Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis
No 3501
Anglica Wratislaviensia LI
Wrocław 2013

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Investigating the Phenomenon of ELFE in the Language Education Context

Abstract: The term 'English as a lingua franca' (ELF) has been widely used to refer to communication in English between speakers of different first languages. The management of language education in the European Union system seems to be quite problematical. There are some voices against a dominant role of English and its non-native users are described as victims of a linguistic Frankenstein in the sense that other languages' role is reduced. This negative role of English was already noticed by Mahatma Gandhi who claimed that giving the knowledge of this language to millions is a kind of slavery (Gandhi 2008). It can be said that English as a lingua franca in Europe (ELFE) is a kind of European-English hybrid which, as it evolves, will take its norms of correctness from continental Europe rather than from Great Britain or the United States.

The present article seeks to contribute to the general understanding of the ELF phenomenon in Europe. It consists of the theoretical deliberations about ELFE and the author's proposal for its study. First, it discusses in detail the phenomenon of ELF and its emergence. The systematic study of the nature of ELF is also presented including lexicogrammar features by Seidlhofer and pronunciation features crucial for intelligibility described by Jenkins as the Lingua Franca Core. A special emphasis is put on the status of ELFE in language education. Finally, the author of the article presents a set of ideas for investigating the phenomenon of ELFE in the academic settings on the basis of the ELFA corpus available at University of Helsinki.

1. Emergence of English as a lingua franca

English is the most commonly used language in the world in the field of science, commerce, politics, diplomacy. Most of Internet exchanges are by means of English. This accounts for the status of the language which like Latin and French in the past became a global language referred to as a lingua franca.[1] Seidlhofer (2001) categorises a lingua franca to *vehicular languages*, i.e. languages spoken and utilised

[1] A term *lingua franca* became a universal term referring to a dominant position of a language. Originally, the term was used by speakers of Arabic and Persian to refer to the language of the Crusaders, all of whom were assumed to be Franks. A term *lingua anglesa* would be probably more adequate. However, *lingua franca* implies a temporary dominant position of English.

outside of the country of its origins, as opposed to *vernacular languages* which are used within and among native speakers in the country of origins.[2]

The rising status of the English language gave rise to the several new varieties of English which have been legitimised by an expression *New Englishes*. As Jenkins (2003) notices, the new varieties that have emerged are recognised as independent systems rather than deviant forms of traditional native varieties. She also views these varieties as another component of the emerging English as lingua franca model. One of such a variety is called English as a lingua franca in Europe (ELFE). English as a lingua franca has emerged as a way of referring to communication in English between speakers representing various first languages. David Crystal (2003) in his *English as a Global Language* claims that roughly only one out of four speakers of English in the world is a native speaker of the language. Considering this fact one may say that the majority of ELF communication is among non-native users of English. Native speakers of English may, however, participate in these interactions.

An interesting question that was posed by Byram and Grundy (2003) refers to the ownership of lingua franca. In order to answer the question, they present a number of definitions of ELF which either include a participation of native-speakers in the communication process or restrict its use only to the speakers of various first languages excluding native speakers of English from the ELF community. There is no one unequivocal answer to the question whose EFL really is.

According to Firth (1996), ELF may be treated as a *contact language* between the speakers who neither share a common mother tongue nor a common, national culture, and for whom English is a foreign language used for the purpose of communication. If we view ELF in this way, it may be perceived as a part of the more general phenomenon such as *World Englishes* or *English as an international language* (EIL).[3] It seems there is a little misunderstanding of the two terms, namely EIL and ELF which are frequently confused. The former refers to the use of English within and across Kachru's three circles for both intranational and international communication.[4] The latter, in turn, comprises communication in

[2] Barbara Seidlhofer is Professor of English and Applied Linguistics at the University of Vienna. She is also the Director of the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) project. The main objective of the project is to provide a basis for description of ELF.

[3] The authors use various terms to refer to the use of English spanning Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle contexts. Mair (2003) uses a term "English as a world English." Brutt-Griffler (2002) prefers a cover term "World English." Gnutzmann (1999), in turn, discusses in the book the issues related to "English as a Global Language."

