

A lingua franker than ever

The last two decades have been filled with comment on the English juggernaut, yet in the last five years the swell of observations has been greater than ever, and often centred on the phrase *lingua franca*. A cross-section:

- **Triumphalist** 'Our infinitely adaptable mother tongue is now the world's *lingua franca* – and not before time,' in the lead-in to 'The Triumph of English,' the *Times* of London, 25 Feb 95.
- **Troubled** 'Why fight to preserve small languages when the lingua franca of the global economy is English?', Michael Ignatieff, in 'The State of Belonging,' *TIME Magazine*, 27 February 95
- **Technical** '[T]he use of English as a global lingua franca requires intelligibility and the setting and maintaining of standards.' – David Graddol, *The Future of English?*, the British Council 1997.
- **Trenchant** '[T]he spread of one language across the globe as the one monopolizing tongue, part lingua franca, part "master" language, and in part the sole language that gives access to the world.' – Michael Toolan, 'Recentering English', *ET* 52 (Oct 97).
- **Terrifying?** '...a stabilized and standardized code leashed out on a global scale... English the lingua franca, the franchise language.' – Henry G. Widdowson, 'EIL, ESL, EFL: global issues and local interests,' in *World Englishes* 16:1, 1997.
- **Terminal?** 'English has become the only lingua franca in the world.' – Peter Newmark, 'Translation now', *The Linguist*, 39:3, the Institute of Linguists, London.

The middle-classes everywhere in the world want English for their children – and will pay for it (see 'Private tuition in English' in this issue). And they will demand the best: a standard language kept in excellent shape (as advocated by Bryan A. Garner in *ET* 64 and discussed in my response in this issue).

To an increasing extent not to know this language is not to be hip, not to be connected: consider all those ads for MBA degrees taught in English in universities in non-English-speaking lands. But consider also the vast and varied indigenization of English – eloquently discussed here by Lee-Wong Song Mei, Andrew Preshous, and Su-Hie Ting in terms of Malaysia and Singapore, and demonstrated with élan and panache by Rakesh Chaudhary in 'Aati kyaa New York?'. Consider also the magic of all the languages of David Dalby's *Linguasphere*, and all the possible loss discussed in David Crystal's *Language Death* (p. 60).

Tom McArthur

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