

English as a killer language: South Africa as a Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at presenting a general overview of the linguistic situation in South Africa in association with the rise of English as a global language. A qualitative approach is adopted to explore the motives behind English learning in South Africa and then to clarify South Africa's present-day craze for English and its impact on the indigenous languages. The researcher determines two paradoxes of thought in order to discuss the status of English as a lingua franca. Furthermore, different aspects of English as a global language and its impact on cultural, minority languages and linguistics diversity all over the world are highlighted in this study. Many prominent scholars in South Africa warn against the uncontrolled expansion of English in the official contexts. The researcher highlights some steps for reducing the negative and augmenting the positive effects of the language spread particularly in South Africa.

Introduction

English is an international language, spoken in many countries either as a native or as second or foreign language. By 2050, it is predicted, half of the world will be more proficient in it. English is the most widely spoken language with regards to number of countries, even though Chinese, Hindi, and Spanish have more native speakers. It is the language of globalization –of diplomacy, politics, and international business. In addition, it is the language of computers and internet. The world-wide advance of English language is necessary to deepen our understanding of globalization. It is obvious that this language has been rapidly gaining popularity for a number of decades. English is learned everywhere because people have found out that knowledge of English is the passport for a better career, advanced knowledge, and communication with the entire world. Furthermore, English is considered a huge step forward in many people's and countries' struggles for self-sufficiency and success. Thus, mastering it is a major tool for development and advancement.

English is unlike any other language in the history of the world in term of its status and position. According to Buck (2005) never before has the world witnessed a language spreading so extensively throughout the global population. Even though there are many positive aspects of English as a global language, there are negative aspects as well. The worldwide rise of English has produced some major challenges. The imbalance of power between English and minor languages may lead to a dramatic reduction of global linguistic diversity in the future. Consequently, smaller language groups fear that they will meet the fate of extinction as indicated by Coulmas (2013). Interestingly, a little academic attention has been directed to the rise of English language, particularly in regionally specific contexts. The position of English as a global language and the potential threat that it poses to the indigenous languages and cultures is obvious in South Africa.

Research Questions

Three central research questions guided this research:

- (1) Should we see the advance of English as a global language as positive or negative development?
- (2) Is English similar to lingua francas of the past? Or qualitatively different and thus more dangerous?
- (3) Is the rise of English considered an instrument for economic success or creator of new inequalities?

In seeking to answer the mentioned research questions, two paradoxes of thought are identified in order to discuss the status of English as so called lingua franca.

Literature review

According to Crystal the necessity of a global language is mainly appreciated by the international academic and business communities, as well as by individuals as the world becomes more and more global (Crystal 2003). Regarding English as a global language has triggered spirited debate. As the term "Global language", not interchanging terms are also widely used such as "international language" (e.g. Jenkins 2013), "English as a lingua franca" (e.g. House 2003), or "World English" (e.g., Mair 2003).

Why English has expanded as much as it has, and why it might be seen as the best choice for an international language have many justifications. For instance, the geographical-historical reasons as well as the socio-cultural reasons are regarded as major factors in this phenomenon. The geographical-historical part explains how English has reached its position and the socio-cultural explains how and why it remains that way. While the socio-cultural aspect looks at the way people in many ways have become dependent on English for their social life and for their economic well-being (Crystal 2003: 29).

Crystal (2003) explains that today's position of English has mainly two reasons: the expansion of the British colonial power and the emergence of the economic power of the United States. In this context, English is an international lingua franca which is the language of hegemonic power of our days. Super national languages come next, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Russian, Arabic, and Chinese (Coulmas 2013). The UNESCO ATLAS of World's Languages in Danger (2010) confirmed that English, Spanish, and French keep track of some 2,500 languages that are expected to be at risk of extinction. Consequently, language replacement is a process that has been going on for thousands of years, but in the age of globalization it has increased dramatically, resulting in a global situation which quite inconsistent. Furthermore, many scholars linked the excessive spread of English to the question of language death (e.g. Pennycook 2006; Skutnabb-Kangas 2003). Thus, English is known as a "killer language" (Skutnabb-Kangas 2003), and its process of expansion referred to as "linguistic genocide" (Pennycook 2006).

Is English similar to lingua francas of the past? or qualitatively different and thus more dangerous?

Lingua franca is defined as any language that is widely used as a means of communication among speakers of other languages.

'lisan-al faranga' is a term used by Arabs to refer to their speech with travelers from Western Europe. This original meaning was later extended to describe a language of trade. Graddol (1997) regarded a remarkable feature of lingua franca that the number of non- native speakers is higher than its native speakers.

As Phillipson (1992) has reflected "English has acquired an addiction that was long-term consequences that are from clear". In this section, I shed the light on the differences of opinion between those who believe that English is just another lingua franca and who worry that its rise under conditions of globalization means that it is more permanent, and more dangerous phenomenon.

