

The English Language:

An International Medium of Communication

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Language Size by Number of Native Speakers

| Rank | Language | Estimated number of native speakers | | |
|------|----------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------|
| | | Comrie (1998) | Ethnologue(2005) | Difference |
| 1 | Mandarin Chin. | 836,000,000 | 873,000,000 | +27m. |
| 2 | Spanish | 332,000,000 | 322,000,000 | - 10m. |
| 3 | English | 322,000,000 | 309,000,000 | - 13m. |
| 4 | Hindi/Urdu | 333,000,000 | 241,000,000 | - 92m. |
| 5 | Arabic | 186,000,000 | 206,000,000 | +20m. |
| 6 | Portuguese | 170,000,000 | 177,000,000 | + 7m. |
| 7 | Bengali | 189,000,000 | 171,000,000 | - 18m. |
| 8 | Russian | 170,000,000 | 145,000,000 | - 25m. |
| 9 | Japanese | 125,000,000 | 122,000,000 | - 3m. |
| 10 | German | 98,000,000 | 95,000,000 | - 3m. |
| 11 | French | 72,000,000 | 65,000,000 | - 7m. |

Native Speakers and Secondary Speakers

| Rank | Language | Native speakers | Secondary speakers | Total |
|------|-------------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 1 | Mand. Chin. | 837,000,000 | 178,000,000 | 1,015,000,000 |
| 2 | English | 309,000,000 | 199,000,000 | 508,000,000 |
| 3 | Hindi/Urdu | 241,000,000 | 224,000,000 | 465,000,000 |
| 4 | Arabic | 206,000,000 | 246,000,000 | 452,000,000 |
| 5 | Spanish | 322,000,000 | 70,000,000 | 392,000,000 |
| 6 | Russian | 145,000,000 | 110,000,000 | 255,000,000 |
| 7 | Portuguese | 177,000,000 | 11,000,000 | 188,000,000 |
| 8 | Bengali | 171,000,000 | 14,000,000 | 185,000,000 |
| 9 | Indonesian | 23,000,000 | 140,000,000 | 163,000,000 |
| 10 | Japanese | 122,000,000 | 11,000,000 | 133,000,000 |
| 11 | French | 65,000,000 | 50,000,000 | 115,000,000 |
| 12 | German | 95,000,000 | 14,000,000 | 109,000,000 |

Evaluating language status

- Number of native speakers: 0-4 points
- Number of secondary speakers: 0-6 points
- Number of countries (and their populations) in which the language is officially used: 0-7 points
- Number of domains of use (business, diplomacy, science, etc. ...): 0-8 points
- Economic power of the countries for which the language is an official language: 0-8 points
- Literary heritage and social prestige: 0-4 points
 - G. Weber. 1997. 'Top Languages' in *Language Monthly*, 3: 12-18

Proportions of users

- World Population: 6.5 billion
- Percentage of users of:
 - Chinese: 15%
 - English: 8%
 - Hindi/Urdu: 7%
 - Arabic: 7%
 - Spanish: 6%
 - Russian: 4%
 - Portuguese: 3%

Relative Importance of Languages, according to Weber's points system (1997)

| Rank | Language | Points |
|------|------------|--------|
| 1 | English | 37 |
| 2 | French | 23 |
| 3 | Spanish | 20 |
| 4 | Russian | 16 |
| 5 | Arabic | 14 |
| 6 | Chinese | 13 |
| 7 | German | 12 |
| 8 | Japanese | 10 |
| 9 | Portuguese | 10 |
| 10 | Hindi/Urdu | 9 |

Will Chinese ever rival English?

- Currently:
 - Many more native speakers of Chinese
 - Smaller percentage of secondary speakers
 - Difficulties:
 - Chinese is a tonal language
 - Foreigners find tones difficult to master.
 - The Chinese writing system
 - Alphabetical systems are easier to learn
 - Motivation ...
 - Does China want to share its language and culture?
 - Difficult to change the existing status of English and French

Language Histories

- When did Chinese begin?
 - -- time immemorial
- When did Finnish begin?
 - -- time immemorial
- When and how did English begin?
 - in the 5th century AD on an island off the coast of north-west Europe.
 - a West Germanic dialect brought by invaders
 - originally nothing like modern English

Development of English

The original W. Germanic dialect was augmented by:

- Scandinavian words (9th-10th cent.)
 - Northern *skirt* – Southern *shirt*
- *Norman French (after 1066)*
- *Gaelic (dour, whisky), Welsh (v. few words)*
- *Latin (the language of scholarship)*
- *Greek (17th-19th cent, science and philosophy)*
- *Dutch nautical terms (skipper, schooner, yacht), Czech (pistol), Hungarian (coach), Australian Aborigine (kangaroo), etc., etc.*

English: a Magpie Language

The basic vocabulary of English is Germanic.
come/go, man/wife, in/out, red/white, etc.

