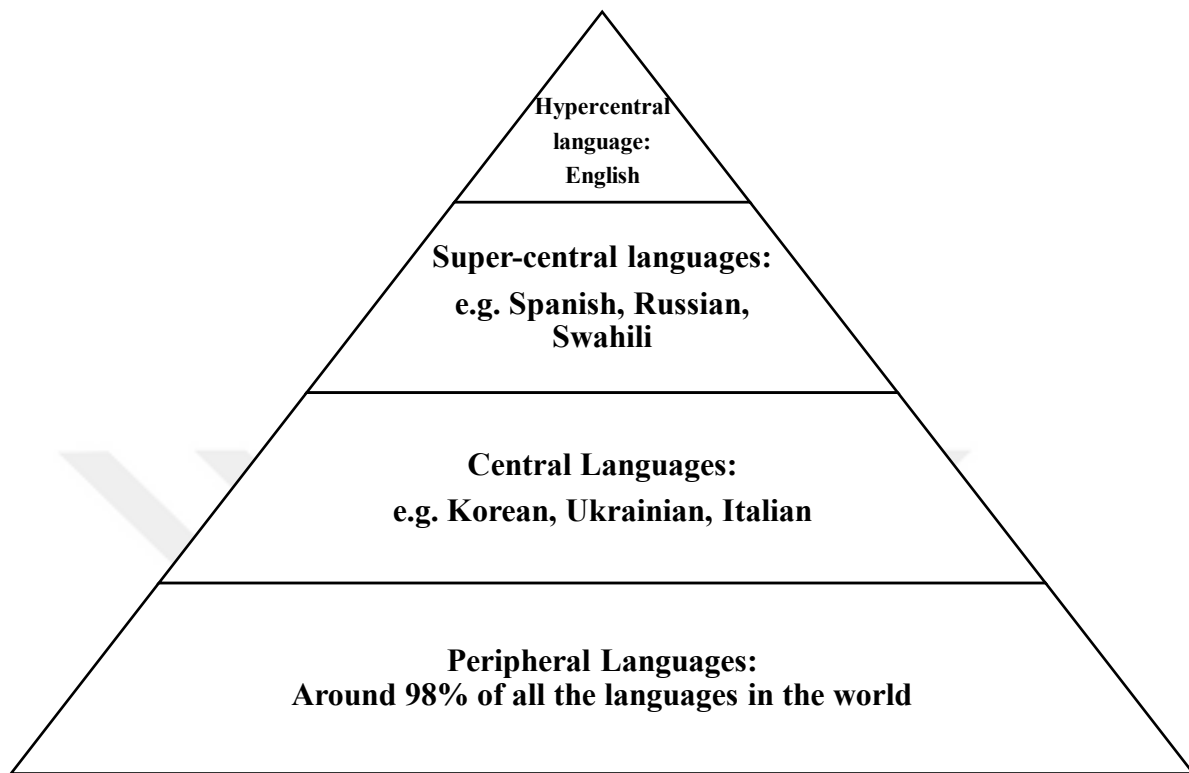


Figure 2.1. Global Language System developed by de Swaan

The proposed model of the hierarchy of languages in the modern world represents a four-level pyramid in which each level dominates their subordinate level. At the bottom of the pyramid, there are around 98 percent of all the living languages, but these are mostly oral with no or little recognition, and not generally used in public domains. Central languages are around 100 languages, and these usually have nation-wide recognition and are used in all domains in public and education. Super-central languages consist of around 12 languages: Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), French, German, Hindi, Japanese, Malay, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Swahili, written alphabetically. They have a greater influence in the regions they are spoken in, compared to central languages. At the top of the pyramid, there is the hyper-central language which dominates all the subordinate levels.

The framework of the global language system and the distribution of access to communication and the world's resources within its scope paves the way for the linguistic capital notion that language is not only a tool for communication, but it also functions as a social asset (Bourdieu, 1991).

According to this notion, individuals who speak languages or dialects considered prestigious (such as English, French, or Mandarin) hold more social power and can access more opportunities. Conversely, minority languages (often marginalized or endangered) are seen as having lower value in the social hierarchy. This creates inequality for speakers of non-dominant languages, as they encounter social exclusion, unequal access to opportunities, and information.

From another critical perspective on language and globalization, it has been strongly argued that the pressures of globalization and neoliberal economic policies have caused language to be increasingly seen as a marketable commodity on its own rather than a cultural legacy or a symbol of identity. Similarly, ethnic and cultural identity is marketed as a product too, which leads to commodification of authenticity; however, language has a role to play as it is a medium of communication. This commodification of language transforms the meaning and value of languages and privileges certain languages with economic value, resulting in deepening linguistic hierarchies and harming the potential of multilingualism (Heller, 2003).

Heller (2003) further argues that use of language in the modern world shapes decision making processes not only at the corporate level but also at the individual level. In developing countries where English either coexists with local and national languages or is taught as a foreign language, i.e. the outer and expanding circle in Kachru's (1992) seminal model, students are highly motivated to attend English-instructed schools because of the economic benefits as English proficiency is directly linked to job opportunities, achievement and success (Cameron, 2012).

Bilingualism has been commodified as a marketable skill as well, and it manifests in sectors such as tourism, hospitality and translation; and not all bilingual pairs are valued equally as another widely spoken language apart from English carries more market value than a minority language. Language certifications and proficiency levels in this context function as gatekeeper mechanisms that turn language proficiency into a formal capital (Heller, 2003, 2007).

The commodification of the English language extends beyond the efforts of contemporary ELT. Under the new flows of capital and neoliberal policies, English has become the most important linguistic commodity, working not only as an economic resource but also as a symbol of

modernity. The increasing growth of the service sector also demands the use of English language, which created a concern among organizations to assess the linguistic performances of their employees. Moreover, when English-language businesses operate in another language, their codes of conduct carry the influence of its original English language. In this context, use of English by organizations, companies, and the media is preferred because it emblematically conveys notions of internationalism and global-ness; and the localized formats convey a global semiotic commodity (Cameron, 2000).

Within de Swaan's hierarchical model (2001), speakers of central languages are typically also proficient in one of the supercentral languages that connect vast linguistic regions to the hypercentral language, English. As a result, translation and localization efforts tend to prioritize supercentral languages or the hypercentral one rather than central or peripheral ones. Therefore, most translation flows occur in the upper levels of the structure as they favor languages with greater networks of communication. Consequently, speakers of less widely used languages remain dependent on dominant linguistic hubs for access to global knowledge and communication.

Therefore, translation and localization efforts operate within these existing hierarchical flows. Translation typically occurs from dominant languages (hyper-central and super-central) into central or peripheral ones. This reinforces the dominance and prestige of the source language. Moreover, localization allows speakers of less widely spoken languages to access global content, but it does not necessarily help their language or cultural perspectives to circulate globally. Even when translation occurs between two less widely spoken languages, English usually serves as the pivot language, which centralizes the English language further. Thus, while translation and localization appear to foster linguistic diversity, they often maintain the hierarchical structure that privileges dominant languages. Thus, although translation and localization efforts seem to promote linguistic diversity and inclusion, they often operate within market-driven systems that prioritize efficiency and global reach over linguistic equity, ultimately maintaining the hierarchical structure that privileges dominant languages.

2.4. Digitalization and Language Dynamics in the Age of Globalization

Technology and globalization are deeply interconnected forces that have reshaped the cultural and social fabric of contemporary society. The rapid expansion of digital technologies and the internet has not only accelerated global interconnectedness but also intensified the dominance of certain languages, particularly English as the primary medium of global communication. While technology facilitates unprecedented access to information and cross-cultural interaction, it simultaneously reinforces linguistic hierarchies by privileging languages with greater online visibility. Although the internet and emerging advanced digital tools hold potential to promote and preserve linguistic diversity, linguistic diversity efforts remain contested and limited within a digital environment that continues to favor the dominant languages, particularly English.

The role of technology in shaping globalization, and subsequently its effects on languages, has been a topic of particular interest by scholars for a very long time. Mayrowitz (1985) argued that technology and media are not merely tools, but also environments that reshape how individuals and societies communicate and gain access to information. This notion of supraterritoriality (Scholte, 2002) helps explain how languages and translation practices operate across borderless digital networks and reinforce linguistic hierarchies.

The increasing flows of capital, information and people are no longer restricted to conventional borders. Coined as time and space compression (Harvey, 1989), this means that advances in technology, communication, and transportation make physical distances less significant, and time becomes a more dominant factor. The perceived reduction in the significance of time and space is due to advances in communication and transportation technologies. With the ability to communicate instantaneously, the world appears to become smaller in terms of perceived time and space.

In the concept of the network society, a new social structure has emerged alongside the rise of digital information and communication technologies (ICTs), termed as space of flows, according to which dominant political, economic and cultural processes operate through digital networks. As a result, people and institutions are increasingly interconnected as these technologies allow instant

communication and dissemination of knowledge. (Castells, 1996). The spread of a common language is seen as necessary for the functioning of global networks, and dominant languages, such as the case of the English languages, has become more visible in digital spaces. This creates a push towards language homogenization, as it allows for more efficient communication and operation within these networks; however, it also reinforces existing linguistic hierarchies.

In particular, it is because of the presence of a standard digital language and its ability to create an interface between technological fields, the technology is able to transform continually, as information can be generated, stored, transmitted and processed (Castells, 1996).

The world wide web was invented by Sir Tim Berners-Lee in 1989 while working at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN). It was merely an information system that enabled documents and other web resources to be accessed using a browser. It was released to the public in 1993 for free. Castells (2010) explains the process leading to the free distribution of the web as follows:

To this pioneering insight, Berners-Lee and co-workers added new technologies adapted from the multimedia world to provide an audiovisual language to their application. The CERN team created a format for hypertext documents that they named hypertext markup language (HTML), designed in the Internet tradition of flexibility, so that computers could adapt their specific languages within this shared format, adding this formatting on top of the TCP/IP protocol. They also set up a hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP) to guide communication between web browsers and web servers, and they created a standard address format, the uniform resource locator (URL) which combines information on the application protocol and on the computer address holding the requested information. Here again, URL could relate to a variety of transfer protocols, not just HTTP, thus facilitating general interface. CERN distributed world wide web (www) software free over the Internet, and the first web sites were established by major scientific research centers around the world. (p.51)

The internet was developed primarily in the United States, where English was the native language of its primary developers and initial user base. This led to English becoming the default language for many websites, coding languages and early online communications (Berners-Lee, 1999).

Berners-Lee (1999) considered the web not only as an advanced technological tool, but also a tool for global knowledge sharing, claiming to have designed it as a universal space. However, he

recognized the challenges of universal access. Language barriers and digital divide created a restriction for such universal inclusivity. He argues that it is essential for the web to serve people of different cultures with different cultures, therefore the web must be accessible in the languages of all its users to achieve to be a global system.

There have been attempts to localize the world wide web in the mid 1990s. First the ASCII character set was updated and extended in an effort to include non-English characters, but this extension was extremely inadequate, limited to 256 characters specifically, to embrace the characters of languages with a non-Latin alphabet such as Chinese and Arabic. Then the UNICODE system was developed in a way to include 97,655 characters. However, the web internationalization efforts are very complicated and a lot of linguistic work remains to be done. There is a great number of English technical terms used on the internet that remain to be translated into other languages, for instance. Suffixes for domain names still use English abbreviated words, as in .edu for education used for the web address of universities, or .gov for governmental institutions, for example (Crystal, 2006).

Later in the 1990s, the web revolutionized retail and business-to-business commerce, with companies like Amazon and Alibaba as leaders in the industry. This made it easy for consumers to purchase goods and services from anywhere in the world. And these platforms started connecting buyers and sellers globally, fostering international trade and entrepreneurship. The user interfaces and essential operations of these web-based businesses were primarily English. And the rise of such e-commerce platforms operating internationally required buyers and sellers from different countries to speak a common language.

The internet also allowed people from different parts of the world to communicate instantly through email, social media and instant messaging apps, breaking down geographical barriers. And platforms like Facebook, X, and LinkedIn emerged and have created global communities, enabling cultural exchange and collaboration. News and other media organs also played important roles. Online news outlets and streaming devices have made it possible to stay informed about global events real-time, ensuring an interconnected world-view. The media and entertainment industry, such as Hollywood movies, also contributed to this process, promoting English language.

In the context of globalization, the English language has solidified its position as the world's most pervasive language, Crystal (1987) offers a comprehensive overview of its global reach and institutionalized authority:

English is used as an official or semi-official language in over 60 countries, and has a prominent place in a further 20. It is either dominant or well-established in all six continents. It is the main language of books, newspapers, airports and air-traffic control, international business and academic conferences, science, technology, medicine, diplomacy, sports, international competitions, pop music, and advertising. Over two-thirds of the world's scientists write in English. Three quarters of the world's mail is written in English. Of all the information in the world's electronic retrieval systems, 80% is stored in English. English radio programmes are received by over 150 million in 120 countries. Over 50 million children study English as an additional language at primary level; over 80 million study it at secondary level (these figures exclude China). In anyone year, the British Council helps a quarter of a million foreign students to learn English, in various parts of the world. In the USA alone, 337,000 foreign students were registered in 1983. (p.359)

As of October 2025, English was the most frequently used language for web content, accounting for 49.2% of websites. Spanish followed with 5.9%, German with 5.2%, and Japanese with 5.2%. The remaining 16 languages in the research each accounted for less than 5% (Statista, 2025). These figures mirror the existing linguistic hierarchies discussed earlier. More recent data underscores the relationship between linguistic diversity and the growing trend of language homogenization. 7164 languages are in use today. The most spoken 20 languages in the world account for less than 1% of the total languages existing with 3.6 billion people speaking them as a native language. (Ethnologue, 2025)

The emergence of online research tools, online courses and digital libraries was a breakthrough for making knowledge accessible globally. The history of scientific languages has witnessed a significant shift to English dominance with the influence of political, economic and social factors. Consequently, over 90% of the world's scientific research is in English as the English language has become the *lingua de facto* of academia (Gordin, 2015).

