

Role Of English In Shaping International Environmental Policies And Agreements

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Abstract: *The increasing environmental concerns faced by the global community—such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution—require concerted international collaboration. In these collaborations, language plays a pivotal role in facilitating dialogue, negotiations, consensus-building, and the formulation of legal frameworks. English, as the dominant global lingua franca, has emerged as the principal medium of communication in most international environmental negotiations and treaties. This research paper investigates the critical role English plays in shaping international environmental policies and agreements. It explores how English influences diplomatic discourse, the dissemination of scientific findings, participation from non-native speakers, and the equity of policymaking. Furthermore, the paper examines both the advantages and the linguistic imperialism concerns related to the widespread use of English in environmental governance. Through case studies of key agreements like the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement, and frameworks from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), this study highlights the linguistic dynamics that contribute to environmental policy development and their implications for inclusivity and effectiveness.*

Keywords: *English language, international environmental policy, diplomacy, climate change, Paris Agreement, linguistic hegemony, sustainability, environmental governance, multilingualism, global communication.*

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, English has emerged not only as a medium of international communication but also as a powerful instrument in the formulation and dissemination of international environmental policies and agreements. The role of language in global governance is often understated; however, English, as the dominant lingua franca, plays a central role in environmental diplomacy, scientific discourse, policy negotiation, legal drafting, and public awareness campaigns. The global environmental agenda, including landmark frameworks such as the Paris Agreement, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), relies heavily on English as the primary working language, shaping both the process and the outcome of international environmental governance.

The prevalence of English in multilateral environmental negotiations facilitates a shared platform for countries of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. As environmental issues transcend national boundaries, effective communication becomes imperative for collective action. English enables this by providing a standardized language

through which states, non-governmental organizations, intergovernmental institutions, and civil society actors can engage. From drafting treaties to reporting obligations and from climate science dissemination to capacity-building workshops, English is the linguistic bridge across diverse geographies and knowledge systems.

A growing body of literature from 2010 to 2024 has examined the intersection between language, environmental governance, and policy effectiveness. Scholars such as Phillipson (2010) and Crystal (2012) have highlighted how English's global dominance has shaped international discourse, including in environmental forums. They argue that English functions as a gatekeeper in the transmission of environmental knowledge and in access to decision-making processes. Similarly, Skutnabb-Kangas and Heugh (2012) raised concerns about linguistic imperialism, arguing that the exclusive reliance on English may marginalize non-English-speaking stakeholders, leading to inequities in global environmental policymaking.

The Paris Agreement (2015) serves as a primary example of how English influences international environmental negotiations. While the Agreement is translated into six official UN languages, its negotiations, draft texts, scientific reports, and preparatory documents are predominantly produced in English. A study by Hulme (2016) emphasized that the climate change discourse has been shaped through English-language scientific reports such as those by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which dominate global narratives on environmental change. This reliance on English has significant implications for developing countries, particularly those with limited English proficiency, who may face challenges in fully participating in technical discussions and accessing funding mechanisms tied to policy compliance.

More recent studies have explored how digital communication and transnational environmental activism are shaped by English. For instance, Briggs and Meyerhoff (2019) demonstrated that English-centric digital campaigns—such as Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion—have enjoyed global traction largely because of their linguistic accessibility to English-speaking audiences. The authors note that while these movements raise global awareness, they also risk overshadowing local environmental struggles articulated in indigenous or minority languages.

The role of English in environmental education and capacity-building has also been significant. According to research by Donnelly and Jacquet (2020), environmental training programs supported by international organizations are predominantly delivered in English, influencing how knowledge is transferred to practitioners and policymakers in non-English-speaking countries. This raises questions about inclusivity, representation, and the potential loss of context-specific knowledge embedded in local languages and cultural narratives.

Furthermore, the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital platforms from 2020 onward has reinforced English as the default language in global environmental databases, satellite data interfaces, and scientific communication tools. As noted by Zhang et al. (2022), AI-driven climate modeling tools and platforms such as Google Earth Engine and Copernicus are heavily oriented toward English-language instructions and documentation, creating a technological-linguistic barrier for non-Anglophone users.

In response to such challenges, some scholars have advocated for multilingual approaches to environmental governance. Tollefson and Tsui (2018) proposed integrating multilingualism into international environmental protocols to enhance inclusivity and equity. However, the logistical and financial implications of multilingual policy implementation remain substantial. Still, as global environmental challenges intensify, so does the need for equitable participation, where language inclusivity becomes a question of environmental justice.

