

Expanding Horizon of English Language as a Lingua Franca

Sabindra Raj Bhandari¹ and Suman Ghimire²

Abstract

This article explores the growing influence of the English language in this world and how it has connected people of different linguistic backgrounds playing a significant role as a lingua franca. This study aims to show how the influence of English has increased as it has enabled global communication. It is expanding, reaching many people working as their medium of communication. It has also facilitated worldwide communication and cooperation, serving as a bridge language for communication. English as a communication medium in many international forums, business, academia, science, and technology has strengthened its use and continued its global status. Its dominance in digital content and programming language is likely to make it highly relevant in the future. With its extensive use, its hybrid and simplified version can be developed. It is also taught internationally and its promotion is also increasing even more with modern phenomena like migration, climate change, pandemics, international conflicts, and global challenges. It also has a chance to become a unanimous world language which can connect all the people of the universe including the threat of losing its present status of lingua franca. The article applies an explorative design to unveil how English from a small domain reached a larger arena.

Keywords: Communication, expansion, global language, varieties of English, world English

Introduction

Lingua franca refers to a language used in a specific communication context in which it is used as a medium among speakers who are from different linguistic backgrounds either intra-nationally or internationally. Lingua franca is a contact language to communicate with each other when people from different societies meet together in a situation where they are from different native language-speaking backgrounds. Ronald Wardhaugh cites the UNESCO (1953) definition of the lingua franca as, “a language which is used habitually by people whose mother tongues

1. Department of English, Patan Multiple Campus, Lalitpur, Email: bhandarisabindra@gmail.com

2. Department of English, Pashupati Multiple Campus, Kathmandu

Article history: Received on: Nov. 11, 2024; Accepted on: Dec. 21, 2024; Published on: Jan. 31, 2025
Peer Reviewed under the authority of THE ACADEMIA, journal of NUTAN, central committee, Kathmandu, Nepal, with ISSN 2350-8671 (Print).



Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International License.

are different to facilitate communication between them” (55) and they must apply some means of communication that is a lingua franca. It highlights the use of lingua franca mainly beyond native speakers often being used in commerce and diplomacy. Some situations of people force them to be in contact with the people of different languages and they need a medium of communication and the lingua franca performs its role of making connections between them. Referring to its role in the process of conversation among people Alan Firth writes, “a contact language between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common national culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication” (240). These days as an international lingua franca, the English language has established its status as a common property, a medium of uniting people around the globe together with modern phenomena such as globalization, migration, economic integration, political interdependence, studies, research, networking and the internet. As a lingua franca, the English language covers diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of speakers being rather heterogeneous. As a language with vast global spread, English has created many identities, forms and varieties not only in native-speaker communities but also in all contexts where it is used either as a second language as a foreign language or a lingua franca negotiating with the culture of the speakers. This way English has come out of the grip of native speakers resulting in many sociolinguistic variations while dealing with the complexities of incorporating the people of the global world.

English, as a viable medium of communication among people from different vernaculars, has become a lingua franca and an international language. After the Renaissance, there increased the movement of people from one place to another and English helped in bridging communication among different native language-speaking people as lingua franca mainly after the rise of the United Kingdom as a colonial power. These days, English has become not only a language of communication but also the language of business, science, technology, diplomacy and aviation. In lingua franca communication, the speakers need to make adjustments to their local variety of English due to its wide spreading features. Representing the idea of world Englishes, Jennifer Jenkins writes about lingua franca, “...not of orientation to the norms of a particular group of English speakers, but of mutual negotiation involving efforts and adjustments from all parties” (201). This way, a lingua franca creates adjustment among speakers by connecting them and making them avoid their native identity.

The movement of people for various purposes such as work, entertainment, sharing experiences, visits, trade and studies has created a language barrier and in such contexts, English has become the choice of all as a viable medium in the process of fulfilling the gap and has performed that role. The future of English as a lingua franca is to work as a medium of communication uniting people of the world concerning multiple forms, identities and challenges which are emerging day by day to promote many things such as education, tourism, business, health care and industry along with

the advancement of science and technology. Thus, this article justifies its claim by answering these research questions:

- A) How does English become a lingua franca?
- B) What would be the future direction of English in the world of technology?

In this regard, the main objectives of articles have been to explore its flexible and enlarging history to establish itself as a lingua franca. Likewise, it also proposes a new pattern and space of English in the forthcoming world of science and technology.

From British Isles to World Englishes

The origin of the English language is set back to England, after the Norman Conquest in the medieval period, a West Germanic language was first spoken in a small territory and now has become a global lingua franca. In its earlier stage, it was spoken as a mother tongue by very few people and even today it is spoken in some countries as a native language. The worldwide influence of the UK since the seventeenth century spread English across the world along with its colonial power and it became the international language. English appears in three guises native language, foreign language and lingua franca. Based on its spread, acquisition and function, Braj B. Kachru has labelled them spreading into three concentric circles, the inner circle, the outer circle (or extended circle), and the expanding circle (12). In terms of its speakers English has become the dominant language in the world spreading over a vast horizon though it is spoken in a few countries as a mother tongue. Passing through multiple stages of transition it came to the present age and includes the issues of various sectors. Being all-pervasive and ever-widening in nature and forms, it is not limited only to a small territory of the British Isles.

