

## English and globalization

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### Abstract

English language has played an integral role in the globalization. Not a single domain of life has escaped from the influence of English. The English language is the second most widely spoken tongue in the world today. Due to globalization, it seems that the English language more than any other is having a most pronounced and lasting impact on the collective networks of the world mind. English as the global lingua franca has played a positive role in the interaction between different cultures. It has played an integral role in bringing the myriad cultures together (acculturation) which create unity in diversity.

**Keywords:** Globalization, language, lingua franca, hybrid, colonial

### 1. Introduction

The word “globalization” was first employed in a publication entitled *Towards New Education* in 1952, to denote a holistic view of human experience in education. An early description of globalization was penned by the founder of the Bible Student movement Charles Taze Russell who coined the term “corporate giants” in 1897, although it was not until the 1960s that the term began to be widely used by economists and other social scientists. The term has since then achieved widespread use in the mainstream press by the latter half of the 1980s. Since its inception, the concept of globalization has inspired numerous competing definitions and interpretations, with antecedents dating back to the great movements of trade and empire across Asia and the Indian Ocean from the 15th century onwards. In the postmodern era, Globalization (or globalisation) describes the process by which regional economies, societies, and cultures have become integrated through a global network of political ideas through communication, transportation, and trade. The term is most closely associated with the term economic globalization: the integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration, the spread of technology, and military presence. The term can also refer to the transnational circulation of ideas, languages, or popular culture through acculturation. An aspect of the world which has gone through the process can be said to be globalized. English language has played an integral role in the globalization. Not a single domain of life has escaped from the influence of English. This paper will analyze the indelible impact of English in terms of linguistic and cultural changes at global level.

The English language is the second most widely spoken tongue in the world today. English is, after the Chinese one, the language most people speak and it is the most popular second language and foreign language pupils learn in school. As a global language, English is spoken in most parts of the world, for instance in Great Britain, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and in many more countries. The global role of English is clear in the following words, “English is now the language most widely taught as a foreign language— in over 100 countries, such as China, Russia,

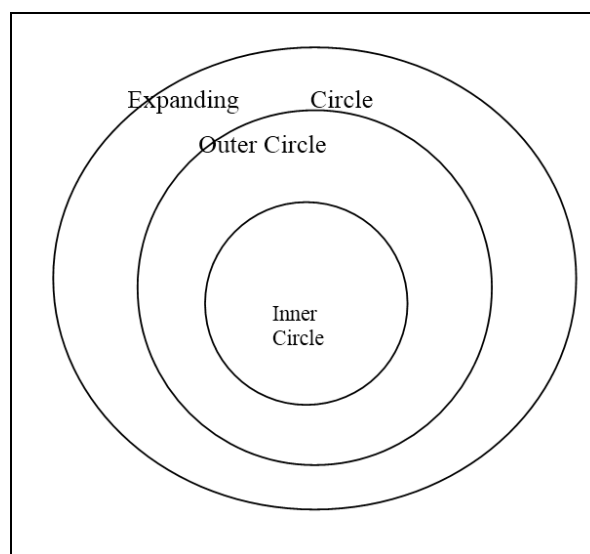
Germany, Spain, Egypt and Brazil— and in most of these countries it is emerging as the chief foreign language to be encountered in schools, often displacing another language in the process” (Crystal 1997:4) <sup>[3]</sup>.

### 1.1 Spread of english

The spread of English has been described as three circles:

- The inner circle of native speakers, those whose *mother tongue*, or *first language* is English, as for most speakers in England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa,
- The outer circle, where English is the official or public or *second language* in many countries in Asia and Africa and India.

The expanding circle, which includes all countries and speakers who use English to communicate with people with whom they do not share another common language. It includes China, Japan, Greece, Poland and a steadily increasing number of other states. In these areas, English is taught as a foreign language.



Moreover in African states English serves as main form of communication. The English language often wipes out smaller languages and their cultures by exclusive use in media and economy. English is not popular because of its linguistic properties but there are conscious, coordinated promotion programmes. English language seems to be having a bigger impact on the world as a whole and has become the global defacto standard used in business, cultural and political exchange. The integration or coming together of the world's cultures and economies commonly (globalization), and a shift in language usage and language demarcations is closely bound to these global changes. These international shifts and trends affect the languages that we all speak, which in turn have a marked effect on the functions and organization of our brains and the way that we think.

Due to globalization, it seems that the English language more than any other is having a most pronounced and lasting impact on the collective networks of the world mind. "A stripped-down English of catchphrases and trite idioms, light on richness, is becoming the true global language." (Giridharadas 2010) [6]. Also, the birth of the Internet in an English speaking country has also had a huge impact on this global evolution of the language, with almost 80% of the world's digital information now stored in English. The Internet is basically English oriented, as most of the large search engines are based in the U.S.A and the major computer languages themselves are a kind of sub set of the English language. This alone has been a huge effect on globalization and has meant that English speaking countries are at a definite advantage when it comes to communicating with the world as a whole. English continues to be the chief lingua franca of the Internet—a position which is now beginning to be acknowledged in the popular media. For example, in April 1996 *The New York Times* carried an article by Specter headed, "World, Wide, Web: 3 English Words", in which the role of English was highlighted.

