

# Any English in the Future?

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## Abstract

*The general assumption which prevails nowadays understands English as a language which is spreading around the world incredibly fast, thus becoming a global language. The aim of this paper is to analyze the circumstances that have caused English to become the leading world language and the possible ways of approach to English in the future. Is there going to be one uniform standard English language or is the tendency rather towards a plurality of Englishes? Or, is there any other language which could overtake this specific role of English? How is English influenced by other languages – and can we still call it English? The paper attempts to provide some hints and suggestions concerning the above mentioned questions.*

*Keywords: English, World Englishes, lingua franca, Slovenglish, intercultural communication*

## Introduction

English is nowadays an inseparable part of the omnipresent globalization process, which can be traced everywhere – in commerce, finance, politics, military affairs, science, education, culture, and the media. English is frequently used in networking, International and Non-Governmental Organizations (such as the European Union, the United Nations, UNESCO, Greenpeace, etc.), sub-cultural youth groups, and the internet. Because English is used not only by native but by non-native speakers from different parts of the world as well, there is no simple correlation between English and the interests of a particular state. On the contrary, English is greatly connected to the dominant economic system and to global networking (Phillipson 64–65). The idea of “global English” is, however, nothing new, as we can see from the following two quotations. In the first one we can see the words of *Thomas Babington Macaulay*, who, in 1835, wrote the following:

Our language ... stands pre-eminent among the languages of the West ... Whoever knows that language has a ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations ... It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. (Phillipson 61)

Just a few years later, in 1849, *Read* wrote:

Ours is the language of the arts and sciences, of trade and commerce, of civilization and religious liberty ... It is a store-house of the varied knowledge which brings a nation within the pale of civilization and Christianity ... Already it is the language of the Bible ... So prevalent is this language already become, as to betoken that it may soon become the language of international communication for the world. (Pennycook 15)

However, never in history has there been such great attention paid to this topic as there is now. In recent years this issue has come into focus among scholars of different fields, starting with applied linguistics, but continuing in sociology, demography, economics, psychology, cultural anthropology and last, but not least, education. What are the reasons for this enormous interest? How did it happen that English has come so far and is there any way of predicting its future? In 50 years time, will we, or our descendants, still use English to communicate with our friends, colleagues, or business partners around the world? In my article I do not wish to talk lengthily about the history of English; I would like to make just a few points which I believe are important when we talk about English as a global language and its possible development in the future.

### ***Lingua francas in the past and at present***

Being aware of the Euro-centrism of the following statement, we can nevertheless state that when we think about world history in connection to languages, we can see at least two languages that, in their time, became *lingua franca* for a significant part of the world. The first one was Latin in the Middle Ages, which was spoken in a large part of the world due to the imperial power of Rome and which, due to the Roman Catholic Church, retained a great importance in the ecclesiastical world until the 1960s (i.e. until the Second Vatican Council) (Rajagopalan 50). The second language was French, which was hard to imagine as not being the language of high society in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Crystal, *English as a Global Language* 123). However, both these languages lost their important and unique role. When we consider English, it was not really important outside its native environment in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but due to the close interconnection between language and power it became more and more dominant – in the 17<sup>th</sup> century it spread around the world owing to the military and colonial rule of the British Empire; the Industrial Revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century brought technological and industrial power, which again had an impact on the use of English; in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the USA took over the leading role of the global economic power; and finally in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there is cultural power, with the USA in the leading role again, including such areas as advertising, cinema and pop culture in general, and the internet (Crystal, *The Future of English* 10). It is also necessary to acknowledge the fact that science and

technology have superseded the role of the Church, and English has won its place in these areas as well. As David Graddol puts it: “English is now the international currency of science and technology” (Graddol, *The Future of English?* 9). It is an unquestionable fact that English has become a global language to a great extent due to its use in the academic world. “... the increasing use of academic English is not confined to the printed word, but equally applies to the spoken utterance.” (Mauranen et al. 634). This is how the situation of English at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could be described. However, we need to keep in mind that the above-mentioned description may not remain correct. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we have seen an ongoing rapid Americanization of life-styles around the world, but on the other hand, America is a country which receives a lot of criticism as well. As David Graddol writes in his *English Next*: “... anti-Americanism is deeper and broader now than at any time in modern history. It is most acute in the Muslim world, but it spans the globe – from Europe to Asia, from South America to Africa... Simply put, the rest of the world both fears and resents the unrivaled power that the United States has amassed since the Cold War ended.” (112)

