

# **Whether American English is the most influential variety of English in the world today.**

**Author: Michelle Tan, Li Shuyang**

## **Introduction**

In a 2007 article, New York Times proclaimed English to dominate the world as no language ever has (Mydans, Seth). It is indisputable that English is the world's lingua franca which means that people who do not speak English as their first language can use it daily to communicate with people from other cultures. However, which is the most influential variety of English in today's world? This essay argues, based on evidence found, that American English remains the most influential although its influence might be reducing a little bit.

## **Literature overview**

Firstly, population statistics were from World Bank data. The list of majority native English speaking countries as recognised by the UK government was obtained from The University of Sheffield. A variety of sites such as local government websites to the BBC were used to discover what form of English (British or American) was used by each country.

To look for American English's influences on non-native English speaking countries, I used a variety of sites such as local government websites or national news sites to prove that there are these influences.

For information about American and British films, I used Business Insider's entertainment news.

Last but not least, I used a 2011 case study published in Asia Pacific Education Review Kyungha Ahn to determine the influence of American English on Korea a decade ago and a more recent human interest article about Singaporeans learning Konglish. (The Smart Local teaches Konglish) For Japanese people's preference

between Japanese English and American English, I referred to a 2013 study in the Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development.

### **Methodology**

Firstly, I started by looking for all the native English speaking countries in the world and finding the size of their populations. It is clear that both the UK and US will speak British and American English respectively. For the remaining countries, I assumed that if they are part of the British Commonwealth or were colonised by the UK, they use British English unless I could find information that said otherwise.

Secondly, I looked at non-native English speaking countries with a large percentage of the population who can speak English. This is because I wanted to prove that American English has some influence on them. These countries were Philippines which are known around the world to have one of the largest non-native English speaking populations and Singapore where English is one of the official languages and Singapore is famous for high literacy level.

Last of all, to look at the prevalence of American and British English in media, I found the top dozen movies that sold the most tickets in 2021. Among these 12 movies, I selected the English movies and again, separated them into American English movies and British English movies. However, many films have actors and actresses from various countries so I focused on the accent of the lead actors of each film to decide whether to classify that film as using British or American English.

### **Results and discussion**

For native English-speaking countries, all the countries in the table below except the USA, Canada and Australia follow British English. Even though Canada and Australia are part of the British Commonwealth, they speak their own type of English.

#### **Native English speaking countries using British English**

Antigua and Barbuda	Population: 97.93k
The Bahamas	Population: 393.25k

Barbados	Population: 287.37k
Belize	Population: 397.62k
Canada	Population: 38,005.24k
Dominica	Population: 71.99k
Grenada	Population: 112.52k
Guyana	Population: 786.56k
Ireland	Population: 4,994.72k
Jamaica	Population: 2,961.16k
Malta	Population: 525.28k
New Zealand	Population: 5,084.30k
St Kitts and Nevis	Population: 53.19k
St Vincent and the Grenadines	Population: 110.95k
Trinidad and Tobago	Population: 1,399.49k
United Kingdom	Population: 67,215.29k

#### **Native English speaking countries using own type of English**

Australia	25,687.04k
Canada	38,005.24k

#### **Native English speaking countries using American English**

United States	329,484.12k
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However, because the USA has a very big population of about 330 million, its population is more than all the other countries combined. So, among native English speaking countries, American English is still the most influential because it has a larger population who use it.

Additionally, the majority of the Philippines can speak at least some English and in the Philippines, American English is used. This is seen from the English used on the country's education ministry website. Words like 'authorized' are spelled with 'z' which is American style instead of 's' which is British English.

Singapore is an interesting example. Singapore used to be a British colony and uses British English. Students in public mainstream schools take the Cambridge GCE O level examination. In Singapore, English is an official language and the country has a high level of education and literacy. For example, in the 2018 PISA test organised by OECD, students from Singapore scored an average of 549 marks for the English reading test. This is much higher than the world average of 487 points. However, I discovered that American English has a big influence on Singapore although it is supposed to use British English. For example, newspapers and media websites in Singapore use American English words. An article from The Straits Times newspaper, Singapore's national newspaper, that was written in 2019 uses the word 'pants' which is American English instead of 'trousers' which is British English.

American English has so much influence because its entertainment media is more prevalent than British media. A lot of this is because of Hollywood and the popular films that it produces. For example, from the top 12 best-selling movies of 2021, 9 are English films. The results are shown in the table below:

Rankin	Name of film	Lead actor(s) and accents used
9		
1	Spiderman: No Way Home	Tom Holland: American Zendaya: American

4	No Time to Die	Daniel Craig: British
5	F9: The Fast Saga	Vin Diesel: American John Cena: American
7	Venom: Let There Be Carnage	Tom Hardy: American Woody Harrelson: American
8	Godzilla vs. Kong	Millie Bobby Brown: American Alexander Skarsgard: American
9	Shang-chi and the Legend of Ten Rings	Simu Liu: American
10	Eternals	Gemma Chan: British Richard Madden: British
11	Dune	Timothee Chalamet: American
12	Black Widow	Scarlett Johansson: American

As one can see from the table, seven out of nine movies use American English. What is more, it is interesting to see that some British actors such as Tom Holland, Millie Bobby Brown and Tom Hardy use American accents for the films. This is generally because the characters that they play are supposed to be American. However, this still proves how influential American English is. It is also likely that the popularity of American television series like Brooklyn 99 and Stranger Things and American musicians like Taylor Swift and Selena Gomez also help to spread American culture and make American English the most influential.

Nonetheless, in countries where American English has great influence, locals are developing their own version. They do this by mixing the local language with American English. A very good example is Konglish where words like 'so-gae-ting' (blind date) have evolved. ('So-gae-ting' is a mixture of the Korean word 'so-gae'

which means introduction and 'ting' which is taken from the English word 'meeting'). Impact of Konglish However, due to globalisation, these different versions of English may gain popularity and American English becomes less influential. As we know, Korean popular culture is spreading fast with Korean drama series like Squid Game and K-pop groups like Blackpink gaining popularity all around the world. Hence, people overseas may want to learn Konglish so that they can communicate with locals when they travel to South Korea. This was shown by an article written by The Smart Local in Singapore, where Korean culture is popular, which teaches readers how to use Konglish. With this, we can argue that if these forms of English continue to rise, American English will become less influential.

Yet, it is true to say that American English will still remain the most influential type of English even though local versions of English may be invented. This is because there are only some words that have been changed to include the local language. These words are not enough vocabulary to become a whole new form of English. Hence, people still need to rely on American English to communicate. In addition, American English will still be recognised as the official form of English. People will use it in professional settings to communicate with colleagues and clients and students will have to study American English for examinations. We can see this in a 2013 study of Japanese college students who showed that they still preferred American English although they hoped for Japanese English to be more recognised worldwide. This shows they are proud of their culture but they recognise that they still need American English for formal communication.

## **Conclusion**

All in all, American English is still the most influential type of English in the world today. This is because of America's large population size and huge popularity of American entertainment media around the world. Also, American English is used in major economies where English is not the first language like Japan and South Korea as well as Philippines because these countries' history has a link with the US. It is definitely true that local languages may mix with American English and 'dilute' it but this will not significantly reduce the influence of American English as these local

types of English are pretty informal so these countries still rely on American English for official matters.

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