To study molecular genetics, all you need to get into the Harvard University Library, or the medical library at Sweden's Karolinska Institute, is a phone line and a computer. And, it turns out, a solid command of the English language. Because whether you are a French intellectual pursuing the cutting edge of international film theory, a Japanese paleobotanist curious about a newly discovered set of primordial fossils, or an American teen-ager concerned about Magic Johnson's jump shot, the Internet and world wide web really only work as great unifiers if you speak English. (Crystal 1997:107) [3]P

Specter concludes saying that if you want to take full advantage of the Internet there is only one way to do it: learn English, which has more than ever become America's greatest and most effective export. Hence the global value of English cannot be estimated as it is infinite.

Perhaps one reason why the English language has become such an international force is because of its ability to adapt and mutate in the face of change, an open ended philosophy that has certainly served it well. English as a means of communication is good at incorporating the "other" into its own language as can be seen with the many words and phrases originally from other languages that most people would now consider authentically English. The strength of the English language is that it accepts these variations and integrates them into itself effectively. There is a huge cultural uptake of

English, with dozens of variations on the language coming into existence as people have shaped it with their own cultural conditioning. These differing versions of the language are still understandable as English however, and have helped it to evolve and grow at a rapid rate. English has become a sort of common denominator in international affairs, as it has a fairly open ended linguistic structure and is able to be understood in a wide variety of circumstances. English shifts from foreign-language to second-language status for an increasing number of people; we can also expect to see English develop a larger number of local varieties. These contradictory tensions arise because English has two main functions in the world: it provides a vehicular language for international communication and it forms the basis for constructing cultural identities. The former function requires mutual intelligibility and common standards. The latter encourages the development of local forms and hybrid varieties. As English plays an ever more important role in the first of these functions, it simultaneously finds itself acting as a language of identity for larger numbers of people around the world. (D. Graddol 2001: np) [4]. Hence, this is the reason why we have according to Graddol the different varieties of English and hence large number of English speakers.

The question which emerges over here is that why is English acting as a language of identity for larger number of people around the world? In order to answer this, we need to look at the language policy but from the post-colonial prism. There are a lot of colonial states with multilingual character because of the imperialist powers in the 19th and 20th century. In Africa, for example, there are no attempts to use any African language in high-status functions, they are not even taught in schools. The period during colonialism changed a lot in the world's history and following development, and colonialism make us think about cheap raw materials and workers the imperialist powers wanted to gain, but we often forget about something else, that the real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth but economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. For colonialism, this meant two faces of the same coin. The post-colonial and post-communist worlds and the European Union reveal increasing corporate involvement in education, and World Bank policies favour European languages. "Studies of global English range from those that uncritically endorse global English to those which see it as reflecting a post-imperial but essentially capitalist agenda" (Online). Many of the contemporary trends are captured in two competing language policy paradigms that situate English in broader economic, political and cultural facets of globalization, the Diffusion of English paradigm, and the Ecology of Languages paradigm. A number of studies of various dimensions of linguistic and professional imperialism in the teaching of English to Asians reveal the persistence of western agendas in education. There is also increasing documentation of resistance to this, both at the level of awareness of the need to anchor English more firmly in local cultural systems, and at classroom level. Language pedagogy needs to ensure that English is not learned subtractively. Only in this way can globalization be made more accountable and locally relevant.

Globalization has turned the world in to a global village is heard quite often and English language is surely to be

accredited for this grand achievement. But despite language change, which is the result of cultural change, how English resists the onslaught of time is debatable. Before, plunging in that debate, we will look at the factors responsible for language change. Language change or the evolution of language is the phenomenon whereby phonetic, morphological, semantic, syntactic, and other features of language vary over time. The effect on language over time is known as diachronic change. Two linguistic disciplines in particular concern themselves with studying language change: historical linguistics and sociolinguistics. Historical linguists examine how people in the past used language and seek to determine how subsequent languages derive from previous ones and relate to one another. Sociolinguists study the origins of language changes and want to explain how society and changes in society influence language.

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## 2. Conclusion

To conclude, the dynamic role of English in shrinking the world to an enticing global village is noteworthy. The antagonism and ambivalence about English saying that it gets a privileged position is obsolete in the postmodern era where the post of post-colonial is answered by writing back to centre and that too in the colonizers language (“You taught me language; and my profit on't Is, I know how to curse: the red plague rid you, For learning me your language.”). Now even the empire need not write back as it has sufficiently done so. Though we have writers like Ngugi Wa Thiong, who chose to reject English as the medium of expression in his book *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) <sup>[13]</sup> saying Africa needs look back its economy, its politics, its culture, its languages and all its patriotic writers”. But we do have a renowned writer like Arundati Roy who once remarked unequivocally that, “I love English. It is the skin of my thought” or Bapsi Sidwa’s words forceful words are equally resonant, “They are condemned to write in English, but I don’t think this is such a bad thing because English is a rich language.”(Gaur 2004:206) <sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, English is contained with linguistic hybridity but it is this variation within the language which lends it the credibility to hold the different cultures together in a unique and extraordinary way.

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