

LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM AND THE GLOBAL DOMINANCE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract: The global dominance of English has become a defining feature of contemporary globalization, shaping academic discourse, economic participation, and cross-cultural communication. However, this dominance is not ideologically neutral; it reflects historically embedded power relations and continues to reproduce structural inequalities. This study critically examines the phenomenon of linguistic imperialism in relation to the global spread of English, integrating classical theoretical perspectives with recent empirical research (2020-2025). Employing a qualitative, literature-based methodology and critical discourse analysis, the paper explores how English maintains hegemonic status through institutional policies, digital infrastructures, and global knowledge production systems. The findings indicate that while English functions as a necessary lingua franca facilitating global mobility and information exchange, it simultaneously contributes to linguistic marginalization, epistemic inequality, and cultural homogenization. The study argues that contemporary linguistic imperialism operates in subtle, systemic ways, particularly through education systems and digital platforms. The article concludes by advocating for decolonial and multilingual language policies that balance global communicative efficiency with linguistic justice and cultural sustainability.

Keywords: linguistic imperialism, global English, multilingualism, language policy, globalization, epistemic inequality

Introduction. The rise of English as the dominant global language is one of the most significant sociolinguistic developments of the 21st century. English is now the primary medium of international communication, academic publishing, digital content, and global commerce (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2015). While its global utility is widely acknowledged, the processes underlying its spread raise important questions about power, inequality, and cultural representation.

The concept of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) provides a critical framework for understanding how English has achieved and maintained its dominant position. Originally linked to colonial expansion, linguistic imperialism now operates through globalization, neoliberal economic systems, and the dominance of Western

knowledge production (Block et al., 2020). As such, English is not merely a tool of communication but a carrier of ideological and cultural power.

Recent scholarship has shifted from viewing linguistic imperialism as a purely historical phenomenon to recognizing its contemporary manifestations in global institutions, including higher education, international publishing, and digital platforms (De Costa et al., 2022). For example, the dominance of English in academic journals often marginalizes scholars from non-English-speaking backgrounds, creating epistemic inequality (Flores, 2020).

This article addresses the following research questions:

How has English maintained its global dominance in the post-colonial and digital era?

What are the socio-cultural and economic consequences of this dominance?

How can language policies respond to the challenges of linguistic imperialism in the 21st century?

Main body:

Methods. This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in critical discourse analysis (CDA) and systematic literature review. The analysis integrates classical theoretical texts and contemporary studies from 2020-2025 to balance historical perspective with current relevance.

The materials were drawn from peer-reviewed journals, scholarly books, and international reports. They were chosen based on their relevance to the topic of linguistic imperialism, their academic reliability, and their coverage of a wide range of global contexts.

The study employs Fairclough's (2013) CDA framework to examine how language ideologies are embedded in institutional practices. Additionally, a decolonial perspective is used to analyze how global knowledge systems privilege English and marginalize alternative epistemologies (Mignolo, 2018).

Results and discussion

Historical continuity and contemporary reinforcement. The dominance of English originates in British colonial expansion but has been reconfigured through American economic and technological influence (Phillipson, 1992; Block et al., 2020). In the digital era, English dominates online platforms, artificial intelligence systems, and global media, reinforcing its hegemonic position (De Costa et al., 2022).

English in global knowledge and academic systems. English serves as the primary language of academic publishing and international scholarship. High-impact journals overwhelmingly require English submissions, creating barriers for non-native scholars and reinforcing epistemic inequality (Hyland, 2021). This leads to an uneven distribution of knowledge production, privileging Western academic norms.

Linguistic inequality and socio-economic stratification. The global demand for English proficiency has commodified language education. Access to high-quality English instruction is uneven, often limited to socio-economically privileged groups, thereby reproducing inequality (Flores, 2020). English proficiency becomes a form of linguistic capital linked to employment and global mobility.

Language shift, endangerment, and cultural impact. The spread of English contributes to language shift and the decline of minority languages. UNESCO (2021) reports that many languages are endangered due to globalization and dominant language pressures. At the cultural level, English facilitates the spread of Western values, sometimes resulting in cultural homogenization. At the same time, the emergence of World Englishes demonstrates local agency, as communities adapt English to reflect their own identities (Jenkins, 2015). This suggests that English is not simply imposed but also transformed in diverse sociolinguistic contexts.

Rethinking linguistic imperialism in the modern era. Contemporary linguistic imperialism operates through institutional and ideological mechanisms rather than direct imposition. Global academic standards, digital infrastructures, and economic systems sustain English dominance. However, increasing attention to linguistic justice and translanguaging practices challenges monolingual norms and promotes more inclusive perspectives (De Costa et al., 2022; Flores, 2020).

Conclusion. The global dominance of English reflects a complex interplay of historical, political, and economic forces. While English serves as a vital tool for global communication, it also perpetuates linguistic inequality and contributes to the marginalization of non-English languages and knowledge systems.

This study highlights the importance of developing inclusive language policies that promote multilingualism and protect linguistic diversity. Educational institutions, policymakers, and global organizations must work toward balancing the functional benefits of English with the need for linguistic and cultural sustainability. Efforts to decentralize English in international domains-such as encouraging multilingual publishing, supporting translation initiatives, and valuing local knowledge systems-can contribute to a more inclusive and balanced global linguistic order. Ultimately, the goal is not to diminish the role of English, but to ensure that its global presence does not come at the expense of linguistic diversity and cultural integrity.

Future research should focus on empirical studies of multilingual practices in digital environments and the development of equitable frameworks for global knowledge production.

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