

## **The English Language as a Mediator of the Intercultural Dialogue within Danube Space**

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**Abstract:** The paper explores the importance of the English language in the process of cooperation between the countries in the Danube region and outlines the value of the knowledge for the different cultures and the variety of languages that are spoken in this region. Study of contemporary linguistic and cultural borrowings in Bulgaria, Russia and the USA. Comparative analysis based on survey results. The results of the survey show the people's opinion on the value of the English language as a tool for solving the communication problems stemming from the different languages that are spoken in the Danube region. The results also show how people perceive this region and what issues are considered as important for its development. The results can serve as a starting point of a large-scale study on the linguistic and cultural diversity within the Danube region. This paper interprets the impact of the English language in the process of achieving mutual knowledge about the cultures of the ten countries that are situated along the Danube river.

**Keywords:** English language; Danube countries' cultures; variety of languages; cohesion; mutual understanding; language barriers

### **1. Introduction**

Danube is a very special river for Europe in an economic and cultural sense. It passes through ten countries with different lifestyles, cultures and various rates of economic development. Eight different languages are spoken along the 2 850 kilometers of the Danube: German, Slovakian, Hungarian, Croatian, Serbian, Romanian/Moldavian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian.

The economic development of the Danube countries also is different. Eurostat proves this with the different GDP per capita for each of these countries. The Danube river is a natural resource that could cause a positive influence on the economy of the countries that are part of the Danube region. But the equal development of the countries can be achieved through the intensification of the contacts and intercultural dialogue between them. In order to do this it is needed to overcome the linguistic barriers between the citizens of the Danube countries which is achievable only through the usage of a language mediator like English.

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## **2. Contemporary Significance of the English Language Worldwide**

Nowadays we are witnessing two very powerful processes. They are globalization and Europeanization. Foreign language knowledge is crucial for their realization. We need to know foreign languages to communicate, to realize trade, tourism, to travel and etc. Foreign languages are our key to the success. In Diana Popova's article "On the Use of English words in the Bulgarian Press – Invasion Globalization or Pretence" there are a lot of useful ideas and important conclusions. The globalization acquires its present dimensions through the new technologies. These technologies led to the appearance of internet and social media. Globalization creates universal cultural symbols and value systems that are criteria for the human's behavior. Globalization is also responsible for the establishment of universal languages.

English language has imposed as a common language and according to the book "Identification in the language", written by Mihail Videnov. English language has become a "macro language". The author interprets the idea that "The English language has emerged not because of the dominance of England, but because of the USA global leadership."

The influence of English language in the globalization is very strong. The positive sides of the English language are explained in detail in Carlos Carrion Torres's article with the title "English as a Universal Language". English is the second largest native language all over the world. It is "the official language in seventy countries and the English-speaking countries are responsible for about 40% of world's total GNP". It is the world media language and the language of the computer world. The use of English words is often an automatism among the computer-based groups. According to Lyudmila Kirova in the book "The Computer Technologies and the Bulgarian Language": "The main reason for the use of the English language in the Bulgarian computer-based groups' speeches is the foreign language communicative environment imposed by technological reasons."

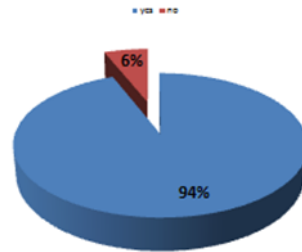
It appears the term 'English as a lingua franca'. According to Barbara Seidlhofer's article "English as a Lingua Franca": "only one out of every four users of English in the world is a native speaker of the language ... in most cases, English is a 'contact language' between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture". It could be concluded that the power of the English language is well-spread all over the world in different fields: media language, computer language, the language of the integration and cooperation. This is the language which overcomes the borders and breaks down the language barriers. It is easy to be learnt because an alphabet with only twenty-six letters. It uses the Latin writing system which is well-known and a lot of other languages use it. For example, eight of the ten countries which are a part of the Danube region use the Latin writing system: Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia,

Romania and Moldova. This fact supports the view that English language could be understood and acquired easily. In the Steve Doughty's article „English is the Lingua Franca of Europeans as Two Thirds Speak the Language which has Squeezed out all its Rivals“ it was found that “94 % of the students in secondary schools and 83 % of students in primary schools across the EU” are learning English as their first foreign language. Seven of the countries of the Danube region are a part of the EU – Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania. This fact proves the wide distribution of the English language all over the world and in particular for the Danube region.