[4] Baj Kachru coined the term "World English." In order to understand the use of English in the world, he conceived the idea of three concentric circles of the language. The inner circle represents the traditional bases of English (380 million of speakers from the United Kingdom, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Anglophone Canada, South Africa, and some of the Carribbean territories). In the outer circle countries English is not used as a mother tongue, however it plays a significant role for historical reasons and functions as an official language (150–300 million of speakers from India, Nigeria, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia, Tanzania, Kenya,

English only within the expanding circle among the speakers representing different first language backgrounds and across their cultural boundaries. In literature one may also come across another term used for English, namely English as a medium of intercultural communication (Meierkord 1996).

It is an undeniable fact that the English language functions nowadays as a global lingua franca, which is welcomed by some people and disapproved by others (see section 3 for a discussion of ELF drawbacks). What has been so far disputable is the impact of native speakers on the use of ELF. As it has been pointed out above, native speakers of English (inner circle users) do not participate in the vast majority of verbal exchanges in English. Yet, they exert strong proprietary rights over English in terms of the norms. Undoubtedly, these norms are more related to pragmatic patterns than grammar and pronunciation, in which the ELF speakers frequently use deviant forms. Interestingly enough, what may be also observed nowadays is a transmission of forms from non-native users of English (expanding circle speakers) into the language of native speakers (inner circle users). An example of such a shift is a universal question tag *isn't it* which is used for all the persons by many British English speakers.

ELF displays continental variability which means that its varieties are used in Europe or Asia. ELFE — the European variety of ELF sometimes labelled as *Euro English* — possesses the linguistic features which may be traced in the native languages of its European users (for a detailed discussion see section 2).

2. Systematic study of the nature of English as a lingua franca in Europe

There have been some calls for the systematic study of ELFE at all its levels to make the new concept acceptable among the linguists alongside English used as a native language.

Most of the data on how ELFE is actually used comes from the two basic sources: Jenkins's studies of interactions among non-native users of English focused on pronunciation and Seidlhofer's studies having an insight into ELFE's lexicogrammar. Meierkord (1996) conducted also the research at the level of pragmatics, however the studied corpus was not as extensive as in the previous two studies.

The pioneering work by Jenkins (2000) shows that there are some sounds often regarded as "particularly English" and difficult to pronounce such as the voiced and voiceless "th" sound or the dark "l" sound which are not necessary

non-anglophone South Africa and Canada). The expanding circle includes countries where English does not play a historical or governmental role, nevertheless it is widely used as a foreign language or lingua franca (100 million to one billion; much of the rest of the world's population which is difficult to estimate).

for international intelligibility. Jenkins introduced the term of the Lingua Franca Core which refers to these ELFE's features which were found to be crucial for intelligible communication among the speakers of various first languages. Apart from the two sounds mentioned above, all other consonants are obligatory in ELFE. Likewise vowel length contrasts (e.g. the difference in the length between the vowels in the words "leave" and "live") and nuclear (tonic) stress indicated by capital letters also constitute the features of ELFE. Other features are designated non-core, yet many foreign language teachers spend a great deal of time over practising the features such as word stress, the exact quality of vowel sounds, a typical rhythm of RP English intonation, or weak and strong forms. While the space of the article prevents making predictions to development of all core and non-core ELFE features mentioned by Jenkins, only one illustrative example is discussed below.

Since almost all continental Europeans have problems with the "th" sound (with the exception for the Greek and Spanish speakers), one may anticipate that finally the sound will be substituted with one of its local variations, i.e. either "s," "z," "f," "t," or "d." The Polish speakers, for example, frequently substitute voiceless "th" with "f" and "s," while voiced "th" with the dental "v" sound. The French and German speakers have a tendency to opt for "s" and "z" sounds, while Italians and Scandinavian English speakers prefer "t" and "d" sounds. It may be also predicted that there will be many regional varieties of ELFE and e.g. in the Eastern Europe "f" and "v" will be more acceptable than other forms.

Seidlhofer's work in the field of lexicogrammar also aimed at establishing some basic ELFE features. The researcher compiled a corpus of interactions in English from 1250 fluent speakers representing 50 various first languages.[5] The interactions were recorded in various settings and concerned various topics such as leisure, profession or education. They also covered a range of various speech events in terms of function (exchanging information, enacting social relationships).[6]

The corpus is called Vienna-Oxford ELF Corpus since it is supported by Oxford University Press and housed at Vienna University.[7] The interactional analysis reveals some characteristic features of ELFE. Among them there are: 1) dropping present tense "s" in the third person, 2) non-standard use of definite article, 3) using

[5] Initially the VOICE project only focused on establishing the ELF features in Europe, however later on the speakers from non-European countries were also recorded.

