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The Lingua Anglica

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Contents

1.	Personal Connection & Introduction	3
2.	Analysis	6
	3.1 A Change in History: The Lingua Franca is No Longer and Was Never Just French	6
	3.2 The Very Beginnings of the English Language and Modern Expansion Across Europe	8
	3.3 Motivational Factors for Learning English	12
	3.4 The Age of the Internet	14
	3.5 How English as the Lingua Franca Has Improved Communication in Europe	15
	3.6 Future Predictions	16
3.	Conclusions	23
4.	Bibliography	25

Personal Connection

I am fascinated by the development of human culture, and although I grew up in the United States, I visited Europe as a child with my parents almost every year, specifically to the Czech Republic, where my father was born. While traveling throughout Europe, we would need to speak the language of the country we were visiting. This was not so many years ago, however, now, living in Europe, the use of English is so dominant that, unless you are going to smaller towns and villages, in many countries, you can get by with only speaking English. Why is this? I have wanted to investigate exactly how and why the use of English in Europe has increased so greatly in recent years and what motivates the younger generation to learn English, yet the older generations not.

Furthermore, with my experiences of living in Europe, traveling to many countries, and working as a private English teacher, I have encountered impressive levels of English and a huge demand for English education for children. I believe this widespread use of English in Europe is very beneficial to overall communication and has opened a door for many to persevere international careers in English. I foresee a different Europe in the future, simply due to an increase in English proficiency.

From an academic standpoint, as I am completing my Bachelor's degree in Global Cultural Studies and pursuing a career in anthropological journalism, this topic intrigues me to expand my linguistic knowledge of the evolution of English in Europe while analyzing its past, present, and future impacts. In addition to the critical analysis of the lingua franca that I elaborate on in this thesis, my findings are organized in an informative yet easily comprehensible format that parallels a journalistic piece.

Introduction

S každým novým jazykem, kterým mluvíš, žiješ nový život- You live a new life for every new language you speak. If it were not for English being used globally as a lingua franca, you, the reader, would not have been able to appreciate and understand the true meaning of this Czech proverb. A new language is like a new life, a new way to express yourself, a new way to communicate with others, a new way to understand the world. Thanks to the lingua franca of English, Europeans may enjoy these experiences that come with learning English and become linguistically united.

Today in Europe, on average, 60% or more of the population speaks English as a foreign language¹ and roughly 63 million speak English as a native language. French and German, previously the more widely used languages in Europe before WWII², are now spoken by just 19,7% and 22,4% of Europeans³, respectively. Despite there being 24 official languages and over 60 regional or minority languages spoken throughout Europe, English is studied far more than any other language⁴. English proficiency levels are also high in European nations, with only four falling below the moderate proficiency level. The majority of European countries speak English at moderate, high, and very high levels (see the graph below of the English proficiency levels based on each European nation). How is it that English, the historical language of England, has become the most widely spoken language in Europe, overtaking French as the lingua franca, and replacing

¹ "Share of Population with Knowledge of English in Non-native European Countries as of March 2019", Statista, 27 August 2019, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/990547/countries-in-europe-for-english/>

