

Global English

Estimates of the number of present and future speakers of English suggest English will be spoken across the globe for the foreseeable future. But what kind of English will it be?

Evidence from other languages indicates that there are two opposing movements of linguistic change at work within a language.

The first movement is **convergence** - in which speakers of separate languages come together either using a pidgin - a mixture of their languages - or using a different second language. The Scandinavian countries are examples of this: although the languages Swedish, Norwegian and Danish are similar, and from a common Old Norse root, an overwhelming number of speakers use English as their second language.

The second movement is **divergence** - in which speakers of a common language differentiate their speech from each other and create first a distinct dialect then in due course a separate language. We see this from Latin which fractured into Italian, Spanish and Portuguese.

Both forces are constantly at work and examples are given below. Which force is more likely to take control of English as a world language. Only major changes in the political climate are likely to make an impression in the short term, though a series of minor external influences could cause a general change.

The major change could well be a change in the power of English's main speakers, the USA. In a parallel with Latin following the decline of the Roman Empire, it is likely that any decline in the political, economic or technological power of the USA would lead to greater divergence and the development of separate mutually incomprehensible varieties.

The general change of increased global communications and travel has already had a strong influence on the use of English, leading to significant convergence on English as a second language - or, ironically, as the old phrase has it, a "lingua franca".

Convergence

Speakers of minority languages (Dutch, Swedish, Latvian) speak English as a second language to communicate more widely

Speakers of economically poor regions (Thai, Cambodian) speak English to trade more easily

Politically powerful nations enforce use of their language on those they have invaded (Norman French on Anglo Saxons, English on India, French in the Caribbean, Spanish in South America)

Divergence

Adoption of the language by many cultures and second language learners, especially without formal teaching methods, means it becomes more flexible as they integrate and blend it into their own tongue.

As informal learning and blending takes place the language splits first into dialects then into separate languages over time eg *Franglais*, *Globish*, *Hindglish*...

Establishing your own language is an indicator of independence. Speakers who have had English forced on them may retaliate by pushing their original language eg Welsh, Gaelic or Catalan in

<p>Technologically powerful nations enforce use of their language by designing it into their technology and culture (Coca Cola, Microsoft computer operating systems, Internet)</p> <p>A dominant literature encourages readers to learn the language</p>	<p>response to Spanish</p> <p>The collapse of or over-extension of political power leads to a splitting up of regions and thence languages. eg Latin is remoulded as Italian, Spanish, Portuguese.</p> <p>Individual dialects or registers rise in importance as they become more prestigious as a result of power, fashion, trade etc. The West Midlands dialect became the language of the Court and therefore received the prestige required to make it the language of culture in Oxford and Cambridge, thence the standard English and RP accent we know today.</p>
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Further influences include increased literacy and educational opportunities which have led to formal language learning, including the huge popularity of the BBC English language courses in China. However there is a theory that the recent surge in economic activity in China will propel Chinese or Canonese as a global language itself.

Global Travel and transport plus global communications certainly speed up the pace of linguistic change, but that change has always taken place.

There is a theory that the combination of lack of formal grammar teaching in the UK and US, contrasting with formal EFL teaching of foreign learners is producing second language speakers who have a more accurate formal grasp of English than native speakers. Could this in turn lead to a branch of Formal Classical English, learned and spoken globally but which puts native speakers at a disadvantage? Discuss!

Finally, specific changes in English may be predicted. In writing I predict the atrophy, if not the demise, of the apostrophe. It is widely misused even by native speakers though it could survive as a token of prestige for the literate.

I also suggest that the "th" sound - the voiced post dental fricative as in "then", "though" and "weather" but not as in "thin" and "throw" (where it is the unvoiced post dental fricative) - will fade away as it is unusual in any other language and difficult to emulate. Whether it will be replaced by the "z" of the French ("I am verry 'appy wiz ze wezzer") or the germanic "d" or the cockney "v" ("wos 'a wever loik?") is a matter of guesswork.

Based on:

<http://www.putlearningfirst.com/language/04change/global.html>

The Future of English

Research published in the journal Science in February 2004 by David Graddol suggests that:

English, currently the second most spoken world language (Mandarin Chinese is first), is likely to be overtaken by Arabic and the related languages of Urdu and Hindi by 2050.

He estimates that by 2050 the number of native speakers aged 15 to 24 would be (millions):

Chinese	166 m
Hindi/Urdu	73.7
Arabic	72.2
English	65
Spanish	62.8

In 1995 the total number of speakers was estimated as:

Chinese	1.1 billion
English	372 million
Hindi/Urdu	316 million
Spanish	304 million
Arabic	201 million

Languages gaining in popularity include Bengali, Tamil and Malay

Languages losing their popularity include German and French

A Global Language?

It is generally agreed that English is - and will remain - a Global Language as long as the USA remains a global power. However it is as a second language mediating world trade and communications that it has its most insidious effect. Spoken by non-native speakers it is likely to change into a number of dialects or even pidgins which may eventually have to be learned by native English speakers if they are to participate in world trade.

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<http://www.putlearningfirst.com/language/04change/future.html>