


Als neue Weltsprache ist Englisch nicht mehr alleiniges Eigentum der Briten oder Amerikaner. Im zweiten und letzten Teil unserer Serie über die Zukunft der Sprache untersucht DAVID CRYSTAL die Phänomene, die sich zum einen auflösend, zum anderen vereinigend auf die Sprache auswirken. **medium**

 You can hear more comments from David Crystal on this month's cassette

billion	Milliarde
inevitably [ɪn'evɪtəbli]	zwangsläufig
to adopt sth.	etw. annehmen; hier: etw. übernehmen
setting	Umfeld
indigenous [ɪn'dɪdʒənəs]	einheimisch
tribal ['trɪəbl]	Stammes-
attitude	Haltung
loanword	Lehnwort
vacuum cleaner	Staubsauger
[ˈvækjuəm]	
to emerge [ɪ'mɜ:dʒ]	aufkommen
je ne sais quoi	(frz.) ein gewisses Etwas
lingua franca	Verkehrssprache
utterance	Ausdruck
mother tongue [tʌŋ]	Muttersprache
in quick succession	kurz hintereinander
simultaneously	gleichzeitig
[ˌsɪml'teɪniəsli]	
phenomenon	Phänomen
[fə'nomɪnən]	

Over the past 100 years, English has come to be spoken by more people in more places than ever before. Some 1.5 billion people — a quarter of the world's population — use it as a first, second, or foreign language. But when a language spreads, it inevitably changes. What will happen to English now that it has achieved such a global presence?

The biggest single change to English is in its vocabulary. Whenever a community adopts a new language, there is going to be a lot of adaptation of vocabulary. This happens in two main ways.

First, some words change their meaning. Often, a word doesn't quite fit in the new setting, but, rather than invent a new one, people change the meaning of the old one to fit the new context. For example, in parts of South Africa, the word "lounge" has come to be used for certain types of restaurant and places of entertainment. One might see it in the name of an Indian restaurant such as Bhagat's Vegetarian Lounge, or in a phrase such as "beer lounge".

Second, words are taken over ("borrowed") from the local setting — usually words from the indigenous language or languages spoken in the country. In the *South African Sunday Times* we find this sentence: "Diplomatic indabas only rarely produce neatly wrapped solutions to problems." What is an "indaba"? The word is from the Nguni group of languages. It originally meant a tribal conference, but is now used for any conference between political groups.

English speakers have always had a welcoming attitude towards loanwords. English is a vacuum cleaner of a language, readily sucking in words from other languages it meets — well over 350 of them. For example, although English is historically a Germanic language, its vocabulary is largely Classical/Romance in origin.

Not only individual words are adopted by the new forms of English emerging around the world. Sometimes, it is a phrase or even a whole sentence — in much the same way as we have borrowed "je ne sais quoi" or "c'est la vie" from French.

It is easy to see why this happens. People using English, even at a fairly advanced level, cannot think of the right word, phrase or sentence; or, although using English as a lingua franca, they find that a particular utterance in their mother tongue better suits what they want to say. If they are talking to someone from their own language background, there is no problem in switching into the other language to solve the communication problem. A dialogue may move out of English, then back into it again, several times in quick succession.

The same thing can happen the other way round, too: people begin in their mother tongue, then switch into English when they find their first language does not allow them to say what they want. This often happens when they get on to a field that they have learned only in English, such as computing.

When people rely simultaneously on two or more languages to communicate with each other, the phenomenon ▶



Global presence:
all over the
world, English
can be found
mixed with other
languages

