
RESEARCH ARTICLE

English, the Global Language: Its Strength, Status, and Future

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ABSTRACT

English is believed to have reached a position of a global language, and it is on its way to becoming a dominant language. Achieving such a status is a product of several factors, including economy, politics, culture, technology, military power, etc. English has seen different periodical developments throughout its history. Nowadays, millions of people use English around the world; Kachru (1992) categorized the geographical areas where English is used into three different circles, the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. This descriptive, cross-cultural study explores perceptions of three groups of respondents from three countries representing Kachru's three circles. The 27 participants from America, India and Morocco responded to a survey about the status, role and future of English in their countries. After analyzing the survey, the results indicated that most respondents believe that English has dominated the world due to several elements. The main finding here is that 25/27 respondents claim that English will maintain its global status throughout the 21st century.

KEYWORDS

English, global language, language status, Kachru's three circles

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1. Introduction

With the ever-growing rates of interdependence and interconnectivity between different parts of the world, some languages rise to the top and exert a form of dominance over other languages and dialects. Others dwindle and gradually disappear. People today interact using a variety of languages, globally. Several experts estimate that there are approximately around 6,500 languages spoken around the world, however, almost 50% of which are considered endangered or face extinction (Jalilzadeh & Dastgoshadeh, 2011). It is believed that languages and dialects live and disappear just like all the living things on earth. It seems like a doubtful thing to happen, but research has documented cases where a language or dialect went extinct. History has shown several instances of people who lost their mother language (Higby & Obler, 2015). In contrast, there are many other languages that are widespread and seen as influential worldwide. For example, Spanish, English, Chinese, French, Arabic, and Russian. It is fascinating to know that languages are classified in terms of standards of weakness, strength, limitation, and dominance. This is an intriguing area of sociolinguistics that keeps evolving.

This paper's concern is the English language and its position as an international language. The status that the English language enjoys worldwide could be attributed to an array of elements, including economic, political, technological, cultural, and historical factors. In its origins, English took its first step among the tribes of northern Europe which were considered very primitive at that time. However, it developed to occupy a high status around the world; it is seen as the major means of communication among people in different parts of the world. It is remarkable when we consider how it evolved from a tribal language to becoming a world language. Wherever one turns, English is spoken and written in various degrees and across a wide range of contexts and regions. It is legitimate therefore to ask the question of how English achieved this status and what could happen when it is adopted in many walks of life across the world. Statistics indicate that in Europe, English is the favored

foreign language by 89% of students. In terms of how people in Europe perceive the usefulness of a language, 68% are in favor of English (Parimal, 2013).

In this study, the researcher provides a brief overview of how English developed throughout different historical periods. Then, status, future, and challenges of English are discussed before moving to tackling the notion of language ownership and its implications. The study also covers distinctions between native and non-native speakers' characteristics.

1. Background

In the beginning, English was not the original spoken language of the people of what is now called England. Crystal (1995), in his book: *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, illustrates that prior to the coming of the Germanic tribes in the fifth century, the locals used and communicated using several languages across the British Isles. English saw important changes throughout its history. Traditionally, experts in the historical development of English claimed that it had gone through three main stages. The first one was called *Old English*, from 450 to 1150. The second stage is labeled Middle English and lasted from 1150 to 1500. The language since 1500 is called Modern English (Baugh & Caleb, 1993).

2.1. Old English

As any other language, Old English might have had several types of effects from other neighboring languages and dialects. The main source of influence could have come from Latin since it was widely used and recognized for its power as the Romans had considerable influence in many parts of Europe (Abu, R., 2012). In his book *The Story of English*, Philip Gooden (2009) argued that the Celtic language also exerted much influence on English because the local people had to leave their lands and move somewhere else. Some of the words that could be traced to Celtic origins are seen in names of places and geographic features, such as *London*, the *Thames* River, and the *Avon* River.

Latin had a critical influence on modern English (Alvarez, 2023). The Roman soldiers and merchants used new names and labels to refer to items in daily use and brought in new changes to the local cultures. Crystal (1995) reported that about 50% of English words have originated from Latin, including those that are related to plants, animals, food, drink, and household items. In addition, many public domains and official settings adopted new words from Latin, such as those used in legal institutions, religion, trade, and military. Below are some examples of the loan words from Latin, Crystal (1995).

