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*The “Language of Progress”:
English in Postwar Western Europe*

ABSTRACT: *Today, many Europeans speak English. A major reason for this is the fact that Britain and the United States, two Allied powers, actively promoted English in Europe after World War II. As this essay demonstrates, these Allied powers believed that promoting English would assist them in having covert control over Europe’s political and economic ambitions, reinforce their own geopolitical hegemony in the context of the Cold War, and provide economic benefits by reaching more people with cultural exports and English language teaching (E.L.T.).*

KEYWORDS: *modern history; Europe; United States (U.S.), Britain; World War II; postwar Europe; Allied powers; Cold War; imperialism; English language teaching (E.L.T.)*

Introduction

There is a well-known quote in the western world that is usually recited as some variant of, “If Hitler had won the war, we’d all be speaking German!” While there is no way to know the truth of this assertion, today the opposite is true: most western Europeans understand at least some English.¹ This is no coincidence, as this is the language of two of the major Allied powers that actively promoted English in postwar Europe. Powerful countries have an interest in spreading their languages around the world, and that is certainly true regarding the English-speaking Allied powers. The English language was promoted in western Europe by the United States and Britain in the postwar era primarily because they believed it could be used as a tool to Americanize western Europe so that Europeans would be more susceptible to U.S. and British influence. Spreading English also aided Cold War efforts by advancing the idea that Europe should align itself with the United States and Britain rather than with the Soviet Union. In addition, there was an economic incentive because of the profitability of English language teaching (E.L.T.) and the creation of a wider audience for English language cultural exports and trade interests.

I. Historiography

Scholars of various nationalities have analyzed the presence of the English language in Europe, and while there is generally agreement with regard to how English spread in Europe, there is more disagreement when it comes to why it was promoted. There seem to be two extremes on this subject: firstly, the view that English is a neutral means of communication that was promoted because of its usefulness and ability to allow Europeans of all nationalities to communicate effectively, and secondly, that the promotion of English by the Allies was a malicious act of linguistic imperialism that was part of an effort to homogenize Europe for the benefit of the English-speaking Allied powers. Most historians have

¹ European Commission, “Europeans and Their Languages,” *Special Eurobarometer* 386 (June 2012), 31, [online](#).

a view somewhere in the middle of these two extremes, although there are people who hold views on both ends of the spectrum.

Jeffra Flaitz details that there was a particular hostility toward the spread of English in France that intensified in the postwar era.² She states, "The reaction of French power elites to the spread of English in France has spawned a movement which is exclusive in its membership and is generally referred to as *la défense de la langue française*."³ She stresses that this view is held by a "small segment of the French population," but that the negative attitude toward English in France has been significant enough to result in the government passing legislation with the goal of promoting French over English.⁴ Flaitz outlines the views of those within the French population who oppose English, and they generally believe that "the threat to French" posed by the English language is threefold: "(1) loss of French political, social, and linguistic prestige; (2) linguistic corruption; and (3) ideological colonization."⁵ The third point is directly related to Americanization, as opponents of the spread of English in Europe widely perceived it as an American endeavor. Flaitz lists numerous instances in France where English has been perceived as an act of linguistic imperialism. Her list of examples includes: René Etiemble of the University of Paris, who argues that "upon exposure to English, French men and women risk absorbing American values and attitudes that can lead to spiritual and intellectual ruin;"⁶ Jack Lang, a French socialist, who warned that "adoption of English as an international *lingua franca* would lead to the uniformization of Europe;"⁷ and a 1983 French publication, *Projet culturel extérieur*, which likens the spread of English in western Europe to the spread of Russian in eastern Europe, also declaring that speaking French was "a symbol of anti-imperialism."⁸ Flaitz herself rejects the idea that the spread of English in France had imperialistic intentions, saying that the link between language and culture is only "alleged."⁹ Claude Truchot also mentions Etiemble in one of his theses and takes the view that his opposition to English is less about its spread in Europe than it is about American imperialism.¹⁰ The view that the spread of English is a dubious act of

² Jeffra Flaitz, *The Ideology of English: French Perceptions of English as a World Language* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, Inc., 1988), e-book.

