

Reading Selections 3A–3C

Essay and International Agency Reports

Selection 3A Essay

Before You Begin

1. How many languages do you speak?
2. What do you consider to be your native language(s)?
3. Do you think it would be a good thing or a bad thing if everyone in the world studied English in school?
4. What would you expect to read about in an article entitled “Can English Be Dethroned?”?

What better place to think about the role of English than in an English class! “Can English Be Dethroned?” (taken from a UNESCO publication) raises issues concerning the spread of English. Read the article, and see what you think. Your teacher may want you to do Vocabulary from Context exercise 1 on pages 48–49 before you begin reading.

Can English be dethroned?

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Major languages other than English are spoken by over half the people on the planet. What can be done to give them more clout in international bodies?

- 1 **B**ack in 1919, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson managed to have the Treaty of Versailles, which ended the First World War between Germany and the Allies, written in English as well as French. Since then, English has taken root in diplomacy and gradually economic relations and the media. The language now seems set to have a monopoly as the worldwide medium of communication.
- 2 In the beginning of the 21st century, faster economic globalization is going hand in hand with the growing use of English. More and more people are being encouraged to use or send messages in English rather than in their own language. Many do not mind. They see this as part of the unavoidable trend towards worldwide uniformity and a means whereby a growing number of people can communicate directly with each other.
- 3 From this point of view, the spread of English may be seen as a positive development which saves resources and makes cultural exchanges easier. After all, it might be said, the advance of English is not aimed at killing off local languages but is simply a means of reaching a wider audience.
- 4 Perhaps. But accepting that as the last word ignores the deep-rooted ties between individual freedom and political power, between the linguistic, social and economic mechanisms which in every society underpin relations between people and groups and between culture and communities. A person makes a mark through his or her ability to use the most useful language or languages. And over several generations, the most useful languages eliminate the others.
- 5 Cultural imperialism is much more subtle than economic imperialism, which is itself less tangible than political and military imperial-

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ism, whose excesses are obvious and easy to denounce. It would be wrong to say that the world domination of English is something deliberately organized and supported by Anglo-Saxon powers, hand in glove with political initiatives or the penetration of the world economy by their transnational firms. The “language war” has very seldom been regarded as a war and has never, anywhere, been declared.

6 The military, diplomatic, political and economic strategies of the major powers can be studied and criticized, but linguistic strategies seem to be inconspicuous and tacit, even innocent or nonexistent. Will countries stand up to domination by a single language?

7 Many years after the founding in 1945 of the Arab League, whose current 22 member states have 250 million people, the countries which share a French linguistic heritage broke new ground by circulating a joint policy. In order to promote linguistic, economic and political cooperation, they set up the International Organization of French-Speaking Countries, which (like the British Commonwealth) embraces more than 50 countries with over 500 million inhabitants.

8 Since 1991, there have been conferences of Dutch speakers from eight or more communities representing some 40 million people, as well as Ibero-American summits, which every two years bring together more than 20 Spanish-

speaking countries (350 million inhabitants). Turkish-speaking summits have been held biennially since 1992, with delegates from six independent countries (120 million people) of Europe, Central Asia and small ethnic communities elsewhere. Since 1996, the Association of Portuguese-speaking countries has brought together people from seven countries (200 million people).

Pockets of Resistance

9 Will uncoordinated resistance by the world’s most widely-used languages be enough to cope with the threat of cultural uniformity? Perhaps not, since each language has its own geographical sphere in which it is used with varying degrees of competence. If you add up the number of speakers of the world’s dozen most-used languages, you come up with a figure of more than three billion—half of humanity—which easily surpasses the two billion for whom English is more or less the official language (the Commonwealth and the United States). Backed by a concerted strategy, these major languages would surely make headway in international institutions.

