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The English Cosmopolis

A historical analogy in late modernity

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Shorter Article

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Abstract

A cosmopolis may be understood as a durable, cross–regional cultural–political order in which a prestigious bridge language provides the central anchor and the shared medium for knowledge, cultural authority and institutional practice across multilingual settings. In this article I hypothesise that, in the early 21st century, English in international employ is beginning to occupy a socio–cultural position comparable in certain respects to that of the pre-modern formations associated with Sanskrit, Latin and Classical Arabic. To examine this possibility, I begin with a deliberately broad, first-pass identification of the most salient cosmopolis features, limiting the analysis to the characteristic profile of the prestige bridge language that underwrites each cosmopolis. I then consider whether a comparable profile plausibly holds for global modern English, drawing on existing research on its global role. The results are preliminary, but they suggest that this perspective may offer a useful analytical lens for investigating English in its present sociolinguistic position, and that it merits more systematic follow-up work.

1. Introduction

Global English in the early 21st century may be less historically unprecedented than it is often assumed to be. Earlier periods likewise saw a small number of prestige bridge languages, most notably Sanskrit, Latin and Classical Arabic, expand far beyond ordinary intergroup communication and come to underpin durable orders of culture, authority and exchange across multilingual and politically discontinuous settings (cf. König 2019; Korenjak 2023; Pollock 2006). These cases suggest that, under certain conditions, a language already very widely used for communication across groups can develop into something more than 'just' a practical medium of contact. It can become the more or less default long-term cross-regional channel through which cultural legitimacy and recognised knowledge are systematically produced, organised and reproduced. In such cases, the bridge language comes not only to mediate but also anchor a wider but relatively coherent culture-and-power formation whose stability no longer depends primarily on any single bounded political unit, such as a state or empire.

Against that background, I advance the hypothesis that global modern English is beginning to occupy a comparable sociolinguistic position. The point is not that English is identical to those earlier lingua francas, but that its present sociolinguistic position may be better understood if treated as a modern instance of a historically recurrent pattern. I offer a preliminary two-step probe of the hypothesis, confined to sociolinguistic evidence and deliberately setting aside sociocultural and political dimensions of the wider culture-and-power formation anchored in a prestigious bridge language. Although this focus narrows the scope of the analysis, it targets a crucial component of any such formation, namely the prominence and structuring role of the 'hypercentral' lingua franca (de Swaan 2001, 6) invariably at its core. The results are preliminary, but they are broadly in line with my hypothesis. This is sufficient to treat the present global role of English as a plausible instance of the broader recurrent historical pattern outlined here, while offering a potentially useful analytical framework and motivating further, more in-depth empirical investigation.

Pre-modern history presents a familiar but still under-analysed puzzle for research on use of bridge languages. A select few of them – most vividly Sanskrit, Latin and Classical Arabic, but arguably also candidates such as Akkadian, Classical Chinese or Classical/Koiné Greek – first spread in the familiar way as imperial lingua francas but then outlived (and in many respects significantly surpassed) the empires that initially carried them. Frontiers shifted, political centres changed and even the linguistic allegiances of their original speech communities moved on (as, for example, when speakers

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of Latin became speakers of the Romance languages, descended themselves from spoken Latin). Yet, in parallel, certain ('high', written) forms of these languages survived and thrived as the preferred cross-regional media for centuries. Their socio-cultural relevance still resonates today, and they remain remembered as the 'great', 'cultural' languages of the world.

Beyond their role in connecting multilingual communities, these historical languages shared a further, very distinctive trait. Each became closely linked to major religions, which formed the backbone of pre-modern socio-cultural frameworks. Over time, this linkage helped them also become default media of elite education, scholarship and high-prestige writing within their expansive and discontinuous spheres of influence. These functions then coalesced into an extremely durable cultural–political order in which, first, any single state sponsor became secondary, then centrality no longer depended on a stable native-speaker 'owner' group and eventually not even on explicit religious sponsorship as such. Instead, the bridge language itself (and especially its written canon) became both the centre of gravity of the durable order and the main medium through which cultural and political life was articulated. Pollock (1996, 197) introduced the term 'cosmopolis' as a single label for this culture-and-power configuration anchored in a prestige bridge language, arguing that it is not well captured by standard categories such as ethnicity or statehood, nor by conventional sociolinguistic terminology.