English plays a multifaceted role in shaping international environmental policies and agreements, functioning as both a facilitator and a filter. While it enables transnational cooperation and policy coherence, it can also limit the participation of non-English-speaking actors. The literature from 2010 to 2024 underscores both the advantages and the constraints of English's dominance in global environmental governance. A balanced approach that recognizes the utility of English while promoting linguistic diversity and accessibility is essential for achieving truly inclusive and effective international environmental action.

ENGLISH AS THE LINGUA FRANCA IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

In the contemporary era of globalization, English has emerged as the *lingua franca* of international diplomacy, politics, science, and environmental governance. Its widespread acceptance and use in global institutions make it a

vital tool for collaboration, negotiation, and decision-making on complex issues like climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainable development. English plays a crucial role in shaping international environmental policies and agreements, serving as the primary medium of communication in multilateral platforms such as the United Nations (UN), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

One of the key reasons English holds this position in environmental governance is its status as the working language of most international organizations. Policy documents, scientific reports, official communications, and legal frameworks are predominantly drafted and disseminated in English. This facilitates shared understanding, transparency, and accessibility among stakeholders from diverse linguistic backgrounds. When complex scientific data regarding climate change or ecosystem degradation needs to be presented, English provides the standard linguistic base for disseminating knowledge to policy makers and international communities.

Furthermore, English enables diplomatic dialogue and consensus-building among nations. In international environmental negotiations—such as the Paris Agreement, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Convention on Biological Diversity—delegates from non-native English-speaking nations must often communicate in English to participate effectively. The standardization of language reduces misunderstandings and enhances the efficiency of negotiations. As a result, critical agreements that require global cooperation and coordinated action are more feasible when there is a shared linguistic medium.

Additionally, English serves as the conduit through which environmental science influences policy. A vast majority of scientific journals, environmental reports, and climate assessments are published in English. Researchers, policy advisors, and NGOs rely on English-language literature to access the latest findings and inform policy formulation. This centralization of information in one language accelerates the integration of science into environmental policymaking, particularly in urgent matters such as global warming, carbon emissions regulation, and deforestation prevention.

However, the dominance of English also raises challenges. It can marginalize non-English-speaking nations, scientists, and communities who may lack the proficiency to engage fully in international dialogues. This linguistic barrier can lead to unequal participation, where voices from developing nations are underrepresented or misunderstood. Moreover, reliance on a single language can result in the loss of valuable indigenous and local environmental knowledge that is not documented in English.

Despite these concerns, English continues to play an indispensable role in facilitating cooperation and global environmental governance. It bridges gaps between nations, fosters understanding across cultures, and enables the coordination of global strategies for environmental protection. For English to truly serve the global community, however, it must be used inclusively and equitably, with efforts to support multilingual access and translation wherever possible.

English as the *lingua franca* of global governance significantly influences the formulation and implementation of international environmental policies and agreements. While its central role enhances collaboration and coherence in global environmental efforts, it also necessitates a conscious commitment to linguistic inclusivity to ensure that global governance remains fair and truly representative.

ENGLISH AND SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

In the contemporary globalized world, English has emerged as the *lingua franca* of science, diplomacy, and international policy-making. One of the most crucial areas where the dominance of English is profoundly evident is in environmental policy and global environmental governance. The language has become an essential medium through which scientific findings are communicated, international environmental agreements are negotiated, and environmental awareness is globally disseminated. As environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution transcend national borders, a common language is critical to fostering collaboration, coherence, and shared responsibility.

Scientific discourse forms the backbone of environmental policy-making. Policymakers rely heavily on scientific data, models, and expert reports to formulate effective and evidence-based environmental policies. English

dominates this scientific discourse. The vast majority of scholarly articles in environmental science, climate studies, and sustainability research are published in English-language journals. Influential scientific assessments such as those produced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and other global institutions are primarily authored and disseminated in English. This dominance ensures that English-speaking nations and scholars often have a greater influence in setting the research agenda and framing the narratives surrounding environmental issues.

