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CAMPUS DE EXCELENCIA INTERNACIONAL



FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA
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GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES
Trabajo de Fin de Grado

The Spread of English as a Lingua Franca: Background and Main Reasons.

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Salamanca, 2021



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This thesis is submitted for the degree of English Studies

Date 18th June, 2021

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Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "E. Montes", with a horizontal line underneath.

Abstract

The present research shows how the English language has become the new lingua franca. To this effect, it is going to be exposed how its spread arose, from the British Empire to the end of the Second World War and the consequent consolidation of the United States as a superpower, and finally, to its hegemonic role of today. In addition, the causes and reasons that influenced its expansion are going to be analysed as well as how they gradually gave prestige to English language. Finally, it is going to be exposed how ELF should be put into practice and the importance of culture and pragmatics in its use.

Key words: English as a lingua franca (ELF), international communication, spread, English globalisation, English language teaching.

Resumen

El presente estudio muestra como la lengua inglesa se ha convertido en la nueva lengua franca. Para ello, se va a exponer cómo surgió su expansión, desde el Imperio Británico hasta el final de la Segunda Guerra Mundial y la consecuente consolidación de los Estados Unidos como superpotencia, y finalmente, hasta su hegemónico pape de hoy en día. Además, las causas y razones que influenciaron su expansión se van a analizar al igual que cómo gradualmente dieron prestigio a la lengua inglesa. Por último, se va a exponer como debería ponerse en práctica el inglés como lengua franca, y la importancia de la cultura y la pragmática en su uso.

Palabras clave: Inglés como lengua franca, comunicación internacional, expansión, globalización del inglés, enseñanza del inglés.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, in a world where about seven thousand languages coexist, we must highlight the supremacy of English over other languages in terms of international communication. This supremacy has meant that many countries around the world have adopted English as a lingua franca (ELF) in their communities even though most of them are neither Anglo-phone nor Anglo-cultural. Furthermore, the fact that English spread so easily and rapidly has not been solely due to linguistic purposes, but has been deeply influenced by economic, cultural, political, scientific and academic reasons. Therefore, the aim of this research is, on the one hand, to analyse what role these five fields have played in the international spread of English and the background that has managed to position it as a means of communication par excellence. And, on the other hand, it is going to be analysed the advantages of countries that adopt ELF, such as having access to the international market guided by English, or even having a wider range of employment opportunities. In addition, it will be analysed how ELF should be used and learned so as to achieve a successful understanding.

1.1.DEFINITION AND HISTORY OF ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA

When it comes to define ELF, we must be aware that it is a concept that is still being defined. In fact, a large number of scholars have tried to establish a concrete meaning for this quite abstract concept. For instance, Alan Firth, a Danish professor at Aarhus University, defined lingua franca as *“a ‘contact language’ between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication.”* (240). Thus, taking this definition as a point of reference, we can understand ELF as a language commonly used by different groups of countries, that have different languages and cultures among them, in order to achieve an optimal and comprehensible communication. As a consequence, we can observe how English is currently playing the role that occupied Latin until the 14th century in Europe. In this sense and according to Ian Mackenzie *“ELF is prominent in international politics and*

diplomacy, international law, business, the media, and in tertiary education and scientific research'' (2). Therefore, ELF can be seen as the communicative bond between different countries around the globe.

Regarding its history and growth, it is necessary to deny the idea that the spread of ELF was the result of British Imperialism. Naturally, it had a great bearing on its spread, but we must highlight the role that the United States played. According to Braj Kachru, an Indian professor and linguist, *''The linguistic imperialism of English was primarily motivated by the ambition to acquire control of strategic land and resources on the part of Britain, and later, by the United States.''* (908). However, as Carol Myers-Scotton defended, *''After World War II, the American role in that war spread the prestige of all things American. The United States was also a mass producer of cultural inventions in English (e.g. films, pop music) although the UK can claim the Beatles.''* (407)

David Crystal concisely illustrated how English gradually gained international prestige:

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Britain had become the world's leading industrial and trading country. By the end of the century, the population of the USA (then approaching 100 million) was larger than that of any of the countries of western Europe, and its economy was the most productive and the fastest growing in the world. British political imperialism had sent English around the globe, during the nineteenth century, so that it was a language 'on which the sun never sets'. During the twentieth century, this world presence was maintained and promoted almost single-handedly through the economic supremacy of the new American superpower. Economics replaced politics as the chief driving force. And the language behind the US dollar was English. (10)

Therefore, the expansion of English, in linguistic terms, is highly linked to certain economic, culture, scientific and technological, political and academic reasons.

