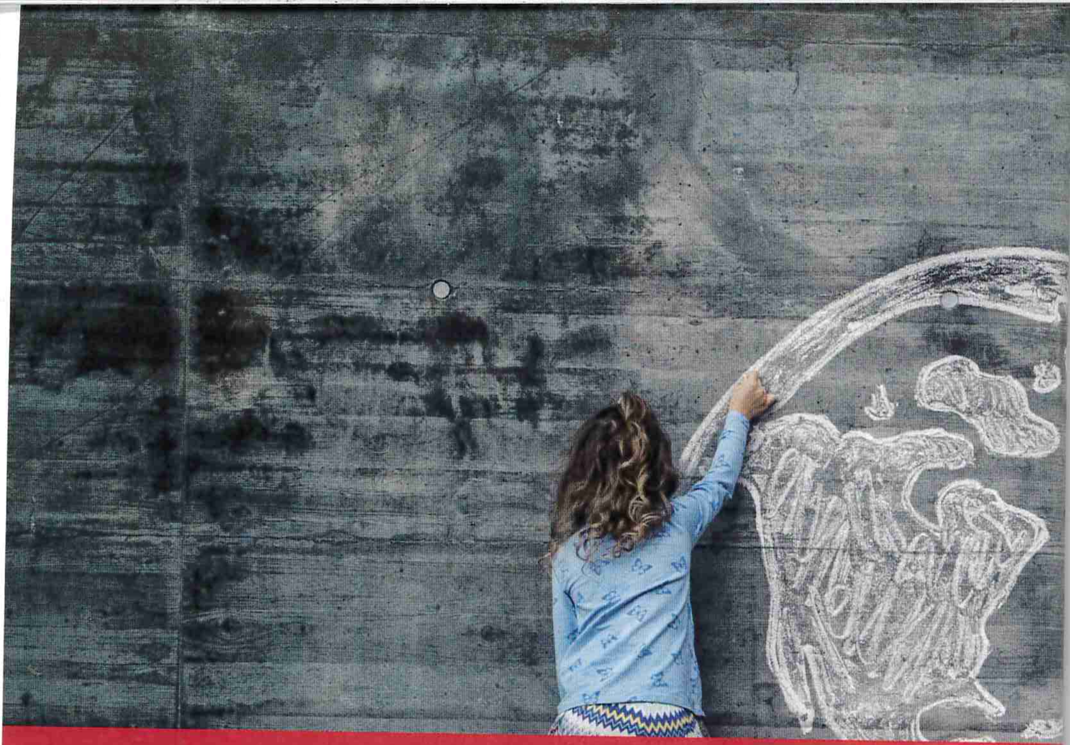


Chapter 4
Global diversity

In this chapter you will:

- Look at the ways in which different groups of people around the world use English
- Study some examples of different World Englishes
- Evaluate the debates and arguments that take place about the place of English in the world

4.1 English around the world

In the chapters so far, you have looked largely at English language diversity in the UK. In this chapter, you will start to consider the ways in which English is used around the rest of the world, its uses and functions and how it has come to be seen as a global language. This is a huge, and rapidly expanding, topic, so what follows is only the beginning of what you could study. Suggestions are given throughout the chapter for further research and study, and wider reading is recommended at the end.

The growth of English around the world has been a long process. In the early 1600s, English only had 5–7 million speakers (the vast majority of whom were in England itself) and now has somewhere between 1.5 and 2 billion speakers (most of them outside the UK, whose population is only around 60 million): this is a huge increase and there is no sign of it slowing down.

This growth has been a contentious process, sometimes associated with colonisation, violent repression and ruthless political policy, but could also be viewed as a natural expansion, linked to the movement of people around the globe and the need for a shared means of communication that many people can understand and make use of. These different perspectives will be considered later in the chapter along with debates about the nature of the English used around the world and its relationship to English in the UK.

Figure 4.1: It's English, but not as we know it

ACTIVITY 4.1

'I have bumblebees in the bottom'

Look at Figure 4.1, which shows examples of English written by non-native English language users. What do you notice about the ways in which English is used and how it varies from what you might expect to see in Standard British English?

4.1.1 Where English began

English began life as Anglo-Saxon, reflecting some of its roots in the languages of the Angles and the Saxons, both Northern European tribes who settled in the British Isles during this period. English first appeared in the fifth century CE and took centuries to become firmly established as the main language in its own country, let alone spread to other countries. This might seem like a strange idea from a modern perspective, but English as a language was generally looked down upon in the UK until the fifteenth century when it became more firmly established as the language of the ruling elite and thus acquired the status it needed to become a national language. Indeed, the notion of the country of 'England' as it is now known was not really established until the rule of King Alfred in the ninth century CE and it was much later still that English came to be seen as the language of the nation state.

While English was widely spoken, the languages that were preferred by the Church and the state were Latin and – after the Norman Invasion of 1066 – Norman French. English was the spoken language of the main population but it was not seen as a language fit for the high offices of state.

The *Cambridge Topics in English Language* title, *Language Change* offers more detailed discussion of the growth of English as a language and the debates about its uses and functions, but in summary English grew in status through the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. During this time, English came to be used in teaching, law, religion, government and science. By the eighteenth century, it was well enough established for educated people to argue about its correct use and to publish numerous books about grammar, spelling and 'proper' speech.