Let me return to the historical comparison between Latin/French and English. Can we really make an analogy between the rise and fall of Latin, or French, and the rise and potential fall of English? As Kanavillil Rajagopalan emphasizes, we need to take into account the significantly varying historical circumstances. Although Latin had spread across a considerable part of the world, the different groups of people who spoke it were rather separated from each other. Therefore they started to use Latin in different ways, which resulted in the emergence of different Romance languages. On the other hand, with the invention of the internet, satellite television, and all kinds of modern technology, English faces a completely different situation – it is used by millions of people around the world in constant interaction (Rajagopalan 53). Therefore, it is very unlikely that English will follow the same path that Latin did, i.e. shattering into mutually unintelligible languages.<sup>1</sup>

### English around the world

The question is not, however, as simple as it seems. In the 1980s the US linguist of Indian origin Braj Kachru was concerned with English usage around the world in terms of mutual intelligibility, and introduced his idea of English as a language in three circles:

1. The *inner circle* includes countries where English is the mother-tongue. Even here there are varieties, the most familiar examples being British and American English but there are also others – Australian English, New Zealand English, Canadian English, South African English, Caribbean English and, within Britain, Irish, Scottish and Welsh English.

2. The *outer circle* includes countries where English was/is used as a second official language. These are mostly former British colonies, therefore there are such varieties as Indian English, Pakistan English (or collectively South Asian English), West and East African English (Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria). These are also called World Englishes or New Englishes – each of them is specific, influenced by local languages and culture, history, etc. In these World Englishes what is affected most is the vocabulary; many new words are added to English, specific word-formation processes take place, different collocations and idiomatic phrases arise. The differences among the Englishes of the *inner circle* are far

smaller than the differences between *inner circle* Englishes and those of the *outer circle* and even among the Englishes of the *outer circle* themselves.

3. The *expanding circle*, to which all the countries where English has been recognized as an important tool for international communication belong. English is taught here at all levels of education and has become a natural part of the curriculum. These countries include China, Japan, Korea, Greece, and many others.<sup>2</sup> From today's perspective I believe we might also include all the post-communist countries.

What are the differences among these three kinds of English? Is it legitimate to talk about these kinds as if they were three different languages? Under closer examination we notice in fact a great difference among them. The *inner circle* gives the world the standard. It is not surprising that most teaching materials and codifications of English come from the countries of the *inner circle*. These are therefore used around the *expanding circle* countries where English is taught as a foreign language. Also of great importance are the facts that grammars have been focusing on *written* standard English, and that the national as well as international use of English has been in the hands of well educated people who influence the standard of English. In this way, the *inner* and *expanding circles* use mutually intelligible English. Nevertheless, it has become clear that English which serves for international communication purposes is different from the English which is spoken in native, i.e. British or American, families. But, again, we have to ask the question of the specific purpose of this English usage – it will surely be different among trade partners and among friends from different parts of the world, and it will be different at international conferences or settings, for example within the European Union or the United Nations (Crystal, *English as a Global Language* 177–189). Another fact that has to be made clear is that this is true when we talk about the “grammatical core” of Standard English, which means the lexical-grammatical system without native-speaker accents, lexical items that are distinctive in various ways (such as according to region or profession), and, most especially, idioms, which are culturally elusive and opaque (Prodromou 50).

The *outer circle*, however, is a different story. Many of the countries of the *outer circle* have a colonial history. In the former colonies English might be rejected as a language of enslavers. As David Crystal puts it: “English has an unhappy colonial resonance in the minds of many” (Crystal, *English as a Global Language* 125). At the same time, however, he adds that this has not happened too often. And today's situation shows in fact the opposite: “...the Outer Circle has at long last successfully asserted its right to appropriate the language for the expression of its diverse cultures and identities...” (Seidlhofer 2003, 142). Of course, from today's perspective, people of the *outer circle* are a part of the globalized world as well so they in fact have an advantage in comparison to the *expanding circle* speakers, as English is a natural language for them.

