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Article

The Future of English

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Abstract
The article will offer an overview of possible future developments relating to English. It will begin by rehearsing the phenomenal expansion of English as a global language, including not only its numerical and geographical expansion but also its penetration of more and more domains of use. It will then examine the trajectories of some 'world' languages from the past as possible indicators of the future development of English, and the situation of some major world languages in the present. Next, it will outline how English itself has changed as a language over the past roughly 100 years and speculate on possible pointers for future changes in the light of the continuing tension between standardisation and variation/change. The phenomenal success of English Language Teaching as a global business is rapidly transforming itself under the pressure of technology in particular. The article will suggest possible changes to the way English is taught. Finally, the current status and functions of English as a global language will be reviewed with a view to speculating on how these might change, and possible reasons for this. Forecasts tend to be based on projections from the current situation, yet unforeseen events can have a profound and rapid effect, as was the case with COVID.

Keywords
Global, English, development, future, uncertainty

1 The Current Position of English in the World

The 20th century saw a phenomenal expansion of English as a global language. Estimates vary but a recent count showed something like 2.3 billion users worldwide (Patel, Solly & Copeland 2023, pages 336-341), which represents 31% of the world population. Of these, only about 380 million have English as their first language however, which shows an enormous growth in non-metropolitan parts of the world. English is easily the largest second language worldwide and the most-taught language in school curricula (Eurydice, 2023).

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Kachru (1985) proposed his three circles description of the role of English in the world. In the Inner Circle were those countries where English was the first language, such as the UK, USA, Australia, etc. The Outer Circle comprised countries like India, Nigeria, the Philippines, etc, where English was a recognised and widely-used second language alongside other local languages. The Expanding Circle covered all the rest, where English was used in some domains, but sporadically and unevenly, in contexts where the local languages remained dominant. This was a neat, and at the time it was proposed, fairly accurate division. Since then, the lines have become somewhat less clear. The penetration of English into many new domains, such as the Internet, and the spread of English as a Medium of Education, has blurred the distinction between the Outer and Expanding circles. And within the Inner Circle there is now far greater variety following on from widespread immigration.

So how did English transform from an important language but one relatively confined to the Inner and Outer circles, to the dominant position it now occupies? English spread widely geographically in the 19th century largely through colonisation. It also benefitted as the language of the industrial revolution and scientific discoveries, and the ensuing expansion of international trade. But two factors ensured its dominance from the mid-20th century to the present. One was the military victory of the USA and its allies in 1945-6 followed by the USA taking on the role of global arbiter in international conflicts and the spread of military bases internationally. The other was the economic global dominance of the USA and the acceptance of the US$ as the standard for international trade. The rise of neo-liberalism has since transformed the world economy with the creation of multi-national corporations reaching into every corner of the globe. Concurrently, demand for goods has expanded international trade dramatically under the pressure of consumerism. And in the 21st century, developments in communications technology, including the Internet, which has facilitated the rise of social media, along with television and the mobile phone, has made possible an unprecedentedly inter-related world of communications. And English has served as the major vehicle for both.

So English has now infiltrated multiple domains. It is widely the preferred language in international trade, banking and financial services. It also dominates international relations through agencies like the UN and major international charitable and development agencies. The exponential increase in air travel and mass tourism has also extended the use of English to many new geographical areas. Much global commercial advertising is also in English. The global news media are largely dominated by English, with most major national channels offering access to the news in English. Deutsche Welle, Al Jazeera, France 24 and RT International are but some examples. The entertainment industry has also burgeoned in the last 75 years, with film, popular music and online gaming becoming the vehicles for the widespread consumption of English.

English also dominates the world of information.

> ...almost 78 % of all information in the world is produced in the following ten languages: English, German, Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin), French, Japanese, Italian, Russian, Portuguese, and Dutch. English dominates universal information space and constitutes more than 44 % of printed and electronic materials. German follows English and comprises 7.6 % of the global information production. (Di Bitetti, MS and Ferreras, J A, 2016).

This includes traditional publishing, where according to some estimates, English accounts for some 60% of all publications. In the area of science and medicine this rises to somewhere between 75%-95%. Translations of English publications into other languages accounts for 60% of all published translations globally, whereas translations into English represent only 3-5% of all publications in English (Kisery, 2024).

