4   A global language

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4.1   Introduction: the recency of World English

As early as 1780, John Adams, one of the founding fathers of the
United States of America and its second president, commented that
'English is destined to be in the next and succeeding centuries more
generally the language of the world than Latin was in the last or French
is in the present age' (Adams, 1852). Throughout the 1800s others
echoed his prediction. But it was not until the second half of the
twentieth century that his prediction became a literal reality.

A language achieves a truly global status only when it develops a special
role that is recognised in every country. The notion of 'special role' is
critical. It is obviously present when large numbers of the people in a
country speak English as a first language, as happens in the USA,
Canada, Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and a
scattering of other territories. It is also present when it is made the
official language of a country, or is given joint-official or special-regional
status (the terms vary in different dispensations), and comes to be used
as the primary medium of communication in such domains as
government, the law courts, broadcasting, the press and the educational
system. English now has some kind of special administrative status in
over seventy countries, such as Ghana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, India,
Singapore and Vanuatu. Then, in a different way, English achieves a
special role when it is made a priority in a country's foreign-language
teaching policy; it has no official status, but it is nonetheless the foreign
language which children are most likely to encounter when they arrive
in school, and the one most available to adults in further education.
Over 100 countries treat English as just a foreign language (chiefly in
Europe, Asia, North Africa and Latin America), and in most of these it
is now recognised as the chief foreign language being taught in schools,
or the one which a country would most like to introduce (if only more
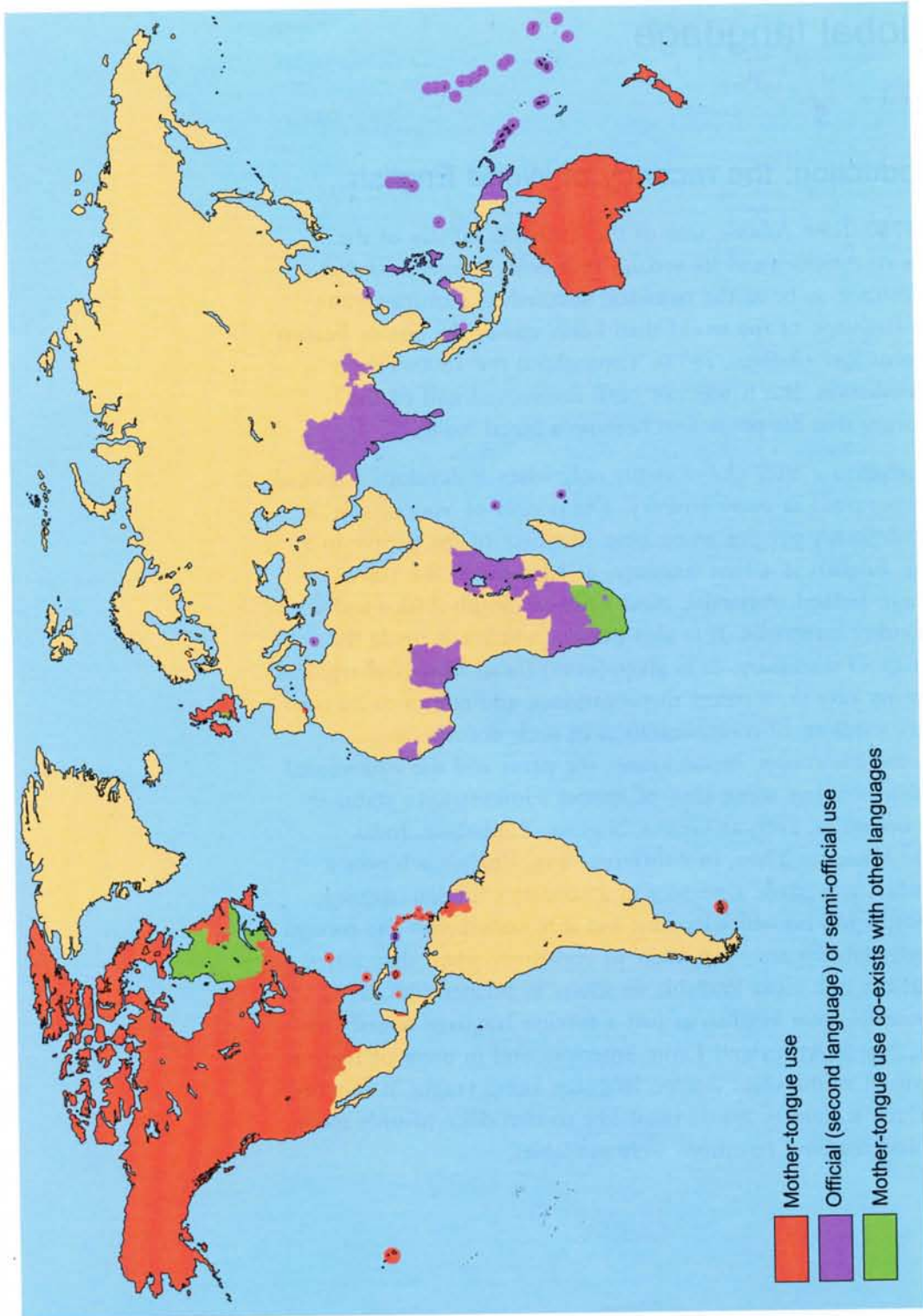trained staff and teaching resources were available).

