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English as a global language: language variation and language death

Trabajo de Fin de Grado en Estudios Ingleses

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0. Introduction

English has established itself over the years as one of the most important languages in the world, being required for many people to access education, the labour market or even entertainment. International communication as well as diplomacy are conducted mostly in English and –if we search anything online– it is very likely that most of the information will be in English. From academic research to arts, more content is increasingly being created in English, no matter the country of origin of the creators. Globalisation is also allowing interconnection between people from all around the world more than ever, and the language used in that context is very often English. Considering that English has indisputably become the global language of today, the main purpose of this project is therefore to discuss the consequences of English having become a global language and the position of English in the global linguistic scenario.

Historically, English is a language that can be said to have taken over societies. In the past, this was due to European settlers travelling and overpowering populations who were less prepared in warfare and technology and in the present day it is due to the fact that the countries which have English as a mother tongue (England, Ireland and former colonies of the British Empire) have in the last few years been among the most influential and developed countries in the world. It is worth also noting the increasing number of learners of English worldwide, who are taking it up in order to improve their chances at better job opportunities within their communities and also internationally. These non-native speakers, who use English as a lingua franca, have become the largest number of speakers of the language worldwide.

One of the most important consequences of the fast-developing nature of English in the last few decades is the fact that it has started to fracture into many different varieties. These varieties are the reflection of the wide scope English covers nowadays and represent the way the different territories where it is spoken have made English their own language, to the extent of being able to identify themselves with it.

There are different approaches to language change and variation. Some linguists such as Aitchison (1991) may view it as ‘decay’, with the fragmentation produced as a result of the different processes of language change equalling a loss of power for the most ‘standard’ varieties –such as the British or American. For most linguists, however (Crystal, 2007; Jenkins, 2015), the range of varieties of English associated to language change are natural phenomena that accompany language use.

One aspect that will be specifically dealt with in this paper is the impact English has as a powerful language in communities of speakers where other minority languages have been coexisting with it and even the possibility that English may cause the 'death' of those languages. As pointed out by Crystal (2000, 2007), language death is a natural phenomenon that has already occurred in the past and is very common in the present time as well. This paper will therefore deal with that topic, focusing on how English has potentially affected minority languages, to the point of having become one of the causes of their death. This assumption has been explored by different theorists such as Crystal (2000), Honisz-Green (2005), Mufwene (2005) or Ceramella (2012) among others, who discuss the concept of 'killer language' with particular reference to English.

In conclusion, the basic goal of this degree project is to analyse the nature of English as a global language and to discuss the consequences of its global expansion, which may potentially have turned it into a 'killer language'. A classic example of English posing a threat to minority languages is the linguistic situation in Papua New Guinea, where it can be argued that English has lessened the chance of survival of many indigenous languages. This issue which will also be briefly surveyed in this paper.

1. English as a global language

A global language is, according to Crystal (2003: 3), a language which develops a 'special role' recognized in every country. Countries around the world choose this language and decide to give it space within their communities, even if it has few native speakers. Crystal (2003: 4) also indicates that there are two ways of introducing a language within communities that do not have it as a mother tongue: firstly, by making it the official language of that country, and secondly by making it a priority when it comes to foreign language teaching in a particular country. What this implies is that children, from a very young age, will start having contact with that language and, eventually, the overall population of the country will be immersed in a foreign language for a significant amount of time, contributing to their language proficiency in it. In this regard, the English language is –according to Crystal (2007: 427)– "official or semi-official language in over sixty countries, and is either dominant or well established in every continent." The Welsh linguist emphasizes the position of English in the world, pointing out the many fields of social interaction in which English is the main language, from books to diplomacy or science.

The fact that a particular country would choose to favour a particular language (apart from their own mother tongue) as a common tool for communication does not arise

haphazardly. It has been up to now mostly due to historical or political reasons, and it depends as well on the funding available to invest in language teaching (Crystal, 2003: 5). It could be pointed out, for example, the effect English as a global language is having in some of the countries where it was introduced due to the British process of colonization –especially in Africa and Asia–, to the point that after their independence the language was kept and a new generation is brought up with English as a mother tongue. This most probably political choice enables these societies to part-take in the global conversation, in search for the prestige and socioeconomic advancement attached to the notion of English language (Schneider, 2011).

There are other factors mentioned by Crystal (2003: 7-10) which tend to favour the development of one language as a global language: primarily the power it holds, whether that is political, military or economic, and not so much on how 'easy' it is regarding its linguistic structure. For a language to take a stronghold in a given place it is much more important to be financially able to spread it and maintain its presence wherever it is than its status from a linguistic-typological point of view. English has acquired such a widespread presence in the world that the estimated number of native speakers of it at the beginning of the 21st century was around 450 million people (Horobin, 2018: 111). The English we know and that is used by millions now is, as Schneider (2011: 10) puts it, the product of colonisation and diffusion of that language for centuries. Therefore, countries around the world historically linked to the English expansion and the British Empire have now English as one of their official or primary languages. More recently, other countries have chosen to integrate it into their foreign language teaching policy, facing the strong influence English is having in almost all aspects of life.

It could be said that having this global language facilitating communication in the form a lingua franca would, encourages global development and relationships. According to Crystal (2003: 11), a lingua franca serves the purpose of easing communication among people who do not speak each other's language. Resorting to a commonly known language instead of having to depend on interpretation and knowing a variety of languages is one of the main driving forces to encourage a global language. In the same way as Latin or French have been means of education in the past –and in that sense lingua francas of their day–, and significantly dominant, Crystal claims that English has reached the position in which it can be regarded as a lingua franca, with very few competitors (Crystal, 2008: 427).

