

An English World

(by Glenn Fern)

Hong Kong, Singapore, London, New York, New Delhi, and Toronto; what do all of these global financial centers have in common? People in all of these countries do business in English on a daily basis, with their customers and suppliers throughout the world. They make business trips, conduct video conferences, place telephone calls, build websites, send email and write contracts. The *de facto* language of business in this fast paced era of business globalization is English.

The Finance Minister of France once shocked the nation when he gave a speech in English at an international finance conference. He was accused of being a traitor to France and its beloved French culture. He was shocked at the insults and wild accusations being thrown at him. His response was, “Everyone knows that English is the language of business, so what is the problem?”

The British merchant adventurers of the 17th century dominated trade in nearly two-thirds of the world. Naturally the English language followed their establishment of trading posts and numerous colonies. Many of these ex-British colonies have grown and prospered since their independence from Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. These ex-colonies retain a close cultural relationship to Britain, maintaining the use of English and many other cultural ties. Britain dominated the world of business from the 17th century until the beginning of the early 20th century. Today the ex-colonies of Britain loom large and are imposing upon the stages of international business and finance; countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, Singapore, and Malaysia, to name a few. Any country that would like to trade and do business with this large and influential group of countries should be equipped to do business in English. The historical influence of Britain has been passed on to this group of countries, as an enduring legacy of doing business in English.

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Today, for better or worse, English has been accepted as the international business *lingua franca*. Someone in Tokyo who doesn't know English will find it extremely difficult to communicate with colleagues in Singapore, New Delhi, Hong Kong, Australia, and France. Since most people have studied English in school, it is easier for them to communicate in this language. Those who cannot communicate clearly in English face a huge disadvantage in the era of business globalization.

Today companies operate internationally. A company may have its headquarters in the United States, a regional headquarters for Asia-Pacific in Singapore, an assembly plant in Japan, suppliers in China and Taiwan and distributors and customers worldwide. All the employees of this company need to communicate, and they do it in English.

In this fast paced world of the Internet and globalized business, you have to be able to communicate in English to work effectively in a large multinational corporation. Anyone who cannot communicate in English, will be left behind at a quiet local office, to do work of no great consequence. English is the key to success, in the business world today!

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