The invention of the World Wide Web by Tim Berners-Lee in 1989, followed by the gradual evolution of the Internet in the 1990s and 2000s has completely revolutionised the speed of accumulation and distribution of information. Along with the development of ever more sophisticated devices for accessing this supply of infoglut, we have seen the development of social media, which is as addictive as

it is trivial, (https://prioridata.com/data/social-media-usage/) with again a predominance of English. It is estimated that 51.2% of Internet use is in English (https://www.statista.com/chart/26884/languages-on-the-internet/).

English has even infiltrated education worldwide in a number of ways (Altbach, 2007). The growth of the International Baccalaureate is just one example, with 8000 programmes run in 5800 schools in 160 countries (https://www.ibo.org/about-the-ib/facts-and-figures/). The IB is just one aspect of the growth of international schools worldwide, which now counts over 14,000 schools with some 7 million students (https://iscresearch.com/data-on-the-international-schools marketin2024/#:~:text=As%20of%20January%202024%2C%20ISC%20Research%20data%20recorded,3%20and%2018%20and%20employing%20664%2C645%20teaching%20staff) English Medium Education at university level is also on the rise. In 2020, for example, in China alone there were 63 universities with EMI (English as Medium of Instruction) programmes, with 9 International Branch Campuses, like Nottingham University/Ningbo (McKinley, Rose & Zhou, 2021; McKinley, Xu & Zhou, 2021). And there are similar EMI programmes in many countries, especially in the Asia region. There has also been a boom in overseas students seeking education in countries like the USA, UK, Canada and Australia.

2 Other Past and Present "World" Languages

Languages with an extensive reach are not new of course. It may be instructive then to survey the fate of at least some of these languages and to review some of the languages in common use which are still numerically and geographically significant, including Chinese, Hindi and Spanish.

The rise and fall of Latin is among the most frequently cited. Latin had spread along with the military conquests of the Roman Empire. At its greatest extent the Empire ran from Hadrian's Wall in the north of Britain, to the forests of central Germany in the northeast, to Mauretania in the West and Mesopotamia in the southeast. But with the Teutonic invasions in the 6th century, it fell apart. The effect on the language was two-fold. On the one hand, it survived as the liturgical language of Christianity, and later as the lingua franca of the cultured classes and of scientific inquiry, until it has now effectively ceased to be used at all. On the other hand, the Latins of the varied Mediterranean populations diverged until they formed separate languages: French, Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese, Italian and Romanian (https://ancientlanguage.com/when-did-latin-die/).

Persian spread throughout large parts of Asia in the middle ages and had been adopted as the prestige language of administration and the court by the Ottoman Empire, the Pashtuns in Afghanistan and the Mughals in India. However, it gradually lost its influence as the Ottoman Empire went into decline from the 18th century and the Mughal rule in India disintegrated following internal wars, rebellions, invasions, loss of economic prosperity and the rise of British power.

The case of French is of particular interest. The rise of French in Europe in the 17th century followed the military victories and cultural flowering under Louis XIV. This was followed by the political earthquake of the Revolution and its reverberations, to the era of Napoleonic conquests, and the colonial expansions of the 19th century. French was by then the language of choice for international relations and for European aristocracy. However, the debacle of 1870, the sapping of energy of WW1, the defeat of WW2, the Vietnam War, the Algerian war of independence, and the rise of American economic and political influence severely undermined its prominence. Conservative attempts to regulate French linguistically through the control of the Academie Francaise may also have restricted its expansion. Yet French equated with culture till very recently and was sustained by French literature and the arts in general. And it is still spoken by 250 million people worldwide and 29 countries have it as an official language (22 in Africa!) – and 16 as a co-official language.

It may also be instructive to briefly review the cases of some other major world languages. Hindi is spoken by some 345 million people as a first language in India, which makes it by far the most widely

spoken language. Additionally, some 250 million count it as a second language. And both Hindi and Maithili are also widely spoken in Nepal. It is also one of the two 'official' languages in India, along with English, which gives it additional status. The situation is of course complex in such a multilingual country. The education policy subscribes to the Three Language policy: the regional language, Hindi and English. Large regional languages ('scheduled languages'), such as Tamil, Gujerati, Marathi, Bengali, Odia, Panjabi and Maithili continue to hold their own locally (and in the diaspora).