Fishman (2011) explains that historically languages have risen and fallen with the military, economic, religious, or cultural, powers that supported them. For example, Russian was the dominant language from Berlin to Beijing until the fall of Soviet Union- the ideological system that supported it. A second reason why lasting English language dominance may be unlikely can be found in the basic human tendency to resist domination. Fishman explains that languages "serve a strong symbolic function as a clear mark 'authenticity'". Moreover, the fact that English began its international role through empire and conquest, and that its current predominance has been reinforced through the power of the U.S. does not help the reputation of English and links this issue to a host of other trends of anti-Americanism and anti-Westernization.

However, results of "English phenomenon" are alarming and simply too big to ignore. Particularly, minor languages and cultures are highly affected by this expansion of English. To elaborate, English is reaching heights never before attained by any language, and it is leaving other tongues behind in the dust. While other languages such as Chinese and Spanish, tally more native speakers than English, no other language in recorded history has ever spoken as widely as English. Thus, other languages are being pushed to the sidelines as mentioned in the Economist. Several scholars indicate that English is "too strong too loose its power" and declare that learning any language other than English is simply unnecessary in today world. The higher the English language climbs in status as "the language of globalization", the more other groups lose. Many of the world's languages are expected to become extinct by the end of the century. It was stated in the Economist, "Wherever a language dies, a bit of the world's cultures, history, and diversity dies with it". Yet even when languages are not wholly lost, many have lost the vocabulary to describe certain topics. In addition, much of the world's written academic discourse now occurs in English, and Philipson (1992) cites concern that "scholar working in English are unable to communicate their professional expertise in the mother tongue, and that the mother tongue itself is atrophying in particular areas rather than continuing to develop and adjust.

Is English language a tool for Economic Success or a Creator of New Inequalities?

This paradox demonstrates the widespread rejection on whether the rise of English is considered as an economical instrument for progress and commerce, or as a dangerous process of creating new inequalities based on English-proficiency. To elaborate, knowledge of English has played a major role in advancement and development throughout the world. It is described in The Economist as a fundamental skill of modern life like the ability to drive or to use a laptop. In addition, John Short and colleagues emphasized speaking English is highly important for being competitive in the international markets. South Africa and India are evident examples of economic success through English. Consequently, individuals, states, and corporations are motivated to use English in order to increase their audience which they are able to communicate. As Skapinker (2007) explains that English is the language which Vodafone, Micro-soft and Google conduct their business. Also, English is the language in which Egyptians speak to Chinese and Germans to Japanese. Thus, English has serious negative effects on those who do not know it. Despite its necessity for success in the working world, it leaves those who do not know it behind. Mastering English is required from workers in different fields to serve people who do not share their lingual roots. English has noticeable influences on academia. Buck (2000) commented on this issue that cultural production and intellectual activity in the non-Anglo world is less creative than what's going in English, but definitely they are reaching a smaller audience. In this context, many scholars have noted that the publications written in English have a considerably higher "impact" (measured by frequency of citation) than other languages' works. In a nutshell, the only English systems should be questioned because they reward English speakers and leave the rest outside. Furthermore, many scholars accuse English of violating equality of opportunity. Yet, the central role of English in bringing privileges to its users should not be ignored.

Minor Languages and cultures

What will happen to indigenous cultures and languages under the influence of English as a global language?

Coulmas mentioned (2013) language spread is not a natural development. Rather it is a complicated process driven by several variables such as trade, migration, slavery, and conquest.

English expansion might lead to the elimination of other languages. Losing a language means losing identity. The language is much more than just an instrument for communication. According to Trudgill (2003), there is an intimate relation between language and culture and a large homogenisation of culture might lead to a shift in language where native people adopt another language and gradually the old language may become extinct. There is a significant difference between “language death” and “language murder”. Language death refers to when a language evaporates naturally; its speakers are leaving it deliberately, but “language murder” refers to that the killer language actively discourages use of other languages. Minority languages may be eliminated from the media and educational systems Crystal (2013). English is regarded as a “killer language”, which means that it is a dominant language learned subtractive, at the cost of the mother tongues, rather than additively.

A few “English Only” movements were established in the United States, the first one in 1803; the speaking of French was banned among the population in Louisiana. Moreover, several attempts to eliminate Spanish and French have taken place. English is declared as the official language in many states in the US. The English-Only movements have been refused by linguists; they justify that a language does not establish political unity. The use of one single language in a society is no guarantee for social harmony. This has been proven many times during the history, e.g. American Civil War, Spanish Civil War and former Yugoslavia (Crystal 2003).

