

# 1 SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FORCES OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

## 1.1 THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD

### OBJECTIVES

This unit introduces the representation of English in the world. It takes diversity, status, and role of English as the main points.

### IN THIS UNIT, YOU WILL LEARN:

- about the role of the English language today;
- how English is used in different parts of the world;
- about who speaks English:
- about what countries constitute the English-speaking world;
- where English is spoken as an official or a co-official language;
- where it is used as a second language;
- about the English-based pidgins and creoles;
- how English varieties are different from one another.

### OUTLINE

- The role of the English language.
- Change and variation of the English language.
- Different Englishes.
- National varieties of English and their codification.



### SYNOPSIS

The importance of the English language is difficult to underestimate for a range of reasons. It is:

- the most widely spoken language after Chinese and Spanish;
- spoken on a regular basis on all the continents; in 2015, out of the total 195 countries in the world, 67 nations have English as the primary language of official status; in 27 countries English is spoken as a secondary official language;
- most widely learned second language in the world;

- one of the languages used by the U.N., and the official language of the 163 member nations of the U.N. (Cf.: 26 nations in the U.N. cite French as their official tongue, 21 cite Spanish and 17 prefer Arabic);
- the language of international air traffic, world publishing, science and technology, conferencing, computer storage (the medium for 80% of the information stored), etc;
- widely used among the international political, business, academic communities (over two thirds of the world's scientists write in English);
- the language of the largest broadcasting companies in the world (CBS, NBC, ABC, BBC and CBC);
- arguably the richest in vocabulary (out of all 2,700 world's languages); the Oxford English Dictionary lists about 500,000 words (apart from approx. half-million technical and scientific terms still uncatalogued).

The diversity of modern English is the result of its historical development. There are many ways in which English changes and varies. Language change is seen in time while variation becomes evident through geographical and social diversification of speakers.

English, a Germanic language which developed in England as a consequence of the Anglo-Saxon invasions of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, started as a collection of dialects spoken by monolinguals. Accordingly, the form of this period is referred to as **Anglo-Saxon**, or **Pre-Old English** (AD 450 – 700). The oldest form is found in the 7<sup>th</sup> century's extant poem *Cædmon's Hymn*. Another great piece of Old English literature is a heroic poem called *Beowulf* (preserved in *Cotton Vitellius A XV* from c1000). What is generally known as **Old English** (700 – 1100) was an inflecting language which preserved many Germanic features.

The period of **Middle English** (1100 – 1500) saw the emergence of modifications: word order replaced inflections, and there were recurring waves of borrowing from Latin and French. These and other changes are clearly seen in Geoffrey Chaucer's literary work *Canterbury Tales*.

In the later 15<sup>th</sup> century, printing hastened the process of standardization and English gained its recognizable form – **Modern English** (1500 – 1800). Modern English literary activity is commemorated in William Shakespeare's heritage and the *Authorized Version of the Bible*, or *King James Version*, English translation of the Bible published in 1611 under the auspices of James I of England.

The post-Renaissance era with its highly diversified **Post Colonial English** (1700 – present day) motivated the codification of English vocabulary and grammar (Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 1755).

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. In practice, the diversity of forms and speakers should be emphasized. Besides the **major varieties of English**, such as American English (AmE), British English (BrE), Indian English, Canadian English (CnE), Australian English (AuE), Irish English, New Zealand English (NZE) and their sub-varieties, countries such as South Africa, the Philippines, Jamaica and Nigeria 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. The term is really applicable only when there has been considerable linguistic development away from the traditional standards of British and American English. With some degree of local standardization, as has happened in India, Ghana, Singapore and in countries where English is used as a second language.

Note that the term *New Englishes* is also sometimes applied to the first-language situations (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa), as well as where creole or pidgin Englishes are important (the Caribbean, Papua New Guinea).

In conclusion, the expansion of English led to the rise of different varieties. Viewed as a single system, Englishes are of a wide range representing the diversity of form and function.

