

English as a Global Language: Are Native Speakers Losing Out?

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Rosie Goldsmith

Good evening, everyone. My name is Rosie Goldsmith and I'm here as your chair tonight. I'm also here as a language activist. That might sound a little bit radical, but that is what I am. I'm a linguist, I'm a journalist and a very proud champion of language learning in the UK. So apologies from the start: I'm not an objective chair. For me, there is no alternative to language learning. They've given me a passport to an interesting life, travel, a career in the BBC, foreign affairs, international arts. And I hope they've given me a greater understanding of the cultures and politics of the world.

But there's a bold new debate to be had and it's this: should we give in to the growing global dominance of English? If English is a global language, should we just not bother learning languages? Are native speakers losing out? And more questions: does language learning really matter? This may shock you terribly; it shocks me. What are the perils of monolingualism? Should we worry about the decline of interest in schools, university and business? What is the impact of all of that on our economy and culture? Is it actually true that English is a global language?

Before I introduce you to my very lovely panel, I just want to say all of this is on the record, as you know. If you want to use Twitter, please use #CHEvents.

My panel are all distinguished in the field of language learning, education and business. They're all linguists. Before I hand over to them, I have some brand-new research, hot off the press. I think they'd be delighted to find out that there's been a Valentine's Day survey in the US saying that being a linguist makes you more attractive. Forget the flowers and the chocolates, and learn languages.

So welcome to our very attractive panel. Professor Michael Worton, who was vice-provost of University College London from 1998 to 2013 and Fielden Professor of French language and literature. He is a longstanding champion of modern languages and of the humanities in higher education. He was also awarded the rank of Chevalier of the Order of the *Legion d'honneur* in 2011. Great to have you here, Michael.

Humair Naqvi is enterprise and education regional director of Rosetta Stone. Rosetta Stone is a provider of technology-based language learning solutions. Humair has worked in educational technology for over 15 years, supporting various schemes in government, education and business. He's worked for Rosetta Stone for five years, amongst many other things.

Richard Hardie, in the middle, is the non-executive chair of UBS Ltd., and chair of the Born Global project, which I'm sure you'll hear more about in a moment. He's also vice-president of the Chartered Institute of Linguists. He's another French speaker, amongst many other things.

Each panellist is going to talk for about eight minutes on a particular aspect of this question. So I'm going to say it to you one more time: English as a global language – are native speakers losing out? First off is Professor Michael Worton.

Michael Worton

Thank you. I want to start off with what actually a global language is and what it is not. It's not defined by the number of native speakers it has. Mandarin is by far the world's largest language in terms of native speakers, with nearly 1 billion speakers. English has only 480 million native speakers but has 2 billion

speakers across the world, so it has four times as many speakers as there are native speakers. In this it is completely unique. The only comparator in the history of the world is Latin, in terms of number of native speakers versus those who have adopted it. The reason is not unimportant: Latin was adopted as the previous global language because of the Roman Empire. It was all about power and the administration of power. English was on the way to becoming a global language because of the British Empire, when it needed to have imposed one single language in the continents of Africa, South Asia, America, Australia and so on. This is not unimportant, because if you look at the EU today, if you look at its administration costs, as much as one-third of the total administration costs of the European Union go on translation.

So if you like, this is why in the 19th century there was a great desire to create a global language. Between 1880 and 1907, the world created 53 new artificial languages. The purpose of these was to create or bring about world peace, harmony, understanding. At the end of the 19th century there was one, wonderfully named Volapük, which had as many as 1 million speakers. Today, I defy you to find anyone who has even heard of it, never mind is able to write a sentence in it. One has survived limpingly, with now about 100,000 fluent speakers across the world, and 1 million who say they can recognize what it's like even if they can't read it, and that's Esperanto, which was created (as you all know) as an attempt to bring a language which would undo all of the conflicts that come to us through linguistic misunderstandings.

