
UNIT 3 STATUS AND ROLE OF ENGLISH IN THE GLOBAL WORLD

Structure

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will address the following questions:

- What is a global language?
- What makes English a global language?
- What are the implications, both positive and negative, of the globalization of English?
- How is the increasing importance of English language causing a reallocation in the power structures of the marginalized compared to other communities?
- Description of the spread of English.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the most interesting linguistic phenomena witnessed over the past few hundred years is the spread of the English language across the globe. Only a few centuries ago, English was a collection of dialects spoken within the shores of a small island, the British Isles, used by a small number of people. Now some variety of this language is spoken in almost every country of the world. It is also observed that the number of speakers speaking it as a second or foreign language far exceeds those who speak it as their mother tongue. The growing importance of English is evident from the fact that it is increasingly regarded as the lingua franca of the world. English is also the language of international communication, politics, commerce, science and technology, travel, music, overseas education, shipping, aviation, etc.

3.2 WHAT MAKES ENGLISH A GLOBAL LANGUAGE?

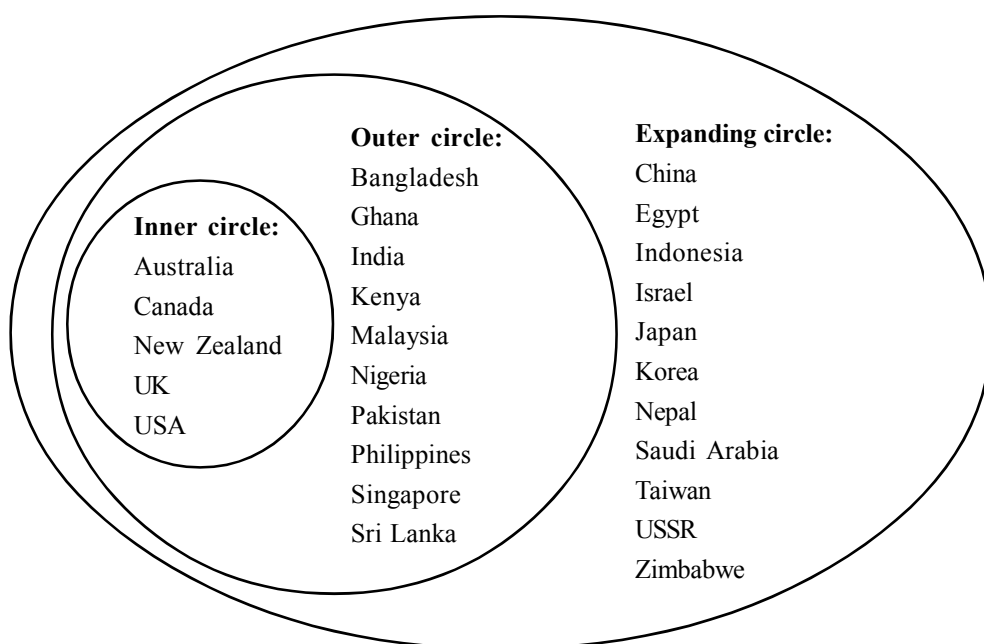
Before we discuss this question, we need to be very clear on two points:

What is global language?

As Crystal (2003) says, a language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a “special role” that is recognized in every country. What is meant by a ‘special’ role for English?

- 1 Such a role is most evident in countries where a large number of people speak English as their mother tongue e.g. Britain, U.S.A., Australia and so on. However, given this criterion, English would not achieve global status; Spanish leads in this respect. It is spoken as mother tongue in more than 20 countries, including the Latin American countries.
- 2 When a language is the official language of a country and is the medium of communication in such domains as government, the law courts, media and education, it is often characterized as a ‘second’ language. English is the second language in countries such as India, Ghana, Nigeria and Singapore, etc. In fact, this list seems to be ever increasing. English is the most common official language with recognized status in 51 countries.
- 3 When a language is assigned priority in a country’s foreign language teaching agenda, even though the language has no official status. English is the language most widely taught as a foreign language in over 100 countries such as China, Russia, Germany, Spain, Egypt, Brazil, etc. English continues to replace other foreign languages – in 1996, English replaced French as the chief foreign language in schools in Algeria (formerly a French colony).

So a language gets a special status when it shows three-pronged development: as the first language, as the official language and as the main foreign language. Given such a situation, a global language will inevitably come to be used by more people than other language. English has reached this state – a quarter of the world’s population is already fluent/competent in English and the figure is steadily growing. No other language can match this rate of growth at present.



