

# **GLOBALIZATION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

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## Abstract

The English language is spoken by over one billion people across the globe, either as a native language or a foreign language. Its dominance today has roots in British colonialism and, more recently, the Internet. Globalization has played a role in both the spread of English and the demand for a global *lingua franca*, which has often been met by English. The situation of English is examined in three emerging economies (India, China, and Brazil) and is analyzed under the current contexts of globalization to predict the future of English on the global stage. Ultimately, given the circumstances of the rise of English and the projected direction of continued globalization and the global marketplace, though the dominance of English may not last it is considered highly unlikely that another language will end up having such a broad impact on the global community as English has already had.

*Keywords:* globalization, English language, lingua franca

### Globalization of the English Language

Globalization has been a buzzword for decades now and continues to occur at an ever increasing rate. With a greater contact between foreign nations and their populations, the demand for a way to communicate with speakers of other languages has also risen. In particular, the connectedness of modern media and the emergence of a global marketplace have driven this demand, which has been filled by few languages, none to a greater extent than English (Crystal, 2003). In addition, there is an increasing number of international migrants, a result of a shift from the traditional unidirectional immigration to bidirectional transmigration (Shin, 2013). One type of transmigration which is becoming more popular is educational migration, in which parents send their children to a new country, often the United States and sometimes accompanied by the mother, to learn a new language (English) and gain linguistic capital.

The language of globalization has been English, but English is not the only language which had or has a significant reach, in number of speakers or in importance. In the following paper I will concentrate primarily on three languages: Spanish, French, and English. These represent the Western languages with the broadest spread across the globe, in large part due to their histories with colonialism, while Spanish and English rank 2nd and 3rd respectively in number of worldwide native speakers (Lewis, Simons, & Fennig, 2013). According to McArthur's model of language sizes (2005), French is classified as a Level 3 language while Spanish is classified as a Level 2, both with significant populations of speakers in areas of previous colonization but without a worldwide presence. English is provided its own designation as the sole Level 1 language due to its wide distribution and broad acceptance as a global language. The necessity of a separate label to distinguish English from other widely spoken

languages is just one example of how the phenomenon of English globalization is unique in its inception and unlikely to be repeated by any other language in the future.

### **Spread and Function of English as a World Language**

#### **Colonialism**

Western colonialism spread both cultures and languages far across the globe from their mother countries. The major countries involved in expanding their global influence, Great Britain, France, and Spain, often established their colonies for economic, political, or religious reasons, yet the greatest impact still felt today has been the spread of European cultures and languages to distant areas of the world. The Spanish language has flourished in terms of the number of people that speak it, claiming the second highest number of native speakers in the world (Lewis, Simons, & Finnig, 2013). French maintained its position as a *lingua franca* in Europe until the 20th century and has since established a network of countries based on its language and cultural influence (Hnízdo, 2005). However, English has managed to do both, growing in number of speakers and worldwide importance in large part thanks to its colonial roots.

Though Spanish colonialism extended to Africa and the East Indies, now called the Philippines, the vast majority of Spanish colonial holdings existed in the New World, particularly in Central and South America. Most of the colonies were created as viceroyalties and considered to be the private property of the king of Spain ("Western colonialism"). While there were some new cities founded by Spanish colonists, much of the Spanish expansion in the New World occurred through the subjugation of the Native Americans and their conversion to Christianity. Indeed, the religious focus of the colonies was only surpassed by their economic usefulness, due to the large quantities of precious metals, including both gold and silver, which

were to be found throughout Central America and western and central South America, such as Peru and Bolivia. The influx of the *conquistadors* and gold miners brought with it the Spanish language, and it was quickly established throughout the Spanish Empire. However, it was neither coming from a position of dominance within Europe nor would the eventual development of the Spanish colonies lead to it becoming widespread outside of the Spanish Empire.

French as a global language and the *lingua franca* of Europe has its roots in imperialism and colonialism. However, the two positions are very different, as the idea of a French national language did not emerge until the 18th century, when a system of free but mandatory education in French served to suppress the regional *patois* and unite France under one tongue (Kasuya, 2001). From this point on the ideology expanded to view French as the language closest to thought, and thus superior to all others, especially local and regional languages such as the *patois*. Thus it was natural then to transmit the same dominance hierarchy to France's overseas colonies as its global empire expanded. Yet by this point the colonial expansion of France was limited in nature because the French government was often focused more on the position of France in Europe rather than on the global stage ("Western colonialism").