ACTIVITY 4.2

Before English

English was not the first language spoken in the British Isles. Try to find out as much as you can about the ways in which the languages of the world have developed by looking at the following websites and blogs.

Which languages were spoken in the UK before English and where did they come from?

- www.cambridge.org/links/escdiv6029
- www.cambridge.org/links/escdiv6030
- www.cambridge.org/links/escdiv6031

In some respects, the development of English as a national language sowed the seeds for its growth as an international language. While the 'grammarians' of the eighteenth century argued about the details of language, they were also busy defining the parameters of a language that could represent and celebrate the developing nation state. In a way, by defining what English as language was like, they were also defining what England as a nation might be. And by this time, English (the language) was already starting to move away from England (the country) and into other countries, beginning its steady spread around the globe and its growth as a world language and a language made up of elements from other parts of the world. Philip Seargeant (2012) notes:

> Thus, while within Britain a standard language ideology was developing which was regularizing aspects of the language, as English was being spread abroad it necessarily became mixed and diversified. This happened both in terms of the different British dialects that were being exported – the colonial process brought together people from different areas of Britain, and, to an extent, different social classes – and in the ways the language was adapted to the contexts in which it was being used. (Seargeant 2012)

For example, the different types of English that went into the formation of varieties such as Australian and New Zealand English – elements of London English, Irish and Scots English, along with that spoken in many other larger cities – played a part in shaping what these varieties would become in the future. And it was not just the English growing in new territories that diversified: as English reached new places, it brought back with it – and integrated into its own vocabulary – new words. The Early Modern English period (1450–1700) saw a rapid growth in the English lexicon, some of which was influenced by words that were imported from the Americas, Africa and India.

ACTIVITY 4.3

Word origins

Look up the etymologies (word origins) of the following words in the English vocabulary. Which languages and which parts of the world have they come from? What might this tell you about the global reach of English?

- Pyjamas
- Bungalow
- Assassin
- Thug
- Mohawk
- Tattoo
- Kosher

4.2 Where English has gone

English is used all around the world now and has a home in every continent, but it reached various locations at different times. While in this instantly connected age of telecommunications, language can spread around the world in a moment, in the past, English moved at the speed of the fastest form of transport, whether that was on foot, on horseback, or on board a ship (Figure 4.2). English first moved from England to other parts of the British Isles – Scotland, Wales and Ireland – before making the journey across the Atlantic to the Americas and then to Africa, India, Australia and dozens of other territories.

Figure 4.2: The spread of English

4.2.1 The British Isles

Some of the first staging posts on the journey of English beyond its own borders were other parts of the British Isles. In Scotland, Wales and Ireland, Standard English was established alongside, and often in opposition to, local forms. Scottish Standard English grew in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in a country where Scots, 'the direct descendant of the Northumbrian form of Old English planted in south-eastern Scotland between 525 and 633' (Johnston 2007) was already established.

In Wales, English made inroads from the eighth century onwards but it was not until the twelfth century, as Robert Penhallurick (2007) explains, that English 'incursions into Welsh territory (were) significant enough to mark the beginnings of the long process of Anglicisation. These incursions came in the wake of the Normans, who established strongholds through the north and south of Wales'. As Penhallurick goes on to say, 'from the end of the nineteenth century, English can be considered the majority language in Wales' (Penhallurick 2007).

Ireland was a more complicated picture. Raymond Hickey (2007) explains that, 'The English language was taken to Ireland with the settlers from Britain who arrived in the late twelfth century. Since then the fate of the English has been closely linked with that of the Irish language which it came largely to replace in the late modern period' (Hickey 2007). The movement of people from Scotland to the north of Ireland brought in Scots English while in the south of Ireland, a separate form developed.

In all three countries, Celtic languages also existed and, with the advance of English, these were pushed to the fringes. For example, during the period 1200–1600, Irish was the dominant language in Ireland but by the eighteenth century English was widespread and by the time of the Great Famine (1846–48) Padraig O'Riagain states that only '30% of the population were Irish speaking, mostly in Western regions' (2007). The famine led to over a million lives being lost and many of these were Irish speakers. The movement of rural people to larger towns, because of the famine, further fragmented the place of Irish and the introduction of the national school system in 1830, in which the teaching of English was preferred and the use of Irish actively discouraged, made this more acute.

Welsh, Scots and Irish are all still spoken in their respective countries and have undergone something of a revival in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but English is the dominant language in all three countries. However, this is not necessarily viewed as a positive situation by all speakers of the indigenous languages. The forms of English used in these countries vary in a number of ways from Standard English as well and more details about these variations can be found in the Wider Reading section and texts mentioned above.

ACTIVITY 4.4

English around the British Isles

Use the MacMillan Dictionary Blog website (www.cambridge.org/links/escdiv6032) to research and investigate the main ways in which Scottish, Welsh and Irish English differ from each other and from Standard English, in terms of phonology, lexis and grammar.

4.2.2 The USA

English first appeared in what is now the USA in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, with the first permanent settlement established in Jamestown Virginia in 1607. Other settlements followed and many of these were made up of people who were seeking religious freedom and to escape persecution: forerunners of the modern word 'refugee', it could be argued.

