

Francophonie: An Alternative Education for Globalisation

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This article analyses the Francophonie strategy to foster diversity of cultures and multilingualism in a globalised world. The first part of the article provides with the analyses of the historic role of the French cultural and educational model in the diplomatic relations. Then the article refers to the context of the Second World War and the American dominance overshadowing the French model. In this context, the development of the Francophonie strategy is analysed with a particular reference to the political strategies that France has implemented to achieve its goals. One of the most important ones is the pressure that has exerted for the adoption of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), 2006).

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Introduction

Throughout the 20th century, US has become the leader in international relations and has theorised about the role of education in the diplomatic sphere. During the Cold War, there was an intense academic debate in the US concerning the role of education in the diplomatic relations. Some authors even considered education as the fourth dimension of international relations together with the military, social and political dimensions (Combs, 1964). Since then, the role of education in international relations has been considered as a key element and in the global world is theorised as an element to influence the power of a nation in a soft way, in other words, as a soft-power (Nye, 2004).

This article analyses the French strategy to defend the diversity of cultures and education in the context of globalisation and the dominance of the Anglosaxon culture and education. In particular, the text revises the historic role of the French universal education model based on the education of citizens by means of the assimilation to the French language and culture in 1880. This model was overshadowed by the American model in a new international order established after the Second World War. In this new context, France has developed an international political strategy together with other countries to defend the plurality and diversity of cultures. In this sense, France and the countries involved in the Francophonie strategy have struggled for the recognition of the right to the diversity of cultures and education at the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). In this context, in the new millennium, a turn into a different direction has been made in order to defend the French education as a means to defend multilingualism and the plurality of cultures, far away from the assimilationist approach. In synthesis, the article analyses the evolution of the Francophonie idea from a linguistic and geographic sense to a political one.

The Dominance of the French Cultural and Educational Model in International Relations

The French language had replaced Latin in 1714. Since then and until 1918, this language had been the reference in the European diplomatic relations. At this time, speaking or writing in French showed not only the mastering of a language, but also a certain degree of distinction and a high level of education and culture.

The diffusion of French cultural products in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries was not because of the deliberated action of the government policy, but the spontaneous development of the most evolved civilisation in Europe at that time. The privileged position of the French language and culture explained the political importance of this country and its literary, artistic and scientific patrimony that emphasised intellectual and spiritual values.

The French Revolution signified the opening towards modernity in politics and the consolidation of the liberal states which had a strong impact not only in the European continent but also worldwide. As an example, we may remember that the “Statue of Liberty”, more accurate referred to as “Lady Liberty”, was a gift from France to America in 1886 to celebrate the independence of the latter country. The “Statue of Liberty” was a symbol of a common sharing of principles: freedom, equality and fraternity on the European side of the Atlantic and life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness on the American side.

The French Revolution constitutes a point of “no return” not only in France where at the time it represented the most modern political ideas, but also scientific progress and internationalism. The mastering of the French language and culture all over the world was associated to a special ability to present philosophical, religious and political problems with a universal scope and proved to be a language particularly adapted to express civilised, rational, clear and precise ideas. As a vehicular language in addition to a national value, it signified universality itself, a human patrimony that played the role as an intermediary and a universal translator.

The French universalistic aspiration was already advocated by the Jesuits catholic education. Later, it was also reinforced in the period of the French Enlightenment that provided it with an official defence of the human rights worldwide. The impact of French heritage is so strong that even today, it is maintained and reinforces the positive worldwide image of France (Legros, 1993, p. 55).

In 1880, France lost its hegemony abroad when it was defeated in the Sedan War and lost territories such as Alsacia and Lorraine. In addition, the new European military and intellectual powers such as the Germanic one were coming into the stage. In this context of European economic, political and territorial rivalry, there was an expansion of the French patriotic desires. The two centuries of French cultural hegemony that France had enjoyed since the replacement of Latin as “lingua franca” was now ending and other European languages were gaining more international reputation.

