

## English as a World Language

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**Abstract.** English is the most widely used language in the world. English, a member of the Indo-European group of languages, has flourished into a world language. Spoken by more than 370 million people in the United Kingdom, the United States and the former British Empire as a first language, it is used by 350 million people as a second language in countries like India, Pakistan, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and Nigeria etc. In some developing countries like India, Nigeria and the Philippines, English is the official language with other languages. English serves its various roles in international communication. All the correspondences and official writings are accomplished in English. English is the language of schools, courts, administration, business, international affairs and Internet. The universities and colleges of Great Britain, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore have English as the medium of instruction. English is also used in the top business schools, medical centers and advanced study institutes of North America and Great Britain. Most of reference books, articles, technical periodicals, scientific researches and reputed journals are published in English to-day. English is the language of global trade, commerce and tourism. English is used for international news, education, technology, economic progress and cultural exchanges etc. Modern technological information in agriculture or bio-technology is provided by English.

**Keywords :** World language; international communication; global trade; second language; official language; instruction; commerce; tourism; education.

In the eighteenth century, John Adams has prophesied English to become the most respectable language of the world in the next century. Indeed, English has a global spread and today English is the most widely used language in the world. English, a member of the Indo-European, Indo-Aryan or the Indo-Germanic group of languages, has flourished into a world language. Originally, this language was spoken by the British citizens and by the emigrants of Britain in various parts of the world. Later, British Colonial Empire introduced English in its colonies for the purposes of administration. As a result, English spread among the colonies. English-medium schools were established in the British colonies and the pass-outs found better opportunities in life. As a result, the number of English users increased. Baugh and Cable write :

In numbers of speakers as well as in its uses for international communication and in other less quantifiable measures, English is one of the most important languages of the world. Spoken by more than 370 million people as a first language in the United Kingdom, the United States, and the former

British Empire, it is the largest of the occidental languages. (4)

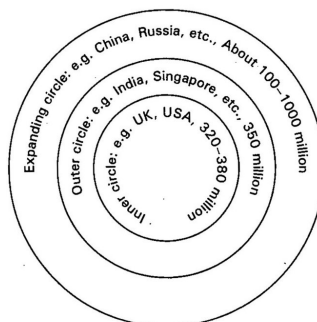
Both French and English are languages of wider communication. But English is frequently associated with practical activities. Joshua A. Fishman puts forward the point that French is found suitable for dramatic functions only in the third world countries.

He considers French equal to English for the purposes of reading good novels, poetry and for offering personal prayers. But outside the periphery of aesthetics, the presence of English is universal. In the econo-technical world, English reigns supreme. Although Japan has risen to economic and technical dominance, the Japanese language has no significant function in international affairs as Japan was isolated from the west between 1640 and 1854 when several European languages consolidated the bases of expression. Alastair Pennycook comments in his article "English in the World/The World in English" collected in *Analysing English in a Global Context*:

Otto Jespersen ([1938] 1968) estimated speakers of English to have numbered 4 million in 1500, 6 million in 1600, 8.5 million in 1700, between 20 and 40 million in 1800, and between 116 and 123 million in 1900.... Today, rough agreement can be found on figures that put the total number of speakers of English at between 700 million and 1 billion. This figure can be divided into three roughly equal groups: native speakers of English, speakers of English as a second (or intranational) language, and speakers of English as a foreign (or international) language. (78-79)

English is an international language. A quarter of the world's population knows English and 1.5 billion people are competent in using English. Out of the 1.5 billion English knowing people, about 337 million people use this as a first language in countries like the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand etc. and about 350 million people use this as a second language in countries like India, Pakistan, Singapore, Malaysia, the Phillipines and Nigeria etc. Approximately 100-1000 million people are actively engaged in learning and using English in such countries as 'China, Japan, Russia and in other countries in Europe and South America.' (Krishnaswamy and Krishnaswamy, 1)

The global use of English can be illustrated through a diagram of the three circles of the English family...



The three 'circles' of the English family

The inner circle of the diagram shows the countries in which English is used as a first language. The outer circle represents countries where English is used as a second language. The expanding circle involves countries where English is used as a foreign language. In these countries English is used as an important language for trade or international communication.

The Engco model presents an index of global influence. It has considered economic factors including Gross Language Product and openness to World trade and demographic factors (number of young speakers and rates of urbanisation. It has also considered human development index for different countries. The model weights languages on the basis of the number and wealth of the speakers and their social networks beyond their regions. The model shows that English is at the top of all languages. "Global influence" of major languages according to the engco model. An index score of 100 represents the position of English in 1995.

1	English	100
2	German	42
3	French	33
4	Japanese	32
5	Spanish	31
6	Chinese	22
7	Arabic	8
8	Portuguese	5
9	Malay	4
10	Russian	3
11	Hindi/Urdu	0.4
12	Bengali	0.09

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Source: The Engco model

Even the European Common Market has decided to use 'Euro-English' as the common language for communication. English has spread across the world extensively in short span of time of fifty years. Not only the large number of people using English make it an international language, but other factors combine to produce such a status :

- (a) The economic and political power of English using people
- (b) The military power of English using countries
- (c) The Social roles of English around the globe

English is widely used as a second language around the globe. The number of speakers, with variable proficiency, range between 50 million and 300 million. In some developing countries like India, Nigeria, and the Philippines, English is one of the official languages. In some countries, English is present as a neutral language among competing native languages since the establishment of any one language would produce ethnic feelings. Communication in English has proved superior to those in the native languages, whereas texts books are available in English but not in the native languages.

