

Continental Englishes

It seems to be a truth now universally acknowledged that English is the global lingua franca:

- 'English has become the lingua franca of business and politics from Berlin to Bangkok' – Alfredo J. Estrada, book review, *International Herald Tribune*, 15 Oct 92.
- 'English has become the lingua franca of international scientific and engineering work' – Susanne Jordans, book review, *Language International* 8:1, 1996.
- 'Our infinitely adaptable mother tongue is now the world's lingua franca' – lead-in to Simon Jenkins's article 'The triumph of English', *The Times*, 25 Feb 95.

It should therefore, presumably, be superfluous to point out that English is widely used in particular places. But the phenomenon is so remarkable that few can resist discussing the strength of the language – and maybe the threat it poses – in one region or another. Recently, however, the emphasis has begun to centre not on the entire planet or on individual countries but on continents.

Take 'English in Asia: Money Talks', an article by William McGurn in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (21 Mar 96). This spotlights English as 'Asia's unifying tongue and its language of opportunity', 'Asia's premier language', 'the language of Asian business', 'the single common link among the region's wildly diverse peoples', 'a huge advantage', and 'part of the identity of a new Asian middle class'. In addition, the regional scuttlebutt has it that emphasis may soon be placed not so much on English as a foreign or second or international language but simply on English as an *Asian* language.

Meanwhile the debate continues on English in Europe – and especially in the European Union. Ross Smith's article 'Single market, single currency, single language' (*ET* 46, Apr 96), which started life in *The Linguist* (34:4, 95), has led to a follow-on piece in the *EL Gazette* (May 96), with further discussion likely in *ET*. This debate can only gain from Suzanne K. Hilgendorf's lead article in this issue, 'The impact of English in Germany', whose range and detail provide a valuable insight into what is happening in Europe's most powerful national economy.

Tom McArthur

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