Chinese of one variety or another, but mainly Mandarin, is spoken by anywhere between 940 million and 1.30 billion as a first language. (Statistics on numbers of speakers of languages vary quite widely!) Most Chinese speakers live in China. Roughly another 40 million live outside China. The language policies introduced in the Communist government takeover in 1949, have aimed to make Mandarin (Putunghua) the national standard, aided by the introduction of simplified characters (简体字),which has also served to dramatically increase literacy rates, which now stand at about 92% (Jing Tsu, 2022).

Spanish is spoken by anywhere between 486 and 572 million. Most Spanish speakers live outside Spain, in Latin America, and increasingly, in the USA. But the language is globally significant for trade, international politics and cultural identity.

We shall return to Chinese and Spanish as potential rivals to English later in the article.

What can we learn from this brief review of historical language spread and decay and from other current major world languages other than English? Clearly the factors favouring language expansion are:

~ occupying a large domestic geographical area already, as is the case with Russian, Chinese and Hindi;

~ occupying a large global area, as with Spanish.

~ already having a large and relatively monolingual population, as with Chinese, Malay and Spanish;

~ possessing political, military and economic power, as with Chinese, and Russian;

~ acting as the vehicle for religious beliefs, as with Sanskrit and Pali in the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism in ancient times, Latin and Spanish historically, and Arabic currently;

~ possessing a rich cultural heritage which appeals to other cultures and language groups, as with French and Spanish;

~ exercising linguistic influence through scientific and technological discovery, as with German in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and more generally as a school language, earlier with Latin and French.

Yet what makes English a unique case is the sheer extent of its expansion geographically, numerically and functionally. None of the languages reviewed cover or covered the whole globe, none have as many non-native speakers and none have inserted themselves in such a wide range of functional domains as English has done.

3 Changes to English as a Language

3.1 Language changes

There are two opposing tendencies in languages, which are always in dynamic tension. One is continuity, stability and consistency. The other is change, variety and differentiation. Without the former, the language falls apart. Without the latter, it declines by being unable to accommodate to changes in the world.

We can consider language change under three headings: linguistic change internal to the language, change brought about by geographical distance, and change as a response to new domains of use.

Linguistic change is part of what languages do: they change. The change may be slow, incremental, uneven and partial. But no living language is without change, and there is not much anyone can do about it (Aitchison, 1981). A detailed account of the changes in English since its beginnings is provided by Crystal (2004) among many others. Sometimes linguistic change in a language variety is related to social factors, such as class, age, gender. Sometimes it is linked to identity. The most readily identifiable changes tend to be in phonology and lexis. For example, the number of new words which appear in English is so large that dictionaries cannot keep pace. (Merriam-Webster 2023, Oxford 2023, Cambridge 2023).

Geographical distance is a powerful motor of language change. Languages transplanted to distant places rapidly develop idiosyncratic features, especially in lexis and in phonology. For English, the development of new Englishes, in the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, South Africa, the Caribbean and West Africa are now well documented (McCrum, Cran & McNeil, 1987, pages 307-342). It is noteworthy that, for the most part, the new features do not seriously affect mutual comprehensibility. And where a variety begins to transform into an identifiable new language, as in the cases of Krio in Sierra Leone, or Jamaican creole, Taglish or Mex-Tex, they develop alongside a more internationally comprehensible variety, rather than substituting for it. In most cases, speakers are bi-lingual or bi-dialectal, just as they are in metropolitan varieties, using the new variety as a badge of identity and using an internationally-comprehensible variety of English for communication with the wider world.

New domains of use inevitably demand new language to talk about them. Science and medicine are good examples of this, as is the Internet. Pop culture has also fostered significant changes. But the whole domain of mass communication, especially social media, has been a powerful dynamo of change, whether lexically, by inventing new terminology, or syntactically, in response to space constraints, as in online messaging (Crystal, 2001). For as long as there are new technological or social domains, there will be associated language change, which will include the discarding of items as technologies become obsolescent.

So what are the factors which favour change on the one hand and stability on the other?

3.2 Factors favouring change and variety

Geographical spread, and contact with other languages (internal and external to a society) are important factors while colonisation was a major factor. Now the mobility of populations, especially mass migration, is significant.

The need to incorporate/ accommodate to new domains of use, as discussed above. For example, in technology, science, popular culture, sport, consumerism, etc.

Generational factors also favour change. Youth culture has been a powerful driver of change since the 1960's in UK, for example.