2. ELF IN ECONOMY

With regard to what Myers-Scotton illustrated, at the end of the Second World War, the United States rose as a world-class superpower, expanding commercially through Europe, which after the war had been devastated, while spreading its

ideology of capitalism. This American supremacy over the economy began to force international companies to learn English in order to have more opportunities within a market that promised great stability and economic security. This situation caused the global business headquarters to be located predominantly in financial centres in the United States, as in Wall Street, or in the United Kingdom, with the financial district of City located in London. In addition, this international spread of English which, as we have seen, has economic dyes, continues to outstrip the English-speaking native countries economically. Andy Kirkpatrick talked about these economic benefits that English-speaking native countries get from ELF. He stated that:

As implied above, there is no doubt that the choice of a native speaker model advantages the American and British English language teaching industries. They can sell materials, provide training and courses, place native speaker teachers and develop international examination and testing systems. All this is financially beneficial for the parties concerned. (185)

Hence, it is clear that the spread of ELF, regardless of its causes, has economically benefited countries that have English language as their mother tongue. For instance, English native speakers or ELF speakers would have more job opportunities than non-English speakers. Therefore, we can not only see how ELF offers economic advantages to its users, but also how the economy (being predominantly guided by English) has strengthened the position of English as a lingua franca or vehicular language. However, ELF has not only reached its current position by economic influence, but we must also highlight the role of great importance that both British and American cultures have played.

3. ELF IN CULTURE

Language and culture have always had a close connection given that culture is as influenced by language as language is inevitably born and modified by culture. Prue Holmes and Fred Dervin defended this relationship stating that *“LFEs, like other lingua franca, are not cultural vacuums, as in all contexts of language uses, language and culture are fundamentally connected”* (221). Therefore, this relationship occurs between ELF and culture as well. As it has been said, it should

be noted that British culture and especially American culture played a key role in the spread and establishment of ELF. Will Baker illustrated this idea stating that:

Risager suggests that this individual perspective may have led to confusion over the relationship between specific languages and cultures and consequent claims that languages such as English are in some way inevitably tied to British or U.S. culture as in strong forms of linguistic relativity. (571)

Right after the Second World War, which caused the feeling of cultural identity to decrease dramatically, there was an immense televisual, musical (specially with the rise of rock and jazz) and cinematographic production by the United States. This mass production greatly favoured the world to be constantly in contact with the English language on a daily basis. Therefore, American culture invaded theatres, homes, fashion, cinemas..., that is to say, it invaded the life of all cultures all over the world. Movements such as the hippie or punk, the spread of capitalism, or the appearance of Hollywood (which are events intrinsically linked to English language) gradually awarded prestige to English and, what is more, they consolidated the position of ELF. At this point, English influence had spread throughout the world just as Robert Phillipson defended:

However, the use of English is increasing throughout Europe: as the dominant corporate language; 70%+ of films on TV and in cinemas in Europe are Hollywood products; youth is consumerist, Coca-colonised, and more familiar with U.S. products and norms than others; (Frankensteinia, 336).

4. ELF IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

As has been previously said, the prestige of ELF was accentuated due to economy and culture, but we must also underline the role of science in the establishment of ELF. After the Industrial Revolution, Great Britain and the United States carried out scientific and technological advances of a crucial importance, which of course continued to increase not only the status of ELF, but also the need for English as a means of communication. Myers-Scotton expressed how science influenced ELF by stating *“A large part of this prestige was due to*

its association with scientific advances and technological inventions by Britain and the United States.'' (406,407).