The implications of losing linguistic diversity for inclusion and exclusion also set forth the concept of digital divide. The two notions are interconnected in the context of globalization. One of the central concerns is the digital divide: the gap between those who have access to information and

communication technologies and those who do not. Access to the internet, digital literacy and the ability to use digital tools effectively are increasingly essential for economic and social participation. This divide can lead to significant disparities in opportunities and outcomes, potentially causing new classes to emerge within society (Castells, 1996).

The digital divide is not only about access to technology but also about linguistic barriers. Those who do not speak the dominant global languages, particularly English, are often excluded from the full benefits of the global information society. The social and economic inequalities will be starker with the current trajectory. The outcome depends on how countries and societies address this issue. Castells (2001) explains the dynamics shaping access to information in detail:

First of all, basic research, the ultimate source of knowledge, is located, in overwhelming proportion, in research universities and in the public research system around the world [...] This means that, with the important exception of military-related research, the basic research system is open and accessible. [...] Furthermore, the academic research system is global. It relies on relentless communication between scientists around the world. The scientific community has always been to a large extent an international, if not global, community of scholars, in the West since the times of European scholasticism. [...] With the spread of the Internet in the 1990s, and the acceleration of the speed and scope of scientific discovery, the Internet and electronic mail have contributed to the formation of a global scientific system. In this scientific community there is certainly a bias in favor of dominant countries and institutions, as English is the international language, and US and Western European science institutions overwhelmingly dominate access to publications, research funds, and prestigious appointments. [...] Scientific research in our time is either global or ceases to be scientific. (p. 124)

It can be inferred that even though science is global and accessible through digital means, it provides certain privileges and advantages to English speakers and the English-speaking countries, and even controlled by these global actors, which introduces an inequality in this open system with certain implications for inclusion and exclusion. In the era of globalization where dominant languages dominate digital space, the digital divide might push speakers of other languages out of this digital space, making digital literacy crucial for participation in the network society.

In the era of globalization, language is no longer tied to fixed, national communities. It circulates across borders; however, not all linguistic resources travel equally. Some varieties, accents, and dialects are perceived and valued differently according to the settings they are used in, which is a model of stratification called orders of indexicality. Indexicality means that language does not only

communicate information, it also informs the speaker's social background, education, region, or status. For example, a strong regional accent might index local identity, while fluent academic English might index global competence. The orders of indexicality are amplified by digital platforms. English and other dominant languages are indexed as prestigious and globally intelligible, but other languages are indexed as limited and informal with far less visibility in the digital sphere. As a result, online platforms privilege content produced in dominant languages. Therefore, linguistic hierarchies and inequalities persist and are even reinforced in online spaces (Blommaert, 2010).

In this context, the evolution of technological and digital tools, including artificial intelligence (AI) in the age of globalization exemplifies the term creative destruction (Schumpeter, 1942) as each wave of technological innovation creates new possibilities for broader reach but at the same time displaces existing practices. However, because technology primarily favors English and other dominant languages, new technologies and models are developed by the time earlier technologies become accessible to speakers of less widely spoken languages. This cycle of technological innovation maintains the linguistic hierarchical structures as the benefits of each new digital product or AI model favor languages with greater linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991).

The linguistic bias in technology has become more prominent in recent studies with the emergence and prevalence of artificial intelligence (AI)-based language technologies, such as large language models (LLMs), machine translation, and multilingual databases, which perform better at representing certain languages due to their built-in design. Only fewer than five percent of the world's more than 7,000 living languages are represented online. This results in ineffectiveness in lexical semantics as culturally authentic words and phrases of underrepresented languages, such as kinship terminologies, cannot be successfully translated within these systems. This bias creates a form of epistemic injustice, a term coined by Fricker (2007), according to which speakers of less spoken languages are unable to fully express their own experiences in global platforms due to lack of terms and discourses. This causes the inclusion efforts to remain superficial (Helm, et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the promise that the artificial intelligence (AI) and artificial-intelligence powered large language models (LLMs) hold to foster linguistic diversity is increasingly contested as these

models are inclined to reproduce already existing dominant norms because of the nature of their data training sets. Such models are trained on languages they are exposed to, predominantly English, and their capacity to create texts with proper rhetoric with cultural references and linguistic nuances remain significantly limited. Furthermore, translations produced by LLMs, though appear to be very fast and effective, tend to favor most spoken languages and are restricted for less spoken languages in terms of linguistic diversity (Kuteeva & Andersson; 2024).

Blommaert and Rampton (2011) also argue that new forms of communication emerged with the expansion of the internet and digital technologies beginning in the 1990s, resulting in what they term superdiversity. Superdiversity refers to the complex, multimodal use of language powered by digital communication technologies, and it is created by and amplified within digital contexts, challenging the traditional view that languages are bound systems that coexist within a speech community. This framework suggests that digital communication does not eliminate or replace multilingualism; rather, it intensifies and restructures existing linguistic hierarchies by creating more complex and stratified linguistic repertoires. Because meaning-making is multimodal and indexical, digital media platforms become key sites where linguistic hierarchies are enacted. In this view, all communicative practices are subject to orders of indexicality (Blommaert, 2010), in which certain linguistic forms gain value and legitimacy while others are marginalized. Furthermore, despite being presented as tools that favor linguistic inclusion, technological advancements and AI often mirror existing linguistic hierarchies, as they are primarily optimized for dominant languages. This notion further strengthens the conceptualization that linguistic diversity is not only concerned with multilingualism or the number of languages being spoken; it is the distribution of languages, language models, and the functionalities of such languages in a given context and space. In this regard, linguistic hierarchies still reproduce and are reinforced even in the presence of multilingual language models; and language homogenization is not the problem by itself. Even in linguistically diverse contexts, these fluid systems continue to be shaped by socio-political influences, which lead to the emergence of new hierarchies or the reinforcement of existing ones.

These hierarchies directly resonate with the Bourdieusian approach in that dominant languages possess greater symbolic capital and yield more social and economic value. Similarly, de Swaan's

(2001) global language system reveals these dynamics within a structure where the hyper-central language and central languages occupy the most prestigious and circulated positions. Languages are dominated and thus lose their effectiveness and functionality because they cannot be commodified, and continue to do so as long as neoliberal policies tend to favor high-value languages. Therefore, all translation and localization practices operate within this market-driven, stratified linguistic system, and they are not neutral mechanisms to promote linguistic diversity.

In this regard, localization and translation within the concept of glocalization is often presented as a strategy for promoting linguistic diversity; however, its effectiveness is unclear. Ritzer's (2003) concept of globalization suggests that global forces impose their standard systems under the guise of local adaptations. In this context, many localization efforts serve to reinforce, rather than resist, dominant linguistic structures. The same way that a globally branded product such as McDonald's may offer a locally adapted menu, translated (or subtitled or dubbed) content also often retains the linguistic or ideological authority of the source. In this way, even though localization appears to be a part of inclusivity, it preserves the symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991) of dominant languages. The persistence and prevalence of English-language content, even in multilingual or localized formats, only reveal that efforts to challenge linguistic homogenization and promote linguistic diversity have certain formidable and structural limitations.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Research Strategy and Design

The aim of this research is to assess the effectiveness of a community-driven language initiative in representing and preserving linguistic diversity through translation and localization efforts, further examining the extent to which patterns of linguistic hierarchies continue within such an infrastructure. In this context, the thesis seeks to observe the presence and visibility of both dominant and less visible languages in a selected case example. In this regard, the community-driven, TED Translators program, translating TED content, has been employed as a case study.

The TED Translators program, run by the localization department of TED Conference, a nonprofit media organization with a global audience, has been selected for an in-depth analysis. The volunteer initiative has over 54,000 registered translators at the time of the research, translating the TED Talks into 115 languages using advanced digital tools.

This thesis has employed a mixed-methods research design to thoroughly examine the role of the TED Translators initiative in representing linguistic diversity in the context of globalization. By combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, the research aims to capture trends and traits of language dynamics discussed in the theoretical foundations of this study.

In order to improve the validity of the research and the findings, a triangulation approach has been used, incorporating three different data collection methods to address the research question, using not only pre-existing data but also the attitudes of volunteers and insights from the organization itself. This included content analyses of available data on translation and actual outcome of the program, which is obtained on the official website of TED, an online survey with the participation of volunteer translators, and a semi-structured interview with the localization department of TED.

3.2. Data collection methods

3.2.1 Content analysis

A content analysis was conducted after having collected secondary data on TED.com, the official website of TED. The 115 languages translated on TED was ranked with the corresponding number of translations for each language. The languages have been categorized to be compared to the global language system (de Swaan, 2001) in the theoretical foundations and literature review of the thesis, providing significant data on the presence of linguistic hierarchies and the translation flows between languages.

The content analysis of the languages translated for the TED Translators program aimed to demonstrate the actual outcome of the program and examine whether a small subset of dominant languages account for the majority of the translations, whether translation activity is more evenly distributed across languages, and whether dominant languages serve as pivots in translations, thereby revealing patterns of linguistic hierarchies within the initiative.

The distribution of languages was compared with de Swaan's (2001) global language system to examine linguistic hierarchies within globalization and to observe the dominance of major and high-value languages in translation and localization practices. Ranking of languages based on the number of translations they receive was observed to follow a hierarchical model consistent with de Swaan's (2001) model, where the hyper-central and super-central languages receive more translation traffic and provided data regarding major languages functioning as pivot languages. This data provides empirical evidence on the stratification of global language flows.

In addition to examining the distribution of translations across languages, a second content analysis was conducted on the 25 most translated TED Talks, which aimed to understand whether volunteer translators tend to select talks that center around particular thematic topics, thereby revealing patterns in volunteer selection, content preference and translation flows. After reviewing the content of each talk by watching all of them, reading their transcripts, and understanding the core message in each of them, recurring themes were identified and similar ideas were grouped together into analytically meaningful categories. As a result, 11 codes relevant to the contents were assigned

to identify how frequently these codes appeared across the talks and whether they clustered around certain topics. Out of 11 codes were assigned for the total 25 talks, four of them repeated more than eight times: life (13 times), self-discovery (10 times), happiness (10 times), and success (nine times).

This additional analysis aimed to demonstrate whether volunteer translators select content they find personally meaningful or content from more technical or specialized fields. Through this analysis, it becomes possible to assess whether thematic diversity is maintained or whether content selection remains concentrated in a narrow set of themes. If the most translated talks reflect similar topics, this may suggest that volunteers' choices limit thematic diversity and allow the research to assess to what extent such selections interact with linguistic hierarchies. Such patterns have implications for understanding the effectiveness of grassroots translation initiatives: Translators may contribute to a restricted thematic range in which translation flows are concentrated, thereby shaping the structures of what becomes globally circulated content.

3.2.2 Survey

As a primary data collection method, an online survey was employed to understand the inclinations and expectations of volunteer translators. Surveys are one of the most effective data collection methods in academic research especially when it is required to work with a large and geographically dispersed population. Surveys allow researchers to collect standardized information systematically, both qualitatively and quantitatively. In the context of this thesis, using a Google form enabled a rapid distribution across various time zones, in addition to its cost-effectiveness and functionality.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were obtained from the survey as the questions designed included demographic questions, open-ended responses, and 5-point Likert items. Descriptive data were also gathered to allow the research to assess demographics of the participants and their backgrounds; this set of data contextualizes the volunteer base and demonstrates whether it is diverse or concentrated in certain profiles.

For the thematic analysis of the open-ended survey responses, first, all responses were read multiple times to gain an initial sense of their content, tone, and underlying meanings; this initial immersion is equivalent to Braun and Clarke's "familiarization" phase in thematic analysis (2006). Following this, a round of initial coding was conducted in which key phrases, recurring ideas, and words and phrases were highlighted and labeled with short descriptive codes. Once the preliminary coding was complete, similar or related codes were clustered together to form broader conceptual categories. This approach aligned with Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) recommendations for pattern coding and theme development. These categories were then reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence and conceptual clarity, resulting in a set of final themes that accurately represented shared perspectives across participants. This method allowed the research to systematize diverse qualitative responses and identify underlying tendencies, motivations, and perceptions expressed by the volunteer translators.

The thematic analysis of the open-ended responses revealed important insights about the motivations and inclinations of the volunteers: what they value about the program, and what personal, cultural, or ideological motivations drive their contributions, and how they perceive the initiative. Overall, it aimed to assess why they volunteers engage in the program, and how they interpret its role in representing linguistic inclusion, thereby assessing the effectiveness of the program from a participant-centered perspective. The emerging themes are the role of technology and AI, global knowledge sharing, thoughts on the initiative and future of linguistic diversity.

