

HOW ENGLISH BECAME THE OPERATING SYSTEM OF THE GLOBAL
ECONOMY

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Annotation: This article moves beyond viewing English as a simple communication tool, analyzing it instead as a critical form of infrastructure—a de facto global standard that reduces friction, enables integration, and shapes competitive landscapes. We explore its multifaceted role in facilitating trade, structuring multinational operations, powering the digital marketplace, and defining professional pathways. The evidence suggests that fluency in English now functions as a key economic asset, determining how seamlessly countries, corporations, and individuals plug into the networks of global capitalism.

Keywords: Global English, lingua franca, international business communication, transaction costs, global value chains, digital economy, linguistic capital.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada ingliz tiliga shunchaki oddiy muloqot vositasi sifatida qarashdan chekinib, unga iqtisodiyotning muhim infratuzilmasi- to'siqlarni kamaytiradigan, integratsiyani ta'minlaydigan va raqobat muhitini shakllantiruvchi de-fakto global standart sifatida yondashiladi. Biz uning savdoni osonlashtirish, transmilliy operatsiyalarni tizimlashtirish, raqamli bozorni harakatga keltirish va professional rivojlanish yo'llarini belgilashdagi ko'p qirrali rolini o'rganamiz. Dalillar shuni ko'rsatadiki, ingliz tilini bilish darajasi hozirda asosiy iqtisodiy aktiv bo'lib xizmat qilmoqda va mamlakatlar, korporatsiyalar hamda jismoniy shaxslarning global kapitalizm tarmoqlariga qanchalik uzluksiz integratsiyalashuvini belgilab bermoqda.

Kalit so'zlar: global ingliz tili, lingua franca, xalqaro biznes muloqoti, tranzaksiya xarajatlari, global qiymat zanjirlari, raqamli iqtisodiyot, lisoniy kapital.

Аннотация: В данной статье мы отходим от рассмотрения английского языка как простого инструмента коммуникации, анализируя его как критически важную форму инфраструктуры- де-факто глобальный стандарт, который снижает барьеры, обеспечивает интеграцию и формирует конкурентную среду. Мы исследуем его многогранную роль в содействии торговле, структурировании транснациональных операций, функционировании цифрового рынка и определении путей профессионального развития. Полученные данные свидетельствуют о том, что владение английским языком в настоящее время функционирует как ключевой экономический актив, определяющий, насколько беспрепятственно страны, корпорации и отдельные лица интегрируются в сети глобального капитализма.

Ключевые слова: глобальный английский, лингва-франка, международные бизнес-коммуникации, транзакционные издержки, глобальные цепочки создания стоимости, цифровая экономика, лингвистический капитал.

Imagine two executives negotiating a joint venture: one from Seoul, the other from São Paulo. It is highly improbable they are both fluent in Korean and Portuguese. Instead, as David Crystal (2003) famously outlined, they will almost certainly default to English. This isn't about cultural preference, but pragmatic necessity in a world of staggering linguistic diversity. English



has emerged, by accretion rather than decree, as the common tongue of global commerce. But its role is far more profound than enabling conversation. This article argues that English acts as the essential grease in the wheels of globalization, a non-financial instrument that lowers barriers, builds trust, and accelerates the flow of everything from capital to code. It is the unspoken currency of international deal-making.

Economists talk about "transaction costs"—the hidden expenses of making a market exchange, which include the search for information, negotiation, and enforcement of contracts. Language barriers are a significant transaction cost. English directly mitigates this. In international trade, a standardized lexicon is vital. Key documents from bills of lading to letters of credit are overwhelmingly produced in English. As noted in analyses of global finance, this standardization provides a common legal and procedural framework, reducing ambiguity and the risk of costly disputes (Blevins, 2018). When a manufacturer in Indonesia and a distributor in Poland both use English-language Incoterms, they share a clear, legally recognized understanding of responsibilities for shipping and insurance. In global finance, English is the language of credibility. Major stock exchanges, from New York to Hong Kong, require financial disclosures in English. International bodies like the IMF and World Bank publish their pivotal reports and data primarily in English. A corporation seeking foreign investment must, therefore, be able to tell its financial story in English to be heard by the global investment community. This requirement, as Pieterse (2020) argues, functions to reduce information asymmetry, giving investors confidence and facilitating the free movement of capital across borders.

