

Transcript - English Mania

Let's talk about manias. Let's start with Beatlemania.

(Recording of crowd roaring)

Hysterical teenagers, crying, screaming, pandemonium.

(Recording of crowd roaring)

Sports mania: deafening crowds, all for one idea -- get the ball in the net.

(Recording) Goal! Okay, religious mania: there's rapture, there's weeping, there's visions. Manias can be good. Manias can be alarming. Or manias can be deadly.

(Recording of crowd cheering)

The world has a new mania. A mania for learning English. Listen as Chinese students practice their English, by screaming it:

Teacher: ... change my life!

Students: I want to change my life!

Teacher: I don't want to let my parents down!

Student: I don't want to let my parents down!

Teacher: I don't ever want to let my country down!

Student: I don't ever want to let my country down!

Teacher: Most importantly...

Student: Most importantly...

Teacher: I don't want to let myself down!

Student: I don't want to let myself down!

How many people are trying to learn English worldwide? Two billion of them.

Students: A t-shirt. A dress.

Jay Walker: In Latin America, in India, in Southeast Asia, and most of all, in China. If you're a Chinese student, you start learning English in the third grade, by law. That's why this year, China will become the world's largest English-speaking country.

(Laughter)

Why English? In a single word: opportunity. Opportunity for a better life, a job, to be able to pay for school, or put better food on the table. Imagine a student taking a giant test for three full days. Her score on this one test literally determines her future. She studies 12 hours a day for three years to prepare. Twenty-five percent of her grade is based on English. It's called the gaokao, and 80 million high school Chinese students have already taken this grueling test. The intensity to learn English is almost unimaginable, unless you witness it.

Teacher: Perfect!

Students: Perfect!

Teacher: Perfect!

Student: Perfect!

Teacher: I want to speak perfect English!
Student: I want to speak perfect English!
Teacher: I want to speak ...
Student: I want to speak ...
Teacher: ... perfect English!
Student: ... perfect English!
Teacher (yelling more loudly): I want to change my life!
Student (yelling more loudly): I want to change my life!

JW: So is English mania good or bad? Is English a tsunami, washing away other languages? Not likely. English is the world's second language. Your native language is your life. But with English you can become part of a wider conversation -- a global conversation about global problems, like climate change or poverty, or hunger or disease. The world has other universal languages. Mathematics is the language of science. Music is the language of emotions. And now English is becoming the language of problem-solving. Not because America is pushing it, but because the world is pulling it. So English mania is a turning point.

Like the harnessing of electricity in our cities, or the fall of the Berlin Wall, English represents hope for a better future -- a future where the world has a common language to solve its common problems.

Thank you very much.