

EDITORIAL

ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA OF SCIENCE IN MOROCCO

Dr Bouti Khalid, MD, Dr Borki Rajae, MD.
International Journal of Medicine and Surgery
Email : khalidbouti@mbmj.org

During the extension of the Arabic-Muslim Empire in the world, where a large part of the earth, from southern Europe throughout North Africa to Central Asia and on to India, was controlled or influenced by the new power, the Arabic-Islamic science knew a Golden Age (750 to 1258 C.E.). During that time sciences underwent remarkable development, and translations from ancient Egyptian, Persian, Greek, Latin, and Chinese into Arabic went very quickly, which made Arabic as the only language of science in the world during that age [1].

Between the 15th and 17th centuries, with the decline of the Arabic influence, Latin took this strategic role as the language of science. At the end of that period, researchers began to move away from Latin. Once Latin was unseated as the lingua franca of science, scientific productions splintered into local languages. By the 19th century, scientific communication had settled on three main languages: French, English, and German. However, German lost its position after World War I, and after 1933, where Germany government dismissed one fifth of its physics researchers and one eighth of its biology professors for political reasons. Many of them left Germany for the U.S. and England, where they started publishing in English. After the World War II, most scientific literature was published in either English or Russian. Few decades later, and as the Soviet Union fell into decline, the use of Russian declined too. In 1985, France, Austria, Germany and Spain published more than 25% of their publications in languages other than English, but this percentage fell to 10% or even lower by 2002. That was compatible with the fact that by the year 2000, we observed that 96% of documents published in the Science Citation Index Expanded were written in English [2]. By 2015, publishing in English is no more a choice, it has also become the dominant, even the

sole language, in international scientific congresses and symposiums.

In recent years, as this phenomenon got bigger, the expression 'English as a lingua franca' (ELF) has emerged as a way of referring to communication in English between speakers with different first languages. The use of the term lingua franca is related to the way speakers of Arabic, at the time of the Crusades, referred to the language of Western Europeans (whom the Franks were assumed to represent) as *lisan alfiranj* [3]. Despite being welcomed by some and deplored by others, it cannot be denied that English functions as the international scientific contact language [4]. With the internationalization of higher education and research, English is now the acknowledged lingua franca of science. The teaching of English as a second language is now universal. In Europe, the most important policy statement is the 2005 Framework Strategy for Multilingualism,⁹ which stresses the need of the learning of 'mother tongue' plus two languages where English is always present [3].

It is increasingly acknowledged that non-native speakers of English outnumber native speakers, where about 80 percent of verbal exchanges in which English is used as a second or foreign language do not involve any native speakers of English. ELF is a phenomenon which characterises much of the contemporary world [5, 6].

One of the best examples of English dominance is that in EU-US negotiations, English is the sole language involved. This is in conflict with the declared policy that in the EU's international relations, the multilingualism that characterizes its internal affairs should also apply. This is a

clear case of English as the lingua cucula. Externally the EU has become monolingual [3].

Science is a collective and international enterprise, the use of English makes communication among scientists all over the world, and international dissemination of knowledge easier. That use depends on the national or international scope of research and science. Thus, the research conducted in arts, law, and humanities is generally looking for national audience and can use the national language, than that in medicine, mathematics, or engineering who talk to an international community and need to use the actual Lingua Franca [2].

Morocco, like other Arab countries, must start a long-term changing process. In one hand Arabic should be the only language of high education even in medical schools as long as Arabic medical students and doctors studying in Arabic always get better average notes than Arabic medical students and doctors studying in French and English in international residency exams in the United States, England, Canada, and Australia. English should also be main language of scientific production in sciences that target international audience. In other hand Arabic should be the publishing language in sciences that target local audience. Learning from our experience with French, we have to stress that English should be a tool for communication, and should not be the language of elite formation, social inclusion and exclusion. Moroccan Scientists have to improve their visibility in mainstream science through different strategies. The main one is to publish in English journals. We must stress here that the first 20 countries in research and science publishing are

studying using their mother tongues, and publishing in English.

In short, English is everywhere, and we cannot avoid it. However, English can also be primarily intended to serve as a lingua franca, where its use is essentially motivated by communicative needs, not linguacultural factors, for instance in scripted conference presentations, international publishing, on official political occasions and for formal business correspondence. Here it serves as a cross-linguistic or international medium of communication, where prestige and communicative effectiveness are seen to be strongly correlated with linguistic correctness [7].

REFERENCES

- [1] Falagas ME, Zarkadoulia EA, Samonis G. Arab science in the golden age (750–1258 CE) and today. *The FASEB Journal*. 2006;20(10):1581-6.
- [2] Bordons M, Gómez I. Towards a single language in science? A Spanish view. *Serials: The Journal for the Serials Community*. 2004;17(2):189-95.
- [3] Phillipson R. Lingua franca or lingua frankensteinia? English in European integration and globalisation1. *World Englishes*. 2008;27(2):250-67.
- [4] Seidlhofer B. English as a lingua franca. *ELT journal*. 2005;59(4):339.
- [5] Dewey M. English as a lingua franca and globalization: an interconnected perspective. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*. 2007;17(3):332-54.
- [6] Seidlhofer B. 10. Research perspectives on teaching English as a lingua franca. *Annual review of applied linguistics*. 2004;24:209-39.
- [7] Seidlhofer B, Breiteneder A, Pitzl M-L. English as a lingua franca in Europe: Challenges for applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*. 2006;26:3-34.