

Homework 1
International English

Prior to reading this article, I underestimated the age of English by most of a millennium; although I was aware of the language's early West Germanic and Norse influence, I would not have anticipated, for instance, the classification of Shakespeare's English as 'Early Modern.' At least in diction, Shakespearean English differs drastically from our language today. However, the historical roots of Middle and Modern English in the Norman invasion of 1066 and the Renaissance, respectively, do justify this categorization. I was also not aware of the particular incompatibility of French orthographic conventions with words of (presumably) Germanic or Norse descent, although this explains many of the inconsistencies of today's language. While interesting, none of these points are particularly relevant to my own communication, except perhaps as historical perspective.

More relevantly, although aware that English is a notoriously difficult second language, I learned that several reduced subsets of English vocabulary and grammar have been developed for the purpose of simplifying teaching the language to non-native speakers. It is probably desirable to know the extent and content of common such subsets and thereby restrict to oneself to such subsets when communicating with a foreign audience.

I also hadn't considered the practical desirability of what the article terms 'neutrality' in international English. However, any 'neutral' dialect of international English would necessarily be artificially constructed, and hence, to be successful, the dialect would have to be backed by some authoritative body responsible for its dissemination. Consequently, the creation of a successful 'neutral' dialect of English seems highly unlikely in the near future. Nevertheless, striving for neutrality in one's speech might facilitate communication across different backgrounds.

I found particularly interesting the David Crystal quote under the section titled 'Many Englishes', regarding the possible need to 'become bilingual in our own language.' While it's plausible that one might modify his or her exposition to communicate with people of a different English background, for the average speaker, knowing when and how to do so seems prohibitively difficult without specific education and concerted practice. Thus, I suspect, only a minority of English speakers will adopt such 'bilingualism', and most (in particular, native speakers of American or British English) will simply depend on faithful expansion of their dialect through rest of the world.