Table 1: *Latin Loans*

Old English	Today's English
<i>palnte</i>	<i>plant</i>
<i>win</i>	<i>wine</i>
<i>cyse</i>	<i>cheese</i>
<i>catte</i>	<i>cat</i>
<i>cetel</i>	<i>kettle</i>
<i>disc</i>	<i>dish</i>
<i>weal</i>	<i>wall</i>
<i>munuc</i>	<i>monk</i>
<i>mynster</i>	<i>minister</i>

2.2. Middle English

Historians state that the Middle English era saw its onset at the time of the Norman Conquest in the 11th Century. Baugh and Cable (1993) illustrated that changes that affected English were critical and more extensive than any other influences that English had before. The two authors claimed that English during this period lost inflections mainly due to the Norman invasion. The major changes were mostly in terms of English grammar and vocabulary.

The French language had exerted a clear influence on English at the time (Hernández, 2020; Pervan, 2020). British people started using French in their daily interactions. This impact is still very obvious although, in regards to French citizens, they were very small in number (Crystal, 1995). British people used French in their day-to-day affairs without having to resort to learning a version of Old English. Moreover, French was prestigious and noble. This usually is the case throughout history since the occupiers tend to enforce their language and give it more power while neglecting local languages and dialects, which often were spoken by farmers and laymen. In contrast, French was considered more superior since it was adopted in domains of administration, religion, military, etc.

2.3. Modern English

At this stage, the English language saw fundamental changes because of the impact of the printing revolution that took place in Germany. Next to promoting standardized spelling and punctuation, the printing age provided a strong foundation for

the spread and dissemination of written productions, allowing for a quick and efficient circulation of new publications (Embark, 2019; Prasad & Singh, 2024). During the years that followed the printing technology, hundreds of thousands of books were published. It was a flourishing time that allowed scholars to systematically study language, including its vocabulary, grammar, style, and writing system (Baugh & Cable, 1993).

In addition to printing, other important developments contributed to the spread of the English language. For example, increased levels of publications, transportation, significant progress in industry, among others (Baugh & Cable, 1993). This period in European history was known as the Renaissance, a time when English saw extraordinary developments and changes, particularly in terms of vocabulary (Prasad & Singh, 2024). During this era, a variety of innovations and new concepts emerged across Europe; therefore, there was a critical need to create and adopt new terms and expressions. A great deal of vocabulary that English borrowed to address its needs originated from Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, Italian, etc. (Crystal, 1995).

The three periods that were briefly explained above had paved the way for English to reach a global expansion. It is obvious that the different developments that occurred since the 19th century in economic, political, and social spheres played a significant role in its expansion. The following section covers the current status of English language.

2.4. Global English

Moving forward, what lies as the base for English becoming a global language are in the political, military and geographical dominance of the British Empire. Furthermore, most inventions and technological advances took place in Great Britain and the USA. More recently, another factor that facilitated a more sophisticated prevalence of English is seen in the socio-cultural influence of English worldwide.

2.5. Political-Geographical Explanation

Great Britain exerted a significant political and military influence in the 19th and 20th centuries globally. In his second book, *English as a Global Language*, Crystal (1997) explained that toward the end of the 20th century, English was used by 250 million speakers, with the overwhelming majority residing outside the British lands. In addition, Britain had great influence over large territories in different corners of the world including India, New Zealand, Singapore, the Caribbean, and many places in Africa. Such dominance and control allowed English to acquire key factors for a global prevalence. The phrase “the sun never sets on the British Empire” is a significant reminder of the power that Great Britain enjoyed during imperial times. Following the mid-twentieth century until today, the United States took the torch in promoting and advocating for English via its political, economic, and military presence and dominance around the world. Alfarhan (2016) explained that the emergence of USA as a superpower critically contributed to the spread English. This has allowed English to function as the world lingua franca (Johnson, 2009).

2.6. Economic and Technological Explanation

Another explanation through which one can comprehend the vast and quick expansion of English as a global language is in terms of technological and economic progress that took place in the USA and Great Britain. This was advantageous and allowed the language to gain more dominance over new markets, and therefore acquiring more speakers. Moreover, transportation, trade, and advancements in communication were also critical in stimulating more growth of English. A clear and more recent technological breakthrough is the Internet and its products and applications (Zuo, 2013). Anyone willing to have a smooth quick access to these technologies is required to have a decent level in English. It allows people to cope with new technologies (Seppala, 2011). Moreover, English is now recognized as the major medium for doing international business (Paru, 2019). In a report by the *Financial Times*, most business discussions between non-native speakers happen in English (Financial Times).

