

English - A world language

Why English?

There are over 3000 languages in the world. So why has English become so widely spoken?

From about 1600, explorers, adventurers, settlers and soldiers went out from Britain to found settlements and colonies overseas. They took the English language with them. At the height of their power, during the 19th century, the British could say that the sun never set on their Empire.

Today almost all the countries of the old Empire have become independent. However, most of them are now members of the Commonwealth of Nations, and English continues to be an important language for them.

After the Second World War the United States became what Britain had been in the 19th century: politically and economically the most powerful nation in the world. As its power spread, so the English language spread.

Finally, with the development of computer technology and the explosion of information, English truly became a global language. Today over 80% of the information stored in the world's computers is written in English. Over two thirds of the world's scientists write in English and three quarters of the world's mail is written in English.

English is the main language of the business world, of international travel, airports and air-traffic control, of electronics and computer technology; it dominates international politics, medicine, sports, pop music and advertising.

The top ten native languages of the world

Language	Country	Millions
1. Mandarin	China	670
2. English	U.K., U.S.A., etc.	369
3. Hindi-Urdu	India, Pakistan	278
4. Russian	U.S.S.R.	246
5. Spanish	Spain, Mexico, etc.	225
6. Arabic	Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc.	134
7. Portuguese	Portugal, Brazil, etc.	133
8. Bengali	Bangladesh, India	131
9. German	Germany (West + East), Austria, Switzerland, etc.	120
10. Japanese	Japan	113

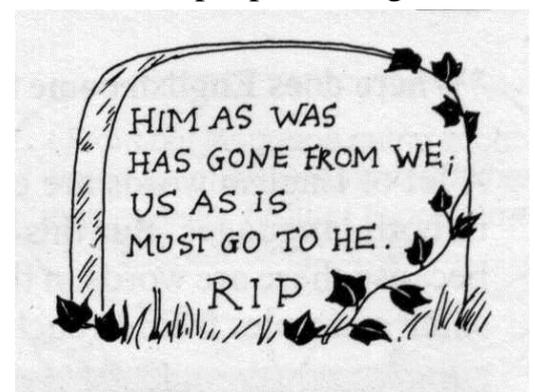
Mandarin - a form of Chinese - is spoken as a first (or native) language by more people than any other in the world. However, few people outside China have any knowledge of it, and not everybody inside China uses it either. With English it is different. The population of England is about 46 million, yet there are an estimated 369 million people throughout the world who speak English as their native language.

In addition to the 369 million people who speak English as their native language, it is estimated that a similar number of people - probably at least 400 million - speak it as a second or foreign language. English is a second language for those who live in

countries where it is used for some official purposes, e.g. in schools, universities or courts (India, Pakistan, Singapore, Hong Kong and a number of African states); otherwise, in countries where it has no such official status, it is a foreign language (Germany, France, Japan, etc.).

400 years ago, all English-speaking people lived in the British Isles. Only about 1 in 100 of the world's population used English; today it is used by about 1 in 7 people throughout the world. Two of the main reasons for this remarkable development are the following:

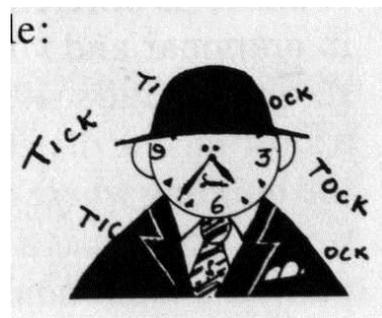
- The **British Empire** was built up providing Britain with colonies all over the world. (Remember that the USA started as a British colony!)
- Especially since the end of the **Second World War** the USA has grown enormously in world-wide influence, playing a leading role in such fields as



science, technology and pop culture.

So far English has been spoken of as if it was one and the same language throughout the world. But that's not true of course. American English is, as you know, different from British English in a number of ways. In pronunciation, for example. That's what makes this joke possible:

American: What kind of work do you do?
Englishman: I'm a clerk.
American: A clock?
Englishman: Yes, a clerk. What's so funny about that?
American: You mean you just go tick-tock, tick-tock?



But American English is not the only kind of English that is different from British English; so is the English spoken in South Africa, Australia, India, The West Indies and every other English-speaking country. Even where spelling, vocabulary and grammar are not very

different, pronunciation and intonation are usually enough for most people to recognize where the speaker comes from. Not only do different countries have their own varieties of English, there are also different varieties of the language within the country.

As far as accent is concerned, it's the vowel sound that vary most in the different parts of the country. One of the biggest differences is between the north and the south of England.

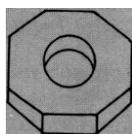
A dialect is different from the standard language in pronunciation but also in grammar and vocabulary. Most speakers or really broad dialects live in rural areas and so it is not surprising that from vocabulary, especially, can vary from one dialect region to another. For example, the standard word for the building where cows are kept is *cow-house* or *cow-shed*, but in the southwest it is known as

shippon, in the north-east as *byre*, and in various other parts as *beast-house*, *neat-house*, *cow-stable* and *mistall*.

Ever heard of "pidgin" English?



Loliwara



Mama bilong skru



Klokbelo

One kind of English that is thoroughly different from the language spoken in Britain and the U.S.A. is pidgin, or pidgin English. Pidgin is spoken in different parts of the world (e.g. West Africa, Hawaii and New Guinea), it's a mixture between English and the particular native languages of the area. The vocabulary is mostly English, the spelling and grammar are usually rather different. Here are some examples, just for fun.