

UNIT

2

World
in progress

STEP

1

THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE

VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

The most widely used language
in the world

The English language is not the most **widely spoken** but certainly the most **widely used** language in the world. It is spoken as a first language in the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand and a number of Caribbean nations. English is also **widely learned** all over the world and it has become the world's **unofficial international** language, as well as the language of science, computing, aviation and tourism.

A short history of the English
language

OLD ENGLISH (450-1100)

The history of the English language started with the arrival of the three Germanic tribes, the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes, who invaded Britain during the 5th century AD. The Angles came from "Englaland" [sic] and their language was called "Englisc". It can be defined as the primitive **stage**¹ of the English of today. The vocabulary was strongly influenced by Latin. This language, which we can define as Old

English, **underwent**² many transformations in about 700 years.

MIDDLE ENGLISH (1100-1500)

The Norman conquest brought a new language, French, which had an immediate impact on Old English. But French was the language spoken essentially by the court and aristocracy. In the 14th century English became dominant in Britain again. It was no longer a purely Anglo-Saxon language, but **rather**³ a combination of the Norman and old Anglo-Saxon languages. It is generally considered the beginning of Modern English.

MODERN ENGLISH (1500-NOW)

It is the language spoken from mid-late 16th century. In the course of the following centuries, many new words entered the language and led to what is now called "Modern English".

Glossary

1 stage: fase

2 to undergo: subire

3 rather: piuttosto



COMPREHENSION

1

Say whether the statements are True or False.

- 1 The English language is the most widely spoken language in the world. ☐ T ☐ F
- 2 It is the second most widely used language in the world. ☐ T ☐ F
- 3 It is spoken as a first language in the UK, the US, Canada and other countries. ☐ T ☐ F
- 4 It is the official language in computing and tourism. ☐ T ☐ F

2 Choose the right alternative.

1 The history of the English language started

- [A] in the 5th century AD.
[B] in the 7th century AD.
[C] in the 11th century AD.

2 Vocabulary was strongly influenced by

- [A] Latin. [B] Greek. [C] Sanskrit.

3 The Norman conquest brought

- [A] Italian [B] Welsh [C] French

as a new language.

4 French was the language spoken essentially

- [A] by the court and aristocracy.
[B] by common people.
[C] by the middle class.

5 In the 14th century English was a combination

- [A] of French and Latin.
[B] of the Norman and old Anglo-Saxon languages.
[C] of the Norman and Roman languages.

6 Modern English is the language spoken from the

- [A] mid-late 16th century.
[B] mid-late 17th century.
[C] late 18th century.

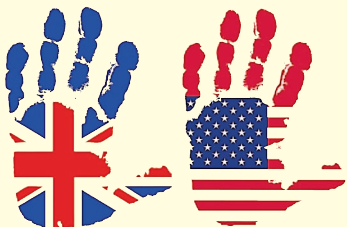
SPEAKING

3 Work with your partner. Ask and answer the following questions.

- 1 When did you start studying English?
2 What do you find particularly difficult about learning the English language?
• *accent and pronunciation* • *grammar* • *spelling*
Which of these skills do you find difficult?
• *speaking* • *writing* • *listening* • *reading*

Varieties of English

About two thirds of the world's native speakers live in the United States. Most of them speak English, though the US has no official language. The English spoken in the US is called American English. British English and American English are two forms of English. There are differences between these two forms, in particular in the way people speak (accent and pronunciation). There are also some differences in the spelling of words (how words are written) and in some words.



Differences in Grammar

One of the most noticeable differences is the use of the Present Perfect. Speakers of American English generally use the Present Perfect tense (have/has + past participle) far less than speakers of British English. In spoken American English it is very common to use the Simple Past tense as an alternative in situations where the Present Perfect would usually have been used in British English.

British:

I've just arrived home.

We have already drunk.

American:

I just arrived home.

I already drank.

Differences in the spelling

British English	American English
Colour	Color
Harbour	Harbor
Neighbour	Neighbor
Centre	Center

Differences in vocabulary

British English	American English
Flat	Apartment
Luggage	Baggage
Taxi	Cab
Biscuit	Cookie
Lift	Elevator
Autumn	Fall
Petrol	Gas
Film	Movie
Toilet	Restroom
Lorry	Truck
Holiday	Vacation

Other varieties of English

African American (the English spoken by South Africans), Canadian English, Australian English, Indian English.

