

English across the world

The spread of English

English is spoken as a first language by more than 350 million people throughout the world, and used as a second language by as many, if not more. One in five of the world's population speaks English with some degree of competence. It is an official or semi-official language in over 70 countries, and it plays a significant role in many more.

Englishes, not English

English is not just one standard language, but can be thought of as a 'family' that includes many different varieties. Of course, the vast majority of words and meanings shown in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* are used in all the regional varieties and cause no problem of understanding.

However, in order to do justice to the richness of the English language across the world, the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* also includes vocabulary items specific to particular varieties of English.

We cover British and North American English and the difference between them in great detail in individual dictionary entries. For a summary of these differences, please see page R16.

The table below shows the labels we use in the dictionary to describe words from different areas where English is spoken.

<i>AustralE</i>	Australian English
<i>CanE</i>	Canadian English
<i>E AfrE</i>	East African English
<i>IndE</i>	Indian English (the English of South Asia)
<i>SAfrE</i>	South African English
<i>SEAsianE</i>	South-East Asian English
<i>WAfrE</i>	West African English

The pronunciations we show are those that a speaker of British or North American English would use to say the words. For many African English words we also show the pronunciation used by an African speaker of English.

From the UK and Ireland, we show Irish English (*IrishE*), English from Northern England (*NEngE*), Scottish English (*ScotE*) and Welsh English (*WelshE*).

English across the UK and Ireland

Although English is spoken across the UK and Ireland, there are interesting variations in the vocabulary used in different areas.

Irish English, for example, is influenced by the Irish language and by Old and Middle English. Words such as *colleen* and *och* are derived from Irish, while words such as *craic* and *eejit* stem from Old and Middle English. *Och* is also used in Scottish English—Scottish Gaelic (pronounced

/ˈɡælɪk/) and Irish Gaelic /ˈɡeɪlɪk/ are both Celtic languages with common roots. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* includes a variety of other Scottish English words, including *burn* and *brae* (from Old and Middle English) and *gillie* (from Gaelic). *Tatties* are from English 'potatoes' and are eaten with *neeps* (which sound like they should be turnips but are actually swedes).

Some standard English words, like *message* and *press*, have additional meanings in Irish or Scottish English. In both varieties, to *do the messages* means to do the grocery shopping, while a *press* is a large cupboard.

Dialects in the north of England vary greatly across counties. The dialect of Liverpool and Merseyside, for instance, is known informally as Scouse, and the dialect of Newcastle-upon-Tyne is known as Geordie. The vocabulary differences between standard British English and Northern English can mainly be seen in informal language and slang (*chuck*, *summat*, *ta-ra*). Interestingly, there are some similarities between Northern English and Scottish English. The two varieties share some items of vocabulary (*bairn*, *lass*, *wee*), which is perhaps unsurprising considering their geographical proximity.

Welsh English is made up of a several dialects of English specific to Wales. It is heavily influenced by Welsh, which is a distinct language spoken by approximately 20 per cent of the population of Wales. Welsh English words in the dictionary include *butty*, *dab* and *tamping*.

It is not just vocabulary that differs across regional varieties. Regional accents are common and can be very distinct. The accent of someone from Gloucestershire, for instance, is different from the accent of someone from Bristol, despite the fact that Gloucestershire borders Bristol. The British English pronunciation in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* represents what is referred to as Received Pronunciation (RP): see page R30 for more details of how pronunciation is shown in the dictionary.

Australian and New Zealand English

Australian and New Zealand English generally follow British English in many aspects of vocabulary and spelling, although many North American words are used. A feature of both is that the line between formal and informal usage is not as clear as in some other varieties of English. Suffixes such as *-ie* and *-o* give us expressions such as *arvo* and *barbie* that are also used in quite formal contexts.

The vocabularies of Australian and New Zealand English have many words in common, for example *ute* and *sook*. They also have shared

histories, with, for example, their participation in the First World War contributing words such as *Anzac* to their common vocabularies. But they also have developed distinct vocabularies. For example, New Zealanders have a type of holiday home called a *bach*, and Australians take their *Eskees* with them when they go camping.