These immigrants brought with them a range of language varieties. As linguist David Crystal explains:

> The two settlements – one in Virginia, to the south, the other to the north, in present-day New England – had different linguistic backgrounds. Although the southern colony brought settlers from several parts of England, many of them came from England's 'West Country' – such counties as Somerset and Gloucestershire – and brought with them its characteristic accent with its 'Zummerzet' voicing of 's' sounds, and the 'r' strongly pronounced after vowels (...) By contrast, many of the Plymouth colonists came from the east of England – in particular, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Essex, Kent and London, with some from the Midlands and further afield. These eastern accents were rather different – notable lacking an 'r' after vowels – and they proved to be the dominant influence in this area. (Crystal 2003)

The indigenous people – the Native Americans – appear to have had little influence on the new American English that was starting to form, beyond a few lexical items (words such as 'skunk', 'cougar', 'tomahawk' and 'squash') which themselves were often approximations of the original words used. Dick Leith argues that this is because 'the language of a conquered people has little effect on that of the conquerors' (Leith 2007).

Much of the rest of the early history of American English is a history of immigration, from Ireland, Scotland, Spain, the Netherlands and Germany, among others. But also, and tellingly for later developments in the language and culture of the USA, the slave trade brought many thousands of Africans. As Crystal outlines: 'A population of little more than 2,500 black slaves in 1700 had become about 100,000 by 1775, far out-numbering the southern whites' (Crystal 2003).

While new arrivals brought with them different native languages, many of these were quickly swallowed up into the wider pool of American English or jettisoned for the language that was already taking root. American vocabulary, as the seminal American writer H.L. Mencken notes, 'tends to grow richer and freer every year' (Mencken 1919) and makes use of a range of 'materials' to create new language. New words come about through contact with other languages but other words take existing lexis from British English and shape it in different forms. Mencken refers to 'boot' and 'shoe' as taking different paths in UK and US English, along with 'shop' and 'store'. Some American words have meanings or grammatical forms that once existed in UK English but which have changed in one place but not the other. So, British 'Autumn' and US 'Fall' describe the same season of the year, but the latter was once used frequently in the UK. 'Gotten' as a participle form of the verb 'to get' is seen as non-standard (or just plain wrong) in British English and standard in American, but again was once common in the UK and remains in older expressions such as 'woe-begotten' and 'ill-gotten gains' or the more familiar 'forgotten'.

ACTIVITY 4.5

Separated by a common language

Research the words in the table below and see if you can find the US or UK equivalent required in each space. Explore the etymology of each of these terms, using a source such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* online or the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Where are they from? In which country did they first appear?

UK	USA
	Apartment
	Sidewalk
Tramp	
	Elevator
Trousers	

4.2.3 Other places

The movement of English around the world is often described by linguists as taking the form of two distinct diasporas, the nature of which often influences the shape of the English being used in those countries subsequently.

KEY TERM

Diaspora: a dispersal or spreading out from a central point

According to World Englishes expert Jennifer Jenkins, these diasporas are characterised in the following ways:

> The first diaspora involved relatively large-scale migrations of mother-tongue English speakers from England, Scotland and Ireland predominantly to North America, Australia and New Zealand. (Jenkins 2015)

In these countries, English became established as mother tongue varieties, spoken by large numbers of people and gradually changing to meet the needs of the users.

> The second diaspora took place at various points during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in very different ways and with very different results from those of the first diaspora. (Jenkins 2015)

KEY TERM

Mother tongue variety: the language that a person learns first as a child

In the countries of the second diaspora – Nigeria, Kenya, India and Singapore, for example – colonisation led to the establishment of second-language varieties, or what Jenkins refers to as 'New Englishes'. You can read more about the ways in which English reached many of these countries in the *Cambridge Topics in English Language* book, *Language Change*, or in the suggested wider reading at the end of this chapter, but in the next section you will look at examples of how English varies in some of these areas.

4.3 How English varies around the world

Along with the specific varieties of English around the world that you have looked at so far, there are some wider patterns that can be discerned when looking at World Englishes. Some of these patterns are related to the functions of English – what it is used for – and the contexts in which it is used, but there are also linguistic characteristics that are common to many of the different Englishes. It is probably worth remembering that any language will vary, depending on the uses to which it is put. Indeed, English in the UK varies along a continuum from the most formal written variety to the most conversational spoken form and this will also be affected by factors such as:

- how well you know someone
- the expectations of the different participants

- the setting and immediate context
- the mode through which you communicate.

English around the world is no different. A language user might use a very colloquial style that mixes elements of English with another language when talking to a friend or swapping online messages with a family member, but might switch to a much more formal kind of English in a work setting.

4.3.1 Phonology

One of the most noticeable forms of variation between World Englishes is the way in which different sounds are realised. Consonants and vowels vary in their pronunciation from place to place, but also the stress patterns placed on syllables within words differ. You can see a lot more about phonological variation in Chapter 1 but some noticeable examples of global variation are included here.

