

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

English is a West Germanic language originating in England, and the first language for most people of Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It is used extensively as a second language and as an official language throughout the world, especially in Commonwealth countries such as India and South Africa, as well as in many international organizations.

Modern English is sometimes described as the world lingua franca. English is the prominent international language in communications, science, business, aviation, entertainment, and diplomacy and also on the Internet. It has been one of the official languages of the United Nations since its founding in 1945 and is considered by many to be on its way to become the world's first universal language.

The influence of the British Empire is the primary reason for the language's initial spread far beyond the British Isles. Following World War II, the increased economic and cultural influence of the United States led to English permeating many other cultures, chiefly through development of telecommunications technology. Because a working knowledge of English is required in many fields, professions, and occupations, education ministries throughout the world mandate the teaching of English, at least a basic level, in an effort to increase the competitiveness of their economies.

Over 380 million people speak English as their first language. English today is variously estimated as the second, third, or fourth largest language by number of

native speakers. However, when combining native and non-native speakers it is probably the most commonly spoken language in the world, though possibly second behind a combination of the Chinese languages. Estimates that include second language speakers vary greatly from 470 million to over a billion 5 depending on how literacy or mastery is defined. There are some who claim that non-native speakers now outnumber native speakers by a ratio of 3 to 1.

Because English is so widely spoken, it has often been referred to as a ‘global language’, the lingua franca of the modern era. While English is not an official language in many countries, it is currently the language most often taught as a second language around the world. Some linguists believe that it is no longer the exclusive cultural sign of ‘native English speakers’, but is rather a language that is absorbing aspects of cultures worldwide as it continues to grow. Books, magazines, and newspapers written in English are available in many countries around the world. English is also the most commonly used language in the sciences.