

## ENGLISH AS THE GLOBAL LANGUAGE

1. The concept of the unique/global language.
2. Conditions and factors bringing a language the global status.
3. The globality of English. International lingua-franca.

### RECOMMENDED READING:

Crystal, David. *English as a Global Language*. – Cambridge : CUP, 2013. -2<sup>nd</sup> ed. –212 p.

English as a Global Language // <https://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/case-studies/minority-ethnic/>

The history of English: how English went from an obscure Germanic dialect to a global language // [http://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/issues\\_global.html](http://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/issues_global.html)

### KEY TERMS:

- EFL (English as a Foreign Language);
- General English;
- Global English;
- global language;
- International English;
- lingua franca;
- Transatlantic English;
- World English;
- world language

### LECTURE NOTES

#### *A global language and why it is needed.*

There is no official definition of "*global*" or "*world*" language, but it essentially refers to a language that is learned and spoken internationally, and is characterized not only by the number of its native and second language speakers, but also by its geographical distribution, and its use in international organizations and in diplomatic relations. A global language acts as a "*lingua franca*", a common language that enables people from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities to communicate on a more or less equitable basis.

Latin was the lingua franca of its time, it was the language of the powerful leaders and administrators and of the Roman military - and, later, of the ecclesiastical power of the Roman Catholic Church

#### For the global status three main things must be taken into consideration:

- the number of countries using it as their first language or mother-tongue;
- the number of countries adopting it as their official language;
- and the number of countries teaching it as their foreign language of choice in schools.

#### Other important factors contributing to the global status of a language:

- the intrinsic structural qualities;
- the size of its vocabulary;
- the quality of its literature;
- its association with great cultures or religions;
- the political power of its native speakers;
- the economic power with which it is able to maintain and expand its position.

#### A global language is needed for:

modern communications;

- globalized trade;
- easy international travel;

- many institutions and organizations - the World Bank, World Health Organization, UNICEF, the Universal Postal Union, the Commonwealth, the European Union;

- the world peace and unity.

**The pitfalls of having a global language:**

- the disappearance of some minority languages;
- that natural speakers of the global language may be at an unfair advantage over those who are operating in their second, or even third, language;

- a threat to freedom of speech and to the ideals of multiculturalism;
- linguistic complacency on the part of natural speakers of a global language, a laziness and arrogance resulting from the lack of motivation to learn other languages.

**English is the nearest thing there has ever been to a global language because:**

- it is spread worldwide;
- it is the de facto lingua franca in the fields of business, academics, science, computing, education, transportation, politics and entertainment;

- a global community, currently uses five official languages: English, French, Spanish, Russian and Chinese, and an estimated 85% of international organizations have English as at least one of their official languages (French comes next with less than 50%); about one third of international organizations (including OPEC, EFTA and ASEAN) use English only, and this figure rises to almost 90% among Asian international organizations;

- provides a neutral means of communication between different ethnic groups.

**English is an appropriate choice as a global language because of its intrinsic appeal:**

- the richness and depth of the vocabulary (by some estimates, the English lexicon is currently increasing by over 8,500 words a year, although other estimates put this as high as 15,000 to 20,000. It is estimated that about 200,000 English words are in common use, as compared to 184,000 in German, and mere 100,000 in French);

- the flexibility (in respect of word order; and the ability to phrase sentences as active or passive (e.g. *I kicked the ball*, or *the ball was kicked by me*); the ability to use the same word as both a noun and a verb (such as *drink*, *fight*, *silence*, etc); new words can easily be created by the addition (e.g. *brightness*, *fixation*, *unintelligible*, etc), or by compounding or fusing existing words together (e.g. *airport*, *seashore*, *footwear*, etc);

- relative simplicity of grammar, spelling and pronunciation (complete dispense with noun genders, abandoned distinction between familiar and formal addresses; non-existent case forms for nouns; irrelevance of subtle tonal variations of Cantonese, or the bewildering consonant clusters of Welsh or Gaelic;

- the cosmopolitan character from its adoption of thousands of words from other languages with which it came into contact) gives it a feeling of familiarity and welcoming compared to many other languages (such as French, for example, which has tried its best to keep out other languages);

- the fact that it is reasonably concise compared to many languages, as can be seen in the length of translations;

- less proneness to misunderstandings due to cultural subtleties than, say, Japanese, which is almost impossible to simultaneously translate for that reason;

- its more democratic character and the absence of coding for social differences (common in many other languages which distinguish between formal and informal verb forms and sometimes other more complex social distinctions);

- the extent and quality of English literature throughout history.

**In spite of all that the future of English as a global language is not assured over:**

- the pressure for international intelligibility, and the pressure to preserve national identity;
- the economic and technical dominance of some other country and language (Chinese);
- an increase in population and decrease of 'Englishness' (Hispanic population of the USA);
- official policies of bilingualism or multilingualism in countries with large minority language groups (Canada).

**Source:** The history of English: how English went from an obscure Germanic dialect to a global language // [http://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/issues\\_global.html](http://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/issues_global.html)

### *English overseas and back on the mainland.*

British colonisers originally exported the language to all four corners of the globe and migration in the 1950s brought altered forms of English back to these shores. Speakers of different descent have blended their mother tongue speech patterns with existing local dialects producing wonderful new varieties of English (London Jamaican or Bradford Asian English). Standard British English has also been enriched by an explosion of new terms, such as *bhangra* (traditional Punjabi music mixed with reggae and hip-hop) etc.