- Words like 'cot' and 'caught' would be pronounced differently in most forms of UK English, but would sound the same in many varieties of North American English. Have a look at the lexical set of CLOTH/NORTH in Chapter 1 (Table 1.2) to see this alongside other vowel differences.
- Words like 'sit' and 'seat' would sound very similar when spoken in Nigerian or Ghanaian English.
- Consonants such as /r/ and /w/ pose problems for different speakers for whom these are not familiar sounds, so for example an Indian English speaker might replace /w/ with /v/ in a word like 'water'.
- The 'th' sound in words like 'that' and 'thought' is pronounced differently (as /ð/ and /θ/). These are often changed to /f/ and /v/ respectively.
- Rhoticity, a feature mentioned in Chapter 1, relates to the pronunciation of the /r/ in words like 'park' and 'farm'. It varies around the UK but has very different social connotations in the USA, with rhotic speakers often being viewed as of a higher status, whereas in the UK rhoticity is often seen as a marker of a rural, working class identity and therefore less prestigious.
- English uses a stress-based intonation, where the stress on certain syllables follows a regular pattern (often unstressed followed by stressed). Syllable-based languages such as Yoruba, French and Hindi have a pattern in which all syllables follow a regular pattern, whether stressed or not, and this often transfers into how English is spoken.

4.3.2 Vocabulary

Words vary from place to place within the UK but on a global level this variation is even more noticeable. When English has reached different countries, it has often made use of local words to expand its own lexicon. In the places where

those languages are still used, a more varied and rich vocabulary often exists, incorporating and blending many local words alongside English words.

In South Asia, for example, you can find words such as *dosa* and *roti* borrowed from Indian languages being used around the world to describe types of bread, but also hybrid (or compounded) forms of words such as *congresswallah* which combines an English word with a Hindi word or suffix for 'person' or 'someone who does a job'.

In South-East Asia, there are many borrowings from the Malay language and what Nicola Galloway and Heath Rose (2015) refer to as 'semantic extensions': words which have taken on a wider meaning in a different location. For example, Singapore English uses the verb 'open' to also mean 'turn on' as in 'open the light'.

4.3.3 Grammar

Word order and morphology vary across different varieties of English around the world and some of the key patterns are noted later in section 4.4 on English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF). A common pattern is for plural endings on count nouns to either be unmarked or marked using a different system. For example, 'I have many book' does not mark the plural on the noun 'book' and 'the gyal dem' (the girls) marks it using 'dem', while what would normally be seen as non-count nouns often become plurals. So, nouns like 'information' or 'furniture' would be pluralised to become 'informations' or 'furnitures'.

Tenses differ in their formation with usages such as 'I walk here yesterday' and 'I have been here ten years ago' showing that past action is conveyed in a range of ways.

Crystal (2003) identifies a large range of grammatical variation from the research literature – including 'I finish eat', 'I already eat' and 'Did you find?' – and you can find many more examples by following up some of the wider reading outlined at the end of this chapter.

KEY TERMS

Count noun: a noun which refers to separate items that can be counted

Non-count noun: a noun which refers to something that cannot be counted or separated

4.3.4 Pragmatics

Beyond the literal meanings of words and phrases, is another layer of meaning that comes through implication and understanding of figures of speech. These are often phrases or sayings that have been passed down through the history of a language or rely on idiom. Clearly, these can pose problems because their literal meaning is not apparent. Why, for instance, should 'It's raining cats and dogs' mean 'It's raining heavily'?

On another level, communication relies on more than just words; cultural expectations around conventions such as turn-taking, politeness and even how loudly people should speak can vary.

KEY TERM

Idiom: an expression or phrase that is commonly used but whose meaning is not literal (e.g. 'to kick the bucket' means 'to die'). Such expressions often have ancient historical origins

ACTIVITY 4.6

Using the corpus

Text 4A and Text 4B consist of answers to exam questions written by learners of English from around the world. What kinds of patterns can you identify in the way in which each student uses English in their answer?

Text 4A

It is said that, when you meet someone for the first time, the first impression you get from him, is the one that usually makes you like or dislike him and generally is very important in shaping the opinion about the person you've just met. However, sometimes, this very first impression, can make you reach wrong conclusion, and therefore it can effect your attitude in a way that later, you may regret for it.

I'm afraid that the latter happened to me in the case of my friendship with Alex. We have been close friends for more than a decade now, sharing our secrets, every pleasant and unpleasant moment of our life. This so strong relationship that has been developed between us two make me now feel emparassment whenever I recall the first time I met him.

From the Cambridge Learner Corpus

Text 4B

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter to me. How are you? I apologize for not writing you since about two months now. This is because I was very busy. What you wrote in your letter about the situation here (in my country) is of course exaggerated. It is true that, there was a strike for about two months. But now the strike has ended. And people are trying one way or the other to adopt to the new situation.

The people went on strike because life is going bad and bad every day. An Engineer cannot avoid going to his work by car everyday, because petrol is too expensive you can imagine that. The situation here is too difficult. There is no electricity from ten (a.m) to six (p.m) everyday. Our Government said that there were no coal. You see we are living like the third world people here but now after the strike. Things are coming back to normal. Now we have free medical care. Before the strike we pay for medical care. A week in the hospital cost more than an Engineering salary for the whole month.