In fact Kachru (1985) has succinctly visualized the global spread of English with his model of three concentric circles:

The Inner circle refers to those countries where English is the first language/ Mother tongue for the majority of the population. These include places like U.K, USA, Australia and so on.

The Outer circle refers to countries where English arrived due to exploitation and colonization. After these countries attained independence, English continues to play a major role, often taking on the status of an official language. The countries include India, Nigeria, Singapore, etc.

The Expanding circle includes countries where the presence of English is more recent and not linked to colonization and exploitation but primarily to its status as an international language. These countries include China, Korea, Brazil and so on. China is the country that has attracted the greatest amount of attention since the learners of English here are more than the mother tongue speakers in UK and USA put together.

The Inner Circle and the Outer Circle varieties have been fairly well documented but the focus of research on the Expanding Circle is relatively new and concentrates on two main areas: 1) to establish the extent to which English has acquired local forms and functions that are sufficiently stable to constitute as a distinct variety, 2) to describe phonological, lexical, syntactic and discourse patterns which would characterize a distinct variety (Saraceni, 2015)

Check Your Progress 1

1. What are the three reasons which give English a special status?

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2. Discuss the difference between the Inner, Outer and the Expanding Circle.

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3.3 WHAT MAKES A LANGUAGE GLOBAL?

A language does not become a global language because of its structural properties, or the size of its vocabulary or even the literature written in it. A language becomes an international language for one chief reason: the political power of the people who speak it. Earlier it was their military power, for example, Greek became the language of international communication in the Middle East over 2,000 years ago, not because its speakers included great intellectuals like Aristotle and Plato, but because of the military successes of Alexander the Great. Similarly, Latin became an international language throughout the Roman Empire due to the military might of the Romans. When the Roman military power declined, Latin continued for a millennium as the international language of education thanks to the power of the Roman Catholic Church.

Similarly, Arabic came to be spoken so widely across Northern Africa and the Middle East owing to the spread of Islam, carried along by the force of the Moorish armies. Again English, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese and French found their way into the Americas, Africa and the Far East due to their colonial policies during the Renaissance.

However, in today's context, dominance of a language is not solely due to the result of military might. A militarily powerful nation may establish a language, but it takes an economically powerful one to maintain it and extend its use.

Finance, Science and Technology also rule the world. English is now the international language of science and technology. The growing technological role of USA has since then ensured that English once again becomes the global language of experiment and discovery. Since World War II, scientific journals have shifted from publishing in their national languages to publishing in English. Interestingly a study conducted in the early 1980s showed that nearly two-thirds of publications of the French scientists were in English.

The Internet is regarded by many as the flagship of global English. McCrum et al (1986) says that English is the medium for 80 per cent of the information stored in the world's computers. The Internet carries English language services into nearly every country and with growing private subscriptions, into people's homes.

Of course scholars such as Crystal (2003) have highlighted certain properties of English, which make it internationally appealing. For example, the inclusion of a very large foreign vocabulary in English is said to have given it an edge over other languages. French, for instance, has gone out of its way to retain its "purity". Learners often comment on the "familiarity" of English vocabulary, and this is probably because English has over the centuries borrowed thousands of new words from the languages with which it has been in contact.

Comments have also been made on the 'democratic' structure of English. It has been sometimes suggested that English is rather poor as a system of coding social class differences, which is not true of a language such as Javanese that expresses an intricate system of class relationships. French too has a pronominal system, which expresses power (Crystal, 2003).

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 Say whether the following statements are true or false:
 - i. A global language has a more complex internal structure.
 - ii. Greek became an international language because great thinkers like Aristotle and Plato spoke the language.
 - iii. The Moorish army was responsible for the spread of Arabic in Northern Africa and the Middle East.
 - iv. One of the primary reasons for the spread of English today is because it is the main language of the resources on the Internet.

- v. English is not a “good language” because it allows borrowing from other languages.
- 2 Give five reasons why English has become a global language.

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3.4 IMPLICATIONS OF THE GLOBALIZATION OF ENGLISH

There have been both positive and negative effects of the globalization of English.

The global spread of English has had interesting sociolinguistic implications. In countries where it has been transplanted it has imbibed many features of the indigenous language(s) and culture(s), primarily at the level of the lexicon and pronunciation, in certain cases even at the level of syntax. English has, in turn, enriched the languages it has come into contact with. Due to robust multilingualism, mixed codes have also enriched the language spectrum.

There have also been very serious negative consequences of the development of English as a world language. English has been associated with death or virtual death, of many indigenous languages in those countries where it has been transplanted. North America, Brazil, Australia, Indonesia and parts of Africa are examples of the unprecedented rate at which indigenous languages are getting lost. Some estimates suggest that perhaps 80 per cent of nearly 6,000 languages of the world will die out by the end of this century. If this happens it would be an enormous tragedy, since with a language the identity and culture of a people also die out. Death of a language is of as much importance as the death of a species.

