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THE FATE OF ENGLISH
IN THE POST-BREXIT EUROPEAN UNION

At present, there is much speculation about the possible consequences of Brexit in the European Union. One possibility is that the exit of Britain from the Union will promote the emergence of an authentic European English, used as

a «second language» or a quasi-Outer Circle English, serving the needs of the European Union as the common link language for administration and cooperation between member states.

In many senses, English is a continental European language, one spoken as an L2 by 38 per cent of the population. Given the wide scale spread of English throughout Europe in recent decades it is no longer described as an Expanding Circle variety, but rather something different – as a second language or in terms of continental Europe as a developing Outer Circle context.

While Kachru's paradigm was most obviously applicable to Africa and Asia the emergence of English as Europe's undisputed lingua franca has also raised the issue of the extent to which the Kachruvian paradigm is now applicable to continental Europe as well. In this context, D. Crystal argues that in a post-Brexit world the conditions will be set for the emergence of a recognizable variety of Euro-English within the European Union.

Within days of the referendum on 23 June 2016, the French made it clear that their understanding was that one could argue that without Britain, English would cease to be a language of the EU, seeing as there would no longer be a member state with English as an official language.

However, the process of the development of English in Europe in recent years has proved that the concern and uncertainties of many pessimists appeared to be groundless. A major shift occurred toward attaining the mastery of skill in communicating rather than attempting to achieve «near native proficiency» on the basis of knowledge of the structure of prescriptive grammar and translation exercises.

Beyond lexical use, a number of scholars have reported on a wide range of features, which characterize the manner in which English is used in continental Europe.

One example here, in grammar, is the generalization or expansion of the *-ing* form in utterances such as *I am coming from Spain*, which, in other standardized varieties of English would be the simple present *I come from Spain*. Phrases such as *we were five people at the party*, instead of *there were five people at the party* or *five people were there* are also becoming more commonplace.

Continental Europeans speaking English as an L2 readily use this construction, *we were*, instead of *there were*, and seem comfortable with its use and meaning.

In pronunciation, we can now observe individual words becoming accepted with pronunciation, which is not characteristic for «standardized English». For example, the word *cooperation* is now commonly pronounced by many in continental Europe as [kɔpə'reɪʃən] and the word *unique* as [ju'nɪk]. Thus, the strategies that continental Europeans deploy when using English will inevitably evolve differently in comparison to the strategies of Inner Circle users of English.

In conclusion, we may state that with the British absent, the requirements necessary for the emergence of a continental European L2 variety of English may be fulfilled.