³ Flaitz, *Ideology of English*, 103.

⁴ Flaitz, *Ideology of English*, 103.

⁵ Flaitz, *Ideology of English*, 104.

⁶ Flaitz, *Ideology of English*, 107.

⁷ Flaitz, *Ideology of English*, 108.

⁸ Ministère des relations extérieures, Direction générale des relations culturelles, scientifiques et techniques, *Le projet culturel extérieur de la France* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1983), quoted in Flaitz, *Ideology of English*, 110.

⁹ Flaitz, *Ideology of English*, 103.

¹⁰ Claude Truchot, "The Spread of English in Europe," *Journal of European Studies* 24, no. 94 (June 1994): 141-151, here 144.

cultural imperialism in Europe does not seem to be taken too seriously by most scholars.¹¹

Some historians take the view that English is a neutral means of communication and is not necessarily tied to the Americanization of Europe. These historians generally analyze English in Europe in the present day, but even so, individuals such as René Etiemble and Jack Lang would argue that even today, the English language in Europe is an Americanizing force that has its roots in Cold War era policies. One such historian who argues that English is a neutral language is Alessia Cogo, who states that English has become widespread in Europe because it is a practical and neutral *lingua franca*.¹² She also argues that English cannot be considered a force for homogenization, stating that English in Europe is heterogenous and has "variability" and "adaptability."¹³ Jennifer Jenkins aligns with this view and states that those who oppose the spread of English generally do so because they fear that it would negatively affect "standard" English or that it would promote a monolithic type of English around the globe.¹⁴ No historian denies that the widespread use of English in Europe today is at least partially a result of American and British efforts, but the extent to which historians connect Americanization to the spread of English differs. Cogo and Jenkins minimize this link and emphasize the practicality of the English language over its cultural influence, whereas others, such as Etiemble and Lang, compare the spread of English to imperialism mostly on cultural grounds.

Daniel Spichtinger holds a view in the middle of the two extremes. He argues that English cannot be so easily tied to imperialism and states that the disagreement over linguistic imperialism is a matter of a "fundamental disagreement about the nature of language" and that "proponents of linguistic imperialism are sometimes overly influenced by left-wing ideology."¹⁵ That said, Spichtinger does not fully disregard the concept of linguistic imperialism, saying that it "might not be impossible" for it to occur in some instances.¹⁶ He also does not deny that the spread of the English language in the postwar era is strongly

¹¹ Berndt Ostendorf, "Why Is American Culture so Popular? A View from Europe," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 46, no. 3 (2001), 339–366, here 339–340; David Reynolds, "Review: America's Europe, Europe's America: Image, Influence, and Interaction, 1933–1958," *Diplomatic History* 20, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 651–661, here 656.

¹² Alessia Cogo, "English as a Lingua Franca in Europe," in *Investigating English in Europe: Contexts and Agendas*, ed. Andrew Linn, English in Europe 6 (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 79–88, here 80.

¹³ Cogo, "English as a Lingua Franca in Europe."

¹⁴ Jennifer Jenkins, "The Future of English as a Lingua Franca?," in *The Routledge Handbook of English as a Lingua Franca*, ed. Jennifer Jenkins, Will Baker, and Martin Dewey (London, Routledge, 2017), 594–605, here 597.

¹⁵ Daniel Spichtinger, "The Spread of English and Its Appropriation," (Diplomarbeit/M.A. thesis, Universität Wien, August 2000), 18, [online](#).

¹⁶ Spichtinger, "Spread of English," 20.

connected to Americanization. Spichtinger goes into great detail about the spread of English in Germany. He describes how the English language was held in high regard in Nazi Germany: they saw English as "the language of a Germanic nation that has, like no other before it, conquered the world."¹⁷ In addition, he points to the fact that "English was installed as the first foreign language at the turn of the year 1936/1937 on the ground that it was regarded as more Germanic than French."¹⁸ With that in mind, it would be dishonest to say that English was "imposed" on postwar Europe in an imperialistic sense, especially in postwar Germany.