Literature, which encourages experimentation, is often in the vanguard of language change. 1700 new words in English are attributed to Shakespeare alone. And creative writers from many of the former colonial territories have led the way in disseminating local language features.

The need to validate group and personal identity is a key driver in some kinds of language change. 'The way we speak tells you who we are – and tells you that you are not one of us!'

There is some debate as to the inherent superior flexibility of some languages. For example, do some languages enjoy an advantage in their openness to the formation of new words? English certainly has a large number of mechanisms for creating new words (https://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/how-new-words-are-created). But it is surely not alone in this.

What may be more important is the degree of openness to change within a society. English flirted with the idea of an academy to control the language in the 18th century – but the idea never enjoyed popular support, and duly fizzled out. Other languages, French in particular, have been enthusiastic

proponents of the Academie. This may have affected the reluctance of French to accept language change. We can compare the readiness of English to borrow words and usages from anywhere to a sponge effect. Some other languages which resist 'contamination' can be compared to an umbrella.

3.3 Factors facilitating stability and continuity

Codification. This operates through phonological, lexical and grammatical descriptions. Dictionaries, lexicons, phonological descriptions and grammars are all attempts to 'fix' the language in some way. Previously, they were largely prescriptive, conferring the seal of approval on often inaccurate 'rules' and condemnations. Increasingly, through the 20th century they have now become largely descriptive, derived from research based on authentic language corpora (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). However illusory it may be to attempt to pin down a language, these codified mechanisms are a force for continuity and stability. And English is the most extensively described language ever.

Education. This operates by controlling the way language is taught and perceived – through curricula, syllabi, course-books, examinations, tests and certification. School systems are designed to ensure conformity, not change.

Publication. The printed media, including newspapers, fiction and non-fiction books, journals, public documents and poetry are all subject to genre constraints, which tends to be a stabilising force.

Communicative need. Language also regulates itself in response to the need for mutual communication. The need for inter-connectivity internationally (the Internet, international commerce, geopolitics, entertainment, news, etc.) ensures that the language in which it is transacted does not diverge too far from an agreed standard (even if it is well-nigh impossible to define such a standard in detail). So there is a kind of unconscious homeostasis, ensuring there is always a balance between novelty/change and continuity/ stability.

4 Changes to the Teaching of English

Here we need to distinguish between two aspects of English language teaching. One relates to the methodology of teaching the language. The other has to do with the commodification of teaching the language.

4.1 The methodology

Throughout its recent history, English teaching methodology has been characterised by restless experimentation and the urge to find novel solutions. Arguably, this goes back to the Reform movement in the 19th century with Vietor's rallying cry 'Der Fremdsprachenunterricht muss umkehren' ('Foreign language teaching must change direction'), (Howatt, 2004), arguing for a break from the traditionally dominant grammar-translation model.

By the early 1960's, following widespread adoption of the Direct Method, a structural-situational method was widely used, with a strong audio-lingual movement (mim-mem) based on Behaviourist principles, especially in the USA. The 1970's saw a sea-change with the rise of the Communicative approach.

From the 1970's and 80's onward, we have seen a plethora of innovative movements and practices. Task-based learning, the Designer methods (Silent Way, CLL, Suggestopoedia, Psycho-drama, TPR), ESP, EAP, Multiple Intelligences, NLP, CLIL, Dogme, the Flipped classroom, CALL, Humanism, Emergent language, ELF, and most recently AI.

It seems reasonable to assume that this innovative drive will continue, though what shape future developments will take is uncertain. The current confused debate over AI has yet to find resolution (https://

youtu.be/kVKyOsQc0T0), though practical ways of dealing with AI are starting to emerge (Peachey 2023, Floris 2024).

4.2 The commodification

Essentially, what was a cottage industry until the 1960's, has grown into a global mega-business. From a situation with a few private language schools, very few books on methodology, such as Billows (1970), only a few courses (Eckersley, 1937/55), no certification for teachers, small numbers taking the Cambridge First Certificate and Diploma, and just two university departments in Applied Linguistics (Edinburgh and London), a vast and complex global enterprise has arisen. New departments of applied linguistics sprouted in the 1970's, offering post-graduate certification, leading publishers such as CUP, OUP and Longman began a rapid expansion of new course materials for the global market, UCLES developed IELTS in the early 1980's to compete with already-established TOEFL, teacher training programmes proliferated offering CELTA and DELTA qualifications, UK and US specialists bestrode the world offering advice and running overseas programmes, the British Council expanded its network of institutes worldwide – and overseas students came to the UK and elsewhere in their droves both for short courses and for university-level courses. The ELT business has become a multi-million pound enterprise. Can this growth be sustained?