From the Cambridge Learner Corpus

RESEARCH QUESTION

World Englishes

Pick one or more of the following varieties of World Englishes and use the websites suggested in Activity 4.2 (and the wider reading at the end of this chapter) to put together a range of examples about how the variety differs in key linguistic areas from Standard English in the UK (and your own variety of English). Find out as much as you can about the history of the variety – when it arrived, how it has been used and attitudes towards its use – and then consider how you could use this information in the practice question that follows.

- Malaysian English
- Caribbean English
- South African English
- Australian English
- New Zealand English
- Nigerian English
- Indian English
- Singapore English

PRACTICE QUESTION

More similar than different?

Evaluate the idea that there are more similarities than differences between the Englishes used around the world.

4.4 English as a *lingua franca* (ELF)

One of the more recent developments in thinking about World Englishes is to see English as a *lingua franca*. A lingua franca is a language used between speakers who have no common language between them, to enable communication for purposes such as trade. *Lingua francas* are built on a base language, which tends to be a global language such as English, for obvious reasons. Thus, English is the world's most common *lingua franca*, and Swahili, Arabic, French, Spanish, Hindi, Portuguese and several others are also used in this way, to a much lesser extent. English is not the world's first – or only – *lingua franca* (Latin and Persian have served those roles in the past, to varying degrees) but it is definitely the most widely used.

KEY TERM

Lingua franca: a language used to communicate between people who speak different languages

A *lingua franca* is often described as an 'auxiliary' language, used for functional rather than social purposes, and speakers are just as likely to be native users as they are non-native. It is a convenient method of communication to serve global human relations, and is appreciated by millions worldwide. Crucially, when English is used as a *lingua franca* (ELF), it is not a variety as such, with specific features, but something that changes to suit the needs of its users at a given time and in a given context. Jennifer Jenkins (2006) lists five common characteristics of English as a *lingua franca*:

1. It provides a mutually intelligible language, used by speakers of different languages allowing them to communicate with one another.
2. It is an alternative to English as a Foreign Language, rather than a replacement – it serves a functional communicative purpose rather than being associated with education.
3. It is just as likely to include elements of Standard English as well as linguistic features reflective of more local forms.

4 Accommodation and code-switching are common practice during *lingua franca* communication.

5 Language proficiency in speakers may be low or high.

In terms of the linguistic structure of English as a *lingua franca*, Barbara Seidlhofer (2004) identifies the following typical characteristics:

- non-use of the third-person present tense *–s* ('she look very sad')
- interchangeable use of the relative pronouns *who* and *which* ('a book who'; 'a person which')
- omission of the definite and indefinite articles where they are obligatory in native speaker English and insertion where they do not occur in native speaker English
- use of an all-purpose question tag such as 'isn't it?' or 'no?' instead of 'shouldn't they?' ('they should arrive soon, isn't it?')
- increasing of redundancy by adding prepositions ('we have to study about') or by increasing explicitness ('blue colour' vs. 'blue' and 'how long time?' vs. 'how long?')
- heavy reliance on certain verbs of high semantic generality, such as 'do', 'have', 'make', 'put' and 'take'
- pluralisation of nouns which are considered uncountable in native speaker English ('informations', 'staffs', 'advices')
- use of *that*-clauses instead of infinitive constructions ('I want that we discuss about my dissertation').

These characteristics demonstrate that English is shaped as much by its non-native speakers as by its native speakers and that is hardly surprising given the sheer weight of numbers involved: many hundreds of millions of people using English are not doing so as native users. However, there is still some dispute among linguists about the exact relationship between different varieties of World Englishes and ELF. One significant question to be asked is whether a single form of English might develop as a *lingua franca* – perhaps becoming a kind of global standard – or, as ELF clearly proposes, if a more fluid and flexible use of language that varies according to its users and immediate needs will spring up wherever there is a need.

Many people adopt the rather prescriptive view that *lingua francas* are somehow inferior or deficient forms of a language, with crude and basic grammatical and phonological systems. Jennifer Jenkins (2015) discusses the implications of this – that there can be a bias against non-native forms such as *lingua francas*, because of a preference for the 'correct' native forms of English. She argues that speakers

should have a choice about the forms they use, and that the use of standard, native forms is unnecessary for most of the world's English speakers.

Indeed, the whole link between England (the country) and English (the language) has been critiqued by the linguist Mario Saraceni (2011) who argues that existing models for explaining the relationship between World Englishes foreground what he calls 'the metaphor of "spread"' which creates a fundamental problem.

> If the presence of English in the world is seen as based on a centre-periphery relationship, the periphery will be characterised by Englishes which have been modified and adapted to suit local environments, while the centre, by contrast, will be strongly connected with an unadulterated form of English, reinforcing the belief in a sort of linguistic garden of Eden, where English is pure and perfect, or, at least, authentic. This perpetuates the much-exploited possibility that Englishes can be placed along an equally arbitrary scale of 'quality', 'authenticity', 'purity', 'correctness' and so on. Altered forms of English, meanwhile, will perhaps arouse interest and curiosity, but are unlikely to gain the sort of recognition that is aspired to primarily among World Englishes scholars. (Saraceni 2011)

Saraceni's argument is that rather than view English as belonging to any one group more than another, or one variety of English to be seen as more 'genuine' than another, a different focus should be explored. The communicative uses to which people put English in their own individual way – as part of a linguistic repertoire, probably consisting of many other languages – should be at the heart of the discussion. As he explains:

> … strategies of negotiation are far more important for mutual intelligibility than using identical linguistic forms and that linguistic closeness is attained through accommodation rather than exclusively via the possession of one shared code. (Saraceni 2011)

Naturally, this approach has been attacked by prescriptivists for its apparent absence of reference to a 'standard' form of English and its supposed *laissez-faire* perception that communication can be left to the individual needs of the speakers. Much like the debates about language variation and diversity in the UK, the arguments often come back to conflicting views on the role of a standard form and how closely it should be followed. Is there such a thing as a 'Global Standard English' that can be referred to by all English speakers wherever they are in the world and whatever they are doing? And if not, should there be one? This very question was at the heart of a debate between two eminent linguists in this field, Randolph Quirk and Braj Kachru.

Debating the issue between 1985 and 1990, often in the pages of the journal *English Today*, the two linguists adopted positions often characterised by their opponents as 'liberation linguistics' (on the part of Kachru) and 'deficit linguistics' (on the part of Quirk). For Quirk, it is important to adhere to a standard form of

English, with British English most likely to inform that standard. For Kachru, the argument is not over the need for standards but how and why certain standards should exist and who has control over them. He sees the reality of English language use as much more complicated to control and codify than Quirk and argues that in attempting to impose a central standard, not enough attention has been paid to the identity of the different Englishes found around the world.

4.5 Arguments about English

As you have already seen, the development of English around the world has been contentious. As English grows, other local languages can be forced out of use and even die out entirely. What is also interesting is to see how UK English is affected by the growth of other varieties of English around the world. In this section, you will look at the ways in which a particular variety of English – American English – has returned to the UK and influenced the home-grown variety.

4.5.1 American and UK English

It is not uncommon to hear complaints about American English such as the one below.

> Like the grey squirrels that were introduced into the UK from the U.S. 130 years ago — and have almost wiped out our indigenous (and much lovelier) red squirrels — American words are infectious, destructive and virulent. And they are taking over. (Stevens, 'Don't talk garbage… or why American words are mangling our English', *Daily Mail*, 30 May 2012)

For over a century American English has been perceived by some as a threat to British English. The growth of the USA as a world power throughout the twentieth century, not just in terms of its economy and international political role but its cultural and social influence, has led to an increased use of American English around the world. In fact, it might be argued that American English is a much more powerful and influential variety than UK English. Crystal explains it in this way:

> So much of the power which has fuelled the growth of the English language during the twentieth century has stemmed from America… the country contains nearly four times as many mother-tongue speakers of English as any other nation. It has been more involved with international developments in twentieth-century technology than any other nation. It is in control of the new industrial (that is, electronic) revolution. And it exercises a greater influence on the way English is developing worldwide than does any other regional variety – often, of course, to the discomfiture of people in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa, who regularly express worries in their national presses about the onslaught of 'Americanisms'. (Crystal 2003)

These worries are often expressed using metaphors of invasion and plague: discourses that present American English as a threatening and dangerous outside influence. But it is not just the linguistic threat that exercises some British commentators. Writing for British right-wing newspaper *The Daily Mail* in 2010, the journalist Matthew Engel argued:

> Nowadays, people have no idea where American ends and English begins. And that's a disaster for our national self-esteem. We are in danger of subordinating our language to someone else's – and with it large aspects of British life. ('Say no to the get-go! Americanisms swamping English, so wake up and smell the coffee', Engel 2010)

Once again, arguments about language are used as a proxy for wider social and cultural concerns, in this case the global dominance and supposed cultural imperialism of the USA. So, to what extent are Stevens and Engel (and many others) correct that English has been influenced (or indeed taken over, invaded or infected) by American English? Certainly, there has been some movement from one side of the Atlantic to the other. In the early twentieth century, with the growth of the film industry, the word 'movies' first appeared in US English (first cited in the OED as 1909 for 'movies' and 1910 for 'movie') and then crossed the Atlantic to grow in popularity in the UK. Google n-grams can be used to chart the relative popularity of the terms (see Figures 4.3 and 4.4) and it can be seen how the use in the UK followed, but was less widespread than, US usage.

Figure 4.3: Google n-gram showing the frequency of the use of the word 'movie' in the USA over time