### **3. English as a Mediator of the Intercultural Dialogue within the Danube Space**

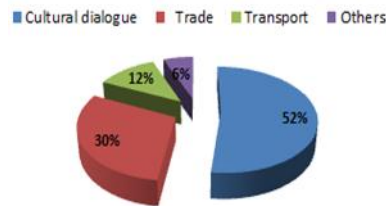
All the ten countries of the Danube region need of a lot of translators in order to communicate and to achieve a success in the process of knowing each other. The countries are close but there is a lack of knowledge between them. The Chairman of the Institute for Danube Region and Central Europe among other things, Erhard Busek said on 23rd of May 2014 during his visit in Ruse in the conference hall in Kanev centre that “We are close to each other but we do not know each other”. These words show the truth. We, the possessors of the Danube cultures need to know each other in cultural, economic and law aspect. All the communication needs to be in a language that is known by many people. Nowadays, the English language is spoken by most of the people in Europe. It is one of the official languages of the European union. This language helps to overcome the language barriers and to know the culture of the others. English language makes us more active in the intercultural communication. There are a lot of foreign words from the English language that had appeared in the Bulgarian one. This process had developed also in the other countries. That's why the importance of the English is really crucial. For example, in the Bulgarian language there are a lot of borrowings from the English language that are in the area of policy (consensus), economy (manager), computer science (file), medicine (diagnosis), education (module), music (remake), sport (fitness), media (electronic media), fashion (suit shirt), etc.

For the purposes of this work a survey about the role of this language between the people in the Danube region was conducted. A short questionnaire was sent to people which age was between 20 and 35. These people were from Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine and Germany. All the number of the participants was fifty. The questionnaire was sent them through internet. The first question asked the participants if they were interested in the topic how the potential of the Danube river could be successfully developed. Three of them did a negative answer and forty-seven a positive one.



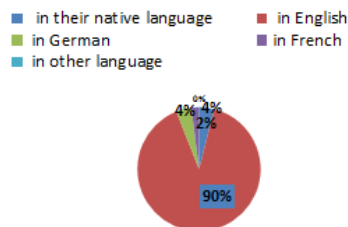
**Figure 1. The interest in the ways which could help to develop the potential of the Danube river among the people which age is between twenty and thirty-five**

The second question was about what sphere should be the first step in the development of the potential of the Danube river concentrated in. The options were cultural dialogue, trade, transport and others. Twenty-six of the participants chose the first answer which shows the importance of the cultural knowledge in order to have a trade, a successful business, improvement of the transport, etc. Fifteen people marked trade, six of the participants chose transport and three answered others as they added the word tourism.



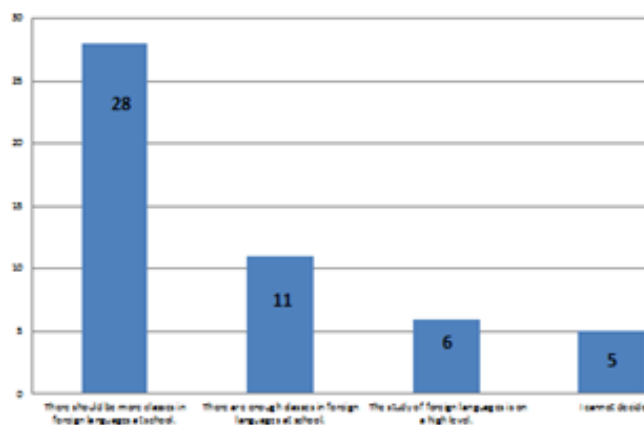
**Figure 2. The different spheres that should be the first step in the development of the Danube river**

The third question was about the language in which they prefer to communicate. The options were speaking in the native language, in English, in German, in French or in any other language. Forty-five of the participants marked the English language, two – their native language, two – to speak in German, one – in French and no one marked the last option. This fact focuses on the importance of learning English language nowadays.



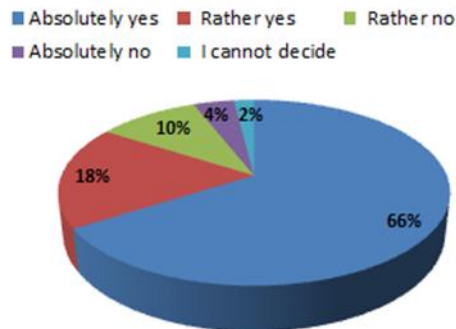
**Figure 3. Language preferences for communication within the Danube region**

The fourth question from the questionnaire was about the educational system and how it works in terms of foreign language learning. The options were as follows: the first one was that there should be more classes in foreign languages at school; the second one was that there were enough classes in foreign languages at school; the third one suggests that the study of foreign languages is on a high level and last but not least was the option “I cannot decide”. The answers that were received were twenty-eight for the first one, eleven for the second one, six for the third one and five people marked the last one. These results suggest the idea that foreign language learning is very important and it would be good if there would be an improvement. For example, more classes in the foreign language, more practically concentrated lessons with more speaking in the language.