Both Australian and New Zealand English have been shaped by the relationships between European settlers and indigenous populations. In Australia, there are numerous Aboriginal communities with many languages and dialects, and many words have been borrowed from these languages. They include *kangaroo*, *wallaby*, *Alcheringa* and *yakka*. In New Zealand, Maori has contributed many words to the vocabulary, including *haka* and *mana*; the Maori name for New Zealand (*Aotearoa* = 'the land of the long white cloud') is being used increasingly in international contexts.

Canadian English

Canadian English has been influenced by both British and American English. In the dictionary, meanings and spellings that are only used in the United States are marked (*US*). Items that are also used in Canada are marked (*NA* or *NAE*) for *North American English*. Some British words such as *serviette* are used in Canadian English, but this is not shown in the dictionary. There are also a number of words that are exclusively Canadian: *eavestrough*, *humidex* and *parkade* are a few examples. Canadian English has also been influenced by Canada's history with the French, evidenced in words such as *poutine* and *toque*. In Canada both British and American spellings are used.

English in Africa

English is today the African continent's single most widely used language. Several different varieties have developed in the different regions of the continent. These include **East African English** (spoken in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) and **West African English** (spoken in countries such as Nigeria and Ghana). Each of these has its own characteristic vocabulary, which includes words for local customs, food, modes of transport, clothing, musical instruments, etc.

East African English is influenced by the other languages spoken in East Africa: Kiswahili and Luo to name just two. These influences can be seen in vocabulary items such as *bodaboda*, *nyama choma*, *mzungu*, *daladala* and *nyatiti*.

West African English contains similar words stemming from indigenous languages: *garri*, *afara* and *agbada*, for instance. Some English words have been adapted and extended over time to convey specific meanings. A *been-to*, for example, is 'a person who returns to his or her home in Africa after studying, working, etc. in a foreign country', while the adverb *next tomorrow* is used to refer to the day after tomorrow.

South African English is the first language of about ten per cent of the population of South Africa, but the second language of many others. The language of Afrikaners (descendants of Dutch settlers) has influenced the English spoken in South Africa (*biltong*, *dorp*, *stoep*), but there are also many words that are borrowed from various other African languages (*donga*, *indaba*, *lobola*). Although some words stem from British or American English, they often have entirely different meanings from their British/American counterparts. A *robot* in South African English is a traffic light, while a *cafe* is a type of convenience store.

English in South Asia

Geographically, South Asia comprises seven countries: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives. Though there are noticeable similarities in the way English is spoken and written in these countries (hence, the label *South Asian English*), there are in fact seven distinctive regional varieties of English. Because of India's long history of contact with Britain and consequently with English, Indian English is often regarded as typical of the English used in the region.

Some words and phrases from South Asian English have their origin in the major languages of the region, like Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Punjabi and Urdu: *bhai*, *jungle*, *jute*, *catamaran*, *bhangra* and *purdah*. Because of Britain's long history of contact with India, some of these words have also been adopted into British and other varieties of English, and speakers of these varieties may not always be aware of the South Asian origin of the words. Other words, which remain specific to South Asian English, like *taluk* and *panchayat*, are taken from regional languages and used to describe specific social structures. Some others, like the verbs *air-dash*, *chargesheet* and *prepone*, are formed from English but only used by Indian speakers of English. Several words of South Asian origin, like *bhaji* and *biryani* have become common in British English more recently because of the influence of the significant number of people of South Asian origin in Britain.

English in South-East Asia

Although no single standard variety of English has emerged from this region, English is very important as a language of communication in countries such as Malaysia and Singapore. Words from these countries include the names of some local products, for example tropical fruits (*mangosteen*, *rambutan*). Some British English words and expressions have distinct meanings. *Bungalow*, for instance, refers to a large house that is not joined to another house on either side, and does not necessarily have only one level. *Uncle/auntie* is used as a polite way of referring to an older man/woman rather than always to refer to a particular family member.