Figure 4.1 The use of English around the world

Mother-tongue use

Official (second language) or semi-official use

Mother-tongue use co-exists with other languages

The term 'global English' thus has a genuine application in the first decades of the twenty-first century. However, it could not have had such an application in the mid-twentieth century. Although the notion of a lingua franca is probably as old as language diversity itself, the prospect that a lingua franca might be needed as a practical tool for the whole world is something which has emerged strongly only since the 1950s (notwithstanding the efforts of the various artificial language movements during the first half of the century). Not only was there then a post-war demand for a mechanism enabling nations to talk and listen to each other on a regular basis, the actual number of nations in the world participating in that mechanism was soon to increase significantly. The United Nations had only fifty-one member states when it began in 1945, but this had risen to 192 members by the turn of the century. The consequence was an increasing reliance on the concept of a 'working language', as an alternative to expensive and often impracticable multi-way translation facilities, with English more likely to be the mutually accessible language than any other. Although the point has not received the historical study it should, relevant anecdotes abound. Alex Allen, High Commissioner for Australia in the late 1990s, recalls being present at the meetings which led to the formation of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development: simultaneous translation took place routinely into various languages, but only until 10 o'clock, when the interpreters had to go off-duty – at which point discussion would often continue into the early hours, with everyone using English (Allen, 1999). Reports of this kind of thing happening at political gatherings are commonplace now, notwithstanding the pressure to safeguard and maintain other languages at an official level, and are reflected in the daily realities of interaction in the worlds of business and education.

Translating daily experience into reliable linguistic statistics is virtually impossible, given the absence of routine data-gathering procedures about language use in the population censuses of the world. When it comes to global statistics, we are in the business of informed guesswork. Still, international organisations, linguistic surveys and individual authors, using various criteria, have come up with some figures, usually separating native (first-language) and non-native use of English, and sometimes further distinguishing second-language use (where English has special, often official, status within a country) and foreign language use (where it does not). Each category has an in-built

uncertainty, the nature of which needs to be appreciated before the totals can be used with any cogency.

The first-language totals cited at the turn of the century have been swinging between 400 and 500 million – a considerable range, probably because of differences of opinion as to what should be included under this heading. The chief factor must be the status of pidgins and creoles historically derived from English. If these are considered now to be 'varieties of English', then their speakers will be included, and we will move towards accepting the higher total; on the other hand, if they are thought to be separate languages, whether on grounds of mutual unintelligibility or sociopolitical identity or both, then their numbers will be excluded, and the lower total will be more acceptable.

The non-native totals are even more difficult to be sure about, for the obvious reason that fluency is a continuum, and, as was discussed in Chapter 1, commentators differ in their view about how much competence in English a person needs before being counted as a member of the community of world English users. A criterion of native-speaker-like fluency would clearly produce a relatively small figure; including every beginner would produce a relatively large one. A widely circulated British Council estimate – more informed than most, as it was based on reports of numbers attending courses and taking examinations, as well as on market intelligence provided by its 'English 2000' project – has referred to a billion (i.e. one thousand million) people engaged in learning English (British Council, 1997). That figure needs to be interpreted cautiously, because it includes all learners, from beginners to advanced. If we take, as a criterion, a medium level of conversational competence in handling domestic subject-matter, then we might expect between half and two-thirds of this total to be counted as 'non-native speakers of English'. However, there need be only small variations in percentage estimations in the more populous countries (chiefly, India and China) to produce a large effect on the figures. In India, for example, estimates of the numbers of English speakers have varied between 3 per cent and 33 per cent (Kachru, 2001) – which in real terms represent a range between 30 million and over 330 million. The 2001 census data report a figure roughly halfway between these two totals (Graddol, 2010). In China, estimates of around 220 million at the turn of the century are thought to have increased significantly in the period leading up to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games (Feng, forthcoming).

Faced with such notable variations, in which people with particular political agendas can argue for English being stronger or weaker, a cautious temperament will use averages of the most recent estimates, which would mean a grand total of between 1500 and 2000 million speakers from all sources (for predictions of the larger total, see Graddol, 2006). This figure permits a convenient summary, given that world population passed the six billion mark during late 1999. It suggests that approximately one in three of the world's population are now capable of communicating to a useful level in English.

Table 4.1   Annual growth rate in population, 2002–7: selected countries

	%	
Australia	1.2	
Canada	1.0	
New Zealand	1.2	
UK	0.5	
USA	1.0	
Average	0.98	
Ghana	2.4	
India	1.7	
Malaysia	1.8	
Nigeria	2.3	
Philippines	2.0	
Average	2.04	

(Graddol, 1999)

Two comments must immediately be made about this or any similar conclusion. First, if a third of the world's population are able to use English, then two-thirds are not. Nor do we have to travel far into the hinterland of a country – away from the tourist spots, airports, hotels, and restaurants – to encounter this reality. Populist claims about the universal spread of English thus need to be kept firmly in perspective. Second, there is evidently a major shift taking place in the centre of gravity of the language. From a time (in the 1960s) when the majority of speakers were thought to be first-language speakers, we now have a situation where the ratio of native to non-native speakers is around 1:4. Moreover, the population growth in areas where English is a second language is about twice that in areas where it is a first language (see Table 4.1), so that this differential is steadily increasing. David Graddol

(1999, p. 61) suggests that the proportion of the world's population who have English as a first language will decline from over 8 per cent in 1950 to less than 5 per cent in 2050. The situation is without precedent for an international language.

4.2 Explanations for the emergence of world English

Activity 4.1

What factors do you think led to the emergence of English as the leading global language in today's world? Take a few minutes to write down some possible reasons. There is no separate comment for this activity but my thoughts can be found in the discussion that follows.

There are several explanations as to why English has emerged as the pre-eminent international language in the world today. Some are plausible; some are not. A good example of an implausible explanation is the argument that there are properties in the language (*intrinsic linguistic factors*) which make it especially attractive or easy to learn. The imagined simplicity of English is frequently cited, with its relative lack of inflectional endings, the absence of grammatical gender and lexical tone, and the non-use of honorifics sometimes cited as evidence. Ignored by this account are such matters as the language's syntactic, lexical and stylistic complexity, or the proportion of irregularity in its spelling system. Linguists, respecting the axiom that languages are equivalent in their structural complexity, have no difficulty rejecting intrinsic arguments of this kind. It need only be pointed out that languages which are strongly marked by inflection and grammatical gender, such as Latin and French, have been international languages in their day, to demonstrate that global stature has nothing to do with linguistic character.

