

## A SURVEY OF ENGLISH AS A WORLD LANGUAGE

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper focuses on the survey of English as a World Language. To tackle this, the historical overview of English, the meaning of a World English Language, factors that establish English as a World English, and the current status of English across the world will be discussed. All these are geared towards giving this topic a true survey. However, we cannot say all there is about English as a World Language.*

**Keywords:** *English, World English, Status of English, Foreign language*

### Historical Overview of the emergence of English

English is a West Germanic Indo-European language family. It has three stages of development which are Old English (500-1000AD), Middle English (1100-1500AD), Early Modern English (1500-1800AD) and Late Modern English (1800-Present). Before going into the explanation on each of the periods, it is pertinent to state here that English was previously pronounced Englisc by the Angles and Saxons, Germanic tribe of invaders who conquered the eastern coast of Great Britain in the 5th Century BC and introduced the language to them. The language was further influenced by the Norse language through the Vikings invasions in the 9th and 10th Centuries (Stella & Kpolugbo 2006: 58-59). The only surviving text in the Old English is the poem Beowulf whose author is anonymous (Stella & Kpolugbo 2006: 60).

The Middle-English was so named as a convenience period when William, the Duke of Normandy conquered the Anglo-Saxons in 1066AD in what is called the Norman-Conquest. At this time, Latin influence drastically reduced. These Norman invaders spoke a dialect of Old French known as Anglo-Norman" (Stella & Kpolugbo 2006: 62). It was at this period that one third of the English population was killed in what is known as the Black Death (1349-50). In 1362, the statute of Pleading established English as the language of the courts and parliament, thereby displacing Latin. Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales" is the best known text of the Middle English period with its attendant inconsistencies in spellings.

The Early Modern English (1500-1800AD) witnessed the influx of books because of the Renaissance spirit. "The Great Vowel Shift which involves a change in pronunciation and the production of vowel sounds became further to the front of the mouth and the letter 'a' at the end of the words became silent" (Stella & Kpolugbo 2006: 74). William Shakespeare's style of writing is said to belong here.

The Late Modern English period (1800-Present) is similar to the Early Modern English in virtually all aspects, except in the area of influx of more words. This is as a result of two factors – the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the technological society.

### The Meaning of a World Language

A world language is a language spoken internationally and which is learned by many people as a second language" (Wikipedia 1). The idea presented above is that a world language is a global Lingua Franca as well as a language that is taught and learnt by virtually all countries of the world. The people in these countries consider it a privilege to learn it and speak it. In these countries which can be categorized as English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) countries, students study the language at the degree and even up to the post graduate levels. ESL and EFL will be discussed fully in the subsequent section.

Now, there are few languages that can be categorized as world languages based on certain criteria. These parameters according to Randolph Quirk et al are “the number of native speakers, the extent to which language is geographically dispersed, the extent to which English is a medium for science or literature or other highly regarded cultural manifestation and the economic and political influence to those who speak English as their own language” (2). Out of several languages of the world, three stand out as world languages according to Wikipedia with the statistics of each of the native speakers, second language speakers and foreign language speakers in the table below:

Language	Native Speakers	1st and 2nd Speakers	Students as a foreign Languages	Total Speakers	Official Status Distribution
English	430m	950m	750m	2130m	Anglophone
Spanish	406m	466m	20m	528m	Hispanophone
French	78.6m	118.5	100m	730m	Francophone

Fig. 1.0

It is not a surprise that English is the first in terms of first and second speakers of the language, the students as foreign language learners and the total speakers. The reasons are not far-fetched. Inyang M. Udofot states that “English has borrowed loan words from many languages with which it has come in contact”. (Inyang M. Udofot 2005:104). One can find words of other languages which have become part of the lexicon of English language. Udofot provides the following lists:

Italian – Semolina, falsetto, bravura, vendetta, torso, studio and replica

Spanish – Albino, guerilla, mustang, cafeteria and tango.

High African Dutch – veldt, commando, spoon and commander.

High German – iceberg, schnapps, kindergarten, seminar, semester, protein, ohm, and hinterland.

Arabic – Safari, wadi, loofah, and alfalfa.

Russia – vodka, genocide and intelligentia.

Scandinavian languages – role, nag, ski, floe and ombudsman.