As the colonies of England achieved freedom, English was used alongside the vernaculars. In many independent countries, English is used as a primary language or a necessary second language in the schools, the courts and business. Baugh and Cable comment, "A language may be important as a lingua franca in a country or region whose diverse populations would otherwise be unable to communicate. This is especially true in the former colonies of England and France whose colonial languages have remained indispensable even after independence and often in spite of outright hostility to the political and cultural values that the European languages represent." (4) In Uganda, English is the one official language and less than one percent of the population speaks it as a first language. In India, English is used officially with Hindi and other fourteen national languages. In Tanzania, Swahili is the one official language but English is indispensable in the schools and the high courts.

The role of English in international communication is widely accepted and its success lies in its propensity and adaptability. Braj B. Kachru writes in his article. "The Sacred Cows of English" published in *English Today*, "When over 650 artificial languages have failed, English has succeeded; where many other natural languages with political and economic power to back them up have failed, English has succeeded. One reason for this dominance of English is its propensity for acquiring new identities—its power of assimilation, its adaptability to 'decolonization' as a language, its manifestation in a range of varieties, and above all its suitability as a flexible medium for literary and other types of creativity across languages and cultures." (8)

The influence of English, originally the tongue of the Germanic tribes of the British Isles, is felt on all the continents. The spread of English was affected by colonization and immigration to America. The sea-faring people of this island actively participated in international trade. The revolution in communications has greatly contributed to the spread of English. Major broadcasting and motion picture industries of the United States and Great Britain have major roles in the spread of English. English, now, has global presence:

A language becomes global only because it has the ability to adapt and blend with other cultures and can give and take from them. Thus, English today, has ceased to be the sole possession of the native English speakers and become a world language. (Krishnaswamy and Krishnaswamy, 2)

English is successful in becoming the front-ranking international language. The use of English is increasing significantly in Latin America, Netherlands and Scandinavian countries. As a link language, it has played an important role. It links the whole world together. All the correspondences and official writings are accomplished in English and English becomes a linking factor. Its role is vital for us, "English, with its cosmopolitan outlook and easy adaptability is poised to play an important role in the emerging global village." (Ramamurthi, 126)

English is a window on the world. The introduction of English language has opened avenues for knowledge acquisition. English is the language of capitalism in the contemporary world. It has become the language of Internet, International business and communication. Printed matter is available in English across the globe. English is a required language in the world of information explosion. Pallab Dutta writes:

English is typically the language of latest version applications and programs and new freeware, shareware, peer-to-peer, social media networks and websites. Software manuals, hardware-installation guides and product fact sheets of popular consumer electronics and entertainment devices usually are available in English first before being made available in other languages. (Dutta <http://www.chow.com>)

English is the main language used in international affairs. English is used by diplomats and high rank officials working in Germany, Japan, France, South Korea, Brazil, Italy and Russia to know global affairs and international diplomacy. English is widely used in higher education. It is the medium of instruction in the universities and colleges of Great Britain, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. It is also used in the top business schools, medical centres and advanced study institutes of North America and Great Britain.

Information in agriculture, economics, commerce, business, stock markets, consumer products, history, space technology or bio-technology is available in English. All kinds of technological or medical advancements are reported in English. English is used in science and technology. Krishnaswamy and Krishnaswamy comment:

Thus, despite the fact that English is not the language of rural India the medium of instruction in agricultural universities has remained English. The need to be aware of latest technology and ideas has also led to retaining English as the medium of instruction in management and engineering courses and in other colleges and universities. (5)

Most of reference books and articles are written in English. All the encyclopedia's literature is available in English. Reputed journals and technical periodicals are printed in English. Scientific researches are published in English in comparison to other languages. English is an important language used in teaching-learning process. When students of non-English speaking country go to western country for education, English is used by them for communication. Alastair Pennycook comments in his article "English in the World/The World in English" collected in *Analysing English in a Global Context*:

In international academic relations, the predominance of English has profound consequences. A large proportion of textbooks in the world are published in English and designed either for the internal English-speaking market (United Kingdom, United States, Australia and so forth) or for an international market. ( 82)

English is the main language of global trade and commerce. In many countries, English is the language of tourism and it is used to interact and engage with tourists and immigrants. When people travel to different countries where different languages are spoken, English is the language for transfer of information. It is a means of communication to deal with the language barrier problem and it also bridges the gap created due to the language. English is the language of identity for people. It is the gatekeeper for jobs in the global market.

English is also used for international news and cultural exchange etc. India uses English to market its cultural heritage and it gains worldwide values, tradition and progress. English is the language of administration and judiciary in India. It is the medium of instruction in our universities and colleges. English is 'the living stream of ever growing knowledge.' In the interconnected and globalised world, English works as the most important language of the world. Krishnaswamy and Krishnaswamy comment:

We need English because it is necessary for mobility, for social and economic purposes, and for job opportunities. It is the language that opens the doors of the global market. As an international language, English has a great 'surrender value' through the world. That is why there is a great demand for courses on Business English, Management English, English for Information Technology, Technical Writing, Spoken and Written English, Medical Transcription, and so on. (16)

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[The Engco model is designed by The English Company (UK) Ltd. for calculating the relative status of world languages. Its internet site is <http://www.english.co.uk>]

