
RESEARCH ARTICLE

English as a Social Media Lingua Franca among Georgian Social Media Users

Tamar Dundua

PhD Student, Tbilisi State University; Head of the language center at St. Andrew's Georgian University

Corresponding Author: Tamar Dundua, **E-mail:** t.dundua@sangu.edu.ge

ABSTRACT

The present article examines the status of English as a social media Lingua Franca based on Georgian social media users. The purpose of the research is to identify how dominant and frequent the usage of English is on social media in Georgia. It also includes the respondents' attitude towards the change, their readiness to accept it and their proper understanding of the neologisms established on social media. The article also includes a diachronic overview of the dominance of different languages in the Georgian language. In order to obtain the current linguistic image on social media, descriptive research was conducted, and the data was collected and processed based on the answers on the Google form questionnaire, which included 15 questions. In the light of the descriptive study, it was apparent that the majority of the respondents (197) agree that English is the main language for communication apart from the native language.

KEYWORDS

Social media, English Language, lingua franca, Georgian context.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 21 April 2023

PUBLISHED: 28 April 2023

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2023.6.4.18

1. Introduction

Throughout the history of Georgia, different countries influenced its culture, language and religion. In the last two centuries, Russian influence was dominant, but the situation dramatically changed after collapsing the Soviet Union and Rose Revolution in the early 2000s when Georgian people started striving for Western culture and civilization; due to the political course of Georgia, the English Language started to become one of the pre-requisites in every field of life. Since the educational reform in 2004, the majority of entrants have been choosing the English Language exam. Pursuant to the national qualification framework, it is also mandatory to acquire a B2 level of English upon graduating from the University. As every aspect of our daily life is tightly connected to social media, English language dominance was interesting to be examined there as well, it is apparent that social media has a huge impact on us, especially after the pandemic, as several consecutive lockdowns made us be involved in some social apps. Based on recent statistics, internet use has increased dramatically according to the data published in February 2023 (Dixon, S (2023, February 13) – more than half of the world uses social media -59% of 4.76 billion people around the world use social media, 137 million users have come online within the last 12 months, The average daily time spent using social media is 2 h. 31m. The given data implies that the language that we use for communication has been transferred and adapted in social media. Considering the facts mentioned above, examining the English language status as a lingua franca on social media in the Georgian context has become significant.

Different authors define lingua franca differently. The key meaning of the term is a bridge, a common language, but if we follow the origin of the word - in Italian, it means Frankish language – the language spoken for communication between the people speaking vernaculars. According to Britannica (Mufwene, S. S. 2022, December 08, Lingua Franca, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/lingua-franca>), the term was first used during the middle ages, and it described a French and Italian based Jargon or pidgin. In the middle ages, the term meant the trade languages. Throughout the course of history, different languages were more significant than others; classical Latin was the dominant lingua Franca of European scholars until the 18th

century, while in the 15th-18th century in Europe, the dominant diplomatic and trade language was Portuguese. In Southeast Asia, Malay was the main lingua franca, which had been adopted by Chinese and Arab Trades in the region before Europeans.

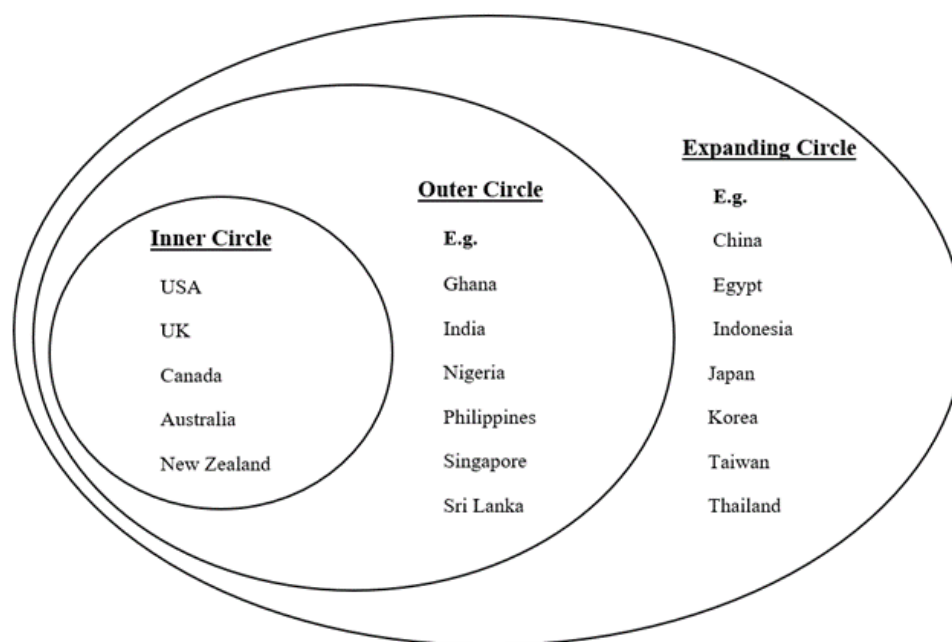
As for modern lingua francas, they may not have official status as different institutions adopt different languages, e.g. the united nations employ six official languages, international air traffic control uses English as a common language, and some Asian and African countries have unofficial lingua francas.