In addition, The Likert-scale items were included to gather standardized quantitative data and to measure general attitudes and perceptions among a large and geographically dispersed volunteer population. Likert (1932) states that attitudes cannot be measured directly, but they can be estimated through patterned responses to statements; the graded scale gathers information about the intensity of feeling, allowing the research to assess attitudes quantitatively. Furthermore, it is more scalable than earlier methods, making it suitable for a high-population group. Likert-scale items provided significant percentages that reflect the attitudes and assessments of participants concerning the potential and effectiveness of the program. The Likert results indirectly contributed to research question in examining the extent to which the inclinations and motivations of the translators shape the outcome of such an infrastructure.

3.2.3 Interview with the localization team at TED

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the Localization Department of TED. The interview took place online, and the responses were documented with the full consent of the team. Cissy Yun, Program Coordinator at the Localization Department, represented the organization.

Semi-structured interviews offer a balanced approach of consistency and flexibility. This flexibility enables the researcher to adapt and follow up with additional questions based on the answers of the respondent, providing more nuanced insights. In an academic setting where understanding motivations, perspectives, and strategies is crucial, a semi-structured interview is useful to provide detailed qualitative data.

In this context, the research asked questions such as “How important is it for TED to sustain translations whether with the help of volunteers or AI?” “What motivates translators to volunteer from your perspective?” “What are the main goals of the TED Translators initiative in promoting linguistic diversity or overall inclusivity for all language communities? How does the program measure success in reaching these goals? Are there any strategies for less visible languages? “What motivates TED to maintain a community-driven model instead of fully professionalizing translation?” Advantages/disadvantages? “Where do you see ‘TED Translators’ in this pivotal era where AI and manual translation finally intersect?” and “In your view, what is the future of multilingual digital content, and how do you see TED’s role evolving in that space?”

To conduct a meaningful thematic analysis of the interview, relevant phrases, sentences, and insights were identified and then assigned codes. Subsequently, related codes were grouped together to create broader themes. Finally, identified themes were given meaningful names and clarified how each theme connects to the research question. Direct quotes were dominantly used to support each theme.

The emerging themes provided important insight from the perspectives of the organization, complementing the content analyses and the findings drawn from volunteer responses. The interview allowed the researcher to compare the institutional perspective with the empirical data.

Moreover, it explored the effectiveness of a community-driven model, the debate between human translations and advanced large language models, and the potential role that an international organization can play in promoting inclusivity and supporting multilingual content. Overall, the interview aimed to examine to what extent institutional strategies and translation practices operate within the systemic linguistic hierarchies, how they interact, and whether they are effective enough to challenge the hierarchical flows of translations favoring dominant languages. In that regard, it is possible to assess how institutional narratives align with or diverge from actual, observed outcomes, enabling the research to examine whether organizational strategies effectively support the intended goals and objectives of representing linguistic diversity, or whether they are insignificant in preventing linguistic hierarchies from forming despite inclusive intentions.

4. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

4.1. TED & TED Translators Initiative

TED Conferences, officially TED LLC, is a Canadian-American non-profit organization that holds several conferences a year and posts the talks online through its multimedia platforms for free distribution, mainly TED.com.

TED distributes and shares its talks and content under the slogan “Ideas Change Everything,” replacing the old slogan that was used until the year 2024 “Ideas Worth Spreading.”

TED was founded in 1984 as a conference focused on technology and design (TED stands for Technology, Entertainment, and Design), but later expanded to include all topics from science, academic to humanitarian and political talks and global issues. It had been held annually in California from 1990 until 2014, but now it has been held in Vancouver, Canada since 2014.

Even though TED has one main “flagship” conference every year in Canada, it also holds several other conferences in different venues around the world. Some of those are TED Countdown Summit, a conference that gathers innovators, scientists, policymakers, and activists to combat climate change, powered by TED’s Countdown initiative; TEDNext, a three-day conference usually held in the United States for discussions about happiness and wellbeing at work and life; TEDAI Vienna, another three-day conference on artificial intelligence held in Europe. Some conferences are discontinued and replaced by new ones that better align with emerging trends.

TED has several other initiatives apart from the conferences. TED-Ed, for example, produces educational 5-minute animations designed for educators and students worldwide. TED-Ed animations receive over two million views per day and have over five billion views to date. 1,600 animations are used by over one million educators in classrooms across the globe.

TEDx conferences are independent local events organized under a TEDx license obtained through an application to TED. There are certain requirements to organize and host a TEDx event specified by TED, but these events have their own local themes and speakers, and they can be held in the language of the country of the event. There are over three million TEDx events worldwide. The TEDx events and their global spread are an example of glocalization discussed earlier in the thesis.

All TED content is shared and promoted on several social media platforms such as YouTube, X, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. They are also directly accessed on TED.com. TED Talks received over 2.5 billion views with content shared 400 million times in 2023, and has 180 million monthly followers.

Even though TED had a few initiatives to produce content in different languages, such as TEDenEspañol and TEDinArabic, TED Conferences and related TED content are originally in English.

The TED Translators initiative started with the demand of a few followers of the TED Talks to translate the talks into their local languages so that they could share them with their friends and family who do not speak English. The program launched in 2009, with 300 translations in 40 languages, created by 200 volunteer translators. Currently, more than 220,000 translations have been published in 115 languages and counting, created by more than 53,000 volunteers. In 2012, the program expanded to include the transcription and translation of TEDx Talks, the translation of TED-Ed lessons and the translation of content distributed by worldwide partners who help grow TED's global footprint.

The rapidly rising demands from different language communities that wanted multilingual access to TED Talks led TED to employ volunteers to subtitle TED Talks. The TED Team did not mandate specific languages for TED Talk translations; instead, the selection was driven by the demand and efforts of language communities worldwide.

In order to subtitle the talks, TED collaborated with Amara, an online subtitling editor. TED enabled a three-step verification system to ensure and maintain high-quality translations. Under this system, a translator would complete translating and subtitling a TED Talk on Amara and

submit it for review. Then a reviewer, an experienced volunteer translator who has successfully translated and published at least 10 TED Talks, would review the translation and refine it. Reviewers could either send the work back for further edits or make refinements while guiding the translator. Once the translation passed the review stage, it was submitted for approval. In this final step, a volunteer language coordinator, specifically appointed by TED to uphold the translation quality, would review and approve the translation, thereby officially publishing it.

The language coordinators were highly skilled translators with strong academic backgrounds and contributions to the TED Translators program. Moreover, all translators and reviewers are credited for the translations they provide. Their names appear when the video starts if the subtitles are turned on, and their TED profile can be visited. The TED profile of a TED Translator lists all the translations they have provided for TED.

TED's collaboration with Amara lasted until 2021 when Amara could no longer meet the demands and needs of the TED Team. With over 50,000 volunteers, an increasing number of queries that language coordinators struggled to address, and the growing use of AI in translations, TED established a long-term collaboration with CaptionHub, an AI-powered platform for multilingual subtitling and voice-over.

In the current system, volunteers from certain language communities work with an AI-generated pre-translation. However, since AI often produces errors and lacks the required quality, translators must refine and correct the text. To streamline the workflow, TED has implemented a two-step verification process. While the language coordinator program has been discontinued, TED introduced a new role called language supervisors, who assist with queries and requests but, more importantly, have the authority to amend published subtitles.

As the number of volunteers and subtitles continues to grow, TED has launched working on a new project within the TED Translators initiative focusing on AI-powered dubbing of TED Talks. A select group of TED Translators in specific languages voluntarily refines AI-supported dubbing on Panjaya, an AI-supported video localization platform to translate, dub and lip-sync videos into select languages while preserving the natural look. In this system, translators work on the scripts

from the regular translation process, but the videos are voiced by AI. Translators refine and edit the script and speech, making it ready for lip-sync so it looks and sounds more natural. With this system, TED aims to offer its videos dubbed in as many languages as possible over time, making its content accessible for speakers of other languages.

4.2. Content Analysis of TED's Translations

A content analysis was conducted to examine the languages into which TED content has been translated and published. In this regard, the 115 languages used on TED have been ranked according to the number of translations each language has published. Subsequently, the official status of these languages has been verified on Ethnologue and assessed at what level of the four-level pyramid these languages fall in the hierarchical model introduced by de Swaan (2001) and discussed in the literature review of this study.

This approach provides significant data relevant to understanding linguistic hierarchies and language homogenization within the TED Translators initiative. The collected data, i.e. the number of translations per language, the number of official languages versus minority languages receiving translations, and their positioning in each tier (peripheral, central, super-central, hyper-central) in the global language system, reveal disparities in translation volume, showing to extent to which some languages remain dominant whereas others remain underrepresented. The qualitative data show how the program's translation practices align with the Global Language System by de Swaan, demonstrating patterns of linguistic hierarchies and stratification; how the translation flows occur within a concentrated group of high-value languages; how the translation languages become even more concentrated with the addition of advanced technology rather than expanding; how much the translations expand into less spoken languages; how dominant languages serve as pivot languages; and how language dynamics in the broader context of globalization apply within the initiative.

Table 4.1. 115 languages subtitled by TED Translators ranked according to the number of translations and compared with the Global Language System by de Swaan (2001).

THE 115 TRANSLATED LANGUAGES ON TED.COM				
#	NAME OF LANGUAGE	NUMBER OF TRANSLATIONS	OFFICIAL STATUS	THE GLOBAL LANGUAGE SYSTEM
1	English	24241	OFFICIAL	HYPER-CENTRAL
2	Spanish	18337	OFFICIAL	SUPERCENTRAL
3	Arabic	14509	OFFICIAL	SUPERCENTRAL
4	French	11949	OFFICIAL	SUPERCENTRAL
5	Portuguese, Brazilian	11932	OFFICIAL	SUPERCENTRAL
6	Italian	9089	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
7	Chinese, Simplified	8919	OFFICIAL	SUPERCENTRAL
8	Vietnamese	8411	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
9	Portuguese	8321	OFFICIAL	SUPERCENTRAL
10	Korean	8319	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
11	Russian	7877	OFFICIAL	SUPERCENTRAL
12	Turkish	7858	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
13	Chinese, Traditional	7584	OFFICIAL	SUPERCENTRAL
14	Japanese	7077	OFFICIAL	SUPERCENTRAL
15	Hebrew	6265	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
16	Romanian	5177	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
17	Persian	5093	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
18	Polish	5045	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
19	Hungarian	4933	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
20	Indonesian	4552	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
21	Greek	4502	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
22	German	4324	OFFICIAL	SUPERCENTRAL
23	Serbian	4145	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
24	Dutch	3946	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
25	Thai	2936	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
26	Ukrainian	2762	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
27	Bulgarian	2686	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
28	Burmese	2465	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
29	Croatian	2385	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
30	Kurdish (Central)	2204	REGIONAL LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
31	Czech	1994	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
32	Swedish	1575	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL

33	Northern Kurdish (Kumanji)	1483	INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE	CENTRAL
34	Hindi	1480	OFFICIAL	SUPERCENTRAL
35	Slovak	1315	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
36	Lithuanian	880	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
37	Albanian	867	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
38	Catalan	751	TERRITORIAL/ OFFICIAL	PERIPHERAL
39	Danish	743	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
40	Latvian	721	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
41	Norwegian Bokmal	683	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
42	Galician	662	TERRITORIAL/ OFFICIAL	PERIPHERAL
43	Slovenian	645	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
44	Armenian	581	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
45	Finnish	480	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
46	Macedonian	441	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
47	Mongolian	433	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
48	Marathi	396	NATIVE LANGUAGE - RECOGNIZED AS OF 2025	PERIPHERAL
49	French (Canada)	360	OFFICIAL	SUPERCENTRAL
50	Chinese, Yue	338	REGIONAL LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
51	Gujarati	272	NATIVE LANGUAGE - RECOGNIZED AS OF 2025	PERIPHERAL
52	Kazakh	272	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
53	Malay	265	OFFICIAL	SUPERCENTRAL
54	Georgian	254	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
55	Estonian	249	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
56	Urdu	242	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
57	Tamil	239	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
58	Bengali	215	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
59	Uzbek	197	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
60	Belarusian	169	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
61	Sinhala	166	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
62	Bosnian	158	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL

63	Esperanto	143	CONSTRUCTED AUXILIARY LANGUAGE	NOT APPLY
64	Swahili	141	OFFICIAL	SUPERCENTRAL
65	Azerbaijani	140	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
66	Basque	106	TERRITORIAL/ OFFICIAL	PERIPHERAL
67	Malayalam	84	NATIVE LANGUAGE - RECOGNIZED AS OF 2025	PERIPHERAL
68	Telugu	84	NATIVE LANGUAGE - RECOGNIZED AS OF 2025	PERIPHERAL
69	Montenegrin	66	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
70	Nepali	65	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
71	Filipino	46	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
72	Afrikaans	34	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
73	Tagalog	30	NATIVE LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
74	Norwegian Nynorsk	27	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
75	Khmer	25	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
76	Pashto	25	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
77	Uyghur	24	TERRITORIAL/ OFFICIAL	PERIPHERAL
78	Kannada	23	NATIVE LANGUAGE - RECOGNIZED AS OF 2025	PERIPHERAL
79	Somali	21	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
80	Punjabi	20	NATIVE LANGUAGE - RECOGNIZED AS OF 2025	PERIPHERAL
81	Algerian Arabic	19	NATIONAL VERNACULAR	PERIPHERAL
82	Icelandic	19	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
83	Amharic	17	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
84	Serbo-Croatian	16	MACRO LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
85	Tibetan	14	TERRITORIAL/ OFFICIAL	PERIPHERAL
86	Tajik	13	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL

87	Kyrgyz	10	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
88	Creole, Haitian	8	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
89	Malagasy	8	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
90	Tatar	7	TERRITORIAL/ OFFICIAL	PERIPHERAL
91	Irish	6	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
92	Sardinian	6	INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
93	Igbo	4	NATIONAL LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
94	Lao	4	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
95	Maltese	4	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
96	Latgalian	3	INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
97	Mauritian Creole	3	NATIVE LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
98	Slesian	3	INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
99	Turkmen	3	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
100	Asturian	2	MINORITY LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
101	Cebuano	2	MINORITY LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
102	Hakha Chin	2	INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
103	Luxembourgish	2	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
104	Tunisian Arabic	2	INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
105	Assamese	1	NATIVE LANGUAGE - RECOGNIZED AS OF 2025	PERIPHERAL
106	Bislama	1	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
107	Dzongkha	1	OFFICIAL	CENTRAL
108	Faroese	1	MINORITY LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
109	Hausa	1	NATIONAL LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
110	Hupa	1	INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
111	Ingush	1	TERRITORIAL/ OFFICIAL	PERIPHERAL
112	Klingon	1	CONSTRUCTED LANGUAGE OF STAR TREK	NOT APPLY

113	Latin	1	EXTINCT WITH AN OFFICIAL STATUS	PERIPHERAL
114	Occitan	1	INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL
115	Rusyn	1	INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE	PERIPHERAL

The ranking of the 115 translation languages used on TED, together with their categorization according to de Swaan's four-level global language system, which explains the functionality of world's languages in global communication, clearly shows a pattern in which peripheral languages appear at the bottom of the ranking with an insignificant number of translations, central languages are grouped in the middle, all super-central languages cluster just below the top, and English remains at the top as the sole hyper-central language. The data not only aligns with the global language system, but also suggests that translation networks favor the higher tiers, creating a significant centralization of linguistic capital and making efforts to represent or promote linguistic diversity through translation efforts ineffective.

In the global language system, there are only 12 super-central languages. Seven of these languages (Spanish, Arabic, French, Portuguese, Mandarin, Russian and Japanese) are within the next fourteen languages followed by English. Simplified Chinese and Portuguese of Portugal are within these fourteen. German, Hindi and Malay are still within the first half of the list, with the first two having over 1,000 published translations. Swahili, an important super-central language from Africa, is on the 64th row.

The number of English translations is significantly higher than the number of translations that the super-central languages have received, because local TEDx talks delivered in other languages frequently translated into English. Moreover, their English translation must be published and available online before they can be translated into another language. This pattern supports de Swaan's World Language System, where central languages serve as "pivot" languages in translation flows. A "pivot language" is a central or intermediary language that connects other languages in translation and communication. It is not only widely spoken; it acts as a bridge between peripheral languages that might not be directly translated into one another. For example,

if a TED Talk is originally Korean (a central language), it might not be directly translated into Catalan (a peripheral language). Instead, it would be first translated into English (the hyper-central language) and then from English to Catalan. Thus English “pivots” or “bridges” the two otherwise disconnected languages.

Hyper-central, super-central, and subsequently central languages receive more translations, while peripheral languages receive few or none. This suggests that there exists a linguistic hierarchy, where central languages dominate the flow of information and content, reinforcing their global influence. Translation and localization efforts operate within a hierarchical flow, favoring high-value languages while less-spoken languages continue to marginalize because speakers of these languages must rely on more valuable languages to access global ideas. Thus, translation practices not only mirror but also reinforce existing linguistic hierarchies, where dominant languages function as gatekeepers of global knowledge and their speakers accumulate more discursive power.

Moreover, the adoption and uneven distribution of the AI support for languages within the initiative discredits the notion that technology democratizes access for everyone, including linguistically. AI support for the subtitling was observed to consist of all the super-central languages and extends only into 13 central languages, which reveals that the efforts of advanced technology in representing linguistic diversity is ineffective in the program. The AI support for translations contribute high-speed and efficiency, which adds more translation traffic for these languages. Another significant observation was made regarding that the most-recent development on the translation practices of the program, the AI-powered dubbing of TED Talks, which includes fewer super-central languages but only extends into three central languages: Italian, Korean and Turkish. These three languages also ranked within the top 12 languages in the content analysis with relatively high number of translations among super-central languages, and they are three of the four central languages with the highest number of translations, which suggests that the high translation traffic for a language shapes its support for more technological development.

This reveals that technological advancements and AI tend to favor high-value languages in this program; as a result, these languages receive more translations whereas peripheral and less spoken languages are marginalized in the digital landscape. Overall, these findings suggest that as the

program adopts more advanced technological tools, translation flows become even more concentrated around a smaller group of high-value languages; therefore, digital innovations exacerbate linguistic hierarchies rather than helping with linguistic representation.

Table 4.2. AI support for TED Translators program languages.

Category	Languages (supported for subtitling)	Number of Languages
Super-Central Languages	English, Chinese (Simplified & Traditional), Russian, Portuguese, Portuguese (Brazil), Spanish, Arabic, Malay, Japanese, German, Swahili, French, Hindi	13
Central Languages	Dutch, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Korean, Polish, Romanian, Thai, Turkish, Ukrainian, Vietnamese	13
Total	—	26
Category	Languages (supported for dubbing)	Number of Languages
Super-Central Languages	English, Chinese (Mandarin), Russian, Portuguese, Spanish, Arabic, Japanese, German, , French	9
Central	Italian, Korean, Turkish	3
Total	—	12

Even though the technology exists, the absence of adoption of the technology for other languages reproduces and even reinforces the same hierarchies that existed before AI. The potential of AI to support lesser-known languages remains unrealized provided that institutions still operate through market logic that favors efficiency, not linguistic equity. In this context, the AI support encompasses languages that ensure scalability and expansion, and other languages remain structurally marginalized. Even when individuals have the ability to use AI tools to translate into their own languages, or languages that are not supported by an organization, the lack of institutional support means that these languages remain structurally excluded. Personal access does not challenge or overcome the broader linguistic hierarchy; it exacerbates the current situation in which only high-value languages receive recognition.

Furthermore, when the 115 languages are checked for their vitality and endangerment statuses, an almost identical pattern with the content analysis in which high-value languages are ranked at the top with significantly higher number of translations. It is observed that translation efforts fail to extend into endangered or non-institutional languages, further emphasizing the findings that translation flows occur within a global linguistic hierarchy.

Table 4.3. Language vitality and endangerment statuses of TED languages.

Classification System	Vitality Category	Number of Languages	Percentage of Total (N = 115)	Meaning of categories
UNESCO	Safe	51	44.3%	Languages with strong intergenerational transmission and institutional support.
	Potentially Vulnerable	44	38.3%	Some risk of endangerment; spoken by all generations but may lose domains of use.
	Definitely Endangered	4	3.5%	Children no longer learn the language as a mother tongue at home.
	Endangered / Unsafe	3	2.6%	Few users remain; declining use in public and private domains.
	Critically Endangered	1	0.9%	Spoken only by a few elderly speakers.
	Not in Use / Extinct	1	0.9%	No native speakers remain.
	Not Applicable	2	1.7%	Artificial or constructed languages (e.g., Esperanto, Klingon).
Total (UNESCO)		115	100%	115 total TED languages classified.
Ethnologue	Institutional	102	88.7%	Used in education, work, mass media, and government; vigorous and standardized.
	Stable	4	3.5%	Stable intergenerational use, limited institutional support.
	Endangered	4	3.5%	Decreasing speaker population; loss of domains.
	Extinct	1	0.9%	No longer spoken as a first language.
	Not Applicable / Mixed	4	3.5%	Constructed or special-case entries.
Total (Ethnologue)		115	100%	115 total TED languages classified.

The vitality distribution reveals that 51 languages of the program (44.4%) are classified as safe, and 102 of them (88.7%) are classified as institutional. However, these languages still receive disproportionately fewer translations than super-central languages and the hyper-central language. This reveals that the high visibility of certain languages and the marginalization of the others within the program is not driven by the vitality and endangerment status of the language, but by global linguistic hierarchies that assign greater value to certain languages.

These findings show that the translation practices within the TED Translators program is not effective enough to extend into and represent languages that are classified as endangered or not safe, but more importantly, the translations are observed to cluster around languages that rank as safe and institutional according to the metrics of UNESCO and Ethnologue. This reveals that being classified as safe or institutional does not automatically protect a language from occupying a stratified structural system dominated by higher-value languages, within which they receive far fewer translations in comparison. Regardless of the dataset of 115 languages and their vitality statuses, the translation flows still occur within a group of dominant languages. Thus, the program reflects a structural stratification in which even safe and institutional languages remain peripheral because they are dominated by an upper-tier language, reinforcing the patterns described in de Swaan's model and shown within the analysis of the 115 languages.

The findings of the overall content analysis show that the modern language dynamics and linguistic hierarchies have also applied to the TED Translators initiative with dominant languages having more use and visibility. The uneven distribution of translations reveals a systemic prioritization of dominant languages, reinforcing linguistic hierarchies and contributing to the marginalization of less widely spoken languages in the global information economy.

According to Bourdieu (1991), language is not merely a neutral communication tool, but a form of symbolic capital; a resource that holds social power and can be unequally distributed. In this context, central and super central languages (e.g., English, Spanish, and French) carry greater linguistic capital because they provide greater access to educational opportunities, job employment, international mobility, access to global communication. The disproportionate number of TED Talk translations into these languages reflects their elevated symbolic value.

The limited presence of less dominant languages within the translation flows in platforms like TED Talks reinforces this inequality, as speakers of these languages must rely on more valuable languages to access global ideas. Thus, translation practices not only mirror but also reinforce existing linguistic hierarchies, where dominant languages function as gatekeepers of global knowledge and their speakers accumulate more discursive power.

The TED Translators initiative has been employed as a case study in this thesis because of its massive global scale, and also TED benefits from advanced technological tools and AI. However, the assessment that indigenous or less-widely spoken languages with few translations suggests that a volunteer-driven, large-scale global initiative is not effective enough in representing linguistic diversity without these languages being specifically targeted or without a top-down approach to make such content accessible in these languages.

It is clearly observed from the overall content analysis that the global linguistic hierarchy by de Swaan (2001) and linguistic capital by Bourdieu (1991) both shape and limit the effectiveness of TED's language translation and inclusion efforts. Despite efforts to promote linguistic diversity, the presence and persistence of dominant languages still dictate which languages hold the greatest cultural and economic capital in the global arena.

Ritzer's (2003) concept of globalization further explains this situation between the observable linguistic inequality and the factual inclusion. Translation and localization efforts are often portrayed as mechanisms of accessibility, inclusivity and multilingual participation; however, globalization suggests that these efforts operate within the logic of global expansion, and not true linguistic empowerment. In this regard, translation and localization practices create the appearance of diversity, but the translation flows remain limited and structured around high-value languages that help with scalability and audience reach. Consequently, the program replicates the same hierarchical linguistic patterns explained within the broader context of globalization. Therefore, the TED Translators model shows how linguistic hierarchies reproduce and persist within such a system.

4.3. Content Analysis on the 25 Most Translated TED Content

A content analysis of the 25 most translated TED content has been conducted by ranking the talks in order from the highest to the lowest number of translations they received. The themes of these talks have also been identified to observe whether they share common topics. In order to do that, titles, speaker names, short descriptions, and official TED summaries for each of the 25 most-translated talks were gathered. The talks were watched, and the transcripts were read fully. Subsequently, each talk was assigned a short descriptive code based on the topic and underlying message.

This has allowed the research to assess whether the most translated contents tend to focus on shared and similar topics, suggesting a thematic centralization. Ultimately, it provides insight into whether, in a community-driven model, translators dictate what is translated, potentially concentrating translation flows within certain thematic content, suggesting a content circulation shaped by dominant languages.

Table 4.4. The Most Translated TED Talks with their number of translations and themes

#	Name of the TED Talk and Speaker	Number of languages translated	Topic
1	8 secrets of success by Richard St. John In this 3-minute talk, analyst John shares the results of a seven year long, 500 interviews to find what leads to success: passion, work, focus, persist, ideas, getting good, push and serve.	75	Self-discovery, success, life, happiness.
2	Try something for 30 days by Matt Cutts In this 3-minute talk, Cutts suggests that a 30-day period is a good idea to try something new and see how it is resulted.	74	Self-discovery, success, life, happiness, inspirational.
3	Do schools kill creativity by Sir Ken Robinson In this 19-minute talk, Robinson explains the vast learning capacity of children and encourages an education system which promotes creativity and innovation.	64	Inspirational, education.
4	Keep your goals to yourself by Derek Sivers In this 3-minute talk, Sivers shares the result of a research, arguing that people who share their goals in life are less likely to achieve them.	63	Self-discovery, success, life
5	What adults can learn from kids by Adora Svitak In this talk, Svitak, a prolific short story writer despite her young age, suggests that childrens' bold ideas have a lot to teach adults.	58	Success, life, education.
6	Remember to say thank you by Laura Trice In this 3-minute talk, Trice argues that thanking people and appreciating what they do or who they are in life makes a difference in peace and happiness.	55	Life, happiness.
7	Don't insist on English by Patricia Ryan Ryan, an English language teacher in Arabic-speaking countries, explains that the ideas and achievements of many non-English speakers might be prevented due to the expectation and requirement of certain English levels.	54	Education, success.