The topic of the use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) or within an international context has been tackled by a good number of theorists, including Pakir (1999) and Jenkins

(2015) among others. Most of the studies focus on the changes experienced by English when it is used by speakers who have other languages as their mother tongues, therefore making ELF almost a new variety "essentially hybrid and plurilingual in nature" (Jenkins, 2015: 42). It is also widely agreed that the increase in the use of English is directly linked to the opportunities those who speak it can access. Using English as a lingua franca becomes a reciprocate relationship between the language and the places and people it reaches, as Pakir (1999: 104) points out:

> English is a global vehicle that refuels at every stop, creates economic and other opportunities, and returns to its home bases, each time upping the financial ante for English users. English has become a global commodity that seems to have no sell-by date attached to it.

From Pakir's words, it can be understood that English works as a liaison between the countries where the language originated and the new places where it is spoken. By doing so, English strengthens its position as a global language and increases the value of everything associated with it, promoting the creation of content or research in the language. The more accessible this content is, the more people will be able to thrive through it, contributing to social mobility and financial success around the world. Pakir's prediction has proved to be correct, as more than 20 years later we are witnessing the success of the English language in many disciplines, allowing reciprocate learning through one common global language. It is worth noting that content in English has been created in very powerful and developed countries for centuries. It has been the process of globalisation that has markedly brought interest in the most advanced research (primarily from English speaking countries). Those wishing to access it and interact with it from outside the inner circle had to put in the effort to learn or create in the same language. As Pakir (1999: 107) notes as well, some smaller countries perhaps had no other choice than reverting to English in order to improve or maintain their financial situation, which may be very dependent on international relations and trade. Small decisions like these made by many countries over the past few years could be argued to have also helped English become a global language.

Another reason for the implementation of a global language is, for some theorists, that it could serve as a tool to smooth differences and prevent war among countries, but linguistic unification –it could be argued– has been attempted previously in history in a smaller scale and it has not proved to create any more peaceful environments (Crystal, 2003: 15-16). The

'benefits' of being a helpful tool to internationalisation and ending our differences obviously paint a picture that shows a global language's brightest side. However, as Crystal (2003: 16-22) observes, there are several aspects to take into consideration regarding the notion of global language that could be not as beneficial. For instance, a situation of inequality could arise, in which certain groups of people could act dismissively towards other languages if this global language comes to them as a mother tongue or they have better access to its learning than other groups. Furthermore, there is a chance that if a global language is to take over the space that several minority languages are holding, all other languages would fall in disuse. This particular phenomenon will be discussed in the next chapters (see sections 2.2 and 3). Finally, the imposition of a global language could also lead people to give in to linguistic complacency. This has been already happening recently in English-speaking environments, where we can observe how some people find learning languages useless, or less useful than only speaking their mother tongue. The main argument behind this mindset is that if other people understand 'my' language, there is no need for me to approach learning 'their' language, with all the cultural loss and knowledge that implies.

As previously stated, power is one of the most important factors in the success of the expansion of a language, as no language would acquire a global status but for the inherent power of the people who speak it and the circumstances and situations it is brought in for. Moreover, as Crystal (2003: 7) states, a global language is already powerful before it is made global by use. If that language does not have any kind of associated power, it will hardly be chosen by others as their foreign language of choice. English has reached this position by seeping in many fields in which powerful English-speaking countries dominated the scene and continue to do so. This results in increasingly large figures for English speakers in today's world. For years now, most of us have entered the English-speaking world to access education, entertainment, science, news and much more. This is enabling a constant flow of information and knowledge among speakers from very different backgrounds, especially non-native, who would otherwise not have been able to do so (Pakir, 1999: 108). Statistics which account for the number of total users of English –native speakers and users or English as a second and foreign language combined– estimate that figure in around 2,000 million speakers, out of which two thirds are not from the considered traditional English-speaking countries (Crystal, 2007: 427, 428). This number is in all likelihood bound to increase in the near and distant future, given the endless possibilities of communication and travel English offers.

2. Language variation and language death

There are two linguistic phenomena that are irretrievably associated to language: variation and death. As far as English is concerned, variation is very remarkable due to its wide expansion in recent history. The first migratory phases, or diasporas, took it from England, Ireland, and Scotland –where it was established as mother tongue– to the USA and Canada, Australia and New Zealand. A second wave of dispersal took it to other countries from the South Pacific, Asia and Africa (Jenkins, 2015: 6) (Figure 1). Eventually, the British expansion promoted the creation of an environment in which English is present as a mother tongue in very powerful and developed countries, as well as having official or co-official status in many others which gained independence over time. As previously noted, this expansion also brought in a trend –justified by the range of possibilities it offered– of learning English as a foreign language.

With this general picture in mind, we must address now the question of the death of many languages that are present in the same spaces where English is now very much the strongest and most relevant language. In order to analyse the impact of English on communities where other vernacular languages are spoken, we will briefly survey the most important findings in linguistics about language variation today, especially focusing on English.

The first diaspora	
Migrations to N.America, Australia, New Zealand → L1 varieties of English.	
❑ USA/Canada:	From early 17th century (English), 18th century (North Irish) to USA. From 17th century, African slaves to South American states and Caribbean Islands. From 1776 (American Independence) some British settlers to Canada.
❑ Australia:	From 1770
❑ New Zealand:	From 1790s (official colony in 1840)
The second diaspora	
Migrations to Africa and Asia → L2 varieties of English.	
❑ South Africa:	From 1795. 3 groups of L2 English speakers (Afrikaans/ Blacks/from 1860s Indians).
❑ South Asia:	India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, from 1600 (British East India Company). 1765–1947 British sovereignty in India.
❑ SE Asia and S Pacific:	Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Philippines from late 18th century (Raffles founded Singapore 1819).
❑ Colonial Africa:	West: Sierra Leone, Ghana, Gambia, Nigeria, Cameroon, Liberia, from late 15th century (but no major English emigrant settlements → pidgins/creoles). East: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, from c. 1850.