There are some straws in the wind. The Covid pandemic shut down international travel for almost two years. In that period, the ELT business adapted in various ways, largely by taking to the internet, so that webinars and Zoom largely replaced face-to-face contact. Many smaller private schools went under and some university departments have either closed or cut staff. And student numbers have not recovered even now despite a mini-boom (https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2024/10/31/building-sustainable-futures-rethinking-international-student-recruitment-in-the-uk/). This may in part be due to the realisation that online learning is a realistic, and much cheaper alternative. It may also be the result of political misjudgement on the part of government. For overseas students, the main factors in deciding where to go to learn English are: perceived level of expertise, cost in a time of shrinking budgets, bureaucratic rules, and perceptions of being welcome or not in the host country. When expertise can be accessed online, when local alternatives are available at lower cost, when governments impose restrictions on immigration, and when the general climate is at least in part hostile, then potential students may look for alternatives. This does not however mean that fewer students will be learning English, but simply that they will find other providers.

5 Some Possible Futures

It is important to acknowledge past and current research into the future of English supported by the British Council, (Graddol 1977, Graddol 2006, Patel, Solly and Copeland 2023). A full account of this work is provided elsewhere in this Special Issue but it may be helpful to note the eight themes reported on in the latest publication (pages 14-17 of the Research Summary 2023). These were:

1. Will English remain the world's most sought after language?
2. What role will English play in our multilingual reality?
3. What is the future of English as a medium of education?
4. How will teachers remain relevant in future English language learning systems?
5. Public and private English language provision: who has the answers?
6. Can English language assessment meet stakeholders' changing needs?
7. Can technology narrow the equity gap in English language education?
8. To what extent is employment driving the future of English?

These overlap with some of the areas explored in this article, though the emphasis is understandably on questions related to the teaching of English and the British Council's role in it.

Let us consider some likely futures in relation to the three aspects of English we have been reviewing: the language itself; the teaching of the language – methodological and as a commodity; the status of the language as the preferred vehicle for international communication.

The language itself. As we have already observed, languages are in a constant state of change and there is no reason to suppose they will stop changing. Languages also tend to develop distinctive varieties – geographical, social or domain-related. Again there is no reason to think this process will stop. Some geographical varieties of English will evolve into new languages in their own right. It seems unlikely however, that this will impact on English as a global vehicle of communication. People are remarkably adaptable, and well able to operate in different languages, and at different lectal levels within the same language, according to their perceived needs in different contexts. International varieties of English are regulated by codification, education and publication and for as long as English is viewed as the preferred medium of international communication that is unlikely to change.

The teaching of the language. The restless search for innovation in English language teaching methodology will doubtless continue. Current 'new' areas include incorporating Critical Thinking (Aylett, 2024, Wilson, 2019), 21st Century Skills (Graham, 2019, Norris, 2019) and Eco-issues (Graham, 2024, Maley, 2022, Waters, 2024), into language teaching. The big question now is AI, which has raised the spectre of making teachers redundant. For the moment this seems unlikely, though clearly there needs to be some fresh thinking about how best to accommodate to this new resource – as threat or opportunity (Peachey, 2023, ELTJ, 2024, Floris, 2024). Meantime, it is still worth reflecting on the limitations of any technology (Postman, 1998).

The commodification of the language. Until relatively recently, the Inner Circle countries, and especially UK, USA, Canada and Australia were regarded as the major providers both of English language teaching and English as a medium of instruction (EMI). This seems to be changing. Some countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and India in particular have proved attractive alternative locations for foreign students (ICEF Monitor, 2024). Such locations can increasingly claim equivalent levels of educational expertise with the Inner Circle providers. They are usually far cheaper – and cost is increasingly a key factor. They can also present fewer bureaucratic barriers to entry and more congenial and culturally familiar places of residence.

The current perception of the UK since Brexit, and of the USA since Trump, is that they are hostile environments for overseas students. Another factor is the widespread development and use of online platforms for learning which arose partly from the restrictions on travel during the Covid pandemic. Why travel, if a cheaper online alternative is available?