The topic of world English is a modern and hot issue which emphasizes the importance of many varieties of English around the world. They are the result of colonization in several countries in the world, as well as an effect of globalization and US imperialism making it out of the grip of the native speakers to a lingua franca for most world citizens. The significant increase in the number of English speakers these days cannot be ignored as people speak it for various purposes creating many varieties. Its rapid spread as a language of communication has stimulated many varieties resulting in 'World Englishes' or 'New Englishes' or an international language or a lingua franca. In connection to its growing number of speakers, Jenkins says, "Whereas the English language was spoken in the mid-sixteenth century only relatively by a small group of mother tongue speakers born and bred within the shores of the British Isles, it is now spoken in almost every country of the world, with its majority of speakers being those for whom it is not a first language" (2). Then it became a common property essentially distinct from and independent of English as a native language and achieved its de facto status. Due to its global spread, multiple

identities and combination of it with other languages it comes in a continuous form of evolution and diversification. Similarly, it is about other modern phenomena such as globalization, media, politics, economy, cultural artefacts and social aspects.

The Expansion of English

Unlike the people of the past, we see a cross-flow of people around the globe due to the expansion of business, political interdependence, travel, investment, study, and pleasure making life international. The various activities of today's human beings have intensified contacts among people of various nations crossing linguistic and cultural borders. This situation has created the need for a medium of communication by the languages that can be used worldwide as a means of international communication. In many cases, the English language has played a prominent role in connecting these people. The spread of English has been increased not only by the expansion of the British Empire but also with the rise of the United States as a supreme power in international politics, economy, science and technology. Many former colonies who tried to replace the English language with their own languages have failed and have used it despite their objection. Regarding its influence in the world Karlfried Knapp states, "Given the relevance of science and technology for the fate of individuals as well as entire nations today, this change can hardly be overestimated: To profit from the latest developments in these fields, and even more to keep involved in them, one has to be able to use English" (174). As is the language of science and technology, people have to learn it to grasp many opportunities and benefits. As the language of international forums, it has become a necessary language for job seekers. There are many job opportunities in the market which can be obtained by the ability to communicate in English. It is not only related to public image and the chances of competition in the education market but also to making collaboration easier being a common property.

The more the movement of people from all over the world increases, the more English expands as an alternative language in multilingual and multicultural contexts. At present, English seems to be gaining ground as a medium of communication in non-Western countries as it is being initiated and controlled by non-native users. As people's need for the increasing use of English is determined by modernization, technology, migration, and political and social tendencies the situation has become very different from the past and there is an increase in the role of English as a lingua franca. Due to its vast spread, and influence of it in many forums, it has become omnipresent in all domains of public and private life. Showing its vast spread going beyond the inner and outer circle and its position in a global world, Marie-Luise Pitzl says, "The global presence of English is, therefore, a reality that can neither be denied nor argued away, regardless of whether we consider it desirable or not" (9). It has become a part of life mainly in academia and we cannot separate it. As also is the language of higher education, it has more global influence. Maureen Snow Andrade states, "Because of English being an international language, the prevalent language

in the fields of science and technology, and the language through which much educational content is delivered, English proficiency is foundational to meeting the demand for higher education nationally and globally” (75-76). The growing demand for the English language reflects its expansion in this modern era. Due to its historical origin, English cannot be separated easily from our daily activities as it has already become global having wider perspectives. The growing influence of it along with far-reaching influences can be observed from many popularly common terms.

Future Direction of English

English is sure to create multilingual diversities with many varieties of English. It is because the major uses of English are applied even in diverse contexts where it functions as a lingua franca far beyond its native speakers’ lingua-cultural norms and identities. Thus, it has multiple forms and multiple identities, is used in combination with other languages and semiotic modes, and is in a constant state of evolution and diversification. It is not, therefore, a clearly and precisely circumscribed entity and a great deal of scholarship addresses the blurred nature of its conceptual boundaries. When language is motivated by communicative needs, it serves as a cross-linguistic medium of communication resulting in challenges for applied linguistics. Various speakers around the world use the English language in many ways creating their varieties. The position and prestige related to the native speaker of English do not remain as in the past when multilingual groups spoke English as one of their languages. In this regard, Andy Kirkpatrick mentions, “Varieties of English are not restricted to these postcolonial settings, of course. There remains an extraordinary range of varieties and variation within, the traditional homes of English” (1). It means English has gone through many stages of change due to its widespread use by non-native speakers. Many varieties created from the shift of inner to expanding circles also transmit the kinds of literature in English. Various linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds of the speakers allow constant variation transcending the boundaries of the native speakers.