Figure 1: Summary of the two dispersals of English. Retrieved from Jenkins (2015: 7)

2.1 Language variation

Attitudes towards language variation are wide-ranging. Most linguists who study language change agree on the fact that the use of a language is what shapes it and what gives way to the rise of varieties. These changes can be regarding words, sounds or grammar. Being these aspects at the base of language, Edwards (2013: 30) states that at some point language change and variation could affect understanding and communication. Looking at English as a global language, and the scope of variation that exists in it nowadays, these differences could be effectively argued to hinder communication. However, the English language has not reached that point, for the most common varieties are similar enough to ensure understanding among them. As Edwards (2013: 30) observes, the differentiation in language is central to group identity, and communities of speakers may tend to use language in a different way from others to acquire a sense of belonging:

> In the broadest sense, the dynamics of group identity remain at center stage [of language change]. Different languages mark communities or cultures or subcultures that wish to maintain some distinctiveness. Where groups share a language, distinctions are found at the dialectal level: Austrians are not Germans, Bolivians are not Spaniards, the Irish are not English.

Nevertheless, less well-read people have come to even regard certain variants of English as less attractive or less developed (Edwards, 2013: 34). This may result to be directly linked to the common knowledge of the distinction between standard and non-standard languages. Having the notion of standard language automatically sets that the rest of varieties are non-standard, which Edwards clarifies does not intend to classify them as sub-standard. All variants of English should be respected and equally contribute to the diverse panorama of English nowadays. However, the general public may understand from that differentiation that non-standard variants are 'less-than' varieties, which is completely unfortunate. These attitudes come from disinformation and prejudice, and advocating only for what is regarded as 'standard' puts the great diversity and cultural baggage associated with each variant of a language at risk, particularly one with such a complex historical trajectory as English.

Now that millions of people from very different linguistic and social backgrounds have started using English, the language that many only referred to as 'British' or 'American' offers a much richer spectrum of varieties. Having different forms of one language because it has been used differently in different territories adds to a diverse community of speakers whose space is the whole world. However, some theorists like

Aitchison (1991) view language change as a sign of decay and deterioration of what is already known. Despite that, and as noted before, it should be acknowledged that languages are strictly what the speakers make of them: they are born, they change and die according to the needs and changes of the society in which they are used (Crystal, 2007: 459). It is undeniable that variation in the English language exists. Whether some linguists prefer to view it as detrimental or not depends on their own opinions. The study and acknowledgement of English variation is highly relevant today, not only because of the landscape created by the expansion of the British Empire overseas, but also because of its current use by millions of non-native speakers. Contrary to general expectation, the linguistic situation in development now, in which English is becoming or has already become a global language, has not served to unify the language but rather contributed to its spread and differentiation from the already existing, more powerful and normalised varieties.

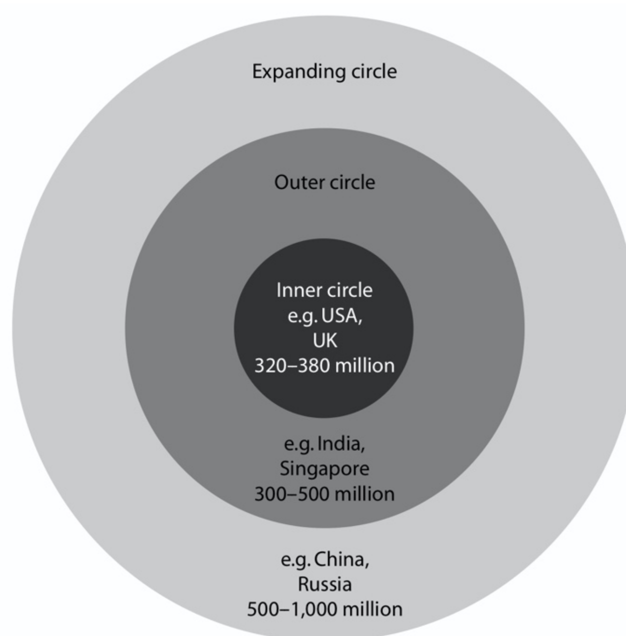

Figure 2: Kachru's 'Three Circles' model. Retrieved from Crystal (2003: 61)

Within linguistics, there has been an ongoing debate on how to classify and organise the many varieties of English around the world. One of the most well-known models designed with this aim is Kachru's 'Three Circles' or 'Concentric Circles' model (Figure 2), which has been used for years in an attempt to explain the distribution of English variants around the world (Crystal, 2003: 61; Schneider, 2011: 32; Jenkins, 2015: 14; Horobin, 2018: 118). It consists of three concentric circles, the innermost circle containing the 'traditional'

varieties of English or those countries which have English as a primary of native language, the next outbound area named 'outer circle' containing those countries which have English as a second language or holding co-official status, and finally the 'expanding circle', which refers to all those varieties of English spoken in places where it is considered a foreign language.

