

Whose language?

How many people can speak English? Some experts estimate that 1.5 billion people – around one-quarter of the world's population – can communicate reasonably well in English.

Never in recorded history has a language been as widely spoken as English is today. The reason why millions are learning it is simple: it is the language of international business and therefore the key to prosperity. It is not just that multinational companies such as Microsoft, Google, and Vodafone **conduct** their business in English; it is the language in which the Chinese speak to Brazilians and Germans to Indonesians.

David Graddol, the author of *English Next*, says it is tempting to **view** the story of English simply as a triumph for its native speakers in North America, Britain and Ireland, and Australasia – but that would be a mistake. Global English has entered a more complex phase, changing in ways that the English-speaking countries cannot control and might not like.

An important question one might ask is: whose English will it be in the future? Non-native speakers now outnumber native English speakers by three to one. The majority of encounters in English today take place between non-native speakers. According to David Graddol, many business meetings held in English appear to run more smoothly when there are no native English speakers present. This is because native speakers are often **poor** at ensuring that they are understood in international discussions. They tend to think they need to avoid longer Latin-based words, but in fact comprehension problems are more often caused by their use of colloquial English, especially idioms, metaphors, and phrasal verbs. On one occasion, at an international student conference in Amsterdam, conducted in English, the only British representative was asked to be 'less English' so that the others could understand her.

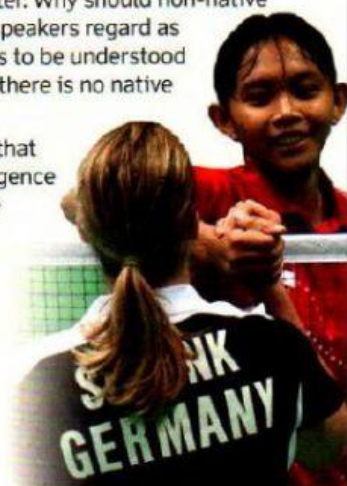
Professor Barbara Seidlhofer, Professor of English and Applied Linguistics at the University of Vienna, records and **transcribes** spoken English interactions between speakers of the language around the world. She says her team has noticed that non-native speakers are varying standard English grammar in several ways. Even the most competent speakers sometimes omit the 's' in the third person singular. Many **omit** definite and indefinite articles where they are **required** in standard English, or put them in where standard English does not use them. Nouns that are not plural in native-speaker English are used as plurals by non-native speakers (e.g. 'informations', 'knowledges', 'advices'). Other variations include 'make a discussion', 'discuss about something' or 'phone to somebody'.

Many native English speakers will insist that these are not variations, they are mistakes. 'Knowledges' and 'phone to somebody' are simply wrong. Many non-native speakers who teach English around the world would agree. But language changes, and so do **notions** of grammatical correctness.

Those who insist on standard English grammar **remain** in a powerful position. Academics who want their work published in international journals have to **adhere to** the grammatical rules followed by native English-speaking elites.

But spoken English is another matter. Why should non-native speakers bother with what native speakers regard as correct? Their main aim, after all, is to be understood by one another, and in most cases there is no native speaker present.

Professor Seidlhofer says, 'I think that what we are looking at is the emergence of a new international attitude, the recognition and awareness that in many international contexts non-native speakers do not need to speak like native speakers, to compare themselves to them, and **thus** always feel 'less good.'



LEXIS IN CONTEXT

Being aware of register

When you read a formal text you will find words and phrases which the dictionary will list as *formal*. When you record them, make a note of the neutral / informal alternative, e.g. *ensure* (formal), *make sure* (neutral).

- e Look at the **highlighted** words in both parts of the text. They are all formal register. Match them to their neutral equivalents below.

neutral equivalents

- 1 *verb* to be (still)
- 2 *adj.* bad
- 3 *verb* to do
- 4 *verb* to follow
- 5 *noun* idea
- 6 *verb* to leave out
- 7 *verb* to need
- 8 *verb* to look at
- 9 *adj.* so
- 10 *verb* to write down

formal register.

- a. *verb* to conduct
- b. *verb* to view
- c. *verb* to transcribe
- d. *noun* Notions
- e. *Adj.* Poor
- f. *Adv.* Thus
- g. *verb* to omit
- h. *verb* to require
- i. *verb* to remain
- j. *verb* to adhere to



Read the text again and choose the correct answer to the following questions.

1. How many people can speak English?
 - a. 1,500,000,000 people
 - b. 1,500,000 people
 - c. 1,500 people
 - d. 1,5 million people
2. Why are so many people learning English?
 - a. It's the language that is taught in school
 - b. It's the language of international business
 - c. It sounds sexy
 - d. It's the language of Hollywood
3. According to the text, which language do Chinese use to talk to Brazilians?
 - a. Chinese
 - b. Portuguese
 - c. Spanish
 - d. English
4. How many non-native speakers of English are there for every native speaker?
 - a. One
 - b. Two
 - c. Three
 - d. Four
5. What happens when there are no native English speakers in business meeting or academic events?
 - a. Non-English speakers understand each other better.
 - b. Non-native speakers do not learn informal English.
 - c. Non-native speakers avoid long Latin-based words.
 - d. Native speakers consider it a triumph.

Drag and drop the following words to their definition

- A. Phrasal verbs
- B. Idioms
- C. Metaphor

1. An **expression** whose meaning is not predictable from the literal meaning of the words in it.
2. A way of describing another thing by suggesting a comparison of it to something else.
3. A combination of verb and one or more adverbial or prepositional particles

Are these idioms (A), metaphors(B) or phrasal verbs(C)? Write A, B, or C.

1. ____ Leave out
2. ____ Call back
3. ____ Beat around the bush
4. ____ It was a battle of egos
5. ____ Let's call it a day
6. ____ My heart is broken