Throughout the English-speaking world, **Standard** (or **Queen's, BBC, Oxford**, sometimes **British, Public School**) **English** is used as a standard prestige variety of language within a speech community, providing an institutionalized norm. Since the 1960s, particular attention has been paid to the emergence of differing **national standards** in areas where large numbers of people speak English as a first or second language (the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa). **Received Pronunciation (RP)** is the regionally neutral, educationally prestigious *accent* in British English. When this accent displays features of regional

influence, it is known as **Modified RP**. Standard American pronunciation is known as **General** or **Mid-West American**.

Standard English is whatever form of the English language is accepted (at any point in time, and in any particular country) as the national norm, encompassing grammar, vocabulary and spelling. There is nothing inherently superior about Standard English. It is just widely understood and disseminated variety, which is generally accepted as having the highest prestige.

There is no such thing as a **World Standard English**, or **International Standard English**, although British English and American English are the two most obvious contenders.

**Non-standard** (sometimes referred to as **substandard**) varieties are linguistic forms or dialects that do not conform to the norm.

Distinction can also be drawn between **native** and **non-native varieties**.

Native varieties of English are used by those for whom English is a **mother-tongue**. Non-native varieties have emerged in speech communities where most of the speakers do not have English as their mother tongue. It is noteworthy that in some countries, such as India, Singapore, Ghana or Nigeria, the ‘native – non-native’ distinction is problematic because in those contexts non-native speakers become exposed to a routine usage of the English language from a very early age.

The non-native speakers group breaks into the speakers of ‘**second-language**’ and ‘**foreign language**’ where boundaries are not clear cut, either. Both second-language speakers and foreign language speakers acquire English through learning at school or in the street.

However, **second-language speakers** apply English when their mother-tongue, which is one of the local languages, appears to be inadequate in the course of communication with people of other tribal background. In the need of their official language, the countries with a great diversity of local languages would not choose between any indigenous languages representing different ethnic backgrounds. To prevent social and educational disadvantage, ethnic conflicts, inter-tribal tension and violence they prefer to establish equality between local cultures and languages by giving an official status to an outside language such as English.

English is used as a **foreign language** in the countries where it has no official status, but it is learned at schools, high educational institutions, or through the use of a wide-range.

The table below provides statistics on speakers of English:

TYPE OF SPEAKERS	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS
worldwide	above 1.5 billion (in 2015)
mother tongue	330–400 million (i.e. less than 10% of the world’s population, but possess over 30% of the world’s economic power)
second language	470 million – more than 1 billion
foreign language	approx. 600–700 million
fluent speakers	approx. 150 million
with some degree of competence	about 1 million
learners (TESOL 2014)	1.5 billion (worldwide)
full-time English teachers (TESOL 2014)	more than 3,000 (worldwide)

To sum up, the question *Who speaks English?* is a difficult issue. The answer deals with social and cultural climate that contributes to the attitude of speakers, to how English is used (at home, at work, outside work, with people from other ethnic groups, in link to education, etc.).

**Official language** is the chief language of a nation state as declared by the Constitution. It is also the country’s language which is used in such public domains as the law courts, government, and broadcasting (Great Britain, Australia). Several English-speaking countries have two or more official languages – Canada (English and French), New Zealand (English and Maori), South African Republic (English, Afrikaans and a number of indigenous languages).

Many people are surprised to know that the United States has **no official language**. As one of the major centres of commerce and trade, and a major **English-speaking country**, many assume that English is the country’s official language. But despite efforts over the years, the United States has no official language. Almost every session of Congress, an amendment to the Constitution is proposed in Congress to adopt English as the official language of the United States. Here is an extract from the Bill introduced in the House of Representatives, February 9, 2017 (H.R.997): *To declare English as the official language of the United States, to establish a uniform English language rule for naturalization, and to avoid misconstructions of the English language texts of the laws of the United States, pursuant to Congress’ powers to provide for the general welfare of*

*the United States and to establish a uniform rule of naturalization under article I, section 8, of the Constitution.*

It is important to point out that in nations such as Britain, Australia or New Zealand, English would be the **national language** as well as the official language, although this may not always be overtly stated. The difference between national and official language is usually of no significance in these countries.