German cognates
kommen/gehen, Mann/Weib, in/aus, rot/weiss.

Cultural terms like *art, language*, and *music* are of Old French origin.

French cognates:
l'art, la langue, la musique.

Learned, abstract terms such as *argument* and *discussion* are mostly from Latin.

'Inkhorn Terms'

- In the 15th-16th centuries more than 40% of the vocabulary of Latin was adopted into English:
 - *ingenious, capacity, mundane, celebrate, extol, dexterity, illustrate, superiority, fertile, contemplate, invigilate, pastoral, confidence, compendious, relinquish, frivolous, verbose*
- But many of these learned terms did not survive:
 - *exolete*: disused, obsolete; effete, insipid.
 - *fatigate*: to cause to become tired.
 - *illicebrous*: alluring, enticing, attractive.
 - *ingent*: vast, immense, very big.
 - *obtestate*: to bear witness, *or* call as a witness.

The Spread of English throughout the World

- England -- British Isles

maritime tradition, international trade,
colonization, missionary work, empire
→ establishment of English overseas

- 17th century → India
- 17th century → North America
- late 18th, early 19th century → Australia and New Zealand,
→ Africa, Hong Kong, and elsewhere.
- After the end of the British Empire, many newly independent countries adopted English as a “politically neutral” official language.
- Political and economic world domination by the USA, 1945-2000.

The Spread of English throughout the World

Reasons for the adoption of English as an official language in the post-colonial world:

- administrative continuity and efficiency
- linguistic and political neutrality
- economic self-interest

Some English Words borrowed from Chinese

- *tea* and its variant *char* [茶]
-- an old borrowing (16th century)
- *feng shui* 风水
- *gung-ho* 功夫
- *mah-jong* 麻将
- *wok* 锅
- *yin and yang* 阴阳
- *kiasu*
-- from Southern Chinese dialect, “a person who is perceived as greedy or grasping and anxious not to miss any opportunity”
from Chinese words [怕输] meaning ‘scared to lose’

Some new coinages: *Business and marketing*

burn rate

noun. the rate at which a new company spends the initially invested capital before starting to earn a return on investment.

chargeback

noun. a demand by a credit-card company for a shopkeeper to make good the loss on a bad transaction.

Some more new terms: *Business and marketing*

contingency fee

noun. a fee paid to a lawyer by a client only if the case wins.

coopetition

noun. collaboration between apparent competitors, for example agreeing on price increases.

—ORIGIN: blend of COOPERATIVE + COMPETITION.

New Words: *Popular music*

Cantopop

noun. a type of popular music combining Cantonese lyrics and Western disco music.

—ORIGIN: blend of CANTONESE and POP.

Europop

noun. pop music from continental Europe with simple melodies and lyrics, often sung in English.

J-pop

noun. Japanese pop music.

Standards for English

- Pronunciation of 'bath': /bɑ:θ/ OR /bæθ/?
- Lexical choice: *envision* or *envisage*? *EG*:
 - We now have the chance to build the world *envisaged* by the founders of the UNOR SHOULD IT BE -
 - We now have the chance to build the world *envisioned* by the founders of the UN
- Grammar:
 - *Too radical **of** an idea* OR *too radical an idea*?
 - *Between you and I* OR *between you and me*?

Conclusions (1)

- English today is a plural phenomenon:
 - Plurality of origins
 - Plurality of purposes and uses
 - Plurality of nations and users
 - Flexible and pragmatic
 - The archaic spelling system is a comparatively minor drawback, compared with German word order and inflections, Czech inflections, Chinese tones

Conclusions (2)

- English today is not the language of any one nation.
 - It does not *belong* to anybody.
- English has become the mutual property of the whole world. It is an international, interdisciplinary medium of communication.