

Books and arts

The future of English

# It used to be English

**The Last Lingua Franca: English Until the Return of Babel.**

By Nicholas Ostler

Walker & Company

1 ENGLISH is the most successful language in the history of the world. It is spoken on every continent, is learnt as a second language by schoolchildren, and is the vehicle of science, global business and popular culture. Many think it will spread without end. But Nicholas Ostler, a scholar of the rise and fall of languages, makes a surprising prediction in his latest book: the days of English as the world's lingua franca may be numbered.

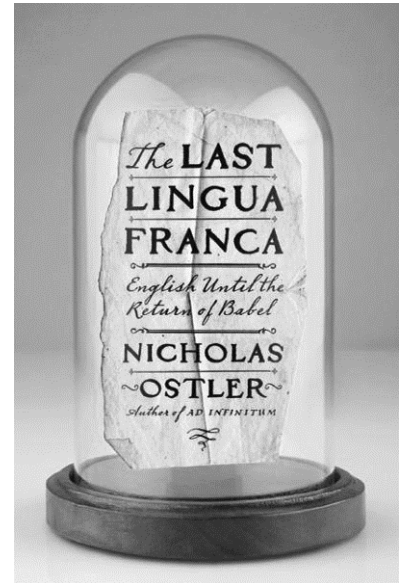
2 Conquest, trade and religion were the biggest forces behind the spread of earlier lingua francas. A linguist of astonishing voracity, Mr Ostler plunges happily into these tales from ancient history. It seems sometimes that

Mr Ostler, fascinated by ancient uses of language, wanted to write a different sort of book but was persuaded by his publisher to play up the English angle. The core arguments about the future of English come in two chapters at the end of the book. But the predictions are striking.

3 English is expanding as a lingua franca but not as a mother tongue. More than 1 billion people speak English worldwide but only about 330m of them as a first language, and this population is not spreading. The future of English is in the hands of countries outside the core Anglophone group. Will they always learn English?

4 Mr Ostler suggests that two new factors — 34 — will check the spread of English. No confident modern nation would today make a foreign language official. Several of Britain's ex-colonies once did so but only because English was a neutral language among competing native tongues. English has been rejected in other ex-colonies, such as Sri Lanka and Tanzania, where Anglophone elites gave way to Sinhala- and Swahili-speaking nationalists. In 1990 the Netherlands considered but rejected on nationalist grounds making English the sole language of university education.

5 English will fade as a lingua franca, Mr Ostler argues, but not because some other language will take its place. No pretender is pan-regional



enough, and only Africa's linguistic situation may be sufficiently fluid to have its future choices influenced by outsiders. Rather, English will have no successor because none will be needed. Technology, Mr Ostler believes, will fill the need.

- 6 This argument relies on huge advances in computer translation and speech recognition. Mr Ostler acknowledges that so far such software is a disappointment even after 50 years of intense research, and an explosion in the power of computers. But half a century, though aeons in computer time, is an instant in the sweep of language history. Mr Ostler is surely right about the nationalist limits to the spread of English as a mother-tongue. If he is right about the technology too, future generations will come to see English as something like calligraphy or Latin: prestigious and traditional, but increasingly dispensable.

adapted from *The Economist*, 2010

## Tekst 8 It used to be English

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- 1p 32 Which of the following is true according to paragraphs 1 and 2?
- 1 The English language will ultimately disappear.
  - 2 Mr Nicholas Ostler should have chosen an alternative topic for his book.
- A only 1 is true  
B only 2 is true  
C both 1 and 2 are true  
D neither 1 nor 2 is true
- 1p 33 What is the function of paragraph 3?
- A to cast doubt upon Nicholas Ostler's speculations  
B to give a summary of Nicholas Ostler's latest book  
C to identify a lack of balance in Nicholas Ostler's writing  
D to point out the complex nature of Nicholas Ostler's subject matter  
E to provide backing for Nicholas Ostler's theory  
F to question the validity of Nicholas Ostler's research
- 1p 34 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 4?
- A a country's international status and education  
B a nation's history and absence of war  
C conservative governments and the linguistic melting pot  
D modern patriotism and applied science

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### Bronvermelding

*Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift, dat na afloop van het examen wordt gepubliceerd.*