

PERCEPTIONS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AROUND THE WORLD IN AN INCREASINGLY GLOBALISED CLIMATE

V.M. Smokotin, C.E. Bollani

Аннотация. Рассматривается современное положение английского языка в условиях глобализации. Исследуются причины становления английского языка как языка международной коммуникации. Освещаются вопросы мотивации студентов. Делаются общие выводы об актуальности изучения английского языка в современном мире.

Ключевые слова: английский язык; английский как лингва франка (АЛФ); глобализация; межкультурная коммуникация; мотивация.

Nowadays, more than ever, the English language is becoming more and more widely used in areas of knowledge and human development. It can be said that it is the language of the modern world. It is, in the era of globalisation, the great international language, the “lingua franca” which has had repercussions on all fields and professions, having begun to acquire importance during the colonial era and now being the language which is most spoken as a second language [1, 2]. Knowing English can no longer be seen as a luxury, but as a necessity [3]. In fact, it can even be said that those who do not know English are at a disadvantage [4]. The aim of this paper is to illustrate the reasons why that is the case, examine the perceptions of English around the world and give an insight into the motivational factors that encourage students to learn English.

First of all, it is the tool that allows communication with people from different countries within the globalised world in which we live. It cannot be put into question that English is the most spoken official language in the world, as well as the fourth most widely spoken native language in the world. It has official status even in nations where it is not the primary spoken language. It is either the official language, or has a special status, in 75 countries of the world. Recent estimations suggest that 354 million people speak English as their first language, and estimates about second language speakers of English vary greatly between 150 million and 1.5 billion [5]. This figure will continue to grow at least until 2015, the year in which 2 billion people in the world could be learning it. In one way or another, within little more than one decade three billion people will speak English, that is to say, half of humanity. The consequences of this linguistic tide moving forward are immeasurable. Within a few generations, for the first time in the history of *homo sapiens*, the majority of our species will be capable of communicating with one another in one language. This expansion will cause a real earthquake in the history of

humanity, one of the important things that will have happened to humanity since the birth of the language.

By world consensus, English has been chosen as the language of international communication. It is, as a matter of fact, the language of diplomacy, in a global world in which relations between countries are becoming more and more important. Knowing it is the compulsory requisite to work in governmental institutions, for example. In 2001, a poll was carried out in the 189 member countries of the UN over the language required for communication between embassies. More than 120 chose English (amongst them, Vietnam, the former members of the Soviet Union and the majority of those belonging to the Arab world), 40 selected French and 20 selected Spanish [6]. This «status» was given to English due to the political, economic and military dominion by the United States and Great Britain during the last two centuries, as well as by the influence of Great Britain on political affairs and international relations.

No language has previously reached universality or got so far so quickly. It is the first time in history that it is possible to label a language as the dominant one, perhaps meaning an end to the concept of English as a foreign language [7]. French outside France has two main areas where it is spoken – Canada and francophone Africa, although the latter is slowly moving over to English. Lusophone Africa is now abandoning Portuguese. Although German experienced a small temporary advancement in Eastern Europe, it has all but disappeared in all other places outside Germany. Russian, which some time ago was thought of as a language to be learnt, is not gaining popularity. In Asia we see the emergence of «Asian Englishes» [8], e.g. in Japan, they are learning English and developing their own preferred variant. We see the same in China albeit with greater resistance and the emergence of Chinglish [4, 9, 10]. But Mandarin and Cantonese will not go further than their native inhabitants. Spanish is gaining importance nowadays and growing, but only amongst the American population, which already speaks English.

At present, when English has acquired the status of the global language, attempts are made to determine its functional purpose and place in the global system of languages as well as to single out its characteristic peculiarities making it the generally accepted means of world communication. The transformation of English into the global lingua franca is an unprecedented phenomenon in the history of world languages. According to the Dutch researcher Abram de Swaan, as the result of the changes in the global system of languages, instead of the hierarchy of world languages consisting of supercentral, central and peripheral languages, depending on their communicative potentials, now there are four hierarchical groups, with English, as the language with the highest communicative potential, forming the «hypercentral group of languages». This group contains only one language – English – which, unlike the other

international languages belonging to the group of central languages, is used for overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers not in limited areas but across the globe [11].

As the change of the global system of languages, leading to the acquisition by English of the global status, had the character of a rapid process, the definition of English as the global language and the description of its peculiarities are still debated in the academic world. Among the numerous approaches to the new linguistic phenomenon, including the evaluation of its consequences for teaching both English and other languages, two trends stand out as most significant. According to the first trend, the transformation of English into the global language is nothing more than a natural process of a world-wide spread of English, which started yet in the 19th century as a result of the power growth of the British Empire and accelerated in the post war years of the 20th century in the conditions of globalisation processes in the course of the information revolution. The followers of the traditional approach continue to apply to the English language in its global status the term «International English» that has traditionally been used to refer to a group of widespread natural languages, including French, German and Russian, as well as to constructed languages designed for international communication, the most known of which is Esperanto. Representatives of this trend regard English in its new status not as a new phenomenon, different from the national varieties of English, but as any, most known forms of national standards used in international communication [12].