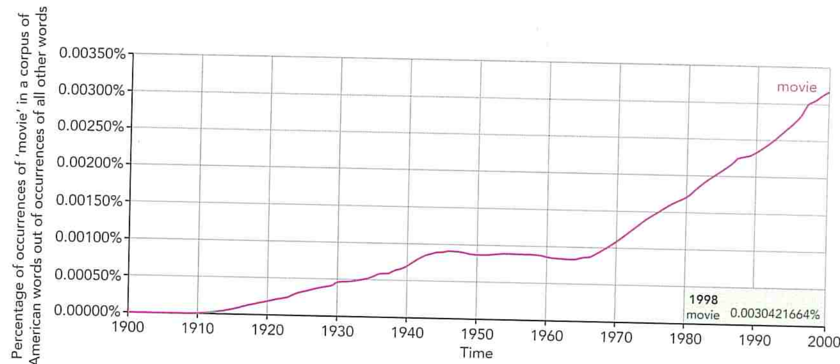
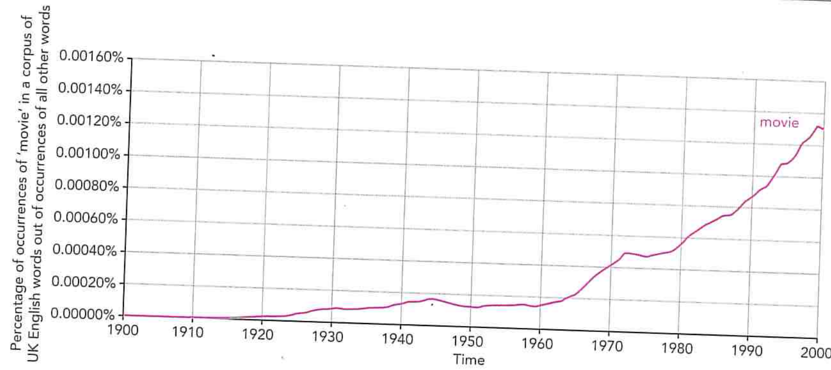


Figure 4.4: Google n-gram showing the usage frequency of the word 'movie' in the UK over time. (Note the different scale of the y-axis.)



Writing in 1995, Henry Porter argued against doom-laden predictions about American English taking over and pointed out that the 'freshness and energy' of US English attracts many people to its use.

> So nearly 60 years ago they were worrying about the effect of imported slang, yet there is absolutely no sign that English English has been subsumed. The fact is that we take from America what we need or what amuses us. American English provides all sorts of vernaculars and jargons which we have not had the wit to invent. There is the criminal argot (mugging, hijack, rub out, stretch, bump off, third degree, junkie, hit man and whack), the showbiz talk (casting couch, deadpan, slapstick, one-night stand, bit part, showstopper, brat pack), and language from the psychiatrist's chair (psychobabble, schizoid, paranoid, psycho, shrink, stressed out).
>
> It is not just a matter of wit. America tends to develop things first and therefore the vocabulary which goes with these new inventions. It has been exposed to a range of immigrant influences which add to English and distort it with an admirable lack of propriety. The Jews who went from Europe to the States in the last century didn't give a fig for Johnson's Dictionary and the English spoken by Queen Victoria. Thus the US gained, as eventually did we, 'schmooz', 'schlepp', 'spiel', 'schnozzle', 'kosher' and constructions such as 'I should know already'. (Porter 1995)

American English (as a newer form of English) and America (as a newer and seemingly more dynamic and exciting nation) seem to carry positive associations which some people feel are more in tune with how they want to present themselves. Why – the argument goes – should I use a stuffy English word that has been around for centuries, when I can use a new and freshly minted American one?

Others argue that the impact of US English on UK English is overstated and frequently misunderstood. Lynne Murphy, an American linguist living and working in the UK, runs a blog called 'Separated by a Common Language' which features a range of discussion about American and English usage. Many of Murphy's articles correct misapprehensions about American English and its supposed ubiquity in UK English, with some providing fascinating case studies about how research can be used to counter myths about language.

ACTIVITY 4.7

Myths of American English

Use Murphy's blog (www.cambridge.org/links/escdiv6033) to identify a range of language issues associated with American and English usage. Select two or three examples of words and phrases that have been discussed and follow the discussions about these words. What do these tell you about some of the myths and panics over the supposed invasion of Americanisms?

Data gathered by Oxford University as part of the annual '500 Words' writing competition for children in the UK would suggest that young people are influenced to some extent by American vocabulary but also by language associated with events in the news, technology and popular culture. For example, in the 2016 competition, words such as those in Table 4.1 grew in popularity.

Table 4.1: Data from Oxford Children's Corpus Summary Report, 2016

	2016 frequency	2015 frequency
velociraptor/s (from films)	368	93
raptor/s (from films)	360	69
refugee/s (from contemporary events)	339	67
lightsaber/s (from films)	267	48
emoji/s (from popular culture)	199	25
spacewalk (from contemporary events)	167	10
stormtrooper/s (from films)	123	19
selkie/s (from folklore)	119	19
illuminati (from popular culture)	108	14
chipmunks (from films)	101	21

In a separate project carried out by Lancaster University, to compile a new British National Corpus of spoken English (the *BNC2014*), out of 2 million words collected in 2014 and compared to the data from the original corpus collected in the early 1990s, the word 'awesome' has gained in popularity while 'marvellous' has diminished. Likewise, 'fortnight' has diminished in use and 'two weeks' increased. Is this conclusive proof of the Americanisation of English? Hardly. The completed *BNC2014* will prove a useful way of exploring trends in the vocabulary of British English though and perhaps shed some light on the influence of certain terms from the USA. Vocabulary is a fast-changing element of language and can provide a useful snapshot of language diversity and change, but it is not the only aspect of language worth exploring.

4.5.2 The problem with English

One further area of discussion to finish this chapter is that of the problems that UK English speakers have (or create) in their interactions with other English users around the world. Just as many people will claim not to have an accent, yet be able to identify everyone else as speaking with one, UK English speakers have their own varieties of English that they are unaware of and these are often quite different from the Standard English that many non-native speakers have learned.