Building on Pollock and on recent work that treats Sanskrit, Latin, Classical Arabic and English as comparable cases of 'maximal' lingua franca use[1] (Dobrić 2026; Dobrić et al. 2025a, 2025b; Pato and Dobrić 2026), I propose that global English may now occupy a broadly analogous role. To facilitate a preliminary assessment of this proposition, focused only on the nature of the bridge language at the core of a cosmopolis, Section 2 distils the most salient characteristics of a language in this type of deployment from the three historical exemplars, and Section 3 investigates whether global modern English also shows them in its bridge use. Section 4 discusses the implications and outlines priorities for more systematic follow-up work.

2. The making of a cosmopolis

For Pollock, the key point in a cosmopolis is political, but 'political' here does not mean modern state administration. It means the public language of rule. Pollock was referring to the fact that Sanskrit became a preferred medium for making authority publicly legible, especially through courtly and inscriptional genres such as praise poetry, genealogies, victory narratives and temple inscriptions (Pollock 2006, 11–12). Because these texts used a widely recognised bridge language and a widely recognised set of genres linked to it, they allowed local acts of rule to circulate and be treated as authoritative across many centres of power, without necessary backing from a single imperial centre. This held even when audiences could not read the texts, as long as they recognised them as being in Sanskrit. This capacity was reinforced by Sanskrit's strong institutional linkage to Brahmanical religion (Hinduism/Jainism) and, in many settings and periods, to Buddhism. In this way, Sanskrit helped establish a shared political and aesthetic register that, even when not fully legible to all, was widely recognisable and respected across many otherwise politically separate entities in South Asia and much of Southeast Asia for at least a millennium (Bronkhorst 2011, 265; Pollock 2006, 175–180).

Pollock's claim was not that Sanskrit produced political unity, but that it provided a shared language-and-genre system for making authority publicly acknowledgeable across a wide, often non-contiguous field, without requiring a single imperial centre as the power basis for that. Comparable but less developed ideas appear under other labels, including the *Republic of Letters* related to Latin (Section 2.2), the *Persianate world* (e.g., Hodgson 1974) and discussions of Akkadian as a lingua franca (e.g., Vita 2020). More general frameworks, such as de Swaan's (2001) *world language system*, Casanova's (2004) *world republic of letters* and Bourdieu-inspired accounts of *linguistic markets* (Bourdieu 2003), converge on a similar insight. They all recognise that across periods and regions, non-state prestige formations rarely – yet repeatedly – coalesce around high-status lingua francas.

The core of a cosmopolis is always occupied by the kind of high-status bridge language traditionally called a 'world' language (cf. Leonhardt 2013; Mallette 2021; Wright 2004), but more precisely describable as a *lingua cosmopolitana* (Dobrić et al. 2025b, 17). Such languages represent a rare, analytically upper-bound form of lingua franca use. They have exceptionally wide reach, remain stable over exceedingly long periods and are reproduced largely (and sometimes entirely) by nonnative users. They do not merely function as a channel within a cosmopolis. Rather, they sustain it by providing the shared code through which institutions and elites coordinate, recognise one another and replicate a common order alongside ongoing diverse, multilingual and very variable everyday speech.

With due caution about over-analogy (Romaine 1988, 1454) and with strong but carefully bounded uniformitarian[2] assumptions (Labov 1994, 20–24), the cosmopolis lens can (as implied by the related notions mentioned above) first be applied to historical cases beyond Sanskrit. Here, the comparison initially extends to Latin in medieval and early modern Europe (roughly the 8th to 18th centuries) and to Classical Arabic in the Islamic world, especially from the Abbasid period onward (roughly the 9th to 14th centuries). In both cases, they represent an extraordinarily esteemed, cosmopolitan language anchoring shared repertoires of influential texts, genres and learned routines (Mallette 2021, 10–15). Given space constraints, in this first-pass article I do not extend the comparison to further candidates such as the mentioned Akkadian, Classical Chinese or Classical/Koiné Greek, though the same lens could likely also be turned to them. For the same reason, the sketches of the Sanskrit, Latin and Classical Arabic cosmopolises I offer here are deliberately compressed and programmatic.