With Kachru's model, the recognition of English variants is widened to include any variant in the world as part of the notion of global English. It allows a more open conversation that considers the influence from communities of speakers outside of the more traditional countries associated with English –either by being the colonisers or the colonised–, i.e. speakers from the inner and outer circles. Schneider (2011: 32) observes that this model has helped to do away with predominance from the inner circle varieties and "instilled increasing self-confidence in localized varieties of English". Being recognised as variants and not simply as 'broken English' –as Jenkins (2015) points out that has been the trend for most of colonial and postcolonial periods– creates a more inclusive panorama. In a globalised world where we are seeing increasing numbers of English speakers from a varied range of backgrounds, Kachru's model can be argued to accommodate to the needs of linguistics: taking into consideration all distinctive varieties in a world where English has become the main medium of communication. Researchers such as Schneider (2011) or Jenkins (2015) consider this model as slightly problematical due to the fact that it seems to be ignoring other realities from some of the countries it classifies. For instance, Schneider (2011: 33) rightly points out that Canada, although from the inner circle, is also French speaking. In spite of that, it could be argued that Kachru's model can serve as a guide to understand the lengths of English in the global context, whether it shares presence with other languages or not –which unsurprisingly is the case in many countries from the outer and expanding circles.

Another existent classification for English variants is McArthur's 'Circle of World English' model (Jenkins, 2015: 13) which specifically notes several variants on a round diagram, having 'World Standard English' at its centre and followed by divisions and subdivisions around it. It goes from much more general groups of English variants in the inner components and the outmost circle contains the specific variants of each group (Figure 3 below). Jenkins regards the notion of 'world English' as questionable, given that it is not a form of English that can currently be identified. It seems that this model aims to show the variants contained in the model as the pieces comprising the world English scene. In comparison with Kachru's, this model does not include the possibility of speakers of English

as a foreign language (EFL) being part of the spectrum of English variation, which Kachru's model does include by having the expanding circle in his model. McArthur's model gives a detailed idea of the extent of variation that English has acquired through expansion –mainly the one due to colonisation–. However, from what has been discussed until now, English as a global language very much entails its use on a global scale with the purpose of allowing global communication. That is the role that English fulfils as a lingua franca of the modern world, therefore ignoring the variants which are used in an ELF environment –by mostly expanding circle speakers– barely acknowledges the scope of English as a global language.

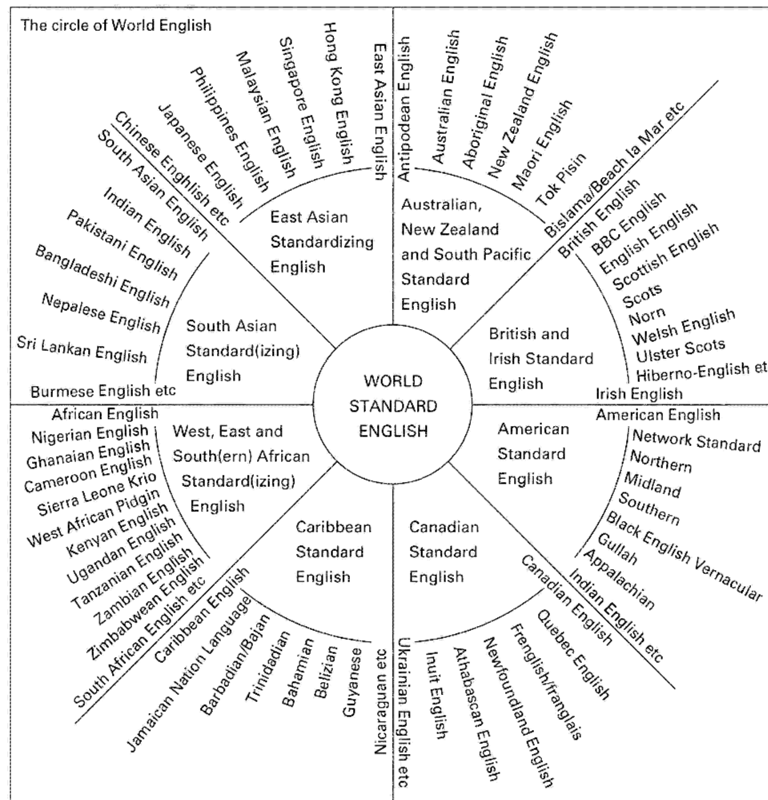

Figure 3: McArthur's 'Circle of World English'. Retrieved from Jenkins (2015: 13)

This approach of ignoring expanding circle varieties as part of the English variants scheme may be explained by the fact that most World English scholars, as Jenkins (2015) refers to them, tend to classify varieties given that they are "linguistically identifiable, geographically definable" (Kachru, 1992: 67 cited in Jenkins, 2015: 42). The range of English variants from a global English perspective must take into consideration the presence of many variants in the expanding circle that, although at the current moment could hardly be linguistically distinctive, are shaping the English language and the linguistic landscape at an international level. Its use as ELF fulfils a key role in modernisation, and McArthur's

model is lacking the largest group of speakers, as pointed out by Crystal (2003) and Jenkins (2015).

2.2 Language death

In the previous sections, we noticed researchers such as Crystal (2007) and Schneider (2011) claiming that language variation is largely a consequence of the spread of a few European languages around the world, which appeared after the colonisation of several countries in the rest of the continents. According to Crystal (2007: 337) the spread of European languages, including English, is also a prime factor in the death of minority languages. Although knowing the exact figures for the total number of languages in the world proves to be difficult to calculate for linguists, Crystal (2000: 207) estimates that out of 6,000 languages, half of them will die by the end of the 21st century. The reasons or causes for the death of so many languages in such a relatively short time vary from language to language, but they are mainly the following three: i) cultural assimilation ii) natural disasters iii) genocide. Out of those three, natural disasters and genocide entail that the speakers are put in physical danger (Crystal, 2000: 70-76), to the point that a language disappears due to the death of its speakers. Examples mentioned by Crystal are a 1998 deadly earthquake in Papua New Guinea[1] or the situation of Colombia, whose long periods of unrest seem to have caused the death of 30 languages –from the arrival of the Spanish and the extermination of indigenous communities, to the more recent conflicts among criminal and paramilitary forces.

