CHAPTER III

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The rise of English is a remarkable success story. When Julius Caesar invaded Britain about 2000 years ago, English did not exist. Five hundred years later, “Englisc” was spoken by a small group – a few thousands? A millennium later (in 1600) when Shakespeare was giving shape to a classical English, approximately six million people spoke English. By 2010, it is expected that nearly 2000 million people will be able to communicate in English, which includes the native speakers and the global speakers of the language.

Today English is the unchallenged lingua franca of the world. Of course, “English has a few rivals, but no equals” (McCrum 9). It was none less than Rajagopalachari, an Indian citizen of great distinction, who was the first and last Indian Governor General of India, Chief Minister of Madras, and the first recipient of Bharat Ratna, who proclaimed that the English language was a boon to India, from Goddess Saraswathi. Most of the peoples of the former British colonies share the same sentiments; they are indebted to English for what they are today.
In this chapter we shall study the important factors behind the dominance of English. Broadly, these factors are divided into two categories:

i) earlier factors,   ii) recent factors.

**Earlier Factors (before 1950)**

**Colonization**

The political factors behind the dominance of international languages are often forgotten by linguists who are concerned about the analytical study of the language. Various languages dominated at various periods of history. At the dawn of civilization in the ancient Middle East, Egyptian rose to prominence among nations. In the Hellenistic period, Greek was spoken all the way from Athens to Central Asia. Latin once reigned supreme over European territory, North America and a few other parts of the world. In the case of Latin, it survived, even after the fall of Rome, for over a millennium, since it was adopted as the official language of the Church. French also had its days as the lingua franca of Europe and the French colonies. Russian was the lingua franca of Soviet Union and the Eastern Europe. Arabic is one of the fastest growing languages in the world today. In the case of all these languages, it was the political and military power of the people that gave the language a status.

English is no exception either; the naval power of the British and their administrative abilities paved the way for the spread of English. English was associated with the power of the Englishman. E. M. Foster in his book, *A Passage*
to India comments: “India like gods. And Englishmen like posing as gods”. Quoting these words of Forster, Braj Kachru adds meaning to them in his book *The Alchemy of English*:

The English language was part of the pose and the power. Indians, Africans and others realized it and accepted it. Therefore it is not surprising that when a native tried to adopt the same pose, that is, to speak the same language, particularly with the Sahib’s accent, it made the sahib uncomfortable (Kachru, *The Alchemy of English* 5).

The very birth of English is much related to the invasion and colonization of England by Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Scandinavians and Normans. And when English became fully-fledged, it took flight to neighboring nations and colonized them in turn. Thus, English spread to America (from the beginning of 17th century), Canada, the Caribbean islands, Australia and New Zealand, South Africa, India and the other South Asian countries, and many parts of Africa and Asia. By the beginning of the 20th century, practically every part of the globe had been represented by the British Empire, that the popular saying was, ‘the sun never set over the British Empire’. “English is now represented in every continent, and in islands of the three major oceans – Atlantic (St. Helena), Indian (Seychelles) and Pacific, (in many islands such as Fiji and Hawaii)” (Crystal, *English as a Global Language* 29).
The Translation of the Bible into English

Every English historian considers the translation of the Bible into English, a milestone in the development of English. John Wycliffe, John Hus and Thomas Linacre are important names associated with the Bible translation (Wikipedia).

However, modern scholars regard William Tyndale’s contribution to the King James version of the Bible, as particularly significant. He gave the English language a simple, pleasing and elegant style that is followed to this day as a model. ‘Let there be light’, ‘Daily bread’, ‘There were shepherds abiding in their fields’, ‘You cannot serve God and Mammon’, and ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself’ are but a few examples of his unique style. Writers in English, all over the world, are still influenced by the Biblical style.