2.1 The Sanskrit Cosmopolis

Sanskrit's status as a cosmopolitan language was closely tied to its role as the language of Vedic revelation. By at least

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the 3rd century BCE, it functioned as the medium of sacrificial liturgy and of the prose traditions of ritual commentary (Jamison and Witzel 2003, 4–5). Around the turn of the Common Era, Sanskrit expanded beyond the strictly priestly sphere and became a default medium for elite learning, philosophical debate and high literary production. This shift made it available as a cross-regional prestige code used across many domains rather than remaining a narrowly ecclesiastical register (Truschke 2015, 4–9). Competence in Sanskrit became treated not only as a communicative skill, but as alignment with a tradition presented as timeless. Sanskrit's cosmopolitan role persisted into roughly the 13th century, before it was increasingly constrained by spoken language developments linked to new political formations (e.g., Cholas, Hoysalas, Kakatiyas, or Yadavas dynasties), to expanding Islamicate power and Arabic and, ultimately, to British colonialism and English (Pollock 1996, 199).

At the level of the wider cosmopolis, this linguistic core developed into a recognisable Sanskrit-centred cross-regional cultural sphere. For roughly a thousand years, courts, temples and scholastic centres across South and Southeast Asia oriented themselves to a shared Sanskritic horizon (Pollock 2006, Ch. 4). Royal inscriptions and court poetry framed kingship and generosity in it as a common high code, and dispersed scholarly communities debated in widely shared Sanskrit-based vocabularies and textual routines. Spoken language and multilingualism remained central to everyday life, but the highest registers of political legitimation, theological and scholarly argument, literary exemplarity and signage in linguistic landscapes were overwhelmingly Sanskritic. What makes this more than a widely used lingua franca or a loose sphere of influence is the durability and breadth of that sustained orientation.

2.2 The Latin Cosmopolis

While the early, 'standard' imperial lingua franca phases of Sanskrit (ca. 3rd c. BCE – 3rd c. CE) and Latin (ca. 1st c. BCE – 5th c. CE) are not equally recoverable in the sources and are therefore hard to compare directly, the comparison becomes clearer once Latin stabilised as a lingua cosmopolitana in the post-Roman West. This shift begins in the late 8th century, when Carolingian educational reforms deliberately re-codified 'high' (written) Latin and re-established it, first within the Church, as a cross-regional elite norm (Leonhardt 2013, 140). From there, through the Church's links to wider intellectual and cultural life, high Latin took on a cosmopolitan role, while the spoken varieties of Latin continued to diverge over the following centuries into the Romance languages. From the later Middle Ages onward, and especially from the 15th century, Latin's cosmopolitan regime was gradually reduced domain by domain. Literatures written in forms resembling spoken language expanded, and schooling and print helped consolidate educated populaces in local languages. Enlightenment knowledge-making and, later, nationalist language ideologies then shifted most functions once routinely served by Latin to emerging 'national languages'. By roughly the 18th century, Latin had largely *classicised*[3] (Joseph 1987, 158), leaving a more restricted ritual and symbolic code that still persists.

Within this broader ecclesiastical and academic setting, early modern Europe also developed a more explicitly intellectual cross-regional formation around the lingua-franca use of Latin, namely the already mentioned *Republic of Letters*. It consisted of scholars connected through correspondence networks, learned journals and scientific societies that used Latin as a bridge language (van Miert 2014, 278–279). The participants of this Latin-based *community of practice* (Wenger 1998) often understood themselves as part of a common world of learning that crossed confessional lines and the many European dynastic borders. In this sense, the Republic of Letters can be treated as a *Latin Cosmopolis*. It was not the same kind of formation as Sanskrit's in its mechanics and technology, but it relied on a similar principle. Membership was signalled by competent participation in Latin, the lingua cosmopolitana of its time and region, and in Latinised genres, norms and scholarly routines, rather than by shared political allegiance or ethnic origin.

2.3 The Classical Arabic Cosmopolis

Classical Arabic's cosmopolitan role was shaped above all by its status as the language of the Qurʾān and of the wider Islamic religious tradition. From the 8th century onward, and early in its career as a bridge language, Arabic became entrenched as the medium of theology and, soon after, of a wide range of sciences cultivated in the Islamic world (cf. Owens 2006, 64). This religious and scholarly base allowed Classical Arabic to function as a shared high variety across many spoken varieties in a multilingual and diglossic[4] setting. It helped connect vast and often non-contiguous regions, even where political authority was divided or contested (cf. Holes 2004; Procházka 2021). From roughly the 14th century onward, Arabic's role changed. It was never abandoned as a lingua franca, and it did not classicise fully. However, it ceased to function as a cosmopolitan medium for contemporary cross-regional exchange in the earlier sense. Instead, it became more regionally anchored, increasingly indexing Arab–Islamic heritage more narrowly, a role that continues today in the form of Modern Standard Arabic (Versteegh 2014, 118–125).