Cultural assimilation is defined by Crystal (2000: 77) as a process through which one language is replaced by another which holds a more dominant role. English reached and settled in many territories during the British colonisation era, positioning itself above the indigenous languages of the colonies due to the power and prestige associated with the people who spoke it in the first place. According to Crystal, indigenous languages in Australia are good examples of this type of language death, although many territories of the South Pacific or any others which experienced a process of colonisation can serve as an example as well, given that there is evidence of indigenous languages being extinct due to the impact of the invaders in those locations. Cultural assimilation is therefore one of the most relevant types of language death to be analysed in this paper, as we are mainly

[1] This natural disaster called for several villages to be relocated, and thousands of people died. The relocation of entire communities and the disappearance of a significant amount of their population have linguists worried over a potential irreversible linguistic extinction of at least 4 distinct languages, in a country with such an extraordinary linguistic diversity dependent on small communities of speakers (Crystal, 2000: 71).

observing the effect English is having nowadays on other languages due to its spread and cultural pressure around the world, rather than due to the death of the speakers of the indigenous languages upon which English is exerting such pressure. However, given the long history and presence of English in some territories during colonialism, languages are argued to have disappeared because of their speakers dying. Crystal (2000: 87) notes that "[i]n Australia, the presence of English has, directly or indirectly, caused great linguistic devastation, with 90% of languages moribund." Nonetheless, as claimed by himself (2000) and Ceramella (2012), this type of scenario has not only occurred because of English. For several languages in South and Central America, language extinction was due to the Spanish process of colonisation. Language death as caused by genocide cannot, however, be attributed to English today, and that is why we will focus now on the consequences of cultural assimilation that minority languages are experiencing, mainly due to globalisation.

There are three stages in any cultural assimilation process (Crystal, 2007: 337). Firstly, there can be pressure on the people to speak the dominant language; it can occur through laws or recommendations (top down direction), through peer pressure (bottom up direction) or sometimes it does not have a clear direction and occurs due to average interaction. These shifts within a community of speakers tend to be in pursue of better quality of life.[2] After this first step, these societies start to develop an emerging bilingualism. At this point, without appropriate measures, linguistic decline can arise, where the old language gives way to the new. It is due to this decline that younger generations will now start to be proficient in the new language, sparking feeling of shame to speak their vernacular outside of the home, dooming them to remain family dialects.

As we have seen in the previous section, English variation is a product of contact with other languages, at least for those varieties within the outer and expanding circles. It is indeed agreed by many linguists (Pakir, 1999; Llurda, 2004; Crystal, 2007) that the spread of powerful languages, specifically English, to other territories creates a bilingual environment –even multilingual sometimes. Nowadays, this allows many communities to maintain both a language which may be struggling to thrive and a language such as English which can link that community to international communication and interaction. Llurda (2004) on this matter comments on Brutt-Griffler's (2002) claim regarding the fact that formerly colonised territories have made use of the language of the colonisers –in the case

[2] Factors like social mobility or better academic/work opportunities are usually taken into consideration by speakers that witness English in particular to be a very profitable language on a global scale.

of our interest, English– as a means to acquire freedom. Although Crystal (2007) accounts for bilingualism as the second step on a process towards linguistic extinction, not in all cases that acquisition of English and language shift can mean language death. Rather, it has led over the years to vast numbers of communities around the world who evolved to be bilingual, maintaining their own indigenous languages and their own variety of English in a balanced manner. They have made of English a language they own due to continued contact with the language during the colonisation period and after their independence.

What can we do to prevent the death of languages? Some people may even question why we should care about some minority languages going extinct. If powerful and already widespread languages are taking over the world allowing international relations, maybe language death is something that we should let happen. The truth is, being different and having variety in culture and language could be said to encourage interaction. That is what makes us humans unique and distinct from each other. Crystal (2007: 339) argues that caring about language death helps us learn from others around us, as language is closely related to the history of a society and their cultural identity.

> If diversity is a prerequisite for successful humanity, then the preservation of linguistic diversity is essential, for language lies at the heart of what it means to be human. If the development of multiple cultures is so important, then the role of languages becomes critical, for cultures are chiefly transmitted through spoken and written languages. Accordingly, when language transmission breaks down, through language death, there is a serious loss of inherited knowledge. (Crystal, 2000: 33-34).

Having vast numbers of languages and variants of languages contributes to the global picture of culture and knowledge that comes associated with each language and society that uses that particular language. Although language death is essentially a natural phenomenon that inevitably comes to some languages, we should strive for the survival of these languages that are in a less advantageous position within the global panorama of powerful and colonising languages.

> The community itself must want to save its own language. The culture of which it is a part must need to have respect for minority languages. There needs to be funding, to support courses, materials, and teachers. And there need to be linguists, to get on with the basic task of *documenting* languages. (Crystal, 2007: 338).

According to Crystal (2000: 79), it is on the stage of bilingualism of a community[3] when it is easiest and most effective to act in order to prevent language extinction. Encouraging the study and documentation[4] of these languages from a linguistic point of view and their use by their native speakers (Crystal, 2000: 149-163, 2007: 336-342) can help slow down the disappearance of many languages, especially in places where the bigger percentage of languages are found –South America, central Africa, South Pacific– (Crystal, 2000: 4). It must be noted that, as Crystal observes in the quote above, it is essential for the community of speakers to be willing to participate in the saving of their language. Honisz-Greens (2005: 117) agrees on this matter, saying that endangered languages can only stay alive "if there is supportive backing from the community". Legal action and documentation work solely will not suffice in the process of language revitalisation.