A language becomes a world language for *extrinsic* reasons only – that is, reasons related to things other than the properties of the language itself – and these all relate to the power of the people who speak it. 'Power', in this connection, has a variety of applications in political (military), technological, economic and cultural contexts. Political power is seen in the form of the colonialism that brought English around the world from the sixteenth century (as was discussed in the previous chapter),

so that by the nineteenth century, the language was one 'on which the sun does not set' (Quirk, 1985, p. 1). Technological power is present in the sense that the Industrial Revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was very significantly an English-language event. The nineteenth century saw the growth in the economic power of the United States, rapidly overtaking Britain as its population grew, and adding greatly to the number of world English speakers. And in the twentieth century, cultural power manifested itself in virtually every walk of life through spheres of American influence. We can identify several domains within which English has become pre-eminent in this way: politics, economics, the press, advertising, broadcasting, motion pictures, popular music, international travel and safety, education and communications. Given this spread of functionality, it is not surprising that so many countries have found it useful to adopt English as a medium of communication, either for internal or external purposes.

Politics

As just suggested, pre-twentieth-century commentators would have had no difficulty giving a single, political answer to the question, 'Why world English?' They would simply have pointed to the growth of the British Empire, a legacy which carried over into the twentieth century. The League of Nations was the first of many modern international alliances to allocate a special place to English in its proceedings: English was one of the two official languages (along with French), and all documents were printed in both. English now plays an official or working role in the proceedings of most major international political gatherings, such as ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations).

Economics

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Britain had become the world's leading industrial and trading nation (Parker, 1986, p. 391). Its population of five million in 1700 had more than doubled by 1800, and during that century no country could equal its economic growth, with a gross national product rising, on average, at 2 per cent per year. By 1800, the chief growth areas, in textiles and mining, were producing a range of manufactured goods for export which led to Britain being called the 'workshop of the world'. Over half of the leading scientists and technologists during the Industrial Revolution worked in English, and people who travelled to Britain (and later America) to learn about the new technologies had to do so through the medium of English. The early nineteenth century saw the rapid growth of the international

banking system, especially in Germany, Britain and the USA, with London and New York becoming the investment capitals of the world. The resulting 'economic imperialism' brought a fresh dimension to the balance of linguistic power.

Figure 4.2 A copy of the *New York Daily Times* from 1851

The press

The English language has been an important medium of the press for nearly 400 years. The nineteenth century was the period of greatest progress, thanks to the introduction of new printing technology and new methods of mass production and transportation. It also saw the development of a truly independent press, chiefly fostered in the USA, where there were some 400 daily newspapers by 1850 (see Figure 4.2), and nearly 2000 by the turn of the century. Censorship and other restrictions continued in Continental Europe during the early decades, however, which meant that the provision of popular news in languages other than English developed much more slowly. Today, about a third of the world's newspapers are published in countries where English has special status (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2008, p. 804ff.), and the majority of these will be in English. This high profile was reinforced by the way techniques of news gathering developed. The mid-nineteenth century saw the growth of the major news agencies, especially following the invention of the telegraph. Paul Julius Reuter started an office in Aachen, but soon moved to London, where in 1851 he launched the agency which now bears his name. By 1870, Reuters had acquired more territorial news monopolies than any of its continental competitors. With the emergence in 1856 of the New York Associated Press, the majority of the information being transmitted along the telegraph wires

of the world was in English. Some degree of linguistic balance would later emerge, but not for a considerable time.

Advertising

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a combination of social and economic factors led to a dramatic increase in the use of advertisements in publications, especially in the more industrialised countries. Mass production had increased the flow of goods and was fostering competition, consumer purchasing power was growing, and new printing techniques were providing fresh display possibilities. In the USA, publishers realised that income from advertising would allow them to lower the selling price of their magazines, and thus hugely increase circulation. Two-thirds of a modern newspaper, especially in the USA, may be devoted to advertising. During the nineteenth century the advertising slogan became a feature of the medium, as did the famous 'trade name'. The media capitalised on the brevity with which a product could be conveyed to an audience: posters, billboards, electric displays, shop signs and other techniques became part of the everyday scene. As international markets grew, the 'outdoor media' began to travel the world, and their prominence in virtually every town and city is now one of the most noticeable global manifestations of English language use. American English ruled: by 1972, only three of the world's top thirty advertising agencies were not US-owned.

Broadcasting

It took many decades of experimental research in physics before it was possible to send the first radio telecommunication signals through the air, without wires. Marconi's system, built in 1895, carried telegraph code signals over a distance of one mile. Six years later, his signals had crossed the Atlantic Ocean; by 1918, they had reached Australia. English was the first language to be transmitted by radio. Within twenty-five years of Marconi's first transmission, public broadcasting became a reality. The first commercial radio station, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, broadcast its first programme in November 1920, and there were over 500 broadcasting stations licensed in the USA within two years. A similar dramatic expansion affected public television twenty years later. We can only speculate about how these media developments must have influenced the growth of world English. There are no statistics on the proportion of time devoted to English-language programmes the world over, or on how much time is spent listening to such programmes. But if we look at broadcasting aimed specifically at

audiences in other countries (such as the BBC World Service or the Voice of America), we note significant levels of provision – over a thousand hours a week by the former, twice as much by the latter, at the turn of the millennium. Most other countries showed sharp increases in external broadcasting during the post-war years, and several launched English-language radio programmes, such as the Soviet Union, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Sweden and Germany.