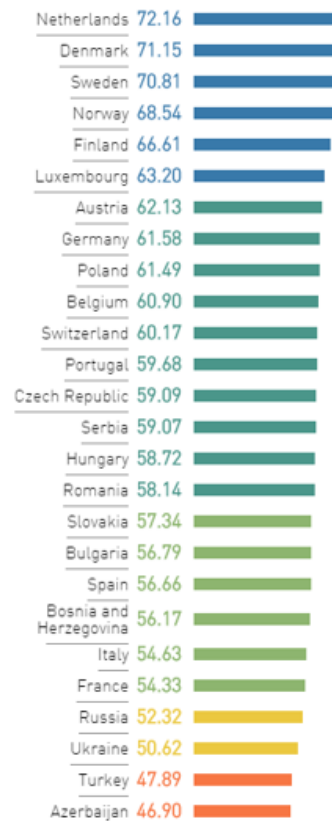
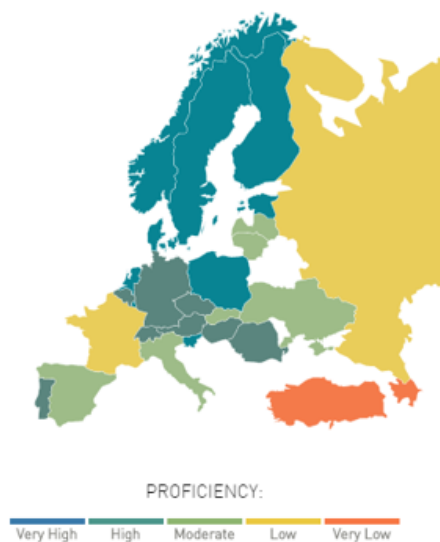
² Claude Truchot, "Key Aspects of the Use of English in Europe," Marc Bloch University (2002): 7, <https://rm.coe.int/key-aspects-of-the-use-of-english-in-europe/1680887835>.

³ Jonathan Van Parys. "The Most Spoken Languages in Europe.", <https://languageknowledge.eu/>

⁴ Bridget Parker, "More than any other foreign language, European youths learn English," Pew Research Center, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/08/more-than-any-other-foreign-language-european-youths-learn-english/>.

German as the official scientific language? With English becoming so widely spoken, people from very different cultural backgrounds and languages can communicate through a lingua franca that is effective and relatively easy to learn. This was not possible just some years ago, when communicating relied on knowing the language of the locals. Now, for instance, a Czech that has learned English for most of his life in school can communicate with a Spaniard, who has also learned English for most of his life. People that speak two distinct languages- Romance and Slavic- now have little trouble communicating.

EF EPI Average:
53.49



From the World Economic Forum

The phenomenon of having English as a lingua franca in Europe is revolutionary, breaking several barriers to communication, and opening a door to numerous opportunities for the younger

generation, of which 41% learn English as a first or second language⁵, compared to 25-34% of the older generations⁶. Through my research, I will uncover the reasons for the rapid and wide expansion of the English language in Europe while additionally analyzing the increase of effective communication and the extension of knowledge. English has provided a unifying mechanism of communication that has allowed Europeans to share knowledge without language barriers. Knowledge has become limitless, and with a growing number of English speakers in the younger generation, what other barriers will be overcome? On the other hand, could this expansion of English eventually make other European languages obsolete and lead to their demise?

Analysis

A Change in History: The Lingua Franca is No Longer and Was Never Just French

Why is the term for a common language called a "lingua franca"? There must be an etymological and historical reason as to why we refer to English, the common tongue in Europe, as a "Frankish language". Very interestingly, this term, "Lingua Franca", or "Frankish language" in Latin, originated during the Middle Ages to describe a French-and-Italian-based jargon used to communicate between crusaders and traders in the Eastern Mediterranean⁷. More specifically, a common language that mixed Italian, Spanish, French, Arabic, and Greek⁸. During the Middle Ages, the Arabs of the Eastern Mediterranean would call all Europeans Franks, therefore when all these languages of Italian, Spanish, French, Arabic, and Greek mixed to create a language that could be understood by all the traders of the Mediterranean, it was called the lingua franca to

⁵ Jonathan Van Parys. "The Most Spoken Languages in Europe."

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Lingua Franca", Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/speculative-grammar>

⁸ "Lingua Franca", Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lingua%20franca>

describe the language of the Europeans⁹. Latin has also been referenced as a lingua franca during the height of the Roman Empire¹⁰, where speaking Latin became a useful tool to communicate throughout the entire empire.