In connection to the *outer circle* speakers it is important to emphasize the specifics of their Englishes. As David Crystal points out, every language contributes to the identity of the nation which uses the language. Therefore the *outer circle* states view English as a part of their identity. However, with the spread of English around the world, English has a different function as well, that of international intelligibility and communication. (Crystal, *The Future of English* 14) But, in intercultural communication, does the identity-forming function play a role as well? Is it possible for an individual who is not a native speaker of English to respect both these functions? The tension between these two functions can be

cancelled out by bilingualism. In today's world, however, bilingualism is not enough. English spreads across cultures, therefore accepting the different cultures is another important matter in international communication. As Cem and Margaret Alptekin stated in the 1980s, the true intercultural individual would have an identity which is able to transcend the local limitations of the native and target cultures "by understanding and appreciating cultural diversity and pluralism thanks to the new language, while not losing sight of native norms and values in the process" (Alptekin 19).

Due to the massive spread of English around the globe, many languages which mix English with a local language emerge. They are often given nicknames such as Franglais, Chinglish, Japlish, Singlish, Spanglish, Denglish or Angleutsch, we know Czenglish, a relatively new term is Slovanlish and many more. The process of influence can flow in several directions – either an English speaker starts to use local terms and local language grammar rules in English, or vice versa – the local language user starts to add English terms and rules into his/her language. Another case is translating into English according to local language grammatical rules and habits (in Slovak classrooms a typical mistake is for instance using *what* as a relative pronoun, or ignoring articles as Slovak has no equivalent grammatical system). As a teacher of English I can confess that being used to explaining linguistic matters in English, I am often at a loss when the need comes to explain the same things in Slovak. The English terms persistently appear in my mind and I end up mixing the two languages in an incredible way such as "Rozlíšenie *compound and complex sentence* je jednoduché. *Compound sentence* musí obsahovať iba vety hlavné, teda vety *on the same level*, zatiaľ čo *complex sentence* obsahuje jednu alebo viac viet hlavných plus vety vedľajšie, *subordinate*." An example of Slovanlish, written by an exchange student from the USA, follows:

All the exchange students, including myself, developed a strange little jazyk all our own. Dubbed "Slovanlish" or "slovanličtina", depending on who you're talking to, it's basically angličtina, but about half the slovos come out po slovensky, which could be a maly communication problem when I get back home. The nouns are the worst, besides those funky little words that you just toss out into the sentence. I'm going to be saying "No" a lot, but what I'll mean by "no" is generally "yes". I read that it takes at least two weeks to stop saying "yes" and "no" in your adopted language, but that seems a little kratky to me. You should have heard us all spolu. It was a little scary. If you'd stranded us all on a desert island somewhere, it would only have taken about a rok and we would have had ourselves a full-fledged jazyk all our own. I have here appended a maly glossary for you in case any of you want to študovať up a bit before I get there in case you find me yelling for you to "pod'kaj a second" or asking you to pomôc with my počítač. I'm sure it doesn't even begin to cover the immense confusion we'll have, but sometimes a little confusion is fun too. Add to the mix the fact that I've been chilling with my Australčanka with all her fun australsky words, and my vocabulary becomes a very very zauimave place. (aubrianne)

## Language and culture

What we need to take into account in connection with these New Englishes is the fact that language is an expression of culture. As the founder of general linguistics, Wilhelm von Humboldt, stated: “there resides in every language a characteristic world-view ... every language contains the whole conceptual fabric and mode of presentation of a portion of mankind” (Losonsky 60). This means that always when learning a language we also need to understand the invisible patterns that lie underneath. Always, when one learns a language, one must in a way also adopt the language’s (community’s) culture. But, what kind of culture lies under the English language? Can we consider English as having the same relation to the culture of certain state/s as for example the Slovak language in connection to Slovakia as a state and nation or any other language in the world being connected to a certain nation and/or state? The case of present-day English is different, as English is used extensively by native as well as non-native speakers from different parts of the world. Therefore, there is no simple correlation between English and the culture and interests of a particular state. English is so widespread that it cannot be connected with a single culture, Anglo-culture, in the way many other languages are connected with a specific territory. Also, for many, especially postcolonial, countries the identification of English with Anglo-culture might be displeasing, or even offensive because their own language is a variety of English (Wierzbicka 4). Already there are scholars who call for intercultural communication training rather than for grammatical or structural training. For instance, Harry Krasnick predicts that by the year 2020 “the problem will be less and less English (as a grammatical code), and more and more intercultural communication competence” (Krasnick 92).