With regard to inventions, two of the most important in science and technology were: the American idea of work named as mass production, and the invention of the Internet, which was also invented in the United States. On the one hand, the mode of mass production was spread quickly throughout the world. Thus, American and British influence not only reached the homes and lives of the inhabitants of the world, but it was also implemented in their work method. On the other hand, without a doubt, the technological advance that played a pivotal role for English language to be spread was the invention of the Internet. However, before we delve deeper into details, it must be clear that we are not referring to the entire history of the Internet or its current position, but to how it influenced and gave ELF prestige from its beginning of expansion, and in reference to international communication between countries or organizations of different languages. From its invention in 1969 to the mid-90s, Internet users did choose to use English as a means of communication in international contexts. Nevertheless, since the arrival of the new millennium, the Internet has undergone an enormous change both in function and in its number of users, displacing English as the lingua franca. David Marsh said that *''The impact of computerisation alone is constantly making the world a smaller place- a place in which the benefits of being able to speak different languages are becoming more and more obvious.''* (9). Marsh makes reference to 'speak different languages'. Obviously, an Internet user, in his day-to-day, was very likely to use it in his native language, be it English or Spanish, French, Italian, etc. However, when it came to communication between countries via Internet, users tended to choose English as a means of communication:

A widely quoted statistic is that three-quarters of the world's mail is in English. It is certainly possible to arrive at this figure if we make guesses about the number of people in different countries who are involved in organizations which use English as an official language, or which rely on English for correspondence. (Crystal, 114-115)

As it has been said before, Crystal does not refer to the current position of English on the Internet, but to the mid-nineties. However, what is intended to be demonstrated is the importance that ELF had during the expansion of the Internet.

Therefore, we can see how by being the world a smaller place due to the Internet role, the need for a common language arose, a need that was met by English. That is to say, the Internet facilitated and produced a greater rapprochement between countries that are each one in one part of the world. In order to carry out this approach, a common and international language was needed as a tool to be able to establish communication. It was here, in this gap, where English was set up with great force.

Due to today's technological advances and thanks to English, we can communicate with any place in the world in a matter of seconds where the Internet stands out. In short, the British culture, and specially the American culture, have highly influenced the spread and consolidation of ELF whether through the economy, cultural movements or through technological advances. Nevertheless, we have to bear in mind other influencing factors such as politics or the academic field.

5. ELF IN POLITICS, GLOBAL COMMUNICATION AND INTERNATIONAL SPORT ORGANIZATIONS.

As it has been said, it has to be mentioned the role of politics in the establishment of ELF. There are many political and diplomatic elements that have positioned English as a universal language. For instance, by law and universal treaties, English is the official language of air and maritime communications, but it is also the official language of the United Nations, the European Union and even of the international sport organizations as can be the case of the International Olympic Committee. Myers-Scotton illustrated how thanks to its prestige, English is used as a lingua franca in international politics stating *''National languages do occupy a place in a variety of contexts at the EU, but in second place after English''* (410).

This situation did not worsen the status of English language. On the contrary, English is becoming more important, what has caused that there are more and more speakers of English as a second language over the years. Therefore, English is nowadays in a moment of great development and expansion which does not

mean that all other languages will disappear, a fact that Myers-Scotton defended *“No matter what happens, members will continue to speak their own language, but, as De Swaan implies, every time a new state joined the EU, it increased the extent to which English is more widely used over other choices”* (410). Therefore, the seemingly incessant spread of English and its ever-growing number of users do not endanger any other language.

6. ELF IN ACADEMIA AND LITERATURE

Moreover, the function of the English in academia, either in the field of research or teaching, in relation to ELF has to be remarked. Just as in the areas discussed above (economy, culture, science, technology and politics), in the academic domain, English is the predominant language. Almost one quarter of the world’s books are published and the vast majority of academic articles, over 96%, are written in English, so this language is not only a crucial tool for academic development, but a necessity.