Beyond its role as a religious medium, use of Classical Arabic also supported a wider sociolinguistic formation comparable, in broad outline, to the Sanskrit and Latin cases. Classical Arabic, as also a lingua cosmopolitana, anchored a large Islamic scholarly and cultural sphere in which it served as the default shared high code of also legal, cultural and intellectual life, spanning from al-Andalus and North Africa through the Levant and Anatolia to Iran and Central Asia (Hodgson 1974, 97). Networks of scholars and teachers connected *madrasas* (Islamic religious schools) through travel for study, pilgrimage routes and trade. These links helped create a cross-regional discourse space in which texts circulated, commentaries multiplied and reputations were made in Classical Arabic. As in the Sanskrit and Latin cases, everyday life continued in local spoken varieties of Arabic and in multilingual practice, but for at least four or five centuries most authoritative cross-regional discourse was by default conducted in the cosmopolitan Classical Arabic.

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2.4 A first-pass diagnostic framework for cosmopolis formation

Across the three cases, the recurring pattern is not simply wide lingua franca use. It is the emergence of a durable socio-cultural order organised around a hypercentral, ultra-prestigious bridging language that operates across centuries and discontinuous polities. Historically, a cosmopolis becomes most easily identifiable when that bridging use stabilises as a 'maximal' lingua franca (i.e., lingua cosmopolitana). In practice, this means that the bridge language becomes the default medium for virtually all high-status translocal activity and that its role is sustained by proficient non-natives as 'stewards' rather than by continuous state power or a stable native-speaker 'owner' group (who often move on to emergent local languages). In such settings, the bridge language remains highly stable yet also productive, allowing it to function as a shared 'infrastructure' across domains and as a marker of participation in a wider order organised around it. Precisely because a cosmopolis is a very complex sociocultural formation, and because it invariably has a special bridge language at its core, the most practical diagnostic entry point is the bridge language itself.

Therefore, for the purposes of this first-pass examination, and drawing on the three historical cases discussed in Sections 2.1–2.3, I outline three broad but practical indicators that a prestige bridge language has developed the kind of sociolinguistic profile capable of underwriting a cosmopolis:

(1) Indicator 1: the bridge language shows routine, often by-default, uptake by nonnative speakers across wide and discontinuous regions, domains and media.
(2) Indicator 2: the bridge language carries unusually high prestige and symbolic authority.
(3) Indicator 3: the bridge language plays a role as a cross-regional infrastructural dependence point for other systems.

The preceding paragraphs show that these indicators are attestable for Sanskrit, Latin and Classical Arabic in their cosmopolitan phases. In the next section, I apply the same three indicators to global modern English, surveying relevant secondary research and assessing how far the evidence supports my hypothesis that an English Cosmopolis may already be taking shape around it today.

3. The English Cosmopolis

Before testing modern global English against the three indicators distilled in Section 2, two major asymmetries between the historical cases and the present one need to be stated explicitly.

Firstly, the late-modern global order differs profoundly from the ancient and medieval worlds, and English is a relatively 'young' bridge language whose colonial and postcolonial rise spans 'only' a few centuries, while its extensive nonnative use in the present sense is younger still and largely concentrated in the last three or four decades. This stands in clear contrast to the much greater temporal depth of the historical cases. What justifies the comparison, therefore, is not sameness of underlying conditions or historical scale, but the premise that recurrent sociolinguistic dynamics may generate comparable developments across historically distant settings.

Secondly, in the Sanskrit, Latin and Classical Arabic cosmopolises, the wider socio-cultural framework around the prestige bridge language was organised chiefly through religion and the institutions, canons and learned routines tied to it. In the contemporary case of English, the comparable framework is secular and composite, involving education, labour-market gatekeeping, popular culture, media circulation and digital-technological infrastructures. The comparison, then, is not between religion and popular culture or technology as such, nor does it imply any simple equivalence between the ancient, medieval, early-modern and late-modern worlds. It is, rather, that these different socio-cultural formations may play a broadly similar organising role in relation to a high-status lingua franca. Therefore, what matters is not the substantive content of the surrounding framework, but the structural fact that a prestige bridge language becomes deeply embedded in the main cross-regional mechanisms through which legitimacy, coordination and access are commonly maintained.

