

# A Review of The Role And Importance of English Language In Today's World

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**Abstract**----Humans communicate with language. Though language is not the only means of communication Whenever communication is thought of, we always associate it with language. The English language has grown in popularity and usage, English is becoming a global language and over a billion people in the world speak some form of it (depending on how 'English speaker is defined') but globalisation and the subsequent impact on language is seen as something that is unavoidable. China is the most populous nation on earth and the Chinese language is the most spoken but the USA has remained ahead of China because (i) Chinese is limited to a geographical area, while English has progressively become the world lingua franca and (ii) The world technical innovation and economic development are communicated through English. This paper x-rays the role and importance of English language in the world today which ranges from being an emerging world lingua franca to criteria for job (employment) to business and commerce and have even been christen as the 'Hollywood language' for the entertainment industry, the internet language etc.

**Keywords**----English Language; Communication; Language; Lingua franca; Globalization

## I. INTRODUCTION

**C**OMMUNICATION is simply the act of transferring information from one place to another (skillsyouneed, 2015). Communication is about passing messages between people or organisations. Messages between a sender and receiver take place using a medium such as e-mail or phone (BBC, 2014). According to Grimsley (2015), Communication is sending and receiving information between two or more people. The person sending the message is referred to as the sender, while the person receiving the information is called the receiver. The information conveyed can include facts, ideas, concepts, opinions, beliefs, attitudes, instructions and even emotions. He classified communication into:

- (i) Verbal communication which is simply sending a message through a spoken language that is understood by both the sender and receiver of the message.
- (ii) Written communication which is sending a message by the use of written symbols that are understood by both the sender and receiver of the message.

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(iii) Body language is a form of non/verbal communication that can be used to send a message. You can often tell if your boss is pleased or upset simply by looking at his facial expressions, posture and gestures. For example, a flushed face may mean embarrassment; a clinched fist may indicate anger; and the rolling of one's eyes may signal disbelief or annoyance.

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The discipline of communication focuses on how people use messages to generate meanings within and across various contexts, cultures, channels, and media. The discipline promotes the effective and ethical practice of human communication (NATCOM, 2015). Communication is the essence of human interaction and learning. The nature of communication is dependent on interaction between two or more individuals and understanding is constructed through that interaction (Isaac online).

The human capacity to communicate has been hypothesized to be causally dependent upon language. Communication can be viewed as a matter of coding and de-coding linguistic information. The speaker codes information and puts his thoughts into words, while the listener de-codes the linguistic information, taking the input from the speaker and translating it back into a thought.

The oxford talking dictionary mentions 'communication' as a synonym of language and The Encyclopaedia Britannica provides the following definition of language: "A system of conventional spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, communicate etc (Anant, 2015).

## II LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Humans communicate with language. Though, language is not the only means of communication. Whenever communication is thought of, we always associate it with language. Language is a vehicle that we use in presenting our ideas, thoughts, feelings, opinions to the world. It is what we exhibit our cultural norms and orientations in and the whole essence of our being is captured in our language (Ewata, 2010).

Language is the ability to acquire and use complex systems of [communication](#), particularly the [human](#) ability to do so, and a language is any specific example of such a system. The scientific study of language is called [linguistics](#). Languages [evolve](#) and diversify over time, and the history of their

evolution can be [reconstructed](#) by [comparing](#) modern languages to determine which traits their ancestral languages must have had in order for the later developmental stages to occur (wikipedia, 2015a).

Increasing [globalization](#) has created a large need for people in the workforce who can communicate in multiple languages. The uses of common languages are in areas such as trade, tourism, international relations, technology, media, and science. Many countries have adopted as a firm education policy to teach at least one foreign language at the primary and secondary school levels. However, some countries have adopted it as a second official language in their governments (wikipedia, 2015b). According to Goa (2010), China has recently been putting enormous importance on foreign language learning, especially [the English language](#).

Languages are not at all uniformly distributed around the world. Just as some places are more diverse than others in terms of plant and animal species, the same goes for the distribution of languages. Out of Ethnologue's 6,909, for instance, only 230 are spoken in Europe, while 2,197 are spoken in Asia. One area of particularly high linguistic diversity is Papua-New Guinea, where there are an estimated 832 languages spoken by a population of around 3.9 million. That makes the average number of speakers around 4,500, possibly the lowest of any area of the world (LSA, 2012). The number of languages currently estimated and catalogued in Nigeria is 521. This number includes 510 living languages, 2 second languages without native speakers and 9 extinct languages. The official language of Nigeria, English, was chosen to facilitate the cultural and linguistic unity of the country post-colonization by the British (Gordon, 2005 & kwintessential, 2014).

According to infoplease (2015), there are roughly 6,500 spoken languages in the world today. However, about 2,000 of those languages have fewer than 1,000 speakers. The most popular language in the world is Mandarin Chinese. There are 1,213,000,000 people in the world that speak that language.

TABLE I  
MOST WIDELY SPOKEN LANGUAGES IN THE WORLD (INFOPLEASE, 2015)

Language <sup>1</sup>	Approx. number of speakers
1. Chinese <sup>2</sup>	1,197,000,000
2. Spanish	414,000,000
3. English	335,000,000
4. Hindi	260,000,000
5. Arabic <sup>3</sup>	237,000,000
6. Portuguese	203,000,000
7. Bengali	193,000,000
8. Russian	167,000,000
9. Japanese	122,000,000
10. Javanese	84,300,000

### III ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The evolution of languages is inevitable due to the globalisation of language and the integration of different cultures and their languages. The need to find a common lingua franca is essential for people and countries in order for them to communicate (Allen, 2015). The same is true for the English language.

