



## ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

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**ABSTRACT** A global language is a language that is recognized and understood by people everywhere. English has been established in many parts of the world. In most countries around the globe the English language can be found in some form or another. There are many reasons associated with the rise of English as a global language. English is enjoying a hegemonic position and in the process became an effective instrument of homogenization. This process has resulted in making English language a global language. This paper examines the emergence of English as A global language.

**KEYWORDS :** Colonization, Globalization, Lingua Franca, Global Language.

### Introduction :

A language that was the tongue of three tribes 1,500 years ago is today the language of nearly two billion people. It has three-times more non-native speakers than native speakers. No other language comes close to matching that, and it is that that makes English global.

It is the language of media, medicine and business.

"Today there are about 6,000 languages in the world, and half of the world's population speaks only 10 of them. English is the single most dominant of these 10. British colonialism initiated the spread of English across the globe; it has been spoken nearly everywhere and has become even more prevalent since World War II, with the global reach of American power."<sup>1</sup> (Christine Kenneally,2007)

"English has borrowed words from over 350 other languages, and over three-quarters of the English lexicon is actually Classical or Romance in origin. Plainly, the view that to borrow words leads to a language's decline is absurd, given that English has borrowed more words than most."<sup>2</sup> (David Crystal, 2003)

Let us see how many people in the world today speak English-  
First-language speakers: 375 million  
Second-language speakers: 375 million  
Foreign-language speakers: 750 million<sup>3</sup> (David Graddol, 1997)

English is taught as a foreign language many countries. "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."<sup>4</sup> (David Crystal, 2003)

Many countries in the world have English as their first language. - "Australia, Botswana, the Commonwealth Caribbean nations, Gambia, Ghana, Guyana, Ireland, Namibia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States have English as either a de facto or statutory official language. In Cameroon and Canada, English shares this status with French; and in the Nigerian states, English and the main local language are official. In Fiji, English is the official language with Fijian; in Lesotho with Sesotho; in Pakistan with Urdu; in the Philippines with Filipino; and in Swaziland with Siswati. In India, English is an associate official language (after Hindi), and in Singapore English is one of four statutory official languages. In South Africa, English [is] the main national language—but just one of eleven official languages.

"In all, English has official or special status in at least 75 countries (with a combined population of two billion people). It is estimated that one out of four people worldwide speak English with some degree of competence."<sup>5</sup> (Penny Silva, 2009)

### The Emergence of English as a Global Language:

From historical point of view, the English language started off as fusion of dialects of Teutonic tribes. From its humble beginning as the vernaculars of certain Germanic tribes of the Angles and Saxons in Europe, English evolved through successive contacts with the

domination by Latin, Nordic languages, Norman (1066), and central French (1204) respectively. By the 14th C., the earliest form of English had emerged. Since then, the language had never looked back as it trudged on, cruising through many centuries of development.

According to Fishman (1991)<sup>6</sup> "English language started out 500 years ago as a language, which had inferiority complex among most of its own speakers... a language viewed both internally and externally as uncouth." But from its lowly status, English has become the most widely used and most highly regarded language in the world. This accentuates the significance of as a global language

The emergence of English as a global language refers to the process of making use of the English language as a *lingua franca* and converting material in the local language into English in an international corporation or other organization. As a crucial component of globalisation, Englishization is a process of rapid growth of English and increase in the variety of functions performed by the language in different speech communities of the world. Situating the growth and expansion of the English Language in historical perspective, Fishman (1996) notes that English has shifted from being the language of the British or American empire to a language that is marketed as essential for participation in the economy.

