



## **Chinese Growing Global Influence and the Possible Expansion of the Mandarin Language**

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#### **Abstract**

Everything is subject to change, nothing is permanent. This phenomenon seems more befitting in the context of the language. Every language that is modern or primitive is either expanding, shrinking or even dying through various reasons. This process of changing a language is not a new one. The Roman language, which was once the most privileged and target language of the world for being the language of scholarship and modern knowledge, today, is no longer an administered language. After the 18th century, the English language has emerged as the global language. In addition to its natural capabilities of integration and assimilation, this happened as the result of a vital substantial process of colonization and scientific inventions, which were further powered by the growing trade supremacy and some implicit or explicit policies of the English spoken regions of the world, especially by Britain. Although the Mandarin language is

the native language of the biggest population but, so far, it has failed to acquire the similar position that the English language enjoys. However, in the recent years, the growing industrial hegemony of China has triggered a debate about the possibility of the expansion of the Mandarin language. Can growing trade supremacy of China help the Mandarin language to reach the world as the British and the American industrial monopoly favored English in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century has become a topic of interest among the scholars. This paper aims at making an assessment of possibilities of the expansion of Chinese language in the light of reasons for English as a global language.

**KEY WORDS:-** *Language, Expansion, Industrial, influence, Global, English, Mandarin*

### ***Introduction:-***

Shifting of power among the nations has occurred throughout the last two thousand years. It has been oscillating from East to West or vice versa. Before the sixteenth century, power was measured in terms of military and civilization vastness and magnitude. Industrial revolution and scientific invention whereas introduced sea changes in every walk of individual and collective life of human society, thereupon, it also changed the concept of supremacy. In the modern times, military and cultural power inevitably goes with economic supremacy. Thus, the nation that desires to rule the world seeks economic monopoly. That was the reason, Britain ruled the world in the eighteenth century and the United States of America enjoys the position of superpower today. Language has always been instrumental, in the history, for the demonstration of civilization superiority. Hence, every powerful nation in the history has attempted to glorify its language be it the Roman Empire, Persian Empire or European and American dominance in the modern world. The English language soared up with the rising global influence of the British and America and has occupied the position of the world language. It has superimposed itself in the primitive or the modern cultures for one of main reasons, along with other causes, that it is the language of the most powerful nations of the world. For last two decade, historian, political analysts and social scientists have been observing the oscillation of pendulum of power from America to China with its fast growing economic power. Thereupon, it has broached different subjects among the academics such as can the Mandarin language go with the growing

hegemony of Chinese industrialization as Roman, English and the Persian languages have experienced in the past. Thus this paper makes an attempt to look into the different possibilities by conjuring the historical reasons for the evolution of the English language as a global language. For this purpose the research has set the following questions to reach at substantial conclusion.

### **Research Questions:-**

- Can Chinese industrial growing supremacy help the Mandarin language to become a global language?
- What are the factors that contributed to making English as the World Language? Does the Mandarin language privilege those factors?

### **Hypothesis:-**

- Trade Supremacy could be a great carrier for the Mandarin language to reach the world if the state deliberately makes a policy to do so, as it has proved in case of the English language.
- The Mandarin language lacks many of those vigorous and vital factors that made the English language a global language.

### **Methodology:-**

Historical and analytical approach has been applied in this research. The data has been collected through the contents analysis of available books, journals, newspapers, and historical records relevant on the internet. The qualitative research techniques have been used to examine and analyze the data and findings. It is a desk study in which different documents, books, journals, newspapers, internet and other forms of recorded material have been used as sources.