Figure 4.3   The Voice of America

Motion pictures

The new technologies which followed the discovery of electrical power fundamentally altered the nature of home and public entertainment, and provided fresh directions for the development of the English language. The technology of this industry has many roots in Europe and America during the nineteenth century, with England and France providing an initial impetus to the artistic and commercial development of the cinema from 1895. However, the years preceding and during the First World War stunted the growth of a European film industry, and dominance soon passed to America, which oversaw from 1915 the emergence of the feature film, the star system, the movie mogul and the grand studio, all based in Hollywood, California. As a result, when sound was added to the technology in the late 1920s, it was spoken English which

suddenly came to dominate the movie world. And despite the growth of the film industry in other countries in later decades, English-language movies still dominate the medium, with Hollywood coming to rely increasingly on a small number of annual productions aimed at huge audiences. It is unusual to find a blockbuster movie produced in a language other than English, and about 80 per cent of all feature films given a theatrical release are in English (Dyja, 2005), although this figure needs to be set against the amount of dubbing into other languages, which is steadily increasing.

Popular music

The cinema was one of two new entertainment technologies which emerged at the end of the nineteenth century: the other was the recording industry. Here too the English language was early in evidence. When in 1877 Thomas A. Edison devised the phonograph, the first machine that could both record and reproduce sound, the first words to be recorded were 'What God hath wrought', followed by the words of the nursery-rhyme 'Mary had a little lamb'. Most of the subsequent technical developments took place in the USA. All the major recording companies in popular music had English-language origins, beginning with the US firm Columbia (from 1898). Radio sets around the world hourly testify to the dominance of English in the popular music scene today. By the turn of the century, Tin Pan Alley (the popular name for the Broadway-centred song-publishing industry) was a reality, and was soon known worldwide as the chief source of US popular music. Jazz, too, had its linguistic dimension, with the development of the blues and many other genres. And by the time modern popular music arrived, it was almost entirely an English scene. The pop groups of two chief English-speaking nations were soon to dominate the recording world: Bill Haley and the Comets and Elvis Presley in the USA; the Beatles and the Rolling Stones in the UK. Mass audiences for pop singers became a routine feature of the world scene from the 1960s. No other single source has spread the English language around the youth of the world so rapidly and so pervasively.

International travel and safety

For those whose international travel brings them into a world of package holidays, business meetings, academic conferences, international conventions, community rallies, sporting occasions, military occupations and other 'official' gatherings, the domains of transportation and accommodation are chiefly mediated through the use of English as an auxiliary language. Safety instructions on international flights and sailings, information about emergency procedures in hotels, and directions to major locations are now increasingly in English alongside local languages. A special aspect of safety is the way that the language has come to be used as a means of controlling international transport operations, especially on water and in the air. English has become the international language of the sea, in the form of Essential English for International Maritime Use – often referred to as **Seaspeak** (Weeks et al., 1984). **Airspeak**, the language of international aircraft control, emerged after the Second World War, when the International Civil Aviation Organisation was created, and it was agreed that English should be the international language of aviation when pilots and controllers speak different languages (a principle which is not always respected in practice, as air disasters sometimes bring to light).

Education

Issues to do with the role of English in global education are discussed in a later book in this series, Hewings and Tagg (eds) (2012) *The Politics of English: Conflict, Competition, Co-existence.*

English is the medium of a great deal of the world's knowledge, especially in such areas as science and technology, and access to knowledge is the business of education. When we investigate why so many nations have in recent years made English an official language or chosen it as their chief foreign language in schools, one of the most important reasons is always educational. Since the 1960s, English has become the normal medium of instruction in higher education for many countries – including several where the language has no official status. Advanced courses in The Netherlands, for example, are widely taught in English. No African country uses its indigenous language in higher education, English being used in the majority of cases. The English language teaching (ELT) business has become one of the major growth industries around the world in the past half century. However, its relevance to the growth of English as a world language goes back much further. In the final quarter of the eighteenth century, we find several examples of English grammars, such as Lindley Murray's, being translated into other languages (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 1996).

Communications

If a language is a truly international medium, it is going to be most apparent in those services which deal directly with the task of communication – the postal and telephone systems and the electronic networks. Information about the use of English in these domains is not easy to come by, however. It is thought that three-quarters of the world's mail is in English, but as no one monitors the language in which we write our letters, such statistics are highly speculative. Only on the internet, where messages and data can be left for indefinite periods of time, is it possible to develop an idea of how much of the world's everyday communications (at least, between computer owners) is actually in English. The internet began as ARPANET, the Advanced Research Projects Agency network, in the late 1960s, in the USA. Its language was, accordingly, English, and when people in other countries began to form links with this network, it proved essential for them to use English. The dominance of this language was then reinforced when the service was opened up in the 1980s to private and commercial organisations, most of which were (for the reasons already given) already communicating chiefly in English. At the turn of the century, it was thought that some 70 per cent of usage – at least on the World Wide Web – was in English, although the proportion has been steadily reducing as more languages and non-English sites come online. Table 4.2 is based on a sample of nearly 1.5 million internet users during the second quarter of 2010 (carried out by Internet World Stats). English still holds the leading position, but Chinese is rapidly catching up, with a percentage growth rate that is three times that of English over the previous eight years. By 2003, less than half the host servers in the world were in English-speaking countries. A similar predominance for English has also been observed in more recent developments, such as social networking forums and microblogging sites like Twitter. Internet usage will in due course probably reflect the balance of linguistic power in the outside world. On the other hand, the head start English has had means that there is more high-quality content on the internet in English than in other languages, so that even though the proportion of websites in English is falling, the number of hits on those sites (i.e. individuals calling up specific web addresses) will remain disproportionately high for some time.

