Americans might tend to inflate the influence of the United States in the history of the spread of English. Before the World Wars, particularly WWII, the US was a bit player on the world stage. The folks with the big international footprint were England, France, Spain, and Portugal.

Look around the world and you can see the linguistic legacy of the colonial era stamped all over the globe. India, Australia, Kenya, and Guyana were all under England's kind protection, and English is the primary or secondary language in all of them. France made its biggest play in West Africa, and you'd better know French if you want to get around in that part of the world without knowing a local language like Wolof or Pulaar. Spain conquered most of the Americas south of the present-day US, so your best language to get around most countries in the Western Hemisphere is Spanish. Portugal had Brazil and some big territories in Africa - learn Portuguese if you plan to attend the next World Cup or Summer Olympics.

[**English Quiz**](http://www.puzznbuzz.com/online-english-quiz)

On the other hand, China and Japan were never conquered by European powers, and the level of English or other European languages that is spoken by their citizens is a constant source of concern in those countries regarding their ability to compete overseas. And Korea has had a massive American military presence for almost 70 years, but very few people, relatively, who can communicate in the language effectively.

So, up until the wars, the spread of European languages had almost nothing to do with the US, and English was already widespread because the British were very good at expanding their empire.

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After the wars, the US got busy internationally in six big ways:

Military bases wherever we could plant them, particularly during the Cold War

US corporate expansion, from Ford to Coca Cola

Entertainment, particularly Hollywood and the Beatles. Oh wait, the Beatles were British, but we did export a lot of other music

Tourism

Technology

Scientific research

All of those activities had some effect on spreading English, but not as much as you might think.

As mentioned, US bases in Korea did little to extend the language there (a pedagogical focus on communication rather than rote memorization of written English would do a lot more, because the appetite is certainly there), and I would suggest that there wasn't much of a ripple attributable to American bases even in places like Germany where English became the go-to second language. If the primary language of the US were Dutch or Spanish, I doubt that you'd see much of either of those languages on the streets at any distance from our bases.

US corporations that want to do business internationally have long since discovered that their marketing needs to be in the local language. The influence of commerce on the spread of the language is vast for a different reason - international companies need a common language for their international employees. Is English that language because many managers of multinational corporations have been American? Or because business leaders from elsewhere have often come to the US to get their training? In either case, English is the language that you need in order to do business on the world stage, and that probably has a lot to do with it being the primary language for the big US corporations that have spread worldwide. If the US spoke French or German, there would probably be a lot more parents around the world who wanted their kids to learn those languages as a stepping-stone to getting good employment.

Source: Quora, [**Martin Benjamin**](https://www.quora.com/profile/Martin-Benjamin-1), speaks English good,Written Jun 23, 2013