

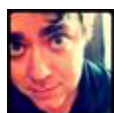
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Renaming English: does the world language need a new name?



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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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English is rapidly becoming a *lingua franca* in international communication for commerce and trade, education, science, international relations and tourism.

It is the fastest growing language in the world, with more people speaking English than ever before. School children in India and China are learning English at a staggering rate as their countries emphasise the importance of English as a ticket to participating in the global economy.



With English rapidly becoming a 'global' language, should we begin to call it something different? EPA/Christopher Jue

For example, the rise of English in China is unprecedented, and has been likened to a *mania*, with school children as young as seven learning to speak English.

So why then do we continue to link this evolving internationalising language with a small island in Europe that once upon a time controlled the world?

Perhaps it is about time we got rid of the "English" and start calling it something else – international, standard or common language?

Not one, but many Englishes

It is important to understand that there is not one English language; there are many. In fact, in Australia we don't even speak and write English. We actually use **Standard Australian**

English, which is not the same English that you might find in the United Kingdom, the United States, India or China.

There are countless blends, pidgins, creoles and mixed English languages. At the same time that English is becoming the language of internationalisation, it is also becoming localised in different parts of the world as multiple world Englishes flourish.

A sociocultural perspective on language considers the impacts of regional dialects, national standards and conventions, slang, different pronunciations and the use of communication technologies such as mobile telephones, texting and email. Our use of English depends on the contexts, audiences and purposes we are using it for.

Spoken English differs from written English. There are different ways of using written English depending on the formality and genre of writing. Spelling, grammar and punctuation change depending on who is writing and for who is reading. English is an “open source” language, with hybrid forms appearing all over the globe as different peoples blend English together with other languages.

Some interesting points about English languages: there are more non-native speakers of English than native speakers; nearly four out of five English-speaking interactions happen between non-native speakers of English; most research is shared in English-language journals; English is the number one language used on internet sites; English is the language of international aviation; and most literature is published in English or translated from English into other languages.

Serious concerns with English as an international language

The rise of English comes with several concerns, including questions of cultural hegemony and postcolonial criticisms. While it is easy to shrug off such criticisms with the argument that English is necessary for social mobility, economic prosperity and education, there remain many unanswered questions around the social and cultural impacts of English as a global language.

For example, the use of English in the internationalisation of research and higher education comes at a cost to local knowledge and languages, as academics in places such as Japan, China, Germany and other parts of the world compete with scholars from the UK and USA to publish in high-ranking English-language research journals.

Even in France, which is renowned for its cultural and linguistic protectiveness, English is gaining ground in its universities, with 83% of French lecturers using English in their field of research.

There is a real tragedy in the loss of language diversity as English takes over, placing other languages at risk of extinction. This has been acknowledged and efforts are being made to preserve indigenous languages in places such as Papua New Guinea, Brazil and Australia. However, is this enough? Are we destroying more than language through the rise of English as the international standard?

That said, there is some sadness in the idea that we might be the last generation of travellers who experience those amusing and sometimes awkward moments when attempting to order food or ask for directions in a country where everyone doesn't speak English.

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