Kramersch (2002) gives a beautiful example of the distinction between using language for communicative purposes and using it for identification purposes, and the type of effective-emotive quality involved in identification. She quotes from an autobiography of a speaker of Vietnamese as L1: ‘As for English I do speak the language but I don't think I'll ever talk it. English flow from the mind to the tongue and then to the pages of books . . . I only talk Vietnamese. I talk it with all my senses. Vietnamese does not stop on my tongue, . . . but flows with the warm, soothing lotus tea down my throat like a river giving life to the landscape in her path. It rises to my mind along the vivid images of my grandmother's house and my grandmother” (Kramersch 2002, p. 98-99).

South Africa

South Africa is called the rainbow nation. It is a multiethnic society encompassing a wide variety of cultures, languages, and religions. The country's democratic constitution recognizes 11 official languages, which is among the highest number of any country in the world. Two of these languages are of European origin: Afrikaans developed from Dutch and English reflects the legacy of British colonialism. English is the most commonly spoken language in official and commercial public life. English is generally understood across the country, being the language of business, politics and the media, and is regarded as the country's lingua franca. Most South Africans are multilingual, able to speak more than one language. English- and Afrikaans-speaking people tend not to have much ability in indigenous languages. According to the 2011 census, isiZulu is the mother tongue of 22.7% of South Africa's population, and English at 9.6%.

SOUTH AFRICAN LANGUAGES 2011

Language	Number of speakers*	% of total
Afrikaans	6 855 082	13.5%
English	4 892 623	9.6%
isiNdebele	1 090 223	2.1%
isiXhosa	8 154 258	16%
isiZulu	11 587 374	22.7%
Sepedi	4 618 576	9.1%
Sesotho	3 849 563	7.6%
Setswana	4 067 248	8%
Sign language	234 655	0.5%

SiSwati	1 297 046	2.5%
Tshivenda	1 209 388	2.4%
Xitsonga	2 277 148	4.5%
Other	828 258	1.6%
TOTAL	50 961 443**	100%

The coming of English

Records indicate that English people made initial contact with Southern Africa prior to the period of formal British colonization of the area (Silva 1995).

Lanham (1982) demonstrates three phases in the establishment of English-speakers in South Africa. The first major in 1820 settlement of approximately 4000 British immigrants came to South Africa. These settlers were mostly working class or lower middle- class backgrounds. The second major settlement of approximately 4000 British immigrants came to the colony of Natal between 1849 and 1851. Unlike the 1820 settlers, these immigrants were typically of middle and upper middle- class origin. The third phase was the discovery of gold and diamonds, and the industrial revolution, which led to further British immigration.

Nowadays, English is established throughout South Africa society, amongst variety of linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Particularly, amongst the educated, English functions as a lingua franca, and is the primary language of government, business, and commerce. Educationally, it is a compulsory subject in all schools, and is the preferred medium of instruction in most schools and tertiary institutions. Amongst the African majority, English has been seen as the language of liberation and black unity (as opposed to Afrikaans, which has been perceived as the language of the oppressor). While English functions as the language of the prestige and power, an African language is maintained as a solidarity code. English had also a strong influence on the language of South Africa, and many of English words have been adopted into Afrikaans and the African languages. The use of code switching- the mixing of English and another indigenous language – is the strongest sign of the impact of English (Gough 1996).

The Influence of English and the Influences on English

Gough (1995) explains that Colored, South African Indian, and Afrikaans are varieties of English in South Africa. These varieties extend on continuum from "broad" to more "cultivated" varieties (depending the educated level and social status of its speakers) (Lanham 1982). Nativization or indigenization is the process through which a language is accommodated and adapted to its speakers and their circumstances (Gough1995). In a country where English is used and acquired in a variety of different contexts, as in South Africa, the indigenization of English reflects specific socio – historical processes which have resulted in the emergence of the mentioned varieties. Gough (1995) mentions that "New English" have come into being in South Africa, reflecting characteristics of the South African situation and its people. For instance, African English is characterized by using of indefinite article before certain 'non-count': 'He was carrying a luggage'

Along with first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, various changes occurred in the political and public life of the country. Nelson Mandela, the first democratically elected president, strongly supported the idea that all culture groups present in South Africa are equal. He urged to revive the previously underprivileged cultures and its languages. Thus, the South African constitution (chapter 1 section six) recognizes eleven official languages: Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isisNdebele, isiXhosa, and isisZulu. South Africa is a distinguished exception with its progressive acknowledgment of multilingual reality. Furthermore, the constitution highlights the need to recognize and at the same time, re-evaluate the indigenous languages, whose status and use were historically diminished. In 1995, the Pan South African Languages Board (Pan SALB) was established to promote the development of all official languages. Also, its further duty is to promote respect for the languages that are commonly used in South Africa and those which are used for religious

purposes. However, the actual operations of the board remain under strong criticism as they are accused of having failed in implementing language policies.