10 It is not just the future of the world’s major languages that is at stake. Further down the scale are 100 or so tongues officially recognized by governments or sub-national regions, such as the constitutional languages of India and the languages of the Russian national-

ties. These languages have their place and a right to defend it. At the bottom of the scale are thousands of sometimes struggling languages variously called native, minority, communal or ethnic tongues. Most are in danger of disappearing. They are spoken by some 300 million people.

11 Will minor languages die out, as some predict? Yes, because the best way to kill off a language is to teach another one. The monopoly that about 100 national languages have on education makes it inevitable that languages not taught in schools will be confined to the home and to folklore and eventually be pushed out of nurturing cultural environments.

12 Language murder or “linguicide,” whether it is carried out intentionally or not, is one of the basic tools of ethnocide, of the deculturation of peoples which has always been perpetuated by colonization and is still the semi-official aim of governments which do not recognize the rights of their native ethnic minorities. As local languages are increasingly excluded from education systems, “linguicide” is speeding up.

13 The language issue in the 21st century raises two questions. How can widely-used national languages resist the encroachment of English? And how can minority languages in danger of extinction be saved and gain access to development?

Comprehension

Answer the following questions based on your understanding of the author’s point of view. True/False items are indicated by a T / F preceding the statement.

1. T / F The growing use of English makes cultural and economic exchanges easier.
2. T / F Over time the most useful language eliminates other languages.
3. T / F Whether or not a language is taught in school has no impact on its use in the community.
4. T / F The growing importance of English is part of a plan by English-speaking nations for global economic domination.

5. T / F Economic policies are more obvious than language policies.
6. T / F The creation of language-based organizations such as the International Organization of French-Speaking Countries has solved the problem of the spread of English.
7. T / F More people speak English than speak the world's next dozen most-used languages combined.
8. T / F Deculturation is a result of linguicide.
9. T / F The spread of English and other world languages is a threat to minority languages.
10. T / F Minority languages can be helped by using the same strategies used by speakers of major languages.
11. In what sense do you think the author uses the terms *major* and *minor* languages? The author of another article in this series uses the term *small* instead of *minority* languages. Which term do you prefer, or can you suggest an alternative? _____

Critical Reading

1. a. How are minority languages endangered by the spread of English and other "world languages"?
- b. How would you answer the author's final question, "How can minority languages in danger of extinction be saved?" Below is a list of actions that speakers of "minority" languages might take. Check (✓) those that you think might be effective in protecting endangered languages. You may want to work with your classmates or compare your answers after you are finished.
 - ___ Write down oral languages
 - ___ Have linguists learn and teach the languages to other nonnative speakers
 - ___ Make tapes of native speakers
 - ___ Teach minority languages in school
 - ___ Teach schools in minority languages
 - ___ Pass laws requiring the use of minority languages in government and business
 - ___ Require public signs to be in minority languages
 - ___ Take steps to increase the use of minority languages on the World Wide Web
 - ___ Encourage writers to publish in minority languages
 - ___ Translate classic books into minority languages
 - ___ Translate popular writing into minority languages
 - ___ Have TV programs in minority languages
 - ___ Use subtitles or "dub" international movies in minority languages
 - ___ Translate all instructions for imported appliances into minority languages ;-)
 - ___ Other? _____

2. In paragraphs 3–4, the author says that to accept the idea that English is “simply a means of reaching a wider audience . . . ignores the deep-rooted ties between individual freedom and political power, between the linguistic, social and economic mechanisms which in every society underpin relations between people and groups and between culture and communities.” What are the “ties” (connections) the author is talking about? According to the author, how does understanding these connections make the use of English seem to be a problem? Work on this question with other classmates.
3. For this international publication, the author wrote in English about the dangers of English. Do you think he would have been more or less effective if he’d written in another language?