8	The hidden power of smiling by Ron Gutman In this talk, entrepreneur and academic Gutman shares facts about smiling, and how it can be a predictor of our life expectancy and well-being as well as the effect of it on others.	54	Life, happiness.
9	Learn to read Chinese ... with ease by ShaoLan In this talk, ShaoLan Hsueh shares her method to teach and help people learn Chinese easily, which is called Chineasy.	53	Education.
10	The power of vulnerability by Brene Brown Brown's TED Talk is about how embracing vulnerability can lead to deeper connection, creativity, love and joy.	52	Life, happiness, psychology.
11	Forget multitasking, try monotasking by Paolo Cardini This talk is a critique of our obsession with multitasking and argues for the value of <u>monotasking—doing one thing at a time with full attention.</u>	52	Life, productivity, self-discovery
12	Your elusive creative genius by Elizabeth Gilbert This talk explores the nature of creativity and how we relate to it, especially the pressure and fear that often come with trying to be consistently “creative” or “brilliant.”	51	Life, self-discovery, happiness
13	Street art with a message of hope and peace by el Seed Artist El Seed explains what he does: the historic art of Arabic calligraphy with graffiti to portray messages of beauty, poetry and peace across all continents	51	Art, productivity
14	How books can open your mind by Lisa Bu This talk is a personal reflection on how reading, especially books from different cultures, can transform your perspective, expand empathy, and help you find your voice.	51	Life, self-discovery
15	Grit: The power of passion and perseverance by Angela Lee Duckworth In this 6-minute talk, psychologist Duckworth argues that grit, he blend of passion and persistence, is what truly drives success over the long term.	50	Success, self-discovery
16	The danger of a single story by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie This talk is a message about the risks of hearing only one perspective about a person, culture, or country through Adichie's her own experiences.	49	Life, inspirational
17	How great leaders inspire action by Simon Sinek In this talk, Sinek introduces the concept of the Golden Circle and explains how the most inspiring leaders and organizations succeed by starting with “why.”	49	Success, inspirational
18	The happy secret to better work by Shawn Achor In this talk, psychologist Achor challenges the idea that success leads to happiness; instead, he argues that happiness fuels success.	48	Success, happiness, self-discovery
19	Every kid needs a champion by Rita Pierson This talk is a call to action for educators to build real, trusting, and positive relationships with their students—because kids don't learn from people they don't like.	48	Education, life
20	What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness by Robert Waldinger In this talk, Waldinger shares insights from the Harvard Study of Adult Development, an over-80-year-long study tracking what truly makes people happy and healthy throughout life.	47	Life, success, happiness, psychology
21	The power of introverts by Susan Cain This talk is about strengths and value of introverted people in a world that usually celebrates extroversion above all, and why introverts should be encouraged as well.	47	Happiness, self-discovery
22	Lose your ego, find your compassion by Feisal Abdul Rauf In this talk, Rauf combines teachings of religion and argues that we must move beyond ego, which divides us and embrace compassion, which connects us.	47	Self-discovery
23	Before I die I want to ... by Candy Chang In this talk, artist Chang shares details of her global participatory project where people are encouraged to share their deep secrets and wishes.	47	Happiness, emotional
24	How we'll find life on other planets by Aomawa Shields This talk is about how astronomers are working to detect life beyond Earth, especially on exoplanets, using a unique blend of astronomy, climate science, and planetary modeling.	47	Science

25	The transformative power of classical music by Benjamin Zander In this talk, conductor Zander shares how classical music can touch, move, and transform anyone regardless of their background or knowledge of music.	46	Art
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Note. The 25 most translated TED Talks. Data obtained from TED.com on April 2025.

The content analysis of the 25 most translated TED Talks clearly shows that volunteer translators focus on topics such as life, self-discovery, happiness and success in their choice of translation despite the vast library of TED content focused on technology, innovation, and science. This reveals that in a community-driven model, translators center on popular themes and topics. In this context, popular refers to themes that appeal to broad, universal human experiences such as personal growth and everyday life challenges. While the TED Translators initiative aim to contribute to linguistic diversity by making content accessible in multiple languages, the observed pattern reinforces the existing linguistic hierarchies because the circulation of translated content becomes concentrated around globally appealing themes; and that limits the thematic and linguistic diversity that reaches speakers of less spoken languages.

The additional analysis shows that the linguistic hierarchy is reinforced because popular talks circulate more and mostly through dominant languages. All of these talks were delivered in English, and their translations are into high-value languages, as shown in the initial analysis; peripheral languages enter into the translation chain much later, if at all. Even though they are the most translated content, only 14 of them received more than 50 translations, which is less than half of the 115 translation languages on TED. Peripheral languages rely on dominant languages for access. This means translation flows operate through popular talks as well.

While the selection of TED translators on what to translate influence the kinds of content that are made accessible across languages, they do not fundamentally challenge the structural dominance of central languages within the global linguistic hierarchy. Therefore, community-driven translation initiatives, without systemic support or strategic intervention aimed specifically at language representation or promotion, remain insufficient on their own to counteract linguistic hierarchies or homogenization; they, in fact, serve the purpose of disseminating global discourse.

The pattern observed in the content analysis on the 25 most translated TED Talks in which translators consistently choose talks on self-discovery, happiness, and success suggests that although translators come from diverse linguistic communities, their selection of similar popular themes mirrors what Bourdieu (1991) describes as the circulation of symbolic capital: content perceived as valuable and socially more acceptable tends to be favored across global audiences. In this sense, translators focus on topics that already possess high symbolic appeal within the global cultural space.

In this regard, the selection points to a behaviour shaped by the symbolic appeal of such themes. By repeatedly selecting similar topics, translators reproduce a selection of globally circulating narratives, contributing to a thematic centralization of certain content across languages. This strengthens the core argument of this analysis in which translation flows occur within dominant, high-value languages; additionally, the persistence of this pattern can be observed through the translations of popular content as well.

4.4. Survey with TED Translators

A survey was employed to understand the motives, thoughts and expectations of TED Translators on translating for the program. An online Google form was used.

4.4.1 Descriptive Data

46 volunteer translators contributed to the survey. Respondents represent a broadly diverse group from 28 countries: Argentina, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, Colombia, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Myanmar, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Syria, Türkiye, the United States, and Vietnam.

The respondents are native speakers of Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Bengali, Brazilian Portuguese, Bulgarian, Burmese, Chinese, Czech, English, Farsi, French, German, Greek, Hindi, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Latvian, Marathi, Portuguese, Russian, Belarusian, Spanish,

Galician, Swedish, Turkish, and Vietnamese. A total of 28 language speakers participated in the survey.

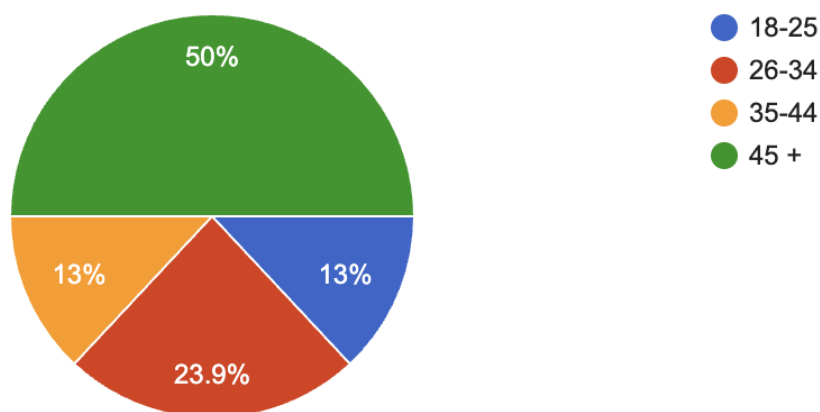


Figure 4.1. The age distribution of volunteer TED Translators

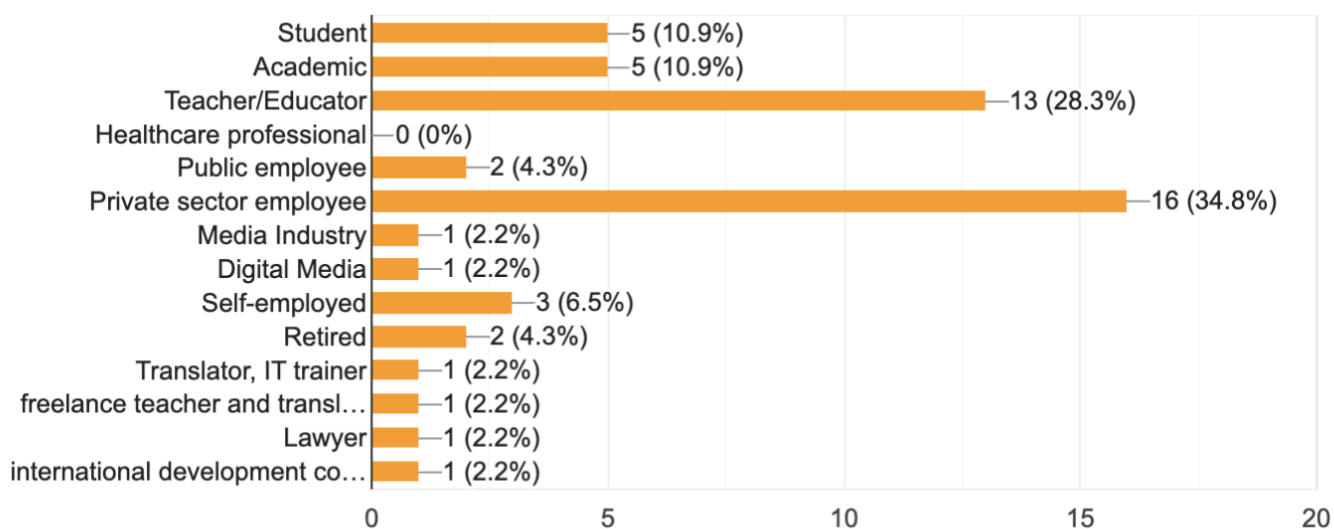


Figure 4.2. The occupational distribution of TED translators

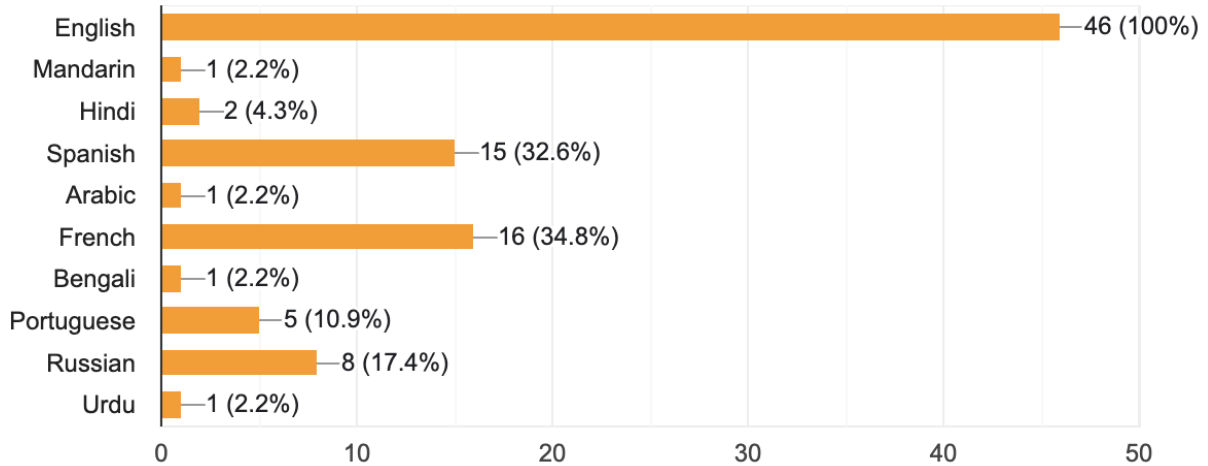


Figure 4.3. Languages commonly spoken by TED Translators

4.4.2 Thematic Analysis

After having reviewed all the responses to the open-ended questions and identifying recurring patterns, phrases, and comments that reflected common themes, a thematic analysis was conducted to examine the inclinations, perspectives and concerns of volunteer translators. Additionally, unique insights directly concerned with the effectiveness of the initiative in linguistic diversity, use of AI in translations, representation of more languages with volunteer efforts were also included to ensure a comprehensive understanding of participant perspectives. As a result, three themes emerged: the role of technology and AI, global knowledge sharing, and thoughts on the initiative and future of linguistic diversity.

