



To What Extent Should English Be A Lingua Franca?

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Hola, ciao, ni hao, konichiwa, namaste. A greeting is often the first thing learned when delving into a new language and these examples are often not common knowledge. “Hello” is the most well recognized term in the world, its meaning is widely understood by almost everyone in the world whether they understand English or not. English’s role in the world as a universal connector is indisputable, but the effects its impact has had can turn the tide of its place as a mediator or an antagonizer. The identity of English as a Lingua Franca is an important topic to be reviewed because it affects anyone who has heard or seen English in any facet.

In deliberating this topic, defining key terms and concepts is important to fully and properly understand each perspective presented. A Lingua Franca is a language used for communication between groups of people who speak different languages.¹ The idea of a lingua franca is the basis of examining whether or not English deserves to be one. An important concept that will be used consistently is classism, described as an unfair treatment of or negative opinions about someone based on their social class (= economic and social position), especially because they are thought to be from a low social class.² Additionally, Discrimination is described as the practice of treating particular people, companies, or products differently from others, especially in an unfair way³

Examining English’s role as a lingua franca requires the introduction of two different perspectives. The first perspective reviews why English should not have lingua franca status and how it lends itself to the discrimination of those deemed inadequate by the social conventions set by so-called “proper” English speakers. The second perspective allows for English to be seen as a unifier, a way for people across cultures to come together and share ideas and information, especially by way of research.⁴

English can be very time consuming to learn. The structure, the rules; learning English is an extremely hard thing to do and demands much time and energy to master. Those who study and learn English as a second, or further, language are often treated in a way that is not reflective of the work that is put into learning such a way of speaking. In the United States, English-speakers who speak another language natively are often subject to hate and discrimination due to the idea that the inability to speak perfect English is akin to a lack of education. Simply having the ability to speak English is not enough to survive in places where English is the prominent language. The idea of a “corporate language” adds a gap between employees whose native language is the same as the corporate language and employees

¹ Cambridge Dictionary. 2022. “Lingua Franca.” @CambridgeWords. May 4, 2022.
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/lingua-franca>.

² Cambridge Dictionary. 2023. “Classism.” @CambridgeWords. January 25, 2023.
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/classism>.

³ “DISCRIMINATION | Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” *Cambridge.org*, 2019,
dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/discrimination.

⁴ Huddart, David. “English in the Conversation of Mankind: World Englishes and Global Citizenship.” In *Involuntary Associations: Postcolonial Studies and World Englishes*, 52–74. Liverpool University Press, 2014.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18kr776.6>.

whose native language is distant from the language used in the workplace.⁵ In many countries, like France, English is the corporate language which emphasizes the gap between those who speak English natively and those who do not.⁶ While a corporate language can divide the workplace, it can also unite a workforce by making it easier for everyone to understand each other, the art of understanding is elevated by the usage of one singular language. With this being said, the benefits of a singular language can often be overshadowed by the problems that arise with its introduction. Companies may use accents to make assumptions about an employee's status and ability.⁷ This problem also extends to education, many foreign students also face discrimination based on their accents and English speaking abilities. In a study conducted by Sonia Martin, a doctoral student at York University, it was found that within the students studied, many, if not most, of them face "language-based discrimination" with four of them outwardly deeming it discrimination.⁸ This idea is exhibited by some examples given by participants of the study saying that they are often left out by peers or that they are verbally berated and embarrassed by teachers and students alike.⁹

The presence of an accent, or any other indication of non-native English speaking, can have negative effects on the work and schooling of millions of people in millions of countries. The same idea of "proper English" that hurts foreign speakers also negatively affects people who speak English natively.

The American accent cannot be encompassed as one thing as there is a multitude of dialects that exists within the United States. A northern accent is often considered to be the default, unassuming and inoffensive to most ears. Dialects like "Valley" or "New York" are also recognizable and may bring up different preconceived notions. Some of the most stereotyped groups have very noticeable accents as well, a huge example being what is considered the general African-American accent.

Accents can be regional or synonymous with personal identity and culture. African American Vernacular (AAVE) is a way that most African Americans speak within the United States, something that unites across subcultures. As common as AAVE is, the hatred and stigma that comes with it is just as common. AAVE is used to determine class level, education, and professionalism of a speaker in most instances¹⁰, and the observations made more often than not have a negative effect on the professional life of the person being judged. In places where English is the primary language, like the UK or the US, being black and speaking in a particularly black manner can cause a person to feel the need to change the way that they act or speak, which introduces the concept of 'code-switching'. Code-switching is a type of behavioral adjustment, described as a manner of changing or adjusting the way one speaks and acts