Many forms of English make use of idiom and slang that are not instantly intelligible to outsiders, as this extract from an article by Spencer Hazel illustrates:

> Speakers who have English as their mother tongue can find themselves in a baffling predicament. While at home they are persuaded that the rest of the world now speaks their lingo. Abroad they discover that their own English renders them incomprehensible to colleagues and business partners. In one piece of research into English as the world's corporate language, a British expat in Scandinavia recounted: "When I started [in Denmark] I spoke I guess as I normally had done and wrote as I normally had done and people weren't getting me, they weren't understanding."
>
> Indeed, while her Danish colleagues were increasingly used to working in English with others from the wider international community, it was the native varieties that caused problems. Used to working with English speakers from all over Europe, a Spanish student in Denmark remarked to another researcher: "Now it's more difficult for me to understand the real English."
>
> What is more, this "real English"—which dizzyingly encompasses the whole range of dialects from Liverpool in England, to Wellington in New Zealand, via Johannesburg in South Africa, and Memphis in the US—is only the start of the problem.
>
> **Communication breakdowns**
>
> When an American manager in Japan cannot understand why his Japanese staff will not give him the "ballpark figure" he has demanded, this breakdown in communication can lead to a real disintegration in workplace relations. And the underlying feelings of mistrust are mutual. The inability of the traveling native English speaker to refrain from homeland idiosyncrasies, subtextual dexterity, and cultural in-jokes has been found to result in resentment and suspicion.
>
> International colleagues resent the lack of effort made on the part of the monoglot English speaker. They experience a loss of professional stature when having to speak with those who are not only comfortable with the language, but who appear to vaunt the effortlessness with which they bend the language to their will. And they suspect that the offending expat uses this virtuosity to gain unfair advantage in the workplace.
>
> On a recent trip to Japan, a manager in an international consortium recounted to me how he and other international partners would hold back from actively contributing to meetings where his British and American partners dominated the floor. Following the meeting they would seek one another out to discuss matters between themselves in private.
>
> This points to a very real danger that native English speakers, especially those who never mastered another language, risk missing out on business opportunities—whether in the form of contracts, idea development, job opportunities, and the like—due to a basic lack of understanding of what international English communication entails. (Hazel 2016)

ACTIVITY 4.8

Idioms or idiocy?

Re-read the section about communications breakdowns. Why are idiomatic or business English expressions problematic in international interactions?

The author goes on to suggest that 'This should be a wake-up call for politicians (...) Rather than laying the problems of English at the door of those who speak it as a second, third, or fourth language, it would be wise for mother-tongue nations to do more to prepare their professional classes for the language challenges they face abroad'. How far do you agree with this view?

Wider reading

You can find out more about the topics in this chapter by reading the following:

For comprehensive and detailed overviews of the growth of English around the world and connected debates

Crystal, D. (2003) *English as a Global Language* (Second edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Galloway, N. and Rose, H. (2015) *Introducing Global Englishes*. London: Routledge.

Jenkins, J. (2015) *Global Englishes: A Resource Book for Students* (Third edition). London: Routledge.

Sergeant, P. (2012) *Exploring World Englishes: Language in a Global Context*. London: Routledge.

Setter, J. (2012) 'Englishes around the world'. In *Language: A Student Handbook of Key Topics and Theories* (ed. D. Clayton). London: EMC.

For the debates between Quirk and Kachru referred to in this chapter

Seidlhofer, B. (2003) 'The Global Spread of English'. In *Controversies in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

For more details about World Englishes, including models to explain their spread and growth

Rana, R. and Cushing, I. (2018) *Language Change (Cambridge Topics in English Language series)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Several websites offer good material on World Englishes, including these:

http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/category/varieties-of-english/

www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/case-studies/minority-ethnic/

www.thehistoryofenglish.com/issues_global.html

Ideas and answers

Chapter 1

Activity 1.1

Some examples of regional differences you might notice include the following:

- A short vowel /ʊ/ in words such as 'roof' (eastern England) or in 'tooth' (Wales)
- A long vowel /iː/ at the end of words such as 'city' and 'tidy' (south Wales)
- A 'rounded' vowel (lips are rounded) in words such as 'work' (Wales)
- A more 'open' vowel (mouth starts in a more open position) in words such as 'load' or 'boat' (Birmingham/West Midlands)
- The vowel /uː/ in words such as 'book' and 'cook' (Liverpool, parts of Lancashire)
- No distinction between words such as 'Pam' and 'palm' (Edinburgh and other Scottish accents)
- A more 'open' vowel in the last part of words such as 'better' or 'Manchester' (Manchester). This is the *lettER* vowel mentioned in the activity.
- The NURSE vowel in New York speech can be pronounced as a diphthong (an example being 'thirty' sounding more like 'toidy').
- The monophthongisation of PRICE in Southern US English speech, so that 'time' sounds like 'tahm'.
- The monophthongisation of MOUTH in the Pittsburgh area of the US (example of 'downtown' sounding like 'dahntahn'). Barbara Johnstone and Scott Kiesling have written a lot on 'Pittsburghese'.
- The MOUTH vowel in Canadian English sounds close to (but not the same as) the GOAT vowel in some contexts, so 'couch' can sound a bit like 'coach'.

More examples can be found in Hughes, Trudgill and Watt (2012).