THE SPREAD AND DIVERSITY OF ENGLISH

OBJECTIVES

This practice session reveals the diversity of the English language worldwide. It focuses on standard and nonstandard varieties of English, their role and functions.

IN THIS SESSION, YOU WILL STUDY:

- about geographical dispersion of English;
- about the types of English varieties;
- where English is spoken as an official language;
- about the importance of English in Europe;
- what a lingua-franca is.

OUTLINE

1. The role of English and its geographical dispersion. Typology of English varieties.
2. The English-speaking countries. The status of English in different countries.
3. National varieties of English.

SELF-STUDY INSTRUCTIONS

Reading for this session on your own, **it is important to give attention to the following points**.

- The expressions *different Englishes* and *the many faces of English* are seeking to describe the diversity of the English language rather than its common core. In this case, *English* means "one variety".
- It is difficult, if not impossible, to draw a boundary among all types of Englishes.
- The expansion of English led to the rise of different varieties.
- Although Englishes are of a wide range representing the diversity of form and function, they should be viewed as a single system.
- There are major varieties of English (American English, British English, Indian English, Canadian English, Australian English, Irish English, New Zealand English).
- There are sub-varieties, countries such as South Africa, the Philippines, Jamaica and Nigeria, which also have millions of native speakers of dialect continua ranging from English-based creole languages to Standard English.
- New Englishes are national varieties which have emerged around the globe, especially since the 1960s in those countries which opted to make English an official language upon independence.
- It is necessary to differentiate between the terms *national variety* and *national language*.
- There is no official definition of the term *global* or *world language*;
- There are some other factors contributing to the global status of a language.

- Having a global language strengthens the world peace and unity, provides effectiveness in modern communication, trade and travel. However, there are also a few pitfalls of having a global language that should be taken into consideration.
- Today, English has become a language mainly used by bilinguals and multilinguals.
- Modernity is a process which began with the Renaissance and nearly reached its completion in the 19th century, stimulated the growth of English as a second language.
- Modernity has stimulated new notions of the 'native' and 'foreign' speaker.
- English is an essential linguistic constituent of Europe.
- The attitudes of the Europeans towards English are changing.
- In the modern European context, English is a European language that provides a new kind of bilingualism.
- English is a foreign language which should be learnt along with the native-speaker cultures;
- English is a national language in EU countries (in Ireland) and is to be treated equally with any other European language;
- English is widely used in Europe as lingua franca.

RECOMMENDED READING

Crystal D. Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1995. P. 26-27, 32, 334–337 (pidgins and creoles).

Jenkins J. ELF at the gate. The Position of English as a Lingua Franca. 2004. URL: https://www.scribd.com/document/518686325/Jenkins-J-2005-ELF-at-the-gate

Kanwal A., Akrm A., Ullah F. English around the World: Exploring Current Debates and Issues in World Englishes. Linguistic Discovery. 2014. #8(2). DOI:10.5281/zenodo.11420531

The Future of English: Global Perspectives. Research Summary. British Council. URL: https://mktgfiles.britishcouncil.org/hubfs/FoE_Research%20Summary_single%20page_for%20download_revisedV2.pdf?hsCtaTracking=81ca7ce5-cea1-48cd-909f-72f27e889f1f%7Cc4e6ffbb-8ec5-4ac6-b7bf-1bef797863ec

FURTHER READING

Grzega J. On the Description of National Varieties: Examples from (German and Austrian) German and (English and American) English. *Linguistik online*. 7,3/00. URL: https://linguistik-online.com/3_00/grzega.html

Hickey R. Variety studies URL: https://www.uni-due.de/ELE/VarietiesOfEnglish.pdf . P. 11-14.

Trudgill P. A Glossary of Sociolinguistics. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2003. 148 p.