So why then has English, in a post-imperial world, survived as the world's only possible global language at the moment, and by far the most likely to continue? I think one of the reasons is because it has the world's greatest number of words. It's got 620,000 words. If you include all the scientific and technical terms, then it's over a million. That's way above everyone else. But it's not just the word count, it's the fact that, more than any other language, English has received and continues to receive from other languages. In the last survey of the English language done by lexicographers, they reckoned that English had borrowed from 350 different languages and had given its words to well over 500 different languages. So if you like, it's this flexibility of accepting and giving of different linguistic systems that has made English actually so enormously porous and therefore so enormously seductive.

It also has, in the sense that it came itself out of three basic roots (Latin, Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman), it has come out of a world in which it had to create many different synonyms from different sources. So it is a language which offers many more possible synonyms than any other.

I think it's this porosity which is what makes it enormously seductive for people who want to learn it and have it as a second, third or fourth language. And also because English is now undeniably the language of the internet. It is the language of science. No matter what China may say, everything published in Mandarin of any quality is also published in English. In France, where it's a law – the *Loi Toubon* – which forbids the importation of any English words, there are English words coming into the French language almost daily. You can't legislate against language. You can simply accept that it is mobile and growing.

It's the language of international business, of international travel, of air control. It's also, crucially, the language of rock music and pop music. It's the language of Hollywood movies and has become global in many ways because of that, in a way that Hindi or Punjabi have not become global languages through Bollywood movies, even though many more people go to see Bollywood movies than go to Hollywood movies.

So I think we can say that English has an almost unassailable position as a global language because it is one that opens out and receives constantly, and is constantly in dynamic flux. So what are the responses, then, to this?

There are the usual complaints about McDonald-ization, about imperialism and so on. But I think it's more complex than that. As English – initially British English, now increasingly American English – spreads across the world, countries are increasingly asserting their own need to have a national identity. You find this whenever countries rebel against and separate from or escape from empire or any kind of federal tyranny. So for instance, when the USSR was dissolved, you find countries like Estonia and Kazakhstan asserting that they wanted all of their natives to speak Estonian – it's a very complex, vaguely Finnish, vaguely Hungarian language – or in Kazakhstan, where everybody has spoken Russian for generations, now it's obligatory that every child must learn Kazakh in school. This is about rebellion against former oppressors.

In a very different way, a much more gentle way, in Britain we've got the importance of the Welsh language in Wales, and Gaelic, especially in the highlands of Ireland and Scotland, as a defiance to, if you like, the notion of a United Kingdom as any kind of homogeneity of identity. Even in many of the Saturday schools where young people are learning Polish or Gujarati or Hindi or whatever, you find that they're encouraging code-switching in their languages, saying to the young people: you don't just have to speak only in Gujarati, you can use words in English. If you ever watch Bollywood movies, you will find there are lots of passages where these people who are native Punjabi speakers and native Urdu speakers and whatever are constantly dropping into English. It's not to say things that can only be said in English, they're things like 'I love you' or 'thank you' and so on.

This is because it's about saying: I am a complex individual; my identity is multiple. That again, I think, is one of the great things about English as a global language, that it's made itself into a desirable way of having multiple identities grafted onto a core native identity.

In Britain, young Britons are born into a country that still wants to have a global role, both in terms of its business and industry and in diplomacy. But most native-born Britons are actually monolingual, and are therefore alienated from much of the world around them. As there's less and less perceived need to speak any other language – people think you've only got to speak slowly and loudly in English to be understood – the growing monolingualism of Anglophone Britons will isolate us if we're not careful, and drive us into insularity.

But we need to learn languages not simply because it's a good thing for career purposes, for trade purposes, for diplomatic purposes, but because if you don't speak another language, you can't understand the world is not the same as we think it is: that people see it in a different way, that they feel it in a different way. They come from different families. A Gujarati family is not like a British family, because they know exactly who is the father's brother and the mother's brother. Uncles are not the same in Hindi or Gujarati or Urdu. The way that families are constructed, the way that love is given, the nature of families, depends on the culture in which one lives. It's a linguistic revelation but it's something which is much more profound: it's about the nature of social identity as well as individual identity.