Table 4.2 Most widely used languages on the internet in 2010

Top ten languages in the internet	Internet users by language	Growth in internet use (2000–2010)	% of total internet users	World population for this language (2010 estimate)
English	536,564,837	281.2%	27.3%	1,277,528,133
Chinese	444,948,013	1277.4%	22.6%	1,365,524,982
Spanish	153,309,074	743.2%	7.8%	420,469,703
Japanese	99,143,700	110.6%	5.0%	126,804,433
Portuguese	82,548,200	989.6%	4.2%	250,372,925
German	75,158,584	173.1%	3.8%	95,637,049
Arabic	65,365,400	2501.2%	3.3%	347,002,991
French	59,779,525	398.2%	3.0%	347,932,305
Russian	59,700,000	1825.8%	3.0%	139,390,205
Korean	39,440,000	107.1%	2.0%	71,393,343
Top 10 languages	1,615,957,333	421.2%	82.2%	4,442,056,069
Rest of the languages	350,557,483	588.5%	17.8%	2,403,553,891
World total	1,966,514,816	444.8%	100.0%	6,845,609,960

(Internet World Stats, 2010)

4.3 English and globalisation

All these factors that have contributed to the emergence of English as the pre-eminent world language are examples of social processes which can be grouped together under the term **globalisation**. This is a key concept for discussions of English in the world today, and so it is worth examining in some detail.

Activity 4.2

Before we turn to Reading A on the subject, take a few moments to think about what the term 'globalisation' means to you. In what contexts have you come across it before? Was it presented as primarily a positive or a negative phenomenon in these contexts? What effects was it portrayed as having for society?

Now turn to Reading A: *English and linguistic globalisation* by Philip Seargeant, which outlines the theoretical scope of the concept, and considers the nature of its relationship with language-related issues.

Part 1

To begin with, read the first section of the article only: 'Defining globalisation' (pages 178–183). While reading, pay particular attention to the different definitions of the phenomenon, and to what the reading suggests are the common threads that run throughout them. You may find it helpful to make notes on the key terms identified in the article (those which are italicised). These are important concepts for the second section of the article, which examines the relationship between language and globalisation.

Comment

While the discussion in this chapter so far has considered the range of historical factors that have contributed to English's current position in the world (factors ranging from the influence of political institutions such as the League of Nations to the impact of the movie industry and the invention of new communications technology), Reading A considers the issue in a more abstract and theoretical way, drawing out the key processes which constitute globalisation. It suggests that different commentators interpret the effects of globalisation in different ways. Some take a very positive view of the commercial opportunities it appears to offer, while others focus on the detrimental effects it is having on 'traditional' cultures and the way it is increasing inequality around the world. A further interpretation suggests that it is resulting in 'hybrid' cultures: where a mix of the contemporary and the traditional, the local and the imported, is creating new cultural and social practices.

In many ways all these perspectives are accurate appraisals of the way that increased interconnectivity is affecting the way things operate in the world, and one can readily find examples which back each of these up. The article goes on to argue that for this reason it is helpful to think in terms of the underlying *processes* which result in all these effects, because these processes can help explain the many different (and often contrasting) social effects that globalisation is producing. Key to the concept of globalisation is the way that new technologies – especially communication and transport technologies – are offering different ways for people to relate to one another. It is now significantly easier than it was a few decades ago to interact with someone on the opposite side of the globe, and to send information, money and goods long distances in a short space of time. Because of this, the world is 'shrinking' and becoming ever more interconnected. These changes in the way that people interact result in changes in social organisation. Society is no longer so 'local', but instead people are likely to move across or connect with different cultures and communities on a far more regular basis.

Part 2

Before reading the second half of the article, give some thought to the role that language might play in the processes of globalisation. What do you think the relationship between language and globalisation might be, and what influences are globalising forces having on the English language specifically?

Now turn to the second section of the article: 'Language and global society'. As you are reading it, consider what aspects of globalisation are of particular importance for the nature and status of English in the world today. Because the article deals primarily in theoretical (that is to say, abstract) concepts, you may find it helpful to try to relate these abstract ideas to the concrete historical processes that we discussed above in relation to the emergence of English as the pre-eminent international language.

Comment

The reading suggests that the relationship between language and globalisation is a two-way street. On the one hand, the increased mobility in society and the way that so many aspects of modern life operate on a global rather than a local scale lead to the need for a common means of communication which transcends national boundaries. If a business organisation is going to trade with partners on the other side of the world, for example, it is important to have a common working language. And English has emerged as the language which mostly readily fulfils this role.

But the obverse of this is that because English is used in ever more diverse contexts, it is also changing to adapt to the circumstances in which it is used. Language contact – which we discussed in the previous chapter – results in new varieties of English developing, which are influenced by the linguistic and communicative practices of the communities which adopt the language. So there are two different forces at work here – one which creates the need for a common language which can be used (and understood) across national and cultural boundaries, and another which results in continued and greater diversity in the language.

4.4   The future of English as a world language

Given the factors outlined in Section 4.2 and in Reading A that have
led to the emergence of English as a global language, what is in store
for the future of the language? Will it continue to gain in prominence
and further cement its position as *the* global language? Are the factors
we have looked at so far going to continue to privilege English, or are
other languages likely to emerge as rival forces on the global linguistic
stage? And if English does continue to spread, what will the
consequences be for its form and shape?

Language is an immensely democratising institution. To have learnt a
language is immediately to have rights in it. You may add to it, modify
it, play with it, create in it, ignore bits of it, as you will. And it is just as
likely that the course of the English language is going to be influenced
by those who speak it as a non-native language as by those who speak
it as a mother tongue. Fashions count, in language, as anywhere else,
and fashions are a function of numbers. As we have seen, the total
number of mother-tongue speakers in the world is steadily falling, as a
proportion of world English users. It is perfectly possible for a linguistic
fashion to be started by a group of non-native learners, or by those
who speak a creole or pidgin variety, which then catches on among
other speakers: the phenomenal spread of rapping is an example.
As numbers grow and non-native speakers gain in national and
international prestige, usages which were previously criticised as 'foreign'
– such as a new concord rule ('three person' rather than 'three people'),
variations in countability ('furnitures', 'kitchenwares'), or verb use
('he be running') – can become part of the standard educated speech
of a locality, and may eventually appear in writing.