In more recent history, however, the lingua franca has not only pertained to the French, Spanish, Arabic, Greek, and Latin languages, but rather to a language that can be shared by a variety of different cultures to simplify and maximize communication potential. French was the lingua franca of Europe for centuries, being “la langue de culture de la civilisation universelle”, or the universal language of culture, as described by Senghor, one of the founding fathers of the Francophone movement¹¹. As with English, French became a dominant language in Europe due to a variety of factors: France had strong economic, political, and military power throughout the 17-20th centuries and was the largest state in Western Europe; France was a colonial power in the era of European expansion and had spread its language in all of its colonies; France developed aristocratic and cultural attractiveness, particularly in the 18th century; and France was an important scientific center¹².

Like the economic, political, and cultural influence that France had maintained throughout centuries, Britain was at the height of its imperial power in the 19th century and its influence was continuously heightening, with its colonies such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, and several countries in Africa, not to mention its previous colony of the United States that then became independent and has had tremendous international influence. The use of English in Europe began to challenge French by the end of the Second World War, when France was no longer politically

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Sue Wright, FRENCH AS A LINGUA FRANCA.” *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 26, 2006, 35-60.
doi:10.1017/S0267190506000031.

¹² Ibid, 37-38.

dominant, and the French language was retreating as a prestigious lingua franca¹³. English had become the new language of negotiation and international diplomacy, as well as for handling legal affairs. Today, English unifies speakers of the over 200 different languages throughout the European continent and provides a common language for all to communicate together with¹⁴.

The Very Beginnings of the English Language and Modern Expansion Across Europe

The English language has a rich history of development and expansion across the world. Originally the English language was uniquely spoken in the British Isle when Germanic tribes had migrated to Britain in the 5th century A.D., bringing along with them a language that would then experience three main periods of linguistic evolution over a span of over 1,600 years: Anglo-Saxon English (during the 5th-11th centuries A.D.), Middle English (during the 12th-15th centuries A.D.), and Modern English (from the 16th century to the present)¹⁵. English has been influenced by a variety of languages over its centuries of evolution, including West Germanic, Latin, Old Norse (the language of the Viking Invaders), and Anglo-Norman French¹⁶. Similar to the lingua franca used during the Middle Ages, English has been influenced by a mix of different historical languages, and still today, it contains these linguistic similarities shared by modern European languages.

Although English is spoken by the majority of Europeans today, its spread did not effectively happen until the 19th century. From the 16th to the 19th centuries, English use in

¹³ Ibid, 41.

¹⁴ Claire Jenik, "The Countries with the Most Linguistic Diversity", Statista, February 21, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/chart/3862/countries-with-the-most-spoken-languages/>.

¹⁵ "What are the Origins of the English Language?". Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/help/faq-history>

¹⁶ Ibid.

continental Europe was restricted to areas that traded with Great Britain¹⁷. The main societal transformations that kicked off its growth in the 19th century were the economic developments due to industrialization and an increase in international trade and communication¹⁸, not to mention Europe's strong ties with the United States. After the Second World War, especially, European countries' economies became more and more internationalized, and most of them turned to English for communication with other European nations; even the Swedish company Volvo gave English official status in 1975¹⁹. Additionally, studies conducted in Strasbourg in 1984 and 1986 regarding a branch of General Motors of France Telecom had concluded that English became used for international business due to exports, connections with outside companies, and the establishment of large multinational companies²⁰. Furthermore, English use in business particularly increased throughout the 1990's with an expansion of competition in the international market, including the companies of Alcatel, EADS (European Aerospace Defense and Space), and Vivendi, all declaring English as their official language²¹. Europe's entrance into the international market in the 19th century definitely had contributed to English's rapid and extensive growth throughout the continent, however, there are several other variables that has led to English's profound use and spread even to this day.

Mandatory and optional English educational options in Europe are included in these factors that have increased English use in recent history, implementing its learning from an early age in the European youth. Learning English in European schools began in the 1920's, where in certain

¹⁷ Truchot, "Key Aspects of the Use of English in Europe", 7.