⁵ Martyna Śliwa and Marjana Johansson. "How non-native English-speaking staff are evaluated in linguistically diverse organizations: A sociolinguistic perspective" *Journal of International Business Studies* 45, no.9 (December 14): 1133-1151. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43653841>. pp 5-10

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid, pg 7

⁸ Martin, Sonia. "Beyond the English Language Program: International Students' Experiences of Language-Based Discrimination." Edited by Rebecca Schendel and Marisa Lally. *Innovative and Inclusive Internationalization: Proceedings of the 2022 WES-CIHE Summer Institute Boston College*. Boston College Center for International Higher Education, 2022. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep47233.13>. pp 2-4

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Harris, Jasmine L. "BLACK WOMEN TALKING: USING LANGUAGE TO DEVELOP BONDS BETWEEN BLACK WOMEN DURING INTERVIEW DATA COLLECTION." *Michigan Sociological Review* 33 (2019): 25-45. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26868250>. pp 25-30

based on the people around them and the image they wish to present.¹¹ This action is so important to African-American culture that many children are unconsciously taught how to code-switch from an early age.

Being able to speak English in a manner that is considered ‘proper’ is important for nearly all who even attempt the language. Speaking English in a nonconventional way can negatively affect the outcome of different life events. Aside from English having an unforgiving nature, it also has the ability to be invasive.

The invasiveness of English can be obvious when looking into the inner workings of life in other countries. When creating a curriculum for their schools, countries with a ‘hyper-utilitarian’ need for English prioritize teaching their children how to speak it over other foreign languages¹², even those that may be common in neighboring areas. Utilitarianism is described by Cambridge Dictionary as the system of thought that states that the best action or decision in a particular situation is the one that brings most advantages to the most people.¹³ With the introduction of a hyper-utilitarian need for English in non-English speaking countries, there is also a low-utilitarian need for foreign languages in English speaking countries¹⁴, a disparity that shows how powerful English is. A vast majority of Americans are unable to speak another language due to the optionality of learning a foreign language in American schools; although some school districts do require some level of a language in high school, the options are often limited to Spanish, French, and a possible third, which does not give proper spotlight to the over 7000 languages that exist. The benefit that English has is often the forefront of why so many countries push it so hard in primary and secondary levels of school, alongside allowing for those that do speak English to get ahead in the workforce and higher education. With English being pushed so hard, there are often little to no opportunities to be able to learn a different foreign language¹⁵ which could affect relationships with neighboring or allied countries.

The way that English is pushed also has an effect on culture and entertainment. The way that these creative pieces are created and distributed can suffer because of the heavy influence of English.

One example of how industries are affected by English is Bollywood. Many Bollywood movies were traditionally made in Hindi, a language primarily spoken in India. Later on in years however, Hindi began to be pushed aside in favor of English in multiple parts of movie production; on set, scripts, and localization have all been turned to be made in English¹⁶. Film Critic Anupama Chopra describes Hindi as a “second language”¹⁷ as the rise of English in India caused many current Bollywood actors to be unable to speak Hindi at all, making it extremely hard to make Hindi versions of movies¹⁸. The discriminatory aspect of English can also be seen

¹¹ McCluney, Courtney, Kathrina Robotham, Serenity Lee, Richard Smith, and Myles Durkee. 2019. “The Costs of Code-Switching.” *Harvard Business Review*. November 15, 2019. <https://hbr.org/2019/11/the-costs-of-codeswitching>.

¹² Bianco, Joseph Lo. 2014. “Domesticating the Foreign: Globalization’s Effects on the Place/S of Languages.” *The Modern Language Journal* 98 (1): 312–25. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43651760>.

¹³ Cambridge Dictionary. 2024. “Utilitarianism.” @CambridgeWords. December 18, 2024. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/utilitarianism#google_vignette.

¹⁴ Bianco, 317

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ganti, Tejaswini. “‘No One Thinks in Hindi Here’: Language Hierarchies in Bollywood.” In *Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labor*, edited by Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson, 118–31. University of California Press, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ffjn40.13>.

¹⁷ Ibid pg 123

¹⁸ Ibid

in this example through the introduction of classism. Many richer children, often called “star kids” or “southern bombay types”¹⁹, do not learn Hindi in their upper level schools, causing them to be completely unable to speak Hindi. Screenwriters who don’t speak English often fear that they may not get their scripts approved because the orator may not be able to read Hindi or the English used may not be as descriptive, greatly reducing the quality of the script.²⁰ The Bollywood film industry was built on the Hindi language and yet it is English that is the most prominent, it is English that is the catalyst for current Bollywood movies being made.