**Figure 4. The level of development of the educational system in terms of foreign language learning**

The fifth question asked the participants if they would participate in a project related to the Danube region. The possible answers were: “absolutely yes”, “rather yes”, “rather no”, “absolutely no” or “I cannot decide”. Thirty-three chose the first one that proves that the young people are motivated and ambitious. They would love to use their intellectual potential to contribute to the development of the Danube regions in economic, cultural, law or political aspect. Nine people marked the answer “Rather yes”. This means that they would also wish to take part in a project for the Danube region. Five of the participants answered “Rather no”, two – “Absolutely no” and one chose the last option “I cannot decide”.



**Figure 5. The young people's willingness to participate in a project related to the Danube region**

There could be a lot of things for the improvement of the transport by the river, for better trade relations between the Danube regions, for easier intercultural communication. The Chairman of the Institute for Danube Region and Central Europe among other things, Erhard Busek said on 23rd of May 2014 during his visit in Ruse in the conference hall in Kanev centre that "The money to finance the Danube Strategy is in the existing funds, but people should apply with specific projects ". These words suggest the idea that we should focus our efforts on the preparation of clear, precise and specific projects. Erhard Busek also added that "There is a huge list of ideas of what should be done for the development of the Danube macro-region and almost no concrete projects how it should be done." The transport related to the tourism along the Danube, the maintenance of the river and port infrastructure need improvement. The transport infrastructure is important for the development of tourism and for stimulating the business in the region as a whole. But for achieving all these results we need intercultural communication and mutual knowledge about each other.

The value of the knowledge of the Danube regions' cultures is very important for achieving better cooperation. Danube river is a unique one with some facts. It is the second longest river in Europe after Volga. River Volga passes through the European part of Russia and just one of its sleeves reaches the territory of Kazakhstan. If we compare the rivers, we will explore that the Danube is the longest river in Europe with the most different cultures around it (ten). All these ten cultures are unique. People speak different languages. Most of the languages with the exception of the German language that is spoken all over the world, have the same problem like the Bulgarian language – internal closeness. Slovakian, Hungarian, Croatian, Serbian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Moldavian are Ukrainian represent the language and cultural treasure of Europe. This wide range of cultures and languages has a potential for the development of a unique tourism. The Danube countries' cultures are possessors of different cultures. If cohesion could be

achieved in the area of mutual understanding, the Danube region will flourish in the cultural and economic sphere.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the ten countries that are a part of the Danube region are spoken different languages and they are representatives of different cultures, customs and manners. They have different legislation and economic development rate. Some of them are a part of the European Union and three of them are not. These countries are cultural heritage for Europe. They are situated very close to the Danube and if the potential of the river is developed successfully, these ten countries could be cooperated in regard to the transport and the infrastructure near the river. The tourism and trade could flourish if specific projects could be created. The funding for the Danube region has enough money to realize the projects. There are a lot of ideas but without projects these ideas cannot become a reality. The first step in the realization of the process of cooperation is the mutual understanding by knowing the culture of the other. Every communication needs a language which helps the communicating people to exchange information. The role of the English language is crucial in this chain of thoughts because it has become a universal language. It is used in different spheres such as media, IT technologies, etc. One of the most positive sides of this language is that it overcomes the situations with the internal closeness of the languages. In most of the cases the Danube region's countries are affected with this problem of the internal closeness. According to the survey the cultural dialogue in English is the panacea for better communications between the ten countries.

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**Annex 1**

**Survey**

1. Are you interested in the ways which could help to develop the potential of the Danube river?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
2. What sphere should be the first step in the development of the potential of the river concentrated in?
  - a) Cultural dialogue
  - b) Trade
  - c) Transport
  - d) Others
3. How do you prefer to communicate with the people from the other countries which are a part of the Danube region?
  - a) in their native language
  - b) in English
  - c) in German
  - d) in French
  - e) in other language
4. Do you think that the educational system is on a good level for the study of foreign languages at school?
  - a) There should be more classes in foreign languages at school.
  - b) There are enough classes in foreign languages at school.
  - c) The study of foreign languages is on a high level.
  - d) I cannot decide.
5. Would you participate in a project related to the Danube regions?
  - a) Absolutely yes
  - b) Rather yes
  - c) Rather no
  - d) Absolutely no
  - e) I cannot decide