INTERNET RESOURCES

What is the most spoken language? Ethnologue, 2025. URL: https://www.ethnologue.com/insights/most-spoken-language/

70 statistics about the English language. 2025. https://ecenglish.com/en/blog/news/70-statistics-about-the-english-language/

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS AND TERMS IN THIS SESSION

- American type accents;
- BBC English;
- British English;
- English based creole;
- English type accents;
- lingua franca;
- mainland varieties;
- Modified RP;
- national language;
- national standard;
- native varieties of English
- native English-speaking area;
- New Englishes;
- NHE (Northern Hemisphere English);
- official language;
- overseas varieties;
- Oxford English;
- pidgin English;
- Queen's English;
- regional dictionary;
- RP (Received Pronunciation);
- SHE (Southern Hemisphere English);
- Social / typological varieties;
- Standard English

SELF-STUDY ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment 1. Are the following statements true or false? You may use these resources, along with others, to find relevant information:

70 statistics about the English language. 2025. https://ecenglish.com/en/blog/news/70-statistics-about-the-english-language/

What is the most spoken language? Ethnologue, 2025. URL: https://www.ethnologue.com/insights/most-spoken-language/

- 375 million people speak English as their second language all over the world;
- 750 million people speak English as a foreign language;
- 80% of websites are in English;
- English is the official language in a lot of countries.

Answer the following questions:

- Which are the "Top ten" spoken languages in the world?
- How many people speak English around the world?
- Which countries have English as an official language? List six of them.
- List, at least, three countries in each continent where English is spoken.
- Are there national varieties of English?
- What is the difference between a native language and an official language? And between a second language and a foreign language?
- Do you think it is important to speak English? Why?

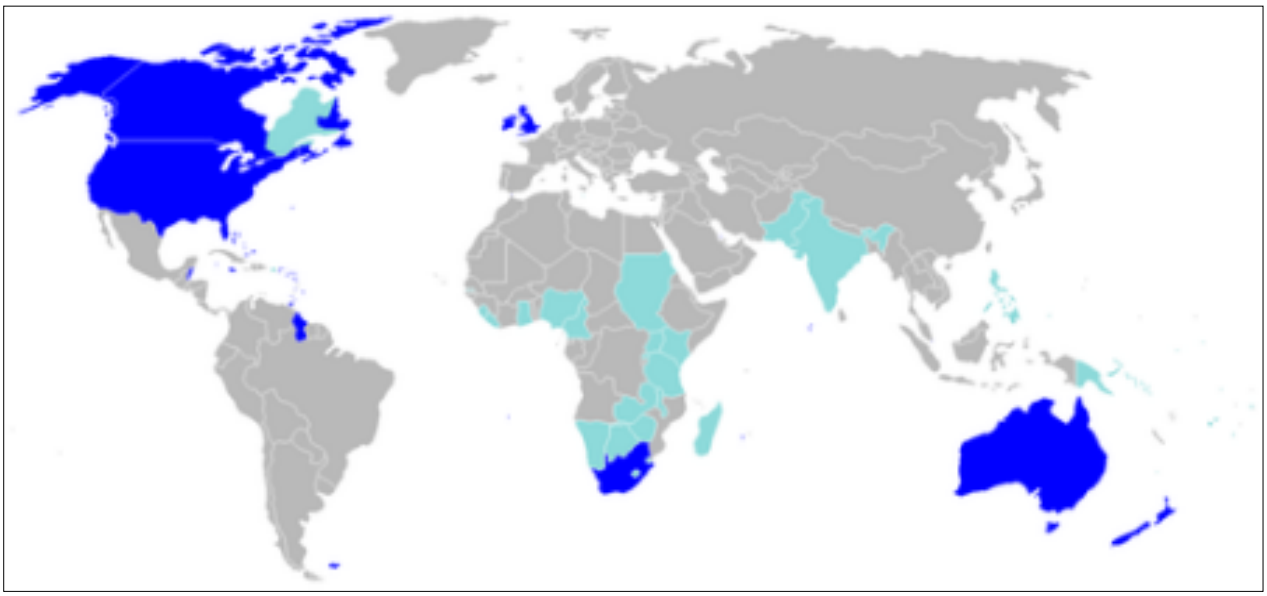
Assignment 2. Comment on the quotations about the English language:

And who in time knowes whither we may vent
The treasure of our tongue, to what strange shores
This gaine of our best glorie shal be sent,
T'inrich vnknowing Nations with our stores?
What worlds in' yet vnformed Occident
May come refin'd with th' accents that are ours?
(*Samuel Daniel, Musophilus, 1599*);

English, when first recorded in the eighth century, was already a fissiparous language. It will continue to divide and subdivide, and to exhibit a thousand different faces in the centuries ahead. <…> The multifarious forms of English spoken within the British Isles and by native speakers abroad will continue to reshape and restyle themselves in the future. And they will become more and more at variance with the emerging Englishes of Europe and of the rest of the world. The English language is like a fleet of juggernaut trucks that goes on regardless. No form of linguistic engineering and no amount of linguistic legislation will prevent the cycles of change

that lie ahead. But English as it is spoken and written by native speakers looks like remaining a communicative force, however slightly or severely beyond the grasp of foreigners, and changed in whatever agreeable or disagreeable manner, for many centuries to come (*Robert Burchfield, The English Language, 1985*).

Assignment 3. On the map below the world countries, states, and provinces where English is the official language are **marked in dark**. Countries, states, and provinces where it is an official, but not a primary language are marked in light. Write the names of the countries on the map.



Source: English Speaking Countries at
http://www.xtec.cat/~ellach/English_speaking_countries.htm

Assignment 4. Read the following extract from *On the Description of National Varieties: Examples from (German and Austrian) German and (English and American) English* by J. Grzega and answer the questions.

"In contrast to regional varieties, national varieties are entities within artificial boundaries. Therefore, they need be seen on the level of a (normative) national **standard**. But the term *standard* leads us to new definitory problems. The concept of *standard variety* is one of the most debated concepts in sociolinguistics. Bussmann (1996: 451f.) defines it as "the historically legitimated, panregional, oral and written language form of the social middle or upper class" and explains that it is "subject to extensive normalization (especially in the realm of grammar, pronunciation, and spelling)." For Dittmar (1997: 201) *standard variety* can be characterized as written variety, codified, supra regional in use and acceptance, preferred in institutional contexts and official situations, prestigious, taught in school, and hardly occurring in everyday speech in its idealized form. The latest work within

the German-speaking context, as to my knowledge, is the empirical study by Huesmann. For her, who is elaborating Ammon's (1987: 327ff.) definition, a language form is standard (cf. Huesmann 1998: 34)".

- Do you agree that "national varieties are entities within artificial boundaries"? Why? Why not?
- What is '*national standard"*?
- Are the terms '*national standard'* and '*national variety'* employed to refer to different concepts, or are they used synonymously?
- Why is the concept of '*standard variety'* one of the most debated concepts in sociolinguistics?
- Why does Bussmann define standard variety as "the historically legitimated"?
- In what sense is the word *panregional* used: (a) 'including or relating to all the places or people in a particular group'; (b) 'considered to be typical of some region, and respected and approved of by the people in those regions'; (c) 'involving people or things from all or several areas'?
- What differences do you find between Bussmann's and Dittmar's approaches to the notion of *standard variety*?
- How are Bussmann's and Dittmar's definitions in line with that of given by McArthur (McArthur, 1992 : 982):

"Standard English has been described as a 'prestige variety'; a variety with agreed norms and conventions that can be used as a model for education and for public use (e.g. in media). The term may also refer to a variety that has been codified; that is represented in dictionaries and grammars. This suggests that the forms of Standard English should show little if any variation: a standard language has in fact been described as having 'maximal variation in function' but 'minimal variation in form' "?