¹⁸ Ibid. 12.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid. 13.

²¹ Ibid. 14.

areas of Germany, learning English in schools took precedence over learning French²². By the 1950's, in Scandinavian countries, English surpassed German and French as the first foreign language taught in schools²³. Even English had surpassed German use in France at this time. By the early 1970's and 1980's, schools transitioned to teach more English than French in Spain, Portugal, and Italy, as well²⁴. Western Europe saw an increase of English use before and after the two world wars, however, due to certain discrepancies in historical events in Eastern Europe, English became integrated at a slower rate in this area of Europe. Before WWII, English was not widely used in Eastern Europe nor taught in schools, where rather French and German were more firmly established²⁵. Additionally, the Russian language became compulsory to learn after WWII until the end of the 1980's in certain countries²⁶. English and German use was later re-introduced in education after the end of the Stalinist period, when Russian instruction was no longer mandatory, and their uses quickly increased then after²⁷.

Today, the learning of English in public education has become compulsory in several countries, in both Western and Eastern Europe. There are 44 European nations recognized by the United Nations, 14 of which require English to be taught in school as a second language, including Spain, Latvia, Sweden, Norway, Hungary, and Greece, and the remaining member states offer English as an elective²⁸. Nevertheless, English language learning is available in all European nations. English has become the most-taught foreign language in Europe, with 77% of primary

²² Ibid. 7.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Countries in Which English Language is a Mandatory or an Optional Subject", The University of Winnipeg, 2022, <https://www.uwinnipeg.ca/global-english-education/countries-in-which-english-is-mandatory-or-optional-subject.html>

school students learning English as a foreign language²⁹. German and French, previously taught more to the older generations, now only account for being taught as a foreign language to 3,2% and 3% of primary school students, respectively³⁰. Furthermore, English is being taught even more in secondary schools, with 94% of upper students in the EU learning English as a foreign language; compare this with the data from 2000, where the figure was just 35% of European students learning English as a foreign language³¹. These figures have more than doubled in just 22 years.

Not only does English have resounding influence in primary and secondary European education, but additionally in upper and university-level education. Students have the option to participate in Erasmus, a program of the European Union that supports youth education with a high budget of 26.2€ billion³² that is used to sponsor students' academic ambitions to study in foreign countries. These students can choose to study in English in a variety of European countries and meet other international students that are also choosing to learn in the lingua franca. When the Erasmus program first officially began in 1987, only 3,244 students went abroad, and only 11 countries were included in the list of possible destinations: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and United Kingdom³³. Today, Erasmus has enriched the lives of over 10 million participants and each year over 300,000 students partake in this enlightening experience³⁴. The possible study destinations have greatly expanded to include

²⁹ Parker, "More Than Any Other Foreign Language, European Youths Learn English".

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "What is Erasmus?", European Commission, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/about-erasmus/what-is-erasmus>

³³ "Nine Things You Didn't Know About Erasmus!", European Commission, <https://europeancommission.medium.com/10-things-you-didnt-know-about-erasmus-41bb2c8ebd9c>

³⁴ Ibid.

all the EU member states, members of the European Free Trade Association, and members of the European Economic Area³⁵.

In addition to partnerships with neighboring European nations for higher education, European students may choose from several US universities that support studying abroad or have their own US foreign campus in Europe, including The American University of Paris, The University of New York in Prague, Suffolk University of Madrid and Freie University of Berlin. It can be noted that English is taught consistently throughout a student's entire academic career, further strengthening levels of fluency and professional opportunities. Observing that English is being taught to young children in Europe is not as impactful as declaring that English is used all throughout childhood and into adulthood, conveying that English is a powerful language for research in science, literature, arts, business, politics, and more. The youth of today's Europe can persistently utilize English in all their affairs and academic endeavors.