In the next chapter we will examine in detail the features of some of
these different Englishes from around the world. For the moment, let
us focus on the political, social and sociolinguistic issues which
accompany this diversity in the language. We can start by asking what
power and prestige is associated with these new varieties of English? It
is all happening so quickly that it is difficult to generalise. But
impressionistically, we can see several of these new linguistic features
achieving an increasingly public profile in their respective countries.
Words become used less self-consciously in the national press – no
longer being put in inverted commas, for example, or given a gloss.
They come to be adopted, often at first with some effort, then more
naturally, by first-language speakers of English in the locality. Indeed,

the canons of local political correctness, in the best sense of that phrase, may foster a local usage, giving it more prestige than it could ever have dreamed of – a good example is the contemporary popularity in New Zealand English of Maori words (and the occasional Maori grammatical feature, such as the dropping of the definite article before the people name 'Maori' itself). Above all, the local words begin to be used at the prestigious levels of society: by politicians, religious leaders, socialites, pop musicians and others. Using local words is then no longer to be seen as slovenly or ignorant, within a country; it is respectable; it may even be 'cool'.

The next step is the move from national to international levels. These people who are important in their own communities – whether politicians or pop stars – start travelling abroad. The rest of the world looks up to them, either because it wants what they have, or because it wants to sell them something. The result is the typical present-day scenario: an international gathering (political, educational, economic, artistic, etc.) during which senior visitors use, deliberately or unselfconsciously, a word or phrase from their own country which would not be found in the traditional standards of British or American English. Once upon a time, the reaction would have been to condemn the usage as ignorance. Today, it is becoming increasingly difficult to say this, or even to think it, if the visitors have more degrees than the visited, or own a bigger company, or are social equals in every way. In such circumstances, one has to learn to live with the new usage, as a feature of increasing diversity in English. It can take a generation or two, but it does happen. It happened within fifty years between Britain and America: by 1842, Charles Dickens (in his *American Notes*, revised in 1868) made some observations about American linguistic usage – such as his amazement at the many ways that Americans use the verb 'fix' – all expressed in tones of delight, not dismay. But, whatever your attitude towards new usages – and there will always be people who sneer at diversity – there is no getting away from the fact that, these days, regional national varieties of English are increasingly being used with prestige on the international scene.

If these **New Englishes** are becoming standardised, as markers of educated regional identity, what is taking their place elsewhere within the social spectrum of these communities? Here, very little descriptive research has been done, but there are enough anecdotal reports to suggest the way things are going. When actual examples of language in use are analysed, in such multilingual settings as Malaysia and Singapore,

we immediately encounter varieties which bring elements of different languages together (*code-mixing*) and make use of informal features that would not be used in standard British or American English. Conversations of this kind, between well-educated people, are now heard at grass-roots level in communities all over the English-speaking world (Mesthrie, 1992; Siegel, 1995). However, establishment attitudes towards these varieties are still generally negative. In 1999, for example, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of Singapore devoted several minutes of his National Day Rally speech to a plea for Singaporeans to cut down on their use of **Singlish** (a hybrid of English, Chinese and Malay) and to maintain the use of standard English, if the country's aims for a greater international role were to be realised. He illustrated this part of the speech with some Singlish expressions, then focused his anxiety on the influence of the media, and in particular the leading character from the country's highly popular television sitcom, Phua Chu Kang ('PCK'), known for his rapid, fluent Singlish. The prime minister then approached the Television Corporation of Singapore, and asked them to do something about it; they then agreed to enrol PCK in some basic English classes so that he could improve his standard English. The action was widely reported both within the country (e.g. *The Straits Times*, 23 August 1999) and abroad, and not without scepticism. As *The Independent* put it (17 October 1999), the chastising of PCK 'was something like the Queen rebuking Del Boy during the opening of parliament'.

Figure 4.4 The Speak Good English Movement in Singapore

That language should receive such a high profile in a 'state of the union' address is itself surprising, and that a head of government should go out of his way to influence a television sitcom is probably

unprecedented in the history of language planning! But it illustrates well the direction in which matters are moving. Singlish must now be a significant presence in Singapore for it to attract this level of attention and condemnation. The nature of the reaction is also a good illustration of the nature of the problem which all New Englishes encounter in their early stages. It is the same problem that older varieties of English also encountered: the view that there can only be one kind of English, the standard kind, and that all others should be eliminated. From the days when this mindset first became dominant, in the eighteenth century, Britain and a few other countries have taken some 250 years to confront it and replace it with a more egalitarian perspective in educational curricula. The contemporary view, as represented in the National Curriculum for England, is to maintain the importance of standard English while at the same time maintaining the value of local accents and dialects. The intellectual basis for this policy is the recognition of the fact that language has many functions, and that the reason for the existence of standard English (to promote mutual intelligibility) is different from the reason for the existence of local dialects (to promote local identity). The same arguments apply, with even greater force, on a global scale. There is no intrinsic conflict between a standard variety of English and Singlish in Singapore, as the reasons for the existence of the former, to permit Singaporeans of different linguistic backgrounds to communicate with each other and with people abroad, are different from the reasons for the emergence of the latter, to provide a sense of local identity. Ironically, the prime minister himself recognised the importance of both these goals, in emphasising that the future of Singapore needed both an outward-looking set of economic and cultural goals as well as an inward-looking sense of the 'something special and precious' in the Singaporean way of life. A bidialectal (or bilingual) policy allows a people to look both ways at once, and would be the most efficient way of the country achieving its aims. Fostering a standard English is one plank of such a policy. Condemning Singlish is not.