3. Is English a 'killer language'?

Resentment towards English can be said to have flourished over time due to its extensive reach worldwide, this being generally linked to the effects of colonialism (especially in countries of the second diaspora, as mentioned at the beginning of Section 2). Several communities of speakers have experienced the death of their vernaculars due to the arrival of settlers and, as mentioned in Section 2.2, the death of the people and the pressure to speak a different language affected severely the chances of survival of those languages. Nonetheless, even admitting the devastating consequences of language extinction, several linguists agree on the fact that blaming English nowadays for the potential death of some of today's endangered languages is an over-simplification (Crystal, 2000: 87; Honisz-Greens, 2005: 119; Mufwene, 2005).

Mufwene (2005: 19) argues that there is a general misconception about globalisation, which is that it promotes global uniformity. It is understood by the general public that the role of English as a global language has conditioned the future of many minority languages. By becoming the dominating language in all kinds of fields, it seems logical that English must be responsible for the near extinction of several minority languages. Ceramella (2012) also surveys different misconceptions that have arisen due to the presence of English globally. He acknowledges a common statement associated with English, which is that "if

[3] Previously mentioned by Pakir (1999) and Llurda (2004).

[4] Crystal (2000: 150): "Documentation is a major enterprise. Essentially we are talking about the permanent portrayal of a language using all available means."
Crystal (2007: 339): "…getting the language (…) recorded (using both sound and film), analysed, written down. The obvious reason for this is educational – the need for literacy."

one language carries all the messages related to our daily needs, other languages become useless" (Ceramella, 2012: 12). Crystal (2000: 80-81) is also aware of this misconception and tries to find a balance for those cases in which English shares a space with other languages, in order to seek bilingual or multilingual communities as a means to avoiding language extinction:

> The dominant language is necessary because it provides people with a bridge between two worlds – an intelligibility bridge, without which their progress would be negligible. The dominated language, by contrast, has quite another role. By definition, it has no value as an international or intercultural lingua franca; it cannot facilitate communication between peoples; it is not outward-looking. It is there for the opposite reason: to express the identity of the speakers as members of their community. It is inward-looking – but in the best sense – fostering family ties, maintaining social relationships, preserving historical links, giving people a sense of their 'pedigree'.

On this matter, Mufwene (2005) finds crucial the need to distinguish the role of the language within the community who uses it: is it a role of international lingua franca or a national means of communication? The claim to discerning the use of English within a community or territory is shared by Eckert et al (2004), who argue that the presence of English does not always entail language loss. In their view, this is because other languages in those territories can be well established, fulfilling a national or regional purpose and not coming into conflict with the role of lingua franca that English may have. We must be aware that the spread of information and culture associated with globalisation has allowed a degree of variation and merging, rather than a complete takeover on the part of the English-speaking culture (Mufwene, 2005). Mufwene (2005: 28) further explains that although colonisation and globalisation are mutually related and to a certain extent responsible for the expansion of English "at the expense of others", the subsequent evolution of languages in a given territory depends on the local populations. Eckert et al (2004: 109) state that "it depends very much on the political and economic power of its speakers whether a language acts as a killer language." This view is shared by most linguists, who understand that the international role as lingua franca that English holds today has created spaces in which English has a dominating presence and minority languages are relegated to regional or identity purposes, with the risk that they may fall in disuse. Nevertheless, Crystal (2000: 81) considers that the trend of referring to these languages as 'dominant' or 'dominated' must disappear in order to give way to an environment in which we see both languages present in a community as

complementary and not as competitors against each other. Honisz-Greens (2005: 118) also agrees on the need for co-existing languages to be complementary, saying that it is the only way in which multilingualism in communities can work.[5] Crystal (2000) later on admits that shedding these practices of competition can prove to be difficult, as sometimes they have come tied to political movements in favour or detriment of a certain language,[6] conditioning the way in which we view language diversity. Crystal is very aware of these policies, as history of the favouring of English over other languages can be found in his own home country of Wales. Welsh was up until fairly recently frowned upon by institutions and shunned and banned at schools. Similar policies have been implemented in other countries, favouring and even imposing English, or French, Spanish and Portuguese, over indigenous languages (Crystal, 2000: 84-85).

> (…) faced with a situation where people make a conscious decision to stop using their language, or not to pass it on to their children, seeing it as an intolerable burden, a better description might be 'language suicide'. This certainly seems to be more often the case in settings where English is the desirable goal[7] – which is one reason why talk of English as a 'killer language' is a gross over-simplification of a complex situation. The effects of a dominant language vary markedly in different parts of the world, as do attitudes towards it. (Crystal, 2000: 86-87).

> Adaptation to changing socio-economic ecologies is the primary reason of language loss, which actually occurs through the cumulation of decisions taken individually by the members of the relevant population as they face the communicative challenges of their socio-economic environments. Language loss is noticed only retrospectively and language endangerment is noticed when the cumulation of such individual responses has progressed so far that proportionally fewer and fewer people find the heritage language useful to their communicative needs. (Mufwene, 2005: 26)

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[5] These claims are also supported by Jenkins (2015: 176), who argues that bilingualism can make a difference when it comes to language death. She believes a bilingual society must be encouraged instead of frowned upon. If competition among languages is supressed, the need of survival of a language is not present anymore.

[6] Most times in the name of national unity. As Honisz-Greens (2005: 115) puts it: "Other nation states often select and consolidate national languages and sideline others to increase national unity and reduce the costs of providing government services or educational materials in [small languages]."

[7] With the increasing number of people learning English nowadays (see Section 1), it seems reasonable that communities of speakers in which English has already been present for a significant amount of time will lean towards learning it or passing it on to children –given the countless possibilities it brings on an international level– rather than their own vernacular.