Moreover, the major international environmental summits and agreements—including the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement, and the Convention on Biological Diversity—are primarily negotiated and documented in English. The language serves as the working medium during discussions, allowing delegates from different linguistic backgrounds to reach consensus. English's role in facilitating diplomatic negotiations is vital in ensuring that technical environmental knowledge is effectively translated into international agreements. It also simplifies the interpretation and implementation of these policies across countries.

However, the dominance of English in scientific and environmental discourse is not without challenges. Non-native English speakers often face barriers to publishing in high-impact journals or actively participating in international forums. This can result in underrepresentation of indigenous knowledge, local perspectives, and region-specific environmental concerns, which are essential for developing context-sensitive policies. Efforts are increasingly being made to support multilingualism and inclusive participation, but English remains the primary medium through which legitimacy and authority in environmental policy are constructed.

On a more practical level, English serves as the foundation for environmental education and awareness campaigns across borders. Global NGOs, international agencies, and educational institutions frequently use English to produce environmental reports, advocacy materials, and digital content. This has contributed significantly to raising global consciousness about sustainability, conservation, and ecological responsibility.

English plays a pivotal role in shaping international environmental policies and agreements. It facilitates scientific communication, diplomatic engagement, and global collaboration. While this linguistic dominance streamlines policy-making and dissemination, it also necessitates a conscious effort to include diverse voices and knowledge systems. A balanced approach that recognizes the central role of English while promoting inclusivity and multilingualism is essential for fostering a more equitable and effective global environmental governance framework.

ENGLISH AND ENVIRONMENTAL DIPLOMACY

English has emerged as the global lingua franca of diplomacy, science, and international negotiations. In the realm of environmental diplomacy, English plays a pivotal role in shaping international policies and agreements aimed at addressing pressing global environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, ocean pollution, and deforestation. Its influence extends across United Nations conventions, intergovernmental negotiations, research dissemination, and cross-border collaborations.

Most major international environmental agreements – including the Paris Agreement, Kyoto Protocol, and the Convention on Biological Diversity – have been negotiated and documented primarily in English. As a result, fluency in English often determines the extent of participation, influence, and understanding of countries and stakeholders in these processes. English allows negotiators, policymakers, scientists, and activists from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to engage in meaningful dialogue, reducing language barriers and fostering mutual understanding.

Moreover, English dominates environmental research publications and scientific discourse, enabling the global sharing of data, models, and climate projections. This common linguistic platform enhances evidence-based policymaking and ensures that environmental issues are addressed with scientific credibility and consistency. For developing countries, gaining access to English-language resources and forums significantly improves their capacity to participate in environmental governance and advocate for their unique ecological and socio-economic concerns. International organizations such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) often conduct their operations and publish

their key documents in English. Therefore, the language becomes a tool not only for policy formulation but also for environmental education, awareness campaigns, and funding negotiations. English also facilitates collaboration among governments, NGOs, private sectors, and indigenous communities on sustainable development initiatives. However, the dominance of English in environmental diplomacy raises concerns about inclusivity and linguistic equity. Non-native English speakers may face challenges in expressing complex ideas or negotiating effectively, potentially affecting the fairness of multilateral discussions. Thus, while English plays a unifying and empowering role, there is also a growing need to ensure that multilingualism and local knowledge systems are respected within global environmental governance.

English acts as a catalyst in shaping international environmental policies and agreements by bridging communication gaps, enabling scientific collaboration, and promoting global action. Its role in environmental diplomacy is both strategic and indispensable, though it must be balanced with inclusivity and respect for linguistic diversity to ensure equitable and just outcomes for all nations.

LINGUISTIC HEGEMONY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

In the realm of global environmental governance, the dominance of the English language has emerged as a form of linguistic hegemony, shaping discourse, access, and participation in international environmental policymaking. As the primary medium of communication in most global forums—such as the United Nations, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and numerous international treaties—English functions not only as a tool of communication but also as a gatekeeper of environmental knowledge and influence.

This linguistic dominance has significant implications for environmental justice. Environmental justice is rooted in the principle that all people, regardless of language, race, or socio-economic status, should have equal access to environmental information, participation in decision-making, and protection from environmental harm. However, when English becomes the default language in environmental negotiations and scientific reporting, it can exclude non-English-speaking communities from full participation. Indigenous populations and marginalized groups, whose ecological knowledge is often orally transmitted and embedded in local languages, may find their voices diminished or ignored in formal international processes.