II. Postwar Efforts

The spread of the English language in Europe certainly did not begin with the end of World War II. However, it was in the postwar era that English became more prominent in mainland Europe than it had ever been before, primarily because the Allied powers had nearly complete control of most of western Europe, and the most powerful of the western Allies, the United States and Great Britain, sought to spread their influence through a variety of means, one of which was language. Britain had recognized the importance of spreading language prior to the end of World War II, as evidenced by the fact that the British Committee, which would later become the British Council, was founded in 1934. The British Council, from its foundation to the present day, is one of the most prominent organizations that works to spread the English language around the world. It operates under the authority of the British government, and thus the goals of the British Council can be regarded as aligning with the interests of their government. Britain's actions with regard to spreading language and influence apply not only to postwar Europe but also to the British colonies; however, this essay focuses on Britain's activities in postwar Europe.

Both Britain and the United States recognized the ability of language to influence foreign nations for their own benefit. The idea was to make other nations more like "us," or to homogenize them, in order to make them easier to influence. I should clarify here that the terms "homogenization" and "Americanization" in the context of English in Europe are synonyms. As Flaitz points out, the phenomenon of the English language in Europe is mostly perceived as a result of American influence (in the immediate postwar years), so even the British promotion of English can be regarded as a form of "Americanization." The British Council came about as a result of Britain's Foreign Secretary being tasked with making "British ideals better known and appreciated overseas" in 1920.¹⁹ The goals slightly changed in 1940 when the British Council was incorporated by a

¹⁷ Spichtinger, "Spread of English," 66.

¹⁸ Spichtinger, "Spread of English," 67.

¹⁹ British Council, *Appraisal Report: British Council, 1934–2016*, The National Archives, U.K., November 2016, 5, [online](#).

Royal Charter, the most notable change being the addition of its principal activity: “Promoting a wider knowledge of [the United Kingdom] and the English language abroad; and developing closer cultural relations between [the United Kingdom] and other countries for the purpose of benefitting the British Commonwealth of Nations.”²⁰ The purpose of the British Council outlined in 1920, combined with their 1940 objectives, show that there is a clear link between spreading language and spreading ideology, the end goal being to benefit “the British Commonwealth of Nations.”²¹ Official documents from the British Council do not detail exactly what these “benefits” are but give a general idea as to why the English language was spread overseas: Britain wanted to make foreign countries more like Britain. The British Council focused mostly on western Europe until 1953 (though they also had offices in South America and the Middle East),²² so these objectives were mostly designed with that area of the world in mind.

After World War II, rebuilding and reshaping Germany was a major objective of the occupying Allied governments, and the United States sought to rebuild Germany in both a literal and figurative sense. Like Britain, the United States made efforts in postwar Europe to reconstruct European countries in its own image, in part through spreading the English language. While American sources specifically regarding the spread of the English language in the immediate postwar era are scarce, sources detailing the American goals of reshaping Europe are plentiful, and the two subjects are intimately connected. A wartime handbook produced by the U.S. War Department stressed that Germany’s military defeat would result in “social revolution, and that the United States must have some part in it.”²³ A postwar memorandum regarding German affairs plainly laid out the American objectives in postwar Germany:

Our over-all objective as regards Germany may be stated as finding ways and means of preventing Germany from again menacing our safety and that of the nations [...] we call ‘the democratic world.’ There are three main ways of seeking to achieve this objective. (1) We can seek to make the Germans convinced believers in democracy [...] (3) We can so weave Germany into a larger whole as to contain satisfactorily the energies, economy, and political ambitions of the Germans.²⁴

The United States had a clear interest in homogenizing postwar Germany and reshaping it in the image of the United States, but these sources do not explicitly detail how this was to happen, only that the U.S. government would take actions in an effort to make it happen.

²⁰ British Council, *Appraisal Report*, 6.

²¹ British Council, *Appraisal Report*, 6.

²² British Council, *Appraisal Report*, 7.

²³ U.S. War Department, *Handbook of Military Government for Germany*, August 15, 1944, 2, [online](#).

²⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum Prepared in the Bureau of German Affairs: Germany in the European Context*, February 11, 1950, [online](#).

III. Education

The key to transforming Europe was education. This is outlined in a postwar U.S. propaganda film called "Here Is Germany," which gives a very brief outline of how the United States was going to rebuild and reshape Germany.²⁵ The film generally stresses how Nazism must be stamped out by the occupying Allied forces, and the end of the film summarizes how the United States planned to do this, namely, primarily through radically revising German education. The film specifically stated that new German textbooks were to be printed "under our direction" in an effort to ensure that "all Nazi doctrine is destroyed."²⁶ The film does not elaborate on exactly how the United States was going to transform German education beyond printing new textbooks and getting rid of Nazi teachings, but it establishes the fact that the Allies, in this case the United States, recognized the importance of controlling German education to change how Germans thought of the world.

It is known that European textbooks in the immediate postwar era were printed under the authority of the Allies, as mentioned in the film. Spichtinger goes into great detail about how German textbooks and English-language teaching textbooks in Europe changed as a result of the Allied occupation. E.L.T. textbooks are of particular interest because they were used throughout western Europe and not just Germany, as the German textbooks that Spichtinger references apply only to Germany. He indicates that E.L.T. textbooks in the postwar era had more American influence than British influence because the British "had far less money to their disposal than the Americans," and the British Council concerned itself more with influencing European elites rather than European education.²⁷ This lends some credibility to the notion that the widespread use of English in Europe is a result of American influence. Spichtinger describes how postwar E.L.T. textbooks in Europe were infused with the re-education policies of the United States and had recurring themes of "democracy, religion (as a factor in history and philosophic thought), humanitarianism and politics. The unity of European culture [was] also emphasized."²⁸ The themes in E.L.T. textbooks remained much the same throughout the decades in Europe, promoting "[t]he impression of one big, happy family of English speaking nations" and encouraging the idea of a "voluntary association of nations."²⁹ Spichtinger stresses that these Allied-produced postwar textbooks (not just the E.L.T. textbooks) contained these themes of unity in contrast to textbooks produced prior to World War II that had

²⁵ U.S. War Department, "Here Is Germany," 1945, Reel 6, U.S. National Archives, Identifier 36077, Accession Number 2355, Local Identifier 111-OF-11, [online](#).

²⁶ U.S. War Department, "Here Is Germany."

²⁷ Spichtinger, "Spread of English," 74.

²⁸ Spichtinger, "Spread of English," 72.

²⁹ Spichtinger, "Spread of English," 75.

promoted nationalistic messages, and that the English language was at first spread alongside the ideal of European unity.³⁰

The themes of these American-produced E.L.T. textbooks show that the English-speaking Allied powers wanted to promote a particular narrative of European unity through the English language. The promotion of such a narrative would end up influencing European political thought and would assist in homogenizing western Europe in a social and political sense, a process that Spichtinger refers to as "Americanization" (despite his criticisms of linking the spread of English in Europe to American "linguistic imperialism").³¹ If Germany were to become more like the United States, its citizens would be easier to influence, as outlined in the U.S. memorandum on German affairs.³² This concept applied not only to Germany but also to the rest of Europe and the world. A 1966 document regarding foreign assistance programs further details how this was the case: "The teaching of English is to the advantage of the United States because when a person becomes exposed to the English language he can read USIA [i.e., United States Information Agency] publications, he can understand its films, can listen to the VOA [i.e., Voice of America] and becomes one who will more readily accept U.S. ideas than if he had a remote language and no knowledge of English."³³ Spichtinger also cites examples of E.L.T. textbooks advancing the idea that English is a unifying (and useful) language in and of itself; he quotes from one: "a Swede and a Dutchman meeting in Vienna will converse in English; an Egyptian politician will address his European colleagues in English; a Russian pilot [...] will talk to the airport tower in English."³⁴

Official American sources in the immediate postwar era rarely brought up education in foreign countries, let alone English language teaching. Spichtinger highlights the importance of the European Recovery Act, also called the Marshall Plan, but the latter does not directly mention American influence in European education.³⁵ When looking at sources that do concern foreign education, the U.S. Information and Exchange Act of 1948 provides a more detailed perspective of the United States on spreading its influence and the English language overseas.³⁶ Similarly to the British Council, the United States sought to influence education systems abroad to promote its own image. The 1948 Information and Exchange Act, which contains a program for English language teaching abroad, states in its

³⁰ Spichtinger, "Spread of English," 72.