## Data Analysis:-

Language is a living object. It is born, it evolves and undergoes many gestational stages, and it may die as any other animate thing. Since human beings have acquired the capability to learn, speak and communicate, all languages have gone through this process. Some languages met natural death and some genocide, some languages managed to survive and some are striving to survive. Today, according to reliable statistics of the world, about 6000 languages are spoken across the globe; among these 70% of the world population speaks only 100 languages, while others are either spoken by a less number of speakers or are moribund—about to die. And most interestingly, 20% speak a single language and this number is increasing with every passing day (statista 2019).<sup>1</sup>

The concept of language, its importance and vitality in human society has, along with human civilization, evolved over many centuries. It has soared from merely a tool of communication and identity marker to a huge commodity. It is no more a simple part of the abstract culture of a nation now, and rather has developed into an economy. That's fact the world realized when, during colonization, they started importing their languages too. After the inception of globalization, language commodification also accelerated <sup>2</sup>(Hornberger & McCarty 2012). As they were striving to get supremacy in industrialization and modern technology, they did their best to gain language supremacy too. The European colonizer implanted their languages suppressing the indigenous languages. As they were reaching the outskirts and far-flung localities of African and Asian continents through technology-based industrial products, their languages were also knocking on the doors of their consumers. Wherever they stayed, their languages, by their ingenious policies, permeated, penetrated and influenced each institution of the society. Today, English is spoken by a triple number of non-native speakers as compared to its native speakers. Its mighty presence is not confined to cityscapes of the world, but can be felt in remote areas too. The industrial supremacy of English speaking regions, especially British and American, took the English language beyond the walls of formal colonies to every nook and cranny. Until now, it has been enjoying the prestige of lingua franca without being challenged by any other language (Hornberger et al.2012).<sup>3</sup>

Those are by-gone days now when Europe especially English speaking regions had a monopoly and unchecked domination in trade. Today, European and American trade supremacy

is potentially challenged by China. This is an emerging fact, which has adequately been realized in every quarter of the world. But for many, it is too early to prophesy whether this growing industrial and trade domination would substantially spur its culture, particularly its language Mandarin, as has happened in the case of British and American regimes of business hegemony. With the increasing importance of China globally, this question is arising whether the vigorous promotion of Chinese internationally will convert into a novel form of linguistic expansion. This paper makes an attempt to reveal possibilities and impossibilities of the actualization of this realized fact. All the factors that projected the English language as the global language will be dissected to unfold the future of globally expanding the Mandarin language.

It is an irrefutable fact that hegemony of the English language is not merely a result of economic expansion; rather, it is an outcome and force of many combined historical realities, which the Chinese language missed deliberately as a state policy or as the result of their ignorance. The most vital forces that carried the English language and introduced it to far flung nooks of the globe were the expansionist policies and colonization of the Europeans, especially British. Wherever Britain went as a colonizer it not only established colonies and captured their natural resources but also robbed the inhabitants of their indigenous languages as part of their efforts of westernization of the globe. This period continued for almost two to three centuries across the world, particularly on Asian and African and Pacific Continent. English was not introduced as a language only; it was made an instrumental utility and strong marker of status identity, hence correlated with the social and economic status of its speakers (Rincento 2000).<sup>4</sup> Thus, it became mandatory to acquire for all those who aspired to change their social and economic status. The Mandarin language missed this phase and pivotal force. China has never been an overseas colonizer. Although it has grown so big by expansions, they were confined to local areas only (Quora 2018).<sup>5</sup> Qing dynasty focused on the intensification of the annexation of adjunct areas and emphasized on the glorification of civilization rather than spreading out for natural resources. Yet, the possibility of expansionist intentions of China cannot be ruled out considering the fact that their wings were trimmed in two Opium Wars by the British and French armies (Quora 2018).<sup>6</sup> Therefore the Mandarin language could not reach the distant areas of the world. The Mandarin language is spoken by 16% of the world population which is the biggest number in terms of native speakers but it lacks non-native speakers, whereas English is the third

in terms of native speakers, but as non- native speakers it enjoys the first position and about 20% of the whole population of the globe speaks it (statista 2019).<sup>7</sup>