Kachru's (1985)<sup>7</sup> division of the English world today into three concentric circles attests to the rapid expansion of the language. The inner circle consists of the native English-speaking countries (i.e. U.K, U.S.A, Australia, New Zealand and Canada where English is the mother tongue. The outer circle comprises the Anglophone world, i.e. the former colonies of the U.K and U.S.A such as India, Nigeria, Kenya, Singapore, Philippines, etc where English is a second language or the *other tongue*. In such countries, several Englishes, i.e. nativized varieties of English have achieved the status of either a national or an official language. The outermost expanding circle consists of countries where English is as 'Foreign Language,' a *further tongue*, which is fast becoming a dominant second language in the domains of education, science and technology (e.g. China, Japan, Taiwan, Thailand and many countries of the Arabophone, Francophone, and Lusophone world).

The phenomenal growth of English has established its dominant status as the language of contemporary information technology. English has the lion's share of the world's books, academic papers, newspapers, and magazines. American radio, television, and blockbuster films export English language pop culture worldwide. More than 80 percent of the content posted on the Internet is in English, even though an estimated 44 percent of online users speak another language in the home.

Graddol (1997)<sup>8</sup> has shown that as an international lingua franca, English ranks first among the languages of home pages on the web. This partly explains the over 1 billion estimate of people all over the world that have been projected to speak English today.

English is everywhere. The Economist says, "English is the language of globalization-of international business, politics... It is the language of computers and the Internet... it is the dominant international

language in communications, science, aviation, entertainment, radio and diplomacy....”

"English... is an important tool for operating on the world stage," says John Whitehead, director of the British Council. The ability to speak and understand English is mandatory in certain fields, professions, and occupations. In fact, English is so widely spoken; it is referred to as, the "lingua franca" of the modern era.

More and more companies worldwide are making English competency a prerequisite for promotions or appointments. The success of politicians around the world also increasingly depends on their facility in English.

Crystal (1997) and Graddol (1997)<sup>9</sup> listed the following factors as responsible for the phenomenal spread of English: (i) implantation of the English language in Anglophone colonies; (ii) the adoption of English as one of the six languages (French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Russian) accorded official status in the United Nations after World War I; (iii) the adoption of English and French only as the languages of the international and intergovernmental organisations; (iv) the rise of the U.S.A in the 20th Century as a superpower; (v) the adoption of English as the preferred language for international communication by 22 multilingual countries that account for about 5000 of the world's 6000 languages.

Ciscel (2000) conceptualized a trichotomy of linguistic hegemony to assess the values and vices of Englishization vis-à-vis the development of other world languages. The three types identified as constituting the continuum of linguistic hegemony are (i) linguistic opportunism, (ii) linguistic imperialism, and (iii) linguistic genocide (linguicide).

Linguistic opportunism as an ideology of hegemony predisposes the hegemonic language to exploit the sociolinguistic vacuum created by the absence of consensus indigenous national/official languages, in the face of complex multilingualism as characterized by the Indian linguistic situation. Whereas linguistic imperialism represents the linguistic arm of political and economic hegemony and imperialism, linguistic genocide is monopolistic, totalitarian and destroys all competitions.

According to Dor (2004)<sup>10</sup>, the process of globalisation undoubtedly has far-reaching linguistic consequences, but these, the writer claims “have less to do with the spread of English and the reduction of linguistic variability as such and much more to do with the general social function of language and the relationships among languages, speakers, nation-states, and the global market. As these relationships are gradually changing, most dramatically on the Internet, the global linguistic community begins to witness the emergence of novel patterns of linguistic usage, standardization, maintenance, and variability—patterns that more than anything else meet the needs of the evolving global consumers market.

As Skutnabb-Kangas (2000)<sup>11</sup> says linguistic diversity is disappearing at a much faster speed than biodiversity, adding that the world's ‘globalized’ education brings about the disappearance of linguistic and cultural diversity.

### Conclusion:

As global communication expands throughout the world, so does the need for a global language. A global language is a language that is recognized and understood by people everywhere. In many parts of the world that language has been established, English. In most countries around the globe the English language can be found in some form or another. Everyone has their own reasons for the rise of English as the global language. However, there are some common traits between them.

As Salman Rushdie puts it: ‘What seems to me to be happening is that those people who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it—assisted by the English language’s enormous flexibility and size, they are carving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers.’”

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