The Immortal Shakespeare and his contribution to English

William Shakespeare is indisputably the greatest dramatist and poet that England, and probably the world, has ever produced. The voice of the Bard of Avon has been so enchanting and endearing that it just could not be contained within England. It was received with equal enthusiasm and admiration, all over the world. As the strings of a sitar come alive at the touch of the master, the English language in the hands of Shakespeare became a symphony of sounds and meanings, as never heard before. Although English has been developing steadily, right from its inception in England, through the days of Beowulf and Chaucer, it
was Shakespeare who gave the language a ‘fine finish’ and since his days English has remained, as Crystal puts it, “patently the same language” to this day.

Most of the famous works of Shakespeare, especially his plays have been translated into several languages of the world. Some of them have become popular films in several regional languages.

That Shakespeare, the 16th century bard from Stratford-on-Avon, continues to capture the imagination of writers and film-makers is evident from the way his numerous plays are translated, enacted, quoted, adapted and watched world over even now; the latest being Vishal Bharadwaj’s Hindi film Omkara, which is an adaptation of Shakespeare’s famous play, *Othello* (Vijayalakshmi).

**Industrial Revolution**

The age of transition from manual labour to machine aided labour was industrial revolution. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Britain had become the world’s leading industrial and trading nation. Most of the innovations of the industrial revolution were of British origin. The Industrial revolution was visibly seen in every part of Britain, that Britain was rightly called the ‘workshop of the world’. James Watt, George Stephenson, Michael Faraday, Humphrey Davy and Henry Bessemer are but a few names globally known for their inventions.
Coming to the linguistic consequences of the industrial revolution, thousands of new words were added to the English vocabulary, and more important than that, English was spreading fast to other countries, in the process. Many scientists and technicians visited England to learn about the new machines and British experts were invited by several countries to share their knowledge with others.

The industries of Britain depended on other countries for raw materials. Many countries were colonized mainly for the raw materials available there. So those countries were colonized by the British naval power and military power in order to get raw materials. And of course the English language went with this trade. So the industrial revolution was something that encouraged the development of trade, the development of military conquest and the spread of English (Slaght 6).

**Science and Scientific Discoveries / inventions**

Many of the popular scientists of modern science were from Britain or America, like Isaac Newton(British) or Thomas Alva Edison(American), and many other scientists of other countries who did not find financial support or encouragement in their own land were identified and supported by the Royal Society (of London for the Advancement of Science). Marconi, for instance, though born in Italy,
received little encouragement there; and so, from 1896 he carried on with his experiments in London, where he filed his first patent.

The literature related to Science and other research works contributed a lot to the emergence of English as a lingua franca:

When the American research is added to the British, it is possible to suggest that about half of the influential scientific and technological output in the period between 1750 to 1900 would have been written in English (Crystal, *English as a Global language* 81).

Recent Factors (after 1950)

The Emergence of America as the Superpower and the Empowerment of English

During the Second World War, America proved her mettle as a superior nation – in military power, science and technology and in political and economic stability. Hence, after the war she occupied the topmost place in the international arena, unceremoniously pushing behind Britain, her mentor, and all other nations. French was gradually replaced by English - American English. The Soviet Union was the only rival power that could resist some of her moves to some extent. And with the collapse of communism and the break up of USSR, her supremacy was unchallenged and total.
When England retreated from all her colonies, it was left to each of the former colonies to retain or throw away English. However, it is evident that invariably all the former British colonies not only retained English but also developed it further; the influence of America cannot be ignored as a major factor behind the dominance of English in the post colonial period. The following observation by John Slaght throws more light on this:

British political imperialism had sent English around the globe during the 19th century so it was maintained and promoted almost single-handedly through the economic superiority or supremacy of the new American superpower. And the language behind the US dollar was English (Slaght 6).

It is understandable that English is prominently present in India, Sri Lanka or Nigeria, as a British colonial legacy, but when English is being learnt on a large scale in China, Russia, Japan or Poland which were never under the British rule, we can only attribute this to the political and economic power of the US, whose language is English.