So if we want to live more fully and more deeply in our global world, what is the UK doing for us? I will wail only briefly. The number of people taking A levels in foreign languages has dropped by 50 per cent over the last two decades. That's horrendous. It's terrifying. The main reasons given for this is that language learning is difficult. Well, how do all babies learn to speak language? It can't be so difficult that every child in the world can manage a language.

Also, and Richard will probably talk about this later, a language qualification is not seen at the moment as essential for employability. We know also that language learning is now very much a class issue. Young

people from disadvantaged families or are attending schools in disadvantaged areas are much less likely to learn a language than those in richer areas or from better-off families.

Just last week, one of the exam boards announced that they're ending A levels in Polish, Hebrew, Bengali and Punjabi from 2017 because of lack of interest. It can't be because we don't have any Jews, we don't have any Punjabi families, we don't have any Polish families or whatever. So why is there no desire of young Polish people who are born in Britain or come over here very young – why don't they want to learn the language of their families back home?

There are positive things that have happened. Whatever you may think of Michael Gove, and we are all divided on what exactly he did as secretary of state, but one of the greatest things he did was to create the English baccalaureate, which actually said that every child must have a foreign language in order to get this measure of the E Bac, this regulatory recognition. This was introduced explicitly because the government wanted to make sure that all children were studying two sciences – sciences also are compulsory – and a foreign language. Since last year, foreign languages are compulsory now in primary schools. Therefore, every child between 7 and 11 will have to learn a language, ideally not simply in a classroom but doing other things like counting or playing or dancing or whatever.

In their definition of why they wanted to have primary school languages, the Department for Education said in its public statement, 'Learning a foreign language is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures'. I couldn't put it any better. It's just a pity that the curriculum for the primary school contains nothing about culture – it's just about learning to communicate.

So there are ways in which our government is trying to help us to learn more languages and ways in which it is trying to stop us learning languages. This, I think, is very much the state of play we find ourselves in. When we were chatting earlier, I think it was Rosie who said, why can't we move on beyond the current state of play? That's one of the things we're hoping we can do over the next several months. Government regulation and guidance can be very helpful. It is very important. But government intervention can be very damaging, as when ten years ago last year, they took modern languages out of the national curriculum after the age of 14.

So those of us who believe passionately in the importance of learning languages need to work together. The primary schools, the secondary schools and the universities need to work together on curriculum issues, on content, as much as on the practicalities of grammar. We must work also with the local communities, with the many Saturday schools across the country where young people are learning their community, their heritage languages. We must also encourage our universities to be a bit more imaginative in the way that they teach and broaden their own curricula to study not only English as English literature and American and Commonwealth literature have defined it, but the evolving global English that is a window onto the hundreds of other languages as well as onto itself. Thank you.

Rosie Goldsmith

Thank you very much to Professor Michael Worton for that. You used the words 'love' and 'passion' quite a lot. I'm calling this the Valentine's Day manifesto for languages, based on this very important research we had from the United States earlier too. Thank you so much, that was excellent. Humair Naqvi, if you'd be kind enough to give us your Valentine's Day declaration.

Humair Naqvi

Yes, don't know if I can match the emotion that Michael shows as much, but I'll try. I'm going to take a slightly different stance from two points. One as an employer: we have a global organization that works throughout the world, both in the consumer branding area (which a couple of people referenced earlier on, seeing adverts in the Underground and stuff like that, which is the consumer side of what we do) and we also have a very large enterprise business which works with education (both traditional HE schools, mainstream education across the world) as well as employers, both in the government and the private sector. So we have a cross-vertical market experience, spanning many years now – well over 15 to 20 years now.

