

## English Language Day

English Language Day is celebrated on 23 April. Read about where English came from, how it came to be spoken all over the world and how it is changing.

### Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

### Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

#### Vocabulary

1. .... to raise awareness of
2. .... an impact
3. .... to invade
4. .... to settle
5. .... the spread of
6. .... vibrant
7. .... oppression
8. .... a perspective

#### Definition

- a. unfair or cruel treatment of a group of people
- b. to enter and take control of a country by force
- c. the increase of something in a larger area
- d. to increase knowledge and understanding of
- e. a point of view
- f. a powerful effect that something has on someone or a situation
- g. to go and live somewhere permanently
- h. energetic and exciting

## English Language Day

### What is English Language Day?

English Language Day was first celebrated in 2010, alongside Arabic Language Day, Chinese Language Day, French Language Day, Russian Language Day and Spanish Language Day. These are the six official languages of the United Nations, and each has a special day, designed to raise awareness of the history, culture and achievements of these languages.

### Why is English Language Day celebrated on 23 April?

This day was chosen because it is thought to be Shakespeare's birthday, and the anniversary of his death. As well as being the English language's most famous playwright, Shakespeare also had a huge impact on modern-day English. At the time he was writing, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the English language was going through a lot of changes and Shakespeare's creativity with language meant he contributed hundreds of new words and phrases that are still used today. For example, the words 'gossip', 'fashionable' and 'lonely' were all first used by Shakespeare. He also invented phrases like 'break the ice', 'all our yesterdays', 'faint-hearted' and 'love is blind'. Can you guess what they mean?

## The origins of English

The story of the English language began in the fifth century when Germanic tribes invaded Celtic-speaking Britain and brought their languages with them. Later, Scandinavian Vikings invaded and settled with their languages too. In 1066 William I, from modern-day France, became king, and Norman-French became the language of the courts and official activity. People couldn't understand each other at first, because the lower classes continued to use English while the upper classes spoke French, but gradually French began to influence English. An estimated 45 per cent of all English words have a French origin. By Shakespeare's time, Modern English had developed, printing had been invented and people had to start to agree on 'correct' spelling and vocabulary.

## The spread of English

The spread of English all over the world has an ugly history but a rich and vibrant present. During the European colonial period, several European countries, including England, competed to expand their empires. They stole land, labour and resources from people across Africa, Asia, the Americas and Oceania. By the time former British colonies began to gain independence in the mid-20th century, English had become established in their institutions. Many brilliant writers from diverse places across Africa, the Caribbean and Asia had started writing in English, telling their stories of oppression. People from all over the world were using English to talk and write about justice, equality, freedom and identity from their own perspectives. The different varieties of English created through this history of migration and colonisation are known as World Englishes.

## International English

More than 1.75 billion people speak English worldwide – that's around 1 in 4 people around the world. English is being used more and more as a way for two speakers with different first languages to communicate with each other, as a 'lingua franca'. For many people, the need to communicate is much more important than the need to sound like a native speaker. As a result, language use is starting to change. For example, speakers might not use 'a' or 'the' in front of nouns, or they might make uncountable nouns plural and say 'informations', 'furnitures' or 'co-operations'.

Are these variations mistakes? Or part of the natural evolution of different Englishes? 'International English' refers to the English that is used and developed by everyone in the world, and doesn't just belong to native speakers. There is a lot of debate about whether International English should be standardised and, if so, how. What do you think? If you're reading this, English is your language too.

### Source

- <http://www.un.org/en/events/englishlanguageday/>

## Tasks

### Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	<b>Answer</b>	
1. Portuguese is one of the official languages of the United Nations.	True	False
2. Shakespeare was born and died on the same day.	True	False
3. Shakespeare invented many new words and phrases.	True	False
4. In the fifth century, French was the official language in Britain.	True	False
5. English came to be spoken in many countries of the world because of migration and colonisation.	True	False
6. People from former British colonies took English and used it to describe their own experience.	True	False
7. About a quarter of the people in the world speak English.	True	False
8. Everyone agrees that it's a bad thing to have many varieties of English.	True	False

### Task 2

Complete the sentences with the words in the box.

awareness	impact	independence	lingua franca
oppression	printing	tribes	varieties

1. Each official UN language has a special day that aims to raise ..... of its history, culture and achievements.
2. Shakespeare had a huge ..... on modern-day English.
3. The English language began to develop in the fifth century when Germanic ..... invaded Britain.
4. By Shakespeare's time, Modern English had developed, ..... had been invented and people had to start to agree on 'correct' spelling and vocabulary.
5. British colonies began to gain ..... in the mid-20th century.
6. Many brilliant writers from all over the world used English to tell their stories of .....
7. World Englishes are the different ..... of English created through this history of migration and colonisation.
8. When two speakers of other first languages use English to communicate with each other, they are using English as a .....

### Discussion

Who do you speak English with?

## Answers

### Preparation task

1. d
2. f
3. b
4. g
5. c
6. h
7. a
8. e

### Task 1

1. False
2. True
3. True
4. False
5. True
6. True
7. True
8. False

### Task 2

1. awareness
2. impact
3. tribes
4. printing
5. independence
6. oppression
7. varieties
8. lingua franca