It is in that sense that the discussion turns to English. The aim in what follows is not to establish equivalence between the historical cases and present-day global English, but to examine whether English shows a comparable clustering across the three broad cosmopolis indicators.

3.1 Indicator 1: Extensive and routine, often by-default, uptake by nonnative speakers across wide and discontinuous regions, domains and media

Non-natives now make up the majority of the world's English speakers (Mauranen 2023, 15). This is especially evident online and in university and research settings (cf. Jenkins 2015; Mauranen 2012; Seidlhofer 2011). English is also clearly dominant in key media and platform infrastructures worldwide. Estimates differ, but large-scale web surveys (cf. W3Techs n.d.) consistently identify English as the most common language of online content. It likewise dominates international publishing, academic and otherwise (Hamel 2007, 54). Studies of global media suggest that this is not only a matter of volume, but also of placement. English is strongly represented in high-prestige and high-visibility channels (cf. Manns and Xu 2026; Moody 2026a). Research on popular culture, especially popular music, shows how English resources are repeatedly repurposed in ways that circulate widely through mass media (cf. Lee 2026; Moody 2026b). Taken together, these findings (and many more that could be added) suggest a parallel with historical lingua cosmopolitana (Dobrić. et al. 2025b, 19). Like Sanskrit, Latin and Classical Arabic in their cosmopolitan phases, English is deeply embedded in nonnative-speaker-dominated discourse spaces and functions as a key vehicular code in major media and infrastructural domains.

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3.2 Indicator 2: Unusually high prestige and symbolic authority

Global-language theorists and English-language scholars have long noted English's hypercentral position and its role as a default code of late-modern contemporaneity (e.g., Crystal 2003; Graddol 2006; Pennycook 2007; van Rooy 2024). The first evidence of unusually high and overwhelmingly positive symbolic capital English holds is the role it plays in international *linguistic landscapes*. Work on multiple urban environments (e.g., Backhaus 2006; Dimova 2007; Lazović 2014; McArthur 2000; Schlick 2003) documents English prominently on commercial signs, branding and university environments, indexing international orientation, quality and trendiness rather than targeting native English speakers. From a cosmopolis perspective, these practices signal that English is not just a means of communication, but a semiotic resource for displaying participation in a wider cultural order. This ties in with English figuring prominently in *extramural exposure*, representing the dense, out-of-school contact with media that shapes learners' everyday input. Research on *extramural English* (EE) documents how children and adolescents across Europe and beyond spend extensive time engaging with English via television, streaming, YouTube, social media, gaming and music, often well before or alongside formal instruction (cf. Kaatari et al. 2023; Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016). Such exposure has been shown to correlate strongly with vocabulary size and other language proficiency measures and in some studies to generate substantial learning even prior to classroom English. Survey- and interview-based research in non-anglophone settings likewise points to a broad, if stratified, consensus that English has 'high value' (cf. Rose et al. 2019; Rose and Galloway 2019). Attitude studies often present English as a language associated with modern culture and with a form of globality no longer tied only to Anglophone centres (cf. Kuteeva 2023). Work on youth and subcultural media points to a similar pattern at the level of identity-signalling. English is often used in nonnative, stylised and hybrid forms to signal lifestyles and perform a 'modern' or 'hip' identity, not only to facilitate communication across speech communities (Motschenbacher 2016, 35–38).

3.3 Indicator 3: Role as a cross-regional infrastructural dependence point for other systems

English now functions as a basic enabling infrastructure in multiple systems. In education, it is entrenched as a compulsory subject in school curricula across much of Europe, Asia and Latin America, often from the early primary grades. It is increasingly framed not as an optional foreign language, but as a 'core competence' (cf. Patel et al. 2023). A similar dependence is visible in employment and professional mobility. Job advertisements in sectors such as business, finance, tourism, IT, higher education and the creative industries routinely list English as a default requirement rather than a desirable extra, even in countries where it has no official status (OECD 2023, 26–27). For many white-collar career paths, and in some settings also blue-collar ones, high proficiency in English functions as a quiet gatekeeping device that shapes who can enter, advance and move across borders (Piller 2016, Ch. 4). In higher education, English-medium instruction is often justified in these terms, with reference to international competitiveness and graduate employability (Xie and Curle 2020, 585). Science and research are perhaps the clearest case of system-level dependence. English is the dominant language of high-impact journals, major conferences and many international research collaborations (cf. Hyland 2016; Montgomery 2013). This structure incentivises scholars to publish and participate in English even where local scholarly life operates in other languages (Ferguson et al. 2011, 48–51). Finally, English also operates as a default layer in digital infrastructures. Historically, core internet protocols, software stacks and technical documentation were developed primarily in English, while other languages were added later and often unevenly. Despite extensive localisation, English still shapes much of the interface language, user support and developer environments (cf. Leppänen et al. 2009). More recent work on platform capitalism and *large language models* (LLMs) likewise suggests that English dominates software defaults and the composition of training data (cf. Gao et al. 2020; Minaee et al. 2024).