**International Organizations and English**

The International Organizations and Associations indirectly promote English as a lingua franca, as English plays a major role in the proceedings of most of these meets. English and French were the only two official languages of the proceedings
of the League of Nations. In 1945, the League was replaced by the United Nations. As of today, the UN has a total membership of 192 nations. The UN has more than 50 sub-organs, and English is one of the official languages within all of these structures. As the number of people able to speak English is on the increase, the use of English in the UN proceedings is also proportionately on the increase.

As English is being learnt in nearly all the countries today, it is likely that English might emerge as the single official working language of UN proceedings, considering the expense involved in maintaining many official languages, and the drawbacks of machine translations.

The Commonwealth, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), European Union (EU), South Asian Association of Regional Co-operation (SAARC), Organisation of African Unity (OAU), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), INTERPOL, the International Air Transport Association (IATA), and several other international organizations depend mainly on English for interaction. “English is the only official language of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.” (Crystal, English as a Global Language 87).

Impact of Computer & Internet on Global English

Generally speaking, Computers, and later, the Internet were designed and developed by and in America. Of course, knowledge of English is no more a must today to learn Computer or to use the internet facilities, as many countries have
already reprogrammed and redesigned Computers according to other languages as well. Similarly, the internet is no more monolingual (with English only), but it is becoming more and more multilingual.

Of course when the internet was being introduced to the world in the 1990s through the ‘World Wide Web’ (WWW), which was mutually accessible through the use of a standard protocol, known as Hyper Text Transfer Protocol (HTTP), the internet language was practically English. As years passed by other languages also entered the internet and the percentage of English as an internet language got reduced gradually. The following chart indicates the percentage of each internet language as per September, 2004 ("Global Internet Statistics").

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Korean 3.9
Italian 3.8
Portuguese 3.1
Dutch 1.7
Other languages 10.1

“Online Language Populations”
Total: 801.4 Million
(Sept.2004)
(The chart above indicates that English is still the dominant language of the internet).

- Eighty percent of the world’s electronically stored information is in English.
- Of the estimated 200 million users of the internet some thirty six percent communicate in English.

(“British Council’s Report on Internet”)

It is true that each country is eager to develop its own internet communication, and represent its language in the internet. However, the following two points should be borne in mind while the status and percentage of internet languages are assessed:
i) The increase in the quantum of information contributed through other languages does not decrease the importance of English as an internet language. For instance, though Chinese contributes nearly 14% of internet information (next to English), those who do not know Chinese will not be able to benefit from this. Hence the global viewers would look for information in the global language (English); even the Chinese elite would prefer to browse the English sites, for their international standard. According to a report, “You Tube.com is the most watched website of its kind. Started less than two years ago in a garage in the U.S., You Tube.com has become the most watched website of its kind on the internet, accounting for 60 per cent of all videos watched online…” (Divyakumar).

ii) In the production of Computers, the hardware may be produced, more in European countries, where English may not enjoy a special status. However, what is more important is that the maximum quantity of software is produced in English, particularly in countries like India, Korea, Taiwan etc. Hence knowledge of English is a must to benefit from the software produced in these countries.

The Media and the English language

The printed matter has been the major means of communication since the invention of the printing press. What is new is that inspite of the arrival of T.V. and internet the sale of newspapers, magazines and books is increasing and not decreasing. According to the data compiled by the Encyclopedia Britannica in 2002, about 57 percent of the world’s newspapers are from countries where the
English language has a special status, and it can be assumed that majority of these are in English (Britannica Book of the year).


In the field of Broadcasting, after the discovery of the radio system by Marconi, English was the first language to be transmitted (from USA), in the year 1906 (Crisell 52). The B.B.C has served the world, for nearly a century now, and even today when people want to confirm news they fine tune the BBC station.

The TV has practically replaced the radio; there are thousands of TV channels, operating from various parts of the world. However the English TV channels (BBC, CNN etc.) are still the popular ones.