The initial spread of English occurred during the time of British imperialism and the expansion of the British Empire. The expansion can be divided into two categories based on the type of occupation of the countries held by the Empire, both of which ultimately set the stage for the position English is in now as a major global language. In one category, the colonies were characterized by high levels of immigration and resettlement of British nationals and so consisted of large non-native populations which eventually supplanted the indigenous populations. Most notable in this category are Canada, the Thirteen Colonies, and Australia, major nations where the majority of the population speaks English as their native tongue. The

other category contains the occupied territories that were characterized by small numbers of English nationals who governed the indigenous population with the help of local collaborators. Influential nations which fall under this category include India, South Africa, Hong Kong, and Singapore. In these countries it was common that English instruction was restricted to government officials and other elites, thus elevating the power and status of English within these countries (Hornberger & Vaish, 2009). Though they did not immediately become established as English-speaking nations, the power disparity created during the time of colonial rule has been a contributing factor in movements to increase the availability of English instruction to everyone living in these countries.

The spread of the English and French empires, and thus the spread of their respective languages, were at odds throughout the 19th century. The French "empire of ideas" was contrasted with the English "empire of commerce" (Rothschild, 2005). At the time, both were considered to be eternal, yet neither retained their original conceptions. The transition to a French national language occurred around the same time as the expanding influence of English globally, and therefore the waning influence of French (Kasuya, 2001). On a global scale, the decline has been stymied to a degree by the establishment of the *Francophonie*, the association of countries and organizations belonging to the French-speaking world, though this concept and its subsequent institutions are still perceived as cultural and linguistic imperialism since it has been born out of the former French empire. Within Europe, the changing dynamics were fully realized when the Treaty of Versailles to end World War I was written out in both French and English, signaling the beginning of the end for French diplomatic primacy even in Europe.

### **Government and Diplomacy**

An important area of consideration when examining the rise of English as a *lingua franca* and, concomitantly, the demise of French from the diplomatic stage is Europe, the birthplace of both languages. The shift first began within governments themselves while French maintained its position as an intergovernmental language (Dodd, 2012). One example of the governmental transition can be found in the linguistic shifts of the British privy seal office during the late Middle Ages. The privy seal office is of particular interest because of its location in the heart of the British government and its main function: conveying the king's wishes, either to other governmental offices or even, in some cases, directly to the localities.

The British government was largely bilingual, utilizing both Latin and French until the end of the reign of Henry V and the introduction of English (Dodd, 2012). During this time, French was considered the official language of England in large part due to the fact that it was the native tongue of many government officials (Fisher, 1992). However, the language used for a particular document often was correlated with the function of the document, especially where the privy seal office was concerned (Dodd, 2012). In general, Latin was viewed as the language of official business and was utilized in routine documents, such as forms, where a significant portion of the writing remained the same across uses. More specifically, French was considered the language of internal government and was often used in communication between the various departments. French was also considered to be a mark of education and professionalism, and thus was raised to an elite status. English, meanwhile, was the language of the masses, but was also considered the language of authenticity and, more importantly, the language of the crown due to the introduction of English into the king's signet letters in the early 1400s and the eradication of French from the signet letters by the mid 1400s. The signet letters were personal letters sent by the king through the signet office to provide directions to the chancery and enact

patents. English was also the language of discussion within Parliament, despite the Rolls still being recorded in either Latin or French (Fisher, 1992).

However, while French began to decline from use in the privy seal office around 1440 and had vanished within a decade, its replacement, English, was only dominant for five years before it was then replaced by Latin (Dodd, 2012). This situation would remain the status quo until at least the late 1400s and reflected linguistic trends elsewhere in the government as well, though not in the population at large. Though the swift decline of French was not immediately followed by the domination of English, its use by the general population and its expansion within other governmental contexts, such as urban administration, continued and it ultimately became the official language of Britain.

The transition within England and its government set the stage for the spread of English elsewhere, including widespread recognition within Europe as the international language of choice beginning in the 20th century. French was the sole official language of the European Coal and Steel Community and the language with the greatest role out of the four official languages of the European Economic Community (Hnízdo, 2005). The dominance of French in these contexts was made possible due to the status of French as a primary foreign language in many of the Western European countries. However, during the 1990s French lost this position, usually to English, in every country except for Luxembourg, Ireland, and the United Kingdom, where French remains the primary foreign language. The expansion of the EU in 2004, which encompassed the majority of the Eastern European countries, further decreased the viability of French as a lingua franca due to the fact that French was overshadowed by German, English, and Russian as a foreign language in the newly included countries. Ever since the expansion, there has been a decline in the proportion of its citizens who think that French is important either for



themselves or for their children (European Commission, 2012). Despite its decreasing importance among the European population, French has maintained a significant presence within the European Union as a result of its history in the organization and the geographical locations of the EU institutions, of which the majority are located in Belgium, Luxembourg, and France (Hnízdo, 2005).