degree	Maß
monolingual	einsprachig
to comprise sth.	etw. ausmachen
proportion	Anteil
creole or pidgin	see pp. 44–45
to catch on	sich durchsetzen
concord	syntaktische Übereinstimmung
eventually	letztendlich
to supplement sth.	etw. ergänzen
[ˈsʌplɪment]	
comprehension	Verständnis
conclusion	Schluss
mutually [ˈmju:tʃuəli]	gegenseitig
unintelligible	unverständlich
[ˌʌnɪntelɪdʒəbl]	
alongside	neben
to foster sth. [ˈfɒstə]	etw. fördern
supranational	länderübergreifend
audience	Publikum
to beam sth. down	etw. ausstrahlen
centrifugal force	Flieh-, Zentrifugalkraft
[ˌsentriˈfju:ɡl]	
centripetal force	Zentripetalkraft
[senˈtrɪpi:tɪ]	
to want to have	alles auf einmal haben wollen
one's cake and eat it	
bilingualism	Zweisprachigkeit
make-up	Veranlagung
acquisition [ˌækwiˈzɪʃn]	Erwerb
to foresee sth. [fɔːˈsi:]	etw. voraussehen
gradual [ˈɡrædʒuəl]	allmählich

is called “code-switching”. This is a normal feature of communication in the speech of millions who have learned English as a second or foreign language. Indeed, there are probably now more people who use English with some degree of code-switching than people who do not. And if these speakers are in the majority, or at least represented by large numbers, our traditional view of the language has to change.

It is a point often forgotten, especially by monolingual speakers of English, that a language which has come to be spoken by so many people is no longer the exclusive property of any one group. Nobody “owns” English now — neither the British, with whom the language began 1,500 years ago, nor the Americans, who now comprise its largest mother-tongue community. Everyone — first-, second-, and foreign-language speakers alike — has a share in the future of English.

Language is an immensely democratizing institution. To have learned a language is to have rights in it. You may add to it, modify it, play with it, create in it, ignore bits of it, as you will. And it is just as likely that the

course of the English language is going to be influenced by those who speak it as a second or foreign language as that it will be shaped by those who speak it as a mother tongue. Remember that the total number of English mother-tongue speakers in the world (some 400 million) is steadily falling as a proportion of world English users.

A linguistic fashion can be started by a group of second- or foreign-language learners, or by those who speak a creole or pidgin variety, which then catches on among other speakers. Rapping is one example. And as numbers grow, and second-/foreign-language speakers gain in national and international prestige, usages which were at one time criticized as “foreign” — such as a new concord rule (“three person” instead of “three people”) or verb use (“he be running”) — can become part of the standard educated speech of a locality, and may eventually appear in writing.

All over the world, children are being born to parents with different first-language backgrounds who speak English as a lingua franca. Their English often contains code-mixed or non-standard forms. If these parents choose to speak to their children in this English, as often

happens, code-mixed and non-standard English is learned as a mother tongue — and by millions of the world's future citizens.

Mixed-English languages are certainly on the increase; and it is important to realize that this is happening. It is quite wrong to think of future world English as simply a more widely used version of British English or of American English. These varieties will stay, of course, but they will be supplemented by other varieties which will be increasingly different from them. It is not something we usually see in print; but we readily notice it when we travel — usually in the form of a breakdown of comprehension. We speak to somebody in English, and they answer — but we cannot understand what they are saying, because their English is so different.

With these experiences in mind, can we avoid the conclusion that English is going to fragment into mutually unintelligible varieties, just as vulgar Latin did a millennium ago? The forces of the past 50 years, which have led to the formation of so many newly independent nation states, certainly suggest this new outcome. In several of these countries, English has come to be used as the expression of a socio-political identity and has received a new character as a result. The products are Nigerian English, Singaporean English and so on. And if there has been a noticeable change within this relatively short period of time, must not these varieties become even more differentiated over the next century, so that we end up with an English “family of languages”?

It is certainly possible; but there are pressures working in the opposite direction. Alongside the need to reflect local situations and identities, which fosters diversity, stands the need for mutual understanding, both within a country and internationally. There has always been a need for lingua francas. And as supranational organizations grow politically, economically and socially, the need becomes more pressing. The 185 members of the UN are there not simply to express their identities, but also because they want to talk to each other. Whatever an organization chooses as its main languages, it is essential — if the concept is to work — for everyone to learn the same thing, a standard form.

The term “Standard English” has come to be used widely in this connection. When people read or write for an international audience, what they use is Standard English. A similar international standard is also likely to develop in speech, as contacts increase and people influence each other more in the way they speak. When we consider the opportunities there are for contact these days, whether as a result of the media, travel, or electronic communication, the chances are that the standard element in the international use of English will be strengthened rather than weakened. Satellite television, beaming down large quantities of educated spoken English into homes all round the world, is a particularly significant factor.