The second trend in the research into the use of English as a global means of interlingual and intercultural communication regards English in the status of the global language as a new phenomenon demanding a change in the traditional approach in language teaching and the use of languages in the practice of international communication. In this approach, English is perceived not as a foreign but as a second language necessary for full and active participation in all spheres of social life in the age of globalisation. Many representatives of this approach argue that global English, unlike national varieties, does not belong to its native speakers, who make up a minority among the world English language users and, therefore, the control over the English language development must be handed over to non-native speakers, to all those who use English as the second language. In this approach, English as the language of global communication must not be identified with any of the main English varieties and must not take any of the national standards as the model in the educational process [13. P. 207].

The second approach to the global English as a variety in its own right opens a new research field. With a view of providing research material in this field, the universities of Vienna and Oxford have launched the joint project VOICE (the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English), aiming to establish a structural collection of language data to serve as a first corpus of speech

interaction in English as a lingua franca (ELF) that is computer readable. The founder and director of the VOICE project, Barbara Seidlhofer, substantiated the strength of the concept of singling out global English among other varieties in a seminal paper published in 2001 and pointed out the need for research in the new field [14. P. 133–159]. Exploring ELF has turned into a vibrant research field with its own journal (*Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*) published by Walter De Gruyter.

English is one of the easiest of all languages to learn. That is one of the reasons why it prevailed in the United States. Proof of that is the fact that it is English that won in the USA, despite the descendants of the Germans, for example, having been considerably more numerous at the time of the birth of the country.

In the economic field, industry, trade, business, produce and international commerce, people write, speak and read in English. The main airlines, for example, have adopted it as their official language. Opportunities are far greater for those who know English: it is enough to look at the offers of work in the main newspapers in any country to realise that. There are already many who make use of it on a daily basis: not only to communicate with managers, but also in places of lower responsibility the knowledge of English can convert into an essential competence. In general, all professionals consider it to be of high value.

To explain the great importance of English nowadays, another very important reason is the scientific superiority of the United States and Great Britain in the 20th century, with important discoveries and technological advancements. The 20th century brought with it advances in science and technology which were unimaginable for the majority: the car, the plane, the radio, the television, the radar, the computer, the rocket, the missile, the atomic bomb etc. Initially, such products were made in both countries and were exported to other places in the world. However, soon the other countries began to develop their own industries and «import» Anglophone technicians and scientists, contributing this way to the strengthening and expansion of English.

English currently dominates in science and technology, a position that it took over from German after World War I. Nowadays, any researcher or professional (especially in physics, chemistry and biology) who wants to access specialised books categorically has to know English in order to remain informed on the rapid advancements that are taking place in their area of knowledge. The vast majority of scientific bibliography is in English, including information delivered by the mass media (television, radio, newspapers, videos, films etc.). Also, given the rapid advancement of technology in all fields, new teams, machinery and tools are constantly arriving at companies, and the instructions – whether it be for the assemblage, use, functioning, maintenance or cleaning – come mainly in English. The knowledge of the language of

Shakespeare in these cases is very useful and profitable and many scientists use English as their working language.

Whilst progress has been made in language-translation software and allied technologies, the main language of the Internet is English. It is typically the language of latest-version applications and programs and new peer-to-peer, social media networks, websites, freeware and shareware. 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. Of the total estimate of 2,099,926,965 Internet users, 565,004,126 currently communicate with each other in this language [15]. Also, the percentage of users of the web that are not native speakers of English is increasing rapidly, especially in Asia.

Apart from being one of the six official languages of the United Nations, it is an official language of most other international organisations, whether large or small. After World War II, important financial institutions were created, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which both use English in spoken and written communication. Also, a variety of affiliates to the United Nations use English, including The World Trade Organization, the World Food Program and the World Health Organization.

Five of the largest broadcasting companies (ABC, BBC, CBC, NBC and CBS) transmit in English, reaching across the globe through local holdings and satellite television. In the publishing industry, English also occupies a leading position: 28 per cent of books published annually are in English, and the market for books in English for second language speakers is growing.

It is equally essential to know English when one is travelling or going on holiday abroad: to go shopping, to take a means of public transport without getting lost, to ask for the bill at a restaurant, to get to know the people and the culture etc. It does not matter what place one is going to: if one speaks English, one has a much greater chance of finding another person who also speaks it, which is something that could be useful when needing to get out of any awkward situation. Also, in many countries, most tourism authorities and other officials in contact with the public speak English to engage and interact with tourists and immigrants.

In the field of studies, it is key tool for academic success, especially in certain professional paths where it is a requisite needed for obtaining a title. It is the most widely taught language in the educational centres of all Europe. As far as higher education is concerned, most of the top advanced-study institutes, business schools and medical centres are located in Great Britain and North America. Of course, English is the language used in every activity at these higher learning institutions. Most peer-reviewed journals and technical periodicals which give international acclaim to outstanding achievements of engineers, scientists, technocrats and technologists are issued in English.

