

## **'The world needs only one language – the English language.' How far do you agree?**

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Even though there are close to 7000 languages spoken globally, there are a few languages which hold the privilege of having vastly more speakers than other languages. Most notably, the English language is most widely spoken and taught around the world, and is the language of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, thanks to the influence of the United States. Given that huge barriers of communication exist between peoples who speak different tongues, it is very tempting to think that a 'world language', for example English, would be beneficial to the world. Some have even suggested that English be the sole language used in the world as other languages are unnecessary. I do not agree with this point, as I feel that a world that only uses English is a world lacking in cultural diversity, rife with political tension and an economic impossibility.

Supporters of global monolingualism in English argue that it allows for efficient administration in international relations. In official contexts, time and money are needed for the translation and interpretation of multiple languages. For example, in the United Nations, for every official document to be published, there are six different versions, one for each of its official languages – English, Russian, French, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, and Arabic. Some feel that translating documents is an unnecessary endeavour, wasting effort and funds, and feel that administration would be made much easier by using only one language. Since English is already the most widely-used language in the world today, it is natural to nominate English as the administrative language of the world to make for easier transition from a multilingual to a monolingual global community.

The above reasoning is flawed when we consider that English speakers make up less than half of the world's population. Principally, if the hypothetical homogeneous English-speaking world were to become reality, more people would be disenfranchised by being forced to learn a foreign language than people who are given the advantage of not having to learn one. Thus, even though English is most widely used, fewer people speak English than do not. Numbers do not account for the world needing the English language and the English language alone. Furthermore, dialectal variations exist in English which somewhat undermine the mutual intelligibility of various dialects, for there is no official governing academy for English. Hence, the world should not transition to one where only one language is spoken, much less one that is monolingual in English, due to the disenfranchisement of non-native speakers and diverse variations in English dialects.

Languages form a huge part of a person's identity and heritage. People around the world take pride in speaking their language as language expresses who the speaker is and his place in the community. Belarusian is gaining popularity in Belarus as the citizens of the country are increasingly identifying themselves as uniquely Belarusian and not simply Russian comrades. Moldova's national anthem is titled 'our language' and describes the Moldovan language as beautiful, even motherly. Both of these examples show how inextricably linked language and culture are, and how people take pride in being able to speak their own language. Whole national identities have been created or strengthened by governments using a common language, as in Belarus and Moldova. With only the English language, billions of people around the globe are robbed of their cultural heritage. This results in a gross misrepresentation of the world's population as it erases or neglects all other cultures and gives the false impression of cultural unity. To represent the millions of cultures around the world – from Bantu to Bengali, from Pashtun to Polish, a multilingual global community is necessary to give peoples an identity with which they belong to.

Secondly, having English as the only language in the world exhibits the dominance of the English-speaking world. The United States' status as a superpower also represents its global influence

on culture. As language forms an integral part of one's culture, non-English speaking communities are unlikely to bow to global English monolingualism. While the Chinese, for example, are willing to learn English to communicate with the outside world, they would be reluctant to give up their use of the Chinese language for the sake of English. With similar nationalistic sentiments towards native languages, English hegemony can potentially cause tension and conflict between peoples. This is analogous to a historical example of the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka. In 1948, Sinhala, which was the language of the majority, was made the only official language, angering the Tamil Indian minority. The compulsory education of Sinhala was seen as a tool of the Sinhalese to suppress Tamil rights, triggering Tamil ultranationalism and the brutal Sri Lankan Civil War. In France, tensions simmer among the Breton and Occitan-speaking minorities who feel that French is imposed upon them by the government. Hence, it is evident that political violence is a potential problem when any single language is forced on the world's population 'for global monolingualism'. Since language does indeed form a crucial aspect of ethnic and cultural identity, it is perhaps not so surprising that people are willing to turn to the sword to protect their cultural heritage. In this context, 'the world needs only one language – the English language' is a brash and ludicrous statement to make.

Moreover, it is economically infeasible to maintain English influence in the world. Billions of dollars have to be poured in for an effective transition, both offline and online, to a purely English-speaking world. Once again, it is necessary to consider that near 7000 languages are used around the world, making a transition to English monolingualism extremely difficult, if not impossible. From dictionaries to signboards, from company operations to education, this transition involves individuals, governments, and corporations. The process would effectively go through a complex global bureaucracy from start to end. In 20<sup>th</sup> century China, the government spread Mandarin usage in the country to form a national Chinese identity, yet failed to eradicate other Chinese dialects and minority languages. This is thanks to the non-Mandarin languages having taken deep roots in various parts of China, which infiltrates many parts of the locals' daily lives. A serious attempt in forming a unified monolingual Chinese population begets deploying Mandarin teachers to every part of the country, and modifying relevant infrastructure to erase all traces of languages other than Mandarin. Extend this hypothetical scenario to the entire world learning to speak English, and it is easy to see the economic costs behind creating the ideal English-speaking world. Hence, the economic infeasibility of the global linguistic shift renders the argument for English as the only language rather unattractive.

Regardless of the issues, there is a way to ease international communication and promote cultural diversity in the world. English may be used as the language of diplomats, scientists, and academia, but governments around the world can continue to use their own languages for other purposes in their country. In fact, South Africa is an excellent example – by promoting indigenous languages such as Zulu and Sesotho, the South African government acknowledges their importance, but they still use English to communicate with the rest of the world.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, English is an indispensable part of life and will very likely continue to be the most widely-spoken language. However, we must be careful not to discount the relevance of a multilingual world and non-English languages. This is also the reason why Singaporeans learn English and their respective mother tongues in school. I believe that a compromise between English and other languages is possible and hope that cultural diversity will continue to thrive in the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Comments:**

*A very delightful and insightful read, Jia Yeong! Just be mindful that your essay needs to be*

*consistently aligned with the question requirements. Nevertheless, your examples and arguments here are logically sound, even surprising (especially the evidence). Though the writer's stand isn't hard to agree with in the first place, the evidence used is simply impressive and the elaboration is concise. Keep up with the excellent work! Essay is well structured and coherent.*