Nature has given some languages innate characteristics to expand and flourish. The English language has got all those qualities required to be a global language, and what makes it prominent and discernible among the rest of the languages is the ability to adapt and absorb words from other languages (Swell 2008).<sup>8</sup> It is the only language of the world which benefited both as colonizer and colonized. Britain which was the basin of the English language was conquered by foreign powers, notably Viking and Norman in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The English language got great shocks during those times and was relegated to a lower language. But, at the end of that spell, it grew even stronger: its vocabulary extended, Grammar simplified and pronunciation complicated (Swell 2008).<sup>9</sup> The English language only blossomed when it was stormed by Latin and French languages, but when it escaped from their clutches it had grown into a mature and complete language. Thus, instead of hindering its growth, the conquests had enriched it. The Mandarin language seems to miss this natural quality. It descended from the Sino-Tibetan language family. Mandarin shares most of its vocabulary with other Chinese dialects but a transliteration of borrowed words does work very well in Chinese because Chinese characters did not suit foreign sounds. It is devoid of the capability to absorb foreign words and even globalization of technology could not help it. For example, the word for computer is *diànnǎo*, ‘electric brain’, and the word for telephone is *diànhuà*, literally ‘electric speech’, which do not come with their original names (mustgo).<sup>10</sup> This characteristic of Mandarin restrained it from mixing with overseas languages. Hence, by default, it cannot compete with the English language in this respect.

Religious enthusiasts and Christian missionaries have played an immense role in augmentation of the English language. Their activities facilitated the transplantation of Western culture, educational norms and languages (Rassool, Heugh & Mansoor 2007).<sup>11</sup> These activities were influential and powerful as they were backed by the states and were performed on behalf of the nations. To teach Christianity, the missionaries needed to teach English first to their subjects. Thus, Christianity proved instrumental in spreading English. Chinese language could not find this vital force. In modern China, since its inception as Communist China in 1949, it has been repressed and deinstitutionalized, rather than being supported by religion. But even in traditional

times, though religion had penetration into social, political and economic life of the people, yet preaching and propagation of religion were not consecrated (Cohen 1992).<sup>12</sup>

Stigmatization and glorification of languages have been other efficient tools to create a particular attitude among the speakers of dominant languages. Acquisition of some languages was declared the source of access to superior culture and progress while the speakers of other languages were called uncivilized and barbaric. 'Barbarians' was the term used to describe non-Greek speakers by the ancient Greeks, intent on stigmatization. In Britain, the term Welsh was used for foreigners. Some dominant languages, such as Sanskrit, Arabic and Dutch in Africa, were sanctified as the languages of God. Whereas, some languages such as French were glorified as the languages of reason, logic and human rights, German in Germany was called the language of superior ethno national groups. Hence, English enjoyed the prestige of progress, modernity and national unity. Unfortunately, the Chinese nation, despite being the largest in population, remained isolated and exclusive in terms of their interaction with the external world and consequently could not earn such dignity and glory for their language. Taking benefit of their reluctance to participate in international affairs, they were called barbarians by Western people till the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, the Mandarin language was stigmatized (Phillipson 2012).<sup>13</sup>

The huge volume of scientific publications and literature in a language serves to consolidate a hierarchy of a language (Clare 2010).<sup>14</sup> In ancient times, Latin was the most administered language of the world education for being an immense source of knowledge. After the fifteenth and sixteenth century, with the advent of industrialization and scientific revolution, the English language overcame the Latin language. Nevertheless, the Latin language was richer than English in classical literature and social and political philosophy, but the English language emerged as the most cherished language for being a colossal medium of modern scientific and unscientific knowledge. This appearance was so vast in its magnitude and tempo that it outdistanced other languages. Mandarin, the standard of the Chinese language, was nowhere at the time when English language was soaring up into new horizons all around. Chinese, traditionally being a closed society, was not yet open to other societies. It was the time when industrial or scientific revolutionary waves had not yet visited China. It is very fascinating to note that the printing press was first invented in China during the Tang Dynasty, reportedly in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century, (History)<sup>15</sup> but it could not help the Chinese language to flourish across

the globe. Local literature is available in bulk in the Mandarin language but it is confined to native speakers. Some renowned literary figures emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century but they were translated into other languages especially into English before being read in their original language. The 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed an unprecedented industrial-technological revolution in China, and literature on technology and scientific inventions appeared in Mandarin to reach a new generation with less moxie and ambitions than the world. Anything valuable written in the Chinese language is overnight translated into English for the easy access of the readers and audience, insinuating the attitude of ‘not need to learn it’.