Mufwene (2005), although critical of researchers such as Crystal for their tendency to simplify a very complex situation, coincides in some respects with Crystal, stating that the process through which now English may be blamed for the death of languages is not as simple as blaming colonisation or the language itself. They both claim that speakers are the ones who begin language shift, and it is by using or preferring certain languages that the ones abandoned eventually die, if the appropriate measures to avoid it are not adopted. According to Eckert et al (2004: 112), language death is related to the power dynamics among languages and their speakers. In their view, 'killer language' seems an incorrect metaphor to refer to the language that is considered more profitable to a community.

Researchers such as Brutt-Griffler (2002) and Schneider (2011), when facing the fact that English reached several territories through colonialism, argue that colonisers had no intention in sharing their language with the population from the colonies. In this respect, Mufwene (2005: 27) agrees and elaborates that varieties of English in these areas sprung from a need to adapt to particular environments, for example when dealing with administrative matters or higher education. The use of vernaculars and English in these cases is complementary. Former colonies decided to keep English –mostly for institutional matters– after their independence, and now it is proving to be even more beneficial, as English is the world's lingua franca. Some theorists (Llurda, 2004; Mufwene, 2005) argue that English has become a neutral language in certain environments –those in which it is used as ELF–, because it can be separated from its associated culture and ideas in order to allow an international flow of information. If we are able to reach the point in which the users of English around the world see it as a complementary language to their vernaculars, the battle against the extinction of minority languages is half-won. Unfortunately, in some cases, "[m]any countries are too poor or unstable for successful language policies to be implemented" (Honisz-Greens, 2005: 115). Support from institutions and governments is needed, particularly funding must be available to promote the teaching of minority languages to a society willing to learn. If these measures, which Crystal (2007) and many others encourage, are not available, the path is open to other powerful languages (national or foreign) to meet the needs of speakers within their countries and on an international level. As Mufwene (2005: 45) states, speakers are who ultimately "kill their languages by opting to speak another language."

Overall, sentencing English as a 'killer language' seems for many linguists too much of an over-simplification, taking into consideration a process that has taken centuries of migrations, language variation and acquisition. By addressing the complex processes by

which languages die, we have come to realise that decisions made by individuals bring societal changes which are a prime factor in the future of small languages. It is true that the world we live in has now English as a predominant language, but some linguists argue it has turned to be a neutral lingua franca which helps shift speakers' views on their small vernaculars. That way, instead of abandoning the language that is part of their identity, bilingualism is promoted and each language has a distinct role while still preserving a crucial part of a nation's culture.

4. Papua New Guinea: language contact and the birth of Tok Pisin

One interesting aspect linked to the spread of English is language contact. It develops between the newly arrived language and the already present language or languages in a specific territory. In cases where contacts are very intense, two types of languages may develop: pidgins in the first place, and from them, creoles. Pidgins are "reduced second-language forms which are not anybody's mother tongue" (Schneider, 2011: 27-28). They come into being when a group of people finds the need to communicate and they do not speak any language in common. As Wurm and Mühlhäusler (1985: 8) observe, pidgin languages appear due to particular needs of a community, and they can either grow or disappear. Given that a pidgin prospers, and it is learnt as a mother tongue by the next generations, a creole arises, and its vocabulary and grammar become more complex (Jenkins, 2015: 37). According to Jenkins, these two types of contact languages have been regarded in the past as inferior, but she argues that some linguists are now finding useful their study regarding second language acquisition and creolisation[8] (Jenkins, 2015: 36-37).

Papua New Guinea is a country located in the South Pacific which has been the focus of study for many linguists. One of the reasons for that is its remarkable language diversity, accounting for around 800 different languages[9] (Wurm and Mühlhäusler, 1985; Mühlhäusler, 2003; Sumbuk, 2006; Anderson, 2012). Another reason for Papua New Guinea to be in the spotlight of linguistic research is that it has experienced language contact since the arrival of the first settlers, particularly of German origin, during the second half of the 19th century. The English influence on the territory started at the beginning of the 20th century, when Australia took over its administration (Mühlhäusler, 2003: 5-6). The result of these interventions was the birth of a pidgin: Tok Pisin. It began as a trade language

[8] Development of a pidgin into a creole (Jenkins, 2015: 37).

[9] Figures vary depending on the source and date of the retrieval of information, but it stands between 700 and over 800. The exact number is difficult to determine, as there is a lack of linguistic surveys of the territory (Sumbuk, 2006: 87, 92).

between the Europeans and the indigenous population at plantations, but now Tok Pisin has become one of the primary languages of Papua New Guinea (Wurm and Mühlhäusler, 1985: 8). It is considered to be a creole today (Jenkins, 2015: 37), but at the time of Wurm and Mühlhäusler's research (1985), Tok Pisin was considered an expanded pidgin.[10]

Tok Pisin is not uniform in the whole of Papua New Guinea. Experts such as Mühlhäusler (2003) acknowledge a degree of (mainly geographical) variation in today's language. These variants directly result from gradual change along the years, according to the geographical area in which it was spoken and the social position of those who spoke it. Mühlhäusler (2003: 6) explains how, in origin, Tok Pisin was used in the plantations for vertical communication (i.e. "between Europeans or plantation foremen and workers"), but later on started to serve as a means for horizontal communication (i.e. among people in similar social position as a lingua franca, and not necessarily within the plantation environment). Mühlhäusler argues that, through that shift around 1930, the influence from English was reduced, as the Native peoples stopped seeing it as the language of the Europeans and rather their own language. It became useful as it allowed communication among people who spoke different indigenous languages. However, Tok Pisin is once again experiencing contact with English, mainly due to being used by younger generations (Mühlhäusler, 2003: 33) and in urban areas (Wurm and Mühlhäusler, 1985: 448), where we can assume the impact of globalisation may be more noticeable.