We will encounter similar attitudes in all parts of the world where English is developing a strong non-native presence, and at all levels. Teachers of English as a Second or Foreign Language have to deal with the situation routinely, with students increasingly arriving in the classroom speaking a dialect which is markedly different from standard English. The question of just how much local phonology, grammar, vocabulary and pragmatics should be allowed in is difficult and contentious. But there seems no doubt that, gradually, there is a definite

ameliorative trend around the English-speaking world, with expressions which were once heavily penalised as local and low-class now achieving a degree of status. How fast this trend develops depends on economic and social factors more than on anything else. If the people who use mixed varieties as markers of their identity become more influential, attitudes will change, and usages will become more acceptable. In fifty years time, we could find ourselves with an English language which contains within itself large areas of contact-influenced vocabulary, borrowed from such languages as Malay or Chinese, being actively used in Singapore, Malaysia and emigrant communities elsewhere. First-language speakers from those areas would instinctively select this vocabulary as their first choice in conversation. Everyone else would recognise their words as legitimate options, passively at least, with occasional forays into active use. It is a familiar story in the history of the English language, though operating now on a global scale.

Indeed, such a scenario would not be so different from that already found in English. There are over 350 living languages given as vocabulary sources in the files of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. For example, there are already over 250 words with Malay as part of their etymology in the *OED* so the foundation is already laid. The contact-language words of the future will of course include more alternative rather than supplementary expressions – localised words for everyday notions, such as tables and chairs, rather than for regionally restricted notions, such as fauna and flora – but the notion of a lexical mosaic as such is not new. It has always been part of the language.

4.5   An English family of languages?

The future of world English is likely to be one of increasing multidialectism, but could this become multilingualism? Is English going to fragment into mutually unintelligible varieties, just as Vulgar Latin did a millennium ago? The forces of the past fifty years, which have led to so many New Englishes, suggest this outcome. If such significant change can be noticed within a relatively short period of time, must not these varieties become even more differentiated over the next century, so that we end up, as Tom McArthur (1998) argues, with an English 'family of languages'?

Activity 4.3

Take a few moments to think of reasons which might lead to English fragmenting into a family of discrete and mutually unintelligible languages. What aspects of modern global society might prevent this from happening?

Comment

The question of whether we will end up with an English 'family of languages' does not have a single answer. The history of language suggests that fragmentation has been a frequent phenomenon (as in the well-known case of Latin), but the history of language is no longer a guide. Today, we live in the proverbial global village, where we have immediate access to other languages and varieties of English in ways that have come to be available only recently, and this is having a strong centripetal or standardising effect. With a whole range of fresh auditory models becoming routinely available, chiefly through satellite television and on the internet, it is easy to see how any New English could move in different directions at the same time. The pull imposed by the need for identity, which has been making New Englishes increasingly dissimilar from British English, could be balanced by a pull imposed by the need for intelligibility, on a world scale, which will make them increasingly similar. At the former level, there may well be increasing mutual unintelligibility; but at the latter level, there might not.

None of this disallows the possible emergence of a family of English languages in a sociolinguistic sense; but mutual unintelligibility will not be the basis of such a notion in the case of New Englishes, any more than it has been in relation to intranational accents and dialects. Although there are several well-known instances of dialect unintelligibility among people from different regional backgrounds, especially when encountered at rapid conversational speed – in Britain, Cockney (London), Geordie (Newcastle), Scouse (Liverpool) and Glaswegian (Glasgow) are among the most commonly cited cases – the problems largely resolve when a speaker slows down, or they reduce to difficulties over isolated lexical items. This makes regional varieties of English no more problematic for linguistic theory than, say, occupational varieties such as legal or scientific. It is no more illuminating to call Cockney or Scouse 'different English languages' than it would be to call Legal or Scientific by such a name, and anyone who chooses to extend the application of the term 'language' in this way finds a slippery slope which eventually leads to the blurring of the potentially useful distinctions between 'language', 'variety' and 'dialect'.

The intelligibility criterion has traditionally provided little support for an English 'language family'. We have learnt from sociolinguistics in recent decades, however, that this criterion is by no means an adequate explanation for the language nomenclature of the world, as it leaves out of consideration linguistic attitudes, and in particular the criterion of identity. It is this which allows us to say that people from Norway, Sweden and Denmark speak different languages, notwithstanding the considerable amount of intelligibility which exists between them. It seems that if a community wishes its way of speaking to be considered a 'language', and if they have the political power to support their decision, there is nothing which can stop them doing so. The present-day ethos is to allow communities to deal with their own internal policies themselves, as long as these are not perceived as being a threat to others. However, to promote an autonomous language policy, two criteria need to be satisfied. The first is to have a community with a single mind about the matter, and the second is to have a community which has enough political-economic 'clout' to make its decision respected by outsiders with whom it is in regular contact. When these criteria are lacking, any such movement is doomed.

Autonomous language policy is discussed further in Chapter 6.

There are very few examples of English generating varieties which are given totally different names, and even fewer where these names are rated as 'languages' (as opposed to 'dialects'). There are some cases among the English-derived pidgins and creoles around the world (e.g. Tok Pisin, Gullah), but any proposal for language status is invariably surrounded with controversy. An instance from the mid-1990s is the case of **Ebonics** – a blend of Ebony and phonics – proposed for the variety of English spoken by African-Americans, and which had previously been called by such names as 'Black Vernacular English' or **African-American Vernacular English** (McArthur, 1998, p. 197ff.). Although the intentions behind the proposal were noble, and attracted some support, it was denounced by people from across the political and ethnic spectrum, including such prominent individuals as Education Secretary Richard W. Riley, the black civil rights leader Rev. Jesse Jackson and writer Maya Angelou. Quite evidently the two criteria above did not obtain: the US black community did not have a single mind about the matter, and the people who had the political-economic clout to make the decision respected also had mixed views about it.