The history of the English language really started with the arrival of three Germanic tribes who invaded Britain during the 5th century AD. These tribes, the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes, crossed the North Sea from what today is Denmark and northern Germany. The Angles came from "Englaland" [*sic*] and their language was called "Englisc" - from which the words "England" and "English" are derived (Englishclub, 2014). According to HubPages (2015), English was originally the language of England, but through the historical efforts of the British Empire it has become the primary or secondary language of many former British colonies such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and India.

The English language has grown in popularity and usage, English is becoming a global language and up to a billion people in the world speak some form of it (depending how 'English speaker' is defined but globalisation and the subsequent impact on language is seen as something that is unavoidable (Stanyer, 2015). According to [Raine \(2012\)](#), "the fact that English now belongs to 'everyone or to no one' ([Wardhaugh 1987](#)) would seem to imply that English will maintain its position as the global dominant language throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond".

About one hundred and one (101) countries speak English language and a population of 335,491,748 speakers, L2 users: 1,500,000 in United Kingdom. L2 users worldwide: 505,000,000 (Lewis, Gary and Charles, 2015). According to Statista (2015), the statistic shows the most spoken languages worldwide. 1,500 million people worldwide speak English, of whom only 375 million are native speakers. The world's most widely spoken languages by number of native speakers and as a second language, according to figures from UNESCO (The United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), are: Mandarin Chinese, English, Spanish, Hindi, Arabic, Bengali, Russian, Portuguese, Japanese, German and French (BBC, 2014).

### IV THE ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desire by means of voluntarily produced symbols. The role of English language can be viewed in the light of the role of any language.

Language drives:

- (i) Our value systems,
- (ii) Our cultural orientation.
- (iii) Language is the primary vehicle of communication;
- (iv) Language reflects both the personality of the individual and the culture of his history. In turn, it helps shape both personality and culture;

- (v) Language makes possible the growth and transmission of culture, the continuity of societies, and the effective functioning and control of social group
- (vi) Documentation for both now and the future

#### V THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TODAY

The fact that language is primarily for communication cannot be over emphasized and over the years people have believed that is what separates us from all other animals. There are many reasons to learn English, but because it is one of the most difficult languages to learn it is important to focus on exactly why it is you want to learn English. Here we will see reasons why English is so important (5minuteenglish, 2013). Hubpages (2015), highlights the followings as some importance of English language:

- a. English is the International Common Tongue: English language is essential to communication in our current time. First of all, it is the most common foreign language. This means that two people who come from different countries (for example, a Mexican and a Swede) usually use English as a common language to communicate. . English may not be the most spoken language in the world, but it is the official language in a large number of countries. It is estimated that the number of people in the world that use in English to communicate on a regular basis is 2 billion! (ESOE, 2013).
- b. Education: English is also essential to the field of education. Due to its wide usage many countries have adopted it as a second language and encourage learning in it. Many university programmes are done in English even in non-English speaking countries for international students. We find many syllabi in science and engineering are written in English. Because it is the dominant language in the sciences, most of the research and studies you find in any given scientific field are written in it as well.
- c. WWW and the Media: On the Internet, the majority of websites are written and created in English. Even sites in other languages often give you the option to translate the site. It's the primary language of the press: more newspapers and books are written in English than in any other language, and no matter where in the world you are, you will find some of these books and newspapers available. In fact, because it is so dominant in international communication, you will find more information regarding nearly every subject if you can speak this language. Most of the content produced on the internet (50%) is in English. So knowing English will allow you access to an incredible amount of information which may not be otherwise available! (ESOE, 2013).
- d. Travelling and touring: With good understanding and communication in English, you can travel around the globe. Because it is the international language for foreigners, it's easy to get assistance and help in every part of the world. You can test it by online travel. Any

travel booking site you can find will have English as a booking option.

- e. Economy and commerce: English skills will also help you in any business venture you choose to follow. If you visit some offices, companies, governmental organizations, or even math or engineering companies, you will see the importance of English. Any big company will hire their professional staff after getting to know whether the people they are hiring are good at English or not. English is the dominant business language and it has become almost a necessity for people to speak English if they are to enter a global workforce, research from all over the world shows that cross-border business communication is most often conducted in English. Its importance in the global market place therefore cannot be understated, learning English really can change your life (ESOE, 2013).
- f. Entertainment language: It is referred to as the language of Hollywood. Everyone knows that Hollywood is in the United States, and that the biggest television and music industries in the world are based there. As I mentioned above, TV and movies are a great way to practice your English once you start learning. What's more, knowing English opens up thousands of movies, television shows, and games for your enjoyment. If you want to work in the entertainment industry, English is essential. Many of the world's top films, books and music are published and produced in English. Therefore by learning English you will have access to a great wealth of entertainment and will be able to have a greater cultural understanding (ESOE, 2013).
- g. Racism: speaking English immediately opens up opportunities regardless of your ethnicity, colour, or background (5minuteenglish, 2013).

#### VI CONCLUSION

Today's world and economy is increasingly globalized, and this means that many of us are interacting across cultures in a way we never did before. Despite China being the most populous nation and Chinese the most spoken language on the planet, the United States is still a leader in technical innovation and economic development. This can be traced to the fact that English is used in the United States and in each of these fields (5minuteenglish, 2013).

The USA has been ahead of China basically due to the 'English advantage' and from this paper, it can be concluded that the trend in economy and commerce, entertainment, www, job seeking, education and learning, travelling and tourism etc. worldwide can all be tagged the 'English advantage'.

Those who are still unaware of the importance of English should start learning it, as a time will come when everything will be understood, spoken and written in English. In a lot of ways, that time is already here. Go ahead, watch some media, and get an idea of the language. You won't be disappointed.

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