

The Rise of International English: The Effects of Globalization on the English Language and its Applications on the Greater Linguistic Community © 2025 by Jackson Corfield is licensed under [CC BY-ND 4.0](#)

The Rise of International English: Navigating the Effects of Globalization on the English Language and its Implications on the Greater Linguistic Community

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Abstract

In this paper, I shall discuss the effect of globalization on the English language, and the effect that the English language has had on the modern globalized world. First, I will compare the future of English to the fate of Latin, which led to the formation of the Romance languages. I will compare the spread of English in the modern world to the spread of Latin in Ancient Rome and argue that English will not split into separate languages as Latin did but instead will converge into a new standard of international English influence by speakers from both inside and outside of what is traditionally considered to be the Anglosphere. I will then explore the effect of the spread of English on communities that adopt it as a second language and argue against the subtractive approach to second language learning by which English continues to supplant thousands of minority languages. Instead, I will argue in favour of an additive language learning approach that teaches people to speak English without sacrificing local languages in the process. I will discuss the social, educational, and economic benefits that the adoption of English has on the individual, and the cultural and linguistic sacrifices that English brings to minority linguistic communities.

1 Introduction

There are many languages that have been used as lingua francas across human history, which have served the purpose of uniting people of different linguistic backgrounds under one common language. Renaissance Europe had Classical Latin, the Islamic world had Arabic, and the modern globalized world has English. In the past century, the English language has had an unprecedented rate of growth and is now taught as a second language to learners across the globe. As the world becomes more globalized, English is being adopted by increasingly more speakers as a way to take part in the international community and have access to opportunities beyond the bounds of one's own linguistic group. As English continues to spread, it makes one wonder what kinds of effects this new global status will have on English as it grows and changes, and the implications it will have for the people who adopt it. It is easy to draw connections between English and Latin, whose spread and development across Europe led it to break up into multiple unintelligible languages. Will English meet this same fate? The English language will diversify as its speakers do the same, but how significant will this diversification be? In this essay, I will discuss the future of the English language, and the effects of its ever increasing global status upon it. I will argue that the current dominant standards of the US and UK will eventually give way to a new global standard, escaping the fate of Latin and remaining intelligible to its vast array of speakers. Finally, I will describe that while the adoption of English has advantages for its learners, its damaging effect on minority languages will be dire if not treated carefully.

2 Discussion

As the world has become increasingly more globalized, the need for a common lingua franca has grown alongside it. Many linguists have attempted to rectify this issue by creating constructed languages intended to facilitate cross-cultural communication, such as Esperanto and Interlingua. These attempts have proven to be futile, however, as these constructed languages have become obsolete due to the omnipresence of English. English was initially spread by the colonialism of the British Empire and has spread even further now that its international status has been established. Nowadays, there are three layers to the English-speaking world: the inner layer in which it is spoken as a mother tongue, the outer layer, which consists of former British colonies in which it is a prestige language, and the extended layer, in which it is the most prominent foreign language (Tao 2019). Schneider (2015) explains that there are now roughly two billion speakers of English worldwide that can hold a basic conversation, and the portion of the world's population that can speak English has gone from a fifth to nearly a third within the last generation. This increase has been driven entirely by non-native speakers, as the number of native speakers remains stable at around 350-380 million. The strongest increase can be seen in the outer layer

of former British colonies, where English is spoken mainly (but not exclusively) by the elites and serves as either an official or de facto second language.

The colonial history of the British has not been the only catalyst of English's ever growing status, however, as the global dominance of the largely monolingual Anglophone United States has contributed as well. Harper (2011) argues that the US exerts hegemonic power structures that allow for subtle cultural dominance, which is echoed in the linguistic cultures of the many countries under its influence. He explains that this power structure is exerted not only from the top down, but also from the bottom up, as individuals choose to learn English for the opportunities and cultural prestige that come along with it. Though the US does not seem to do this on purpose, the effects are still the same. Tao (2019) echoes a similar sentiment, claiming that due to the Anglo-American dominance in the field of technology, English has become the primary technological language of satellite microelectronics, global satellite communication, computer network linkage, and information technology. This dominance in science and technology further contributes to the spread of English. Because English language skills are now directly tied to possibilities of employment and participation in the world economy, there is not only a strong incentive for individuals to learn, but national governments have begun to provide widespread English language education for their citizens as well (Harper 2011).

Globalization today is not an unprecedented phenomenon. The current trends seen with the spread of English continue a long history of intercultural contact facilitated by common, literary, and scientific languages used in research and higher education that has existed for millennia (Lo Bianco 2014). Lingua francas have historically been a by-product of the expansion of cultural influence and higher education. As previously mentioned, this same trend can be seen throughout history, with Classical Latin being used in the academic circles of Renaissance Europe, and Arabic being used in universities across the Islamic world. As the study of English becomes more popular, it seems to be losing its status as foreign language education and instead appears to be merging with general education as English proficiency joins the list of basic necessary skills, like the use of spreadsheets and email (Lo Bianco 2014).