A critical analysis of English suggests that it is also an exclusionary class dialect, favouring particular people, countries, cultures, forms of knowledge and possibilities of development; it is a language which creates barriers as much as it presents possibilities (Pennycook, 2006). As Tollefson 2009:9 says: for those who already speak English, the economic value of the language translates directly into greater opportunities in education, business and employment. For those who must learn English, however, particularly those who do not have access to high-quality English language education, the spread of English presents a formidable obstacle to education, employment, and other activities requiring English proficiency.

One of the obvious effects of the global spread of English is the range of variation that exists within English language today and the diverse social contexts in which it is used. In the last twenty years there has been recognition of the new varieties of English that have emerged in countries where English has the status of a second rather than a foreign language. We have therefore Indian English, Singaporean English, Nigerian English and so on. These local varieties of English are distinct from the so-called ‘native’ varieties of English. Historically, “indigenisation” takes place in situations where a second language gradually

acquires more and more communicative functions and becomes an integral part of the linguistic interactions of a large body of people, and is, in fact, considered to be their own language.

It must be noted at the same time that these so-called 'native' varieties of English (where English is spoken as the first language: England, America, Australia, New Zealand and so on) have highly differential varieties from each other as well, especially at the level of lexicon.

Lexicon

American	British/Australian
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Gas	petrol
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Cheque	bill
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Faucet	tap
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Drapescurtains

Drug store	chemist
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Elevator	lift
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Candy	sweets
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Cookies	biscuits
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Apartment	flat
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Spelling difference

American	British/Australian
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Color	colour
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Behavior	behaviour
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Humor	humour
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Center	centre
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Enroll	enrol
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Installment	instalment
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Organize	organise
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Pronunciation difference

The /r/ sound is absent in words like girl, purse, bark, fourth, etc. in British English. However, in General American English all these words have a distinct /r/ pronunciation.

American uses the /æ/ (of 'cat') in words such as 'pass', 'path' 'can't', 'dance', 'aunt' whereas British/Australian uses the /ɑ/ (of 'father').

Even within the countries where English is the 'native' language, different varieties of English exist. For example the English spoken in London and Yorkshire has many differences.

So variation in the English language is not peculiar to second language scenarios but also within the so called countries where English is the first language. Variation in language is inevitably dependent on the local factors.

Check Your Progress 3

Briefly answer the following questions:

- 1 Give five examples of words from Indian language which are now part of the English dictionary.

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- 2 What is the negative consequence of English as a world language?

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- 3 English is considered “an exclusionary class dialect”. Discuss.

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- 4 Discuss the variation within the so-called “native” varieties of English.

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- 5 Do you consider English an Indian language? Why/why not?

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3.5 ENGLISH IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: THE WAR AND ENGLISH

As Graddol (1997) states by the end of the nineteenth century Britain had established the pre-conditions for English as a global language. Yet the world position of English might have declined with the empire, like the languages of the other European colonial powers, such as Portugal and the Netherlands, had it not been for the dramatic rise of the USA in the twentieth century as a superpower. There were, indeed, two other European languages contending to be global lingua franca(s): French and German. Eco observes “Had Hitler won World War II, ... we would probably today use German as a universal vehicular language...” (1995:331)

For the spread of English, the aftermath of World War II was decisive. America through its economic supremacy became the new superpower. And the language behind the US dollar was English. As Steiner observes:

English acted as the vulgate of American power and of Anglo-American technology and finance... In ways too intricate, too diverse for socio-linguistics to formulate precisely, English and American English seem to embody for men and women throughout the world and particularly for the young the ‘feel’ of hope, of material advance, of scientific and empirical procedures. The entire world-image of mass consumption, of international exchange, of popular arts, of generational conflict, of technocracy, is permeated by American English and English citations and speech habits... (1975:469)

After the war, several international agencies were established to help manage global reconstruction and future governance. Especially since the 1940s several political, financial and social institutions have been set up which are the meeting place of the whole world as it were. The chief international forum for political and social communication are the bodies such as UNESCO and UNICEF (1946), WHO (1948) and International Atomic Agency (1957). Key financial institutions have been established in the 20th century such as IMF in 1944. USA became closely involved in post-war economic reconstruction of Europe, Japan and other parts of the Asia Pacific region. The Korean and later the Vietnam War continued the process of spreading American influence. Now, as more countries have been rendered ‘open’ to global flow of finance, goods, knowledge and culture, the influence of English has spread.