The worldwide acceptance of teaching methodologies is inextricably linked with the enlargement of a language. The introduction of ‘CLT’ (Communicative Language Teaching) rapidly captured the position of universal teaching methodology which indispensably coupled with the expansion of the English language (Pennycook 2017).<sup>16</sup> The language teaching methods, transferred to the world as modern, scientific, and efficient, have always affirmed the beliefs of the spread of that language. This consequently has a disregard for the importance of other languages and cultural practices. Mandarin, often with weak theoretical foundations and dubious advance educational, sociological, and economic setting outside, could not find that evangelical ardor with which the pedagogical methods of English language were disseminated and introduced to the world (Kachru 1990).<sup>17</sup> Chinese were either not interested in exporting their language or they failed to devise such teaching methodologies capable of vying CLT which could eventually spread the Chinese language. The last few decades have seen changes in previous attitudes. Chinese governments appeared more zealous about spreading their language in the last decade. They have been establishing language centers across the world to propagate it but methodologies that are practiced in the classrooms are yet the same methodologies of the English language. Once they have grown enthusiastic to spread their language, they must seek to couple it with its genuine and fresh methodologies born out of educational, social and cultural values.

Language is an inevitable part of power politics. A language is, in many ways, a key to unlock the power corridors. Every second language learner has desires; identity, capital, image and power associated with that language. English in many third world countries, especially ex-colonies, offers these aspirations to individual learners. Both language and thinking about a language are always set in the very particular social, cultural and political milieu (Pennycook



2017).<sup>18</sup> For instance, one cannot dream of becoming a part of the bureaucracy in Pakistan, which in true sense holds power in affairs of state, unless he/she has a good command of English. The English language is a prerequisite to identify oneself as elite. This is an eventual result of British policies during the period of colonization. They adopted policies favoring only English speakers to ascend to power, exercising authoritative positions. The judiciary, armed forces and bureaucracy of many countries, especially the Third World and colonized countries, are exclusive clubs of English speaking individuals. The Chinese language does not inspire individuals with such inspiration. Until recently, it has been considered merely a language of the biggest indigenous population of the world. Besides being a communication tool, the Chinese language has been devoid of any other charm for the learners as a second language. It is not identified with power among the learners. But, this attitude is gradually shifting now as the interest of China in world politics is augmenting. This realization will be elaborated in the last part of the paper.

Language association has always played a vital role in the expansion of particular languages. People want to affiliate themselves with Europe instead of China. The relationship between the culture and language constructs one's sense of identity (Hall 1997).<sup>19</sup> Language is a striking color used to paint our identity by us, for us and about us. Language acts as a medium through which our identity is extended, communicated, reasserted, reconstituted, negotiated and constructed. For many language learners, acquiring English means gaining liberal, democratic and enlightened social values of the West. China lacks this reputation in terms of universally cherished social values of the West. In addition, for the youth English language embodies the romanticization of life. For instance, Japanese women's yearn for the English language can be explained in terms of occupation, education and heterosexuality (yellowbridge 2020).<sup>20</sup> For many others, identifying oneself with the English language is a matter of pride and superiority, taking the notion of white supremacy. The Mandarin language is empty of such an enthralling cultural force and exterior charms, except being the language of the biggest population.

Sports, recreational activities and more importantly the entertainment world have great potential for the expansion of languages. The West is home to many world famous games, recreational activities and amusement sand, thus, has given language to them. World famous crowd pulling games such as soccer, hockey, cricket and tennis began and flourished in Europe and America

particularly in English-spoken regions and travelled across the globe carrying the vernaculars of their inventors. The rules of the games, the commentary during their play, pre and post-match analysis in English has been in fashion in the world games. Be it Mandarin or any other language, they seem outdistanced in this race. Even in the World Olympics 2008, the central commentary was made in English for the larger and global audience while Mandarin was meant for the local audience only (olympic.org 2008).<sup>21</sup> The world entertainment and media are vast in magnitude and tempo in glorification and expansion of a language. The filmmaking industry started from France and soon spread to other European countries and American continents captivating the world viewers in their strong grip and spread the English language in far flung regions. With no distinction of age, color, race or religion every person desired to learn language to enjoy movies. The cartoons have emerged as childhood teachers as children spend most of the time sitting before TV sets mimicking not only the actions but also the language, pronunciation and accent. Other languages lack this fecundity. Even if they are used in movies, cartoons and other media forms, they are confined to a limited audience. Same is the case with the Mandarin language. Entertainment and media sources in the Chinese language are targeting the regions where it is used as native language, otherwise it is translated into English in the larger market.