Cinema has captivated the young and old alike, more than any other form of entertainment. Here again, the first English films were forerunners to the rest that followed from other parts of the world, in other languages. Even today, the Hollywood film industry dwarfs its counterparts in other parts of the world, in quality. The cinema has proved to be a very powerful means to spread English globally. Charlie Chaplin is known all over the world as a genius in acting.
Benhur, The Ten Commandments, My Fair Lady, The Sound of Music, Star Wars, Titanic and the Lord of the Rings are but a few of the classics without a parallel.

**Western Music** for many people, particularly in the Asian countries, means English music and songs produced in English speaking countries, particularly, in America and UK. According to the *Penguin Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, 1990 edition, of the 557 pop groups in the world 549 worked in English; and of the 1219 solo vocalists, 1156 sang in English. Even the pop groups of non-Anglophone countries sing in English, for reasons best known to them: for instance, the entire international career of ABBA, the Swedish group with over 20 hit records in the 1970s, was in English.

The youth all over the world irrespective of their mother tongue have been fascinated by English music, songs and dance. Jim Reeves, Elvis Presley or Micheal Jackson needs no introduction in any remote corner of the world.

**English in International safety**

International safety is related to ships and sea routes, aircrafts and air traffic, and other safety and security concerns like, Fire Service, Ambulance service and the Police.
English has long been recognized as the international language of the sea. In 1980, a project was set up to produce essential English for International Maritime Use, which is generally referred to as Sea Speak.

Unambiguous communication between organizations which are involved in handling emergency situations related to the fire service, the ambulance service and the police are essential. A lot of research is being carried out to standardize communication among nations, in this area, known as Police Speak (Johnson 18).

The Air Traffic is a matter of international safety, far more important than all the rest. Not only during the take off and landing at the international airports, but also in the mid air, a wrong word or a wrong signal, can be fatal. Multilingualism cannot be experimented with, in the field of air traffic and air craft control. The official use of English as the language of international air craft control was introduced immediately after the Second World War. A standardized version of the terminology and phrases related to air traffic control is known as Air Speak “Over 180 nations have adopted the recommendations of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) about English terminology” (Crystal, *English as a Global Language* 109).

On Feb. 16, 2007, *The New Indian Express*, reported: “India has sent home at least 20 foreign pilots flying for its airlines in the past year as their poor English posed safety concerns” (“Pilots grounded for poor English”).
On the same page, another report was found that Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) also complained that majority of the foreign crew was unsuitable for the job, as they could not communicate in English.

**SMS (Short Message Service) and the Emergence of a New Variety of English**

SMS is becoming so popular that even those who have never tried their hand at construction of English sentences, are tempted to do so now, after the arrival of SMS. SMS is a free for all English - no grammar, no spelling, but all that is required is a little imagination. The following is a sample of an SMS:

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Hi gr8 thkz...dn’t luv sum1 lik a flwr,
Luv thm lik a rivr cos a rivr flws 4eva..
Gud ni8...swt drmz.
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The idea behind SMS is the economic use of letters and words, to save time and space. A lot of creativity is also involved in this. Unfortunately, many students are also trying this method in their answer papers. Many students have even forgotten the right spelling of many words. “SMS lingo on the mobile phone is fine but let it not creep into academics” (Preeti).

The positive side of SMS is that it promotes a new variety of global English, though not conventional. In the case of some, it is also an opportunity to learn new words, and refer to the dictionary. Some are able to make use of the dictionary option available in mobile phones to learn the spelling of less familiar
words. Even those who write the SMS in mother tongue do so using English alphabets.

**Religious factors**

Religion also plays a role in spreading a language. Pilgrimages made to holy lands and places of religious significance, translation of holy books, and learning about various religions – all these involve learning of language / languages. The Islamic scholars and clerics in Indian Kashmir, for example, are learning English in an attempt to propagate Islam’s “true message” and remove misconceptions in the West about their faith:

> English is a global language, and once we speak it, we’ll be able to easily convey Islam’s true message through this language to people of other faiths… We want to clear that perception. Islam is for peace and brotherhood, justice and friendship… (Wani 1-2).

