

English and everything you need to know about it

English is a widely distributed language, originating in England, which is currently the primary language of a number of countries. It is extensively used as a second language and as an official language in many other countries. English is the most widely taught and understood language in the world. Although Modern Standard Chinese, Hindi and Spanish have more mother-tongue speakers, English is used by more people as a second or foreign language, putting the total number of people with a knowledge of English worldwide at well over one billion.

Over 300 million people speak English as their first language. Estimates about second language speakers of English vary greatly between 150 million and 1.5 billion. English is the dominant international language in communications, science, business, aviation, entertainment, diplomacy and the Internet. It has been one of the official languages of the United Nations since its founding in 1945 and is considered by many to be the universal language.

English is a West Germanic language that developed from Old English, the language of the Anglo-Saxons. English, having its major roots in Germanic languages, derives most of its grammar from Old English, although a Celtic substrate influence has also been postulated. As a result of the Norman Conquest, it has been heavily influenced, more than any other Germanic language, by Norman French, Latin and Greek. From England it spread to the rest of the British Isles, then to the colonies and territories of the British Empire (outside and inside the current Commonwealth of Nations) such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and others, particularly those in the Anglophone Caribbean. As a result of these historical events English is the official language (sometimes one of several) in many countries formerly under British or American rule, such as Pakistan, Ghana, India, Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, and the Philippines.

Mandarin Chinese, Hindi and Spanish have more native speakers than English does; however, the geographic distribution of Mandarin and Hindi, as both first and second languages, is more limited than that of English. Spanish is more widespread than Mandarin and Hindi, but not much present in Asia or Africa. English also is the most widely spoken Germanic language. Following World War II, the economic and cultural influence of the United States increased and English permeated other cultures, chiefly through development of telecommunications technology. Because a working knowledge of English is required in many fields, professions, and occupations, education ministries throughout the world mandate the teaching of English to, at least, a basic level.