### **English in Major Emerging Economies**

English rose internationally on the backs of British colonialism and the widespread settlements of English speakers, but it has been maintained and grown since then as a result of the increase in power and global dominance of the United States. Given the history of the spread of the English language and its current prevalence worldwide, there is an interest in predicting whether English will continue in its dominance. It is likely that countries with emerging economies on the global marketplace will play a central role in either maintaining the dominance of English or promoting the switch to a new global language. This is especially true when considering the fact that colonialism, and the subsequent spread of language accompanying it, was driven significantly by economics.

#### **India**

The official language policy of India is based around the Three Language Formula (TLF), a set of guidelines for the language-medium of instruction in Indian government schools which ultimately requires instruction in three languages, usually Hindi, English, and a third regional language, between grade eight and grade ten (Hornberger & Vaish, 2008). The language debate in India began shortly after the country's independence from the British empire, and a push for a national language to replace English as the official language quickly started (LaDousa, 2005). However, the proposed replacement language, Hindustani, which encompasses both Hindi and

Urdu, could not be agreed upon by the various ethnic groups inhabiting India, in large part due to the ideological divisions between Hindi and Urdu. Despite an initial agreement to transition to Hindi as the official language after 15 years, the ideological divide resulted in English being retained as an associate official language.

From this point, the idea for the TLF was born during a time when claims were being made for state divisions based on language (LaDousa, 2005). The formula was proposed to promote a national unity through the education of multilingual citizens, such that Indians from all parts of the country would be able to communicate and contribute to national discourse. The TLF has manifested itself in many districts as forcing the choice between Hindi-medium education and English-medium education, where Hindi-medium is often associated with government schools and lower costs, comparatively, while the English-medium schools are associated with private schools, higher costs, and higher prestige (LaDousa, 2005; LaDousa, 2006). Recently, though, the high status of English, and the perception of the increased status that the knowledge of English will provide, has led to a significantly increasing demand for English language instruction and English-medium schools, especially among those families who cannot afford to pay for the traditionally expensive English-medium private schools, such as the convent schools (Tooley, 2009).

### **China**

English was originally introduced as a foreign language in Chinese education in the late 19th century due to China's growing contact with the rest of the world, in particular England (Chang, 2006). However, growth of the language was slow and ultimately, when the People's Republic came to power, English was nearly eradicated in favor of promoting Russian as the first foreign language of choice because of China's ties with the Soviet Union. This situation did not

last long, though, due to the growing influence of English around the globe and China's desire to become more politically and economically competitive. Currently, English is taught as a major in post-secondary schools and is growing in popularity, but the English-major programs do not provide a sufficient education to graduates. The lack of other disciplines being included in the program and the prevalence of English education at lower levels, both in public schools and private language institutions, has resulted in a greater proportion of job applicants as a whole having at least decent command of English and thus reducing the advantage of English major graduates. In fact, one of the requirements to gain a bachelor's degree in Chinese colleges now is to pass the College English Test for Band 4, resulting in at least some English proficiency being common among all college graduates now (Shen, 2009). In China, the impetus for learning English is generally to aid in gaining jobs and status (Chang, 2006; Shen, 2009).

### **Brazil**

The perception of the language situation in Brazil has largely centered around the misconception that Brazilian Portuguese is unified and spoken as the primary language by the majority of the population (Massini-Cagliari, 2004). This elitist view has been perpetuated both within and outside of Brazil and has resulted in language policies which reflect the ideal situation rather than the reality of regional dialects in addition to both indigenous and foreign languages. The oppression of the linguistic masses is best demonstrated by two recent bill proposals centered on keeping the Portuguese language "pure" and preventing, even punishing, the use of loanwords in official documents, the media, and even in speech.

The foreign language policy in Brazil has fluctuated more than the policies concerning Portuguese. For a period of time following World War II, foreign language instruction was largely based on the European model, including the languages taught (Bohn, 2003). This meant

that, in terms of the national language requirements, French was given the highest priority and was started the earliest, at age 11-12, followed by English, and finally one year of Spanish. The change in government from 1964-1988 altered this policy, but only because foreign language instruction was completely deemphasized in favor of promoting science and industry. This resulted in the creation of private commercial foreign language schools which heavily favored English teaching.

The system of privatized foreign language instruction is still largely intact today (Bohn, 2003). Even as the government has reintroduced foreign language instruction into public schools, many teachers and administrators have looked to the private sector to provide training and even to teach in the public schools themselves. The elite in Brazil along with the commercialization of foreign language instruction have created the ideology that language is a commodity to be utilized to achieve higher status, a significant factor in the prevalence of English as the foreign language of choice. Unlike Portuguese, there is no current national agenda on foreign language, only that the power to choose which foreign languages are taught and how they are taught lies with the local education authorities and school communities. While this is intended to encourage focus on regional needs, the lack of national direction has also contributed to the prevalence of English, even above Spanish, despite the latter's status as being geographically closer.