[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org) provides another statistics of other sources regarding world languages and their natural speakers to include:

Language	Native Speakers	Total Speakers	Official Status Distribution
Mandarin	848m	1026m	Simophone world
Hindustani (standard Hindi, Urdu)	3.23m (260m Hindi) (63.4m Urdu)	484m (380 Hindi) (104m Urdu)	Indian Subcontinent
Arabic	353.5m (206m native speakers of all Arabic varieties + 246 million Arabic speakers as a second language of all Arabic varieties – 100.5 million not well educated and have not adequate proficiency in standard Arabic)	730m	Arab World
Russian	162.5m	272m	Russophone
Portuguese	202.5m	217.5m	Lusophone
German	82.8m	118.m	German speaking people

Fig. 1.1

From figure 1.1, we find that Mandarin has the highest native speaker

### **Factors that established the status of English as a World Language**

The English language did not enjoy the status of a world language in the fifteenth and earlier centuries because at that time Latin was a dominant world language and language of scholarship. English then was still used fairly in few countries. No wonder Gwynne Dyer in his easy, "The Triumph of English as the World's Language" reported the prediction of the second USA President John Adams in 1780 that "English will become the most respectable language in the world and the most universally read and spoken in the next century, if not before the end of this one".

The prediction has since come to pass. For example, Randolph Quirk et al asserts that "English is the world's most important language and is the world's most widely used language" (Randolph Quirk et al 1972:2-3). This importance is established by a number of criteria which includes the prominence it enjoys, it is a medium for science and other highly regarded cultural manifestation and economic and political influence it has on its speakers". (Randolph Quirk et al 1972:2)

Specifically, there are salient factors that establish the status of English as world language. First is the emergence of Britain and later America as world super powers. Britain was in the habit of introducing their language to their colonies. They did this successfully in some African countries like Nigeria and the Americas. However, when Britain lost its number one position in the world to America, the influence of English shifted hands. America carried and is still carrying out the job of spreading English but a variety known as American English.

Second, English is the language of science and technology. Quirk et al, concurs to this position when they assert that "English scores as being the primary medium for twentieth-century science and technology" (2). Inventors enrich English vocabulary with words of their inventions e.g. drone.

The third factor is that English is a language of computers and the internet. During the invention of computers and the internet in the early nineteenth century, they were configured and operated in English. This phenomenon has led to what is now called language of the internet. This is not to say that other languages are not used, but English dominates.

The fourth factor that makes English a world language is that it is a language of globalization. The world is now a global village because of the invention of computers and the internet so much that two businessmen that are separated by the seas and landmass can conveniently transact business. International politics and diplomacy are also part of the globalization. Countries relate with one another for many reasons – for peace-keeping, operation in troubled countries, bilateral relations between countries.

The fifth factor that makes English a world language is the fact that it is the language of education and instruction in ESL countries. For example, in Nigeria, the national policy on education states that English is to be studied as a subject and used as a medium of instruction at all levels of secondary education. Other countries where English is the language of education and instruction includes; America, some parts of Canada, Ghana, Singapore, India, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, the Caribbean and South Africa (Quirk et. al. 1972:, 3).

### **The Current Status of English across the World**

When we compare English and other world languages, English dominates. This dominance is traceable to the period before and after the Second World War (1939-1945). By this time, Britain (i.e. the United Kingdom) was the world economic and political super power. She colonized most countries in Africa, America, Asia and even Europe because of the partition of Africa in the Berlin conference of 1884/85 and usually left it vestige – the English language with its attendant influences in the colonies.

So, in all the countries that Britain colonized, English is spoken there. Some of these countries adopted English as their official language. Such countries include; Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, and Gambia in West Africa; and the United State of America in North America.

It is worth stating here that English exists along three dimensions of ENL and EFL, which are also called World Englishes. C.U.C. Ugorji states that these world Englishes correspond, roughly to Kachru's (1990) Inner Circle nations, Outer Circle nations and Expanding Circle nation respectively (Ugorji 2013:89-101). ENL stands for English as a Native Language, which refers to countries that acquire English as their first language. They have communicative competence compared to those that acquire it as a second language. Examples of countries that are in the category of Inner Circle include; Britain, America, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. ESL means English as a second language. This refers to countries that speak English as their second language and are colonized by Britain. These countries adopt English as their Official Language and use it as the medium of instruction. Some countries in this category are; Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia and so on.

EFL stands for English as a Foreign Language. This refers to the learning and teaching of English in countries that have other languages as their Official Language. They use English as a Lingua Franca which is a language systematically (as opposed to occasionally) used to make communication possible between persons not sharing a native language in particular when it is a third language distinct from both native languages" (Wikipedia pg 2). Examples of EFL countries include; China, France, Saudi Arabia, Japan, Israel and so on.

## **CONCLUSION**

We have seen that English is a world language because it is a language of scholarship, science and technology and so on. And it is pervading all the countries of the world specially the EFL countries. As it spreads, it dominates and influences the environment it is introduced.

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