Moreover, English has become an indispensable requirement for teaching. Robert Phillipson, referring to scholars, stated:

They are also increasingly required to teach through the medium of English in higher education, since universities seek to recruit more foreign students. This development is a key feature of the so-called *internalisation of higher education*, and is obliging continental universities to address how best to function multilingually, which generally means in the national language and English. (125)

In addition, it has also to be mentioned the role of ELF in literary art. Writers from different nationalities adopted ELF to make their works more accessible to an audience that is increasingly bilingual. Andy Kirkpatrick defended this idea taking ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Literature as an example *“There is an abundance of ASEAN and Asian Literature written in English. In ASEAN itself, there are numerous writers who have produced a wide range of literature in English”* (28). Therefore, it can be seen how writers rely on ELF as a means for communicating their ideas.

In summary, with so much academic and literary works written in English, the need to learn it increases at the same level as its teaching. This necessity of learning English was illustrated by Myers-Scotton:

The result is that English is becoming part of school curricula all over because nation states and private business believe that in order to retain their influence in international communication, their citizens and representatives have to be able to use English (406).

As a consequence, ELF's prestige was consolidated thanks to the rapid acceptance of its users in a seemingly never-ending vicious circle where both ELF and its users benefit respectively. Nevertheless, in order to get that benefit, as Myers-Scotton said in the previous quote, the user has to be able to speak English, that is to say, a user has to learn English to fit better in this globalized world.

7. ELF IN PRACTICE

Last but not least, in order to put ELF in practice, the user must properly know how to use it. An ELF's user must be aware of the pragmatic norms that surround a conversation so as to successfully communicate, that is to say, a speaker may or may not speak grammatically correct provided that they convey their message clear or legible in an intelligible way. David Block defended the idea that a conversation can be understood despite grammatical errors:

Language user competence was conceptualized not only in relation to grammar and lexis, but also in relation to the way a language is used by members of a speech community to accomplish their purposes (in terms of culturally bound discursive organization and function) and in relation to the interactional skills necessary to communicate effectively and appropriately in that language (in terms of culturally shaped pragmatic knowledge) (289).

Hence, ELF must be seen as a variety of English with no established grammatical or lexical rules, but as a variety of English that changes according to the speaker, its intrinsic use of pragmatics and its cultural influence. The 'language user competence' is achieved when a language user makes a proper use of the language (in its most pragmatic sense) being aware of the cultural difference between the speakers

and the circumstances of the conversation, and adapting to them to convey his message successfully. Robert J. Lowe and Marek Kiczowski defended this idea stating that:

What seems to be more urgently needed in preparing learners from widely different L1 backgrounds to interact with each other in English is to raise consciousness of intercultural understanding, such as being aware of and sensitive to the fact that people from different cultural backgrounds tend to express politeness, gratitude, and condolences in overtly different ways. (219)

8. CONCLUSION

Finally, it may be concluded that ELF has come to our lives to stay for a long time. In the digital age in which we live, communication between antipodean countries does not pose any obstacle beyond the language in which to communicate. On the contrary, we have all the facilities to establish contact between different countries. Then, in order to achieve an optimal communication, the need to use or to find a common and international language arose. Due largely to the influence and power of the United States, but also of the United Kingdom, English has been positioned as the new lingua franca. When we refer to the spread of ELF, we could refer to the British imperialism, but without a doubt, it was after the Second World War, and thanks to the role of the United States, when ELF has its most notorious boom.

Therefore, after the war, the United States became a superpower and was in the spotlight of the world. Its economic and cultural influence (as we have seen through its capitalist ideology or the all-important role of Hollywood) spread English language at an unprecedented speed. It was an expansion with such an impact that English was soon adopted as a lingua franca for science, international politics (as in the case of the European Union) or for academia (where English has become an indispensable requirement of most of the universities). Nevertheless, this fact does not bring disadvantages for its users, but rather, learning English as a second language broadens your vision of the world.

To finish the research, there is no better way than to quote the words of David Crystal, an English linguist who perfectly described the situation in which English finds itself as a lingua franca:

You hear it on television spoken by politicians from all over the world. Wherever you travel, you see English signs and advertisements. Whenever you enter a hotel or restaurant in a foreign city, they will understand English, and there will be an English menu. (2)

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