Of course, there are not great differences between languages that are spoken in similar cultural backgrounds (e.g. around Europe) – even Slavonic and Germanic languages are not too distant from one another (leaving aside the structure, grammar and vocabulary of these languages, although even in these areas there are considerable similarities, but the matter in question here is the underlying *pragmatic* layer). A greater difference is seen when we compare two languages which are really far away from each other, geographically as well as culturally. The following English/Korean dialogue is an example of different cultural habits that mirror in the language as well. If a Korean person transforms his or her habit into English, the result might be at least strange for a native English speaker, but it can even cause misunderstanding:

A: *Someone has stolen my purse!*

B (British): *I am sorry to hear that!*

B (Korean): 어떡게해야 (eotteohgehaeya) (*What are you going to do?*)

For a Korean, the first reply would suggest that the hearer is somehow responsible for the loss of the purse, which is certainly not what is meant in English. This is something which would be expressed as 미안 해요 (bianhaeyo) (*I’m sorry*) in Korean. A similar situation occurs with the simplest words “yes” and “no” – they are used in a very different way in English and in Korean. Many Koreans repeat the question-answer format of Korean negative questions when communicating in English. To the question, “Didn’t you like it?” English speakers answer either “Yes, I did” or “No, I didn’t,” meanwhile many

Koreans respond either “Yes, I didn’t like it,” or “No, I liked it.” By “yes” or “no” they rather express whether they agree or disagree with what was said. They use a combination of positive and negative elements of discourse, which native speakers of English can find very puzzling (Cho 34–35).

### The future of English

Taking into consideration everything which was stated above – is there any way to predict the future of English? Will English continue to be the *lingua franca* in the globalized world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Or will we see many different Englishes, one virtually unintelligible to the other? As mentioned above, we need to consider the two basic functions of a language and at the same time the two main needs of today’s society in relation to a language – the need for *international intelligibility* and the need for a *cultural identity*. Because cultural trends are very important in today’s world, English faces de-standardization – speakers are more open to diversity and individual style. “The most likely scenario seems to be continued ‘polycentrism’ for English – that is, a number of standards which compete” (Graddol, *The Future of English?* 56). English will be influenced not only by people who speak English as a mother-tongue but also by people who speak it as a second language and people who learn it as a foreign language. And, as David Crystal documents, native English speakers are now the group that is in minority.<sup>3</sup> There is only a small chance that any other language will overtake the role of English as a global *lingua franca* in the near future. It is probable, however, that in certain parts of the world other languages will “form an ‘oligopoly’, each with particular spheres of influence and regional bases” (Graddol, *The Future of English?* 58).

As we can see, other languages now challenge the dominance of English in some regions. Mandarin and Spanish, for example, have become important in some parts of the world in a way that they even influence national policy priorities in some countries. Due to the growing importance of China, Mandarin has emerged as the new must-learn language not only in many Asian countries, but also in Europe and the USA. In non-Spanish parts of South America, e.g. in Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago but also in the USA we can see a growing importance of Spanish. In the Central Asian states Russian is becoming popular while in West Asia as well as North Africa this place is filled up by Arabic. In sub-Saharan Africa, some global interests are already helping build up the status of *lingua francas* such as Swahili. If we return to Europe, in different domains, French and German assume importance (Graddol, *English Next* 58–59).

Also, when we think about the latest technology, the cliché of the past two decades or so that English is the language of IT technologies can be quite easily opposed. No longer can we claim that English is the only language which can open the door for us to approach them. There are many other languages used on the internet, there are very sophisticated translators which can be used for almost any language. Also in the world of media, the American CNN or British BBC are no longer the only world-wide channels in English; there are many other national channels which air news not only in English but in several other language versions (for instance RT, France 24, Al-Jazeera, KBS World, Arirang, CCTV, NHK World). It means that in this area we can no longer see the dominant position of the USA, there are many other countries which take over this position nowadays.