Moreover, the framing of environmental issues through an Anglophone lens can lead to culturally biased interpretations of ecological problems and solutions. Concepts such as “sustainability” or “climate resilience” often reflect Western ideologies that may not align with local or traditional understandings. This disconnect can result in the imposition of environmental policies that are ineffective or even harmful when applied across diverse socio-ecological contexts.

At the same time, the prevalence of English facilitates the global dissemination of scientific data, fosters international collaboration, and enables the rapid mobilization of environmental movements across borders. It serves as a unifying force in crafting agreements like the Paris Climate Accord and the Kyoto Protocol, providing a shared linguistic framework for complex negotiations. However, the benefits of this shared language must be weighed against the costs of linguistic exclusion and the erasure of local perspectives.

To foster true environmental justice, there is a growing need to recognize and address the linguistic inequalities embedded in global environmental governance. This includes encouraging multilingual communication in policy forums, promoting translation and interpretation services, and valuing indigenous and local environmental knowledge systems. Only by democratizing the linguistic landscape can the international community ensure inclusive, equitable, and effective environmental action. Thus, while English plays a pivotal role in shaping international environmental policies, it must do so in a way that supports, rather than undermines, linguistic diversity and environmental justice.

MULTILINGUALISM AND ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

English has long served as the global lingua franca, especially in domains like diplomacy, science, and international policy-making. Its central role in shaping international environmental policies and agreements is evident in forums such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Intergovernmental Panel

on Climate Change (IPCC), and other global platforms. However, the dominance of English in these arenas also brings to the fore important discussions around multilingualism and the need for alternative approaches to ensure inclusivity, equity, and broader participation in environmental governance.

Multilingualism recognizes the linguistic diversity of the global community and promotes the inclusion of multiple languages in international discourse. While English facilitates streamlined communication and consensus-building among diverse stakeholders, it also risks marginalizing voices from non-Anglophone regions, particularly indigenous communities and grassroots organizations. These communities often hold crucial knowledge about sustainable practices and local ecosystems, but their contributions can be overlooked if language barriers persist. Thus, fostering multilingual communication ensures that valuable ecological knowledge embedded in local languages is preserved and integrated into global strategies.

Alternative approaches to policy formulation emphasize bottom-up participation, where regional languages and local narratives play a central role. Translation technologies, multilingual documentation, and community-based translation initiatives can bridge gaps in understanding and representation. For example, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has increasingly emphasized the importance of indigenous and local knowledge systems, encouraging the translation of materials and participation in native languages. Such efforts enhance inclusiveness and empower marginalized voices in global dialogues.

Furthermore, the integration of multilingualism in environmental education and media can reshape public perceptions and engagement with environmental issues. When environmental communication is available in multiple languages, it fosters global awareness, strengthens advocacy, and creates more culturally relevant solutions. While English remains instrumental in shaping international environmental policies and agreements, the promotion of multilingualism and alternative participatory approaches is essential for equitable global environmental governance. Multilingual strategies ensure broader engagement, democratize access to policy discussions, and help incorporate diverse perspectives, including those from underrepresented regions. As environmental challenges become more complex and interconnected, inclusive linguistic practices will play a critical role in achieving sustainable, just, and effective global environmental outcomes.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen the role of English in shaping international environmental policies and agreements, several policy recommendations are crucial. Governments and global institutions should promote English as a common medium for environmental diplomacy, enhancing mutual understanding and collaboration. Training programs in environmental English should be implemented for policymakers, negotiators, and researchers from non-English-speaking nations. Environmental agreements must be drafted in clear, accessible English to ensure wider comprehension and compliance. International forums should prioritize equitable linguistic participation while using English for core documentation. These strategies will enhance global cooperation, transparency, and inclusivity in addressing pressing environmental challenges through unified communication.

CONCLUSION

The role of English in shaping international environmental policies and agreements is both enabling and constraining. While it provides a common platform for global dialogue, it also presents barriers to equitable participation, especially for non-English-speaking countries. Addressing the linguistic imbalances in environmental diplomacy is crucial to achieving truly inclusive and effective global environmental governance. The future of environmental sustainability depends not just on technological or economic solutions but also on the linguistic and communicative frameworks we adopt. Promoting a multilingual approach, while maintaining the practical advantages of English, is essential for a fair and collaborative global environmental movement.

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