Motivational Factors for Learning English

The children of today's Europe are learning English more thoroughly and at an earlier age than their parents did, therefore a new generation of English speakers is being created, continuing the spread of the English language. Speaking the lingua franca has unlocked global opportunities for them, where having the tool to speak English in today's world opens the door to a variety of international offers in business, communication, trade, politics, among many others. The young are motivated to learn English to not only be able to communicate with others from different

³⁵ "Eligible Countries", European Commission, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/eligible-countries>

countries and of different native languages, but to also have the ability to choose to work for international companies that offer high salaries, many of which use English. This can be referred to as a motivational factor, which is also a major reason for the recent spread of English use in Europe.

Those who also speak more than one language are more likely to have higher salaries, all the more deepening the motivation for people to learn English and adapt it to their working goals. Several international companies use English as their official working language, including the French food service company Sodexo, the Japanese automobile company Nissan, the German electronic company Siemens, and the Italian engineering company ITT Motion Technologies³⁶. This is all the more reason to learn English at an early age to guarantee fluency by the time the children reach working age. All of these companies have stated that, regardless of where they are based and of what their country of origin's official language is, they have adopted English and require it for work. This entails that a huge amount of international work in a variety of different countries around the world is available in English. Those speaking English therefore have far more job opportunities and have a greater choice globally for work.

An additional motivational factor regards the ease of learning English for Europeans. If a language is quite easy to learn, generally the learner is less likely to feel frustrated or stuck when learning and will rather have a positive outlook to master the language. The reason as to why English is indeed this applicable for Europeans is due to English's rich developmental background that it shares with several other European languages. Old English shares linguistic similarities and history with German, Dutch, Low German, and Frisian, as its ancestor language, Germanic, was

³⁶ Bryan Borzykowski, "The International Companies Using Only English", BBC, March 20, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20170317-the-international-companies-using-only-english>

just a dialect which descended from Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit³⁷. Today, with the vast linguistic connections between English and several other European languages, a native German or French speaker, for example, may learn English with a sense of ease, as these languages share grammatical and etymologic similarities. Not only is the language itself relatively easy for Europeans to learn, but the current environment in Europe has made learning English fully obtainable and comfortable to do so. Boundless resources are available, whether it be in school, on the internet, speaking with fellow classmates in English, or partaking in Erasmus.

The Age of the Internet

The modern spread of English cannot be explained without touching upon one of the major outlets that Europeans use to communicate with each other and with people from around the globe: the internet. Users from a variety of European nations can communicate through the Lingua franca via the internet. As of 2020, the most popularly used language online was English, representing 25.9% of worldwide internet users³⁸. The USA and India are where there are more worldwide internet users, some of the biggest English-speaking nations³⁹. Even those that do not speak English natively have been using English on the internet for convenience for global communication. It can be plainly seen that English, whether it be in the real or online world, has been spreading fast as the lingua franca and dominating the communication sphere. The European youth are learning English more and more, with great influence not only in mandatory English classes in school, but also with their use of internet, where 95% of the EU youth make daily use

³⁷ Merriam-Webster, "What are the Origins of the English Language?".

³⁸ "Most Common Languages Used on the Internet 2020", Statista, 23 August 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262946/share-of-the-most-common-languages-on-the-internet/>.

³⁹ Ibid.

of the internet⁴⁰. The internet is a fun and interactive outlet of communication that has been encouraging English usage and learning.

How English as the Lingua Franca Has Improved Communication in Europe

In general terms, learning a new language involves a variety of new key skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. These acquired skills can improve a person's ability to communicate by being better adapted to problem-solving, creative thinking, and reasoning⁴¹. Furthermore, learning English as a foreign language improves native language development by increasing vocabulary and literacy levels⁴². Since the majority of EU citizens speak a foreign language, and more specifically are united under the same foreign language of English, the foundational abilities of effective communication are very prevalent in Europeans.