³¹ Spichtinger, "Spread of English," 73.

³² U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum*, February 11, 1950.

³³ U.S. Department of State, 106. *Minutes of a Meeting of the President's General Advisory Committee on Foreign Assistance Programs*, September 12, 1966, [online](#).

³⁴ Spichtinger, "Spread of English," 76.

³⁵ *Marshall Plan (1948)*, U.S. National Archives, [online](#).

³⁶ *United States Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948*, U.S. Government Information, [online](#).

objective that its purpose is to “enable the Government of the United States to promote a better understanding of the United States in other countries, and to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries.”³⁷ The objectives of this act are nearly identical to the ones stated by the British Council. It is evident that both the United States and Britain saw English teaching as a method of spreading their ideals throughout Europe (as well as the world), and in the U.S. Information and Exchange Act, this is made clearer in a section detailing overseas institutions: “The Secretary is authorized to provide for assistance to schools, libraries, and community centers abroad, founded or sponsored by citizens of the United States, and serving as demonstration centers for methods and practices employed in the United States.”³⁸ Official documents that come from government sources provide the logistics of how these powers spread their influence, along with the English language as one of the tools they use to do so, but only a partial picture of the motivations behind them. For example, the official objectives of the British Council and the United States in spreading the English language overseas are coated in flowery language such as “increasing understanding,” “developing closer cultural relations,” or “promoting inclusive and fair societies,” without directly mentioning how they benefit from it (or why spreading English helps promote “inclusive and fair societies,” in Britain’s case). Classified documents provide a fuller picture of the motivations behind these policies and reveal ulterior but grander motives for promoting English.

IV. Geopolitical Aspects

The policies outlined above were initially implemented during the early years of the Cold War era (with the exception of the pre-World War II activities of the British Council). The teaching of English in Europe was not only motivated by a desire to change Europe domestically; it also had the potential to influence the geopolitical positions of western European countries to align more with the United States and Britain. A secret document produced by the U.S. Department of State in 1951 regarding the information and exchange programs directly states their purpose, unlike the official documents themselves. Seeing as the English language teaching programs funded by the United States fall under the Information and Exchange Acts, they are included in this, and according to the Department of State,

[t]he current information and educational exchange programs of the Department of State are directed to giving psychological impact to the political, military, and economic decisions and actions taken by the people and governments of the free world, under the leadership of the United States, to frustrate the design of the Kremlin.³⁹

³⁷ *United States Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948*, 1.

³⁸ *United States Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948*, 2.

³⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Study Prepared by the Department of State: The Information Program*, August 8, 1951, 924, [online](#).

This document blatantly states that the United States created the information and exchange programs to psychologically influence foreign governments and their citizens as a way to have discreet leverage over their political, military, and economic affairs, seeing them as being “under the leadership of the United States” against the “Kremlin,” or the Soviet Union.⁴⁰ It also shows that the ideals promoted alongside the English language in foreign countries had two purposes: firstly, that European countries would adopt political and economic positions domestically that were favorable to the United States, and secondly, that they would oppose America’s geopolitical rivals, namely, in the Cold War era, the Soviet Union.