Centrifugal and centripetal forces coexist. We want both to have our linguistic cake and to eat it. We want to

TELL US YOUR VIEWS!

- Do you think that there is only one correct form of English, or many equally correct forms?
- Do you agree that the English language belongs to everybody who speaks it?
- Do you think that, in the future, there will be one standard international version of English? If so, what form of English will it be?

We would like to hear your views on these and other aspects of David Crystal's article. Please send your comments by 20 April to:

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We will print a selection of your comments in the June 2000 issue of SPOTLIGHT, together with comments on last month's article on the death of the world's languages. From the readers who send in comments, ten will receive David Crystal's latest book, *Language Death*, which will be published by Cambridge University Press in July (for details, see page 58).

express our identity through language, and we want to communicate intelligibly through language. We want to be different, and we want to be the same. The splendid thing about humans using language, of course, is that this is the kind of thing the human brain does very well. We *can* have our cake and eat it.

The brain is multifunctional when it comes to language. One of the main insights of linguistics during the 20th century was to demonstrate the extraordinary capacity of the brain for language. Bilingualism or multilingualism is the normal human condition. Well over half the people in the world, perhaps two-thirds, are bilingual. Children learn their languages — often several of them — at extraordinary speed. There seems to be something in our make-up which promotes the acquisition of speech.

As a consequence, I have no difficulty in foreseeing the gradual emergence of a tri-English world — a world, that is, in which three levels of English coexist.

The base level, the place where we all start, is the home — our family dialect. In my case, this was Wales, and my home dialect was a Welsh English so strong in ▶



Uncertain future: will English bring people together or divide them?

Taffy UK *ifml.*
to be fluent in a language

Scouse [skaus]
ain't ifml.

optional
to observe sth. to do sb. a disservice

honorary professor
editor

Waliser(in)
eine Sprache fließend sprechen
Liverpooler Dialekt
see pp. 44-45
wahlfrei
etw. beobachten
jmdm. einen Bären-dienst erweisen
Honorarprofessor
Herausgeber

accent that when my family moved to Liverpool, when I was 10, I was immediately called “Taffy”, and remained so even after my accent had moved in the direction of Liverpooldian. I am fluent both in Welsh English (“Wenglish”) and Scouse. I have two home dialects; but everybody has at least one.

The second level is the national variety of Standard English that most people learn when they go to school. (With a minority of people, the home dialect is already Standard English.) In my case, this was British Standard English. I learned to write it and gradually to speak it, avoiding such formulations as “ain't” and double negatives, and learning a different range of grammatical constructions and vocabulary from those found in my home dialect.

The third level is an International Standard English — an English, in other words, which in its grammar and vocabulary is not recognizably British, American or anything else. When working abroad, many British people become skilled in using a variety that has lost some of its original Britishness, because they know they are talking to people from outside the UK.

International Standard Spoken English is not a global reality yet, but it is getting nearer. One day, I believe an international standard will be the starting point, with British, American, and other varieties all seen as optional localizations. I do not know how long it will take for such a scenario to become fully established. I do know, however, that it will not be an easy transition.

For those who have to work professionally with English, this is a very difficult time. For the first time in 400 years, we are experiencing what happens when English goes through a period of particularly dramatic change.

It is an exciting time to be a linguist, of course, to be observing the beginning of it, but a problematic time to be a teacher, having to guide others through it. After all, we are already living in a world where most of the varieties we meet are something other than traditional British or American English. We do our students a disservice if they leave our care unprepared for the brave new linguistic world which awaits them. ■

David Crystal is honorary professor of linguistics at the University of Wales, Bangor. His many books include *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* and *English as a Global Language*. He is also the editor of *The Cambridge Encyclopedia* and *The Cambridge Biographical Encyclopedia*. His latest book, *Language Death*, will be published by Cambridge University Press in July: ISBN 0-521-65321-5, £14.95.



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Language Death