Crystal (2003) estimates that 85 per cent of international organizations now use English as one of their working languages, 49 per cent use French and fewer than 10 per cent use Arabic, Spanish or German. These figures probably underestimate the *de facto* use of English in such organizations. The International Association for Applied Linguistics, for example, lists French as a working language (and is known by a French acronym AILA), but English is used almost exclusively in its publications and meetings. In Europe, the hegemony of English, even on paper, is surprisingly high. It is estimated that 99 per cent of European organizations listed in a recent yearbook of international associations cite English

as a working language, as opposed to 63 per cent and 40 per cent who cite French and German, respectively.

French is still the only real rival to English as a working language of world institutions, although the world position of French has been in rapid decline since World War II. However, the use of French in international forums is unlikely to disappear entirely, especially in Europe. It has the positive connotation of being ‘not English’. It is the only alternative, which can be used in many international forums as a gesture of resistance to the hegemony of English.

Check Your Progress 4

1 Why did English gain supremacy over other languages?

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2 Do you think that there should be an international language? Why/why not?

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3.6 DIFFERENT VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

As mentioned earlier the spread of English across the globe is a result of migration, colonization of different parts of the world by English speaking people and globalization in the post-colonial period. This has resulted in the emergence of different varieties of English.

The first migration of English involves migration from East and South of England, Ireland and Scotland to America, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa which resulted in new mother tongue varieties of English. The Englishes that developed in these areas were primarily due to dialect contact, internal changes and the contribution of indigenous languages.

In the 18th and the 19th centuries the spread of English in East and West Africa, in the South and South-East Asia was due to the process of colonization of these countries which led to multiple L2 varieties. It is believed that the spread, diversification and emergence of new varieties depended on the type of settlement that took place. This could be 1) settlement colonies, including plantation colonies, 2) trade colonies, 3) exploitation colonies (Mufwene, 2001).

Settlement Colonies: L1 varieties as well as creoles developed in settlement colonies. The different types of settlement colonies led to different types of

varieties of English being developed. L1 varieties developed in North America, Australia, New Zealand where the European population was in a demographic majority and where the indigenous population was marginalized (Mufwene, 2015). Creoles were developed in those areas where the majority of the population was non-European. These were slaves or indentured labour. Because of the diverse languages that this population spoke, it led to a process of creolisation.

Trade colonies: The trade colonies were primarily confined to coastal areas and the contact between the local population and colonial powers were limited to the exchange of goods and commodities. Contact was through interpreters who had some knowledge of the European languages. For instance, English pidgins started emerging in the 18th and 19th centuries out of contact between the non-standard varieties of European languages in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific oceans (Mufwene, 2015). Some of them evolved into new vernaculars/pidgins/creoles.

Exploitation colonies: These were colonies like India, Singapore, Nigeria where the raw materials were sourced for the finished products created by the industrial revolution of the late 18th century. Unlike the trade colonies the Europeans started penetrating into hinterlands of these places and there emerged a greater need for an English speaking population which would provide effective assistance to the administration. The introduction of English education became an imperative. Macaulay's famous minutes talked of such a class of Indians who would serve such a role/purpose.

The present day Asian and African second language varieties are a result of such an English education, English did not replace the local language but began being used in different domains laying the seeds of 'indigenized' varieties such as Indian English, Singaporean English, Nigerian English and so on. English acquired the local flavour and because of contact with local languages and cultures there were structural changes in the sound, lexicon and the syntax and semantics of the English language.

The spread of English in the settlement colonies and the colonized areas had much in common. The English which was transported to the new world (America, Australia) was not uniform as people of various dialects converged and created their own brand of English as we can notice in differences in the pronunciation, lexicon and semantics of British, American and Australian English. The same was the case in the colonized world. Here interaction with the local languages further changed the already variable English. English in India is a result of colonization, but in its long sojourn on Indian soil it has acquired a life of its own and acquired many features and gained so much acceptability that it is now considered an Indian language. However it must be noticed that the least variability is in the grammatical structures and this is maintained through various Englishes. So as Hudson says, syntax is the common bond across all Englishes where the least tolerance for variability is accepted. However in the case of pronunciation, lexicon and semantics all the Englishes have their own flavour.

Check Your Progress 5

1 How did English spread across the globe?

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2 Where did L1 varieties develop? Give reason(s).

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3 What is common between English in the settlement colonies and the colonized world?