Discussion/Composition

1. Some people argue that English is no longer associated with British or American culture or with its colonial past. Instead, they argue that English has become a culturally neutral medium of communication. As evidence they point out that most people studying English today have as their goal communicating with *nonnative* speakers. And many different varieties of “World Englishes” are spoken as native languages today—for example, in India and Africa. Do you think English has become culturally neutral for second-language speakers? What are arguments for and against this point of view?
2. a. Below is a list of reasons why someone might study English. How would the author of “Can English Be Dethroned?” see each of these in terms of cultural imperialism? This question allows you to explore how the author might think about these things. There is no single correct answer; do not be concerned if you have trouble coming up with an answer for each item. As an example, we’ve given our thinking for the first one.
 - To publish scientific papers

The need to publish in English shows the breakdown of local research communities. It also gives an unfair advantage to English-speaking researchers.
 - To read scientific papers
 - To get a job in the tourist industry in your country
 - To talk to nonnative-speaking businesspeople
 - To do business in the United States or Britain
 - To get a job in a multinational corporation
 - To study in an English-speaking country
 - To get a job teaching English
 - To marry an English-speaking person
 - To immigrate to an English-speaking country
 - Other? _____

- b. On the basis of your answers, do you see the use of English more as a convenience or as contributing to cultural imperialism?
- c. Write a position paper that begins "English is/is not an instrument of cultural imperialism." Support your position with your own knowledge as well as information from "Can English Be Dethroned?"
3. Worldwide, governments make "language policies." These policies can include what languages are used in government, schools, and courts and even what language workers may use among themselves. In general terms, nations have two very different positions available to them: they can encourage uniformity, or they may encourage diversity. Which approach do you think is best for your country? Support your position orally or in writing by presenting reasons and examples.
4. Over the next 10 years, do you think the use of major languages other than English will increase or decrease on the World Wide Web? Support your position orally or in writing by presenting reasons and examples.

Vocabulary from Context

Note: Because "Can English Be Dethroned?" is especially rich in unfamiliar vocabulary, the following sections include quite a few vocabulary activities. After you do exercise 1, your teacher may ask you to complete only some of the activities that follow.

Exercise 1

Use the context provided to determine the meanings of the italicized words. Write a definition, synonym, or description of each of the italicized vocabulary items in the space provided.

1. _____ English has become the dominant language for worldwide communication and business. For many people this is a convenience. Increased use of English is seen as a *trend* that simply developed gradually over time. Others see the use of English quite differently. For them, it is a form of economic, social, and political domination and control. It is, they argue, a form of cultural *imperialism*. This is the point of view the author of "Can English Be Dethroned?" examines.
2. _____
3. _____ If English were used only for *diplomacy*, he argues, probably few would complain. But it is used for more than international relations. Because the use of English and other world languages is so widespread, especially in schools, the worry is that languages with fewer speakers will die out. Over several generations, the most useful language *eliminates* the others.
4. _____
5. _____ It's difficult to criticize cultural imperialism, such as the use of English on the Internet. How do you *denounce* something whose negative effects are so hard to see? They are, indeed,

6. _____ quite *inconspicuous* compared to other, more obvious forms of imperialism. Economic imperialism is more *tangible*; people can touch and see the results. And certainly political and military imperialism are not at all *subtle*. Their extreme actions are quite obvious. And their *excesses* are easy to denounce.

9. _____

10. _____ And it's not that English-speaking governments have had a conscious, explicit plan to support the growing importance of English, says the author. It has not been a *deliberate policy* on their parts.
11. _____ There have not been *intentional initiatives* to spread English as their corporations have entered the world economy, *penetrating*
12. _____ world markets. Linguistic strategies are not explicit. Rather they are *tacit* and unspoken.