4.4.2.1 The role of technology and AI

When asked what their expectations are from the TED Translators initiative in the future, a significant number of respondents shared their concerns about AI, and how it will have a negative effect on the translators, even though the open-ended questions did not include a question about AI or technological means specifically. F.L. from the Italian community responded with “I am afraid it will rely on AI more and more.” However, there are more pessimistic and worrisome responses. E.K. from the Japanese community responded with “Completely replaced by AI” as her

future expectation from the initiative. From the Russian/Belarusian community, R.G. responded with “It will die. Probably real translators will be substituted by AI.” The word “substitute” appeared a few times more in the responses, meaning that the majority of volunteers are not happy with the AI becoming more essential in translating and are concerned that they are, in fact, here to replace human translators.

I.V.B. from the Portuguese community provided “With AI, the TED Translations program is going to end. It did not happen yet due to some flaws in AI translations - but AI is learning.” The input she provided clearly shows a common worry that this program might end when the AI becomes more skilled to handle thorough translations. However, a more insightful input came from Brazilian Portuguese volunteer M.C. as her response underscores the lack of supervision for AI to generate perfectly accurate translations as volunteers were expected to do before the program did not have such digital support: “AI is not quite there, it can’t help with the nuance. It definitely decreases the quality of the translation. You have to guarantee quality. We had the responsibility to be very accurate. Even if TED employed GPT, it wouldn’t be enough.”

A recurring theme among respondents was concern over the growing role of artificial intelligence in translation. Many translators expressed their concerns that AI may eventually replace human translators, emphasizing a trend that prioritizes speed and volume over linguistic and cultural quality, in other words quantity over quality. These responses point to a critical awareness among translators of the limitations of machine translation and AI while highlighting the value of human translation in preserving meaning and cultural richness. These insights suggest to a broader implication: while AI can be a powerful tool for increasing access and scalability, it cannot yet substitute for the human capacity to understand and convey the nuances of a language, particularly in a platform like TED, where the message is as important as the words themselves.

On the other hand, there are some inputs from other translators with a positive outlook toward AI, and particularly dubbing videos with the support of AI. Many respondents answered the open-ended questions with a mention of the recent AI-powered dubbing feature from TED. To the questions about future expectations and what they would like to see changed for the program, V.G. from the Spanish community responded with “AI Dubbing is a great opportunity to

combine translation skills with new technology.” E.G. from the Turkish community said, “AI Dubbing is providing good opportunities.” A.P., a native Russian speaker from the United States, responded with “Dubbing translations is a must, as much of our audience prefers to listen to talks, not read the text from the screen.” I.C. from the Hindi community responded with “Including AI for ease.”

It can be inferred from these responses that members of such language initiatives adopt a pessimistic approach as they strongly feel that this job largely belongs to AI now; and although they feel that their contribution is still required, they feel powerless against the increasing reliance on artificial intelligence.

On the other hand, while there is a growing concern about the power and dominance of AI in replacing human translations, there is also a level of acceptance of AI as a collaborative tool, especially when it provides more accessibility. This suggests that translators who favor AI acknowledge it as a helpful tool for added efficiency and speed, potentially contributing to more translation traffic for all languages.

4.4.2.2 Global knowledge sharing

Translators were asked about their opinions on global knowledge sharing and what they would see changed in the way that information is shared globally. X.G. from the Chinese community responded: “With the development of the Internet, the accessibility and volume of knowledge have increased significantly. People around the world can use the Internet to learn about events and academic achievements from every corner of the globe. However, as knowledge becomes more complex, searching for specific information has become increasingly difficult. If I could change one aspect of global knowledge sharing, I'd focus on enhancing people's search skills, or "search quotient." Teaching individuals how to accurately find the information they need in the complex online world would make knowledge acquisition more efficient and convenient, maximizing the benefits of Internet-based knowledge sharing and preventing valuable knowledge from being overlooked due to search difficulties.”

X.G. also has a positive approach about TED's role in this: "The TED Translators program has played a crucial role in breaking down language barriers and spreading ideas globally. For its future, my first expectation is that the community will continue to produce an increasing number of outstanding works. As the world rapidly evolves with the advancement of technology, it's essential that the program keeps pace. I hope to see the latest and most captivating ideas being translated and disseminated worldwide, enabling people from different cultural backgrounds to access and engage with thought-provoking content. Moreover, I sincerely wish for the Chinese TED community within the Translators program to thrive and flourish. A more vibrant Chinese TED community would not only contribute to the exchange of global ideas but also provide a platform for Chinese perspectives and creativity to shine on the international stage. It could attract more passionate translators and enthusiasts, fostering a dynamic environment where diverse ideas are shared, discussed, and further developed. This growth would strengthen the program's influence and ensure that TED's mission of "Ideas Worth Spreading" reaches an even wider audience in China and beyond."

Similarly, K.A. from the Japanese community responded "I hope we can spread ideas free from fake information." K.K. from the Latvian community responded "More personalized curation to deal with the overabundance of information." F.L. responded "I think algorithms shouldn't push only content in English, but in minority languages as well." J.D. from the French community responded "Spread global knowledge to people from various cultural backgrounds, not only English-speaking ones." And V.G. responded "There should be more representation of developing countries."

The responses point to a shared concern among translators about the equity and accessibility of global knowledge spread in the era of globalization. Although the role of technological advancements has been recognized in the increased availability of information in their responses, several participants also acknowledged that this does not necessarily mean equal access or representation. This theme reveals two main concerns: navigating through a vast volume of digital content, and the dominance of English and the underrepresentation of less spoken languages for on the said content.

Together, these insights suggest that effective global knowledge sharing requires more than just technological tools; it demands inclusive linguistic practices, algorithmic fairness, and the promotion of diverse cultural voices and languages, especially from developing regions. The TED Translators initiative is perceived positively in this regard, but at the same time, it has been recognized as not enough in many responses.

4.4.2.3 Thoughts on the initiative and future of linguistic diversity

Participants are asked if there is anything they would like to add anything about the TED Translators program and/or the future of linguistic diversity. A.P. from the Russian community calls for improvement: “Changes need to be implemented to ensure the quality of transcriptions and translations. Overall, the program has every chance to continue to be successful.”

S.B. from Argentina, a very devoted volunteer with thousands of published translations, responded with “I would like to emphasize the crucial role that TED Translators can play in preserving and promoting linguistic diversity. In my research for my master's thesis on cultural diversity, I've found that large language models (LLMs) are not trained on any of the 170+ indigenous language families of the Americas. Conversely, there is an abundance of training datasets for the majority languages. This disparity significantly accelerates inequality in the production of cultural goods leveraged by artificial intelligence. As we move forward, it is essential to advocate for the inclusion of underrepresented languages in AI training processes. This inclusion will not only help preserve linguistic diversity but also ensure that cultural expressions from all communities are recognized and valued in the digital age. The future of linguistic diversity depends on our ability to bridge these gaps and foster an inclusive environment where all languages can thrive.” His response is a critique of the exclusion of underrepresented languages from AI training and a call for inclusivity.

I.V.B. from Portugal emphasizes the role of the initiative in giving democratic access to knowledge in diverse languages: “The Rosetta stone enabled specialists to read lost languages, due to the translations written on that stone. Let's keep up our good work in continuing to give global, democratic, free access to knowledge to everybody, in their own languages and cultures, thus preserving those languages for the future.”

L.S. from the Portuguese community responded with an emphasis on the value of helping prevent language loss: “TED Translators has its own limits, but it's a good project. We should always help languages not to just disappear. Every language is a whole new world/knowledge in itself.”

M.C., a Spanish and Galician speaker, notes the harmful effects of low-quality translations on vulnerable languages: “I think AI is here to stay and I do honestly believe it can be very useful. However, in my opinion we should not be tempted to think that the amount of work done and the fast pace should prevail over producing good quality carefully reviewed translation. For endangered languages at least, I think that quality text may have a positive impact, while poor automatically generated translation is probably harmful.”

M.C., another very prolific volunteer from Brazil who no longer translates for TED responded with an interesting input: “The human element! Don’t give it all up to AI. Value is important. More than ever. Language is a living thing, it belongs to us, it is ours, it doesn’t belong to AI. They cannot create diversity or a new language ... I would’ve never quit if I were paid. The amount of work and effort dedicated is valuable. The work is “profitable.”

It can be inferred from the responses to the open-ended question that the translators consider the initiative as a potentially powerful tool for promoting linguistic diversity and democratizing access to knowledge; however, with certain limitations. Several participants raised concerns about the need to maintain high-quality translations in the face of increasing dependency on AI, as they believe that automated translations could undermine any efforts to preserve linguistic diversity. Furthermore, there was a call to address the digital inequality that arises from the exclusion of underrepresented languages in AI training datasets. As one former prolific volunteer from Brazil put it, “Language is a living thing, it belongs to us... [AI] cannot create diversity or a new language.” This view resonates with broader concerns about digital inequality and the exclusion of underrepresented languages from AI training datasets. Respondents feel that this could deepen existing disparities. Her comments also emphasize that the voluntary nature of the work can lead to withdrawal if the contributions of the translators are not recognized or valued, or even paid for. Overall, the combination of these inputs points to a future in which TED Translators becomes

more successful not for its technological capacity, but also for its commitment to quality, equity and sustained human engagement.

4.4.3. Likert-scale analysis

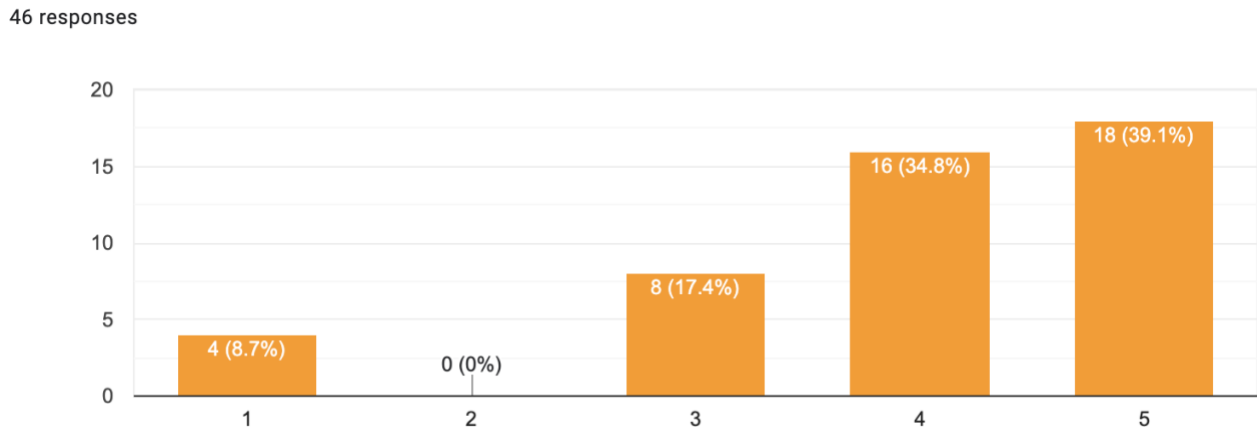


Figure 4.4. Distribution of responses on the Question on a Feature to Highlight Translations

In response to the question, “If TED introduced a feature to highlight translations in lesser-known, endangered or critical languages, how likely would you be to contribute to translating into those languages, assuming your native language is one?”, the responses reveal a strong inclination toward supporting linguistic diversity. Out of 43 respondents, 16 selected “agree” and 18 selected “strongly agree,” totaling approximately 79% expressing a positive possibility of contributing to such an initiative. Eight respondents (18.6%) chose “neutral,” while only one participant (2.3%) selected “strongly disagree.” No participants selected “disagree.” The calculated mean score for this item is approximately 4.14 on a 5-point scale, indicating a generally high willingness to engage in translation efforts for less visible languages. These findings suggest that most respondents are not only receptive to the idea but would likely take action if a feature emphasizing these languages were introduced.

46 responses

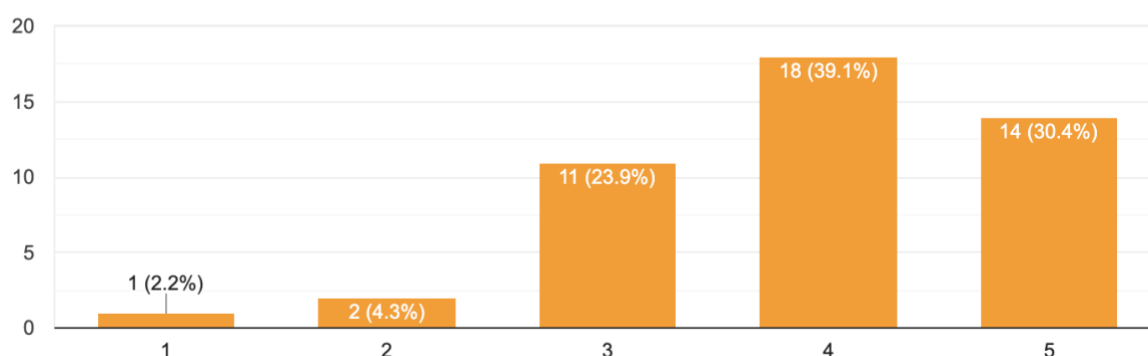


Figure 4.5. Distribution of Responses to the Digital Tools Question

In response to the question “Do you think digital tools (e.g., CAT tools, AI translation) help improve the translation process?”, the majority of participants expressed a positive view. Out of 46 respondents, 18 selected “agree” and 14 selected “strongly agree,” comprising a total of 74.5% who viewed digital tools as beneficial. A smaller portion (25.6%) chose “neutral,” while only 6.9% expressed disagreement. The calculated mean score for this item is approximately 3.91 on a 5-point scale, indicating a general tendency toward agreement. These results suggest that most volunteer translators perceive digital tools as supportive resources in enhancing the translation process, with very few expressing skepticism or opposition.