### **English and Globalization**

The willingness of countries that are becoming larger players in the global marketplace, such as those discussed above, to embrace English at the governmental level and among the populace provides an indicator that the spread of English is only continuing to grow. Modern economic and technological factors, such as the rise of multinational corporations and the ever

expanding Internet, provide further avenues for English to continue its spread largely unhindered, though there are some signs that its progress may be slowing down.

### **Economics and Technology**

Multinational corporations that advertise to bilingual populations have to make a choice for which language to utilize in their advertizing. When one of the languages spoken by the population is English, the advertisements are more likely to be successful in their persuasiveness if they utilize English or are mixed language rather than relying only on the local language (Koslow, Shamdasani, & Touchstone, 1994; Krishna, 2008). This scenario is especially true if the goods or services being advertised are considered luxury or high status (Krishna, 2008). The use of English in advertising also influences the opinion of the consumer about the product, creating associations with prestige, novelty, stylishness, and high quality (Shin, 2013). In contrast, local companies who advertise to the same audience do not show the same effect of language on the successfulness of their advertisements (Krishna, 2008).

Some people predict that the world is headed in a direction which will involve continually increasing use of the Internet, and thus an increasing use of English as well (Nihalani, 2010). This is particularly plausible because English has been the dominant language since the invention of the Internet, both in terms of language-medium of the web pages and in terms of the languages spoken by Internet users. In recent years, however, its dominance has been slipping; since 1998 the percentage of English web pages on the Internet has dropped from 75% to below 45%, and the number of English speaking Internet users has dropped from 62% to 32% in 2007 (Pimienta, Prado, & Blanco, 2009). Indeed, by 2010 the percentage of English speaking Internet users had dropped to 27% while the percentage of Internet users speaking Chinese rose to 24%, astoundingly high considering that no other language group exceeds 8% of

Internet users (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2010). Even more telling is the fact that the top 10 languages spoken by Internet users make up 82% of the total number of users. Google estimated the percentage of English web pages to be around 50% as recently as 2008; by comparison, its estimation of web pages in Chinese and Japanese stood at 9% and 6% respectively, while only 11 other languages surpassed 1% (Pimienta, Prado, & Blanco, 2009). The decline in the percentage of English speaking Internet users can be largely attributed to the increasing penetration of the Internet into China, and thus an increasing number of Chinese speaking people connecting to the Internet.

### **Global Englishes and the Future**

English is found in varying states around the world, and so scholars have attempted to categorize nations based on the status of the English language within their populations. One model which captures the basic differences amongst countries with English speakers has been proposed by Kachru (1985) with his "three concentric circles of English" (as cited in Shin, 2013). Kachru suggests that countries can be divided into three groups based on their status of English: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle consists of nations where the majority of the population speaks English as their native language, such as the United States or Australia. The Outer Circle consists of nations where the population speaks English as a second language, usually as a localized variety, and where English generally is recognized as an official language of the country. Most of these nations are former territories where were part of the British Empire and so were controlled by Great Britain but did not have a significant influx of English-speaking colonists, such as India and Nigeria. Finally, the Expanding Circle consists of nations where English is becoming increasingly valued but is taught as a foreign language and has no official status in the country, such as China and Brazil.

Kachru's model has since been expanded upon in an attempt to reconcile the linearity of his model with the multidirectional flow associated with globalization. One such change has been proposed by Bhatia & Ritchie (2006), who add the caveat that all three circles interact with each other through language mixing. This addition is meant to capture the process by which once the English language is imported into Outer and Expanding Circle countries it becomes localized, but then it is repackaged and exported as well, not only to other Outer and Expanding Circle countries but also to Inner Circle countries in a continuous cycle.

The potential for the continued dominance of the English language is made murkier by the existence of multiple forms of the language, or Englishes, which are derived during the localization process (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2006). In many cases these new forms occur in countries where English is prevalent and has had an opportunity to be influenced by the local language, such as the Singlish found in Singapore (Hornberger & Vaish, 2009). However, in some cases an entirely new "global" form of English is being created, with influences from multiple existing Englishes. For example, the international version of English required by the International Civil Aviation Organization contains features that are not found in either American or British English (Omoniyi & Saxena, 2010).

The establishment of English as a global *lingua franca* began during the time of colonialism, born out of the remnants of the British Empire. It has been furthered by technological developments, such as the Internet, and an increasingly global economy in this age of globalization. Even though its presence is decreasing on the Internet, its usefulness and convenience as a *lingua franca* is unlikely to expire anytime soon. Once it does, though, it certainly will not be replaced under the current circumstances, due to the uniqueness of its arrival onto the global stage and to the uniqueness of its current prevalence. The most likely scenario in

this world of globalization then would be for technological breakthroughs to reduce or eliminate the necessity of a *lingua franca* and bring equality to the field, so that one language (English) is not afforded higher status and prestige compared to others due to the positions and opportunities it opens up or is associated with.



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