
English as a Global Language

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1-What is Globalization?

Globalization means connectivity, integration and interdependence in different spheres such as the economic, social, technological, political, ecological and cultural spheres. The Encyclopedia Britanica says that globalization is "the process by which the experience of everyday life ...is becoming standardized around the world."

As far as economics are concerned, a broad definition is that globalization is the convergence of prices, products, wages, rates of interest and profits towards developed country norms.(1)

International Monetary Fund (IMF) notes the growing economic interdependence of countries worldwide through increasing volume and variety of commercial transactions, free international capital flows, and more rapid widespread technology.(2)

Yet, globalization has various aspects which affect the world in several domains such as industry (alias trans nationalization) with the emergence of worldwide production markets, finance with the emergence of worldwide financial markets and better access to external financing for national and sub national borrowers, politics with the desire to create a world government which regulates the relationships among nations, economy with the creation of common markets for a free exchange of goods and capital, informational domain with an increase of flows of information between geographically remote locations(mainly thanks to Internet) ,in addition to the cultural domain with a growth of cross-cultural contacts, cultural diffusion, the desire to enjoy foreign ideas ,and to participate in "world culture"

As already stated globalization tends to make worldwide all aspects of humans' lives including culture. Yet, language is the heart of peo-

ples' cultures which is not uniform, but which differs from one people to another and from one place to another. However, it is a matter of fact that English has become the language of globalization, or as it is called "the global language" or "the lingua franca" of modern era since it is, by international treaty, the official language for aerial and maritime communications, as well as one of the official languages of the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), and most international athletic organizations, including the International Olympic Committee.

3- English as a Global Language:

Britain's colonial expansion established the preconditions for the global use of English, taking the language from its island birthplace to settlements around the world. The English language has grown up in contact with many others making it a hybrid language which can rapidly evolve to meet new cultural and communicative needs. In the 20th century the increase of English use has been closely linked to the rise of the US as a superpower which has spread the English language alongside its economic, technological, and cultural influence. In the same period, the international importance of other European languages, especially French, has declined.

In fact the world position of English might have declined after the collapse of British Empire like languages of other European colonial powers as Portugal or The Netherlands, but after the Second World War, the US was destined to be the most powerful industrialized country. For the spread of English after the war was decisive. American influence was extended around the world

"English acted as the vulgate of American power and Anglo-American technology and finance... English and American English seem to embody for men and women throughout the world and particularly for the young, the feel for hope, of material advance, of scientific and empirical procedures. The entire world image of mass consumption of international exchange, of the popular arts, of generational conflicts, of technological penetration, is permeated by American English and English citations..." (3)

After the Second War, several international agencies were established to help manage global reconstruction and future governance. Crystal estimates that 85 per cent of international organizations now use English as one of their working languages, 49 per cent French, and fewer than 10 per cent use Arabic, Spanish or German.(4).

The most important international agency created after the Second World War was The United Nations. This latter has an important role in the increase of the use of English. While there are six official languages in the UN only two (English and French) are working languages; however, in practice English is the sole used language in most UN bodies. With the UN representing means for procedure in international relations, English has come to dominate the international interactions. On the other hand, English is also the dominant language in the European Commission, and many Europeans outside the EU have also adopted English as their Lingua Franca. For example, English serves as a Lingua Franca in Switzerland which has four official languages (German, French, Italian and Romansch, spoken by a small minority).

English has been spread as a world language not only via political ways. Financial institutions have been established in the 20 th century after the Second World War, with a great American involvement. Some of those institutions are The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. As a result of American involvement in post war economic reconstruction, and as more countries have been open to global flows of finance, goods, knowledge and culture, so the influence of English has spread.

Nowadays, the description of English as an international language, or as a Lingua Franca is increasingly applied since it is reported that there are now more non-native speakers of English than native speakers (5), and almost 20 percent of world population use English as a Lingua Franca (6) thus English has become the language of globalization and its territory is no longer a set of countries but it is a borderless world where all people can communicate.

It is noteworthy to mention that the term "Lingua Franca" refers to any language widely used beyond the population of its native speakers. It is generally the language of the most influential nation(s) of the time. Any given language can become a Lingua Franca by being used for international commerce, and can be accepted in other cultural exchanges, especially diplomacy. It is also the language used for communication between communities, and so the English language has become.

Because of globalization world economies ,politics, societies ,technologies and cultures are becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent .Moreover, the world's output is getting higher, and more and more people are employed in service industries which are rapidly globalizing; new forms of global teleworking are emerging resulting in language-related activities where English is the main language.

In fact English is now the international currency of science and technology. The growing role of the US ensured that English became the global language of experiment and discovery. Thus English is widely used to communicate scientific, technological, academic, and international trade information through articles and magazines. In this respect, it is stated that one third of the world's books are published in English, that two thirds of all scientists read English , that four fifths of all electronic communications are in English ,and that three quarters of the world's mail is written in English(7).

In this respect, the Internet is regarded by many as the flagship of global English. According to statistics English is the medium for 80 per cent of the information stored in the world's computers (8).It is certainly true that computer technology has transformed the way people

Interact, and the growth of the use of Internet has been important in the last few years. Thus Internet carries English language into nearly every country .The economist Geoffrey Nunberg wrote:

“The electronic media that bind the world together are essentially carriers of language. To work efficiently, they need a common standard...The English language is now the operating standard for global communication” (9)

It is true that the most widely used language in the Internet is English, nevertheless; this reflects the fact that 90 per cent of the world's computers connected to the Internet are based in English speaking countries (10). In this light, it is not surprising that the majority of web sites are created in English, and users in other countries, using other languages, find that they are obliged to learn and use English if they are to communicate through cyberspace.

The question that can be asked now is what is the future of English language? How long is English going to keep its status of a global language that it acquired mainly thanks to economic, political, cultural and technological globalization, influenced by American domination of nearly all those fields? Can other “emerging” languages gain this status thanks to their increasing populations’ growth as well as their economic and technological development and spread, such as the Chinese or the Indian languages?

Notes:

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5. from Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia.<http://en.wikipedia.org>
6. Idem
7. Neil Reynolds. The Globe and Mail, March 24, 2006

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 10. David Graddol, Idem.

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