

The Importance of English as a Global Language

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ABSTRACT

The English language is widely spoken throughout the modern world, and as the world integrates to become a global village, English is gaining tremendous popularity as a global language. Globalization has created a smaller world for people (Rohmah, 2005) and English has been elevated to the status of ‘indispensable’ in the business arena, with the growth of markets causing a breaking down of boundaries of countries. Against this backdrop, companies have to use English to reach out to many customers and potential employees. Hence, in a world which is integrating in every sphere, English is undoubtedly known as the lingua franca. This article discusses the impacts of English as a global language.

Key words: English, Global language.

INTRODUCTION

English as a global language has been used by people world-over as a first language, a second language and a foreign language, and now it is a world language (Rohmah, 2005). A language gains status as a global language when it has a special role that is recognized in every country in the world (Crystal, 1997). English is a world language and not merely an international language, which means that it is used as the lingua franca by people from diverse cultures and backgrounds for the purpose of communication. The notion of an international language is a language which is used in any international communication which involves people from two or more countries (Rohmah, 2005).

The making of a global language

A language can achieve its role as a “global language” when it reaches a special

status which is accepted in every country(Crystal, 1997). Crystal (1997) further claims that a language can be made ‘global’ in two main ways. Firstly by making the language the ‘first’ or ‘second’ language of a country, thereby ensuring that it is used in different forms of communication, in the academic field, in technology, science, and media and in government. He further adds that a language can also have an ‘official’ role or a ‘semi-official’ role, or it can stand as a foreign language, by “being used only in certain domains, or taking second place to other languages while still performing certain official roles.” Thereby, the need to master the language is an imperative in order to survive in these societies. Secondly, Crystal (1997) enunciates that a language can be given global status by attaching and aligning it with education priority. Here, the language is taught in schools and universities as a compulsory subject. Thus Crystal (1997) sums up his argument by explaining that a language is called a “global language” when it achieves the official status and education priority in almost every nation, and, as a result, that language “will eventually come to be used by more people than any other language.” Thus, according to Crystal (1997):

“.....In making a language global, there needs to be a strong power-base, where a language cannot exist independently without a strong power-base (economic, military, politic). Language exists only in the brains and mouths and ears and hands and eyes of its users. When they succeed, on the international stage, their language succeeds. When they fail, their language fails. The essential reason to make a language ‘global’ or ‘international’ is the power of its people. The power here includes the power of military, politics and economic.”

To achieve the “global” role, military power is needed; however, to keep and develop the status, political and economic power are essential (Bharathi, 2015). This implies that, a language needs a strong base and force to popularize itself, in order to maintain the status. Hardly anyone wants to learn a language of a weak and poor nation with no international political status, and, military power, political power and economic power are the three indispensable factors to make a language ‘global’ and to keep its status (Bharathi, 2015).

The use and dominance of English as a global language

English is considered to be the lingua franca in the modern world and has been elevated to the position of a global language which connects the world (Wijewardene, 2021). Lingua franca is a language that is used by different people all over the world for the purpose of communication (Rao, 2019). The prominent characteristic of a global language are that it is the most widely used language in communication in most places in the world, where people feel the need to master it for their life (Rohmah, 2005). As a global language, English is spoken as a first language in many countries, some of which are the USA, Canada, Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and several Caribbean countries (Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 1997; Komin, 1998). However, English does not gain its special status as a global language merely by being spoken by people in those countries. English has become a world language because people in other countries give a special credence to English, even though they do not speak it as a first language (Rohmah, 2005). Special status given to English by other countries can be in the form of using English as a second language and English as a foreign language (Rohmah, 2005). The teaching of English has become a priority in several countries and has contributed considerably to the balance of trade of those countries (Philipson, 1992:4). The computer era has pole-vaulted English into an indispensable seat, world-wide, making it a much sought-after global language (Wijewardene, 2021), an essential part of our lives (Bharathi, 2015) and almost all the scientific and technological information is written in English (Kaplan, 2000; Mauranen, 2003). This has largely contributed to English being elevated to a 'global' level. English has also woven the world together with a cord of communication, thereby bringing people together, and is therefore a widely accepted 'global' language (Bharathi, 2015). Additionally, English is the language of the United Nations and almost all international fora, whilst being the dominating language in sectors such as science, technology, business, tourism and medicine (Bharathi, 2015).

English has risen to a global language due to its overt and recurring usage as the internet language or business language, airport language and also the language behind the US dollar is English (Bharathi, 2015). Russell (1997) cited in (Bharathi, 2015) claims that English is used as

the chief language in every single way of life such as commerce, diplomacy, pop music, publishing, and, is the “international language” in business, airport, tourism whilst being the main language used in education or academic communication as science, medicine etc. Additionally, as books used in university programs are written in English, in order to achieve higher education qualifications, students must successfully overcome the pre-requirement: English (Philipson, 1992). English now strongly confirms its undeniable dominance as a “global language” in both academic communication and every day fields.

English as a window to the world

As the world has been experiencing language globalization, and in this transition, the English language has been playing a prominent role, where so many people in the world whose mother tongue is not English have been trying to master the skills of the English language (Rao, 2019). Because English is widely spoken, it has often been referred to as a "world language", the lingua franca of the modern era, and while it is not an official language in most countries, it is currently the language most often taught as a foreign language (Gohil, 2013). Sectors such as education, employment, business, the internet, travel and tourism, press and media, and entertainment depend heavily on this lingua franca for survival, hence elevating the English language to a position which makes it a vital tool of communication for users from a plethora of disciplines. The English language, also known as the language of the web, has, therefore, undoubtedly become a window to the world, with the 21st century witnessing English transform into a dominant global language (Gohil, 2013). As a global language, English serves the purpose of the needs of multi-national companies and is being increasingly used as a tool of communication between one business organization and the other (Rao, 2019) where English is the language knitting a global workforce. Most multinational companies require a certain degree of English proficiency from potential employees, and, in order to get a position with a top company, more and more people are learning English (rao, 2019). Further, the English language has taken on the role of a bridge, whereby it attempts to eliminate all communication boundaries worldwide by bridging cultural and language barriers (Dunton-Downer, 2010). One important argument in

favour of English as a global language is its effectiveness, and although there are significant language barriers between people of different countries, if more people learn English, these barriers could be broken.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the importance of English as a global language thereby attempting to justify that it is the most widely used language that is accepted and internationally spoken. The facts presented have highlighted that English is required in many field and occupations, globally, and thereby has been termed a 'global language' in addition to being given the name 'the mother tongue of the Web (Gohil, 2013). With the importance of English as a global language spreading throughout the globe, English has established itself as the language of international communication. The English language has achieved the official position and education preference in every nation, and is used by more people, globally, than any other language, and therefore it is aptly termed a 'global language.'

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