Britain, too, had a shared interest in opposing the spread of communism, and the British Council worked toward this goal in part by promoting English. According to Diana Jane Eastment, “[t]he Foreign Secretary said that the best means of preventing the countries of south-eastern Europe from being absorbed into an exclusive Soviet sphere of influence was to provide a steady stream of information about British life and culture.”⁴¹ It is worth pointing out that the anti-communist messaging within Britain’s language teaching programs was likely not unique to Europe. As Eastment details, the British Council gave increased priority to both Italy and Greece because they were Britain’s “‘bastions of democracy’ in the Mediterranean against the encroachments of communism to the Middle East and Africa.”⁴² Considering that Britain’s colonies were especially susceptible to communist influence in the postwar era, it is safe to say that part of the British effort to curtail socialist movements in their colonies was through language teaching. With regard to spreading the English language, both Britain and the United States had the same motivations for doing so in the context of the Cold War: both wanted to oppose Soviet cultural and political influence. While Britain and the United States may have had some slight differences in their ways of promoting the English language on a technical basis, when their motivations are compared, it is easy to see why Britain’s efforts to spread English can be lumped in with the overall “Americanization” of Europe.

V. The “*Language of Progress*”

The perception of the language by Europeans was another aspect of how English was perceived in a geopolitical sense, and both the United States and Britain wanted English to be perceived as a “progressive” language, whether it be political or technological progress. Britain and the United States strove to have English perceived as a useful language, a language of power, and a language of political progress. If English was a useful language, more people would want to learn it,

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Study*, August 8, 1951, 924.

⁴¹ Diana Jane Eastment, “The Policies and Position of the British Council from the Outbreak of War to 1950” (Ph.D. diss., University of Leeds, 1982), 237, [online](#).

⁴² Eastment, “Policies and Position of the British Council,” 230.

thus exposing them to American and British ideals. If English was a language of power, this helped legitimize British and American hegemony and influence throughout Europe. If English was a "language of progress," technological or political, fewer people would criticize its spread, and might in fact argue that it was a good thing. As George Watson points out regarding technological progress, when Sputnik went into orbit in 1957, there was a "sense of amazement and horror [...] that any other nations should be technically ahead of the United States."⁴³ An example of this in the postwar era are the Marshall Plan posters made by the United States in 1950. They generally depict messages of European unity and the idea that Europe must move forward under the guidance of the Allied powers. Some of the posters, such as one intended for use in the Netherlands, have English captions despite the fact that they were intended for use in western Europe, suggesting the idea that English was the language of progress that would move Europe forward.⁴⁴ As Spichtinger argues, "[t]he possibility to communicate with the Allied forces directly increased one's social status and prestige. In brief, somebody who knew English was important."⁴⁵ The idea that English was both useful and the "language of progress" gave English a certain level of authority over other languages. Truchot details how this perception of English persists into the present day in international affairs, long after the end of the Cold War:

English enjoys a special status in international operations in the former Yugoslavia. As Gret Haller, the ambassador and mediator in Bosnia, has pointed out on the strength of her experience there, no one listens to what you say if you do not speak English because English is the language of power and, by speaking another language, you show you have no power.⁴⁶

For historians who argue that English is a "neutral" language, this reality of the English language may be difficult to separate from the legacy of American and British imperialism.

Britain's promotion of English as a "language of progress" in opposition to its geopolitical rivals is more subtle, but it can be seen in the British Council appraisal report from 2016. According to this report, the British Council increased its activities in 1990 in post-Soviet states and after 1975 in Spain.⁴⁷ Both of these years coincide with major political changes in these countries, and given the fact that the British Council had as one of its societal goals in foreign countries to "enhance their capacity to contribute to the democratic process,"⁴⁸ this affirms the idea that Britain wished for English to be perceived as a language of political progress. The United States has a similar policy, which is outlined in the 1961 Mutual

⁴³ George Watson, "Americanophilia," *The American Scholar* 69, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 119–126.

⁴⁴ "Marshall Plan: Netherlands," Marshall Plan Posters, *Historiana*, [online](#).

⁴⁵ Spichtinger, "Spread of English," 74.

⁴⁶ Claude Truchot, *Key Aspects of the Use of English in Europe* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2002), 17–18, [online](#).

⁴⁷ British Council, *Appraisal Report*, 6, 38.

⁴⁸ British Council, *Appraisal Report*, 17.