2.7. Socio-cultural Explanation

Nowadays, millions of people around the world look up to English as the ultimate refuge away from poverty and unemployment. The English language has penetrated all aspects of daily life throughout the world, be it media, culture, entertainment, sports, fashion, etc. (Dutta, 2019). When analyzing the situation, it is extremely intriguing the way people in almost any corner of the world look up to English to seek better opportunities. It is apparent that a key element in English reaching the present status is through media. Entertainment, press, internet, as well as motion pictures have provided English a fast and easy venue to prevail and reach large audiences. For example, in the field of entertainment industry, English occupies an overwhelming dominance without any considerable competition (Paru, 2019). Globalization and marketization allowed English to be a dominant language in international communication. In this regard, it is worth mentioning here the role that Hollywood has had on the spread of English (Zuo, 2013).

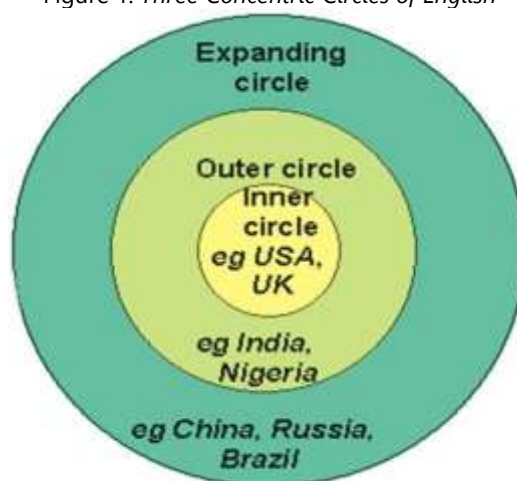
2.8. Implications of the Spread of English

The extraordinary status of English has brought up two kinds of effects. Since it has millions of users worldwide, this has created a dichotomy in which users are classified into different groups, natives or non-natives. Second, even though English has

contributed to the development of their countries, some people argue that it also has negatively influenced their local dialects and cultures. Today, there are hundreds of millions of people who speak and use English as their main medium of interaction, such as in India, Singapore, the Philippines, etc. In fact, they claim that they speak standard English and there is no need to borrow or look up to countries where English originated for correct or appropriate ways or norms of speaking. Furthermore, these speakers can create their own norms of vocabulary use, pronunciation, and syntax (Schneider, 2007). In turn, Braj Kachru (1992) states that no one has authority over a language other than elements such as academic preferences, dictionaries, specifications in career, and social attitudes.

Kachru's model of the prevalence of English globally is very critical in our efforts to comprehend the implications that people have in the three circles that are explained in his reference book *The Other Tongue, English across Culture*. Kachru (1992) introduced his well-known diagram illustrating the *Three Concentric Circles* of the spread of English. The first one is labeled *the Inner Circle*, which refers to countries where English is spoken as a native language. The second one is *the Outer Circle* which includes countries where English enjoys a vital status in society culture and economics, such as Nigeria, Hong Kong, and India. The last circle is referred to as *the Expanding Circle* where English has a status of a foreign language, such as Morocco and Brazil. Below is Kachru's model (Schneider, 2007).

Figure 1: *Three Concentric Circles of English*



Even though English has brought many benefits to the different peoples who use it, some argue that English has brought negative influences on their communities, as well. In *English for Globalization or for the World's People*, Robert Phillipson (1992) reported that the status of English as a global language exercises political, economic, and cultural dominance over other countries. In terms of local languages, he argued that indigenous languages have suffered from English's expansion, which has dominated many fields of life. In many countries in south Asia, south-east Asia and eastern Africa, the promotion of English has been at the expense of neglecting other local languages. Furthermore, Fishman (2004), who is an American specialist in Sociology of language, claimed that English is both replacing and displacing other languages.

Research objective

This study aims at exploring the status, role, and future of English in three different countries, USA, India, and Morocco. These countries represent the Kachru's three circles.