[6] All the interactions were classified into the following speech event types: interviews, press conferences, service encounters, seminar discussions, working group discussions, workshop discussions, meetings, panels, question-answer sessions, and conversations.

[7] There is a contribution of many team members to the VOICE project, among them transcription team dealing with the compilation of a corpus of a spoken language. Access to VOICE data is free of charge. More information is available online at http://www.univie.ac.at/voice/page/team_members#researchers.

just the verb stem instead of gerund, and 4) using "isn't it?" as a universal tag (Seidlhofer 2001; Dorn 2011).

All this gathered data is the evidence for ELFE being not just a "learner language" but a "user language" generated by its speakers and modified according to their needs. The forms and the structures used by ELFE users may be perceived as errors by native speakers of English, yet the most important function of the language, namely its communicative function, is fulfilled. ELFE corpus may be studied not only from a linguistic perspective but also from a psychological one. In the unpublished MA thesis by Bass (2010) the author posed a question whether national languages of ELFE speakers or their identities are in any ways endangered. In her research Bass made use of VOICE project data to establish the factors contributing to change in ELFE users' identity. The data encompassed discussions on a variety of subjects rang-ing from current situation of the European universities, cultural difference within the EU, to informal conversations about the European cuisine differences. The research findings show that speakers' identity seems to be affected severely by the use of ELF. Some participants revealed in their interactions a strong bond with their L1 countries (ELF users from the former Soviet Union countries that gained fairly recently their independence). Bass (2010: 21) on the basis of her observations put forward a claim that in the majority of ELFE speakers participating in her research, no threat of their identity was recognized. These subjects functioned successfully using English as a means of communication which was an intrinsic part of their lives.

3. English as a lingua frankensteinia

It may be presumed that the ELF users may cope better in communication situations with other non-native speakers of English than the users imitating native speakers. Some ELF forms and structures have been borrowed by inner circle English users. The examples may be a universal question tag "isn't it?" or various coinages such as "sheeple" (people who follow popular trends uncritically) or "irritainment" (entertainment you find irritating).

The arguments mentioned above show that ELF may be perceived positively by both ELF users and native speakers of English. However, there are also some drawbacks of this phenomenon. There are some voices from the linguists that ELF is a threat to both the national languages of the ELF speakers and their national identity. Some researchers and scholars in the field of linguistics and sociolinguistics go even further, claiming that linguistic imperialism of English diminishes a role of existing languages not only in Europe but in the whole world. Such a point of view is presented by Philipson (1992), probably the greatest opponent of linguistic imperialism of English, who asserts that his professional life started with training to be an English teacher, which he considered a form of linguistic imperialism.

English is not merely a lingua franca and a neutral instrument used for international, inter-lingual communication. Hence, in literature one may come across various terms reflecting a negative impact of ELF in many spheres of life. English as a *lingua frankensteinia* is captured by such terms as Calvet's (1974) glottophagie, linguistic cannibalism to refer to the way dominant languages absorb small ones. Swales (1996) in turn in his article in *World Englishes* uses a term English as a *lingua tyrannosaura* which implies that some languages are on the way to extinction because of a shift into English.

The asymmetry between English and other languages may be seen in the domain of economy, arts, culture, or education. In the consumerist Cola-colonised Europe English has become the language of many companies replacing partially German, French or Swedish. The majority of films on TV and in cinemas are Hollywood productions. English is also the most widely learned foreign language at school, while the languages such as Russian, French or German are nowadays in retreat. Internalisation and americanisation lead to more degrees and university courses offered in English, especially at business studies.[8] In line with the acts of the Polish Ministry of Higher Education, the academics are encouraged to publish articles and books in English rather than in Polish. Furthermore, English serves as a dominant language of international conferences, and increasingly as a medium for content learning in secondary and higher education.

