

ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA

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ABSTRACT

International communications have always relied on a Lingua Franca an intermediary language, to serve as a bridge to mediate understanding between individuals with diverse cultural and language background. With the arrival of social media in 1995 with the appearance of Ebay, has resulted in an amplified need for a Lingua Franca. Since then, social media has grown into a global phenomenon that has billions of individuals partake in various media services available to them. Due to how wide spread social media has become, it allows members of numerous cultures and languages to interact with each other on a daily basis. This leads to the need for a Lingua Franca to be used to overcome various language barriers that would form in communications of such scope. The language used as a Lingua Franca will vary. But more often than not, the language chosen for that role will be the one of the country with the strongest economic presences. In modern time, the United States of America has that possession. As a result, their mother tongue English had been a dominant Lingua Franca even before emergence of social media. Therefore, as social media spread around the globe so did the influence of English as a Lingua Franca and the need to use English. Allowing the presence of English to grow even stronger.

KEYWORDS: *Lingua Franca, Culture, Social Media, Mutual Understanding, International Communication, Determination, Native Language.*

INTRODUCTION

The difficulties created by the differences in cultures, languages and locations, have made global communications problematic. When interacting with members of different cultures for the purpose of business, pleasure, tourism or education would present challenging situations for communications. These interactions would often be problematic due to language barriers, even more so for people in the remotest places, who had even less contact with speakers of a different language. They would have the hardest of times just ensuring basic communications. During these instances, an intermediary language or Lingua Franca as it is known, would often be used for this purpose. The language that would be elected for this purpose would be the one of the country with the strongest and largest economic presence in the modern world. In the present historical context, the country would be the United States of America (Berns, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2011). English, the mother tongue of the U.S.A, has the leading status of languages that serve as a Lingua Franca. What is more, the English language has occupied this role since the end World War 2. Due to the expanded economy and political influence of the U.S.A from that time, maintaining that role even to modern day (Phillipson, 2012). This role is even further enforced due to the advances in modern communication technologies that have led to the possibility of interaction between people from distant countries with different linguistic and cultural background. These advances in

communications have given way to what is referred to as social media. Which included web serves such as: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and online gaming. Where distances are reduced to a click, and people from anywhere in the world can interact with one and another. In addition to this, English as the Lingua Franca that is used for communications in social media, business and in education around the world, in order to secure its command among the highest possible number of people. This ensures that no one is left out of the collective dialogue happening in the global village that the world is becoming (Berns, 2012; Jenkins et al, 2011). This essay will discuss English as a Lingua Franca, giving particular attention to its predominant use on social media and the reasons behind it. At the same time, there will be an attempt to establish the effects that the use of English as Lingua Franca by speakers of other languages has on the English language itself.

DEFINITION OF LINGUA FRANCA

The world is a home of a vast number of countries and even greater amount of languages. This diversity of languages would often result in to what is referred to as a language barrier, a type of blockage due to the incapacity to understand a speaker of another language. That barrier is one of the major hurdles to overcome when it comes to international relations in the fields of politics and economy. In current times, mainly thanks to technological advancements, the encounters between people of different linguistic backgrounds has become more frequent. This has created an even greater necessity to overcome the language barriers associated with such types of exchanges. As the demand to resolve the problems associated with the language barrier grew more evident, there was a need to create an alternative language to favor mutual understanding, such as a pidgin dialect, or the adoption of an already existing language. The resource to the latter solution originated what is known as Lingua Franca: an intermediary language used by speakers of different language backgrounds (Seidlhofer, 2005; Berns, 2012).

The term Lingua Franca was first used during the middle ages, as a way to describe the pidgin that developed from interactions between French and Italian crusaders of that time (Mufwene, 2008). Since then, the definition of Lingua Franca has changed to the umbrella term that it has in modern times. It is important to note however, that a Lingua Franca is not just a pidgin or a third language that is used for the sake of communication, it can also be the language of one of the persons that are having the discourse at the time. For example, if people of Norwegian, German and Chinese origins are having a conversation where they are all speaking German. Even though there in the conversation there is someone who has German as his native language, the Lingua Franca is still German. Even though there is someone in the group whose native language is German, the Lingua Franca is still German. That is because the other two parties in the conversation have different native tongues and are using German as an intermediary language to secure communication (Berns, 2012). The essential aspect to take into consideration is that, when people with different mother tongues interact, they speak with one and another using an intermediary language. That intermediary language that is used as a tool for communication is Lingua Franca. It is through the use of Lingua Franca that the relations between different countries and peoples are maintained. In the modern world, where communications occur in such an instant manner, the understanding of the phenomenon behind Lingua Franca has assumed an even more relevant position. When it comes to the selection of the language used as Lingua Franca, people tend to choose a language that is more widely used, recognized and known. In practice, the country with the strongest economy, tends to have its language used as Lingua Franca (Seidlhofer, 2011). It is somehow natural that other countries will adopt the language of the dominating country to establish communication, create and reinforce relations. In addition to this, there will be the need to teach this language as a part of an official educational program, in order to insure its diffusion and command. In short, that is how the rise and diffusion of Lingua Franca occurs. Currently, the language most widely used as Lingua Franca in matters of business, education and leisure, is English (Berns, 2012; Jenkins, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2005).