The languages spoken by today's ethnic communities have begun to have an impact on the everyday spoken English of other communities. For instance, many young people, regardless of their ethnic background, now use the black slang terms, *nang* ('cool,') and *diss* ('insult' — from '*disrespecting*') or words derived from Hindi and Urdu, such as *chuddies* ('underpants') or *desi* ('typically Asian'). Many also use the all-purpose tag-question, *innit* — as in statements such as *you're weird, innit*. This feature has been variously ascribed to the British Caribbean community or the British Asian community, although it is also part of a more native British tradition - in dialects in the West Country and Wales, for instance — which might explain why it appears to have spread so rapidly among young speakers everywhere.

The language we now recognise as English first became the dominant language in Great Britain during the Middle Ages, and in Ireland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From there it has been exported to all four corners of the globe. '*International English*', '*World English*' or '*Global English*' are terms used to describe a type of '*General English*' that has, over the course of the twentieth century, become a worldwide means of communication.

#### English hugely important:

- for international communication;
- in some countries where the UK has historically had little influence;
- as an essential part of the curriculum in most schools in Western Europe, Japan, South Korea, China.

**Source:** English as a Global Language at <https://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/case-studies/minority-ethnic/>

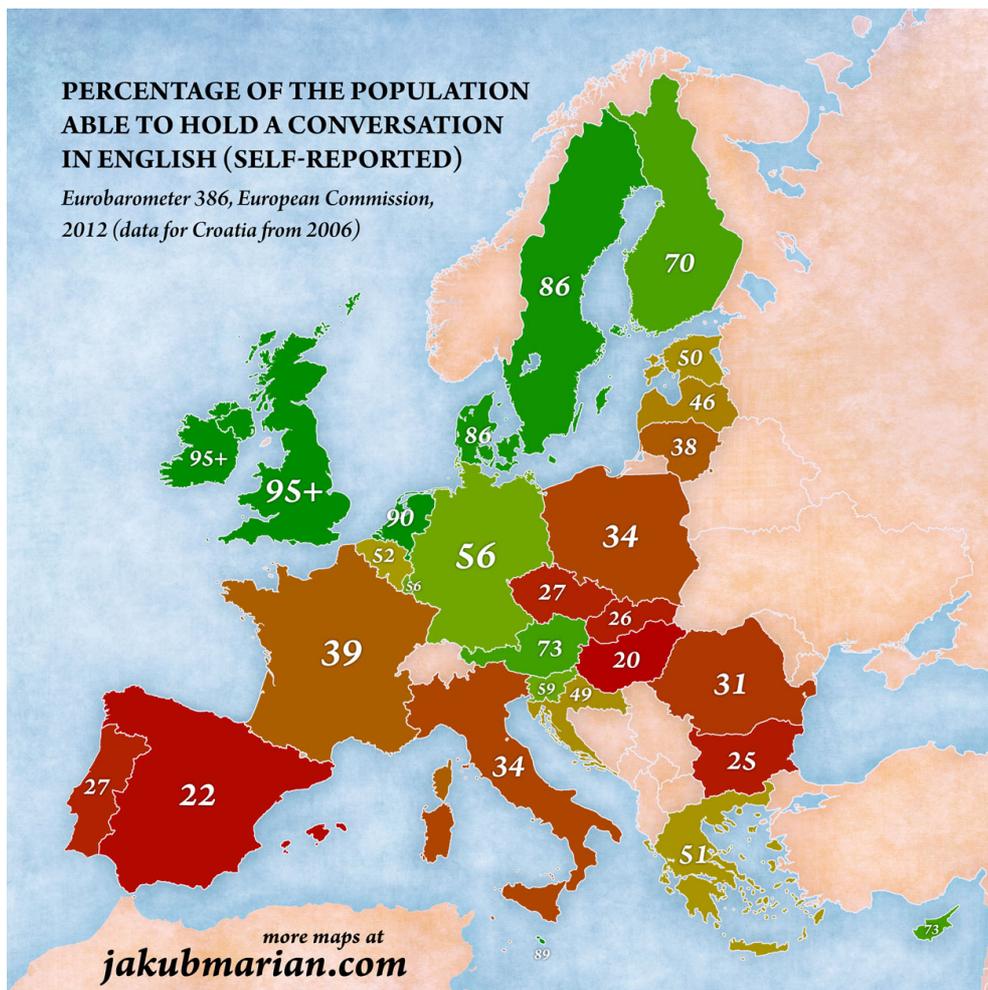
AT THE HEIGHT OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE, LATIN WAS THE LINGUA FRANCA OF MOST OF EUROPE, ASIA MINOR AND NORTH AFRICA



**Source:** Wikipedia. Roman Empire // [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman\\_Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Empire)

**PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION  
ABLE TO HOLD A CONVERSATION  
IN ENGLISH (SELF-REPORTED)**

*Eurobarometer 386, European Commission,  
2012 (data for Croatia from 2006)*



more maps at  
**[jakubmarian.com](http://jakubmarian.com)**

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