In view of all the facts presented above it is not startling that the issue of English as a lingua franca arouses such a heated discussion among linguists and sociolinguists. To provide a clear picture of a situation one also needs to get to know other views which do not recognise any potential threat of ELF. Hülmbauer (2007) or House (2003) investigating the phenomenon of ELF came to conclusion that any fears are groundless. House claims that ELF is used mainly because of its functional role. Moreover, she asserts that ELF cannot be used for identity marking since it is not a national language. ELF is perceived in this respect as a language rooted in English but detached from British or American culture and tradition. Finally, the non-native speakers of English outnumber the native speakers of this language which is a sufficient argument for the lack of any linguistic imperialism. These are ELF users who take advantage of the knowledge of English, which functions simultaneously with their mother tongues. Hause even makes a point that ELF strengthens the bond between speakers and their cultures and native languages. ELF users are aware of their national identity and use even other languages repertoires to enhance opportunities for successful communication in international encounters. Whether advantages of ELF outweigh its disadvantages is open to discussions.

[8] University of Helsinki is an exception since doctoral theses have been written here in Finnish, Swedish, English, German, and French (Haarman and Holman 2001).

4. Departure from teaching English in Europe as a foreign language

Since language educational policies have been the responsibility of the Council of Europe, it is worth looking at approaches this institution takes to the problem of ELF. The educational policy of the European Union reflected in the documents of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe sets three main objectives: pragmatic, intercultural and socio-political (see Beacco and Byram 2002 for details). A problem arises when one confronts the pragmatic objective with the two other objectives. While the pragmatic objective calls for uniformity of English as a lingua franca, the other two may be only achieved through the existence of various languages in multicultural contexts. *Linguistic diversity* is a concept which frequently appears in the Council of Europe documents. Its promotion is executed by showing the interest in less widely spoken languages and their protection. However, the Council of Europe does not contribute to communication across borders. The pragmatic objective is achieved in some member states by the introduction of a compulsory world language to the school curricula.[9]

In Poland just like in Hungary or Bulgaria the curricula and official documents do not specify which languages, schools may offer.[10] Intercultural and socio-political objectives can be achieved when learners have at least two foreign languages, and they are offered a variety of languages, especially these that are not widely used.

In this context the place of ELF needs to be discussed. For a long time English has been taught as a foreign language rather than an international language or lingua franca. As Gnutzmann (1999: 9) notices, in the past the main aims of foreign language teaching were to prepare learners 1) to communicate with native speakers of English, 2) to function in various English speaking countries, 3) to function within the sociocultural norms of native speakers of English, and finally 4) to develop near-native like competence. The point is that the concepts of "the native speaker" and "the near-native competence" are not valid in the modern foreign language education. Nowadays learners do not have to communicate with native speakers of English at all. Being involved in the network of contacts in Europe the speakers of two different native languages use English as a third language for communication. It is all related to increased mobility in the European Union which was not the case two or three decades ago. Furthermore, as Gnutzmann (1999: 9)

[9] According to Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe (2008), the European Union countries which decided for this solution are the following: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Italy, Cyprus, Malta, Luxembourg, Latvia and Greece.

[10] Though English as a foreign language is not imposed in the Polish education, its choice seems to be obvious for many children's parents. The author's view is that more alternatives should be offered to counterbalance the dominance of English in Poland.

notices, even if communication takes place between native and non-native speakers it is on a neutral territory and topics tend to be of a non-native nature. What also needs to be taken into consideration is the fact that nowadays English is used in a variety of contexts, not necessarily in the English speaking countries. Therefore, at present all learners do not have to follow routine foreign language education but rather select on their own the learning objective. For example, a person who intends to study in English in any European country may opt for language education in which non-standard English use is stressed. The idea of preparing learners to function within the socio-cultural norms of native speakers of English needs to be refuted. The belief in a homogenous, monolithic culture of native speakers is not valid nowadays. Learners do not have to necessarily abandon their national identities. Some research findings even show that a learner may have contradictory identities within the self, different identities at different points in time, or multiple and imposed identities (Jessner 2006, 2008). Finally, the aim of achieving near-native like competence does not seem to be applicable in modern education. If one of the interlocutors displays a near-native like proficiency his language may be an obstacle to successful communication. All the arguments presented above show that there is a gradual departure from teaching English as a foreign language to teaching English more as an international language or lingua franca. However, ELF has not been set as a target in language education for a number of reasons specified in the subsequent subchapter.