But we also have a much broader global perspective. It's quite interesting, this debate around English and the whole currency of the language, because I think that's what we've got to refer to, from where I sit anyway. It's a currency, it has many expressive connotations from a mobility perspective, from an aspirational perspective, wherever you go in the world. So while we're having this debate here, ironically the same debate is taking place in Australia, in North America and – in a different way – in other parts of the developing parts of the world. In South America, where there was a very polarized view of the fact that English is absolutely critical for their development, and other parts of the world. So that's the kind of context to which I'm hopefully going to give you some perspective from our side.

I thought it would be a good idea to start with the definition of globalization, which we picked out from the Oxford Dictionary. We talk about a process by which organizations develop international influence or start operating on an international scale. If you think about it, whether it's diplomacy, whether it's trade – and they are very linked, ultimately – it is that process. So that process, particularly the backdrop of what you said already, Michael, in terms of the kind of historical significance of English and how it's developed – it has become, without a shadow of a doubt, the de facto language, the lingua franca, of the globe, in terms of its interaction.

But to me, the influence of English is the critical issue that we have to address in the UK. That's about operating on an international scale from our perspectives and how we're going to develop the importance of English being the vehicle upon which we drive economically, but how we then reflect on the local requirements of navigating in the local cultural and language requirements of the regions that we operate in. Whether it's in education now – increasingly, there is a desire to attract foreign students, so that's an economic driver as well now, increasing in higher education, which is not dissimilar to how economically employers look at things. So I think we have to bear that perspective in mind.

I guess we should look forward to how we can address some of these issues. So the rise of English, I think, is a catalyst actually to other languages. We see that enormously increasing with global organizations, whether in the financial sector, whether in the retail sector, or manufacturing. Even within what I would call the NGO world globally – the United Nations and environments like that – where the increasing adoption and funding and investment that is taking place in languages is enormous. We are not the only player in the market for languages. There are multiple players out there, outside of the traditional mainstream.

So it's quite interesting. Most of the leading schools, even in the UK, have a de facto requirement of English plus a minimum of one or two languages. [indiscernible] and others globally have this prerequisite in place already. Yes, it's somewhat elitist and we need to realize that at the highest end of

employability, there is an absolute requirement of languages. There's a recognition that English is the economic currency. But in order to trade locally, you need to be able to exchange in the local currency, which happens to be the language of that environment. So it's quite important. Leading UK startups are in many cases – some research we did recently (these are SMEs, by the way) – they are increasingly investing in multiple language websites. These are local SME companies within the UK. So there is a desire and a requirement for multiple languages even at the SME level.

You talked about the decline – or you reflected on the websites and how obviously Chinese – there are a lot of Chinese websites increasingly there, but there's as much as English. But the reality is there's a decline in English digital communication out there now and there's an absolute, substantial increase in Chinese. So here's another reason. There's digital KPIs and measurements and research studies out there which demonstrate that there is absolute consumptive – consumer world out there that we all serve, that has a desire for you to speak in their local language. The population increase in development of Chinese and Brazilian and Russian is enormously increasing. I think you will all see that in terms of the economic change that takes place at the moment.

Some research that we conducted recently, which was released maybe two months ago, confirms that most of the employers that we've spoken to – and we conducted research with about 500 senior learning and development HR heads across the UK and Germany. On reflection, as you can note there, it just confirms the importance that they are now increasingly giving to one or more languages. It's about functional fluency. We have to be careful when we talk about language. We're not talking about interpreters and translators, we're talking about functional fluency – flexible lingualism, if you want to call it such – which is another tool that you equip yourself with to become an attractive employee. I think that's an area that the UK is suffering from.

So what is a formula to success? I don't know. There is a big pressure on us from what I would call overseas graduates and high-worth individuals who are increasingly being employed by companies in the UK. We suffer from the same issue. So in order to flip that – to me, the way to do that is we already know that English is, without a doubt, the currency of the languages that we speak. It is the de facto currency. What we need is obviously the things you mentioned in terms of government policy changes, without a shadow of a doubt, to have more of a cohesive framework for all the various stakeholders across education, from K-12, primary, secondary, middle schools, FE colleges, right to HE. It needs actually much more framework around it in order to have some consistency. We can't expect the mainstream educators to somehow get together and create a cohesive plan, it's unrealistic. This has been our experience over five or six years.