In New Nations, this is different. The term *national language* is one that has connotations of belonging to a nation, of ethnic and/or cultural identity. A national language is usually a local language spoken as a native language by at least some of the population of a nation, for example Malay (Bahasa Malaysia) in Malaysia and kiSwahili in Kenya and Tanzania. An official language is generally used for government administration and the Higher Courts of Law, in the media and as one of the languages of education, at least of secondary and higher education.

Varieties spoken in the British Isles are known as **Mainland English** comprising in *English English* (in England), *Welsh English* in (Wales), *Scottish English*, with its prestigious dialect *Scottish Standard English* (in Scotland), also *Irish English*, or *Common Anglo-Irish* (in Ireland, or Eire), and English varieties spoken in the Isle of Man, Cornwall, in the Northern Isles – the Orkney and Shetland Isles. **Overseas English** is the system of varieties spoken beyond the realm of the British Isles.

Varieties of English differ in pronunciation, intonation, spelling, vocabulary and sometimes even grammar. **NHE (Northern Hemisphere English)** and **SHE (Southern Hemisphere English)** are phonologically distinct. The former is spoken in the north of Britain, northern states of America, and in some areas resembling SHE – Ireland, Wales, New England and New York. SHE is to be found in the southern parts of England, the USA, in the Caribbean, and in the countries of the Southern Hemisphere – Australia, New Zealand, South Africa.

There are accents of American English which are closer to RP than to mid-western US English, but it shows the two main types of pronunciation: an **English type** (English English, Welsh English, South African English, Australian English, New Zealand English) and an **American type** (US English, Canadian English), with Irish English falling somewhere between the two and Scottish English being somewhat by itself.

One of the significant consequences of the English spread worldwide and its contact with other languages was the formation of typologically distinct varieties such as pidgins and creoles.

An English-based **pidgin** (or **trade language**, **contact language**) is the form with a markedly reduced grammatical structure, lexicon and stylistic range. They developed as a result of the slave trade in the territories that once belonged to European colonial nations (the Caribbean, West Africa). The native language of no one, it emerges when members of two mutually unintelligible speech communities attempt to communicate (*Tok Pisin* in Papua New Guinea, *Bislama / Beach-la-Mar* in Vanuatu, Fiji, and surrounding areas, *Sango* used primarily in the Central African Republic and the surrounding areas, etc.). A pidgin must be learned as a second language.

When a pidgin develops its scope, structural and stylistic range, and function, it turns to creolization. An English based **creole** is a kind of pidgin which has become the mother tongue of a speech community (Jamaican Creole). Today, there are over 60 English-based creoles, mainly formed in British colonies during the 17–19th centuries, spoken by up to 200 million people. They are found in West Africa (*Aku* in Gambia, *Krio* in Sierra Leone, *Kru English* in Liberia), North America (*Gullah / Sea Islands Creole English* in the south-eastern coast of the USA, *Sheildru / Shelta*, an Anglo-Irish creole used mainly in Ireland, England and the USA by the Irish travellers and their descendants), in the Caribbean (*Bajan* in Barbados, *Creolese* in Guyana, *Trinbagonian* in Trinidad and Tobago, etc.), in Oceania (*Hawaii English Creole*), in Northern Australia (*Kriol*). Having developed from a pidgin, a creole becomes a stable **nativized** language taught to children at school.



### RECOMMENDED READING

- Ощепкова В. В. Язык и культура Великобритании, США, Канады, Австралии, Новой Зеландии. – М. : ГЛОССА/КАРО, 2006. – С. 12-86.
- Скибина В. И. Национально негомогенный язык и лексикографическая практика / В. И. Скибина. – Запорожье : Видавець, 1996. – С. 37-89, 124-159.