The vast use of English in professional and academic settings has improved communication between persons that share neither a common native tongue nor a common culture and has become the language of choice⁴³. The use of English in international situations also provides a sense of inclusion and togetherness, being used as a facilitator for European movement and integration⁴⁴. Since literacy levels of English have greatly improved and many Europeans can hold a conversation in English, the people are able to better understand each other when communicating.

⁴⁰ "Being Young in Europe Today- Digital World", Eurostat, April 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_digital_world.

⁴¹ Diana-Petruta Mahu, "Why Is Learning English So Beneficial Nowadays?" *Short Contributions- Perspectives on Communication* 2, nos. 4 October (December 2012): 375.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Andrea Olivares-Beltrán and Teresa Morell. "The role of English as a Lingua Franca in European projects: The case of the RSGAE project." *EPiC Series in Language and Linguistics* 2 (2017): 135-136.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 136.

It has become the language of choice for coordinating online and live meetings, giving and receiving feedback, creating documents such as newsletters, posters, tutorials, guidelines, and reviews, and more. If we all can speak the same lingua franca, we maximize communication potential and effectiveness.

Future Predictions

As of now, there are over 200 languages spoken in Europe, and despite this lingual diversity, about 60% of Europeans speak English as a foreign language. In the EU, English was inaugurated as an official language in 1973 when the UK joined the EU⁴⁵. Now that the UK is no longer an EU member state after Brexit in 2020, English still remains an official language of the EU, as Ireland and Malta both share English one of their official languages⁴⁶. Even with possible other future fluctuations in European states' memberships in the EU, English will most likely remain one of the most, if not the most, spoken language. If Ireland and Malta were to no longer be a part of the EU in the foreseeable future, English would remain a dominant language, as its influence has already been integrated in European communication and society. This can also be supported by the fact that those European nations not included in the EU are learning English as a second language, despite there not being any official law that assumes English an official language of that region. Iceland may be referenced as an example, in which it is not an EU member state nor has English as an official language, however about 70% of its people speak English as a second language⁴⁷. Iceland has felt the great influence and benefits of learning English for mass

⁴⁵ "Languages", European Union, https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/languages_en

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "Do People in Iceland Speak English or Icelandic?" TourismIceland.is, 20 January 2022. <https://tourismiceland.is/do-people-in-iceland-speak-english/>

communication, children learn English in TV cartoons and shows and in their school's curriculum, and the country has been adapted for tourism by providing English in 90-95% of signs⁴⁸.

There remains the question of whether English will continue to be learned and spoken in Europe at the same rate or even at a higher rate in the future. Potential answers to this question can be seen in a study conducted by the British Council in 2017-2018, where they quantified and described the future of English learning in 2025 in seven European countries: France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Spain⁴⁹. The overall findings from this study have concluded that English will continue to be a second language for many Europeans due to several factors, including due to the dominance of English in business, academia, diplomacy, media, social media and technology, its ease of learning, and to compete with emerging economies in China and India⁵⁰. They additionally included in the report a statement from Edouard Philippe, former French Prime Minister from 2017-2020: 'English is now the lingua franca. That's how it is. You have to speak English if you want to act and move in globalization.'⁵¹ Philippe states the obvious, an opinion shared by several Europeans, that English is and will continue to be the language of the future that will dominate the globalized world.

Moving onto the future of English proficiency levels in schools, as seen in the British Council's study, they are likely to improve. However, the age profile of English learners is likely to change, as the number of children in the European population is declining, therefore there will be less children, in numbers, learning English (see graph below)⁵². Despite this, the overall demand

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ The British Council, "The Future Demand for English in Europe: 2025 and beyond", 2018: 9. https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/future_demand_for_english_in_europe_2025_and_beyond_british_council_2018.pdf

⁵⁰ Ibid, 65.

⁵¹ Ibid, 13.