In 1883, the Alliance Française was founded as a national association for the dissemination of the French language in the colonies and abroad. This private initiative was perfectly in line with the interests of the French left government that was in power in the incipient republican nation-state. The unanimous and clear support of the administration towards the Alliance Française was fast, and soon it received state support and funds and was recognised as of public utility. This institution believed that the French language and culture were not the property of the French people but a wealth of international heritage. The education provided by the French state was targeted at the building of a nation of French citizens who would be rational, progressists and free thinkers, and who would have to communicate in French. The teaching of history was also one of the pillars of the republican education and, through it, the administrators tried to instil in citizens the feeling of belonging to the

nation. The teaching of the French language and culture was taught from an assimilationist approach as the teaching of a common language was taught at school to serve for a freedom project, and was to contribute to the homogeneity of the nation. Education aimed at the integration of all in a social body, through moral values and intellectual categories.

A New International Order: The Institutionalisation of the Francophonie

In the diplomatic sphere, the privilege of the French language was maintained until 1918 when the Paris Conference was held and the Versailles Treaty signed. The pressure exerted by President Wilson on the administrators succeeded in introducing for the first time English as a working language not only in the International Conference but also in the treaty. This symbolic fact underlined that the loss of power of the French political and cultural model in a more complex world was emerging in the early twenties. Slowly, English and the Anglo-Saxon culture gained a very important role not only through the efforts of the UK but also with the strength of the most prosperous nation: the US.

Throughout the 20th century, the influence of the English language and culture increased. After the Second World War, a new international context dominated by the consolidation of the two superpowers: US and USSR (Union Soviet Socialist Republics), emerged. France was left behind in the Yalta, Teheran and Postdam Conferences, and was only recognised as a fourth power. France gained some ground thanks to its historical influence and was included as an official language of the UN (United Nations) in 1945. In fact, the UN headquarters was placed in Geneva, and the UNESCO in Paris, in addition to the headquarters in francophonie capitals (Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg). US had its own victories as some of the most relevant international organisations were located in its territory such as the World Bank or the UN headquarters. In the context where France is no longer considered as a great power, the French cultural policy has to change from an aggressive strategy to a defensive one. In this sense, France has adopted many strategies to defend the French language, such as the Toubon Act concerning the use of French in six areas: (1) consumer information and salary protection; (2) scientific and technical world; (3) public services; (4) education and training; (5) audiovisual; and (6) plurilingualism development. In addition, the French Song Act was passed in order to protect the French music industry.

In the 1950s, the French authorities supported the net of Alliances Françaises. The governmental support helped an extraordinary development of the net of Alliances Françaises between 1950 and 1967 (Bruezière, 1993). Some education authorities, such as the minister of education René Billères in 1956 or even François Mitterrand participated in the Alliance Française ceremonies. In addition, in 1958, Charles de Gaulle was appointed as the president of honour of the association, and in the opening academic year, he mentioned in a discourse “The world can not be built up without France. It can not be done without its thinking, its action” (IDEM). In 1963, prime minister Georges Pompidou in an important social event held at the Alliance Française explained the double mission of the Alliance, which was to disseminate the language, the culture and the thinking of France abroad. At this time, the first manual of the French language and civilisation by Gaston Mauger appeared for the teaching of French. This publication signified an important step forward in the teaching of French, and some French teachers have considered this book as “the most important contribution to the dissemination of French throughout the world”.

Throughout the 1970s in the context of decolonisation, there was a strong revision of the French strategy in cultural affairs in the so-called Rigaud rapport. At the time, Jean François Poncet, minister of foreign affairs,

evaluated the foreign cultural policy with the aim “to renovate the concept of foreign cultural relations and how to orientate them for the next twenty years, until 2000” (Znined-Brand, 1999, p. 64).

The new strategy made a change from the traditional universalistic approach which had been associated with the French grandeur approach to one of a reciprocity and interdependence. Rigaud considered that “Cultural relations could no longer be thought of in terms of the diffusion of our culture, but as the benefits of the exchanges between our culture and the cultures of other countries” (Znined-Brand, 1999, p. 65).