4. Outlook

In broad terms, the comparison laid out in Sections 2 and 3 suggests that the hypothesis I explored in this article remains plausible. In other words, global English appears to show a profile broadly comparable to that of the bridge languages at the core of the historical cosmopolises discussed above. Section 2 sets out three cross-case indicators of a bridge language grounding a cosmopolis, and the evidence reviewed in Section 3 suggests that English in lingua-franca use aligns with each of them. There are, of course, major differences in scale, speed, technology, access and political economy between the pre-modern cases and global modern English that need careful and detailed accounting. Even so, the comparison appears conceptually coherent. In both settings (diachronic and synchronic), a prestige 'maximal' lingua franca appears to move toward a default role in cross-regional authoritative domains insofar as it is sustained by institutions operating across wide and discontinuous spaces, shared norms and communities of practice that extend beyond any single political unit or stable native-speaker 'owner' group. For these reasons, I propose that the cosmopolis lens may, aside from historical bridge language cases, also prove useful as an analytic framework for global modern English. It provides a principled way to ask in which ways and to what extent English may be coming to function as an organising language of a cross-regional, perhaps even near-global, culture-power order. Two caveats matter, however.

First, the account I presented is deliberately centred on the profile of the lingua-franca that underwrites a cosmopolis rather than on the full range of cosmopolis features (such as the specific media contexts, institutions and cultural infrastructures through which it is realised). Thus, it remains intentionally broad and first-pass, meant to validate the concept's overall usefulness in relation to English rather than to deliver an exhaustive account. Second, pre-modern cosmopolises were strongly literacy- and elite-biased formations. In the historical settings discussed here, the cosmopolitan bridge

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language often mediated access to high-register textual culture and, in many cases, to bare literacy itself. English operates in a very different environment. It typically spreads into discourse settings that already have established literate cultures and written standards. This changes what 'defaultness' of its international use means. English takes on a cosmopolitan role not by providing basic access to literacy, but by offering nonnative users high convertibility across domains (including educational, professional and personal mobility), as well as access to a prestigious near-global identity layer.

Further work should move beyond the broad indicators used here and the bridge language alone toward stronger tests in both diachronic and synchronic directions. Diachronically, this means tightening the historical baseline by returning to Pollock's treatment of Sanskrit and extracting reusable diagnostics through more detailed comparison with Latin, Classical Arabic and additional candidate cases. Synchronically, this requires stricter triangulation across non-Anglophone settings to assess whether an English Cosmopolis is taking shape beyond the language itself and beyond the Anglophone socio-cultural layer. In particular, future studies should combine platform and content metrics with evidence from education, labour-market gatekeeping and discourse and attitude research in order to trace its distribution across Anglophone and non-Anglophone nodes and to identify where the analogy with historical cosmopolises breaks down. Finally, further work is also needed, both diachronically and synchronically, on markers of a cosmopolis beyond the bridge language itself, including the most relevant non-linguistic signifiers, such as dominant media, technologies and products.

Notes

1 'Maximal' lingua franca use denotes the upper bound of an atypical lingua-franca instantiation. At this analytic endpoint of the phenomenon, the bridge language becomes the default cross-regional medium and is used chiefly (sometimes even exclusively) in nonnative-to-nonnative communication.

2 Linguistic uniformitarianism is the assumption that the basic processes and constraints shaping language change are broadly the same across time and space.

3 Classicisation is the process by which a certain lingua franca use of a language become increasingly normatively 'fixed' in form and use, sometimes to the point of 'fossilisation', while its functional operation is reduced to a limited set of domains such as religion or administration only (as in later stages of Sanskrit and Latin).

4 Diglossia is a stable functional split in which a prestige '*high*' variety is used for formal writing and institutions, while a '*low*' variety is used for everyday speech (cf. Ferguson 1959).

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