By giving a distinct name, Ebonics, to what had previously been recognised as a variety of English, a hidden boundary in the collective unconscious seems to have been crossed. It is in fact very unusual to assign a novel name to a variety of English in this way, other than in

the humorous literature, where such names as *Strine* (a spelling of an imagined casual Australian pronunciation of the word 'Australian') can be found. There are indeed many world English locations which have generated their regional humour book, in which the local accent or dialect is illustrated by comic 'translations' into standard English (Crystal, 1998). Exchanges of this kind, however, are part of the genre of language play, and recognised as such by author and reader. They are not serious attempts to upgrade the status of the dialect into a separate language. The notion of translation which they employ is purely figurative. Indeed, the humour depends on a tacit recognition of the fact that we are dealing with a variety which is 'non-standard', and that people can recognise what it is saying. There is no true intelligibility problem and no problem of identity status.

In all cases of emerging linguistic status – such as the Ebonics example – the number of speakers involved has been a minority within a much larger sociopolitical entity. We have yet to see whether the same situation will establish itself in countries where the New English speakers are in a majority and hold political power, or in locations where new, supranational political relationships are being formed. For example, although several languages are co-official in the European Union, pragmatic linguistic realities result in English being the most widely used language in these corridors. But what kind of common English emerges, when Germans, French, Greeks and others come into contact, each using English with its own pattern of influence or 'interference' from the mother tongue? There will be the usual sociolinguistic accommodation (Giles and Smith, 1979), and the result may be a novel variety, of Euro-English – a term which has been used for over a decade with reference to the distinctive vocabulary of the Union (with its 'Eurofighters', 'Eurodollars', 'Eurosceptics', and so on), but which must now be extended to include the various hybrid accents, grammatical constructions and discourse patterns encountered there. English-as-a-first-language politicians, diplomats and civil servants working in Brussels have been heard to comment on how they feel their own English is being pulled in the direction of these foreign-language patterns. A common feature, evidently, is to accommodate to an increasingly syllable-timed rhythm (i.e. a pattern where roughly equal time is given to each syllable, as is the case with French). Others include the use of simplified sentence constructions, the avoidance of idioms and colloquial vocabulary, a slower rate of speech, and the use of clearer patterns of articulation (avoiding some of the assimilations and elisions which would be natural in a first-language setting). It is

important to stress that this is not the 'foreigner talk' reported in an earlier ELT era. These people are not 'talking down' to their colleagues, or consciously adopting simpler expressions, for the English of their interlocutors may be as fluent as their own. It is a natural process of accommodation, which in due course could lead to new standardised forms in Europe, and even beyond. Some scholars, such as Jennifer Jenkins (2007), now argue that common patterns of non-native usage will emerge around the English-speaking world, resulting in a new version of **English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)** – a phenomenon that is beginning to receive empirical study (the VOICE project of Seidlhofer, 2010).

Figure 4.5 The official languages of the European Parliament

Activity 4.4

Now turn to Reading B: *English in Finnish society* by Sirpa Leppänen and Tarja Nikula. This extract outlines the role played by English in modern Finland, a country with two official languages: Finnish and Swedish. It gives an example of the type of English used in one particular domain, that of the media. While reading, consider the following questions:

- How has the status of English changed in Finland in line with the language's growing global status?

- To what extent is the type of English illustrated in the talk show example a new or distinct variety of English (a type of 'Euro-English')?

The transcript conventions used for the extract from the talk show include a great amount of detail about how the utterances were spoken. It is not necessary to follow this detail for the purposes of this activity.

Comment

In the last fifty years, English has become increasingly important in Finland, according to Leppänen and Nikula. It now plays a role in almost all domains of social life, and has a significant role in the education system. Attitudes towards the language are mixed, with some voicing concern about the impact that its growing status has on the local languages and culture, while others see it as an important element for the internationalisation of the country.

With regard to the question of whether the English spoken in Finland represents a distinct variety of the language (i.e. whether it has features which mark it out as a specific lingua franca usage), Leppänen and Nikula are somewhat sceptical. In their analysis of the data from the talk show, they note that there *are* indeed features of the interaction which diverge from standard English, and that these could be considered a product of the lingua franca situation. On the other hand, many of these features are also to be found in most spoken interaction – be it in a standard or non-standard variety – which often exhibits 'flaws' or inconsistencies in areas such as syntax and word choice (they discuss the example of 'word searches', i.e. trying to find the right word for what one wants to express), but nevertheless operates smoothly and efficiently as an act of communication. For Leppänen and Nikula, therefore, the issue of whether a 'Euro-English' is in fact emerging remains an open question, and is one that requires further empirical research.

4.6   Conclusion

Global English remains an evident functional reality, but its linguistic character has become increasingly difficult to define. The emergence of hybrid trends and varieties raises all kinds of theoretical and pedagogical questions, several of which began to be addressed during the 1990s (e.g. by Schneider, 1997, and Foley, 1999). They blur the long-standing distinction between 'native' and 'non-native', and between 'first', 'second' and 'foreign' language. They make us reconsider the notion of 'standard', especially when we find such hybrids being used confidently and fluently by groups of people who have education and influence in their own regional setting. They present the traditionally clear-cut notion of 'translation' with all kinds of fresh problems, for, in a code-mixing situation where speakers are switching between English and other languages, at what point in a conversation should we say that a notion of translation is relevant, as we move from 'understanding' to 'understanding most of the utterance precisely' to 'understanding little of the utterance precisely ("getting the drift" or "gist")' to 'understanding none of the utterance, despite its containing several features of English'? And, to move into the sociolinguistic dimension, hybrids give us new challenges in relation to language attitudes: for example, at what point would our insistence on the need for translation cause an adverse reaction from the participants, who might maintain they are 'speaking English', even though we cannot understand them? There may have been analogous situations earlier in the history of English. William Caxton was the first to comment on it, in his Prologue to Virgil's *Booke of Eneydos* (see the account in Chapter 2). We are being faced again with *egges* and *eyren*, but on a global scale.