⁵² Ibid, 65.

to learn English in older people is expected to increase, setting the stage for a movement of a lifelong learning of languages⁵³. It may seem like a surprising conclusion that the number of English speakers in Europe is expected to decline by 8.8% in the future, despite its current steady and rapid growth. The reality is that yes, English will continue to spread, and the fluency levels will improve, however, since the birth rate in Europe, especially in the EU nations, is declining, and has been declining since 2008, the overall English speakers will decrease by natural effect.



From The British Council, "The Future Demand for English in Europe: 2025 and Beyond"

With English having a strong hold in the globalized and international world, it can be safe to say that it will not always remain this way in the future, as other global superpowers- China in particular- may implement and dominate in the global sphere with its language of Mandarin Chinese. Is it possible that Mandarin could eventually surpass English as the new Lingua franca? It is more likely that Chinese and English will co-exist in the future, rather than one being completely dominant over the other⁵⁴. Mandarin Chinese does not yet even dominate its own region of Southeast Asia; therefore, it would be very difficult in the near future for Mandarin

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Jennifer Pak, "Is English or Mandarin the language of the future?", BBC, 22 February 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-17105569>.

Chinese to take over Europe. Furthermore, English is not only widely used in Europe, but also in Asia, where many parents have been choosing to have their children learn English in school for better employment options for when they reach adulthood⁵⁵. The real question could therefore be, Will English dominate Asia next? Although not all possible lingual competitors of English have been acknowledged here, English is currently the fastest-spreading language in the world and there are not enough factors to conclude otherwise.

The final future prediction regards the potential diminution of European languages. If English continues to dominate Europe, will native European languages eventually become obsolete? A study conducted by leading Language Technology experts in Europe warns that many European languages are unlikely to survive the digital age⁵⁶. They have concluded that out of the approximately 80 dominant European languages, only 30 are well represented on the internet⁵⁷. This may lead to digital language extinction in a variety of European languages due to underrepresentation on the internet. Some signs of language extinction include a replacement of a country's native language with a language with more international influence in areas of commerce⁵⁸. Additionally, there may be a loss of prestige in the younger generations to learn a lesser-used native language and they would prefer to learn and have daily use of the lingua franca.⁵⁹ There may come a time in the future where the native languages are preserved by semi-speakers who can communicate with the older generation yet lack proper fluency⁶⁰. This new generation would mostly use a lingua franca in day-to-day situations. Despite the possible warning signs of

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Alice Ako Achuo, "IATE Term of the Week: Digital Language Extinction." Terminology Coordination European Parliament. Last modified April 8, 2022. <https://termcoord.eu/2022/04/iate-term-of-the-week-digital-language-extinction/>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

digital language extinction in Europe, Europeans are passionate about preserving and promoting its diverse linguistic character. In 2018, the European Parliament passed a digital language equality act that will help to overcome language barriers and extinction⁶¹. Also, the ELE project closely collaborates with the European Language Grid to strengthen the commercial European Language Technology landscape by providing powerful and multilingual technologies⁶². Through the efforts of EU acts and regulations as well as reinforcement by European citizens, European languages may survive the digital age.

Language loss and extinction is no new phenomenon in the global scheme, as language diversity is continuously under threat. A language is considered to be in danger when its speakers cease to use it⁶³. Of the approximately 7,000 global documented languages, about half are considered to be endangered⁶⁴. Of these 7,000 languages, 4% of them are spoken by the world population⁶⁵. Changes in language use are a natural process in human development and evolution, particularly due to changes accelerated by colonization and globalization, not to mention the heavy influence of the lingua franca that takes precedence over lesser-spoken languages in areas of business, academia, and international relations, among others. Language loss has been happening throughout the existence of humans and will continue to happen in the future. Currently, the global

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Meirion Prys Jones. "Endangered Languages and Linguistic Diversity in the European Union." *European Parliament Directorate General for International Policies*, March 2013, 4, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/495851/IPOL-CULT_NT\(2013\)495851\(SUM01\)_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/495851/IPOL-CULT_NT(2013)495851(SUM01)_EN.pdf)

⁶⁴ Lindell Bromham and Russell Dinnage. "Global Predictors of Language Endangerment and the Future of Linguistic diversity." *Nature Ecology & Evolution* 6 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-021-01604-y>

⁶⁵ Meirion Prys Jones. "Endangered Languages and Linguistic Diversity in the European Union", 4.

areas with the greatest number of endangered languages are in New Guinea, Central America, Himalayas and Yunnan, and regions in Central and West Africa⁶⁶.

