

The future of english essay examples

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The Future of English

Introduction

English is one of the world's major international languages. Just which is the leader in a league table of languages depends upon the precise nature of the comparison being made. For example, according to an article by Turner (May 2012), Chinese is at top of the league by population with 937, 132, 000. However if the criterion is the greatest number of countries where each is spoken, English tops the table with 115, followed way behind by French at 35, then Arabic at 24 and Spanish, spoken in just 20 countries. Taking account of various factors, the article listed the languages in order of influence, still placing English at the top, followed by French, Russian and Spanish in that order. So English is currently the most influential international language, but will it still be so widely spoken in (say) 100 years time? This essay discusses the future of English as a leading and widely spoken international language.

Some Views on The Future of English

“ English as she was spoke” – an article published in The Economist (Dec 2010), discussed the book “ The Last Lingua Franca: English Until the Return of Babel” by Nicholas Ostler. The article’s subtitle: “ The days of English as the world’s second language (after Chinese) may (slowly) be ending” gives a flavor of the article’s content. Ostler claimed that although English usage is increasing in international terms, as a mother tongue it is not. But he believes that future technology will allow computers and speech recognition software to make it unnecessary. In other words, suggesting that people will be able to communicate with each other across language barriers but without actually using those other languages.

Dip (Apr 2008) took another view regarding the place of English as an international language. Dip saw it as unnatural and fundamentally wrong that English becomes a common language, even for tourists in countries where neither the native language nor their language is English, but where English is used as common ground – as a world language.

Dip expressed annoyance that non-English speakers (e. g. Japanese tourists) tend to speak English to other non-English speakers in a non-English speaking country (e. g. France) to make themselves understood; also that – although he himself is American – Americans abroad expect by speaking English they will always be understood. He considered the widespread acceptance of English around the world to be why many young Americans are quite ignorant of world affairs outside the shores of the United States. In Dip’s view, people are defined by their language more so than by any other factor; hence he feels that if English were to be made the world language,

those important cultural differences would disappear. Instead of considering one world language for the future, Dip believes what's needed is “ more cultural exchange and less cultural imperialism.”

McWhorter (Jan 2011), took a different view. Although he noted that economically China is on an ascendancy and could become the world leader in that respect, he nonetheless believed that English will remain the world's leading international language. He disagreed with Ostler's view that translation technology will obviate the need to learn other languages.

Additionally, he pointed out that because Chinese is so incredibly difficult for foreigners to learn, it is likely that English will remain first choice for the world's international language.

Yet another vision of the future of English was offered by an article in the *The Telegraph*, entitled “ English will turn into Panglish in 100 years.” (Mar 2008). Dr Edwin Duncan, a University of Maryland historian, thought that new words will arise and meanings evolve, especially where English is a second language. *The New Scientist* reported that the global version of English – as utilized by non-native speakers for communication – is already acquiring local dialect content, and suggested that by the year 2020 there might be around two billion speaking English, but that only circa 300 million of them will use English as their first language. Other languages such as “ Spanish, Hindi, Urdu and Arabic” will by then probably have similar numbers of native speakers. In the same article, Dr Suzette Haden Elgin – a former university linguist – viewed as uncertain the precise way that English will develop. She saw the likely options as either “ Panglish – a single English that would have dialects” or “ scores of wildly varying Englishes, many or

most of them heading toward mutual unintelligibility.” She guessed that we will see the actuality in “ less than 100 years.”

Conclusions

There are widely differing views about the future of English as a world language. The Nicholas Ostler book sees a world where technology including computer translation and speech recognition tools will make it unnecessary to learn a second language, which may reduce the amount of English spoken by people of other nationalities.

Dip expressed a different perspective on the subject, deploring the universal global availability of English assumed by many of his fellow Americans and opposing the concept of English becoming the world language. McWhorter’s opinion was that although China may in the future become economically dominant, because Chinese is so notoriously difficult for foreigners to learn, it is very probable that English will remain the leading world language.

The article in The Telegraph reported that English is already becoming more diverse as it is increasingly being spoken as a second language, and that by 2020 the 300 million or so of us speaking English as native speakers will be matched in numbers by people speaking a number of other languages as their first language, and that its precise future development is uncertain. Dr Edwin Duncan, thought that new words will arise and meanings evolve, especially where English is a second language.

Of all these various opinions regarding the likely future of English, it is difficult to say which might be the closest to the reality of that future. Only time will tell. As Haden Elgin suggested - perhaps in the next 100 years!

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