

Listening

Video - *Why has English developed as a world language?*



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kg8jS-AMyMo>

Today English is used as a world common language. And this status of English is primarily the result of two main factors. The first is the expansion of British Empire between the 17th and 19th century. The second is the emergence of the United States of America as the World economic power in the 20th century. Let's look at the first factor, which is the expansion of the British Empire. This consists of two main phases. The first phase started from the 17th century when large scale of migrations of English speakers from England, Scotland, Ireland to North America, Australia, and New Zealand took place. And the English dialects, which travelled with these migrants gradually developed into the mother tongue varieties of English, such as American English, and Australian English with differences in, for example, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. The second phase took place during the 18th and 19th centuries when Britain expanded its colonies in Africa and Asia. This colonisation led to the development of many second language varieties of English. Or what is often called New Englishes, such as Indian English and Singaporean English. These two phases of the expansion of the British Empire built a foundation for the further spread of English, which was propelled by the emergence of the United States of America as the world political and economic power. The dominant role of English today can largely be explained by the dominant role which America has been playing since the 20th century. And this dominance can be seen in many different areas. For example, English is a main official language of a number of international organisations, such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation. And if we look up a list of the highest grossing films in the world, we'll probably notice that most of the top 100 films are in English. English is also a common language of science. It is estimated that about 80% of scientific journals are now published in English. Given this dominant role of English, it is understandable and predictable that English is now taught as a second or foreign language in most countries across the world. And this fact might make you wonder how many people in the world speak English today. This is actually a very difficult question to answer because it is hard to define who should be counted as English speakers when there are so many people with different English proficiency levels. However, David Crystal roughly estimates that there are about 2 billion English speakers in the world, of which 400 million are native English speakers. And 1.6 billion are non-native English speakers. This means that now, non-native English speakers outnumber native English speakers by a ratio of 4:1.