As previously mentioned, the vast spread of English has led many to question what will become of the English language as a result of its widespread use. Graddol (2001) argues that the dominant use of English on the internet has been closing the gap between spoken and written English, and cultural trends have encouraged the use of informal style, leading to a greater tolerance for stylistic diversity. He points out that these trends suggest a weakening of the institutions and practices that have maintained national standard varieties of English and suggests that native speaking countries may be experiencing a 'destandardization' of English.

Non-native speaking countries have been experiencing a change in spoken English as well. Schneider (2015) explains that a range of ‘new Englishes’ have been emerging in countries in which English is spoken alongside the native language in regions such as Asia, Africa, the Pacific, and the Caribbean. This suggests that the so-called ‘Queen’s English’ is unlikely to remain the global model moving forward, but the strong role of English will continue, with speech variability tolerated and skillfully used. As these new local varieties gain more prominence in their respective communities, English textbooks and classrooms will be more likely to pay attention to and teach these local varieties (Graddol 2001). Rajagopalan (2009) argues that the English language that has transformed itself to become the means of international communication is unlike the language spoken in monolingual households in the UK, US, and the rest of the inner layer of English-speaking countries. As he puts it, “the so-called ‘natives’ do not call the shots anymore” (Rajagopalan 2009:51). It is unrealistic to expect British or American standard English outside of their respective spaces. The English used by diplomats and CEOs may sound close to native speech, but these few exceptions pale in comparison to the millions of ordinary people that use English every day outside of what is traditionally considered to be the Anglosphere.

It is common to make a comparison to the Latin spoken in the Roman Empire, which stretched from Britain in the West to modern-day Turkey in the East. Latin was a *lingua franca* in ancient Rome in a similar way to English in the modern global world, so it is easy to draw parallels. The Latin spoken in communities in Europe slowly grew more and more distant until the varieties were no longer mutually intelligible and evolved into the Romance languages. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to worry that English could meet the same fate.

As explained by Rajagopalan (2009), Jenkins (2007) claims that the mutual intelligibility of English is under increasing threat as English spreads at its current exponential rate. In response to this claim, Rajagopalan points out the crucial difference between the English of today and the Latin of the declining Roman Empire: this emerging English is international and does not belong to any one particular place. He argues that this international variety is taking over, and thanks to the constant contact of globalization, it is truly the property of everybody. The Latin that diverged into the Romance languages was not Classical Latin, but ‘vulgar’ Latin, spoken by common folk in local communities. Contact across the Roman Empire was scarce, and these people lived mostly in isolation from other Latin speaking areas. This isolation is what led Latin to diverge, as well as contact with other surrounding languages. Modern international English does not meet these criteria, and its function as a unifier of linguistic cultures has reinforced its usage far too much to diverge in this way (Rajagopalan 2009). Therefore, he claims,

international English is here to stay, and while it will continue to evolve and change, it is highly unlikely to dissipate as Latin did.

The spread of English has certainly had many benefits to those who adopt it, yet these benefits come at a cost. Within some counties in the Anglophone periphery, ethnic rivalries cause language choice to be a complicated and controversial matter. The rise of English has provided a solution to this, as it has become increasingly important as a lingua franca for interlocutors within these countries as well as between them. In these regions, the fact that English is not associated with any one ethnic identity makes it less controversial than local indigenous languages, as its use does not favour any one ethnic group. English functions as an impartial, neutral code, which allows people to converse while mitigating these ethnic and linguistic tensions (Schneider 2015). Phillipson (2009) offers a different take, suggesting that scholars who adopt this model falsely assume the neutrality of English. He argues that when English supplants another language, it accumulates linguistic capital in the region while other languages are robbed of their function and territory. This ‘linguistic capital dispossession,’ promoted by subtractive English language learning, takes over space previously occupied by the mother tongue of the region and displaces it within the linguistic community. He further argues that what is necessary to mitigate this issue is a more linguistically ethical, additive English language education that strikes a balance between English use and the use of local language such that learners achieve multilingual competence in both languages (Phillipson 2009).

Harper (2011) echoes this worry, citing that between 20-50% of the world’s estimated 6800 languages are predicted to no longer exist by the end of the twenty-first century. When these languages are lost, knowledge, aesthetics, and cultural identities are lost as well. At the moment, 96% of the world’s languages are spoken by a mere 4% of the world’s population. This indicates that the threat of death is imminent to these languages and future levels of language decline are on track to be high. Language decline occurs most often in multilingual contexts, in which a majority language with greater political power and social prestige replaces the functions of local or minority languages, which has been observed to be occurring in many countries around the world (Harper 2011). Research on the topic suggests that of all the world’s languages, around 600 are ‘safe’ and the remaining 90% are in increasing danger of extinction (Tao 2019).

