

BEHIND THE LANGUAGE

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(What follows is an extract from “English as a pluricentric language: focusing on American and British English”, my final thesis)

Language is the medium used by human beings to communicate with one another, the means used to carry out work and business, the one used to transmit culture and science. Of course, speakers are not philologists or might not have a deep and accurate knowledge of a language, but presumably, an educated speaker knows something about it, such as its main structures, prestige and relation to other languages.

As for the English language, the situation is a complex one, since lots of varieties are involved, being it a pluricentric language. This means that it has many centres and each of them has got its own codified standard. «The diversity of cultures that find expression in it is a reminder that the history of English is a story of cultures in contact during the past 1500 years.»¹ Scholars agree that a language is influenced by political and economic factors, which give it a shape and determine its prestige. In fact, «the history of a language is intimately bound up with the history of the people who speak it.»², as we will try to see later.

English as we know it today is the result of developments that have been going on through the centuries and are reflected in its own history. Moreover, as all languages, English is constantly changing and the main changes can be seen in vocabulary, though important ones have affected the pronunciation as well. As aforementioned, a language gains importance because of political, military, economic and technological events that give power to the nation where it is spoken. Consequently, even the culture of that country will be influenced by those factors, making works published in its language attractive. We should therefore keep in mind that the focus is not on the language as such, but rather on the country where it is spoken and mainly on its people.³

To sum up, the language has changed and spread through time, becoming what is called a pluricentric language. Different standards have risen in English-speaking countries across the world and each of them has developed its own peculiarities. English is therefore always changing in the countries where it is spoken and will keep doing so, it seems, in the future.

¹ A. C. Baugh, T. Cable, *A history of the English language*, Routledge, London, 2002, p. 1

² Id.

³ One would be interested in Shakespeare even if his works were written in a language other than English. In fact, we read them because we recognize their value and prestige and not because they're written in English.

As for the future of English as a global language, it is not easy to say what will happen, as the status and prestige of a language depend on its speakers. Though scholars have attempted to foresee possible scenarios, no certain answer about English can be given.

What is sure is that English has long been regarded as the official language in international communication and it is currently spoken by people around the world as first, second, foreign language and finally in some countries as a lingua franca.