It is predicted that Papua New Guinea's incredible linguistic diversity will slowly decrease, if compared to other linguistic regions that were in similar position and taking into consideration that most of the languages spoken in the country count with very small numbers of speakers (Sumbuk, 2006). Nevertheless, it has been noted that several of these languages have survived for years maintaining low speaker figures. To add to that uncertain future of the indigenous languages of Papua New Guinea, there are two other important factors to consider. i) Although officially the country "does not promote or discriminate against any language" (Sumbuk, 2006: 93), English is the chosen language in environments such as education, business, administration or media. Mainly, this is argued to be due to lack of funding to create materials in Tok Pisin, let alone in any of the indigenous languages. According to Wurm and Mühlhäusler (1985: 489), Tok Pisin is considered not to have the lexicon necessary to explain abstract concepts, and education materials are much cheaper and already available in English. These arguments are also seconded by Sumbuk's (2006)

[10] Intermediate stage between the original pidgin and the creole.

research. ii) Even though Tok Pisin is rarely formally taught (Wurm and Mühlhäusler, 1985: 9), it seems to have acquired some prestige, and parents are choosing to raise their children in Tok Pisin rather than in their vernaculars (Wurm and Mühlhäusler,1985: 448; Sumbuk, 2006: 93). Combining both factors, Papua New Guinea's small languages may be heading towards extinction threatened by its own lingua franca and the world's lingua franca.

Sumbuk (2006) offers a list of recommendations in order to avoid losing language diversity in Papua New Guinea. He very much shares opinion with Crystal (2000, 2007) on the fact that documentation on Papua New Guinea's linguistic situation is key if we want to avoid the loss of hundreds of minority languages. According to Sumbuk (2006: 92), "[i]t is now known that many languages in Papua New Guinea have become extinct without any form of documentation". This entails that there is no knowledge whatsoever of what these languages looked like or how they worked, and without specific and thorough linguistic study, the future of currently endangered languages could be the same. Apart from needing linguistic surveys, Sumbuk (2006: 90-95) enumerates other reasons why Papua New Guinea's diversity is at risk[11] and suggests that education and self-determination on the part of governments and speakers must be central to any type of revitalisation attempt. The global impact of English can be seen in Papua New Guinea's society through the current status of Tok Pisin, which is largely related to English linguistically speaking. The individual choices of the speakers to use the creole or English as a lingua franca can develop into a situation of mass language death, and that view is assumed to be the reality in a near future. Nonetheless, as Sumbuk (2006: 95) points out, small languages in Papua New Guinea have survived for many years, maintaining more or less the same number of speakers, and thus he stresses the fact that comparing Papua New Guinea's situation to what other territories have experienced may not be helpful nor accurate. Only linguistic surveys may determine how and why small languages have survived until now, and through those findings Papua New Guinea may proceed to maintain small languages safe.

5. Conclusions

This paper has surveyed the spread of English around the world, observing in the first place its impact globally and also its role as a lingua franca. We briefly analysed how such a wide presence of English worldwide has contributed to two different linguistic phenomena: language variation, which has been studied by linguists from very different approaches and

[11] Among these we find: the impact of technological developments being in English, lack of education in indigenous languages and lack of rights of the indigenous peoples and their culture.

theoretical stances, and language death. The latter, which is intrinsic to language use and comes tied to speakers' decisions on which language they find more suitable for their needs, can occur due to a number of factors, which have been discussed in the preceding pages.

Language death in particular is currently having a great repercussion on a global scale. Linguists have been long aware of the fact that many languages could die in this very century, but, as we have tried to show in this paper, measures to avoid language death require incredible amounts of funding as well as a stable determination on the part of governments and speakers. These measures, unfortunately, cannot be implemented by some countries whose situation is less advantageous if compared to that of powerful and developed countries. The omnipresence of English seems to be causing a lot of worry, as its role as lingua franca, combined with some countries' colonial past, may entail the potential disappearance of many minority languages. These concerns have contributed to the study of domination among languages, to the point of considering English a 'killer language'. In this paper we have surveyed different linguists' opinions to conclude that finding a single culprit for a highly complex process seems probably unreasonable. Language use and language death very much depend on the speakers of the language, as well as on their needs. Changes in society, globally or regionally, can affect the prospects of any language, for better or for worse. Linguists have warned about the consequences of linguistic extinction, such as cultural and identity loss, and have put research forward on how to avoid it: teaching the language, but also teaching to love and care about the language, as no measure will be effective enough unless people choose to respect their language or languages.

We have also briefly discussed in this degree project the situation of Papua New Guinea as a case study, considering that it can be an excellent example of language diversity that finds itself potentially endangered by English. Papua New Guinea is closely linked to English through colonialism and the study of its English-based creole Tok Pisin is proving to be an indispensable tool for the analysis of language contact cross-linguistically. Tok Pisin and Papua New Guinea provided a helpful example of language endangerment from the perspective of two lingua francas, Tok Pisin and English, that may be fulfilling the needs of the speakers of many Papua New Guinea's vernaculars, causing their future death. As in the case of other language death situations, linguists have analysed what needs to be done to encourage the use of minority languages in Papua New Guinea, and to ensure the survival of the many languages that make Papua New Guinea one of the most linguistically diverse regions in the world.

All in all, probably the main conclusion of this project is that English has a very strong influence in today's world, which is hardly surprising. However, that influence does not necessarily have to be detrimental to the languages that already exist in certain territories as long as we, the speakers, find the balance needed for each language to have its purpose. Complementation, bilingualism or even multilingualism have been argued to benefit communities of speakers, as they create an environment in which all languages may have their own space while language death is indefinitely averted.

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