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3.7 THE POST-COLONIAL ERA

The post colonial expansion of English can be associated with the forces of globalization. As we mentioned before, after the First World War, the rise of the United States of America in the world as a dominant economic, military, scientific power and the establishment of Commonwealth nations have helped in strengthening the position of English as a language of international importance. Later, English also became the dominant language of the European Union. Many nations therefore, modified their educational policies to include English in their curricula so that they could keep pace with these international trends. For example, European Union countries teach English from grade one as does Hong Kong. It is also taught in grade one in countries like Malaysia, Singapore, India and Bangladesh. This global spread of English has continued to transform the English language in many ways. Englishes are diverging from each other through internal innovations as well as external borrowings. English interacts with multiple factors in its local settings because it exists in multi-cultural and multi-ethnic environments. Globalization has also increased the mobility of people and brought speakers of various Englishes into contact where it becomes necessary for speakers of different varieties of English to understand each other. Moreover, globalization has also caused the global diffusion of various forms of new media such as movies, TV series, internet, radio, online newspapers, and personal transactional modes of contact via email, Facebook, Skype, Whatsapp, YouTube and so on. These have also led to contact between various speakers of English and new varieties of English emerging.

It must be made clear that all the varieties of English whether the so called native or non-native varieties have their own distinct identities. Speakers of different varieties of Englishes must make an attempt to understand each other. It is to be noted that variation exists even in the so called native Englishes. For example, English spoken in London is very different from the English spoken in Yorkshire. No varieties of English is superior to any other variety and while we may speak and write correctly in any language, there is no need to emulate either the British or the Americans.

3.8 LET US SUM UP

Over the ages one language or the other has achieved the status of a global language. What were the reasons for this? In recent times English has attained the status of an international language. We discuss the implications of English – both positive and negative – of being a global language. We also dwell in some detail on the spread of English across the world in the last 300 years.

3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

Crystal D. (2003), *English as a Global Language*, Cambridge University Press.

Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk & H. G. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures*, (pp. 11-36). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lange, C. (2012) *The Syntax of Spoken Indian English*, John Benjamins Publishing Company Amsterdam, Netherlands

Alastair P. (2006) *Global Englishes and Transcultural Flows*, 1st Edition, Routledge.

3.10 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 Three reasons which give English a special status:
 - i It is the mother tongue in several countries, e.g. UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand, etc.
 - ii It is the official language in several countries like India, Singapore, Nigeria, etc.
 - iii It is a dominant foreign language in countries like China, Russia, Germany and so on.
- 2 Inner Circle refers to those countries where English is spoken as the First language/Mother tongue.

Outer Circle countries are those which have a history of colonization.

Expanding circle refers to those countries where English is being rapidly acquired due to its status as an international language.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 True or false:
 - i F
 - ii F
 - iii T
 - iv T
 - v F

- 2 Five reasons why English has become a global language:
 - i. Political and economical power
 - ii. Conquest
 - iii. Science and technology including Internet
 - iv. Does not have system of coding social class differences

Check Your Progress 3

- 1 Chutney, dacoit, guru, juggernaut, jungle, karma, khaki, loot, mantra, nirvana, shampoo
- 2 - English has been associated with death or virtual death of many indigenous languages in those countries where it has been transplanted. North America, Brazil, Australia, Indonesia and parts of Africa are examples of the unprecedented rate at which indigenous languages are getting lost. Some estimates suggest that perhaps 80 per cent of nearly 6,000 languages of the world will die out by the end of this century.
 - English also excludes, creating a class of people who are more privileged and have access to greater opportunities.
- 3 - Because it creates a class of people who have access to knowledge, development and opportunities.
 - Acts as a barrier and denies opportunities to people who do not have access to learning the language proficiently.
- 4 Variation between native varieties exists mostly at the lexical level, although there are differences at the level of spelling and pronunciation as well. This happens because as the language gets transplanted into newer areas, it picks up the local flavour which includes the flora and fauna of the place as well.
- 5 Do it yourself.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1 English gained supremacy over other languages:
 - dramatic rise of USA as a super power
 - after WW2, the international agencies that helped in the reconstruction of the world used English as one of the main lingua franca as USA mainly helped in the reconstruction
 - the Korean and Vietnam wars also led to further spread of English
 - most research publications in English
- 2 Do it yourself

Check Your Progress 5

- 1 Migration, colonization, globalization which led to settlement colonies, trade colonies and exploitation colonies.

English and its Varieties

- 2 In North America, Australia and New Zealand. Here the European population was predominant demographically. They therefore succeeded in marginalizing the local population and their languages.
- 3 English which was transported to the New World (America, Australia) was not uniform as people from different regions and linguistic groups converged, each having their own accents, lexicon, etc.

The same was the case in the colonies.

In both the cases the local language had an impact on English.