13. _____

14. _____

15. _____

16. _____ Are there ways for speakers of other languages, particularly "minor" languages, to oppose the domination of "major" world languages if they so choose? One kind of *resistance* is to work with others to see that local languages are taught in schools. Perhaps there can be meetings of speakers in the same way that there have been *summits* for major languages such as Arabic, French, Spanish, and Dutch. In order to *promote* linguistic, economic, and political cooperation, the French-speaking countries set up an international organization, much like the British Commonwealth. These are all ways to deal with a perceived threat of cultural uniformity. Groups
17. _____ *cope with* this threat by working together.
18. _____

19. _____

20. _____ However, the difficulties faced by minority languages are quite different from those faced by languages such as French. French is a major language that is losing speakers, but minority languages are in danger of disappearing completely. Linguicide, some people argue, is the equivalent of ethnocide, the death of a culture, and that has typically been a tool of *colonization*. The loss of a minority language can make a community feel like it's been taken over by others. The dangers to minor languages do not come from English alone. Around the world minority languages are endangered by both local and international events.

Exercise 2

This exercise is designed to give you additional clues to determine the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary items in context. In the paragraph of "Can English Be Dethroned?" indicated by the number in parentheses, find the word or phrase that best fits the meaning given. Your teacher may want to read these aloud as you quickly scan* the paragraph to find the answer.

1. (2) What phrase means *don't care; aren't bothered by this*?
2. (9) What word means *circle*?
3. (11) What word means *unavoidable; certain; definite*?
4. (11) What word means *traditional customs*?
5. (13) What word means *spread; intrusion; advance beyond the usual limits*?
6. (13) What word means *disappearance; death; loss*?

Exercise 3

This exercise should be done after you have finished reading "Can English Be Dethroned?" The exercise is designed to give you practice using context clues to guess the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary in the article. Give a definition, synonym, or description of each of the words below. The number in parentheses indicates the paragraph in which the word can be found. Your teacher may want you to do these orally or in writing.

1. (4) mechanisms _____
2. (7) embraces _____
3. (9) surpasses _____
4. (10) tongues _____

Figurative Language and Idioms

In the paragraph indicated by the number in parentheses, find the phrase that best fits the meaning given. Your teacher may want to read these aloud as you quickly scan the paragraph to find the answer.

1. (1) What phrase means *has become established*?
2. (4) What phrase means *the truth; the final judgment; all there is to say on a subject*?
3. (4) What phrase means *firmly established; strong*?
4. (4) What phrase means *has influence; creates an impression*?

*For an introduction to scanning, see Unit 1.

5. (5) What phrase means *together with*? (You can find a synonymous phrase in paragraph 2.)
6. (7) What phrase means *did something new*?
7. (9) What phrase means *an action taken together; a joint action; an organized approach or plan*?
8. (9) What phrase means *make progress*?
9. (10) What phrase means *at issue; at risk; in danger*?

Stems and Affixes

The sentences below are adapted from "Can English Be Dethroned?" Use your knowledge of stems and affixes* and the context to guess the meanings of the italicized terms in the sentences below. Your teacher may want you to do this orally or in writing.

1. English now seems *to have a monopoly* as the worldwide medium of communication.
2. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, faster economic *globalization* is going hand in hand with the growing use of English.
3. Many people see the use of English as part of the *unavoidable* trend toward worldwide uniformity.
4. To see the spread of English as being innocent is to ignore the relations between linguistic, social, and economic mechanisms that *underpin* relations between culture and communication.
5. It would be wrong to say that the world domination of English is deliberately organized by the Anglo-Saxon powers to help the penetration into other countries by their *transnational* firms.
6. Turkish-speaking summits have been held *biennially* since 1992, with delegates from six independent countries.
7. Further down the scale are 100 or so tongues officially recognized by governments or *subnational* regions, such as the constitutional languages of India and the languages of the Russian nationalities.
8. Language murder, or *linguicide*, whether it is carried out intentionally or not, is one of the basic tools of *ethnocide*, of the *deculturation* of peoples which has always been perpetrated by colonization and is still the *semi-official* aim of governments which do not recognize the rights of their native ethnic minorities.

linguicide: _____

ethnocide: _____

deculturation: _____

semi-official: _____

* For a list of all stems and affixes taught in *Reader's Choice*, see the Appendix.