Within sprawling multinational corporations (MNCs), language diversity can be a managerial challenge. The response, increasingly, has been to adopt a single corporate language. As Tsedal Neeley (2012) observed in her Harvard Business Review study, for the vast majority of global firms, that language is English. This policy, often called "Corporate English," aims for more than just clear emails. It is a tool for integration and control. When a Swedish engineering firm acquires a company in India, mandating English for official communication helps align strategies, disseminate policies, and create a unified corporate culture. It allows for the seamless formation of cross-border teams and the efficient transfer of managers.

However, this move is not neutral. Research on multinationals shows that mandating a common language can create informal hierarchies, where those with native or near-native fluency gain disproportionate influence in meetings and decision-making, potentially sidelining valuable technical experts with weaker English skills (Fredriksson et al., 2006). English proficiency becomes an unwritten criterion for career advancement, shaping the corporate elite.

The rise of the internet and digital platforms has turbocharged English's dominance. The digital economy is, in many ways, built on an Anglophone foundation. Technology's Native Tongue: The foundational code of the digital world is written in English. Programming languages like Python and JavaScript use English-based syntax and keywords. Critical online protocols (like HTTP) are built on English commands. This makes a functional grasp of English almost a prerequisite for deep technical innovation or high-level IT management (Danet & Herring, 2007). The world's dominant digital marketplaces (Amazon, Alibaba's international sites), social networks (Facebook, LinkedIn), and SaaS platforms (Salesforce) were created in English-speaking environments. Their user interfaces, algorithms, and community guidelines are optimized for English, which can create an inherent advantage for content and commerce that operates within that linguistic sphere (Gillespie, 2014). Success in search engine optimization (SEO) or global digital marketing often hinges on English-language strategy.

The demand for English in business is self-perpetuating, powerfully reflected in global education.



Business Schools: To attract a global student body and signal their international relevance, MBA programs worldwide- from France to Singapore-are increasingly taught entirely in English. This creates a pipeline of future leaders for whom English is the default language of strategy and management.

Professional Gatekeeping: Prestigious global certifications, such as the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) designation or Project Management Professional (PMP), are offered exclusively in English. The most influential research in economics and management is published in English-language journals. To access the latest knowledge and most recognized credentials, professionals must operate in English.

The ascendancy of English presents a paradox. On one hand, it delivers undeniable systemic efficiency. It lowers communication costs, speeds up negotiations, and simplifies complex international operations. It is a powerful force for economic integration. On the other hand, it creates a persistent structural advantage. Native English-speaking countries and individuals enjoy a form of “linguistic rent,” saved from the immense time and financial investment required by others to achieve fluency. This can reinforce existing global inequalities, as noted by linguist Robert Phillipson (2008), who critiques the inherent power dynamics in the spread of “global English.” Nations and individuals without strong English education systems may find themselves on the periphery of economic opportunity.

The evidence is conclusive: English is the operational backbone of international economics and business. It is less a foreign language and more a core professional competency—a critical piece of the global economy’s software. For companies and countries, investing in English proficiency is not an educational luxury but an economic imperative for competitiveness. Looking ahead, the landscape may evolve. Advanced real-time translation technology could lower the barrier to entry, allowing more participants to engage without perfect fluency. However, the institutional and digital foundations built on English are deeply entrenched. The future challenge, therefore, is not to dethrone English but to navigate its dominance wisely-ensuring that the efficiency it provides does not come at the cost of marginalizing diverse perspectives and voices in the global marketplace. In the 21st-century economy, language isn’t just about speaking; it’s about belonging, competing, and ultimately, succeeding.

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