Often, it is the inability to communicate clearly, that leads to misunderstanding and misconceptions. The Imams are confident that if they are able to communicate in English it would be possible to bridge the gap between Islam and the West.

There are also Christian missionaries particularly from Italy and France who are eager to establish themselves in India and other Asian countries, these days. In this way also English is being learnt and spread.
The Emergence of English as a Language of Opportunity

The nature of the available jobs and the advertisements for jobs in today’s Globalized world indicate that the knowledge of English has become a prerequisite for securing a job today. Most of the newspapers and magazines carry articles on the importance of English today. The media in general is conscious of the relation between standard jobs and the knowledge of English. In India, for example, every state government is busy revising and redesigning the curriculum in order to make English language learning more and more effective, and a lot of importance is given to communicative skills, in English language learning. This is true more at the higher education level.

According to a newspaper report, ‘the Anna University has made it mandatory for all engineering colleges in the state to include communication laboratory-based components as part of the syllabus from the third year’. The Vice Chancellor, D. Viswanathan, told reporters that communication skills, and advanced communication skills will be made compulsory to ensure that students do not lose out during recruitment, for want of communication skills. Hence, all colleges under Anna University have been instructed to set up communication labs which will be equipped with aids for teaching English pronunciation, spoken English and communication skills (“Communication labs must for Engineering Colleges”).
Just a couple of days later the VC of Bharathiar University, Coimbatore also appealed to the teachers to create an ‘English-speaking atmosphere’ in the colleges, as that has become a basic necessity in a job-oriented curriculum. He (G. Thiruvasakam) assured the students that he would take all steps possible to modify the curriculum, with special attention paid to the communication skills in English, so that the university courses became more job-oriented (“VC promises job oriented curriculum”).


**Views of the French on the dominance of English**

Rene Delorme is the Superior General of the International Society of Montfort Brothers. As the General, he has the opportunity to visit several countries, and during his visit to India he was asked to give his opinion about the status of English in the world today. His reply was, “Being a French Canadian, I try to converse with people in French first, but I seldom succeed. But I have found that it is easy to manage a conversation in English; wherever I go I find that people are able to communicate in English. English is like a key to social contacts”.

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Rene Delorme also managed to get the response of a few others from France e-mailed to me. The following are some of them:

i) Jean Friant, former Head of the Department of Mathematics, in the University of Angers, France, and a man who has visited several countries, gives the following reasons for the dominance of English (Friant, Annexe – A).

- Importance of the British Empire; a lot of countries using English as a teaching and the communication language
- Influence of the USA
- English is used in the international Organizations like: UN, UNESCO, the Olympic Games, the International Companies...
- Most of the researchers publish their researches in English
- Diffusion of English via songs, video games, internet, and Computer Science in general
- English is very much used in the world of international trade
- The English structure is rather easy
- English is an evolutionary language. It allows the invention of new terms.

ii) Michael Taille', another Frenchman, who has retired as a University Professor of linguistics, attributes the present position of English to the influence of USA. A simplified version of the English, which is very little like British English, will emerge as the global language (Taille, Annexe – B).
iii) Ronald Brisette, another French Canadian, residing in Rome now, is of the view that English is the global language. 'as it is the language used in the commercial trade' (Brisette, Annexe-C)

iv) Jose Paniego Rivero, whose mother tongue is Spanish, and who has been serving as a teacher for several years in Spain, gives the following three reasons for the dominance of English:

- English is a language spoken all over the world.
- Many technical books are written in English.
- The rich countries use this language for economic reasons (Rivero, Annexe-D).

While studying the various factors behind the dominance of English, we realize that English is associated with every aspect of human endeavor and interaction – art, literature, science, and safety that English truly deserves to be the lingua franca of the world.