Chinese industrial growth could be the only potent vehicle of language which may pose challenges to the English language. But to materialize this hunch and notion China as a state must have this realization first. As the hypothesis of the paper states, besides being a powerful instrument of colonization the English language in the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth century is indebted to the industrial hegemony of Britain and America. The inventions, discoveries and the new products with their original names superimposed themselves onto the cultures of the targeted areas and forced languages to borrow them. This is the hypothesis that generated the theme of this paper. In the last few decades, China through its industrial products has reached almost all over the world, introducing itself and its language inscribed on the packing and exteriors of the products. Spoken language may need to travel thousands of miles yet to approach consumers of the Chinese language and become their tongue. But this journey of miles seems to have started. Chinese products are household items now. Be it the home appliance or a modern gadget, they are either made by China or made in China. Written Chinese language is inscribed on it, but mostly they are known by their counterpart English names. The reason is the lack of genuine inventions. The Chinese copy European and American products, so all the products have

already got English names and consumers do not bother to learn new names. But in many other cases, original Chinese products are known by their Chinese names. For example in Pakistan, especially in transportation, Chinese language has super imposed itself in one or two cases. The buses with some distinct features are known as ‘*Yutong*’ (宇通客车), riksha (力車) and ‘*Qinqi*’ (轻骑) have got Chinese names. Similarly, some dishes have occupied food industry with their names in Mandarin language such as ‘*Kluckman*’ (克曼) (yellowbridge).<sup>22</sup> Hence this kind of penetration can be noticed in English language as well. For instance, *Ketchup* (西柿), *Oolong* (乌龙), *tai chi* (太極) and *kung fu* (功夫), *Cumshaw* (感謝), *Kowtow* (叩), *Typhoon* (台), and *gung ho* (工合) have evolved into mainstream usage (Lisa 2020).<sup>23</sup> This infiltration and interpolation of Chinese words are not restricted to English and Urdu only, and rather it is almost everywhere China has established its business contacts. It is more evident in the languages of African and South Asian continents because of their primitive and volatile languages. This process will continue along with the industrial supremacy, and eventually, contact of Chinese speakers will also remain alive with the other speakers. The other means of expansion of language can be hampered by the state agencies if a nation is reluctant to accept it and wants to shield its own languages from foreign influence. If not absolutely stopped, this process could be delayed for a considerable time by emphasizing and exhorting national languages in education, software, all the printing and electronic media and entertainment world. At this junction of history, the Chinese state seems to realize this fact; therefore, since the last decade, it has not only opened the doors of its universities for the foreign students providing them several scholarships but also invested a huge amount in making Confucius centers across the globe. But merely pumping millions of money does not produce results unless the Chinese nation develops an attitude befitting the status of their language. The growing supremacy over international trade can be effectively and scrupulously utilized to vie with the English language.

#### CONCLUSION:-

Thus, in retrospect it seems improbable for any language to compete with the English language in the near future for several reasons mentioned above. The only hope for China to make its language used internationally is its growing industrial supremacy. But, this would be a gradual process demanding a lot of patience and consistency on the side of the state. The recent

interest of the Chinese state in establishing Confucius Centers in many parts is no doubt an essential attempt to spread the Mandarin language, but it lacks the spirit, vitality, tempo and magnitude of colonialism and CLT that privileged the English language in the last centuries. Like European countries and the USA, China has also opened the doors of its universities for international students and started many Exchange Programs with other countries, but this would not help that much unless it offers all the programs in its own language or at least a certain level of the Chinese language proficiency is made mandatory. This is an all- round process; progress in one or two aspects may give rise to hope of achieving the target but materializing it requires a compact policy. This world is ready to accept changes, be it in culture, language, religion, social setting or in economy. It only requires agents, who could expedite it. The chance of change in the world language status rests on China.

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