But whereas the location of teaching provision is likely to shift significantly, so far the control of international assessment and testing remains firmly in the hands of US and UK providers. The IELTS and TOEFL suites of tests are so well-embedded and widely used, they are unlikely to be dislodged any time soon. Much the same can be said for teacher certification such as CELTA and DELTA.

The global status of English. As we have seen, English is overwhelmingly the most used language for global communication. Could this change?

Rival claimants. The most obvious 'threat' to English would be from rival claimants. The most plausible candidates would be Spanish and Chinese.

Spanish has many of the advantages enjoyed by English: a wide geographical spread, a large population and an attractive culture and literature. It is also expanding. According to El Pais (Nov. 29, 2017) by 2050, the USA will have the largest Spanish-speaking population in the world. And there are currently some 20 million students of Spanish worldwide, supported by the network of Cervantes institutes and the ELE certification system.

Chinese, though it has a large population of speakers, most of them are in China. It is also perceived as a difficult language to learn. However, China wields huge economic power and political influence, and this is likely to grow (Chan et al, 2022). Chinese as a foreign language is also developing fast, partly through the network of Confucius Institutes (550 of them in 162 countries in 2019).

However, it seems unlikely that either Spanish or Chinese will take over the global role now occupied by English, unless there is a radical re-alignment of factors. English has fairly successfully freed itself of ties to a single geographical site. It is widely perceived as belonging to everyone. And it has momentum. What is more likely, is that other languages will become more important, and in some areas, geographically and domain-related, will share prestige and influence with English.

Other factors

Predicting the future is a risky endeavour. Typically, there are two approaches. One is to assume that we can project current trends into the future with only small changes, as we have done in the foregoing discussion. The other, based on the idea of the Tipping Point (Gladwell, 2000), allows for the possibility of sudden, radical and unpredictable future change. What then are the possible factors which, alone or in combination, could lead to a radical shift in the status of English in the world?

Resistance to English. There is already a substantial academic discourse critical of the hegemony of English (Canagarajah, 1999, Pennycook, 1994, Phillipson, 1992, 2010, Tsuda, 2023). The negative social effects of linguicism are also well documented, as is the loss of languages (Crystal, 2000, Harrison, 2007). Movements to revive endangered languages have also gathered strength in recent years (Sallabank, 2015). More generally, the rise of the English-speaking classes, along with the digital divide, has accentuated the economic gap between the haves and the have-nots. Resentment is a powerful force once unleashed and could have a negative effect on the hegemony of English.

Political and/or economic power shifts. Language is profoundly affected by power structures. Russian virtually disappeared from the curriculum in China after the split from Soviet Russia in the 1970's, and English replaced it. The same happened almost overnight in Eastern Europe following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR. From 1945 till 2024 the USA has been 'guarantor for a global system of global trade and a defensive umbrella for the western alliance …' (Freedland, 2024). This is now under threat from within, with the possible radical change to 'America First' under Trump, and from without by efforts by Russia and China to forge a new world order through the BRICS group. (Wolff, 2024). These developments would clearly have repercussions for language.

Global pandemics. Covid is already a distant memory. But more pandemics are likely – and when they come, could have large and unpredictable effects on language and language teaching, just as Covid did (ECML, 2023).

Population decline. World population is still rising and forecast to hit 10.4 billion by 2084 with possibly catastrophic results (Emmott, 2013). However, growth is uneven and populations are declining everywhere except in Africa and North America (possible the result of migration from south to north), (Ritchie & Guirao, 2024, UN, 2024). This imbalance could lead to massive migration, with incalculable effects on language patterns.

Environmental collapse. The global biosphere is already in crisis, and environmental catastrophes are only likely to get worse, unless something urgent is done. No one can predict the effects this may have. Already there are mass movements of populations propelled at least in part by agricultural collapse, water scarcity and climatic conditions. It is likely that wars will be fought over resources like water. Language will inevitably be affected by these devastating phenomena.

In any discussion about the future we could do worse than consider the wise words of renowned historian, A.J.P. Taylor:

'Nothing is inevitable until it happens, and everything is inevitable once it has happened.'

'Knowledge breeds doubt, not certainty, and the more we know, the more uncertain we become.'

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