Even though the proposals from the Rigaud report were not adopted, it meant a rupture with the French traditional strategy and led to a new strategy in 1983: The *Projet Culturel Exterieur* (Foreign Cultural Project) de la France focused on the diversity of cultures in existence and the need for the reciprocity of cultures in their exchanges. In addition, there was a new idea which was linked to the concept of public diplomacy and soft-power, and from this new approach, all French citizens are involved in contributing decisively to definition of the image of France abroad.

In the 1990s, two main strategies were defined to reinforce the power of the French language and culture (Noya, 2007, p. 286):

(1) The trade strategy came about through the proposals of the Comité Colbert that gathered together the main trades of prestige in France by representing them as an industry key to the French economy;

(2) Francophonie was defined as a political strategy to foster the use of the French language and defend the importance of the French culture.

The Francophonie Strategy

The origins of the term “Francophonie” appeared for the first time in 1880 in the book *France, Argel et les colonies* by Onésime Reclus. This book divided the planet according to the languages spoken in each country, island, state and continent, and tried to describe the francophonie peoples. From this prospective, the term “Francophonie” had two meanings: (1) The linguistic one referred to the people who spoke French; and (2) The geographic meaning referred to all the people in the world that spoke French. Soon, the meanings and use of this term were forgotten and new terms appeared, such as “francitude”, “Francophonie community” and “francité”, but none of them were successful.

Francophonie as an alternative model appeared after the Second World War. We may identify four phases in the building of the Francophonie networks (Berguin, 1999, p. 238):

(1) The first phase is developed at the beginning of the 1960s after the liberation. At this time French authorities showed their interests and concerns toward the advance of the Anglo-American model. Among these people were university students, journalists or researchers, who multiplied their efforts with many initiatives and contacts, and who helped found various associations such as the French Writers Association, etc.;

(2) The second phase was developed in the 1960s along with the African proposals for the structuring of the francophonie community in places where French is the mother tongue. The French intellectuals were aware that the existence of francophonie communities is much wider than France, which included Québec and other zones in Africa. In parallel, an associative network was set up as the universal French federation, which organized French biennial, etc.;

(3) The third phase allowed the use of the political interventions in the building of the French community. In 1986, the first summit for heads of state and governments that share French was organised. This body was completed with the following intergovernmental bodies: the ministries of education, youth and sports;

(4) The fourth phase led to the instauration of the francophonie summits, the movements for continuous structuring such as Paris (1986), Québec (1987), Dakar (1989), Chaillot (1991) and Maurice (1993). Some new associations were also set-up.

The Reconceptualisation of the Francophonie Idea

In the new millennium, after the institutionalisation of Francophonie, four meanings have emerged (Deniau, 2003):

- (1) A linguistic sense: somebody who speaks French;
- (2) A geographic sense: the people any where in the world who speak French;
- (3) A spiritual and mystic sense: the feeling of belonging to the same community, this is a feeling of solidarity to share common values between the francophonie individuals and community;
- (4) An institutional sense: as both public and private organisations operate in the francophonie space.

From an institutional point of view, since the Second World War, Francophonie has become an alternative education model to the Anglosaxon one and the idea of cultural diversity in general. In 1986, president Francois Mitterrand organised the first summit of the francophonie countries with the aim of defending the French model. This president insisted on this by saying “We are starting a task that will persist in future times, as through a common language exists a thinking”. Moreover, he called upon the participants of such a conference to “promote collaboration and cooperation and to defend a common patrimony in a diverse world” (Bruezière, 1993).

In the new millennium, the French authorities have been able to incorporate the Francophonie objectives and have set up the portfolio of the secretary of state in charge of cooperation and Francophonie. The objective of the Francophonie does not only interest in the French government also but has aspirations to have a world impact. Indeed, “La Francophonie” represents one of the biggest linguistic zones in the world. Its members share not just a common language but also the humanist values promoted by the French language. From this prospective, since its emergence as an organisation in the international sphere, the IOF (International Organization of the Francophonie) is the advocator of the deviation risks that globalisation might bring, and has been a tool for preventing the deepening of inequalities and the weakening of some identities. In addition, through this organisation, there are efforts made against the uniformisation and the anglosaxon political and cultural hegemony.