46 responses

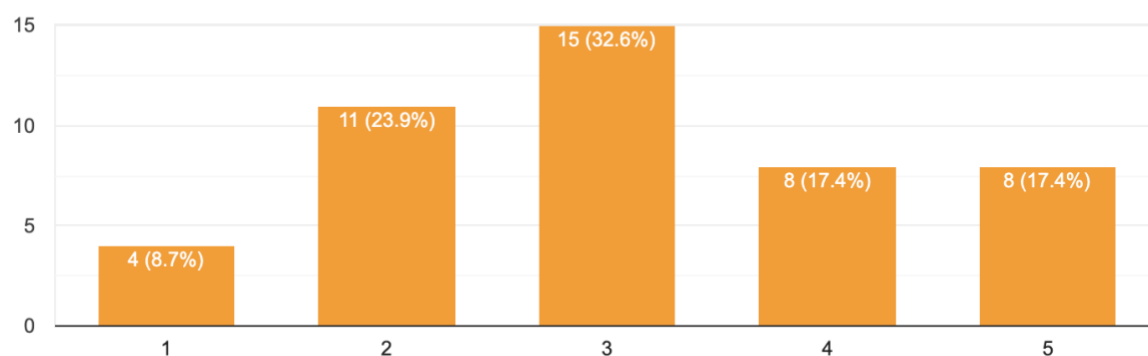


Figure 4.6. Distribution of Responses on the Pace, Accuracy and Digital Tools Question

In response to the statement, “Would you still be able to translate at the same pace and accuracy if you didn’t have the digital tools to support translation?”, the distribution of responses suggests a general reliance on digital tools among participants. Of the 46 respondents, 4 selected “strongly disagree” and 11 selected “disagree,” indicating that approximately 32.6% believe their translation performance would decline without digital assistance. An additional 15 participants (32.6%) responded “neutral,” while 8 chose “agree” and 8 selected “strongly agree,” together representing 34.8% who feel they could maintain their translation quality and speed. The calculated mean score for this item is approximately 3.02 on a 5-point scale, reflecting a nearly even split in perceptions. Overall, the data suggest a moderate dependence on digital tools, with a considerable portion of respondents either unsure or believing that these tools significantly enhance their efficiency and accuracy.

46 responses

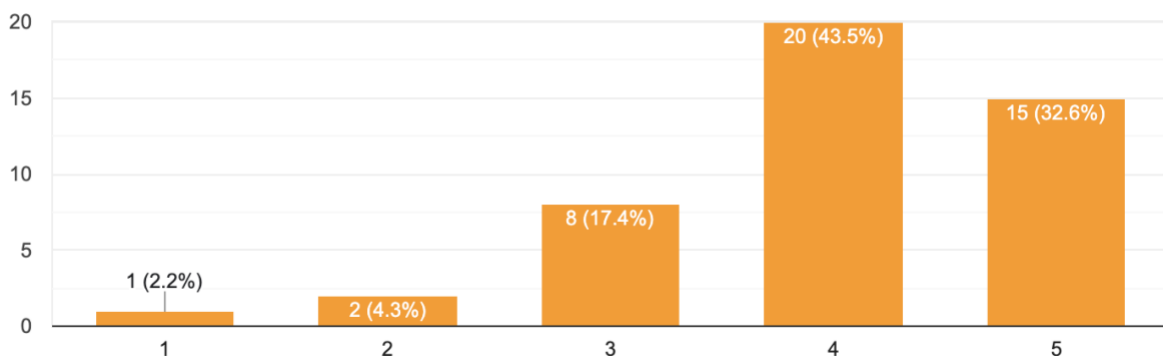


Figure 4.7. Distribution of Responses on the Role of Translation and Subtitling in Mitigating Linguistic Diversity Loss

In response to the question, “Do you think efforts to translate and subtitle content (e.g., TED Talks) can help mitigate the loss of linguistic diversity?”, the data show strong support for the idea that translation initiatives contribute positively to language preservation. Of the 46 respondents, 20 selected “agree” and 15 selected “strongly agree,” accounting for approximately 76.1% of the participants. Eight respondents (17.4%) remained neutral, while only three participants (6.5%) expressed disagreement. The calculated mean score for this item is approximately 3.96 on a 5-point scale, reflecting a clear tendency toward agreement. These results indicate that most

volunteer translators view subtitling and translation efforts as meaningful strategies to support linguistic diversity and reduce the marginalization of less dominant languages.

46 responses

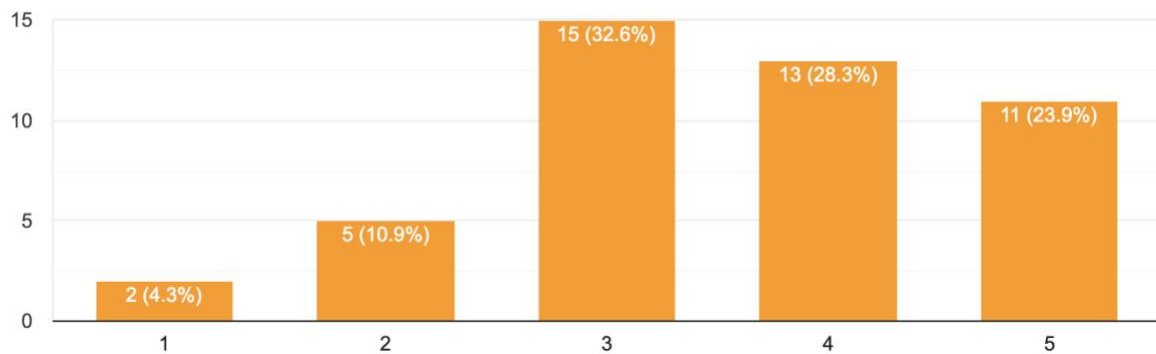


Figure 4.8. Distribution of responses on the perceived influence of dominant global languages on local/national language use and visibility

In response to the question, “Do you think the presence of more dominant global languages is influencing the use and visibility of your local or national language?”, the responses indicate a generally affirmative perception among participants regarding the impact of linguistic dominance. Out of 46 respondents, 13 selected “agree” and 11 selected “strongly agree,” comprising approximately 52.2% who believe global languages are affecting the prominence of their local or national language. Fifteen respondents (32.6%) chose “neutral,” while 2 selected “strongly disagree” and 5 selected “disagree” (15.2%). The mean score for this item is approximately 3.52, suggesting a moderate level of agreement with the idea that global linguistic trends are shaping local language use. These findings point to an awareness among participants of the potential homogenizing influence of dominant languages such as English, especially in digital and international spaces.

46 responses

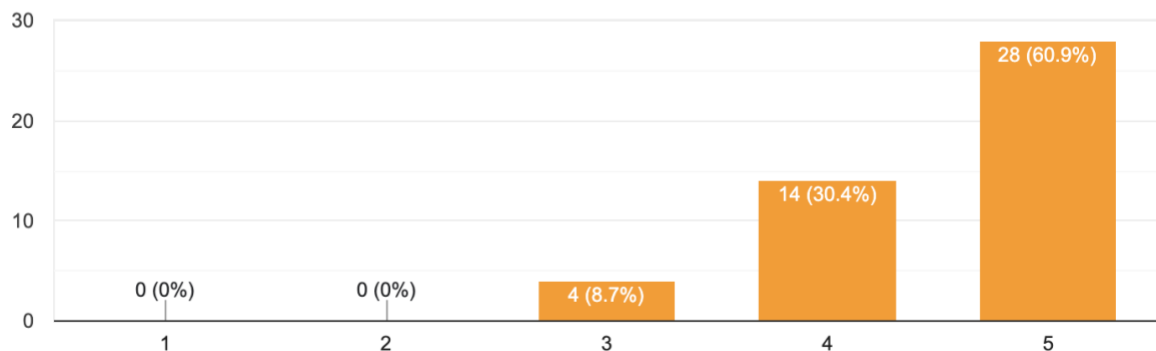


Figure 4.9. Distribution of Responses on the Perceived Importance of Translating Content into Less Commonly Spoken Languages

In response to the question, “How important do you think it is to translate content—including books, movies, academic publications, and other forms of media—into less commonly spoken languages?”, the data demonstrate overwhelming agreement on the significance of promoting linguistic inclusivity. Of the 46 respondents, 28 selected “strongly agree” and 14 selected “agree,” totaling 91.3% who affirm the importance of translating content into less commonly spoken languages. Only 4 participants (8.7%) chose “neutral,” and none selected “disagree” or “strongly disagree.” The calculated mean score is approximately 4.52 on a 5-point scale, reflecting a very high level of consensus. These results strongly suggest that the participant group views translation into minority and not commonly used languages as a critical step toward preserving linguistic diversity, improving access to knowledge, and fostering cultural representation in global media and discourse.

The Likert-scale items were included to gather standardized quantitative data and to measure general attitudes and perceptions among a large and geographically dispersed volunteer population. Such quantitative indicators help contextualize qualitative findings and provide insight into participant sentiment, which is an important dimension of community-driven initiatives. In that regard the Likert-scale responses likely reflect participants’ enthusiasm, personal investment, or aspirational views in order to assess to what extent their attitudes affect the efforts to represent linguistic diversity within the program.

The Likert-scale responses showed a certain level of agreement between volunteers in regard with the potential of the TED Translators program to promote linguistic diversity. Over all participants showed confidence in the initiative's mission to support linguistic equity, accessibility, and perceived inclusivity. This suggests that volunteers consider their contributions significant, helpful, and also in line with linguistic representation. These results further demonstrate that translators hold optimistic beliefs about the program's capacity to support lesser-spoken languages and contribute to the emergence of a more equitable linguistic space. This positive tendency reflects personal motivations of the participants, their commitment to multilingualism, and trust in TED as an organization.

However, despite the motivations and the positive approach expressed by the translators, the translation patterns still follow existing linguistic structures that dictate how languages circulate globally. The content analyses reveal that translation flows are uneven, and they are concentrated around dominant and widely spoken languages, with the English language serving as the primary pivot language within the system. This suggests that individual motivations are not effective enough within a larger system in which linguistic hierarchies shape translation flows, and they are insufficient to counteract these structural hierarchies embedded in global communication systems. In this context, volunteer motivations and intentions alone do not overcome the systemic forces that limit the visibility and functionality of less widely spoken languages.

4.5. Thematic Analysis of the TED Localization Department Interview

A semi-structured interview was conducted with Cissy Yun, the Program Coordinator of TED's localization department, representing the organization. The questions were designed to understand the internal motivations, strategies, and perspectives through the lens of TED, especially through the TED Translators initiative. The analysis of the interview focuses on themes that intersect with the theoretical concerns of this thesis, particularly the preservation and promotion of linguistic diversity in the age of globalization and in a digital environment. The themes are also supported by direct quotes from the interview to provide transparency in the interpretive process.

4.5.1. Commitment to linguistic equity and inclusion

It can be easily observed through answers that a foundational goal of the TED Translators initiative is to expand access to knowledge across all language communities, especially those that are traditionally underrepresented: “Our mission is to make TED content accessible in as many languages as possible—not just the globally dominant ones.” “We’re committed to promoting linguistic equity by uplifting communities that are often overlooked.”

This commitment is carried out through a thoughtful, community-led strategy: “For less visible languages, we take a grassroots approach: partnering with local champions, offering tailored onboarding, and testing tools before scaling more broadly.”

A question of how they prioritize languages and decide on which languages to expand into, Yun answered: “We prioritize languages based on community readiness, digital infrastructure, translation quality, and regional impact.”

TED also recognizes the importance of providing quality translations, regardless of the language: “It’s not enough to simply offer translations—they must be high-quality and stay true to the original speaker’s intent.” This stance aligns with the increasing concerns from the community that translation quality will decrease significantly with the integration of the AI unless certain measures are taken by the organization.

4.5.2. Translation as empowerment and cultural engagement

It is observed from the answers that volunteering through TED Translators is seen as a meaningful form of cultural participation, rather than a passive act of service: “It’s a starting point for anyone curious about the world, language, and knowledge.” The answers suggest that participation in the TED Translators program is not only about the act of translating, but for the purposes of connecting with TED and contributing while learning: “It’s a space where people can step into the role of creator, contributing to something bigger than themselves.”

Further answers comply with the content analysis on the 25 most translated TED Talks, and the observation that translators tend to choose themes that align with their emotions and views: “Our volunteers care deeply about the ideas they’re translating, not just the words. That care shows.”

TED fosters this engagement by offering tools for personal and professional growth: “Whether it’s strengthening their language skills, learning subtitling, exploring translation ethics, or engaging with AI tools, we try to build an environment that supports real growth and ownership.”

