

English as a global language

English has ceased to be an "English language" in the sense of belonging only to people who are ethnically English. Use of English is growing country-by-country internally and for international communication. Most people learn English for practical rather than ideological reasons. Many speakers of English in Africa have become part of an "Afro-Saxon" language community that unites Africans from different countries.

As decolonisation proceeded throughout the British Empire in the 1950s and 1960s, former colonies often did not reject English but rather continued to use it as independent countries setting their own language policies. For example, the view of the English language among many Indians has gone from associating it with colonialism to associating it with economic progress, and English continues to be an official language of India. English is also widely used in media and literature, and the number of English language books published annually in India is the third largest in the world after the US and UK. However English is rarely spoken as a first language, numbering only around a couple hundred-thousand people, and less than 5% of the population speak fluent English in India. David Crystal claimed in 2004 that, combining native and non-native speakers, India now has more people who speak or understand English than any other country in the world, but the number of English speakers in India is very uncertain, with most scholars concluding that the United States still has more speakers of English than India.

Modern English, sometimes described as the first global lingua franca, is also regarded as the first world language. English is the world's most widely used language in newspaper publishing, book publishing, international telecommunications, scientific publishing, international trade, mass entertainment, and diplomacy. English is, by international treaty, the basis for the required controlled natural languages Seaspeak and Airspeak, used as international languages of seafaring and aviation. English used to have parity with French and German in scientific research, but now it dominates that field. It achieved parity with French as a language of diplomacy at the Treaty of Versailles negotiations in 1919. By the time of the foundation of the United Nations at the end of World War II, English had become pre-eminent and is now the main worldwide language of diplomacy and international relations. It is one of six official languages of the United Nations. Many other worldwide international organisations, including the International Olympic Committee, specify English as a working language or official language of the organisation.

Many regional international organisations such as the European Free Trade Association, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) set English as their organisation's sole working language even though most members are not countries with a majority of native English speakers. While the European Union (EU) allows member states to designate any of the national languages as an official language of the Union, in practice English is the main working language of EU organisations.

Although in most countries English is not an official language, it is currently the language most often taught as a foreign language. In the countries of the EU, English is the most widely spoken foreign language in nineteen of the twenty-five member states where it is not an official language (that is, the countries other than Ireland and Malta). In a 2012 official Eurobarometer poll (conducted when the UK was still a member of the EU), 38 percent of

the EU respondents outside the countries where English is an official language said they could speak English well enough to have a conversation in that language. The next most commonly mentioned foreign language, French (which is the most widely known foreign language in the UK and Ireland), could be used in conversation by 12 percent of respondents.

A working knowledge of English has become a requirement in a number of occupations and professions such as medicine and computing. English has become so important in scientific publishing that more than 80 percent of all scientific journal articles indexed by Chemical Abstracts in 1998 were written in English, as were 90 percent of all articles in natural science publications by 1996 and 82 percent of articles in humanities publications by 1995.

International communities such as international business people may use English as an auxiliary language, with an emphasis on vocabulary suitable for their domain of interest. This has led some scholars to develop the study of English as an auxiliary language. The trademarked Globish uses a relatively small subset of English vocabulary (about 1500 words, designed to represent the highest use in international business English) in combination with the standard English grammar. Other examples include Simple English.

The increased use of the English language globally has had an effect on other languages, leading to some English words being assimilated into the vocabularies of other languages. This influence of English has led to concerns about language death, and to claims of linguistic imperialism, and has provoked resistance to the spread of English; however the number of speakers continues to increase because many people around the world think that English provides them with opportunities for better employment and improved lives.

Although some scholars mention a possibility of future divergence of English dialects into mutually unintelligible languages, most think a more likely outcome is that English will continue to function as a koineised language in which the standard form unifies speakers from around the world. English is used as the language for wider communication in countries around the world. Thus English has grown in worldwide use much more than any constructed language proposed as an international auxiliary language, including Esperanto.