

Research article

# The word “uneventful” exemplifies the lingua franca status of the English language.

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## Abstract

In this paper, I argue that the English language is rightly assumed to be the lingua franca in scientific communication. I support this argument by providing three different parameters for recognizing this status. All these evidences are based on the worldwide utility of the word “uneventful.” Finally, I make the tentative suggestion that all developing countries should, while routinely teaching children their individual native language, lay emphasis on the English language unequivocally. **Copyright © WJDCER, all rights reserved.**

**KEYWORDS:** English as lingua franca, the word uneventful, reprint requests, case reports in Annals of Saudi Medicine, random internet articles

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It was Garfield (1983), a communication guru, who wrote that “English is the *lingua franca* of International Science.” For example, editorializing on “Scholarship in Science,” Cheng (1977) was moved to emphasize the need for “command of the English language.” Thus, in order to report on a special lump in the breast, Taira et al (2007), working in a National Hospital in Japan, had to search for cases that “have been reported in the English-language literature.” And, from USA, Huang (2010) wrote: “English is the dominant medium of international academic journals.” Therefore, this paper confirms the lingua franca status from three important angles.

Accordingly, it is recommended that the learning of the English language should be entrenched as a well calculated public policy in developing countries.

### **1. REQUESTED REPRINTS**

I am a firm believer in the “tracer tool” function of reprints (Onuigbo 1985). For example, I was able to analyze 100 reprints that I obtained from far and wide, each author having published a unique case report on the appendix (Onuigbo 1991). I traced that, unfortunately, 6 patients died in this series. Next, there were 25 patients who, although they were discharged alive, were not commented on as regards their recovery status. Finally, concerning the remaining 69 patients, recovery was described as being “uneventful” in as many as 37 cases (53.6 %). Indeed, the crisp comment, “course was uneventful,” was made up to 7 times. Surely, the word “uneventful” is part and parcel of the surgeon’s vocabulary. Strikingly, this very word was used by writers from USA, 20; UK, 5; Denmark, 3; Australia, 2; and Spain, Turkey, India, Norway, Chile, Sweden, and Finland, 1 each. In classic contrast, it was in only 8 patients that recovery was deemed “uncomplicated,” while the word in 2 patients each was “asymptomatic,” “excellent,” “satisfactory,” “normal,” or “unremarkable.”

### **2. ANALYSIS OF SINGLE CASE REPORTS IN THE ANNALS OF SAUDI MEDICINE**

This Middle East Journal stands out in my experience because I began to receive it free of charge from 1985. Incidentally, that particular issue contained two single case reports. In the one written from Riyadh Armed Forces Hospital, Abu Daff (1985) declared that “The child made an uneventful recovery.” In the other from the King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Centre, Akhtar and Ashraf Ali (1985) concluded that “The patient had an uneventful recovery but two weeks later developed an enlarged left supraclavicular lymph node.” Accordingly, it is important to trace the trend in the ANNALS since that year. Manual identification of single such case report was carried out personally. Note was taken whenever the word “uneventful” was encountered. In particular, the country of origin was carefully and recorded. Table 1 shows the geographical spread of the countries in their frequency order. Clearly, much as most cases came from that region, usage of this particular word was also apparent beyond it.

### **3. INTERNET INFORMATION**

Nowadays, the Internet is holding sway in scientific communication. Consequently, it is capable of opening up a new vista for studying the lingua franca status of the word “uneventful.” Accordingly, the following examples are noteworthy with regard to both the country of origin and the field of research. They facilitate the assessment of the positive trend noted randomly during the past two decades.

From Israel, Oelsner et al (1993) followed up 40 patients managed by detorsion of twisted ischemic ovaries. As they put it, “The post-operative course was uneventful, except for transient temperature elevation in five patients.”

From Korea, Lee et al (2000) reported that “the post operative period was uneventful” in a woman with combined primary carcinoma of the Fallopian tube coexisting with benign tumour of the contralateral ovary.

From USA, Victory et al (2007) recalled the history of a woman who “underwent an uneventful cesarean section” and then had concurrent bilateral tubal ligation” because of the disease of endometriosis which affected her umbilicus. Incidentally, for the sake of completeness, they undertook a systematic literature search that included, as they specified, “English language articles. From Taiwan, Peng et al (2007) painted the picture of a 90-year-old woman with torsion of a huge ovarian tumor measuring 21 x 17 x 6 cm. Let me italicize their genuine generalization: “Our patient, *like those in previous reports*, recovered uneventfully after surgery.”

From Nepal, Koirala et al (2008) documented a rare case of breast swelling. The surgical outcome was lucidly and laconically put as being “uneventful.”

## CONCLUSION

Juliane House (2003) wrote in this Journal in terms of today’s global English “whose major characteristics are its functional flexibility and its spread across many different domains.” I am persuaded that the above three personally delineated categories are in consonance with her definition. In short, English as lingua franca deserves promotion in science policy worldwide. In this context, it is weighty that even a French Professor of Medicine, Meyer (1975), had to admit that “the dynamic genius of the English language lends itself admirably to the expression of science.” Indeed, this mode of expression in which the word “uneventful” was used as illustrated above with regard to the immediate recovery status was stretched by Wang et al (2000) of Taiwan to a much later phase. Thus, in their own words, a patient “followed up regularly and uneventfully.” Consequently, it is hypothesized that, if the role of English in scientific communication is fully recognized and stressed in developing countries, their authors will be better placed to contribute in English to world Journals significantly.

In this context, concerning my home country, Nigeria, it is noteworthy that, those who are keenly running the nationalistic race, seek to breast the tape by emphasizing local languages (Fafunwa 1974; Noble 1991). Now, there are really numerous Nigerian ethnic groups. Therefore, by all means, let each child know its mother tongue but, for Science’s sake, let all children also learn English always. This language, which I myself learnt from a tender age, has enabled me to publish in nearly 30 countries of the world including those as diverse as Australia, China, Denmark, Ethiopia, Germany, India, Japan, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, UK, USA, and Zambia. In conclusion, therefore, I would go as far as to predict that, on promoting the knowledge of the English language in Nigeria, and other countries, well groomed authors will blossom. Thus, as an example (Onuigbo 2010), I am myself to compete in international science publishing and even editing!

**Table 1:** Countries of origin and number of papers which included the word “uneventful.”

Country	No of Citations
Saudi Arabia	41
Sultanate of Oman	1

Jordan	1
Kuwait	1
Qatar	1
Pakistan	1
India	1
Uk	1
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Total	48
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