Also, English is the lingua franca of the press and the media - as the main, leading papers are published in English-speaking countries. We can't deny its dominance in pop culture as most movies and songs are created in English. English is the language of the commercial and food industry, as well as many menus are printed in two languages, and one of them, as a rule, is English. English is the language of education as well. There is an increasing number of students pursuing their education and career abroad in leading universities which mostly offer English language courses and degrees.

2. Literature review

All over the globe, the past few decades proved the prevalent use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in international scope; it is the most commonly used language for communication on social media platforms, even among users who do not speak English as their native language.

In order to get to the point and examine the status of English as a social media lingua franca In Georgia, I will use Kachru's circles to differentiate between the level of English language dominance. (Kachru, 1985, three circles of English).



The author of the "Three Circles of English" is Braj Kachru. He was a linguist and professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and is known for his research on World Englishes, including the concept of the "Three Circles of English". Kachru proposed that English should be understood as a global language with three concentric circles: The Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle includes countries where English is the primary language, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. The Outer Circle includes countries where English is used as a second language, such as India, Singapore, and Nigeria. The Expanding Circle includes countries where English is taught as a foreign language, such as China, Japan, and Brazil.

As we see, the Inner circle involves the countries where English has an official language status, and the people are native speakers; in the outer circle, we see the countries where English is a second language- they have their own native languages, but they speak English in the country and internationally. In expanding circle, we see English as a foreign language, which means that English is used for international communication.

3. Methodology

The data for my research has been collected through a Google form questionnaire; 197 respondents answered 16 questions related to the topic. The participants were randomly selected on Social Media; they were all of Georgian nationality or Georgian citizens from different age groups (18-60).

1. Level of English
2. Frequently used social media
3. How frequent is the use of social media
4. Main purpose of using social media
5. Apart from the Georgian language, which language does the user use on social media
6. How often do they post/express their opinion in English or by using some English words
7. While communicating on social media, I use English words/phrases
8. Whenever I use English language words, I fully understand the meaning of the word and the context.
9. I believe that using the English language on social media is a problem
10. The language I choose to communicate with foreigners and people who do not know the Georgian
11. On social media, in different types of posts (e.g. commercial, restaurant menu.) I often see English language versions as well
12. Whenever I post/comment/chat in English, I am oriented on grammar accuracy
13. I fully understand English language abbreviations/slang/emoji
14. I fully understand English language posts/commercials/comments
15. I know the meaning of the following abbreviations ASAP, BTW, BRB, TOS, TGIF, and TBT.

4. Results and Findings

Based on 197 responses, 47.4 % know English on B1/B2 level, while A1/A2 is 22.2 % and C1/C2 30.4%.

4.1 The level of English

A1/A2	B1/B2	C1/C2
22.2 %	47.4%	30.4%

Most participants were B1/B2 level, as B2 is the level, which is required to meet the current educational and employment requirements in Georgia. Besides, the latest tendency is that many people leave for abroad, where they also need to communicate, understand and express complex ideas and discuss field-related topics.

4.2 Frequently used social media in Georgia

Facebook	Instagram	Tiktok	LinkedIn
69.2%	28.2%	30.4%	2.1%

The most popular social media website in Georgia and in all over the world is Facebook; nearly 3 billion people use it monthly, which means approximately 37% of the world’s population are Facebook users. We see the dominance of Facebook in Georgia as well. Most participants chose Facebook as the most frequently visited website.

4.3 How frequently is social media visited by the users:

Very often	Often	Not so often	rarely	Very rarely
47.2%	42.1%	9.7%	0.5%	0.5%

Today’s reality is that every aspect of our life is connected to the internet and online communication; accordingly, the result that most people use it very often is not surprising.