5. Implications for teaching English as a lingua franca

It is an undeniable fact that ELF is omnipresent in daily life of millions of Europeans. Since ELF is such a widespread phenomenon there is a need to accept this variety of English by language teachers, educators and education institutions. As it has been mentioned above, ELF should be viewed as the detached form of English in the sense that it stems from this language, yet it has many features of various first languages of ELF speakers. Furthermore, no cultural or national aspects are ascribed to ELF. ELF speakers rather possess intercultural competence than the specific knowledge on the culture of English speaking countries.

Therefore, the European language policy needs to accept the variety of ELF used by the Europeans. What should be noticed is the fact that English functioning as a foreign language in the European classrooms only promotes bilingualism. The L2 learners learn the language and cultural skills of the native speakers of this language. The introduction of ELFE in the classrooms, in turn, may result in multilingualism and intercultural pragmatic skills which are acquired by ELFE speakers. The L2 learners being exposed to a variety of the non-standard English forms used by the non-native speakers of English develop simultaneously multilingual and multicultural awareness.

However, a question arises to what extent ELF should be accepted in language education. A discussion about ELF acceptance revolves around the concept of *standard form*.

In the language education in Europe there is a tradition to teach the British variety of English with the Received Pronunciation model. Though reading texts and recordings are based mainly on the British English, learners are also acquainted with other varieties of English included in published materials. In many recordings one may hear a conversation between native speakers of English from the UK, the USA or Australia. However, learners are not often exposed to varieties of English generated by non-native users of the language. Some samples of ELF are presented to learners only at higher levels of language education. A closer look at language education reveals that in the texts Anglo-American contexts still prevail, especially in the course books targeted at primary school and junior high school learners. Despite a trend for implementing intercultural communicative approach learners still learn about the British and American culture without understanding intercultural interactions which definitely take place among the ELF speakers.

A crucial question that arises here is whether ELF should deserve any attention on the part of foreign language teachers. It seems that "imperfect" English such as ELF is not considered a legitimate variety of English. It is generally acknowledged that language education needs some norms for evaluation of students' proficiency or assessment of ultimate language attainment at final school exams. The norms based on traditional English grammar guarantee consistency in error correction across various teaching contexts. ELF, in turn, is a variety of English whose norms may be treated as transitional. The abovementioned statements reflect the viewpoint of the author of this article. However, there are some radical voices, such as this represented by Jenkins (2003), which hold that errors are no obstacle to communicative success. Dropping the third person present tense *-s*, confusing relative pronouns *who* and *which*, omitting definite and indefinite articles — all being the features of ELFE — should receive less attention or should be even ignored. One can imagine how difficult it would be for a teacher to assess learners' performance full of errors emerging as systematic and frequent in EFL communication but for the current unified norms imposed by standard English grammar. Jenkins also advocates being more lenient in pronunciation teaching by focusing only on core items crucial for intelligibility such as the maintenance of the contrast between short and long vowels, consonant inventory or aspiration.

The debate on language standards and assessment of proficiency in an FL classroom is still being continued. Traditionalists will stick to the strong standard language ideology stressing the role of modelling of L2 learner's performance only by the use of native speakers' norms. These teachers who support Jenkins's viewpoint will rather respond positively to the complex emergent phenomenon of ELF introducing its forms in a classroom. It seems to the present author that there is no need to radically re-think or re-formulate our present assumptions about teaching

English and the application of an eclectic approach is most desirable. In line with this approach standard and non-standard ELF forms may appear in a classroom. L2 teachers should not, however, focus more on ELF forms, which are not subjected to any formal assessment at exams, but rather enhance learners' awareness of the function English has in various non-native communication contexts. It may be achieved by an introduction of classroom or international educational projects, in which students analyse and compare different aspects of discourse and culture of other European non-native speakers of English.

What needs to be done first, however, is to enhance the awareness of language teachers, who stick to the British English variety and do not inform students about other varieties of English. Collaboration among language teachers not only in the Expanding Circle but also across all three circles seems advisable. There is also a role of publishers who may contribute to a great extent to ELF promotion by providing in their books and materials ELF perspectives.