Research questions

- 1- What is the status of English in Kachru's three circles.
- 2- What role does English play in development?
- 3- Does English have any effect on local languages?

3. Methodology

This research is an exploratory mixed-methods study. It follows a descriptive, cross-cultural survey design to investigate the spread of English as a global language. The researcher designs a survey in which the participants share their views, attitudes, and experiences of English in their home countries, as illustrated in Kachru's model above.

3.1. Participants

The body of participants included 27 members coming from one of the three circles of Kachru's model:

- Inner Circle: Countries where English is used as a native language (UK, US).

- Outer Circle: Countries where English is institutionalized (India, Nigeria).
- Expanding Circle: Countries where English functions as a foreign language (Morocco, Brazil).

The participants were carefully chosen so that we have a balanced representation of the three circles and to elicit a comprehensive view of the issue at hand.

3.2. Data Collection

The major method of collecting the data was a survey distributed to participants from the three countries. The 15-item questionnaire has both open-ended and closed-ended items that were intentionally phrased to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data. The survey focuses on the following points:

- The status and role of English in economics, culture, media, and education.
- Attitudes toward English as a global language.
- Impact of English on local languages.

Below are some of the main items in the survey.

a. Closed-ended items

- 1- English can sustain its dominance in the next 100 year.
- 2- English plays a critical role in the development of local economy.
- 3- English is important in the educational system.
- 4- English spread has a negative impact on local languages.

b. Open-ended items

- 1- Which domains is English used frequently?
- 2- What are some of its effects on economics, media, and culture?
- 3- What kind of effects does it have on local languages?
- 4- What kind of status does English have in your country?
- 5- Would English keep its dominance to the end of the 21st century, justify your answer.

3.3. Data Analysis

In terms of the quantitative data, the researcher employed descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages to analyze and summarize the overall trends in the participants' perceptions. As for the qualitative data, the participants' responses were first coded and then analyzed following a thematic analysis. The aim was to identify the recurring themes and topics regarding participants' views on the role and status of English and its effects in their countries.

4. Results

To answer the first main question on the status of English, (8/9) Indian participants in the questionnaire reported that without English language proficiency, it is almost impossible to get hired in good paying jobs. All of them, however, stated that the Indian economy is heavily dependent on the outside world, which requires skilled English speakers. In terms of the second question about the role of English in the country's development, most of the Indian participants (8/9) reported that in all fields of life, English is the dominant language, such as education, economics, technology, computer science, and media. They believe that English is considered the motor for developing their local economy.

In terms of the influence that English exercises on local languages (RQ. 3). In India, Morocco, and the USA, a third of all the participants (9/27) reported that the impact is negative. For instance, 5 Indian participants argued that some local languages in some states are not given enough attention as is given to English. On the other hand, the remainder (18/27) reported that English has positive effects on their countries at large. It is considered as a key medium for social mobility and personal development for the Indian citizens, whereas for Moroccans, it does not have much influence on people's choices, yet it has a good impact in several economic spheres.

To the survey item concerning the future of English, (25/27) of the participants confirmed that English has the means to continue dominating the rest of the 21st century. Their major argument is that the economic, financial, and military powers of the USA leave no room for another language that could challenge English.

Table 2: *The Participants' Opinions on English Spread*

Question	Indians (N = 9)	Moroccans (N = 9)	Americans (N = 9)
Status of English (Q. 3-4)	100% stated that English heavily impacts their economy, education, media, and other social spheres.	33 % stated that English has a relative status but positive in economy, tourism, outsourcing, and high tech.	Over 85% reported that without English, a person cannot function in America.
Impact of English on other languages (Q. 5-6)	45% reported that English has a negative influence on local languages.	15 % stated that English negatively impacts local languages.	33% reported that English has a negative impact on indigenous languages.
Norm providers of English (Q. 7-8)	45 % look up to England as a norm provider of the correct accent.	50 % mentioned that they prefer American English as the norm.	This Q. was not asked to Americans.
Future of English (Q. 10-11)	100% agreed that English will prevail in the future.	100% agreed that English will prevail in the future.	78% stated that English will continue to prevail. The rest state that Spanish and Chinese have potential to emerge.