English as a Lingua Franca

Nowadays, English is the most widely used Lingua Franca in international communication. The strongest reason behind this prevalence is related to the economic pre-eminence of the United States of America (U.S.A.). There are, however, other factors behind the pervasiveness of English as a Lingua Franca. Among these, is the predominance in terms of dimensions and power that the British Empire occupied from the 16th century until the end of the Second World War. During almost 400 years, English was the mother tongue of a powerful country and a great Empire, being used for the daily communication both inside and outside of their borders (Berns, 2009). Thanks to that, it had ample time and opportunity to establish its foot hold as the dominating Lingua Franca (Jenkins, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2011). The criteria that is used to determine whether conversations carried out in English represent instances of Lingua Franca is the circular model defined by Braj B. Kachru (Seidlhofer, 2011). Kachru defines English speakers into three categories or circles of English users: Inner circle, outer circle and expanding circle. These circles are applied to the country of origin of speakers to determine their place as users of English. Speakers of the inner circle are the ones that are referred to as 'native' speakers, they come from countries that are known to have English as their mother tongue like U.S.A, United Kingdom (U.K) or Canada, among others. The members of the outer circle are from countries that were former British Colonies during the time of the British empire, such as India, Nigeria and the Philippines. The inhabitants of these countries are users of English as a Second Language. Countries outside of these circles fall under the expanding circle. They are countries such as Russia, Japan and Iceland, where English is taught as foreign language (Kachru, 2007).

According to Kachru's definition of native and non-native speakers, it is clear that native speakers are vastly out-numbered by non-native ones. In modern times, where the use of English is on a rise, due to the increasing contact between people of different origins, the language has almost naturally assumed the role of Lingua Franca. However, Kachru's circles don't take into consideration the complex language environments. For instance, when a child that is born to a Canadian family, where both parents are Canadian and speak English, but they are living in Denmark when the child is born. According to the Kachru's circles, the child is a member of the expanding circle even though it should be considered a native speaker of the language because of its family being Canadian. Therefore, the determination of nativity of the child with the concept of L1 and L2 speakers would be better suited for this situation (Jenkins, 2006). Speakers of L1 and L2 are identified by the manner in which they learn to speak a language rather than considering where they are from. Speakers of L1 are referred to as 'native speakers', and they learn speak a language before they learn to read and write it. Speakers of L2 are the ones that learn it at the same time or after they learnt to read and write, they are referred to as 'non-native speakers' (Norton, 2000). With this definition in mind, the number of native English speakers should increase. The reason behind using this newer model, is that the exposure to English is far greater than in previous times. A fair number of children are starting to pick up spoken English much quicker than they did before. Consequently, when they finally start to learn the language in a formal environment, they already have a firm grasp of vocabulary and grammar before they learn to read and write (Jenkins, 2006; Norton,2000).

CONCLUSION

English has been the main Lingua Franca in use the world for almost 400 years. English owes its popularity to being the native tongue of two nations that had the biggest economies. It is used in business, entertainment and leisure, as a preferred means to maintain communicational exchanges. With the arrival of social media, the possibilities of interaction between people of different backgrounds has increased to an unforeseen extent. Despite being the most widespread language in the world, with the advent of social media, English has reached its peak of dissemination thanks

to the use of ELF propitiated by these types of services. The users' desire for a simple and efficient means to convey their thoughts has converted English into the mainstream language for textual and verbal communication on the world-wide web. Additionally, the constant growth and dissemination of the use of social media is likely to contribute exponentially to a growth in the number of speakers of English that originate from different countries and, therefore, have different native languages. The results of the survey that was conducted support this affirmation, as a great majority of them claimed that English is the Lingua Franca of social media. Even the respondents that claimed not to speak the language, could at least read it, demonstrating how effective social media is as an alternative resource to acquire a basic command of English. Many of the participants were also multilingual speakers, that demonstrated an understanding of the need to be able to communicate effectively with people from different linguistic backgrounds. This is the reason why these users recur to the use of English when engaging in conversations with people from different countries with diverse native languages.

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