Educational and Cultural Exchange Program, more commonly called the Fulbright-Hays Act. This act is similar to the U.S. Information and Exchange Act of 1948, including a section regarding language teaching and detailing that it is the act’s goal to “increase mutual understanding,” but there is also a section of the act that specifically states that the act is to finance “visits and interchanges between the United States and countries in transition from totalitarianism to democracy.”⁴⁹ In other words, the United States and Britain sought to take advantage of the changing social conditions of countries transitioning between political systems to promote their own ideas, and one method of doing so was English language teaching. English being perceived as a language of authority and progress benefitted the United States and Britain as it added legitimacy to their hegemony against their less democratic geopolitical rivals.

Britain and the United States also spread the English language around the world because there is an economic incentive to do so. The motivations for spreading English are not purely political. The British Council makes no secret of the fact that spreading English around the world, particularly in Europe, is an economic benefit to Britain. As an article on their official website details,

English tuition and proficiency exams are big business for the U.K. The market for students studying English in the U.K. is dominated by students from Europe – around 75% of the total [...] more than the total number of international students in Higher Education in the U.K. – making a clear valuable contribution to the U.K. economy. This is estimated to be worth £2.1 billion in revenue for the U.K., and to support more than 35,000 jobs.⁵⁰

The United States has similar programs described in the Information and Exchange Acts and the Fulbright-Hays Act promoting foreign students to study in the United States and overseas language teaching programs, which include English teaching programs. Thus, it can be safely said that the United States experiences similar benefits. As Truchot states, “the teaching of English is a fruitful business for these countries who sell courses, teaching material, accommodation for learners, training for teachers, etc. Dutch universities have reckoned it would cost them less to send their students abroad to learn the language than to keep the teaching apparatus they have to pay for.”⁵¹

Truchot also stresses the importance of American cultural products, as they help spread the English language, influence foreign cultures in favor of the United States, and bring economic benefits. A notable example is the film industry. As Truchot stresses, “the world market for cultural products is increasingly concentrated around Hollywood (50% of its revenue comes from abroad compared to scarcely 30% in 1980): [the U.S.] claimed 70% of the film market in

⁴⁹ *Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Program*, 22 U.S.C. 33, §§ 2451–2461, [online](#).

⁵⁰ Sarah Rolfe, “English in Europe,” *British Council*, May 2018: “New evidence suggests that English will continue to be the lingua franca in the E.U. after Brexit,” [online](#).

⁵¹ Truchot, “Spread of English in Europe,” 144.

Europe in 1996."⁵² However, American sources, even formerly confidential ones, only seem to hint at such economic benefits, although it is clear that the United States recognized the same economic incentives to spread English as Britain did. A confidential 1965 document from the White House with the subject "U.S. Government Policy on English Language Teaching Abroad" details that English "opens doors to scientific and technical knowledge indispensable to the economic and political development of vast areas of the world,"⁵³ but even with this knowledge, the United States seems to have primarily concerned itself with the English language being used as a tool for political influence rather than as an economic benefit.

Conclusion

The story of English in Europe is complex. It can be analyzed from the perspectives of the governments that promoted it, the Europeans who speak it daily, or through an economic, social, or cultural lens. The Allied powers understood that language could be used as a powerful tool to alter all aspects of society, which is why the English language was promoted alongside de-Nazification efforts in the immediate postwar era. The widespread use of the English language in Europe today suggests that the Allied efforts to promote it were successful, and as Spichtinger details, the perception of the English language among modern Europeans aligns with how the United States wanted it to be perceived. Spichtinger conducted a survey with European students and asked them questions regarding the English language in Europe. One of his questions was, "Is English (in your opinion) the 'language of progress'?" The response from the students was overwhelmingly "yes," with an average of 81% of students responding favorably toward English.⁵⁴ With an increasing number of Europeans learning English every year, it is clear that it will continue to be the *lingua franca* of Europe, and save for a handful of mostly French critics, everybody else seems to think that this is a good thing.

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⁵² Truchot, *Key Aspects of the Use of English in Europe*, 18.

⁵³ The White House, *National Security Action Memorandum No. 332: U.S. Government Policy on English Language Teaching Abroad*, June 11, 1965, 1, [online](#).

⁵⁴ Spichtinger, "Spread of English," 97.