The diverse varieties created by the diffusion of English worldwide also bring up the ownership issue. In item 10 in the questionnaire, (5/9) Indian participants stated that they preferred the way people from England speak English. At the same time, however, ownership of English, according to most participants (22/27), is something that is measured and judged by any community where English is used. They reported that they spoke good English with no difficulty. Yet, some of them stated that they still look up to England or the USA as model providers.

In terms of the qualitative data, some of the recurring themes that the overwhelming portion of the participants mention in their responses are career benefits, academic research, technology, and entertainment. In India, (8/9) participants stress that being fluent in English is the path for achieving high positions in the workplace. Similarly, 75% of the respondents claim that mastering English provides important benefits in conducting academic research and taking part both in national and international conferences. Another interesting recurring theme is that 83% of the participants state that knowing English facilitates keeping up with the latest technological developments worldwide. In terms of the theme of entertainment, 100% of the Moroccan respondents think that English allows them to enjoy productions of the entertainment industry, such as movies, music, games, etc.

5. Discussion

The literature review on Kachru's categorization provides a clear background for discussing the status of English in the three circles illustrated in the diagram above. First, since the role and status that English enjoys in the Inner Circle (USA) does not require much analysis and interpretation, the following section will cover the discussion of the other two circles, that is India (*Outer Circle*) and Morocco (*Expanding Circle*). Next, there will be a discussion of the future of the English language.

5.2. Situation in India

According to Kachru's three concentric circles, the status of English in India, the *Outer Circle*, represents a vivid example of the dominance of English. Outside the *Inner Circle*, India has the most important variety. In the survey, all 9 Indian respondents believe that English has several advantages for the country's economy. Some of them explained that more and more people in India use English as their main language of communication. The reason they hold this view is due to the economic and social privileges attached to it.

The historical perspective can help us understand the prevalence of English in India. Since early 17th century, the English merchants were able to set trade stations and roads on the Indian coast. Another factor that facilitated the spread of English in India is the role that missionaries played. Nevertheless, the overwhelming spread of English in India would not take place until

mid-18th century with the imperial and colonial interests in the Indian sub-continent (Schneider, 2007). In addition, Meganathan (2015) reported that 90% of higher academic institutions rely heavily on English as a medium of instruction. This is supported by what Guo and Beckett (2012) reported. They believe that English is perceived as a major gateway to employment, education, and popular culture.

The English language has had a significant impact on local Indian languages. Five out of nine Indian participants reported that due to fostering the instruction of English, several native languages have suffered neglect. One of the participants stated that some states place a higher value on English proficiency. Vasishth and colleagues (1997) believe that English could have tremendous effects not only in the countries of the *Outer Circle*, but also in countries of the *Expanding Circle* where English did not occupy a significant status at all.

5.3. Situation in Morocco

The situation of English in Morocco is still in the process of attracting followers. The country has been considered a stronghold of French since the occupation (1912-1956). However, 33% of the Moroccan participants in the questionnaire noted that recent years have brought new trends of music, technology, and Internet which have led to a gradual increase in the use of English. The main domains, where English is steadily gaining new clients, are in education, economics, and culture. A study by the British Council (2021) found that

40 % of young Moroccans assume that English is the most important foreign language to acquire. In addition, the study continues to indicate that 82% of the study respondents have favorable associations with English. According to 60% of the Moroccan participants in the survey, English is gaining ground in the country, particularly in fields of higher education and business. 50% of the respondents believe that public universities make a significant use of English especially in post-graduate studies. Also, several new schools, especially in the private sector, are following the American style of education due to its attractiveness and the international prestige attached to it. A good example is Al-Akhawayne University and Mohamed the 6th University. The British Council report stated that 40% of respondents assume that English has a priority in their foreign language education. On the other hand, around 40% think that Arabic has more importance, while only 10% of the participants believe French is important.

5.4. Challenges and Future of English

Most American, Indian, and Moroccan survey respondents believe that English will keep its position in the world as a dominant language. The following are some of their reactions: "I think English can definitely stay as a globalized language throughout the 21st century"; "English will keep its strength as long as the American media and entertainment productions stay strong", "Right now, English is the dominant language globally. I don't think that will change any time soon". These responses all are in favor of the opinion that English has what it takes to dominate the 21st century. Those who expressed some doubts about the future of English, interestingly, were 2 American participants. Parimal (2023) reported that in the European Union, English has a priority as a foreign language in education by 89% of students. The author added that 68% consider English as more useful as a foreign language among Europeans. Similarly, Mathews (2013) argued that English plays today the same role that Latin played in the past.

