

## Introduction

The phenomenal rise in the use of English world-wide is shaping today's world and that of tomorrow. Not since Latin became the binding language of the Roman Empire have we witnessed anything comparable. But English is not just more of the same. It is not only the language of the Nineteenth Century British Empire nor even of the *Pax Americana* of the Twentieth Century, though both have driven the reach of the language. Today English has become the working language of the global village. English and globalisation are interdependent phenomena and as a consequence ownership of English is vested with neither the British nor the Americans. The truth is that English is now owned by neither but belongs to all who use it. By 2030 the largest ethnic group so doing will be the Chinese.

There is a history to the rise of English. It is one of accident and intention. The 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first permanent English-speaking settlement in the New World – Jamestown, established in 1607 – has given us a benchmark and invites perspective. But without what followed, the establishment of the United States, the rise of democracy and the abolition of slavery in both the USA and the British Empire; without the triumph of democracy over its deadly foes in two world wars

and the Cold War, English could never have reached its present global pre-eminence.

Today its rise and reach is probably irreversible. Heading for 2 billion English users world-wide and riding on the tiger's back of India's success, the Soviet Union's collapse and China's pragmatic adoption of English as its preferred second language it is hard to see what can halt English. The sinews of an interdependent world require it. It is the preferred language of science, transportation, entertainment, information technology, multinational companies, intergovernmental organisations and the European Union.

But is this the journey's end or still a beginning? We must start with the voyage of English.