In 1997 the problematic apartheid language in education policy was finally abandoned after the adoption of the new policy. However, because of the lack of a satisfactory implementation of the policy, the former policy of the apartheid government is still being pursued. English and Afrikaans are still dominant in education as indicated by Heugh (2000). African languages are used as media of learning only for the first four years of primary education. In other words, it has been hard to actually create an effective plan of putting local languages into educational use (e.g. Heugh 2002). Despite the relatively strong educational positions of Afrikaans with respect to language like Zulu or Xhosa, it is English that wins the great majority of the linguistic converts.

When examining the problem of language planning in South Africa it is necessary to highlight the conflicting attitudes towards English. It should be acknowledged that English functions as a valuable token on the linguistic market, therefore, the access to the language should be widely provided. On the other hand, there are voices in the language debate suggesting that the equal status of the eleven official languages remains only in the realm of planning and is not being implemented in reality. Kamwangamalu (2003) expresses in a simple equation consisting apart of a title in his paper "When $9+2=1$ " (nine representing the African official languages, two representing Afrikaans and English, and one representing English).

Attitudes Towards English in South Africa

Many South Africa intellectuals emphasize the importance of developing the African languages for educational and academic purposes. Alexander (2006) puts the need of intellectualism of African languages in the context of increasing homogenization and hegemonisation, as well as cultural diversity and multilingualism. It is evident that South African scholars are motivated by the desire to elevate the African languages to a higher position. Alexander (2006) clarifies the role of language as a marker of the individuals' identity. Consequently, language rights are considered a major part of human rights concerns. Webb (2003) stated many advantages of the use of the native language as a medium of instructions. In detail, Webb emphasizes the strong link between using the first language as a medium of instruction and a successful negotiation of identity, as well as harmonious classroom relations. Furthermore, using home language at schools allow for a less traumatic "cultural and emotional transfer" and a more successful involvement of the parents. The following survey shows the attitudes of youth toward English as a medium of instruction as well as a language of education.

The most common definition of language attitudes is the strong positive or negative emotions experienced by people when they are face with a choice between languages in variety of situations or are learning a language. After a century of only two official languages (English and Afrikaans), the South Africa's constitution recognized eleven official languages. Consequently, language policy-makers and planners have to determine individuals' attitudes and preferences so that their policy can reflect "the need of the people and not the interest of any particular language" (Webb, 1996:186).

Charlyn Dyers in his study "An Investigation into Current Attitudes Towards English at The University of The Western Cape" conducted a longitudinal examination of the language attitudes, preferences, and use among the students of the Western Cape. The study aimed to explore the attitudes have the students towards their mother tongues, Afrikaans, and other South African languages. The results of Dyers's survey showed that the majority of the students have enjoyed learning English at school, and would like to see it used together with mother tongues from primary schools onwards. It is also their preferred medium of instruction at UWC. They said "Most academic textbooks are written in English" and "If you want to study in another country you need English". The following items of the survey clarify the students' attitudes.

1- Have you enjoyed the way English was taught at school?

Agree	undecided	Disagree
67%	8%	16%

2- Should the mother tongue be used together with English as the medium of instruction at primary and secondary schools?

Agree	undecided	Disagree
84%	8%	8%

3- Should English be the only medium of instruction at UWC?

Agree	undecided	Disagree
70%	7%	23%

Is it difficult to study your subjects in English? 4-

Agree	undecided	Disagree
37%	11%	52%

These results confirm earliest studies (Mawasha, 1996, Chick, 1992) which showed that English is preferable as a medium of instruction, even from the earliest years of primary schooling. In other words, Dyers(1997) concluded that that the students prefer English as a lingua franca. They also regarded it as the language of power and social mobility. Nevertheless, they have negative attitudes toward English predominance on television; this confirms findings of Slabbert and Van den Berg's 1994 survey on people's languages choices for TV programs, which found that English is not widely accepted as the language of media.

Conclusions

Accepting using English creatively for individuals own communicative purposes is a convenient solution. This has been suggested by Fishman 25 years ago when he called English as a foreign language "additional language". (1977, 32.9ff.). Thus, English should be regarded as a "co-language" functioning not against, but in conjunction with local languages. Moreover, the researcher believes that the more we do stay aware of the potential effects of English language, the more we will be able to stay abreast of the best ways to maximize its benefits and minimize its costs. In seeking an answer to my original research question about whether the international prominence of the English language should be seen as a good or bad thing, I found out that many issues in this age of globalization, in particular this issue, do not allow for black and white answers determining what is good or bad, right or wrong. Consequently, English is crucial as a global language because it is a strong, well-developed language with millions of speakers; different languages are essential for their cultures and for the advancement of their native speakers. Furthermore, the mother tongue is part of our personal, social and cultural identity. Needless to say, weakness in the mother tongue means a paralysis of all thought and power of expression.

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