So to me, the real win for us really has got to be taking English as the de facto language we have and encouraging the importance economically, in my view, to the importance of a second language, notwithstanding community languages, etc., because obviously that needs to be maintained and retained for cultural balance and cohesion. But economically, without an increase in language development, we have a very big issue to deal with in this country.

Rosie Goldsmith

Thank you very much indeed. Very much to the point. Finally, we have Richard Hardie.

Richard Hardie

Thank you, Rosie. The disadvantage of going third in an unrehearsed presentation is you've got to edit on the hoof.

Rosie Goldsmith

And you're doing it in French, anyway.

Richard Hardie

Well, I'll do it as attractively as I can. I've been asked to talk about the implications of all this for global business. I will talk mainly about the UK, and that's the main area of focus for the Born Global project which Rosie referred to, where Michael is a valued colleague and which I chair with due humility and modesty for the British Academy.

Rosie Goldsmith

Actually, could you just tell us very quickly about Born Global? Because I think if you don't know about it, it would be a very useful project. It's also got some very good recent research as well. Just very briefly.

Richard Hardie

Yes. It's a two-year project. It's the biggest the British Academy has done. It's part of their attempt to bring humanities to the marketplace, or vice versa (it's a theological matter). The starting point obviously is the observation that there is a dwindling supply of young Brits learning languages, either to take their place in business or in higher education or in teaching. We have looked at the question of supply and demand specifically through the eyes of business and employers. We have conducted some new surveys to add to what already is available. Having established the demand, we are also looking at what can be done to supply levels of competence in reading, writing, listening, within the education system. So we've worked very closely with HE, also with the secondary phase, and with the DFE. The brilliant Bernardette Holmes, the main researcher, has been the main writer for the key stage, to and for –

Rosie Goldsmith

And this is available online?

Richard Hardie

The interim report came out in October and is available online.

Rosie Goldsmith

It really is – if we're looking to move this debate, the new research is very important. Humair was talking about their new research too. It's through the British Academy website? Do look at it. It's quite startling research. The CBI has also contributed lots of very interesting facts and statistics too. Sorry to interrupt but I thought it might be useful information.

Richard Hardie

That's all right. That saves a page. So my main contention is that the move from a world where being fluent in English was an asset to one where being fluent in English only is a liability will see a steady closing to young monolingual Brits of the pathways that lead to senior positions in global businesses. This in turn will significantly reduce the country's stock of global citizens and accelerate the decline of its influence both in business and, dare I say it in this institution, in international affairs.

Many factors have led to this situation, foremost amongst them – apart from the decline of language learning in the education system – have been the profound changes in the first years of this century in where business is done and the nationality of business ownership and in how business is done. The changes are speeding up. In October the *FT* published a survey of Chinese outward investment. In 2010 the total stock of Chinese direct investment in the EU was just over €6 billion, less than that held by India, Iceland or Nigeria. By the end of 2012, in two years, Chinese investment stock had quadrupled to nearly €27 billion, according to figures compiled by Deutsche Bank. If you watch the business news, you'll know that figure will have increased significantly since then, particularly in Italy.

Going in the other direction, Morgan Stanley forecast in December that the share of European corporate revenues generated outside Europe would have risen to 54 per cent in 2014, compared with 29 per cent in 1997. The larger companies are all diversifying and globalizing. It's reflected in the composition of their boards. In 2013, the Hayes Group (executive search specialists) looked at 376 companies listed on the main stock exchanges in 12 European countries, including the UK. On average, six out of ten directors were local, compared with seven out of ten in 2012. In 2013, 62 per cent of directors had more experience in their domestic market than abroad, compared with 55 per cent in 2012. You see the pace of change.

A survey published in yesterday's *FT* showed that over a third of board members in FTSE 100 companies were not Brits, a steep increase in recent times. This cannot be put down only to the increased representation in the index of international mining companies. The components of the index are proxies for globalization.