Of course, it should not be forgotten that, by learning English, one has more direct access to some of the best works of literature there are available. Studying English literature, like any literature, enables people to develop new ideas and ethical standpoints, and can help individuals to become educated members of society, as well as to understand the philosophical movements and ideas that permeated a particular culture at any particular time. For example, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* shows how ambivalent the British felt toward empiricism. English literature also gives us a new way of thinking about the world and allows us to understand how contemporary Western culture has developed into what it is today. Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, gave birth to the modern feminist theory, by first presenting the idea that women should not be subservient to men. Literature is also a form of art, capable of bringing about differing emotions and a comforting sense of spiritual well-being.

At the same time, the rapid spread of English around the world as a means of international communication and its penetration into the spheres previously controlled by local languages are causing concern among academics, politicians and the general public. Some of the critics of the language globalization warn against the consequences of the growing acceptance of English as the global lingua franca. Thus the most outspoken critic of the English «linguistic imperialism», Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, has put forward the notions of «linguicism», «linguistic genocide» and «linguicide (killer language)» when describing the linguistic and cultural policies leading to the domination of English in the national educational systems all over the world [16]. However, as research into the effects of English as the language of world communication on ethnic and cultural identities shows, the relations of English and ethnic and cultural identities are based on complementarity: global English is used in the communicative function to connect languages and cultures and it does not replace local languages, which are important as markers of ethnic and cultural identities of its speakers [17. P. 11–12].

In such a climate it is of little surprise that great attention is paid to improving the process of teaching and learning English [18–20]. Technology plays a greater and greater role in teaching English [21]. Of particular interest is research on testing the effectiveness of different language teaching methods [22]. Studies have been undertaken to explain the relationship between students' motivation in language learning and their attitudes. In a study by Nakata [23. P. 201], results show that Japanese university students are motivated to learn English if it is part of their degree, or, more generally, if personal responsibility plays a part. The students' motivation is intrinsic [23. P. 212–214], unlike in Hungary, where, according to Dörnyei, Csizér and Németh [24. P. 144], English is not regarded as prestigious in the same way since it is a compulsory school subject. In Sweden, English is also a compulsory school subject, and the national evaluation of the compulsory school [25.

P. 33], shows that, unlike in Hungary, knowledge of English among pupils is high. According to the study «the pupils consider that English is one of the most important, useful and most interesting subjects in the compulsory school, but four out of ten pupils, nevertheless, consider that English is difficult». The study also discovered that most of the English learning happens outside the school environment.

A study carried out in Sweden by Medina Becirovic Emkic [27] examines students' attitudes towards English language learning, perception of self-efficacy and level of knowledge depending on their ability. Her method involved asking some students from different ability level groups the following questions: Do you find it difficult/easy to learn English and for what reason? Do you like / dislike learning English and if so why? Do you learn more in school or outside the school? Explain why.

Among low ability students, learning English is described as difficult, tedious and unnecessary, given their lack of ability to understand the language and the complete absence of a drive to work hard. They also see their lack of success in English learning as a result of one's learning experiences and they make no distinction between learning English in school and outside school. The pupils' attitudes towards English learning are therefore both experience-dependent and individual-dependent, two factors which both make the students reluctant to learn, if not with the single goal of achieving a passing grade.

Among the intermediate level students, English learning is still perceived as difficult. Individual success is examined in relation to their effort where their partial lack of motivation to learn is the key point rather than their learning difficulties. The pupils do see English as valuable in terms of knowledge, but differ over whether learning English is an enjoyable experience and about whether it is easier to learn English inside or outside school.

Among the advanced level students, the presence of the English language in individuals' lives and its importance are emphasised by the pupils with regard to their own ambition to achieve proficiency in English, with an aim beyond achieving good grades. The participants do not regard English learning as difficult and perceive themselves as apt linguists, though they are unsure about whether learning English is easier in school or by other means (watching films, using the computer etc.). The globalisation of English was mentioned, as well its prestigious position and the fact that it is regarded as influential and thus as an essential qualification for an individual. The only criticism that was made was against the division of time in English teaching.

In conclusion, it is clear that, nowadays, a working knowledge of the English language is of key importance in the world today, given its dominance in terms of number of speakers and in many other fields. It is a matter of history that made English important, but it is a fact that the world and English

language students cannot ignore. It is of great importance that many students, especially those of high ability, have an intrinsic motivation to learn it, regardless of it being or not being a compulsory subject in education.

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Summary. The author examines the use and the current position of the English language in the conditions of globalisation. The reasons for English becoming the language of international communication are researched. Questions of student motivation are identified. General conclusions are made as to the current importance of studying English in the modern world.

Key words: english language; English as a lingua franca (ELF); globalisation; cross-cultural communication; motivation.