Assignment 5. What is Standard English? Is it just a social dialect? Read the extract from *What is Standard English* by Michael Stubbs (Stubbs, 2008: 9) to answer:

"Although the NS features listed above are widespread within Britain, they are nevertheless British, rather than American. One of the most important defining characteristics of SE is that it is not regionally restricted. There is slight regional variation between the SE used in Scotland, Wales, Ireland and England, but very much less than in NS varieties. In fact, there is a remarkably uniform international SE. Again, there are small differences among the standard varieties used in Britain, North America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. The differences in vocabulary and grammar, however, are surprisingly minor, given its very large number of speakers, its very wide geographical spread, and the large common core shared by all these standard languages. One might, for example, read a newspaper article without knowing whether it was printed in New York, London or Sydney: the only clue might be occasional words for local places or artefacts (barring spelling differences). Trudgill and Hannah

(1982) provide a summary of such differences between all the varieties of SE in the world.

It follows that SE is not a regional dialect. It is a social dialect: that dialect which is used by all educated speakers, at least for some purposes, and some people have it as their native language. It is intuitively obvious that there is much more variation in the English used by working-class people than by middle-class people. (This is much less marked for other languages, for example, German, especially if Austrian and Swiss speakers are included.) Thus business people or teachers from London, Glasgow, Sydney and San Francisco would have little, if any difficulty in understanding each other, and the most noticeable differences in their language would be in accent, not in dialect. But farm labourers from south-west England, north-east Scotland and the Appalachians would speak very differently and might have considerable difficulty in understanding each other: although they might shift towards SE to facilitate communication. Trudgill (1975 and elsewhere) illustrates the relation between social and regional diversity as a triangle without its apex. That is, as we move up the social-class scale, there is less regional variation in dialect, although even at the very top there is still a little".

Assignment 6. Work through the chapter from *Introducing Global Englishes* by N. Galloway & R. Heath (2015: 14-25), noting the points the authors make about the following:

- types of speakers of English;
- difficulties of their categorization listed by T. McArthur;
- models of the spread of English;
- the models linked to geographical concerns;
- the models inked to historical concerns;
- the centripetal circles of International English developed by M. Modiano;
- D. Graddol's interpretation of B. Kachru's concentric model of English;
- A. Suresh Canagarajah's approach to English as a lingua franca.

Reflect on *Who speaks English today?*

Assignment 7. Read the definition of *lingua franca* provided by D. Crystal (Crystal, 1999: 199). Do the features of Modern English agree with this definition?

"**lingua franca** An auxiliary language used to permit routine communication between groups of people who speak different native languages. The term means 'Frankish tongue', which was used as a common language in the Mediterranean area in the Middle Ages. Lingua francas are very common in heavily multilingual regions, such as West and East Africa".

- Is it true that English is the most spoken world's language because it has the most native speakers? Take into consideration that there are definitely more native speakers of Mandarin and Cantonese than native speakers of English.

- Do you think that English is the world's most spoken language because it's an official language in almost 60 sovereign states?
- Is it likely that English is the world's most spoken language because it is the most commonly spoken language in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, India, etc.?

Assignment 8. Find information about English as a global and European language. Share and compare your findings with other students, and discuss the following questions:

- Is there an official definition of the term '*global*' or '*world language*'?
- What are the features of a global language?
- What factors are contributing to the global status of a language?
- Do we need a global language? Why?
- Who speaks English today? Is English mainly used by bilinguals and multilinguals or monolinguals?
- What is *ESL* (*English as a Second language*)?
- What stimulated the growth of ESL?
- What is *EFL* (*English as a Foreign Language*)?
- What is the difference between EFL and ELF speakers, according to J. Jenkins?
- What is the role of English in Europe?
- How has the spread of English in Europe changed the sociolinguistic situation in that part of the world?

🗝 **Assignment 9.** Make up a glossary of the following terms: *BBC English*; *British English; English based creole; lingua franca ("Frankish tongue"); mainland varieties; Modified RP; national language; New Englishes; NHE (Northern Hemisphere English); NSE (non-Standard English); official language; overseas varieties; pidgin English; RP (Received Pronunciation); SE (Standard English); SHE (Southern Hemisphere English)*.