The IOF has its head office in Paris, but 70 members and states are also involved as well as four permanent representations in Addis Ababa (a UN Economic Commission for Africa) at the African Union, Brussels (at the European Union), New York and Geneva (at the UN). In addition to the IOF and the Parliamentary Assembly of La Francophonie, four operators are responsible for the implementation of the programs decided at the summits: the Academic Agency of La Francophonie; TV5 Monde; the International Association of francophonie Mayors and the Senghor University of Alexandria.

At present, France is still a political and cultural reference in diplomatic references, but now it is also an alternative model among others that are becoming more dominant. In the summits held every two years, the programmes to foster the Francophonie values are decided. The summits have been held every tow years in Paris (1986), Quebec (1987), Dakar (1989), Chaillot (1991), Gran Bahía (1993), Cotonou (1995), Hanoi (1997), Moncton (1999), Beirut (2002), Uagadugu (2004), Bucarest (2006) and Quebec (2008).

Through these summits, the Francophonie has a stronger international personality to influence in some political issues such as: democracy development, promotion of cultural diversity, and a sustainable and solid

development. In this sense, the Francophonie intends to become a political reference and has achieved important diplomatic goals. Jacques Chirac explained that the Burkina Francophonie is a “community of values” and not of interests.

In the Francophonie Chart (Retrieved from <http://www.francophonie.org>), “Francophonie must take into account the historic changes and the important political, economic, technological and cultural occurred in the 21st century to consolidate its utility in a world that respects cultural and linguistic diversity, in which the French language and its universal values are developed and contribute to an original multilateral action and to the formation of a international solidary community”.

One of the most significant successes of the Francophonie strategy has been the consideration of “cultural exception” in the Uruguay negotiations. This was only the first phase to the signature of the UNESCO towards the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (UNESCO, 2006). Since then and thanks to the active role of France in the international sphere since 2006, the right to cultural diversity is recognised in international regulations.

In this new context, the idea of Francophonie is far away from the significance in the colonialism period where it was born, and it is no longer associated to the idea of a universalistic French cultural model. The Francophonie in the new millennium has changed into a political project linked to a renovated model of human rights and culture dialogue. From a cultural solidarity prospective, each of the member states of the OIF recognises the plurality of the world cultures and the value of the differences of the cultures. In addition, the states and government members of the Francophonie consider that cultural benefits can not be reduced to their economic and commercial side.

Francophonie, when it is institutionalised, is in a privileged position to promote intercultural dialogue (Retrieved from <http://www.francophonie.org>):

Since its emergence as an organisation in the international sphere, Francophonie has placed at the centre of its concerns, the place of culture in the definition of identities. This means that since it was incorporated to the Francophonie each of its members recognises the existence of different identities, cultures and patrimonies. In this sense, it is recognised, respecting the universal principles of the human rights and of democracy.

One of the most important achievements of the Francophonie movement is the approval of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions adopted on October 20, 2006 by UNESCO. This text confirms that cultural dimension is one of the keys to the strategies of the new millennium. This document and the sovereign right of the states to implement policies in this sense help establish the equal dignity of all cultures.

Conclusions

French diplomatic history is strongly linked to cultural diplomacy since early times, and France has relied on its language and cultural potential to become an international economic, social and political power. Since the 1950s and after the Second World War, France has had to defend its cultural and linguistic influence. In this context, the Francophonie strategy is developed in order to defend diversity of cultures and multilingualism. In the 1970s, once the colonisation period was over when the assimilation approach was no longer in force, a step forward was made to accept diversity of cultural as a way to enrich the French culture.

The political meaning of Francophonie has transformed France into an international leader and a political reference model to defend the diversity of cultures in a globalised world ruled by the dominance of the

Anglosaxon language and culture. However, this model has its own contradictions as the interest to preserve the French language and culture in the international context, and responds to economic and political interests. The French model is also contradictory as through a language which intends to deafen multilingualism.

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