

Uniformity versus diversity: Evaluating the position of English as a lingua franca in interlingual communication

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Philipson (2003) stated that "English may be seen as a kind of linguistic cuckoo, taking over where other breeds of language have historically nested and obliging non-native speakers of English to acquire the behavioural habits and linguistic forms of English" (p. 4). This presentation will focus on the question if English taking over as a lingua franca is preferred in spoken speech perception when a language closely related to the listeners native tongue is also available for input.

In the present study we collected recordings of native speakers of Swedish, Spanish, and Croatian reading aloud English texts and used these as stimuli in an online cloze test. In this test, participants would hear a short text in chunks. Each chunk contained a sentence with a beep of uniform length masking out one word. It was the participants' task to fill in these words by choosing an appropriate option from a given selection. The test was presented to native speakers of Danish, Portuguese, and Slovene, respectively.

The intelligibility rates obtained in this experiment will be compared to results found in a previous, similar experiment focusing on the intelligibility of Danish to Swedes, Spanish to Portuguese, and Slovene to Croatians in order to indicate whether speakers of closely related languages obtain higher intelligibility when they stick to their own languages, or whether they might benefit from turning to English as a lingua franca instead. In other words: is English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) rightfully pushing other languages from the nest that is interlingual communication, or should closely related languages be allowed to hatch there as well?