English has made itself the primary language in most countries, causing discrimination or the erasure of other languages and dialects. There are many countries that combat this by ensuring that English is able to coexist with their own languages. English does not have to be seen as dominant and overbearing, English can be used as a unifier and a means for spreading knowledge.

English’s nature is dependent on the way that its used and its means. As in India, English was allowed to take over and was given nearly total reign over the Hindi movie industry, but this is not the case for English everywhere. In Israel, there are two distinct cultures that are heavily represented, Jewish and Arab. Both of these cultures coexist, having their own languages, Hebrew and Arabic, and their own ways of living. English exists beside Hebrew and Arabic, having a different relationship with each, yet neither of these relations involve the erasure or suppression of the other language. In areas with a heavy Jewish population, English is almost as prominent as Hebrew, being taught as a requirement in schools but not pushing Hebrew out of day to day life.²¹ In places with a heavier Arab population, English isn’t nearly as prominent, not often seen in day to day life but still a requirement to be learned in school.²² The ability to speak English can be an important skill to learn and being able to learn it in school while still staying proficient in your native language is something that many countries like Israel are able to do.

English as a world language can take the role of a unifier, a way for people to exchange ideas and culture. More often than not, fan interactions that are across cultures are more often than not conducted in English because of how common the language is.

K-pop boy group BTS is popular all around the world, their fans, ARMYs, have created a community where they are all like a big family. Seeing as BTS and a vast majority of their content is in Korean, many Korean fans (called K-ARMYs) take it upon themselves to translate and relay information with fans in other countries, called I-ARMYs, who may not understand Korean as well as a native speaker.²³ While online translators could be used, having someone who understands the language in full can make the translated message as close to the original as possible, also accounting for idioms and jokes that may or may not make sense in another language. With translations, more fans can properly enjoy BTS’ content and translation specifically to English targets the most amount of fans. English’s role as a unifier does extend to more important aspects of life, like knowledge.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid pg 124

²¹ Shohamy, Elana. “The Weight of English in Global Perspective: The Role of English in Israel.” *Review of Research in Education* 38 (2014): 273–89. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43284070>.

²² Ibid pg 274

²³ Aznur Aisyah. 2017. “Korean-English Language Translational Action of K-Pop Social Media Content: A Case Study on Bangtan Sonyeondan’s (BTS) Official Twitter.” *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature® the Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies* 23 (3). <http://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2017-2303-05>.



English is presently the universal language of research.²⁴ Many important journals, experiments, and documents are published in English for ease of access for viewers across the globe. English holds the title of the universal language of research because it is considered to be 'practical', it has been made fairly easy to learn as its rise in popularity has caused learning English to be accessible to most people, though it isn't accessible everywhere. Because of how prominent English is in research, many colleges around the world hold the ability to speak English on a sort of podium, making it so that students who do have English knowledge are able to use that skill to aid their entry to these schools.²⁵ Because of English's prominence across the world, its place in scientific research is very important because all scientific research benefits all people in some way, shape, or form. Cross-country knowledge exchanges are aided heavily by English's universal status.

Additionally, English helped give birth to Nigerian Pidgin²⁶, a language widely spoken in Nigeria. Nigerian Pidgin is mostly based in English, with a few exceptions made for loan words. Alongside Pidgin, English is often used in social, governmental, and foreign affairs in Nigeria, allowing them to communicate well with each other and with other countries.²⁷ English may have gave way for a new national language to rise in Nigeria, but many indigenous languages are back on the rise through art. Many Nigerian Hip-hop artists as using these lesser known languages in their music, despite the stigma, to bring back knowledge about these languages.²⁸ English may have pushed these languages out many years ago, but now it is able to give way to allow them to get their status back.

English's role as a Lingua Franca is neither black nor white, one side cannot exist without the acknowledgement of the other. English can unify, it can bring people together through many different ways. However, in all these ways, English can also drive people apart. It is for these reasons that English should not have the status of a Lingua Franca, its lack of neutrality and its presence on the far sides of the spectrum between discrimination and unity make its ability to be a world language far too ambiguous to fairly give it the title.

²⁴ Huddart, David. "English in the Conversation of Mankind: World Englishes and Global Citizenship." In *Involuntary Associations: Postcolonial Studies and World Englishes*, 52–74. Liverpool University Press, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18kr776.6>.

²⁵ Kane, Tanya. "Whose Lingua Franca?: The Politics of Language in Transnational Medical Education." *The Journal of General Education* 63, no. 2–3 (2014): 94–112. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jgeneeduc.63.2-3.0094>.

²⁶ Fasan, Rotimi. "'Wetin Dey Happen?': Wazobia, Popular Arts, and Nationhood." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 27, no. 1 (2015): 7–19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24758397>.

²⁷ Ibid pg 9

²⁸ Ibid

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