In the case of Europe, there are 128 languages in the European Union that are considered to be endangered⁶⁷. The concept of the nation state in the modern era has created a more uniform culture across a country to aid in the process of assimilation⁶⁸. A common language and culture were implemented in each nation to ensure uniform and equal communication, particularly enforced by educational policies⁶⁹. Globalization has promoted a more generic culture, where English has been the predominant driver in this transformation, leading to other lesser-spoken languages finding it difficult to compete and survive⁷⁰. There are officially 23 recognized working languages in the European Union and over 60 indigenous regional and minority languages, including Catalan, Galician, and Basque⁷¹. In an attempt to conserve the diverse linguistic culture of Europe, the European Charter for Regional Minority Languages was adopted in 1992 under the Council of Europe to protect historical minority languages in Europe and eighteen countries have signed to ratify this charter⁷². In addition to this, the European Union has been promoting a range of strategies to support the learning of minority languages and member states themselves have been developing methods to safeguard their languages. Overall, future collaboration will be necessary to attempt to save the demising languages. By the process of natural evolution, it is inevitable that some European languages will cease to be in use. English as the lingua franca is a

⁶⁶ Lindell Bromham and Russell Dinnage. "Global Predictors of Language Endangerment and the Future of Linguistic diversity."

⁶⁷ Meirion Prys Jones. "Endangered Languages and Linguistic Diversity in the European Union", 4.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid, 6.

reason for the decreased use in some European languages, however, it is not the sole reason and most likely will not completely overtake all European languages in the near future.

Conclusions

The fact that the majority of Europeans speak English with moderate to high proficiency may be easily overlooked, but this statement is filled with historical significance and evolution, uncovers the effects of globalization and economic dominance, and showcases the stronghold that English has and will continue to have in a variety of aspects of European society. The real reason as to why English has become the most widely spoken language in Europe, with 60% or more of the population able to hold a solid conversation in English, is quite interesting and may tell us all more about the transitions Europe has gone through in the modern era. French may have been the dominant lingua franca previously, however, English has proven to be far more practical and beneficial in a post-World War II and internationalized Europe. English allows Europeans to communicate in the internationalized global sphere with not only other European nations that have also adopted the lingua franca, but with competitive world powers, such as the United States, China, and Russia. The youth may find themselves in more stable academic and professional situations, where English opens the door to a variety of study abroad opportunities and international jobs with higher salaries. Additionally, learning English improves communication skills in real life and on the internet, where once again, English is the dominant language. The list of benefits to learning English may go on and on, which is why English use will continue to grow in the near future and many youths of today's Europe are implementing English in nearly all aspects of their academic and professional lives.

The lingua franca is an ancient concept, dating back all the way to the Middle Ages to describe a jargon used to communicate between traders of different cultural and linguistic origins. The lingua franca allows for these different cultures to preserve their own native languages while adopting a common tongue that all may use when speaking to each other. The same has occurred in Europe's recent history, where English has been used to communicate between all of its nations and on a global level, all the while preserving Europe's diverse native languages. This phenomenon is incredible and allows for Europeans to be able to perfectly understand one another and for people, such as myself, who speak English and have been able to fully immerse themselves in several European cultures without losing communication with the locals. The lingua franca, or better said in this case, the lingua anglica, will remain as a linguistic bridge, connecting and uniting us all.

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