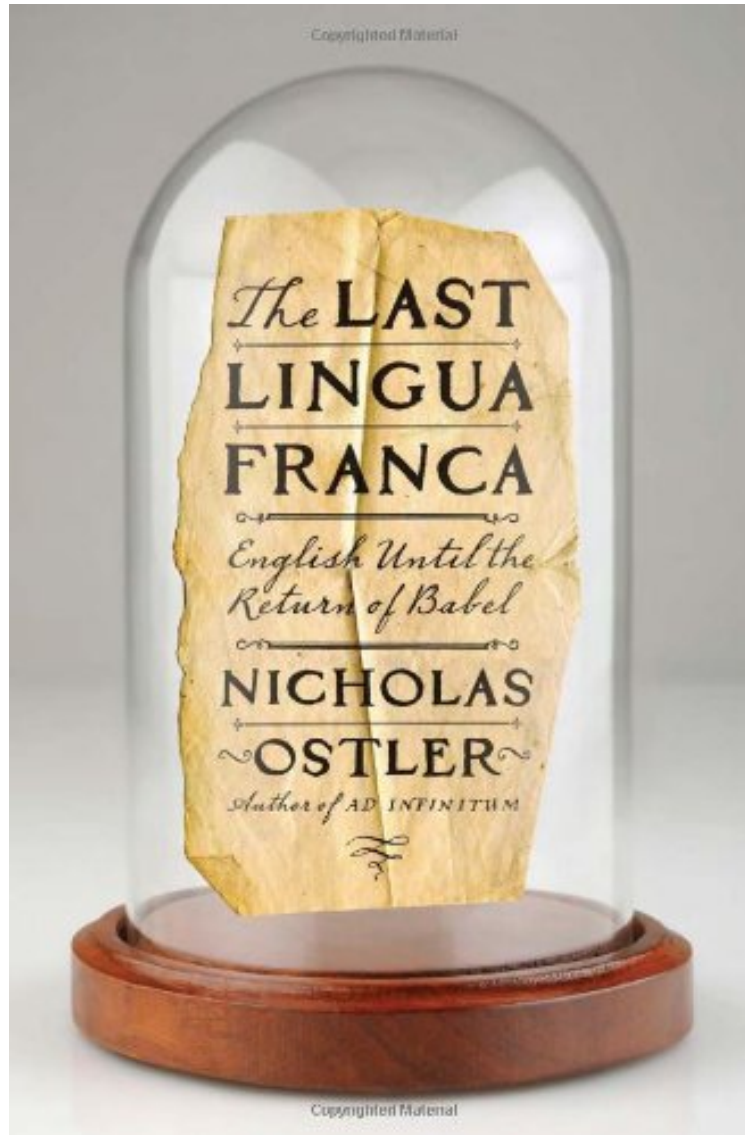


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## The Last Lingua Franca: English Until the Return of Babel

*Nicholas Ostler*

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**Nicholas Ostler : The Last Lingua Franca: English Until the Return of Babel** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Last Lingua Franca: English Until the Return of Babel:

23 of 24 people found the following review helpful. The Past, Present Future of the English LanguageBy S. PactorYou might consider Ostler a popularizer of the field of Socio-Linguistics. His new book, published in the US on November 23rd, is an extended essay on the role of English as a Lingua Franca in the modern World. Having recently read the

author's earlier book *Empires of the Word*, I recognized both the theme and some of the details from the earlier book, which covers much of the same territory as the *Last Lingua Franca*, but in a more general manner. Specifically, in *The Last Lingua Franca* looks to historical examples of other Lingua Francas, and how they failed, and asks questions about whether or not English, the current Lingua Franca, might suffer the same fate. I very much place this book along the same continuum where you find pop intellectuals like Malcolm Gladwell or, shudder, Jared Diamond. This group of writers familiarizes itself with specific social science disciplines, distills the knowledge into modern magazine quality prose, and attempts to generate a hook that will interest readers who normally wouldn't give an eff about the field of "socio-linguistics." As such, I would be inclined to think that Ostler has the right angle, since the "decline" of English is a subject that obsesses both liberal members of the education establishment and political right wingers who sponsor "English Only" bills in the legislatures of the southern states. Most of Ostler's focus in this book is extended examples of different Lingua Francas, how they functioned, and how they collapsed. The reader is treated to chapters on the role of Latin, Persian Sanskrit in their respective societies, followed by his take on the rise of English, and what "the future holds" for English or any other would-be Lingua Franca. Ostler's ultimate conclusion is spelled out in the title of the book itself, "The LAST Lingua Franca." Ostler takes the position that the rise of Machine Translation and non-English speaking countries like Brazil, Russia, China India make English's survival as a the language of the world far from secure. However he also acknowledges that it is difficult to imagine ANY language replacing English. *Lingua Franca* is a worth while read for a reader with a passing interest in linguistics and a college education, but it's hardly intellectual heavy lifting. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Excellent for its historical content and interesting ideas. By GACA long, sprawling account of lingua francas around the world, used as case studies in an attempt to discern the future of English, the most successful such language in human history. The final argument -- that when English ends its run as global lingua franca, everyone will communicate in their own languages with technological translation aids -- seems somewhat utopian, but I can't really find a fatal flaw when you take the long view on this. Of course, regardless of what you feel about that argument, the real value of this book is the wealth of information about the linguistic history of the world, from Persian to Sogdian to German to Nahuatl and Quechua. Be warned, this is a long and dense read. It WILL most certainly take a good chunk of time to read and process, but I think it's well worth it. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Great book ! By Jorge Something to read over, go back over excerpts, etc... for anyone interested in Latin, linguistics, history, etc. Ostler's books are all always good. The kind of book I actually wished I had a hard copy of, and not the electronic one.

English is the world's lingua franca--the most widely spoken language in human history. And yet, as historian and linguist Nicholas Ostler persuasively argues, English will not only be displaced as the world's language in the not-distant future, it will be the last lingua franca, not replaced by another. Empire, commerce, and religion have been the primary *raison d'être* for lingua francas--Greek, Latin, Arabic have all held the position--and Ostler explores each through the lens of civilizations spanning the globe and history, from China and India to Russia and Europe. Three trends emerge that suggest the ultimate decline of English and other lingua francas. Movements throughout the world towards equality in society will downgrade the status of elites--and since elites are the prime users of non-native English, the language will gradually retreat to its native-speaking territories. The rising wealth of Brazil, Russia, India, and China will challenge the dominance of native-English-speaking nations--thereby shrinking the international preference for English. Simultaneously, new technologies will allow instant translation among major languages, enhancing the status of mother tongues and lessening the necessity for any future lingua franca. Ostler predicts a soft landing for English: It will still be widely spoken, if no longer worldwide, sustained by America's continued power on the world stage. But its decline will be both symbolic and significant, evidence of grand shifts in the cultural effects of empire. *The Last Lingua Franca* is both an insightful examination of the trajectory of our own mother tongue and a fascinating lens through which to view the sweep of history.