

The story of English

What kind of English do you speak? American English? Or British English? Or a different variety?

Question: Why are there different types of English?
Answer: Because of History, Politics and Geography.
Let's find out.

1 From England to New England

In 1620, this group of people sailed from England to North America. Their religion was very important for them, and they wanted to be free to live in their own way. They took the English Bible with them. They spoke English: 17th century English. This was the language of Shakespeare, and many of the words, and the pronunciation, were different from modern English. The eastern part of the continent became an English colony. The language here was English, but it began to change. The immigrants needed new words for the plants and animals there. They often used native American words for these. American English was becoming different from the English in England.



Whither* goeth thou?

* Where are you going?

3 Immigration, immigration, immigration

During the 19th and 20th centuries, more and more people went to live in North America. They came from many different countries, and they went there for political, religious or economic reasons. They wanted to start new lives.

These new immigrants to North America brought their languages – Spanish, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Yiddish – and they all contributed words and phrases to American English.

WORD FILE

cattle ranch	A very big farm for cows.
colony	A country which is controlled by another country.
develop [v]	To change or grow.
establish [v]	To make something begin to happen.
give up [v]	To stop doing something.
immigrant	A person who comes to live in a country.
independent	With its own government.
slave	A person who has to work for another person.
variety	Many different types of something.

chutzpah!
 gulag gung-ho
 "I should worry!"

Another influence on American English, of course, was the language of the slaves: Afro-American English. In 1885, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* used this language in print. "... Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it."

4 English travels east

Back in Britain, English was developing too. Politics and trade changed it. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the British Empire grew and grew. People described it as "The Empire where the sun never sets". The soldiers, administrators and traders who built this Empire took English with them. The language travelled to India, to Australia, to Asia, New Zealand and Africa. In many places, it became the language of government.

5 Different Englishes

Britain was a small, overcrowded country, and many people went out to find better lives overseas. They used local words for the new things they found there. Different varieties of English began to develop: Indian English, Singapore English, Australian English. Which one is this?

Once a jolly swagman camped by a billabong
 Under the shade of a Coolibah tree...

6 Movies or films?

In the 20th century, because of the invention of the cinema, American English began to travel to Britain. It changed British English. Gradually, speakers of British English became accustomed to hearing American accents. They knew that "sidewalk" and "pavement" were the same thing. The two languages became closer in many ways.

British English has had other influences in the last few years. There is a big immigrant population from India and Pakistan. Asian music and Bollywood movies are very popular among young people – and Asian English is now part of general British "teen speak".

"She looks so Angrez!"

"Don't be so badmash!"

"He's really jungli!"

Listen carefully – there are many different forms of English. It's still developing. The language belongs to the world!
Question: Which type is correct?

Answer: All of them!
Question: So... do you speak American English, or British English... or international English?

7 Still moving!

Films have helped to take American English all over the world. But don't think this is the end of the story. People now speak English all over the world as a first, second, or foreign language. Non-native speakers of English use it as an international language of communication. And people often use English words when they are speaking other languages. French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese speakers all recognise a "mouse" – which doesn't eat cheese – or a "bug" – which isn't an insect!



Some words are different in the various varieties of English. Do you know any of these? Write a bilingual word list.

WORD FILE

accent	The way people say words in a specific country or region.
administrator	A person who organizes a country or company.
Bollywood	The Indian film industry.
immigrant population	People in a country who have come from a different country.
local	In the area where you live.
overcrowded	A lot of people in a small space.
overseas	In a country across the sea from your country.
set [v]	To establish.
trade [v]	To buy and sell.

movie	film
recognize	recognise

Tip: You can check out some examples of British and American English on page 22.