The UK is rightly proud of its record on foreign direct investment (FDI). It was second to the US in attracting FDI in 2013. But \$1.6 trillion, our accumulated FDI stock, is 60 per cent higher than that of France, our nearest EU competitor. Comparing ourselves in this context to the US is quite instructive. We may be numbers one and two in FDI because everybody in global businesses speak English, and because the UK has a deliberately open investment policy. But why do we have so many non-Brits in senior

management positions but the US doesn't? How is it that the proportion of non-US directors on the boards of the Fortune 500 companies is barely 15 per cent? How is it that nearly all the non-US business schools, in the latest *FT* survey of the top 100 globally, list a requirement for two languages, as you were saying, while none of the US schools – nearly half the total – think it necessary?

Given the size of the domestic market in Anglophone North America, there is simply less demand for non-English speakers. There are also huge numbers of senior management positions where you'll get along just fine if you only speak English. But I should say that far-sighted American colleagues see this as a looming problem and are lobbying Congress for government action.

The easiest place for us to do business is in Europe, for logistical and free trade reasons. It's our nearest market, with a demand for predominantly German, French and Spanish language skills. This is not nearly met by our local supply. The CBI-Pearson annual surveys show that satisfaction with language skills and intercultural awareness of graduates and college leavers is lowest of their top 12 employer requirements. Members of the British Chambers of Commerce point to significant lost business opportunities through not being able to hire Brit linguists, or if the alternative is hiring foreigners, not being able to afford them. Distinguished economists have described this as a language tax, with estimated billions of dollars of loss to our GDP through our not being willing or able to penetrate non-Anglophone export markets.

In larger businesses, which are less cost-sensitive, it's easier to meet the language need through the hiring of bilinguals or near-bilinguals with increasingly impressive English-language skills. That's been a feature. A head of HR at a very large multinational said to us that there's been a step-change every five years for the last 20 years in the level of competence of job applicants that they see from overseas.

So it's easy to meet these demands by hiring bilinguals, so that's what we do. It's increasingly cheap – in London, it's true – to hire into the UK highly skilled, young Europeans, when their home market job prospects are cyclically poor. It's also easy for our non-Anglophone trading partners in the EU to send staff here, essentially to take the jobs that young Brits might otherwise take. Foreigners with businesses in the UK send their own expat staff to manage their local inward investments because they can't find local Brits competent in their language and in the necessary other management skills to do the job. It's not good enough just to have a grasp of the language if you're needing to represent the needs of the production line in Oxford to the design shop in Germany. You need to be able to reflect that very accurately.

In this regard, I think Poland and the Polish language offer an interesting case for study. Polish is now the sixth most spoken language in English primary schools. I wasn't aware that the A level is being withdrawn. It's curious because the numbers of middle to high-skilled Polish jobs created in the last ten years by UK-based companies wanting to outsource and offshore their operations in Poland has passed the 180,000 mark. Because Poland is relatively close, we now have the neologism 'near-shoring' to describe this phenomenon. It's easy to see how Anglo-Polish trade will increase in time and how Anglo-Polish bilinguals (not monoglot Brits) will come to dominate that market.

In the knowledge and service industries, which are among our most valuable sectors, it's becoming increasingly common to outsource particular processes or areas of research to specialists in other countries, and technology makes it easy. These are not necessarily suppliers in Anglophone countries, they're the suppliers which have the best intellectual property available and have probably patented it locally. Outsourcing and offshoring fragment the supply chain and require multiple points of management intervention, often in several languages. English may not always be the shared language.

Monolinguals instantly lose independence and control of communication if they have to use an intermediary. It also adds significantly to the cost.

In summary, we have a dwindling chance to reverse the trend: the terrible paradox that native monoglot English speakers losing out to those who weren't born with but have mastered their language.

Rosie Goldsmith

Thank you so much, Richard Hardie. A rather depressing but I think realistic ending there – a dwindling chance to reverse this. We'd like to open the floor up to you for your questions, please.