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Divisions in Society: Language

As the world becomes more globally connected, the ancient art of language continues to divide countries and people, from not only conducting trade, but from interacting with each other as well. In the past, in order to combat language barriers, L.L. Zamenhof created Esperanto, the first attempt at trying to create a truly global language. Today, technology allows for the instant translation of languages, which allows limited communication between people. Another solution is the use of translators, which is already a $40 billion industry as of 2016. Although language can be a great unifier during times of war and struggle, it creates barriers between different ethnicities and politicians, while hindering international trade, and creating an unnecessary division in society.

In the late 19th century, L.L. Zamenhof realized that ethnic groups in the northeastern city of Bialystok, Poland were not communicating due to language barriers. At the time, anti-Semitism was widespread, and Zamenhof, who was Jewish, believed that a single world language could help span differences in ethnicity and religion. Also, with the newly invented telegraph, people from all over the world were suddenly more connected, which only emphasized the importance of a globally spoken language. However, after the 1920s, Esperanto adoption began to decline as it was never used by enough people to be considered a worthwhile investment to learn. However, English has quickly overtaken Esperanto in becoming a global language. For over 380 million people, English is their primary language, while 250 million learned English as a secondary language. Thanks in part to the Internet over a billion people are learning it, and its estimated that at least a third of the global population has had some exposure to it. English is quickly becoming the language of globalization, since there are many incentives to learn it, for business, entertainment, and politics. Esperanto, compared to English, was backed by no

major government as a primary language and lacked the number of speakers and global influence that English holds.

Today, there are almost 7000 languages used worldwide. In order to communicate with others that speak different languages, people have historically used translators. One example of this is the European Union, which has 24 official languages, and requires 2,000 text translators and 80 interpreters per language. Due to language barriers between the European Union member states, the EU spent 1 billion euros on translation services in 2005. Other international organizations like the United Nations heavily rely on interpreters to translate speeches into one of the United Nations' six official languages: English, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, French, and Arabic. These interpreters are the best at their professions, however normal people must rely on less perfect solutions. One of these solutions is Google Translate. While Google Translate is a valuable tool, it's not entirely accurate, it's slow, and it cannot replace a fluent translator. However, as technology continues to improve, new solutions, like the Google Pixel Buds promise real-time translation for 40 languages, and help improve the usability and convenience of online translators. Finally, due to the Internet, it has become easier than ever before to learn another language. Services like Rosetta Stone and Duolingo promise to be engaging and effective at helping users learn new languages in as little time as possible. Convenient services like these allow people to learn languages in their free time, instead of having to allot a portion of their day to learning a language traditionally in a classroom, helping to reduce the amount of divisions in society caused by language.

Unfortunately, in many poor areas of Africa, access to online translators and human interpreters is rare. Consequently, Africa is one of the most linguistically diverse regions of the world, making this a major problem. Most sub-Saharan countries' borders were created by colonizers who created their borders without regards to cultural boundaries. Many sub-Saharan countries decided to use former colonial languages as their official language to attempt to avoid ethnic strife, since none of the European languages belonged to any of nation's native ethnic groups, which has however not been effective at eliminating divisions between ethnicities. Another African country, Kenya, is home to more than 40 tribes

and 60 tribal languages. Kenya has two officially recognized languages: English and Swahili. Schoolchildren are thought in English, and then typically speak their native tongue at home. Due to Kenya's language diversity, knowing English allows Kenyans to have a greater chance of having a common language between people from different tribes, potentially helping to avoid conflict. However, having multiple national languages still causes divisions in Kenyan society. English is seen as a must-have language for Kenyans looking to move up, while Swahili mostly dominates the city's poverty-stricken neighborhoods. In contrast, South Africa takes a different stance on its language policy. South Africa is one of the few major African countries to have avoided civil war, while also leading sub-Saharan countries economically. South Africa has not one or two official languages, but eleven, which covers almost the entirety of South Africa's spoken languages, and has helped eliminate any potential societal divisions between South Africa's many different ethnic groups. In summary, Sub-Saharan countries that have chosen a colonial language as their official language have typically fared the worst when it comes to civil wars caused by ethnic divisions. East African countries that use both Swahili and a colonial language as their official languages has helped calm, but not eliminate ethnic tension. South Africa's language policy has worked the best in regards to societal divisions by preserving its people's cultures and working to prevent one native language from gaining too much authority over the rest.

Linguistic differences between cultures and ethnicities cause societal divisions worldwide in politics, trade, and people's' everyday lives. As the world continues to become more globally focused, language divisions have become more prominent than ever. L.L. Zamenhof realized this 150 years ago and attempted to solve the problem by creating an easy to learn language that could be used worldwide. However, it failed in adoption and is quickly being replaced by English. Due to the many language barriers we face everyday, translators and interpreters have become more valuable, with the industry worth $40 billion and expected to grow in the coming years. Technology has also changed the way languages are learned by offering an additional, more convenient option to learning a language, instead of the traditional way in a classroom. Finally, Africa has demonstrated how vital languages are to preventing ethnic strife between people of different cultures. Countries that give authority to one or two languages

often fall into civil wars between ethnic groups that are unsatisfied with their representation or treatment in their country. South Africa provides an example to its neighbors that having multiple national languages prevents one faction from gaining dominance over others and prevents violent civil wars, which has allowed South Africa to become one of the most economically advanced sub-Saharan nations. Although the ancient art of language has been used by humans for millennia, the recent trend of globalization over the past 500 years has caused societal divisions between different people of different nationalities by creating language barriers between people in ethnically diverse countries, hindering international trade and tourism, and hampering global politics.