Finally, a question that needs to be answered is whether the introduction of ELF is important for learners at all ages and all levels of proficiency. As it has been previously mentioned in this subchapter, ELF is gradually introduced at higher levels of proficiency. Definitely these are adolescent and adult learners who can benefit from ELF introduction since they have more opportunities of intercultural and interlingual interactions. However, there are also other factors which should be considered. One of them is a learner's learning aim. If a target is a student, who wants to continue to use English in the USA, teaching American English would seem more advisable. If a student's objective is to be able to communicate across cultures then we should teach him/her many accents and varieties of English through exposure. Social and psychological factors should be also taken into consideration. Jenkins (2003) asserts that teachers should find out whether learners actually want to assume native speaker's identity, or they prefer to express their identity through a lingua franca or merely through their native language.

6. Proposal for a study of ELF in academic settings

There is a great need to investigate the phenomenon described as ELFA — English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings since there is surprisingly little empirical data on English used internationally. Having an insight into this kind of data may shed light on some new features of ELF used exclusively by academics and students. University of Helsinki contributes towards a better understanding of ELFA phenomenon implementing two main projects whose main director is Anna Mauranen from Department of Modern Languages. The research team at this university have already completed the compilation of a one-million corpus of spoken academic ELF (The ELFA Corpus Project).[11] There is also the project "Studying in

[11] The ELFA text corpus is available for research at http://www.helsinki.fi/englanti/elfa/.

English as a lingua franca" (SELF) which focuses more on interactive and adaptive processes employed by the speakers. The project authors claim that SELF complements the ELFA corpus taking a more close-up view of ELF used by its speakers in university contexts. In 2010 the ELF project group joined Global English (GlobE) consortium and since that time they have been collaborating within the network.[12]

Studying ELFA is this field of research which may be found very appealing for researchers. "Academia is in many ways a typical ELF domain: it is international, mobile and its dependence on English has skyrocketed in the last few decades" (Mauranen 2010: 7). As she notices, research into academic English was originally orientated to applications for teaching. For a long time the research in the field of English for specific purposes (EAP) was focused on the written mode, mainly because reading and writing skills were perceived as most important. It was only in the late 90s when spoken EAP corpora replaced written ones.

The Helsinki ELFA spoken corpus just like the Vienna ELF corpus may be used by the MA and doctoral students for a number of various projects being descriptive or applicational in nature. Below I have outlined just a few research ideas with the ELFA corpus data which require more scholars' attention:

1) sociological/ psychological research: How do ELFA speakers negotiate their identities? Is negotiation of identities a socially meaningful practice? Does communication context influence a shift in ELFA speakers' identities?

2) theoretical research on ELFA as a contact language: Is there any evidence of universally unmarked features, hypothesised universals of communication, features like simplifications? Is there any evidence of self-regulative processes?

3) descriptive research on ELFA which helps understand how English changes: Is there any difference between ELF in authentic contexts as opposed to academic settings? What are the core features of ELFA that deviate from standard English?

4) applied research on ELFA: What ELFA aspects/features should be practiced? How can we assess learner performance for international use?

7. Final thoughts

Considering all deliberations about English as a lingua franca, it is tempting to evaluate its role. Though for some ELF is lingua frankensteinia, it seems to me that its advantages outweigh drawbacks. As to language education, it seems that EFL should not be defined as a target but awareness of EFL features should be enhanced. The question that occupies the minds of linguists, educators and the speakers of English is "What is the future of ELF?" A historian and linguist Nicholas Ostler (2010) persuasively argues that English as the world's lingua franca the most widely spoken in the

[12] More information about GlobE may be found at http://www.uef.fi/globe.

history will not be replaced by any other language in a non-distant future. Examining the history of various civilisations and lingua francas he discovered that there are three emerging trends which enable to anticipate a decline in ELF. Since the elites are the primary users of ELF, any movements in the world towards equality in society will downgrade their status and simultaneously ELF will slowly but surely retreat. Another predictor of the fall of ELF may be the increasing wealth of China, Rusia, India and Brazil, which will change international preference for the use of English. Finally, new technologies will allow translation among the major languages, which will strengthen the status of mother tongue and diminish the necessity for any lingua franca. However, according to Ostler, all the scenarios will require much time.

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