In East Asia, Chinese viewers are more interested in soap opera from Korea than the USA. Japanese Manga comics are being taken up in Europe and the USA. Hong Kong action movies have helped create a new Western film genre. ‘Bollywood’ influence is being felt around the world. Even in the USA, Hispanic influence is increasingly felt: ‘telenovellas’ are crossing the divide from Spanish to English TV programming. Mainstream broadcasters are buying into Spanish programming. (Graddol, *English Next* 112–113)

In the rapidly changing world, what will happen to English itself? Will English finally be fragmented into so many dialects which will be mutually unintelligible that it will follow the path Latin went a millennium ago? Many linguists, including David Crystal, ask this question and the answer is in no way simple. We have to realize the fact that the world today is absolutely different from the world of the Middle Ages (Rajagopalan 49–54). On one hand there is the need for identity which leads to the diversification of Englishes; but on the other hand there is a strong desire for communication across the world and for this reason people need to use a language intelligible to all – the need for intelligibility makes their Englishes similar through the continued use of Standard English (Crystal, *English as a Global Language* 178).

There is also another point which it is necessary to mention. New standardized forms need not be derived only from varieties of English of the *outer* and *expanding circles*. The speakers of the *inner circle* themselves also add to new usages – when in interaction with non-native speakers they tend to use simpler language, avoid idioms and collocations, they speak more slowly and stress certain parts – in general they speak differently than when in interaction with a fellow native speaker. Crystal predicts that a new form of English, “World Standard Spoken English” (WSSE) will arise. At the moment there is already the written standard English which unites the English-speaking world. (Crystal, *English as a Global Language* 172–189).

People who attend international conferences, or who write scripts for an international audience, or who are ‘talking’ on the Internet have probably already felt the pull of this new variety. It takes the form, for example, of consciously avoiding a word or phrase which you know is not going to be understood outside your own country, and of finding an alternative form of expression. It can also affect your pronunciation and grammar. ... The concept of WSSE does not replace a national dialect: it supplements it. People who can use both are in a much more powerful position than people who can use only one. They have a dialect in which they can continue to express their national identity; and they have a dialect which can guarantee international intelligibility, when they need it. (Crystal, *English as a Global Language* 185–188)

## Conclusion

So how about the future of English? Observing the situation today I believe that English will keep its prominent position for a long time. As Barbara Seidlhofer (2001, 157) stated, “people need and want to learn English whatever the ideological baggage that comes with it...” It will probably undergo many changes in its structure as it is also influenced by

non-native speakers who add their own mindsets to the usage of English. But still the mutual intelligibility viewpoint will remain very strong. The question of international communication will, to a great extent, depend on the use of a common language but the most important part should be our ability to understand and accept, or at least tolerate, different cultures, different states of mind, different points of view. In my paper, I probably asked more questions than gave answers. This might serve as a documentation of the fact that this topic is in no way clear and closed. As language is a living organism, we cannot force it into easily definable patterns and the discussion about it will therefore continue on and on.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a deeper analysis of this issue see K. Rajagopalan's article "'World English' and the Latin analogy: where we get it wrong."

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed survey of the different circles of English see Kachru, Braj B. *The Alchemy of English: The Spread, Functions, and Models of Non-native Englishes*; Kachru, Braj B., ed. *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures*; Kachru, Braj B., Yamura Kachru, and Cecil L. Nelson, eds. *The Handbook of World Englishes*; Kachru, Yamura, and Larry E. Smith. *Cultures, Contexts, and World Englishes*; Kirkpatrick, Andy, ed. *The Routledge Handbook of World Englishes*; Murata, Kumiko, and Jennifer Jenkins, eds. *Global Englishes in Asian Contexts: Current and Future Debates*; Crystal, David. *English as a Global Language*; Graddol, David. *English Next*; Graddol, David. *The Future of English?*

<sup>3</sup> See the graph in Crystal, *English as a Global Language*, 61.

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