4.4 The main purpose of social media usage is:

Communication for different purposes	For entertainment	For expressing my opinion
82.1%	15.9%	4%

Social media has adopted many functions, but mostly it is a medium for communication for different purposes.

4.5 Apart from Georgian, which language do I use on social media:

English	Russian	Other
89.7%	13%	7%

As it was mentioned above, due to the political course of Georgia, English has become the most popular second language in Georgia, which has been proved by the respondents.

4.6 How often do you post/comment in English or by using English words?

Often	Rarely	Never
26.7%	58.5%	14.9%

In terms of using English or English language phrases/words in posts or comment sections, most participants answered that it rarely happens.

4.7 Whenever I use English language words, I fully understand the meaning of the word and the context.

Agree	Disagree
92.8%	7.2%

The result indicates that people are well aware of the context in which they have to use English language words.

4.8 I believe that using the English language on social media is a problem

Agree	Disagree
28.4%	71.6%

The above-mentioned results clearly state the view of Georgian people in terms of using English as a medium of communication on social media. They are open and positive about this change.

4.9 The language I choose to communicate with foreigners and people who do not know the Georgian

English	Russian	other
89.1%	7.8%	3.1%

Most people in Georgia tend to use English in situations where they cannot apply a native language.

4.10 On social media in different types of posts (e.g. commercial, restaurant menu.) I often see English language versions as well

Agree	Disagree
89.7%	10.3%

The result that 89.7% of users state the fact that they see a bilingual commercial or any type of public post on social media reinforces the idea that English is truly a social media lingua franca.

4.11 Whenever I post/comment/chat in English, I am oriented on grammar accuracy

I am fully oriented on grammar accuracy	I do not pay attention to it
70.8%	29.2%

As language is the primary means of communication, most emphasis is put on grammar accuracy in order not to misinterpret the speaker’s idea.

4.12 I fully understand English language abbreviations/slang/emoji

Agree	Disagree
66.2%	33.8%

Despite the fact that most users mentioned that they are more oriented on grammar accuracy, they still have no trouble understanding and interpreting the abbreviations, slang and emoji.

4.13 I fully understand English language posts/commercials/comments

Agree	Disagree
78.5%	21.5%

The same goes for the understanding of English language posts/commercials/comments.

4.14 I know the meaning of the following abbreviations ASAP, BTW, BRB, TOS, TGIF, and TBT.

Majority	Some of them	None of them
46.2%	20.5%	33.3%

As today’s online communication mostly involves abbreviations, it was relevant to ask about the meaning of some randomly chosen abbreviations, and accordingly, we can conclude that they do understand most of them.

5. conclusion

The results obtained above and the generalization of the political and economic situation in Georgia make it clear to state that Georgia is in Kachru’s outer circle, a term used in linguistics to refer to the countries where English is used as a second language. This circle includes countries where English has been adopted as a language of wider communication due to colonialism, globalization, or other reasons. Despite the fact that the official language of Georgia is Georgian, which is spoken by the majority of the population, English is widely spoken and understood in Georgia, particularly in the capital city of Tbilisi and other urban areas. English is taught as a foreign language in schools and universities, and there are many private language schools and courses available for those who want to improve their English language skills. English is also commonly used in the tourism industry in Georgia, as many visitors to the country come from English-speaking countries. Additionally, many businesses in Georgia use English as their working language, particularly those that operate in the international market and as every aspect of our life is directly connected to social media, a strong presence of English is felt there too. Accordingly, based on the obtained data, we can state that English is definitely the lingua franca of social media in Georgia. The limitation of the study is that the results were interpreted based only on the online questionnaire that was filled by up to 200 users and by observing a general situation. For future studies, it would be desirable to conduct research that includes face-to-face interviews with more detailed questions.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher’s Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

References

[1] Dixon, S. (2023, February 13 (Dixon, S (2023, February 13). *Number of global social network users 2017-2027*
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/#:~:text=Social%20media%20usage%20is%20one,almost%20six%20billion%20in%202027>.

[2] Kachru, B. B. (1985) *Standard, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism: The English Language in the Outer Circle, English in the world: Teaching and learning the Language and Literatures*, eds R. Quirk & H. G. Widdowson

[3] Mufwene , S. S. (2022 , December 08) *Lingua Franca*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/lingua-franca>