Language loss is not the fault of the individuals who adopt English, however, as learning English provides great benefits to the individual. Use of English as an international communicative code fosters trade and brings social progress, economic development, and a rise of living standards (Tao 2019). Globalization has expanded the potential labour force for many jobs and companies now hire throughout

the world (Harper 2011). English proficiency is a very valuable skill in this context, as communication is impossible in international job markets without the use of a lingua franca. Many individuals now make the very rational decision to forgo the investment of time and resources into learning their local language in favour of learning English. There are individual benefits to this decision, but the collective results lead to the decline of local and minority languages. Much of the issue lies in the fact that in the current system, this must be a trade-off. Subtractive language immersion programs that suppress the use of the local code impair language proficiency and can lead to a lack of fluency in both English and the mother tongue (Harper 2011). Harper's solution mirrors that of Phillipson, suggesting that nations should provide systems of language education that prepare citizens to engage in the global marketplace while maintaining a strong connection to their own linguistic culture and heritage.

To summarize so far, as the English language continues to spread it is growing beyond its traditional territory in the Anglophone world and increasingly becoming the possession of the wider global linguistic community. Second language speakers already vastly outnumber those who call English their mother tongue and this number will only continue to increase. It is likely that the current dominant varieties of the US and UK will take a back seat in the future and give way to a new global standard of international English. This process can already be observed to be taking place, as modern English is comprised of not only these dominant varieties but a mixture of varieties from inside and outside of the traditionally English-speaking world. Countries may claim to teach one of the current national standard varieties, but the reality seems to be that the real spoken language is already diversifying past these models. A new international English is on the rise and may well soon become the global standard.

Despite its vast reach, English will not meet the same fate as Latin. The conditions which led to the divergence of Latin were different than that of English today, and the feature that distinguishes English from Latin is that it is global. The world is too connected, and English is too cemented as a communicative tool to grow apart as Latin did. The conditions leading to the development of the Romance languages were different, and the key factor is that these languages were shaped by the isolation of the communities in which they developed. The Romance languages, like English, were influenced by the variety of languages that they came into contact with, but while this was a catalyst for divergence in Latin, the same effect is impossible in English. The much more likely scenario is that these features will spread into the vernacular of different areas and perhaps enter international English themselves. The use of English as a lingua franca is far too established for mutual intelligibility to dissipate, and as long as the globalized world remains interconnected, so too will the English language.

The spread of English has had many benefits for individuals and nations alike and has worked wonders in uniting the world into one greater linguistic community. It serves as a relatively neutral code in countries in which language choice is a touchy and tense matter and helps mitigate much prejudice and ethnic resentment. The adoption of English education helps to bring countries and individuals into the international forum and allows them to participate in the global marketplace. English proficiency opens many doors to opportunities that would not otherwise be available to people around the globe. Its use in research and academia also allows research from all over the world to be read by the global community and provides individuals with opportunities to be educated all over the world. This contact with the global community brings social progress, economic freedom, and improved living standards for those who adopt English into their lives.

Despite its numerous advantages, the adoption of English comes at a great cost. The spread of English has been the catalyst for one of, if not the largest, cases of language decline in human history. The dominance that English has in the academic world has pushed local and minority languages out of their respective spaces and caused the reach of work done in those communities to be greatly limited. The overwhelming majority of world languages are now in imminent danger, and the English language has been the unintentional culprit. As English expands into more domains, local and minority languages are being pushed out for English to take their place. As these languages are lost, much of the knowledge, wisdom, history, and culture of their people is lost as well. The danger of English language adoption is great, and as English spreads, the rate of local and minority language decline will only increase. Unless something is done, the greater linguistic community will lose much of the diversity that makes it so great, and the clock is already ticking. With such liberating benefits and drastic consequences, the spread of English is a nuanced issue. English has done so much good in uniting the globe yet has left so much damage in its wake. It is important not to be blind to the danger that is impending on our planet's linguistic diversity. The best course of action to combat this issue would be to reassess how English is taught. As discussed by Harper and Phillipson, current subtractive language education programs should be abandoned in favour of new additive, bilingual programs that teach English without taking away from local languages. This way people can be given the benefits and opportunities that come along with English proficiency while still maintaining strong linguistic identities. Students would be given a strong command of both languages, allowing them to participate in the global marketplace without taking away from their linguistic cultures.

3 Conclusion

In this paper, I have explained the viewpoints of various scholars on the rise of English as a global language and discussed the implications of its new global status on the development of the language. English has risen to power through the expansion of the British empire in the seventeenth century and maintained its reach through the cultural influence of major English-speaking powers like the US and UK. The prevalence of English in world industries such as technology and academia has led English to spread further and cemented its place as the global lingua franca. The future of the English language is likely to be taken out of the hands of the traditional Anglophone world, as the language has already spread far past its borders. A new international English is on the rise and will likely soon overtake standard US and UK English and claim its place as the new global standard. Though many scholars compare it to Latin, English will not meet the same fate as Latin did as it is too cemented as a lingua franca on the world stage. While English has been very beneficial to the countries that have adopted it, it has proven to be devastating to local languages across the world. As members of the global linguistic community, great care must be taken to act responsibly with our new linguistic tool. There is plenty of work to be done, and research on the subject of additive language learning could greatly enhance our chances of stopping so many linguistic casualties. With care, however, our new unified world can continue to thrive without sacrificing the linguistic diversity that makes human language so beautiful.

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