By making communication among people possible, English has become the symbol of the spirit of the age. So far as the matter of its future is concerned, many threats have been raised about it as it creates a threat to local languages, cultures as well as Standard English due to its widespread use. Among such hostilities, English is gaining popularity among users and its spread is growing even more. In this regard, Anna Mauraanen and Eliza Ranta write, “English has been welcomed as a vehicle of efficiency in for example business and science, or as a new means of communication for globally emergent localities as a variety of non-mainstream subcultures” (2). Beyond any doubt, the influence and position of English as a uniting symbol cannot be ignored. Similarly, it has covered all domains of the global world in an ever-widening form. In cross-cultural communication by uniting all the speakers the lingua franca English transcends the three concentric circles. Commenting on Karchu’s tripartite

model Sandra Mollin argues, “Research on English as a lingua franca has multiplied, and has indeed become the newest trend in the study of English world-wide” (42). The model of three concentric circles does not include the dominant role of a lingua franca between these circles and especially within the expanding circle. It means lingua franca creates new varieties of English, enables the people of an expanding circle to develop their variety and connects all groups. Thus, the scope of English as a lingua franca goes far beyond the boundaries of three concentric circles appearing in many varieties, creating them independent and combining the people of the global world.

The current practices show that English is at the top of the global language hierarchy spreading its influence over all domains. Similarly, the rapid use of computer-mediated and electronic media use of English has created hybridity. The status of English was already strengthened by world political, economic and technological developments of the past. At present, international mobility, expansion of media, increasing migration, World Wide Web and globalization have created the need for lingua franca and English from the very beginning. Completing the functions in many professional domains and including people of all levels as a lingua franca English works in future as, “enabling people to connect based on common interests and concerns across languages and communities” (Seidlhofer et al. 5). The focus of it is more social and communication issues creating challenges for applied linguistics as it is oriented to the idea that the primary purpose of language is to communicate. The latest developments and our modern activities emphasize the language already worked as a lingua franca and they continue to do so in the future. Dealing with such modern phenomena many complexities and pluralities of English continue to increase in the future. On the other hand, some critics have opined that there is no certainty that English is going to be the last lingua franca. In this regard, Roby Marlina and Zhichang Xu state: “It is no exception that English, like all previous lingua francas including Arabic, Greek, Latin, Persian, and Sanskrit, will cease to function as a lingua franca. It can be argued that in the future as in the past, linguacultural landscapes will change in line with political, economic, and sociocultural realities” (10). There might also be a change in the status of English like other lingua franca that lost their role. In this sense, the future of English is more complex and less predictable than it has been assumed.

Conclusion

The present-day world has become more complex due to diverse identities, globalization, multiculturalism, migration, and modernization. So, the need for global language and reinforcement of English to work as a medium of binding all of the factors together is a must. In such a context, the English language is leading the increasing diversity by creating a bridge. In this global world, the original nature of the English language has been lost but its vital role in the communication process with the fastest-growing functions among non-native speakers of English has been performed by it

as a lingua franca. Furthermore, as a lingua franca English also binds people all over the world in a global village integrating the advancement of modern technology into daily life activities. The future direction of English as a global language revolves around concepts like 'New Englishes' 'World Englishes,' international language and lingua franca along with many varieties and identities created by modern phenomena including the larger domain of artificial intelligence that emerges day by day. The increasing number of dialects shows that the number of speakers is increasing as it has become ever increasing language in the world. Thus, English as lingua franca needs to be included as a specific functional phenomenon of communication in the expanding circles in terms of its effort to unite all the people of the world and further research can be accelerated to its impacts on applied linguistics.

Works Cited

- Andrade, Maureen Snow. "Global Expansion and English Language Learning." *New Directions for Higher Education*, vol.1, no.173, 2016, pp. 75-85, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20181>
- Firth, Alan. "The Discursive Accomplishment of Normality: On 'Lingua Franca' English and Conversation Analysis." *Journal of Pragmatics*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1996, pp. 237-59, doi:[https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(96\)00014-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(96)00014-8).
- Jenkins, Jennifer. "English as a Lingua Franca: Interpretations and Attitudes." *World Englishes*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2009, pp. 200-207, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2009.01582.x>.
- . *World Englishes: A Resource Book for Students*. Psychology Press, 2003.
- Kachru, Braj B. "Standards, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism: The English Language in the Outer Circle." *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures*, 1985, pp. 11-30.
- Kirkpatrick, Andy. *The Routledge Handbook of World Englishes*. Routledge, 2010.
- Knapp, Karlfried. "English as an International Lingua Franca and the Teaching of Intercultural Communication." *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2015, pp. 173-89, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1515/jelf-2015-0003>
- Marlina, Roby, and Zhichang Xu. "English as a Lingua Franca." *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Leaching*. 2018, pp. 1-13. doi: 10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0667
- Mauranen, Anna, and Elina Ranta. *English as a Lingua Franca: Studies and Findings*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009.
- Mollin, Sandra. "English as a Lingua Franca: A New Variety in the New Expanding Circle?" *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2006, pp. 41-57.
- Pitzl, Marie-Luise. *Creativity in English as a Lingua Franca: Idiom and Metaphor*. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2018.
- Seidlhofer, Barbara et al. "English as a Lingua Franca in Europe: Challenges for Applied Linguistics." *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, vol. 26, 2006, pp. 3-34, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1017/S026719050600002X>.
- Wardhaugh, Ronald. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. John Wiley & Sons, 2011.