Today, English is considered a lingua franca that people from different linguistic backgrounds use to communicate. The majority of this study's participants explained that there are tangible facts that contribute to the status of English today. These include the strong economic, military, and cultural status of the USA as well as other English-speaking countries. One of the Moroccan respondents said: "If you speak English, you can speak with the whole world". Sheehan (2004) mentioned that more than 70% of the world's scientists use English. In turn, Zuo (2013) argued that by 2050, 50% of the world's population will be proficient in English. In the survey, (25/27) of the participants reported that English will maintain its global dominance in the 21st century. Their main argument is that Anglo-Saxon countries have strong economies, cultural and military capabilities.

In the same line of argument, David Graddol (2000), in *The Future of English*, mentioned that it is not feasible for language to challenge the global status of English. He argued that for any language to become an adversary of English, it must acquire certain characteristics that English enjoys in the global stage. That is to say that this language needs to possess political, cultural, economic, and technological potential so that it attracts a global audience. Graddol continued explaining that a few other languages have potential at gaining a global status, such as Chinese, Spanish, or Arabic, but none of them enjoy all the qualities required to turn into a global language yet. However, Graddol wrote that in the mid-term, there may be some developments in the region of southeast Asia which would allow for the emergence of a strong language.

5.5. The Ownership Question

The issue of ownership of English is a critical issue in the spread of English globally. Who has authority over English? For example, its grammar, pronunciation, syntax, etc. Is it native speakers or non-native speakers? In his book *Ownership of English in the Outer Circle: An Alternative to the NS-NNS Dichotomy*, Christina, Higgins (1999) claims that the *Inner Circle* countries do not hold the standards for the correct use of English anymore. In many places worldwide, people have been acquiring and

learning English and gave it its appropriate status and norms of usage. The author also argued that non-native speakers are creating their own versions and norms of using English.

In India, for example, the participants in the questionnaire reported that English is one of the main mediums of communication with speakers of other languages, but, at the same time, they include words from their local languages in their conversations. Kachru (1992) argued the one who can claim to own English is anyone who speaks. Maybe in colonial times, Britain and later the USA held the privilege of being norm providers, but nowadays that has changed radically. English has intertwined with the cultures of these countries, and with time people have given it a multicultural identity. As Kachru asserts, ESL and EFL users have given English its distinct identity of their own in every corner of the world. Accordingly, no one has the right to claim authority over any language (20). Higgins (1999) explained that the controversy between native speakers and non-native speakers has created the notion that only a small minority around the world speaks the correct variety of English. The way these two groups utilize language, and the purposes they use it for are not the same because of their surroundings and social functions of the language.

In an article in the Financial Times, lots of people use English to interact and communicate with other speakers from different parts of the world, who also happen to have learned English themselves (Financial Times, 2024). Zuo (2013) pointed out that popularity of English globally has allowed for the emergence of new variants of English. For example, today people talk about Chinese English, Singapore English, and Indian English. This may have a profound impact on English itself.

6. Conclusion

The world has seen several languages dominate and then fall. Reasons which lead any language to achieve a dominant status seem to be, relatively, the same. Reflecting on the status that Latin or Greek enjoyed in the past, we discover that what contributed to their prestigious positions is fairly the same which, nowadays, is contributing to English's position, elements such as economic, cultural, scientific, and military power. Till recently, who would think that French, which was considered the language of nobility, prestige, literature, and fashion in Europe, would someday decline. The current situation of English, which is spoken in diverse settings worldwide, produces the existence of different varieties. Even though some people may argue about who owns English or who speaks the standard variety, this does not undermine, as Widdowson (1994) states, "The very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it" (p. 385). Many countries include it in their education curriculum to develop themselves scientifically and economically, which proves its ability to adapt to different peoples' needs and daily functions. A number of linguists and language historians affirm that English will maintain its dominance throughout the twenty-first century. However, the future is unpredictable. As Crystal puts it, "There has never been a language so widely spoken by so many people as English. Thus, there may be no precedents to help us predict what happens to a language when it achieves genuine world status" (ctd. in Sheehan, p. 20, 1999).

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