According to TED, this model empowers translators through long-term involvement and opportunities: “That’s why many stay with us for years.” It is important to note here that Yun, too, was a volunteer TED Translator for a long time before her employment with the organization.

Overall, this theme suggests that the volunteer translators are considered part of something bigger than the act of translation. The organization feels that it provides space for the personal growth of the volunteers, which ensures their long-term participation within the initiative. This supports the notion that volunteer-based translation efforts, when combined with institutional support and opportunities for self-development, can sustain and foster the effects of localization efforts.

4.5.3 Human-AI collaboration

TED has adapted a hybrid model that combines AI efficiency with human supervision: “AI generates the first pass—then our expert-in-the-loop translators step in to refine tone, accuracy, and emotion.”

AI is seen as a tool to improve human translations, not replace them: “We believe in embracing AI, not resisting it, while being vigilant about its implications.” The organization also acknowledges that the use of AI will always be notified to the viewers: “Speaker consent is mandatory. AI content is always labeled. Human review is nonnegotiable.” These practices ensure the preservation of authenticity in multilingual content: “This approach isn’t just about translation—it’s about making multilingual content more authentic, scalable, and emotionally resonant.”

Contrary to the concerns raised in the survey results, the organization does not intend to replace human translations with AI; instead, AI will be employed to increase the quality of the translations. TED's adaptation of a hybrid model aims to enhance scalability and authenticity, and it is considered yet another positive outcome for the future of linguistic diversity.

4.5.4 Sustainability through community-driven infrastructure

TED's community-driven approach is both practical and ideological. TED was specifically asked what motivates them to maintain a community-driven model instead of fully professionalizing translation, and they believe that a grassroots model is more scalable than a professionalized one. The quotes suggesting this are: "TED Translators began as a grassroots movement, and that spirit still defines us." and "Relying on a global community of volunteers allows us to scale in ways a fully professionalized model can't."

TED believes that the platform has evolved into a self-sustaining ecosystem: "We've seen TED Translators evolve into a self-sustaining ecosystem." According to the department, volunteers are motivated by a variety of reasons. Still, there is a consistent interest in TED content: "Some are predominantly students, others professionals, and many are somewhere in between... they come because of the power of TED's content."

Though professional agencies are used occasionally, TED finds community translations a lot more successful: "We've experimented with professional agencies... but the quality often falls short—especially compared to what our community produces when paired with AI support." Yun also revealed that the department has begun offering paid assignments to foster speed without decreasing quality: "We've started offering paid assignments to experienced volunteers when speed is essential."

The open-ended questions specifically asked how they measure success. Yun answered that success is measured using a multi-dimensional framework: "A mix of output (translated talks), engagement (viewership and community participation), and expansion (especially into

underrepresented languages).” The long-term vision sees TED playing a central role in a more inclusive digital content environment: “The digital space will become increasingly borderless, where people can access and engage with content created in any language.” “We’re not only translating content—we’re creating high-quality experiences in multiple languages.”

The analysis of the interview identified four key themes from the perspective of the TED Team: linguistic inclusion and equity, empowerment of a community model, hybrid adaptation of AI, and sustainability. It has been observed that TED has an optimistic approach to the operation of the initiative and believes the program will continue to grow and include even more languages while enhancing the support of existing languages. The work with volunteers shows how a global digital platform can be utilized and leveraged for fostering linguistic participation. These insights provide a central argument for the thesis: Digital infrastructures, when designed with inclusive principles, hold great potential for the future of linguistic diversity. However, the success of such models is still dependent on human involvement, supervised use of AI, and more importantly, targeted efforts to include underrepresented languages. Most importantly, the organization’s commitment to inclusivity coexists with persistent linguistic hierarchies; optimistic intentions alone cannot overcome structural inequalities embedded in the global language system. Moreover, the platform is content-driven, and language support is a means to expand reach, which means that language inclusion emerges as a consequence of broader participation goals rather than explicit linguistic prioritization, which, as a result, limits its capacity to disrupt existing hierarchies.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Globalization is a complex phenomenon with certain linguistic consequences, reshaping the distribution, functionality and visibility of the world's languages across countries, societies, and communication networks.

There is an undeniable relationship between globalization and language dynamics. The literature reveals that there is a certain level of linguistic stratification and linguistic homogenization with socio-political and economic factors playing a role. The digital revolution has been viewed as a significant juncture, which has accelerated this process. It is observed that certain languages have either gained or maintained functionalities, whereas others, including local and national languages lost their effectiveness against the dominant ones.

The aim of this thesis was to examine the effectiveness of a community-driven translation infrastructure mediated by advanced digital tools in representing linguistic diversity in the era of globalization; further exploring to what degree translation practices and languages are shaped by hierarchical patterns. The TED Translators Initiative was used as a case example to answer the research question. The TED Translator program is operated by the localization department of TED Conferences LLC, a nonprofit organization that holds conferences and posts them online for free. The program allows access to over 50,000 volunteer translators on a digital platform who translate TED Talks into 115 languages. This case offered the opportunity to observe to what extent a global translation platform expands access to marginalized languages and reproduce existing linguistic hierarchies.

In order to analyze patterns of a linguistic hierarchy, a content analysis was implemented, ranking the translation languages used by the initiative with the corresponding number of translations each language has published, and categorizing them according to the Global Language System introduced by de Swaan (2001) and discussed in the literature review of the research. The data revealed that linguistic hierarchies formed in the era of globalization also apply to the initiative: peripheral languages, with an insignificant number of translations appear at the bottom of the

hierarchy; they are followed by central languages, which still receive far fewer translations than the super-central languages above them; and at the top is the single hyper-central language with a significantly higher number of translations, English, with each level dominating the one beneath them.

Upon having verified the vitality and endangerment statuses of TED's translation languages through the metrics of UNESCO and Ethnologue, further findings of the content analyses revealed that the linguistic inequality caused by the uneven distribution of translations across languages is not limited to the marginalization of the endangered and critical languages. While the translation efforts of the initiative fail to expand into languages that rank low in terms of vitality and endangerment, showing a clear pattern of language homogenization; most of the high translation volume is grouped with safe and institutional languages; however, a stratification within these languages also exists and can be observed. The clustering of the majority of translations around a group of safe, institutional and globally dominant languages suggests that linguistic inequality is not only determined by vitality status, and even safe languages are dominated by higher-value languages.

The analysis of linguistic distribution is further reinforced when the role of advanced technology and AI in representing linguistic diversity on TED Translators program is examined as only the hyper-central language, super-central languages and a few central languages out of 115 languages are supported for pre-translated transcripts by AI for subtitling. Moreover, the selected languages for AI-powered dubbing shows an even smaller subset of only half the languages of those supported for AI-captions, revealing an internal hierarchical pattern within the central languages.

These results provide evidence of language-stratification dynamics within the initiative. Rather than operating as a fixed structure, the hierarchy continually reproduces itself through both manual translation practices and technological tools. Even within a relatively small dataset, consistent patterns emerge in which high-value languages systematically dominate lower-value ones, receiving disproportionately more translations and technological support. The digital support for the selected languages amplifies the advantages of already dominant languages while decreasing

the opportunities for marginalized ones to gain representation, which suggests that technological advancements favor and are optimized for dominant languages for a wider reach and circulation.

Another content analysis of the most translated 25 TED Talks was conducted. The 25 TED Talks have been found to have common or similar themes. The content selection of volunteer translators has been observed to cluster around popular themes that resonate across borders such as self-discovery, happiness, success, and life. This suggests that volunteers prioritize translating popular and universally appealing themes, leaving less globally-appealing talks untranslated and limiting their reach. More importantly, the analysis shows that linguistic hierarchies do not operate independently of content selection, they are reproduced and reinforced through the circulation of popular content.

In addition to the content analyses, an online survey was employed with open-ended questions and Likert-scale items to understand the attitudes, expectations and motivations of volunteers to fostering linguistic diversity and the TED Translators program. 46 volunteers from 28 countries, speakers of 38 languages, have participated. The thematic analysis of the survey responses has a significant emphasis on the role of artificial intelligence in translation and localization efforts; volunteers recognize its vast potential, but they are convinced that it will not be helpful unless human intervention is implemented. Volunteers have also expressed their concerns about the digital language divide, and how algorithms must be modified to close such gaps.

The five-point Likert-scale items indicate that more than half of the volunteers are motivated to increase the visibility of their own languages, alongside other motivations such as expanding the reach of TED Talks. Further questions show that up to 80% of participants selected “agree” and “definitely agree” in response to questions assessing their motivations and desires to foster diversity and inclusion. Yet, the results of this research shows that volunteer motivations are not effective enough in challenging the persistence of existing linguistic hierarchies.

Lastly, a thematic content analysis with a semi-structured comprehensive interview with the localization team at TED revealed four central themes: linguistic inclusion and equity, empowerment through a community-based model, the hybrid integration of AI, and long-term

sustainability. It has been observed that TED is highly optimistic about the trajectory of the initiative, and they have been implementing strategies for more inclusivity and linguistic equity. The thematic analysis revealed that inclusive and optimistic strategies of an organization is not effective enough to provide and foster a linguistic equity, further suggesting that organizational strategies can diverge from the actual outcome as even well-intentioned strategies and approaches are constrained by structural and systemic factors that increase the visibility of dominant languages.

The analysis of TED Translators Initiative has revealed that patterns of language homogenization, linguistic hierarchies, and the spread of English language are clearly observed within the initiative, as the number of translations in dominant languages are significantly higher than those of all other languages. Further analysis indicates that the numerical categorization of the translation languages complies with the Global Language System introduced by de Swaan (2001). Super-central and subsequently central languages accumulate more translations while peripheral languages remain marginalized. The dominant languages that receive higher volumes of translations are also safe and institutional according to the vitality metrics, with more specific digital support. As a result, translation and localization efforts occur within hierarchical flows that favor a certain set of high-value languages.

Despite the motivations of the volunteers and the efforts of TED to foster linguistic diversity and multilingualism, it has been observed that the global linguistic hierarchy, as described by de Swaan (2001) and linguistic capital by Bourdieu (1991), both shape and limit the effectiveness of such diversity efforts. The economic and political power of central languages still dictates which languages have the greatest cultural and economic capital in the global platform. The unbalanced number of TED Talk translations into these languages reflects their elevated symbolic value and confirms the presence of a linguistic hierarchy.

Similarly, peripheral languages are observed to have a very limited presence in the initiative, raising concerns about inequality. Speakers of peripheral languages depend on a central or super-central language to access global content, indicating that dominant languages mediate global knowledge; and only speakers of these languages have control over and access to information.

The use of local and national languages within the broader concept of globalization presents the concept of glocalization, in which local adaptations merge with global influences, which emphasizes the necessity of local values and hybridity in order to adapt to the local landscape (Robertson, 1995). However, counterarguments to this concept have also been presented, the main one of which is the notion of globalization (Ritzer, 2003), a strategy that appears to promote diversity but operates to spread standardized forms for the ultimate goal of global expansion. In this context, the translation and localization practices appear diverse but, in fact, offer only surface-level diversity.

The findings of this study closely resonate with Ritzer's (2003) critique of glocalization, i.e. globalization, in which dominant forces supersede and overwhelm local values, and there is not a balanced exchange; in the case of which, dominant languages have more visibility and often replace local and indigenous languages. The findings of this research revealed that although the translation and localization efforts of TED Translators function as an initiative aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion, the content continues to be distributed through hierarchical flows of translation that favor dominant languages in the era of globalization.

Furthermore, even though the role of a large, community-driven translation initiative, such as TED Translators, as well as the increasing potential of AI in promoting linguistic diversity have been acknowledged in the analyses, the number of critical and endangered languages that gained visibility to promote linguistic diversity within the initiative is not effective enough in challenging global linguistic hierarchies. The use of AI with the translations has been observed as a source of concern rather than a genuine promise of linguistic equity, as it enhances efficiency only for a limited subset of dominant languages. As Blommaert (2010) argues, the digital space seems to be structured by market requirements that privilege globally dominant languages, especially English.

The TED Translators initiative has been observed to reproduce global linguistic hierarchies, although the program aims to promote linguistic diversity and inclusivity, the prevalence of English and the unbalanced distribution of translations suggest a trend of linguistic

homogenization. Based on the perspective of Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, in the age of globalization, languages with greater symbolic and economic capital are prioritized. In this context, localization efforts appear inclusive but ultimately retain the symbolic capital of dominant languages. As a result, even when content is presented in multilingual and localized formats, linguistic hierarchies remain uncontested due to the tangible benefits that certain languages provide such as access to global communication networks, better job opportunities, educational opportunities, and international mobility.

In conclusion, this thesis has explored the intricate relationship between globalization, linguistic diversity, and the potential of digital translation practices through the case study of TED Translators. While community-driven efforts and technological advancements offer promising space to promote language diversity and visibility, the findings of the research reveal that a community-driven, voluntary translation infrastructure repeat and reinforces existing linguistic hierarchies despite the use of advanced technology. Despite the motivations of the volunteers and the inclusive strategies of TED, dominant languages continue to marginalize less widely spoken languages. The findings reveal that translation and localization practices operate within existing hierarchical communication flows.

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